

## “The Brooten Phenomenon”

### Moving Women from the Margins in Second-Temple and New Testament Scholarship

*Sara Parks, University of Nottingham*

#### Abstract

Although at least half the scholars entering the fields of early Judaism and nascent Christianity may now be women, and although scholarship on ancient women, on biblical and apocryphal female characters, and on the construction of femininity and masculinity in antiquity is now thriving, there remains an impermeable conceptual wall between this and what is perceived as “regular” scholarship. The largely unwritten rule, that the study of women and gender is non-mainstream or “niche,” conceptually delimits investigations into ancient women, ancient female literary characters, and the construction of gender in the Second-Temple Period and early Christianity as “ancillary” and not of general relevance. Sara Parks nicknames this problem the “Brooten Phenomenon,” after the ways in which Bernadette Brooten’s work on women leaders in the ancient synagogue has been used (or not used) over the years. Using two brief case studies from Q and from the gospel resurrection narratives, she argues that scholarship ignorant of the role of women and the construction of gender is simply poor scholarship.

#### Key words

Feminist methodology; early Judaism; New Testament; women in the New Testament; women synagogue leaders; women in early Judaism; gender; Bernadette Brooten; misogyny

#### Introduction

There is no question that scholarship in early Judaism<sup>1</sup> and nascent Christianity that is done either *by* or *about* women is by no means the rare exception it would have been just fifty years ago.<sup>2</sup> And yet, although at least half the scholars entering the field may now be women, and although scholarship on ancient women, on biblical and apocryphal female characters, and on the construction of femininity and masculinity in antiquity is now thriving, there remains, I argue, an impermeable

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<sup>1</sup> My field is early Judaism, by which I mean the study of Jewish history and literature within and around the period of the Second Temple, including early Jesus movements and the texts that came to be collected as the New Testament. Approaching the texts of early Christianity without attention to their early Jewish and Hellenistic context is unlikely to produce readings that are sensitive to the cultural repertoire of their authors and first hearers. That is why this article, whose case studies come from the canonical gospels and Q, is framed as a study within Second-Temple Judaism.

<sup>2</sup> This article is adapted from an invited paper for the 10<sup>th</sup> Enoch Nangeroni Meeting of the Enoch Seminar: Gender and Second-Temple Judaism, co-chaired by Shayna Sheinfeld and Kathy Ehrensperger, June 17-21, 2018, Rome. My attendance was generously funded by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham.

conceptual wall between this and what is perceived as “regular” scholarship. On the one side of the wall is “mainstream” scholarship, what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1999) has dubbed “malestream” scholarship due to its unspoken patriarchal or kyriarchal assumptions around what constitutes appropriate method and subject matter. On the other side of the wall are scholars and subjects that, whether or not we admit it, are envisioned as non-mainstream or “niche.” This is a largely unwritten rule, which nevertheless conceptually limits investigations into ancient women, ancient female literary characters, and the construction of gender in the Second-Temple Period and early Christianity as “ancillary” rather than of general relevance. Scholars feel they can safely ignore these people and these fields and still not miss anything that will affect their ability to remain well-read and current. In video-game or *Dungeons & Dragons* terms, gender investigations are “side quests.” They can be fun, and they are interesting for the quester, but they are easily compartmentalized and do not fundamentally affect the real game or the other characters in the main quest.

I cannot pretend to be able to solve this problem in my lifetime, let alone in a brief article. However, I *will* do two things. I will at least give the problem a name: I have nicknamed it the “Brooten Phenomenon” for reasons explained below. I will also demonstrate, using two brief case studies from Q and from the gospels, that it is, indeed, a problem. Further, I do not mean to say that it is a problem only from the perspective of women or feminists. Rather, I mean to say that it is a methodological error that threatens to reduce the quality of *all* scholarship, most definitely including scholarship that is ostensibly by, about, and for men. I propose that getting rid of the view that feminist scholarship or scholarship about gender is “niche” is the only advisable way forward.

### **What is the “Brooten Phenomenon”?**

In short, the “Brooten Phenomenon” refers to the way in which women’s scholarship, and scholarship on women, doesn’t cross the bridge into what is considered to be “real” (i.e. male-centred) scholarship. I have chosen this term because of a crowning example: Bernadette Brooten’s masterful work, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (1982) has yet to pass through the barrier to change the classroom or the field outside of what is incorrectly perceived as the realm of “women’s” scholarship. This book was one of the first things I read by Brooten as a young Master’s student, and I so admired its caution and breadth; it was everything I hoped to achieve one day—as close as a scholar could come to a “final word on the subject.” In it, Brooten refuted—roundly—the argument (or, rather, the unargued assumption) that, unlike other religions in Greco-Roman antiquity, ancient Judaism had no female religious leadership in the form of priestesses or synagogue heads. In a style that has turned out to be typical for Brooten, at the core of the book is a thorough catalogue of ancient primary material, in this case mainly inscriptions. Each inscription in the book provides evidence for women leaders in Jewish antiquity. The effect is all the stronger when the totality of the evidence is considered.

The subtitle of Brooten’s book, *Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, refers to: a) the collection of inscriptions Brooten gathered, and; b) the history of their analysis. This second aspect of the book has some unexpected entertainment value. When Brooten lays before the reader the lengths to which commentators

through the centuries have gone in order to avoid the plain sense of the readings, the effect is almost hilarious. Each inscription had previously been read blatantly unnaturally, including by revered specialists of Jewish and Christian antiquity. Brooten re-analysed (or perhaps *actually* analysed for the first time) this previously-misread inscriptional data using the same methods that one might use for other religions of ancient Greece and Rome, such as the cult of Isis or Rome's Vestals, and piled up a veritable avalanche of evidence for ancient Jewish women in leadership of various kinds.

The scholars before Brooten who had treated these inscriptions—which we now know to provide evidence for ancient Jewish women who were elders, heads of synagogues, or even priests—may have been cautious enough in their other work. But in the case of the evidence for women in positions of power within Jewish antiquity, each scholar, to a man, had dismissed the plain sense of each inscription as being impossible. *A priori* they had collectively said, “we know that women were not leaders in ancient Judaism, so this inscription must have a meaning other than what it says.” But, as Brooten notes, if it had been newly-discovered evidence for a mystery cult, no one would have thought that it made any methodological sense to doubt the inscription (1982, 99). Carrie Duncan (2012, 39) neatly summarizes this remarkable situation:

Although synagogue title inscriptions have been a topic of study since the nineteenth century, early scholars gave only passing interest to the fact that on rare occasions these titles were bestowed upon women. Whereas these scholars assumed practical responsibilities and obligations were incumbent upon male title bearers, they also assumed a complete male dominance of Judaism that would preclude the possibility of female leadership ... As a result of these assumptions, early scholarship typically explained away the significance of female title bearers in a variety of ways.

Here, I will discuss but a few of the acrobatic antics performed in order for interpreters to maintain these assumptions in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. In three Greek inscriptions in particular, women are accorded the specific title “head of synagogue” (*archisynagogos*). The inscriptions are not ambiguous. One, found on a tomb, 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) (Brooten 1982, 5).

Brooten traced the history of scholarship on this cautionary epitaph and found the following: Salomon Reinach first published the inscription; he declares that the title *archisynagogos* must be merely *honorary* rather than *functional*. To get over the fact that *archisynagogos* had already been established as a functional title, he decides, when faced with female *archisynagogoi*, that there must have been two stages in the history of the word's usage—an early functional stage, and a later honorific stage (Reinach 1883; cited in Brooten 1982, 5). His reasoning is that, *a priori*, the word cannot have meant what it usually means because in this case it is referring to a woman. Next, M. Weinberg solves the dilemma of a Jewish woman in a position of power by explaining that Rufina was clearly the *wife* of an *archisynagogos*. His reasoning for this little linguistic minuet is simple: “for women have never held an

office in a Jewish community, and certainly not a synagogue office” (Weinberg 1897, 658; cited in Brooten 1982, 6). Brooten reveals that Emil Schürer has been equally dismissive: “Rufina herself bears the title *archisynagogos*, which in the case of a woman is, of course, just a title” (Schürer 1973–1979, 2.435; cited in Brooten 1982, 6).

Brooten collects example after example of this sort of sidestepping of the not one but three clear inscriptions assigning the term “head of synagogue” to a woman. She cites another scholar who writes that Rufina “was very likely a lady whom the congregation wished to honour, but to whom it could hardly have entrusted the actual charge of an office” (Baron, 1942, 1.97; cited in Brooten 1982, 6). Another has concluded that, “concerning the women, it can certainly not mean that they were bestowed with the dignity of a head of the synagogue, for the synagogue did not allow women such honours; it is rather the wives of presidents of synagogues who are meant” (Krauss, 1922, 118; cited in Brooten 1982, 6). Brooten’s catalogue of previous scholarship highlights the stunning fact that not one of these scholars bothers to *argue* these positions which represent awkward readings of the evidence; they are mentioned in passing as obvious.

Brooten’s book covers numerous additional assignments of titles to women, ranging from “elder” to “synagogue mother” to “synagogue head” to “priest,” again and again exposing the gymnastic contortions to which male scholars would subject the inscriptions in order to avoid taking them at face value. In every case where an inscription which suggested female leadership had been unearthed, scholars had posited bizarre explanations for what they clearly perceived as a problem. The term “priest” (*hieria/hierissa*) had to be a proper name. Had to be the title of the woman’s father. Had to be a misspelling. Or the priest had to be male, but—for reasons unknown—had a female name! Granted, some of the inscriptions are fragmentary or ambiguous, but, as Brooten points out, “if these inscriptions had come from another Graeco-Roman religion, no scholar would have thought of arguing that ‘priest’ does not really mean ‘priest’” (1982, 99). Yes, these cases are mainly evidenced in diasporic Judaism, and no, they do not seem to have survived after the coalescence of Rabbinic Judaism and the so-called Parting of the Ways, but they should at the very least complicate the question of Jewish leadership in antiquity. The too-easy dichotomy that exists between Judaism and Hellenism should not be allowed to serve as a reason why we can ignore Brooten’s findings.

Yet despite the publication of Brooten’s exhaustive collection of clear examples, it has been my experience on both sides of the Atlantic that the old assumption *still* reigns in both classrooms and publications: ancient Judaism had no women leaders. I posit that the case of Brooten’s still-unincorporated yet completely convincing and exhaustive work of over thirty years ago indicates that the question of women in antiquity is not one that is gaining traction beyond what is perceived as its own niche, precisely because, in general, the study of women is treated as an accessory, at best ancillary to what are considered primary fields.

Although *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* is incorporated into, say, *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (James and Dillon 2012), or *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Grossman and Haut 1993), it is not incorporated into general scholarship on synagogues or on the Jewish priesthood. If it is, it is in the manner of the recent volume *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*



(Levine 2000). That is, it has a chapter on women in which Brooten's work, along with the work of others—such as Kraemer, who analysed a similar inscription with a diasporic Jewish woman elder (1985)—is discussed. Yet the contents of the one chapter called “Women in the Synagogue” remain almost completely compartmentalized and do not noticeably inform other chapters. While Brooten's and others' evidence of the active participation of Jewish women in a variety of administrative and religious capacities is treated in this one chapter, the material is kept largely hermetically separate from influencing the rest of the book.

Despite the book's treatment (in the chapter on women) of a number of instances where Jewish women are referred to as *hiereia* or *hierissa* (priestess), the very next chapter, called “Priests,” makes no mention of any such complication. Furthermore, the treatment of Brooten's work on these inscriptions is dismissive. It reads: “In sum, there is certainly a possibility that most, if not all the titles that appear in over a score of Diaspora inscriptions are those of functioning women officials. The challenge, however, is finding a way to substantiate this claim, and not merely assert it” (Levine 2000, 511). This, of course, misses the whole point of Brooten's work, which is that unsubstantiated claims and assumptions have marked the opposite view, that is, that Jewish women could not, *a priori*, have been leaders, and thus Brooten's challenge is that the burden of proof should fall on those who wish to read all of these inscriptions against their simplest reading.

Levine goes on to spend some time making sure that the reader knows that such cases of women's leadership were aberrations and “departures,” and to form a narrative where Judaism had, in these cases, been “influenced by the surrounding culture” (2000, 515), as though such a thing were somehow not the case for every human group everywhere at all times. As though asking for *more* proof of Jewish women leaders, isolating the proof we have as aberrant, and then associating women's leadership with “other cultures” had closed the case, the book goes on to largely tell the history of men, and treat subjects topically without having to bother too much with women's history except as a separate category. The author even concludes, sweepingly:

Jewish society was quite different from its social environs. To the best of our knowledge, women did not play any kind of liturgical role in the synagogue ... Perhaps it was the Semitic, Near Eastern roots of Israelite tradition that might explain why Jews looked askance at women's cultic participation ... or perhaps it was because of the monotheistic nature of Judaism: at the centre of Judaism is one God, of masculine gender. (Levine 2000, 518)

Although Brooten is now a distinguished and world-class senior scholar, this seminal work still languishes in many ways. People still say “unlike other religions of Greco-Roman antiquity, Judaism had strictly male religious leadership.” Or, worse, they contrast this stereotype of Judaism with early Christianity using the trope that A. J. Levine has pointed out within Christian scholarship, whereby “ancient Judaism was hopelessly patriarchal until Jesus came along and emancipated everyone.”<sup>3</sup> This lack of integration of Brooten's work into “regular

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<sup>3</sup> Amy-Jill Levine sounds an alarm about the dichotomy that much of the scholarship on women in early Christianity has set up between “women in early Judaism” *versus* “women in early Christianity,” noting that both are extreme caricatures, with Judaism assumed (*a priori*) to be

scholarship” is not because Brooten’s work is lacking. It is because—dare I write the words—*work on or by women often struggles to cross the bridge into scholarship written by men or purportedly about general (rather than gender-specific) topics*. We have come a long way in the study of women in antiquity,<sup>4</sup> but not in an integrated manner. Advancements in our knowledge of ancient women which are not then incorporated into scholarly consensus and which never really “trickle down” are not changing the field, but remain contained in their own bubble, safely away from “malestream” scholarship. This is what I mean by the “Brooten Phenomenon.”

### **What Needs to Change? Everything.**

What needs to change? In my estimation, our whole paradigm does. I am calling for honed methods, an ethics of interpretation, and, most importantly, scholarship on women and gender *by men for men*.

If more women than ever before in history are working in the fields of early Judaism, early Christianity, biblical studies, and theology, and more scholars in those fields have their eye on women and gender, but their conclusions are quite frequently remaining in closed feedback loops without dissemination and integration, something is not working correctly. If the problem is not the scholarship itself,<sup>5</sup> then the problem is the environment in which it is taking place. What is needed in order for women and gender to break through the wall so that they are no longer conceptualized as a niche but are integrated into all questions is nothing less than a paradigmatic overhaul. I propose a threefold transformation. We need methodological changes, as Brooten suggests in “Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction” (1985, 65-91); we need an ethical framework in which to work, as Schüssler Fiorenza proposes in *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (1999); and in both of these things, we need widespread participation from those who have somehow found themselves in the position of “default human beings”—otherwise known as “men.” In particular, we need the participation of the privileged men at the top of all the intersectional hierarchies of our species.

#### 1. Honed Methods and Ethics of Interpretation

Ours has been a century of cutting-edge methodology. There have been myriad disruptions of the popular scholarly dichotomies and oversimplifications that were once the most common tools of the trade. In general, maybe because the field of

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hopelessly patriarchal and restrictive for women, and Christianity depicted as unflaggingly emancipatory. See Levine (1996, 307).

<sup>4</sup> According to Sidnie White Crawford, “interest in the role and status of women in Second Temple Judaism (and generally in Judaism and Christianity) has increased exponentially in the past twenty-five years” (2001, 330). Murphy writes, in *The Word According to Eve*, “until recently, [the Bible] was studied by female scholars hardly at all, let alone by female scholars who were interested specifically in what the Bible had to say about women. This has changed, to put it mildly” (1998, x). Volumes dedicated to uncovering the historical realities of women in antiquity are beginning to appear as well, for example, Harvard University’s five-volume history of women from ancient goddesses to the twentieth century, *A History of Women in the West* (Duby and Perrot 1994-1996). Other examples in the last thirty years that show the extent to which a serious interest is taking hold (but only among women) in the role of women in early Judaism, early Christianity, and in biblical studies include Yarbro Collins (1985); Schüssler Fiorenza (2014); Eisen and Standhartinger (2013); Meyers (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Spoiler alert: it is not.

early Judaism is newer and we have wrested it but recently from the clutches of the problematic “Intertestamental Studies,” scholars who have moved away from canon-based study are constantly checking themselves against assumptions around words like “biblical,” “Christian,” “Hellenistic,” “canonical,” “orthodox,” etc.<sup>6</sup> I think we are therefore also capable of forging a path out of the “malestream.” Many before us have already undertaken deep methodological reflection on this matter.

a. *Bernadette Brooten.*

Brooten, for instance, suggests that we cannot necessarily approach the study of ancient women using the same categories that we do for ancient men (1985, 65). She suggests that a “shift of emphasis” that places women “in the centre of the frame” may necessitate the delineation of new boundaries, and that “the categories developed to understand the history of man may no longer be adequate, that the traditional historical periods and canons of literature may not be the proper framework, and that we will need to ask new types of questions and consider hitherto overlooked sources” (ibid.). The categories of Judaism and Hellenism, employed above by Lee Levine in order to dismiss Brooten’s work, are one example. Brooten writes:

The assumption is usually that the Hellenistic world was more progressive and the Jewish world more conservative with respect to women, so that when one discovers progressive elements in Judaism, the tendency is to attribute these to Hellenistic influence (1985, 76).

Brooten (1985, 67) suggests a combination of shifts in addition to redrawing scholarly categories, including widening typical pools of evidence, acknowledging radical differences in the amount of evidence available for studies of ancient women, understanding that history has been and still is a men’s endeavour, and accepting that *imagination* is a necessary part of reconstructing women’s history.

b. *Tal Ilan.*

As Tal Ilan has shown, not only by the example of her work but also explicitly in discussions of method, most of our evidence for women is filtered through what ancient men thought about them; what was seen as evidence for women’s behaviours may often instead represent the behaviour of women in the fantasies of men. The important contribution of Ilan’s *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women’s History from Rabbinic Literature* (1997) is not only to lay bare the problematic tendency of previous historians to use Rabbinic sources unquestioningly as face-value documents for women’s realities, but also to reveal how, over time, we are able to see that women characters have been deliberately effaced or even maligned when we pay attention to women comparatively across rabbinic collections. My own research affirms that these tendencies toward the erasure or even slander of women also play out in the time frame between the early Jesus movement and the patristic period.<sup>7</sup>

c. *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*

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<sup>6</sup> A crowning example of this type of scholarship is Mroczek (2016).

<sup>7</sup> See my *Women in Q: Gender in the Rhetoric of Jesus* (tentative title; Philadelphia: Fortress Lexington, in press).

In addition to the above caveats, one of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's most important contributions is the identification of a central obstacle to the integration of women's scholarship and scholarship about gender: the stereotype that "malestream" scholarship is *objective*, whereas feminist scholarship is "engaged" and therefore somehow unscientific. She proposes an interdisciplinary "ethics of interpretation" which:

means to overcome the assumed dichotomy between engaged scholarship (such as feminist, postcolonial, African American, queer, and other subdisciplines) and scientific (malestream) interpretation. Whereas the former is allegedly using ethical criteria, the latter is said to live up to a scientific ethos that gives precedence to cognitive criteria. Instead, I would argue that a scientific ethos demands both ethical and cognitive criteria ... (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, 195-6).

The claim that one can undertake historical work from a "neutral" or "unbiased" standpoint is problematic at best, and violent at worst. Scientific neutrality is not only impossible,<sup>8</sup> but also unethical. Contrary to what is typically assumed, it is not only the scholarship from or about marginalized voices that is "engaged" and has political and socio-historical consequences; rather, it is just that only some scholarship *admits* that it is situated from within gendered, ethnic, socio-economic, racialized, geographical, ideological, and cultural standpoints. Women's scholarship may have an engaged interest and an overt bias in its questions—but scholarship that systematically ignores women and non-binary gender and operates from the presumption that being male, white, Western, and Christian or post-Christian is an acceptable neutral "default" is *also* engaged and biased, under false cover of objectivity.

*d. A. J. Levine*

A number of scholars, most notably A. J. Levine, have guided us away from a common peril of New Testament scholarship by helping to push work on women and gender in antiquity away from the edge of the precipice of anti-Judaism. Levine's "Second-Temple Judaism, Jesus, and Women" (1996, 303) and her "Matthew, Mark, and Luke: Good News or Bad?" (2002) remind us that we need to pay close methodological attention when we use feminist hermeneutics of generosity on biblical texts. There is a difference between the work of providing readings that seek overtly to redeem patriarchal texts by uncovering women's voices and agency, and the work of doing history.

Levine has cautioned that such conflation has resulted in early feminist scholarship on women in Christianity being disturbingly problematic in its inaccurate denigration of first-century Judaism on its way to find gender equality at the roots of the Christian tradition. Works like Judith Plaskow's "Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Interpretation" (1993), Schüssler Fiorenza's "The Power of Naming: Jesus, Women, and Christian Anti-Judaism" (1995), and Kathleen Corley's *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (2002) support Levine's critique of Christian feminist readings that treat Judaism as a

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<sup>8</sup> As Achtemeier puts it, "there is no such thing as a neutral, historical-critical, scientific, objective interpretation of the Scriptures" (1988, 50).



flattened patriarchal foil against which to contrast gender in the early Jesus movement.

Alicia Batten's "More Queries for Q: Women and Christian Origins" (1994) shows that while Jesus' sayings material may contain gender-levelling rhetoric, it did not pop spontaneously from a vacuum, but was in keeping with a number of diverse shifts in gender dynamics in the surrounding Mediterranean, involving Jews and non-Jews alike. Batten, Levine, and others have sounded a clear, decades-long call against the inadvertent perpetuation of anti-Semitism caused by discussing New Testament texts in a way that divorces them from their early Jewish context. This is a call that more New Testament scholarship, not just on the question of gender, would do well to heed.

## 2. Scholarship on Women by Men for Men

Many of us are already aware of the need for shifts toward these kinds of methodological approaches. Virtually everyone who works on women and gender in early Judaism already incorporates the above-mentioned considerations. However, part of the point of this article is to suggest that the people who will need to carry the burden of integrating these methods so that they transform our wider fields are men.

This past year, many of us observed or even took part in a turning point in history: survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault, the majority of whom were women, broke with social convention across the English-speaking world and shared publicly via social media that they had been victims of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. Typically disclosed only privately to trusted friends, and rarely officially reported, admissions that one had experienced sexual assault were now flying through newsfeeds alongside cute kittens and political memes, thanks to the #MeToo movement. Our professional guilds were not exempt from these disclosures; I noticed that a few days after the movement had "gone viral," one female colleague in the study of religion after another also decided to go public. The phenomenon was overwhelmingly driven and supported by women, including women scholars, but I noticed with admiration the handful—perhaps three or four—men in my social networks who joined in attempts to speak out against societal norms that work to make rape normal and leave the vast majority of people who commit rape unscathed, unashamed, or even unaware.

The societal frameworks that make sexual assault against women commonplace may have far more traumatizing results than those which make scholarship on ancient women remain ancillary, but they both fall along the same patriarchal—or kyriarchal—spectrum of silencing and domination. As women are the ones most frequently marginalized along the spectrum of silencing that is patriarchy, it should not fall exclusively to women to drive change toward the more integrated and ethical scholarship we want. We have now come, at least within Second-Temple scholarship, to be aware that canons, terminology, artificially imposed time periods, and the elite nature of ancient textual evidence all work together to obscure our results, and we all work to adjust for these issues. I envision a day when constructions of masculinity and femininity, binary views of gender, patriarchal and kyriarchal worldviews, and male-privileging views of history are also acknowledged in all questions, by all scholars. What I hope to demonstrate now, is

that, if such a change were to take place, the benefits would by no means be restricted to women and non-binary individuals.

### When Questions about Women’s History Answer “Man Questions”

I would like to share just two recent examples of how, in my research on ancient women, I inadvertently uncovered useful information that answered “man questions.” By “man questions,” I—only partially facetiously—mean what are considered to be “real” questions according to “malestream” scholarship. I hope that these two brief examples will demonstrate concretely how asking ancient texts to answer questions about women is by no means a fringe concern, nor are the results of such a study only of interest to one particular marginalized group.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is only when asking questions from all possible angles and with diverse interests in mind that we do ancient texts—and the contemporary search for knowledge about them—any justice at all.

#### Example 1: Women in Q provide evidence against Kloppenborg’s strata

In the first case, I was researching the role of women in Jesus’ sayings material.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, I was dealing with what I call the Q “Gender Pairs”—what Jeremias (1998) first called the *Doppelgleichnisse*.<sup>11</sup> These are cases in the recorded teaching material of Jesus of Nazareth where he tells twin parables with nearly identical didactic content, except that one features a female protagonist or feminine activity and the other features a male protagonist or masculine activity, such as the parables of the man who loses a sheep (Matt. 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7) and the woman who loses a coin (Luke 15:8-10). While I was in the process of identifying all these gendered pairs in Q and classifying them into subcategories,<sup>12</sup> I remained aloof to Kloppenborg’s (2000; 2007) popularization of Schulz’s (1964) theory that Q comprises three redactional strata, with different social situations behind each stratum of development.<sup>13</sup> Q is already a hypothetical document cautiously reconstructed from the sayings material in Matthew and Luke. I was reticent to follow Kloppenborg when he further hypothesized Q to have three separate literary stages. Kloppenborg, Mack (1995 and 1993), and others (e.g. Cotter 2014; Hartin 1994; Howes 2015; Vaage 1994) imagine three distinct phases of community development, often positing that the sapiential material is from an earlier and less organized *formative* phase, directed more toward the group’s own members (Q<sup>1</sup>), whereas the apocalyptic material came on the scene later as the group experienced rejection and persecution, and is a major *redactional* phase directed more toward outsiders (Q<sup>2</sup>) (Kloppenborg 2007; cf. Piper 1989, 176-8).<sup>14</sup> Brief narrative additions

<sup>9</sup> It may sound strange to categorize fifty per cent of the world as marginalized, and yet, in practical terms, the term fits.

<sup>10</sup> I thank my dear Doktorvater Gerbern Oegema for supervising this research with unfailing encouragement.

<sup>11</sup> One of the first scholars to notice this phenomenon in the gospels was J. Jeremias, who named it *Doppelgleichnis* (1998).

<sup>12</sup> The foundation for this work of classification had been laid by William Arnal (1997) and Denis Fricker (2004).

<sup>13</sup> The idea of discerning a literary development within Q was first discussed by Schulz in 1964. Kloppenborg (2000; 2007) went on to develop this hypothesis, resulting in a quite widely-used three-tier stratification of the Q Document.

<sup>14</sup> Piper (1989) sees struggles with outsiders across both Q<sup>1</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup>.

(mainly the baptism in Q 3:21–2, and the temptation scene in Q 4:1–13) form the final smallest stratum (Q<sup>3</sup>).<sup>15</sup>

I happened to be using a copy of Q that was colour-coded according to the posited strata when I noticed that the gendered parable pairs occur across both main strata of Q—the so-called formative or “wisdom” layer *and* the so-called redactional or apocalyptic layer.

There are six gendered parable pairs in the critical edition of Q (Robinson, Hoffman, Kloppenborg 2000). We find four of them in Q<sup>1</sup>, as the earliest hypothetical layer is called: The Bread and the Fish (Q 11:11-12); The Ravens and the Lilies (Q 12:24, 27); The Mustard Seed and The Yeast (Q 13:18-21); and the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Q 15:4-5, 7-9). And we find two of them in Q<sup>2</sup>, as the so-called main redactional layer is called: the Queen of the South and the Ninevite Men (Q 11:31-2); and the Men in the Field and the Women at the Mill (Q 17:34-5).

In my estimation, this existence of gendered pairing across both layers calls into question the notion of a stratified Q. I am not saying that it *proves* that Q has no redactional strata, but I do think that the presence of the gender pairs across both main strata complicates the hypothesis and must be reckoned with. It is a text-critical discovery that I would certainly not have made had I not been researching the attitude toward women in the Q sayings.

Example 2: Women in the gospel resurrection scenes provide evidence for a literary relationship between John and the Synoptics.

A second recent example of how the investigation of women in our ancient sources can elucidate other questions about those sources came to me while I was teaching undergraduates at the University of Nottingham about women in the New Testament, and I had them do a side-by-side comparison of the four canonical resurrection accounts. I asked them to compare all the characters mentioned at the foot of the cross and in the empty tomb scenes, in the hopes that they would notice the striking consistency of Mary Magdalene’s presence alongside the otherwise wide discrepancies. As I was looking at all four passages synoptically, focusing specifically on the women, I noticed something that had not previously occurred to me, at least not in a way I took seriously—a piece of evidence that suggests a literary relationship between John and Luke.

It is often taught to undergraduates without too much complication that John is probably literarily unrelated to the synoptic gospels. We typically call upon John in its capacity as a separate witness to kernels of historicity around Jesus of Nazareth, thanks to its role as an independent attestation. A few people over the years—beginning, I think, with Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.24.2)—have put forth a possible literary relationship between John and one or other of the Synoptics (e.g. Dowell 1992; Windisch 1926), but I have until now accepted the general consensus that the gospel of John is literarily independent, which of course makes a difference to internal interpretations of John, but also to historical Jesus research.

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<sup>15</sup> The third stage consists mainly of the temptation narrative and is “an example of a historicizing tendency” (Piper 1995, 11).

However, an element of the resurrection accounts, which I only noticed when focusing closely on the women, complicates matters.

In the earliest gospel, Mark, the resurrection pericope goes like this:<sup>16</sup>

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8 NRSV)

Here, we have three named women (two Marys and Salome), an encounter with a shining young man, and no male disciples on the scene. The male disciples are mentioned in the instructions at the end, where the women are encouraged to tell “his disciples and Peter” to meet a resurrected Jesus in Galilee. Everyone leaves, terrified.

In the gospel that was probably written next, that of Matthew, the literary dependence, with a bit of embellishment and Matthean flair, is clear:

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Matt. 28:1-10 NRSV)

Here we have just two women—the Marys—and an angel with an almost verbatim message for them that Jesus has been raised and to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. Peter is not mentioned here. Note that we also have here a pre-Galilee appearance of Jesus to both Marys. Such an appearance (of Jesus to Mary

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<sup>16</sup> I include here only the undisputed section, vv.1-8, rather than the shorter and longer endings added later, around which there is some conflicting manuscript evidence. On the various endings of Mark, see Moloney (2002, 339-62).

Magdalene before everyone returned to Galilee) was eventually appended to Mark—relatively late in the tradition, as Eusebius, Jerome, and Origen do not know it (Metzger 2005).

The remaining two gospels are Luke and John. The order in which they were written is unclear as the dating is disputed. Marcus Borg makes some good arguments for placing Luke last (2012, 424-5), but this is not (yet?) conventional (Shellard 1995). Regardless, both are later in comparison with Mark and Matthew.

In comparing the location of the women in all four accounts, two things stand out in Luke and John which might suggest a literary relationship between them, contrary to current thinking. The lesser of the two is the way all four pericopes begin. I have made a chart of the four beginnings (figure 1) to illustrate the various overlaps. The translation is mine to reflect similar and different Greek construction. Across all four accounts there is an agreement of the “bones” of the content at the beginning of the pericope, along with many small differences. For example, all four mention that it is very early in the morning, but all four do so with a different wording: Mark says it is “very early” (λίαν πρωῖ), Matthew says it is “dawn” (ἐπιφωσκούση), John says it was “early, still being dark” (πρωῖ, σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης), and Luke says something like “deep daybreak,” including the concepts of early and dawn, but with different words (ὄρθρου βαθέως). Thus, in some ways each author agrees on the setting, but describes it in a unique way.

Figure 1

Mark 16:1–2	Matthew 28:1	John 20:1a	Luke 24:1
<b>The sabbath having been past</b> , Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that having come, they might anoint him. <b>And very early on the first of the week</b> , when the sun had risen, they come to the tomb.	<b>After sabbath, it being dawn toward (the) first of (the) week</b> , Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.	<b>First of the week, early, it yet being dark</b> , Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb ...	<b>The first of the week, very early morning</b> , they <sup>17</sup> came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.
διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου	Ὅψε ... αββάτων	... no mention	... no mention
λίαν πρωῖ <b>τῆ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων</b>	<b>τῆ ἐπιφωσκούση</b> εἰς <b>μίαν σαββάτων</b>	<b>Τῆ ... μιᾶ τῶν .σαββάτων ...</b> πρωῖ, σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης	<b>τῆ ... μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων</b> , ὄρθρου βαθέως
ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον	ἦλθεν ... εωρῆσαι τὸν τάφον	ἔρχεται ... εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον	ἐπὶ τὸ μνήμα ἦλθον

<sup>17</sup> “the women who had come with him from Galilee” (Luke 23:55)



There is, of note for our purposes, an interesting agreement of John and Luke against Mark and Matthew in these verses. Where Mark and Matthew mention that the Sabbath is over, and it is the first of the week, John and Luke drop the Sabbath being over and simply state that it is the first of the week. Alone, this can by no means be used to argue for literary dependence. It may simply reflect the fact that both John and Luke are of later date, and thus both drop the mention of the Sabbath because they have fewer Sabbath-observant Jews in their audiences.

However, a stronger, slightly bizarre addition to the empty tomb scenes by John and Luke against Mark and Matthew provide more interesting possibilities for literary interdependence. The two earlier gospels end the empty tomb scene with the women tasked with rallying the other disciples in Galilee. The male disciples are not involved in their empty tomb scenes. In contrast, the two later gospels each seem to want to provide male witnesses, rather than leaving women as the only eyewitnesses to the empty tomb. Luke has the women go and relate the resurrection to the other disciples, where they are met with disbelief except by Peter, *who runs to the tomb to see for himself*: “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened” (Luke 24:12 NRSV). John also has Peter witnessing the empty tomb and the linen clothes, but not without a footrace between Peter and “the disciple Jesus loved”:

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in. (John 20:3-8 NRSV)

It looks to me as though these two texts are in conversation. Both want a male witness for the empty tomb, but they are not in agreement about *which* male should have this honour. For Luke, the honour goes to Peter, who runs to see the tomb for himself, but in the Johannine account there is a struggle between Peter and “the beloved disciple,” who beats Peter in the race to the tomb, although he does not go inside first. Does whichever of these gospels was written last know of the other “race to the tomb” tradition and attempt to challenge it?

Upon investigation, I came to realize that a handful of scholars have already noticed this and have posited direct interaction between the two empty tomb accounts, although they have not been able to budge consensus. For instance, in 2016, Chris Keith suggested that the two narratives are in direct competition (2016). Udo Schnelle thought the same, positing in the 1990s that John reacts to Luke (2001, 299, 301).

The differing accounts of Peter and the empty tomb cannot by themselves prove a literary relationship between John and Luke/Acts. Others before me have also noticed and thought about direct literary dependence based on these scenes. What, then, is the point? The point is not that I, as a non-Johannine scholar, have definitively exploded the theory of John’s literary independence all because I have

an interest in Mary Magdalene. The point, so simple and yet not to be underestimated, is that *closer interaction with gender dynamics in our texts can provide additional vantage points toward questions that do not have to do with gender*. Until examining the place of the women at the resurrection scenes, I had not engaged with the discussion of relationships between John and the Synoptics because I had accepted consensus. Going forward, I will no longer simply tell my undergraduates that the consensus is that John is literarily independent, without putting these primary texts in front of them and mentioning other viewpoints.

In both above cases, paying attention to women and gender helped me think about longstanding text-critical and source-critical questions in different ways, and in the case of Q, in new ways.

### **Who Will Benefit from Moving Women from the Margins? Everyone.**

Attempting to reconstruct the history of women or to analyse ancient literature with an eye to gender is a nice, politically-correct, feminist, ethical thing to do. But it is more than that. *It is actually the only way to obtain accurate results as historians*. As Brooten has suggested, the typical time periods, categories, and canons created by men both ancient and modern “determine the very results of research” (1985, 70). In other words, the incorporation and structural integration of feminist scholarship, scholarship about women, and women’s scholarship into “regular” scholarship simply *yields better results*.

The inclusion of ancient women in the scope of our work, rather than only providing answers to a “niche” set of questions, provides answers, in the end, to many important questions that don’t just have to do with gender. Historical studies that include women, or highlight gender, in ways that haven’t been done in the past, provide new pathways into old questions where the academy may be stuck. They break open the data from new angles. They help us to see the whole picture, so that we can answer *all* of our questions more accurately *and* more ethically.

I argue that if we want to find more nuanced and robust answers to questions of history, we *all* need to engage in a paradigm shift where the study of women is not compartmentalized. This will by no means only enlighten scholarship where women are concerned, but it will actually give us the fuller picture necessary to better understand men too. The study of women and gender has already given us the more recent line of inquiry into the ways in which masculinity is also constructed. Virginia Burrus reminds us that, “at a basic level, gender now signals interest in the social construction of men’s roles as well as women’s and/or in the discursive production of masculinity as well as femininity” (2007, 2). The two above case studies work to illustrate how the inclusion and integration of an interest in women and gender can elucidate questions far beyond the so-called niche of gender studies.

### **Going Forward**

Going forward, women’s scholarship and scholarship on women should not be construed as optional “identity politics.” Rather, they must be accepted as essential to so-called “regular” scholarship. Without them, our scholarship is incomplete, or even incorrect.

If all of us—all Second-Temple Judaism and New Testament scholars—would undertake the major methodological shift suggested here, I suspect that it would not just make us feel good for creating a more equitable environment. I suspect it would mean improved results for *all* of our questions: text-critical, literary, generic, rhetorical, and theological. We have had a methodological blind spot, and it has lowered the quality of our work for a thousand years. We need to move women and gender away from the margins, away from the model where women get one hermetically compartmentalized chapter per volume, or one book per series, and thus away from the notion that women study women for women, and men do not need to pay any attention. We need to do this because *all* of scholarship suffers from its patriarchal biases. This is not a new recommendation; it has been a desideratum since the 1960s. However, I do not believe the integration of scholarship on and by women into “malestream” scholarship will happen unless men choose to pick up the task. I conclude this article with a challenge to male scholars to do themselves a favour and make all scholarship feminist scholarship. Only when this happens can we claim to be conducting historical reconstruction in any meaningful way.

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