

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

44

Tal Ilan

Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine



Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

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Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer

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Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine

An Inquiry into Image and Status

by

Tal Ilan



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Dedicated
to my teacher and mentor, the late Professor Menahem Stern
and to his widow Chava

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Preface

This book began its career as a Ph.D. dissertation in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Although it was written in the late 1980s, when feminism and women studies were making enormous strides in many disciplines the world over, working in Jerusalem was like working on another planet. The works of feminists were both unknown and viewed with suspicion as devoid of sound scientific methodology. The literature on the subject of women in the Greco-Roman period was not systematically collected by any of the libraries. Some of the most important books, such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's classic, *In Memory of Her*, on women in the New Testament, were not found in any library in the country.

I myself, I must admit, was not aware that I was writing feminist history. On the contrary, when accused of doing so, I defended myself, claiming that a history of women is not necessarily feminist history. I was doing *real* scientific work. My supervisors, colleagues and other well-wishers supported me in this claim. They were not about to be caught participating in subversive activity. Only a post-doctoral year at the Harvard Divinity School in the Women Studies in Religion Program, directed by Constance Buchanan, brought home to me the extent to which we were misinformed in Jerusalem about the nature of women studies, and of the use of gender as a category of analysis. It turns out that I had been writing feminist criticism all along.

I shall thus begin my record of thanks and acknowledgments at the end. In the academic year of 1992–3, while this book was in preparation, I spent a memorable year at Harvard exploring its libraries and acquainting myself with women studies. This was made possible by an affiliation with the Women Studies in Religion Program of the Divinity School, which provided both the funds and the facilities to make that year so fruitful. I would like to thank the director of the program Constance Buchanan for this rare opportunity, as well as Professor Bernadette Brooten, who introduced me to the program and to my colleagues Carol Delaney, Hyung-Kyung Chung, Stephanie Jamison and Rosalind Shaw who have helped me rethink my position by refusing to let my ignorance get the better of me.

I first heard of women studies from Nancy Sinkof, whom I met as a student. She was an American Jew and a young student like me. Very recently we have been reunited, and I take the opportunity here to thank her for unwittingly influencing my life the way she has.

I chose as the supervisor to my Ph.D. the late Professor Menahem Stern, with whom I had worked in the past and admired greatly. I doubt if there is a living scholar of his stature in the field of Jewish history in the Greco-Roman period. However, Professor Stern was much more than a great scholar. He was the easiest-going helpful and friendly supervisor I could have hoped for, and I believe I would have written these words even had he lived to read them. Professor Stern was brutally murdered, an innocent victim of the Arab-Israeli conflict in which we are all involved in this part of the world. There are no words to express the loss which I suffered when he died, days before the first chapter of my Ph.D. was ready. This book is dedicated to him, and to his admirable widow, Chava, who was no doubt the model for the author of Proverbs when he wrote "A woman of courage who can find?"

Stern's place was taken by the important scholar I. Gafni. Gafni has read every word I wrote in this book with a magnifying glass, scrutinized every error and helped me greatly in bringing my work to the state it is now in. Gafni has also kindly written numerous letters of recommendation on my behalf and has spoken my praise often on his own initiative. I am grateful to be able to count him among my friends.

Sections of this book I discussed with various distinguished scholars. These include my friend Birgit Klein of Heidelberg and Professors Daniel Schwartz, Joseph Geiger and Hannah Cotton of Jerusalem. The latter has been particularly kind, reading the entire manuscript and making many useful comments. The final shape of this book and all errors found in it are, however, entirely my own.

As aptly put by Virginia Woolf in her admirable "A Room of One's Own," in order for a woman to be productive she needs both the physical space and the economic means. My Ph.D. dissertation could not have been completed without the help of various grants and awards which were bestowed on me. Twice, both in 1986–7 and in 1989–90, I received aid from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York. In 1987–8 I was fortunate to be nominated the first recipient of the Rosita and Esteban Herceg grant issued by the newly founded department of Gender Studies at the Hebrew University, and again, in 1990–1 I benefited from the Leifer Grant from the endowment of the Mexican women friends of the Hebrew University. I was also fortunate in 1989–90 to be nominated for the important Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi grant issued by the Yad Ben Zvi center. Last but not least, in 1991 I won the Yaniv prize awarded by Tel Aviv University.

Every book needs a publisher. Most authors can tell long stories about their exasperating search for a publisher. In my case, my publisher found me. I am most deeply grateful to my friend and mentor Professor Martin Hengel of Tübingen University in Germany for this unexpected honor. Hengel has been generously reading my work, both in English and Hebrew, for the last ten years, and he believed in my academic abilities long before anyone else did, least of all me.

His decision to publish my Ph.D. in his TSAJ series is both a compliment and an honor. I also find it a great honor that his co-editor, Prof. Peter Schäfer of the Freie Universität, Berlin, has found my work worthy of publication. I have found the publishing house of J.C.B. Mohr both efficient and congenial and Herr Georg Siebeck with whom I corresponded very easy to get along with.

For a Hebrew Ph.D. to be published outside the borders of Israel it has to be translated into an international language. The translation of my Ph.D. was undertaken by Dr. Jonathan Price, whom I prize both as a great scholar and a great friend. If the English in this book sounds idiomatically correct, this is to be credited to Jonathan's sound no-nonsense style, which I admire in his own work and am proud to have added to mine, although I freely admit it is by far superior to the Hebrew original. For translations of rabbinic texts Jonathan consulted Danby's *Mishnah*, the Soncino *Babylonian Talmud* Neusner's *Tosefta* and *Talmud of the Land of Israel*, Hammar's *Sifre Deuteronomy*, Goldin's *ARNA* and Saldarini's *ARNB*. The final shape and style, however, are his own. He also consulted the RSV for the New Testament and *Apocrypha*. For the *Pseudepigrapha* Charlesworth edition was consulted.

The translation of this book was financed by another person I am proud to count among my friends. Joy Ungerleider-Mayerson, the chairperson of the Dorot Foundation, found time, despite her busy schedule, to invite me to her house, listen to my presentation and read the abstract to my work before recommending that money be appropriated for this purpose. I am exceedingly grateful to her for this. Sadly Joy died untimely before this book was completed.

Although I have extensively edited and also rewritten large section of this work in order to bring it into a book format, the study suffers, nevertheless, from idiosyncrasies inherent to a first book-length study and a Ph.D. thesis. I find it necessary to point out one of them here. I felt, when writing this Ph.D., that it was necessary for the reader to differentiate between works written by women, and others written by men. For this purpose I have devised a simple method, according to which women authors are cited by their full name while men are cited by initials only. This method has been maintained throughout the book, although I realize that it is not what can be described as politically correct.

Abbreviations of rabbinic literature are standard. In addition, *CII* is *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* II, ed. J.-B. Frey (Rome 1952), and *CPJ* is *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* I-III, edd. V. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern (Cambridge, MA. 1957–64).

Jerusalem, February 1994

Tal Ilan

Introduction

The great interest that has recently developed for the history of women is the direct result of the prominence which feminism has attained in modern western society. There are many social currents in this movement which have turned historical studies into a partisan tool, to be used both as damning testimony of the extent of degradation, suffering and enslavement to which women have been subjected in the past, and as “proof” of women’s true abilities, dignity and wisdom, and of their legacy. Pursuits of this nature are most properly termed meta-history, for even though they make use of historical sources and historiography, their main purpose is not actually to write history.

Yet there exists an inherent justification for writing the history of women separately from that of men (but not *vice versa*): much of what has been written as history *per se* is in fact the chronicle of only men’s lives. This choice has been neither conscious nor willfully malicious. Normally the historian, when he came upon women in his sources, would document what they did and how they acted, and the mark they left on the historical record, but quite often, even in wide-ranging and comprehensive studies, these matters would occupy no more than one paragraph. The “golden age” of Athens may serve as a case in point. Literature was written during that period – poetry, philosophy and history – whose influence is felt to this day in western society, and fifth-century Athens is considered the only real democracy before the modern period. But in all of this extensive and important intellectual activity women took no part, nor did the vaunted democracy include women (or for that matter slaves or the many resident aliens in Athens). Naturally the historians of that glorious period have not neglected to mention, for example, the critical influence exercised on Pericles by his common-law wife Aspasia, nor have they failed to draw attention to the heroines of Attic tragedy – Antigone, Medea or Phaedra – but it is clear that this does not comprise the history of Athenian women at that time.¹

One might argue, therefore, that since women’s visible contribution in the sources for the period under study is so small, there is essentially no justification

¹ The question of the historicity of the portrayal of women in Attic drama stimulated scholarship already in the beginning of the twentieth century. See, e.g. A. W. Gomme, “The Position of Women in Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries,” *Classical Philology* 20 (1925), 1–25. For a summary of research: Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1975), 58–60. See also Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York 1985), 329–48.

for writing their history separately, and we should be satisfied with what is said about them in books on general history. But by the same argument, if there is no justification for writing the history of half the human race, there would be much less justification for trying to compose the history of a people like the Moabites, who left no historical traditions; although no one disparages the attempt to bring to life the annals of this people by rooting around in the writings of other peoples (e.g. the Bible), by deciphering the ancient inscriptions which the Moabites did leave (e.g. the Mesha stele) or by explicating inanimate archaeological finds.² The history of Jewish women is certainly no less important an historical inquiry, focusing in identical manner on a group that produced no written sources of its own and must therefore be investigated by searching for and closely examining sources written by others but mentioning them, more often than not incidentally.

The History of Research

The history of Jewish women is not a new topic of study. In fact, it was not long after the publication of Graetz' monumental history of the Jewish people that the first historical survey of Jewish women appeared: *Die jüdischen Frauen in der Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst*, published in Leipzig in 1879. Its author was M. Kayserling, a rabbi who served primarily in Budapest and a Jewish historian whose principal interest was the Jews of Spain. His book covers a wide swath – from the Second Temple period to his own time – as was the custom for comprehensive historical studies in his day. Kayserling's motives for writing the book stemmed from the cultural climate of his own time, which was producing efforts at reform in religion and in the status of women. The proponents of the feminist movement were active already by the mid-nineteenth century, but the book shows no sign of either a pro- or an anti-feminist program.³ In any event Kayserling's book laid the groundwork for future research on Jewish women. He was the first, for example, to compile a list of *Talmudic* women whose biographies he felt worth setting out (pp. 120–33). Even though this list, like much of the book, is more a paraphrase of material he assembled than a critical source-study, it nonetheless was important as a starting-point for subsequent scholarship which aimed to identify important women in literature.⁴ Kayserling was

² For instance, A. H. van Zyl, *The Moabites=Pretoria Oriental Series III* (Leiden 1960).

³ Kayserling was followed closely by H. Zirndorf, *Some Jewish Women* (Philadelphia 1892). Zirndorf was a German-born Reform rabbi who immigrated to the United States at the end of the last century.

⁴ See the following lists: a) Zirndorf (previous note), 121–252; b) L. J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen NJ 1976), 105–11; c) S. Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam: Maria in jüdischer Sicht* (München 1982), 98–9.

also the first, and for many years the only scholar to treat the prominent women in the New Testament as Jews.⁵

While Kayserling wrote from no ideological motive that I am able to discover, ideological tendencies do feature quite prominently in various works written immediately after his. Already in 1884, S.-I. Hurwitz published a series of articles on the subject of Jewish women in the journal *Hashahar*, which was edited by the learned intellectual Peretz Smolenskin. Hurwitz was a Jewish publicist, a *talmudist* by training, a great believer in the revival of the Hebrew language and a Zionist after his own fashion, although a stern opponent of Ahad Ha-am. His articles appeared in the context of a controversy over the character of the *Talmud*, stirred up by a book by A. McCaul published in England at the end of the 1830's⁶ but not translated into Hebrew, under the title נתיבות עולם, until the 1870's. In his work, McCaul argues that the *Talmud* is an inferior, debased composition which by no means represents the noble character of Judaism. McCaul was a philo-Semitic Christian who held millenarian views, and his book was translated into Hebrew probably because it openly served the purposes of religious reform movements within Judaism. As part of his indictment, McCaul claimed that the *Talmud* places the woman in a position equivalent to that of a slave (pp. 24–9, 494–503). Hurwitz took upon himself the defense of women's status in Judaism against this attack. In his first article, "R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and the Education of Women,"⁷ Hurwitz maintained that R. Eliezer is the only one in the entire *talmudic* corpus who disapproves of the instruction of *Torah* to women, and that he had a personal reason for this view, namely, his experience with his learned but wicked wife, Imma Shalom, which convinced him that women should be barred from study. Using the same principle, Hurwitz attempted to prove in another article – "R. Aqiba and the Laws of Matrimony in Israel" – that R. Aqiba favored giving women freedom, education and respect because he was married, as is well-known, to an exemplary woman.⁸ In 1891, Hurwitz brought his defen-

⁵ Kayserling, 47–8; perhaps this is why Zirndorf (144) thought Kayserling was a Christian. Since then, additional surveys of Jewish women of all periods have appeared, usually written by women. These treatments are by and large impressionistic and do not pretend to reach the scholarly standard set by Kayserling. See, e.g. Trude Weiss-Rosemarie, *Jewish Women Through the Ages* (New York 1940); Greta Fink, *Great Jewish Women: Profiles of Courageous Women from the Maccabean Period to the Present* (New York 1978); Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers* (Fresh Meadows NY 1983).

⁶ A. McCaul, *The Old Paths* (London 1837).

⁷ *Hashahar* 11 (1884), 437–41 [Hebrew]. The hostile response by the editor, Peretz Smolenskin, appears immediately following this piece (pp. 441–4).

⁸ *Hashahar* 12 (1884), 377–84, 423–33 [Hebrew]. But see the response by A. Atlas, *Ha-asif* 2 (1886), 365–7 [Hebrew]. Atlas was a vociferous anti-Zionist who served as deputy to the editor of *Ha-asif*, Nahum Sokolow. Atlas demonstrated that most of Hurwitz's claims are not supported by a critical reading of the sources; he claimed that R. Ishmael, R.

se of the *Talmud*'s treatment of women to a conclusion with the publication of *The Hebrew Woman and the Jewess: The Status and Condition of Women in Israel in Family and Society during Biblical and Talmudic Times* (Berditchev). In this work Hurwitz argued that Moses in the *Torah* considerably improved the status of the Hebrew woman by reducing much of the father's authority as *paterfamilias* (*sic!*), and that those aspects of the woman's status not ameliorated by Moses were improved by the sages of the *Talmud*: thus a woman's status improved continuously from the biblical to the *talmudic* periods. It is worth noting, especially in the light of the following discussion, that Hurwitz displayed impressive learning in his various writings, which contained references to previous scholarship such as Kayserling's book. Hurwitz's critical test in every case was to ask whether a measure was good or bad for women and whether in a given historical period women's status was better or worse than in the previous or following period. This approach is prevalent to this very day in the study of the history of Jewish women.

Gershon Stern, a German-Jewish author who immigrated to Israel from Berlin in 1939, published an article in 1913, "Women in the Bible and the *Aggadah*," in *Ha-shiloah* – the Zionist journal first edited by Ahad Ha-am.⁹ Stern adopted an approach directly opposed to Hurwitz': like McCaul, he viewed the literature of the sages as artificial and distorted. At the same time, his approach revealed a decidedly romantic strain in its treatment of the Bible as an authentic and living creation. In his article Stern surveyed the development of the status of women from the biblical to the *talmudic* period as reflected in the *aggadic* traditions and concluded that, whereas in the Bible women appear to lead liberated and easy lives, *talmudic* literature conveys a picture of their oppression and humiliation. In the latter source (according to Stern), the sole purpose of women's existence is to enable men to fulfill certain commandments, above all the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply." This change in the picture presented by the sources, Stern continued, is connected to a transformation of Judaism from a religion which emphasized belief to one which emphasized active fulfillment of commandments. Stern's article reflects the controversy between Jewish religious reform movements of the time and the more conservative currents in Judaism which regarded the Bible merely as a prism through which *talmudic* interpretation was

Aqiba's rival in *halakhic* matters, deserves the credit, if anyone does, for his teachings regarding women, which are often in direct opposition to those of R. Aqiba. My opinion, based on a close reading of the *midrashei halakhah* of both schools, is that the school of R. Ishmael was far more interested in the condition of women, even if one is to judge only from the sheer bulk of relevant material. The controversy between Hurwitz and Atlas clearly derives from the interpretation of the terms "good" and "bad," and of what is good and bad for women. See further by Hurwitz, "Maimonides and the Laws of Matrimony in Israel," *Hashahar* 11 (1883), 659–66; 12 (1884), 577–80 [Hebrew].

⁹ When this article was published the journal's editor was J. Klausner.

focused. A decisive answer has not yet been found to the question raised by Hurwitz and Stern – and probably never will be, as I shall now demonstrate.

In his great work, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1952), Salo Baron devoted a chapter to the status of women in the Second Temple, *mishnaic* and *talmudic* periods.¹⁰ Baron agreed that the status of women improved from the biblical to the *talmudic* periods, and he based his argument almost wholly on *halakhic* material, at the expense of the *aggadic*. Yet it was not necessarily the sources which dictated the conclusions, since this had been the practice followed earlier by S. Zucrow in his book, *Women, Slaves and the Ignorant in Rabbinic Literature* (Boston 1932), but Zucrow had reached conclusions which were the polar opposite of Baron's, arguing that the status of women in the *talmudic* period was far worse than in the time of the Bible.

Feminist theological literature burgeoned in the early 1970s when women joined the controversy which Hurwitz had begun. Yet despite the common feminist thread in their various writings, even women scholars could not agree on how to interpret the sources. Judith Hauptman, after a thorough examination of rabbinic law in three areas – the *sotah* or suspected adulteress, inheritance by women and divorce – was able to find a steady improvement in legislation concerning women.¹¹ On the other side, Léonie Archer took up Stern's thesis and argued, in two articles stemming from her dissertation, that principally *aggadic* sources from the Second Temple period and afterwards, above all the *Apocrypha* and *Pseudepigrapha* indicate on the whole a considerable deterioration in women's status.¹²

Yet this discussion seems to be less a debate than a dialogue of the deaf, for none of the authors seems to have read, or at least has bothered to acknowledge, previous voices in the debate. Consequently one might question whether this entire discussion holds any value for the serious researcher: for a hundred years men and women have investigated the same problem and, basing themselves on the same sources, have reached diametrically opposite conclusions. Furthermore, there is no pattern to serve as a guide: the women do not as a group reach conclusions opposite from the men's, and the sources have not themselves dictated the conclusions of each side; even the periods in which the different adversaries lived did not decisively influence their conclusions. All this goes to

¹⁰ S. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* II (New York 1952), 235–41.

¹¹ Judith Hauptman, "Women's Liberation in the *Talmudic* Period: An Assessment," *Conservative Judaism* 26/4 (1971–2), 22–8. Hauptman teaches *Talmud* in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and the editors of the journal noted her political involvement as a feminist. This article, despite its scholarly style and apparatus, nonetheless reveals a clear apologetic purpose in its effort to demonstrate how women's status can be improved within the framework of the *halakhah*, not by rejection of it.

¹² "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of Greco-Roman Palestine," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, edd. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit 1985), 273–87; "The 'Evil Woman' in *Apocryphal* and *Pseudepigraphical* Writings," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Div. A (Jerusalem 1986), 239–46.

show that the terms “improvement” and “deterioration” are not relevant to the question of women’s status and condition. It appears, therefore, that the role of the historian is to describe changes and developments without making value judgments.¹³

But in fact, feminist literature from its inception has been marked by the tendency to praise or upbraid societies and groups solely on the basis of their treatment of women. As the feminist movement gained form and momentum at the end of the nineteenth century, there appeared a book on the status of women in Judaism by Nehida Remy (Ruth Lazarus), a woman of German-Prussian background who had converted to Judaism and married the Jewish thinker Moritz Lazarus.¹⁴ In her book she tried to demonstrate the positive attitude accorded to Jewish women in history and *halakhah*, and, by contrast, the degraded and inferior position of their Christian sisters. The book has no scholarly pretensions, and despite Lazarus’ attempt to base her claims on the sources she obviously knew very little about Christianity and even less about the Judaism which she had just adopted. Even so, her book was a pioneering work in the controversy between Judaism and Christianity, a controversy of decisive importance in any study of the status of women in the Second Temple period. The study of this subject, in fact, serves as a kind of special yardstick for religious feminist movements, Christian as well as Jewish, for late antiquity was the formative period when rules and laws were decided which have shaped both Christian and Jewish religious communities to the present day, including also the determination of women’s position in church and synagogue. Thus the study of this period can serve (and has served) to defend the current attitude towards women in Jewish and Christian institutions today, or by the same token to overturn the foundations on which those institutions rest.

The Christian feminist theological movement realized its first-fruits in the great work of Elizabeth Cady-Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible*, which was published between 1895 and 1898 in the United States. This work, which represented a stage in women’s struggle for equal rights, launched a strong attack against both the Jewish and the Christian scriptures, which Cady-Stanton criticized, stating (p. 12): “I do not believe that any man ever saw or talked with God, I do not believe that God inspired the Mosaic code or told the historians what they say he did about women.” The work caused a public uproar and did not gain many admirers. Nearly a century had to pass until Christians, men and women alike, dealt seriously again with the problem of the attitude of their own Scriptures towards

¹³ Pomeroy’s formulation stands in no need of improvement (above, n. 1, 229): “To compose a polemic against the men of Greece and Rome and to write a brief in defense of their women are not the proper objectives of an historian.”

¹⁴ *Das jüdische Weib* (Leipzig 1885); Remy’s book was translated into English: Nahida Remy, *The Jewish Woman* (Cincinnati 1897).

women, and when this happened the effort arose within the church itself. This long delay¹⁵ can be partially explained by the fact that the modern battle over equal rights for women could be waged in legislative assemblies and decided by majority vote, without recourse to religious texts, especially in light of the separation between church and state recognized in those same legislatures.

In the intervening period, between the appearance of Cady-Stanton's work and the 1970s, early Christianity's attitude toward women attracted the attention of a completely different group of scholars, namely classicists and ancient historians. Their work, in turn, created a new confrontation between feminism and Judaism, as the following two works will illustrate. In 1914, the Harvard professor A. Hecker published *A Short History of Women's Rights* (New York) in order to advance the cause of equal rights for women, of which he was an enthusiastic advocate. In the work he purported to trace a steady advancement within Roman law towards the granting of more freedoms and rights to women,¹⁶ and a sharp reversal in this progress when the Roman Empire became Christian and consequently introduced severe impediments to women. Christianity, he claimed, had learned its antagonistic and degrading attitude towards women from its parent, Judaism with its corrupting oriental character¹⁷ – for in Hecker's eyes the East represented degeneracy and backwardness, both in antiquity and in his own time.

Similarly, in 1956 C. Seltman, an established Classics professor at Cambridge University, published his *Women in Antiquity* (London) with the purpose of extolling the liberties and sexual freedom enjoyed by women in the classical world, especially in Sparta,¹⁸ but even in Athens¹⁹ and by all means in Rome,²⁰ in contrast to the oppression they suffered under Pauline Christianity, which had perforce adopted the benighted principles of Judaism.²¹ Seltman's book was the product of his classical education in the conservative English tradition, and his anti-Christian posture can be explained accordingly. His motives are revealed not only in his open hostility to Christianity, but also in the praises he lavishes on the classical world in matters for which a sober examination of the facts would hardly justify such praise, for instance the Athenian attitude towards women.²²

¹⁵ Particularly conspicuous in the detailed survey of feminist Christian theology in Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York 1983), 7–14. Cady-Stanton's work is followed immediately by articles from the 1970s.

¹⁶ Hecker, 1–49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 53–7.

¹⁸ Seltman, 55–72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 94–101.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 136–46.

²¹ *Ibid.* 149–51.

²² See Pomeroy (above, n. 1); although Pomeroy's book reflects the growing influence of feminism in the 1970s, she wrote a creditably balanced work; yet her subject was in any

His picture of women in classical Greece resembles rather the fantasy of a modern atheist than the historical reality he purports to describe.

The question of whether Judaism has adversely influenced the Hellenistic gentiles in their attitude to women or vice versa has also been taken up lately by Jewish feminist apologists, who of course make claims exactly the opposite of Seltman's and Hecker's. In 1987 T. Friedman wrote an article asserting, like some of his predecessors, that women's position had indeed deteriorated between the biblical and *talmudic* periods, but that this was the direct result of the arrival of Hellenism in the region.²³ In 1991, another article appeared which made a similar claim with regard to Philo. Philo is universally recognized as holding a very low opinion of women.²⁴ Judith Wegner approached Philo's attitude by inquiring whether it was to be attributed to his Jewish or his Hellenistic background and decided that it was certainly to be blamed on the latter.²⁵ However, both Friedman and Wegner seem to be under the impression that Hellenism was monolithic in its attitude to women, which is exemplified by the Athenian model.²⁶ But it should be remembered that after Alexander the Great conquered the East and Judaism began showing signs of Hellenistic cultural influence, it was not the culture of classical Athens but that of cosmopolitan Hellenistic Macedonian society – which accorded women a completely different status – that was predominant.²⁷ Hence there is no single answer to the question, whether Judaism via Christianity detrimentally influenced the way women were treated in the classical world, or whether the Hellenism of the classical world detrimentally influenced the treatment of women in Judaism; in fact every proffered answer responds less to a historical problem than to the predisposition of its author.

At the beginning of this century, Christian theologians adopted a different approach to the question of women's status in antiquity. Serious German theologians had long ago noted the prominence of women in the early Christian church.²⁸ In an attempt to answer the question, why Christianity attracted wo-

case less sensitive than the subjects dealt with here. For a discussion centering on Athens, see Keuls (above, n. 1).

²³ "The Shifting Role of Women From Bible to *Talmud*," *Judaism* 36 (1987), 479–87.

²⁴ See R. A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden 1970); Judith R. Wegner, "The Images of Women in Philo," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 16 (1982), 551–63; Dorothy Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women = Brown Judaic Studies* CCIX (Atlanta 1990).

²⁵ Judith R. Wegner, "Philo's Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenic?" in *Women Like This': New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Atlanta 1991), 41–66.

²⁶ See above, n. 22.

²⁷ See Sarah B. Pomeroy, "τεχνικαί; καὶ; μουσικαί: The Education of Women in the Fourth Century and the Hellenistic Period," *American Journal of Ancient History* 2 (1977), 51–68; *eadem*, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York 1984).

²⁸ See in particular A. von-Harnack's chapter, "The Spread of Christianity Among

men, they turned to review the position of women in antiquity. The German theologian Joachim Jeremias, in a learned appendix to his book, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu* (Leipzig 1923),²⁹ painted a gloomy picture of the degradation and oppression which he saw as the lot of Jewish women in Jesus' time. Jesus is presented against this background as one who came to redeem Jewish women from their anguish and suffering.

But Christian theologians began to put their own house in order only when modern feminist theology began to catch hold at the end of the 1960s. In accordance with the general feminist demand for equal rights and opportunities, women struggled within the church, especially the Protestant church in all its forms, to fill offices traditionally held by men. This struggle, however, remained internal and in no way resembled women's battle for political equality which had begun a hundred years earlier, for in the religious arena every new step must be justified, directly or indirectly, through Scripture.³⁰ The criticism leveled by Hecker and Seltman against the church's treatment of women began to be sounded within the church itself, yet with a major difference: women who had been brought up and trained as Christians and were hoping to win central roles within the church could not indict the founders of Christianity for antagonism towards women; thus they launched a concerted effort to prove that Jesus sympathized with and cherished women and wished to establish equality between the sexes, but that the church as an institution had adopted a mistaken interpretation of Jesus' teachings and above all of Paul's doctrine, which had led to the present inferior status of women within the church.

R. Scroggs in 1972 and W. Meeks in 1974 each wrote an article defending Paul's attitude towards women and trying to absolve him from responsibility for the church's negative treatment of women.³¹ For our purposes the value of this debate in its early stages lies in a future development, namely that the effort to

Women," in his *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York 1908), 64–84 (the book was first published in German in 1902).

²⁹ This appendix (pp. 232–50) is an excellent example of Jeremias' use of Jewish sources. The book has been translated into English (1969), in which edition the appendix is on pp. 359–76.

³⁰ See, e.g. K. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia 1966), which dealt with this question just when the battle was starting.

³¹ R. Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972), 283–303. A response to this article was written by a woman: Elaine H. Pagels, "Paul and Women: A Response to a Recent Discussion," *ibid.* 42 (1974), 538–49. W. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1973–4), 165–208. This article was also answered by a woman: Averil Cameron, "'Neither Male nor Female'," *Greece and Rome* 27 (1980), 60–8. A discussion of the literature on Paul's attitude toward women could fill an entire book. It will suffice here to say that Christians to this day, both men and women, battle constantly over the question of whether Paul was good or bad for women. I shall restrict myself here to mentioning only two quite recent publications on the issue, both written by feminist wo-

clear the founders of Christianity of any hostility towards women meant that the blame would soon be made to fall on others.

As the debate gathered momentum the number of articles on this subject and on early Christianity in general grew geometrically. In 1974 a collection of articles was published³² dealing with women in the early Christian church and Judaism. It is apparent from this volume that the lines sketched out by Jeremias in his appendix (see above) now supplied the conceptual framework in which Christian feminist theology, in its search for a new scapegoat, would develop. One need only compare, for example, the piece in that collection by Constance Parvey – “The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament” – which traces an improvement in women’s status in early Christianity against the background of its Jewish origins, with the contribution by Bernard Prusak – “Women, Seductive Siren and Source of Sin? *Pseudepigraphical* Myth and Christian Origin” – which explains the image of the evil and dangerous seductress as the product of the Jewish *Pseudepigrapha* of the Second Temple period.

By the mid-1970s, the battle by Protestant feminist theologians was turning out well, as they were beginning to join faculties of theology as well as taking their place in church pulpits. Catholic women had yet to achieve similar success. In the vanguard of their struggle stood the American Catholic theologian Leonard J. Swidler, who in 1976 published *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen NJ), which purports to present serious, objective historical research on the status of women at the end of the Second Temple period and in the *mishnaic* and *talmudic* periods. Swidler managed to create the impression that he was as conversant with the Jewish sources as Jeremias had been, and his thesis was remarkably similar to the one argued by Jeremias fifty years earlier. In fact, however, Swidler seems merely to have stitched together two previous studies: Meeks’ article,³³ on which Swidler relied to des-

men, one claiming that Paul was exceptionally good for women, the other claiming just the opposite: pro-Pauline: Lilian Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Seen by First Century Philippian Women* = *Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series XX* (Stockholm 1988). Anti-Pauline: Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis 1990).

³² Rosemary R. Ruether, ed. *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York). Several journals also provided a forum for feminist theological discussions. In honor of the Year of the Woman in 1975, *Theological Studies* gave an entire issue over to feminist scholars. *Evangelische Theologie* did much the same thing in an issue of 1982, and in that same year *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* devoted an entire issue to the subject of women in the Bible. Since the early 1980s the field has grown beyond recognition and it is pointless to attempt to outline a full bibliography. It will suffice to mention that in 1985, *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* published its first issue. A glance at the 1992 Abstracts of the Society of Biblical Literature Conference in San Francisco reveals how important the study of women has become in these fields.

³³ Above, n. 31.

cribe the classical world as the proper setting for “formative Judaism,” and the appendix in Jeremias’ book, which provided Swidler with source material for his entire book. According to Swidler, in Judaism’s formative period it is impossible to find even one bright spot in the status of women, as it is reflected in the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*.

Swidler’s second book, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia 1979), illuminates essentially why the first book was written. This second work surveys the attitudes of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament towards women, categorizing these attitudes as “positive,” “ambivalent” and “negative,” and directs the reader to the conclusion that Jesus had a positive attitude toward women whereas that of the Hebrew Bible was negative or at best ambivalent.³⁴

Despite the scientific clothing in which Christian feminist works have been robed since the beginning of the 1970s, their basic purpose has been apologetic: Christianity grew up against the background of, and represented a feminist rebellion against, Jewish misogyny; Christianity’s every positive or egalitarian attitude toward women is attributable to Jesus himself, and every hostile element has its source in Christianity’s natural parent, Judaism.

The Jewish feminist movement did not long remain silent in the face of this attack. In 1980, the American Jewish feminist periodical *Lilith* published articles and interviews by two feminist thinkers, Judith Plaskow and Annette Daum.³⁵ In her article, Plaskow demonstrated that the Christian feminist movement was using anti-Semitic arguments to further its own cause, and lambasted the bankrupt methods used by feminist historians such as Swidler.³⁶

³⁴ Other books on women in the New Testament published since the 1970s include: W. P. Barker, *Women and the Liberator* (Old Tappan NJ 1972); Alicia C. Faxon, *Women and Jesus* (Philadelphia 1973); Lisa Sergio, *Jesus and Woman* (McLean VA 1975); Rachel C. Wahlberg, *Jesus and the Freed Woman* (New York 1978); Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia 1978); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus* (New York 1982); Shirley Stephens, *A New Testament View of Women* (Nashville 1980); E. Modersohn, *Die Frauen des Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart 1982); France Quere, *Les Femmes de l’Evangile* (Paris 1982); Faye Field, *Women Who Encountered Jesus* (Nashville 1982); A. F. Ide, *The Teachings of Jesus on Women* (Dallas 1984); T. J. Carlisle, *Beginning with Mary: Women of the Gospel in Portraits* (Grand Rapids 1986); Adrienne von-Speyr, *Three Women and the Lord* (San Francisco 1986); Marla L. Selvidge, *Daughters of Jerusalem* (Scottsdale PA 1987); Lesly F. Massey, *Women and the New Testament* (Jefferson NC 1989); W. D. Watley and Suzan D. J. Cook, *Preaching in Two Voices: Sermons on the Women in Jesus’ Life* (Valley Forge PA 1992).

³⁵ Judith Plaskow, “Blaming the Jews for Inventing Patriarchy,” *Lilith* 7 (1980), 11–2; Annette Daum, “Blaming the Jews for the Death of the Goddess,” *ibid.* 12–3. And see more recently, Susannah Heschel, “Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Theology,” *Tikkun* 5/3 (1990), 25–8, 92–5.

³⁶ In her piece, Daum’s target was the anti-Christian feminist movement, which she also accused of anti-Semitism in its argument that Judaism, the first truly patriarchal religion, was responsible for the extinction of the polytheistic religions in which female

Plaskow's remarks fell on fertile ground. In the 1980s, Christian feminist literature produced by such women theologians as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Bernadette Brooten blazed new paths for research on Jewish women, professedly avoiding the lines of argument set out by Jeremias and Swidler. Schüssler-Fiorenza, in the fourth chapter of her book *In Memory of Her*, described "The Jesus Movement as a Renewal Movement Within Judaism,"³⁷ that is (in direct reference to Plaskow), Jesus' movement as essentially Jewish. But it was precisely this claim which led her into the same trap into which others had fallen. For she tries to prove that the Gospels (written by both Jews and Gentiles) took pains to belittle the value of women, purposely presenting in a negative light the positive remarks Jesus made as a Jew because they remained products of the same patriarchal society, which Jesus rejected. Furthermore, she claimed that by close analysis one may strip off the accretions in the Christian Scriptures and lay bare Jesus' actual teachings which, once uncovered, reveal an essential feminism; and this, Jesus' true feminist message, is the only thing that will enable the Christian feminist movement to achieve its ends. Thus it is axiomatic for Schüssler-Fiorenza that the "patriarchal and androcentric" Scriptures have a feminist core which is unique to Jesus and obviously did not come to him through his Jewish heritage. In the end, therefore, Schüssler-Fiorenza makes the same claims as her predecessors, only in a far more sophisticated and learned fashion.³⁸

Yet in 1984, right after the appearance of Schüssler-Fiorenza's book, Ben Witherington III published *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge), which demonstrated that even in this feminist age there are still those who believe that Jesus' main message in regard to women was not feminist. Witherington argued that Jesus aspired to teach all humanity to love and respect all creatures, even the humblest, but not to disturb the patriarchal social order.

Brooten published her doctoral dissertation, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, in 1982. Without the knowledge that Brooten is Christian, and without acquaintance with Brooten's other feminist studies which reveal a Christian theological back-

deities played a central role alongside the male divinities. In this connection it is worth noting two additional debates which were revived by feminists, but remain peripheral to serious historical discussion: 1. The question of prehistoric matriarchy and whether any traces of it remain in Judaism: V. Aptowitzer, "Spuren des Matriarchats in jüdischen Schrifttum," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 4 (1927), 207–40 and 5 (1928), 261–97; M. Kartan-ger, "Spuren und Reste des Matriarchats in Judentum," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 29 (1977), 134–51. 2. A different question is the degree of femininity represented in the image of the Jewish divinity, on which see, R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York 1967); Maryanne Cline-Horowitz, "The Image of God in Man: Is Woman Included?" *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), 175–206.

³⁷ Above, n. 15, 105–59.

³⁸ As has already been noted by Ross S. Kraemer in her review of Schüssler-Fiorenza's book: *Religious Studies Review* 11 (1985), 6–9.

ground,³⁹ one might think that the dissertation was the product of the Jewish feminist movement, struggling to win for women rabbinical positions in the synagogue. And indeed, the effect of Brooten's work has been felt in Jewish feminist circles.

In 1985, Brooten published a programmatic article on the methods for studying the history of women in the ancient world, particularly in early Christianity and in Judaism of the same time.⁴⁰ She argued that the Jewish world in the Hellenistic-Roman period was part of the larger classical world, and that the standard question regarding Judaism and Christianity, whether one was a good or bad influence on the other, is not at all relevant. Christianity, she claimed, is not the antithesis of Judaism, but a branch, and every innovation within Christianity regarding the status of women, or any other matter, has Judaism as its source. Brooten's work is a counterweight to the books and articles written by Christian feminists during the 1970s; she initiated the serious attempt, continued by other scholars, to avoid imposing value judgments on ancient sources, and pointed the way to a history of women based on what can actually be found in the sources and on a fresh perspective which the feminist movement would certainly inform but not entirely dictate. Brooten has repeatedly stressed the indispensability of essential skills, such as the ability to read sources in their original language, as well as close acquaintance with the substance and methods of scientific research. At the same time, she has emphatically adhered to feminist interpretations and has openly admitted that she does not purpose to write objective history, which, according to her method, is something which does not exist and never has: not extraterrestrial creatures but human beings have written human history, and by the same token the history of Christianity has been written by Christians, just as Jewish history has been written by Jews. Christians have indeed tried their hand at Jewish history, but their distance from the subject has guaranteed neither a better history nor, certainly, approval by Jews of such attempts.⁴¹ Nevertheless,

³⁹ Bernadette J. Brooten, "Junia ... Outstanding Among the Apostles (*Romans* 16:7)," in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, edd. L. J. and Arlene Swidler (New York 1977), 141–4; *eadem*. "Konnten Frauen im alten Judentum die Scheidung betreiben? Überlegung zu Mk 10, 11–12 und 1Kor 7, 10–11," *Evangelische Theologie* 42 (1982), 65–80; *eadem*. "Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, edd. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles (Boston 1985), 61–87; *eadem*. "Paul and the Law: How Complete was the Departure?" *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin Supplementary Issue* 1 (1990), 71–89.

⁴⁰ "Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico CA 1985), 65–91.

⁴¹ For more on Schüssler-Fiorenza and Brooten and their contribution to feminist research, see Anni L. Millhaven, *13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church* (Mystic CT 1987), 43–63, 173–93.

the debate between Jews and Christians on whether ancient Judaism or early Christianity was better for women has not yet run its course. A new book by Daniel Boyarin, who identifies himself as both a feminist and an orthodox, rabbinic Jew, sets out to demonstrate from rabbinic texts that Judaism on the whole viewed women and womanhood much more favorably than Christianity.⁴² Boyarin's book, it is true, incorporates the new sophistication which feminist studies have achieved in the late 1980s and 1990s, centering on complex theoretical issues and extensive interdisciplinary research; but in the final analysis this book has not advanced beyond its predecessors in its assumptions about the objectives of women studies. Furthermore, Boyarin makes the unfortunate mistake of equating a positive attitude to sex in Judaism with a positive attitude to women.

Primarily in America, a Jewish feminist theological movement sprang up in the wake of its Christian predecessor. Just as the latter had previously won pulpits for women in the church, the Jewish movement aimed at winning rabbinical positions for women in the synagogue, but it had first to fight for more basic principles, such as the right to be included in the *minyan* or to be called up to read the *Torah*. Like its Christian counterpart, the Jewish movement sought a religious justification of its goal in a particular reading of the canonical sources – the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* – which, like the New Testament, are used as historical documents in the present study. The struggle began within the Jewish Reform movement, and after success in those quarters it moved on to the Conservative movement, and in America it has reached even Orthodox circles.⁴³

The question has existed for some time as an academic issue, for it was debated on a purely theoretical basis by Conservative Jews already in 1922.⁴⁴ However, the first work to deal with the question of women's roles in the synagogue in the age of feminism was written in 1966 by an English rabbi, R. Loewe, and was in fact not feminist at all. In response to a request by the Anglican church, which was at that time immersed in its own battle with women over the priesthood, Loewe produced *The Position of Jewish Women in Judaism* (London), in which he maintained that Judaism assigned women certain defined roles which were substantially different from those of men, and that consequently a woman's participation in a *minyan* or her reading from the *Torah*, or most emphatically her ordination as a rabbi, were all inconceivable. Naturally Loewe anchored his views in the rabbinic sources.

⁴² D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley 1993).

⁴³ See, e.g. Blu Greenberg, "Will There be Orthodox Women Rabbis?" *Judaism* 33 (1984), 23–33.

⁴⁴ See. J. Z. Lauterbach, "Responsum on Question, Shall Women be Ordained Rabbis?" *Central Conference of American Rabbis Year Book* 32 (1922), 156–62, who opposes the idea based on an appeal to Jewish tradition. A negative response to his presentation is found *ibid.* 163–77.