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WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND PUBLIC SPEECH IN ANTIQUITY

CRAIG KEENER*

Were women on average less educated in antiquity than men? Did they enjoy less opportunity, under normal circumstances, for public speech than men did? After noting the relevance of this question for one line of egalitarian interpretation of Paul, I will examine some exceptions to this general rule, philosophic and other ancient intellectual perspectives, the presence of some women in advanced education, women in Jewish education, and women speaking in public.

I will conclude that in fact women on average were less educated than men and in particular lacked much access to public speaking roles. An egalitarian conclusion need not follow automatically from such very general premises, but neither should the egalitarian case be dismissed on the specific basis of a denial of the likelihood of these premises. Whether or not one adopts the egalitarian conclusion sometimes drawn from the ancient evidence, the ancient evidence itself need not be in question.

I. THE RELEVANCE OF THE QUESTION

Evangelical scholars in good conscience come to differing conclusions on the notorious "gender" passages in Paul, and even those who share similar conclusions may not share all the approaches of their colleagues.[1] (Egalitarians also differ in terms of the circles through which they were introduced to the egalitarian position.)[2] Nevertheless, one can summarize a general pattern in approaches to background in the debate.

As a rule, egalitarians appeal to the cultural setting of the passages to limit their fullest application to a particular cultural setting. Many egalitarians share this hermeneutical approach, even though not all egalitarians reconstruct the setting in the same manner.

As a rule, complementarian scholars accept the value of cultural or situational background for understanding texts yet do not view the

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[1] I differ from many egalitarians regarding recent arguments about the Trinity (Craig Keener, "Is Subordination within the Trinity Really Heresy? A Study of John 5:18 in Context," *TrinJ* 20 n.s. 1 [1999] 39–51). Unfortunately, the tone of the debate has sometimes been so harsh as to make one reluctant to contribute further to it. It need not, however, be conducted in such terms.

[2] Thus, for example, Gordon Fee, Ben Witherington, I, and some others were exposed to it from evangelical Pentecostal, Wesleyan, or Holiness circles that ordained women long before mainline denominations began ordaining women. Some of us are also former complementarians.

backgrounds cited by egalitarians as sufficient to overturn what they view as a consistent and clearly articulated teaching in 1 Tim 2:11–12 and/or 1 Cor 14:34–35.[3] Some also view some of the backgrounds cited by egalitarians as incorrect (an assessment some egalitarians would certainly share regarding some other egalitarians' proposed backgrounds).

Yet even many complementarian scholars may appeal to local situations or ancient culture in these passages to some extent, for example, if they limit the application of 1 Tim 2:12 to "senior pastors" or "speaking from the pulpit." First-century house churches, of course, lacked pulpits, and probably even senior pastors in a modern sense, but this complementarian approach seeks to translate first-century instructions for a modern setting.

Many egalitarian scholars, including myself, have argued that 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12 enjoin silence on women not due to a transcultural characteristic of their gender but due to first-century women as a rule having less access to education or public speech forums than men. This position is not the same as claiming, as some have caricaturized it (and as some other egalitarians have argued on a popular level), that no women in antiquity were educated. In contrast to that caricature, I have simply argued that men of a given social class were far more likely, on average, to be more educated than women, both among Gentiles and—most importantly for understanding of Scripture—among Jewish people.[4]

A number of objections could be raised against the egalitarian argument from women's education, some of which appear to me more persuasive than others. I merely survey these and offer sample responses here, rather than respond to them in detail, as my point in this article is not a substantive defense of this egalitarian position but a more modest defense of one item of background that has often been used to support it.

That women's silence is pervasive biblical teaching is not, in my opinion, a compelling objection, given contrary biblical evidence (e.g. 1 Cor 11:5; Acts 2:17–18; Judg 4:4), although such evidence has also been explained in various ways. (Some complementarians who do not enjoin on women total

[3] All scholars employ background information to explain some texts, today usually including even some "gender" texts like the matter of women's head coverings in 1 Cor 11:2–16. But most passages address issues in the first case relevant to their own day, and we cannot logically infer from this relevance that these passages must lack analogous relevance for today. The questions of moving from original meaning to contemporary application are admittedly complex, perhaps more than some of the more strident voices on either side of today's debate sometimes recognize.

[4] I made the exceptions explicit in *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 83; idem, *1–2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 119. In contrast to some, my friend Wayne Grudem (*Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004] 290) has also correctly observed that I do note exceptions. I have also mentioned that men *normally* being more educated than women should be clear to anyone who reads through ancient literature and not just collections of exceptions ("Women in Ministry," 205–48 in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [2d ed.; ed. S. N. Gundry and J. R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005] 229). Yet to my knowledge, it is not this historical claim but only the claim that women were never educated (which I did not make) that has generated disagreement. I have been disappointed that whereas my work on "gender" issues constitutes less than 5% of my published work, it seems to attract the most comment.

silence in their services might agree with my response to this particular objection.) Others point out that Paul does not qualify his argument as a general one, allowing exceptions for more biblically educated women. This seems to me a stronger argument, but Paul is no more obligated to spell out all possible exceptions to a general case than other writers are. (Nor does Paul specifically qualify the apparent argument that all women are more deceived, a position not all complementarians would hold to be universally the case).[5] That Paul's injunctions would seem to exclude only women, when many men were also uneducated, seems to me a stronger objection that egalitarians using this particular argument must take into account (although it would not affect the argument from ancient prejudice against women's public speech).

But while the merit of this particular line of egalitarian argument will continue to be debated on such points, my present concern is not to try to decide that case but simply to show that the ancient information often cited for this particular argument is in fact accurate information. That is, regardless of one's conclusions regarding the appropriate nature of its application to NT texts, my concern in this article is to argue that the historical information that some of us have offered regarding women's education and public speech is based on sound research, so that our historical scholarship, at least, should not be dismissed. I believe that the evidence for women's comparatively limited opportunities in these areas is sufficiently compelling that it should be accepted regardless of one's view of how it should be applied in current gender discussions.

In this article I thus focus very narrowly on two historical questions: Were women in fact less educated than men were? Were they less apt to speak in public than men were? These questions are essential for those who advance an egalitarian argument based on them and may also be useful for some complementarians who, while supporting male authority in the church, nevertheless limit its application (for example, by not enjoining total silence). Regardless of the purposes to which different writers have put the information, however, these questions, like other historical questions, demand historical inquiry as honestly as possible.

II. PATTERNS AND EXCEPTIONS

We know that aristocrats could respect exceptionally smart, educated women.[6] There were women poets, some from the imperial period.[7] In the

[5] The dominant historic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 is that it excluded women precisely because of ontological limitations in their gender (see the data in Daniel Doriani, "A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2," 213–67 in *Women in the Church* [ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995]).

[6] Cf., e.g., Sallust, *Catil.* 25.2 (though Sempronia was also evil); Plutarch, *Dinner of Seven Wise Men* 3, *Mor.* 148CE (placed as a contemporary of Anacharsis); Pliny, *Ep.* 1.16.6 (though Pliny is unsure if she is the true author). Cf. even praise for a woman's wisdom in Homer, *Il.* 13.432, though this refers to wisdom in women's matters.

[7] On Sappho, see, e.g., Michael Grant, *A Social History of Greece and Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992) 12; Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1982) 4–6. In the imperial period, note, e.g., two in the early

first and second centuries AD, women from well-to-do homes had increased access to education.[8] Men also valued educated mothers, though especially for their contribution to their sons' eloquence.[9]

Nevertheless, highly educated women were exceptional. Women had considerably less access to education than men of their own social class did, especially education involving public activities like speaking.[10] Outside the tiny percentage of the population that was elite, most women had less education, and even the advanced education of exceptions most often centered on domestic activity.[11] One estimate has it that "for every five or six men who could read and write, there was one woman who was fully literate."[12]

Some contend that while most men belonging to higher socioeconomic strata could read and write, only "a small percentage of women from the same social orders could."[13] Female literacy was likely higher for the higher strata in places like first-century Rome, but even there women had significantly less access to education for public activity. In families with means, some girls from age seven received elementary education along with boys; from the age of twelve, however, generally only boys proceeded to the second level in public, while girls focused on acquiring household skills at home.[14] The

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second century AD in T. Corey Brennan, "The Poets Julia Balbilla and Damo at the Colossus of Memnon," *Classical World* 91/4 (1998) 215–34.

[8] Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 112–13; cf. Johannes Christes, "Education," 4.815–25 in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (ed. H. Cancik, H. Schneider, and C. F. Salazar; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 822.

[9] Quintilian, *Inst*. 1.1.6; cf. Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1988) 3. Articulate nurses were also valued for the same reason (Quintilian, *Inst*. 1.1.4–5; cf. Tacitus, *Dial*. 29; *b. Ket.* 50a). Although fathers were primarily responsible for education (e.g. 4 Macc 18:10; *b. Kid.* 29a; 30a), mothers had a role in teaching children (Plutarch, *Educ*. 20; *Mor.* 14B; Herodian, 5.8.10; 6.1.1). Although neither women nor unmarried men may teach children in *m. Kid.* 4:13, the reference is probably to others' children only.

[10] Cf. Harry Gamble, "Literacy and Book Culture" 644–48 in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 645.

[11] Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995) 277 (esp. n. 57).

[12] David M. Scholer, "Writing and Literature: Greco-Roman," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* 1283.

[13] Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 69; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 252, following William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). This seems likely for metropolites in Egypt's nome capitals (Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1983] 62), though some women there, at their parents' discretion, were literate (Lewis, *Life* 62–63). Even the classical period affords evidence for some literate women (Susan Guettel Cole, "Could Greek women read and write?" 219–45 in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* [ed. H. P. Foley; New York: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, 1981]).

[14] D. L. Stamps, "Children in Late Antiquity," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* 198; cf. Duane F. Watson, "Education: Jewish and Greco-Roman," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* 309 (allowing that some girls did receive education from twelve to fifteen). James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999) 255–56, suggests that upper-class girls' education stopped at 14, in time for arranged marriages, while boys would go further. The discrepancies probably reflect the different locations and times involved.

late first-century orator Dio Chrysostom admonished that while gold earrings were acceptable for girls' ears, only education befitted the ears of Greek boys (*Or.* 32.3).

III. PHILOSOPHIC AND OTHER INTELLECTUAL VIEWS

Philosophers and other intellectuals often supported the ideal of women's education[15] and trusted their ability to learn.[16] Around the beginning of the sixth century BC, Cleobulus urged that husbands get wives educated in wisdom (Diogenes Laertius 1.90), supporting their education (but presumably also upholding traditional roles, since these educated women were to be provided specifically for the benefit of their husbands). His own daughter reportedly "composed riddles in hexameters" (1.89).

Aristotle, by contrast, complained that such general education was wasteful; it did not make sense to try to educate everyone in the same way (*Pol.* 2.4.6, 1266b). Aristotle's pragmatic critique was not easily dismissed, and leaves its mark on subsequent advocates of women's education. The first-century AD Stoic Musonius Rufus, therefore, was careful when advocating women's education to guard against accusations that such education subverts roles traditionally assigned to women.[17] Instead, he contended, they should be taught what will help them more effectively fulfill the roles society demanded of their gender. That is, it could pertain to women's work like spinning.[18] Women did not need technical philosophic training, he opined, because they would not have opportunity to use it.[19]

Some argued that women had less intelligence or were more easily deceived than men, views that also affected their training.[20] The Greek moralist Plutarch noted that he went against the common grain in advocating that a husband care for his wife's learning; he believed this training would protect her from following nonsense and immorality (*Bride* 48;

[15] See, e.g., Plato, *Laws* 6.780–81; 7.804–6; 8.838–39, as quoted in Lefkowitz and Fant, *Life* 72–75, §88; Plutarch, *A Woman, Too, Should Be Educated*.

[16] E.g. Xenophon, *Hunting* 13.18. Sometimes this meant the husband teaching her (e.g. Xenophon, *Oec.* 3.10, 14–16; 7.10; Plutarch, *Bride* 48; *Mor.* 145BC; 1 Cor 14:35), which such writers sometimes present as among the more radical options of their day.

[17] Musonius Rufus 4, p. 48, lines 21–23 (Lutz). Musonius is on the defensive here against criticisms that advanced philosophy wastes the time of women who should attend to domestic chores (see 3, p. 42, lines 11–17, esp. 13–15). On Musonius supporting women's education, see, e.g., Roy Bowen Ward, "Musonius and Paul on Marriage," *NTS* 36 (1990) 288. After all, trainers equip female as well as male dogs and horses (Musonius Rufus 4, p. 42 line 35, and 4, p. 44, lines 1–4, a good Stoic "argument from nature").

[18] Musonius Rufus 4, p. 46, lines 8–23 (and this only because nature fitted women best for this, but the roles could be interchangeable at times, lines 23–31).

[19] Musonius Rufus 4, p. 48, lines 21–23.

[20] On their cognitive limitations, see, e.g., Valerius Maximus 9.1.3; Plutarch, *Bride* 48; *Mor.* 145CD; *Test. Job* 26:6/26:7–8. For "old wives' tales," see Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.* 1.20.55; Seneca, *Ep. Lucil.* 94.2; Philostratus, *V.A.* 5.14; *Vit. soph.* 1.25.541; Iamblichus, *V.P.* 32.227; *Jos. Asen.* 4:10/14; 1 Tim 4:7; see also Vincent Rosivach, "*Anus*: Some Older Women in Latin Literature," *Classical World* 88/2 (1994) 107–17.

Mor. 145C).[21] He added that, if left to themselves, women produced only unhealthy passions and foolishness, so the man's input was essential.[22] Whereas Plutarch used their intrinsic weakness to support their learning, Juvenal ridiculed women who sought education in philosophy and rhetoric.[23] Their lesser education sometimes made them susceptible to unscrupulous teachers, who were ready to exploit wealthy women; or so, at the least, the teachers' detractors emphasized![24]

IV. WOMEN IN ADVANCED EDUCATION

Women, who were less commonly trained in philosophy than men were, invited disproportionate comment in written sources and are well-attested there (for example, "Magnilla the philosopher," daughter and wife of philosophers).[25] The Pythagorean tradition was particularly well known for including women.[26] After he listed 218 names of the known disciples of Pythagoras, Iamblichus listed the 17 most famous women by name (*V.P.* 36.267).[27] In this tradition about early Pythagoreanism, then, some 8%, or possibly more, of the disciples were said to be women.[28] By ancient standards, this was particularly high. Theano, wife of Pythagoras, became known for her philosophic wisdom and even authored some works.[29] Pythagoras also allegedly entrusted his writings to his daughter Damo (Diogenes Laertius 8.1.42). Iamblichus extolled the pregnant wife of a Pythagorean philosopher, who, when tortured to compel her to divulge the sect's secrets, bit off her tongue, lest she succumb to her female weakness and betray the secrets (*V.P.* 31.194).

[21] Plutarch (or a later pseudepigrapher) seems to have advocated women's education (*A Woman, Too, Should Be Educated*, frg. 128–33).

[22] Plutarch, *Bride* 48; *Mor.* 145DE. Cf. Publilius Syrus 376 (LCL p. 63): "A woman when she thinks alone thinks ill" (cf. similarly 365). Karin Blomqvist, "Chryseïs and Clea, Eumetis and the Interlocutress. Plutarch of Chaeronea and Dio Chrysostom on Women's Education," *SEÅ* 60 (1995) 173–90, considers Dio more respectful toward intellectual women than Plutarch.

[23] Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.434–56.

[24] Walter S. Liefeld, "The Wandering Preacher As a Social Figure in the Roman Empire" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967) 239–41 (citing polemical texts, Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.13.1, 3; 1.23.2, 4; Lucian, *Runaways* 18); cf. 2 Tim 3:6–7; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.65–84.

[25] From second- or third-century AD Asia Minor (in Lefkowitz and Fant, *Life* 160, §168). That a disproportionate number of women trained in philosophy were daughters of philosophers (Diogenes Laertius 2.86; 8.1.42) reinforces the perception of the social difficulties involved in achieving such a status.

[26] Pythagorean writings also included significant instructions to women (Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* [Library of Early Christianity 4; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 82, citing letters 34, 35), though some of the advice (e.g. about modesty) is conventional.

[27] He lists the most prominent disciples in 35.251, and the chain of successors in 36.265–66.

[28] The percentage could be lower if the women are drawn from a larger period, but since these are the most noteworthy women, the total number of women could also be higher.

[29] For her authored works, see Diogenes Laertius 8.1.43. For her wisdom, see Diogenes Laertius 8.1.43; cf. Ps.-Lucian *Affairs of the Heart* 30. Some held her to be another's wife but Pythagoras's pupil (Diogenes Laertius 8.1.42).

Although the vast majority of his disciples were male, sources claim that Plato had some women disciples (Diogenes Laertius 4.1). Aristippus' disciples were likewise mostly male, but his daughter Arete was an exception (Diogenes Laertius 2.86; cf. 2.72). Philo normally portrays women as intellectually and morally inferior to men.[30] Nevertheless, he knew how to make exceptions when necessary for the elite, such as the empress Livia.[31] He also portrays female Therapeutae as philosophers.[32]

Despite Stoic advocacy of women's education in principle, in practice women disciples are rarely attested among them.[33] (Stoics were the dominant philosophic school in much of the Mediterranean world in Paul's era.) The Stoics' less common rivals, the Epicureans, are a different story. Epicurus allowed women into his communities.[34] Although even among Epicureans women might face conventional prejudices, at least eight women students of the Epicureans are named over the centuries.[35] Their comparatively small numbers show both that women could be included and that they were mostly exceptional.

Among women with training in philosophy, Lucian cited "Aspasia, Diotima, and Thargelia."[36] Lucian also noted that Cynics claimed to have female disciples; he accuses them instead of using the supposed disciples for group sex.[37] Most famous, however, is the one known exception to the maleness of Cynics: Hipparchia became both the pupil and wife of the Cynic sage Crates

[30] E.g. Philo, *Hypothetica* 11.14–17; see further Richard A. Baer, Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (ALGHJ 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970); Dorothy Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (BJS 209; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); cf. briefly Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *HR* 13/3 (1974) 176–77.

[31] Livia, he conceded, became almost male in her reasoning faculties (*Embassy* 319–20). He likewise portrays Rebekah as a soul that is a disciple of wisdom, though this is only in allegory (Philo, *Post. Cain* 136, 151).

[32] For ancient philosophers these women's virginity apparently insulated them from "feminine" traits; see Joan E. Taylor, "Virgin Mothers: Philo on the Women Therapeutae," *JSP* 12 (2001) 37–63.

[33] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) 23. (This claim involves disciples, not aristocratic girls in households where Stoics could be hired to teach.) This may be true even of Musonius, of whom no women are known among his disciples (Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* [LEC 6; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 46). David L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres* (SBLSBS 21; ed. D. E. Aune; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 31, suggests that "Roman Stoics were egalitarian in theory but Aristotelian in practice."

[34] As often noted (e.g. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* [LEC 5; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 39; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003] 58). Some may have adopted traditional sexual roles: in Alciphron *Courtesans* 17 (Leontium to Lamia), 2.2, a courtesan is both a mistress of the aged Epicurus and, possibly, one of his pupils (but this portrayal may simply reflect anti-Epicurean polemic).

[35] For his women students, see Tiziano Dorandi, "Epicurean School" 4.1071–75 in *Brill's New Pauly* 1075. For conventional prejudices, see Philodemus *Criticism* col. 21b.13–22b.

[36] Lucian, *Eunuch* 7 (the LCL note suggests that Diotima, from Plato's *Symp*., may be fictitious). For some other women, see V. L. Harper, "Women in Philosophy" 1625–26 in *OCD*. On Aspasia, see further comment below.

[37] Lucian, *Runaways* 18, playing on Plato's group marriage (Plato, *Rep*. 5.457, 459E), mocked further elsewhere (Lucian, *True Story* 2.19; *Philosophies for Sale* 17).

(Diogenes Laertius 6.7.96–98).[38] She succeeded in advocating her right to learn philosophy as taking precedence over weaving (Diogenes Laertius 6.7.98; some later Cynics seem less trusting of her commitments).[39] Women were thus a small minority even among philosophic schools where they appear (such as Pythagoreans, Epicureans, and at least one Cynic), though there is no question that they are attested.

V. WOMEN IN JEWISH EDUCATION

A Hellenistic Jewish writer mentions the father as teaching the sons Scripture (4 Macc 18:10), but the mother knows Scripture well also (4 Macc 18:11–19). Even in some of the generally conservative traditions, Jewish women had access to some learning.[40] It would have been difficult for matters to be otherwise: they could hear the law read at festivals (though men probably attended some more often).[41] Likewise, they regularly attended synagogues, although at least rabbinic sources view them as having mainly listened passively.[42]

Beyond this, some women must have actively sought knowledge, since one husband felt that his wife was neglecting her household duties to hear R. Meir teach.[43] Some women, especially often family members of rabbis, were said to quote Scripture well, though this often could reflect careful attention through synagogue attendance or family discussion rather than special training.[44] In some later sources wives or children could recite a blessing on behalf of the household head, if he were unable.[45]

Rabbinic tradition reveals some exceptional women, though most were wives, daughters, or sisters of rabbis: Imma Shalom, who helped expose an

[38] See further Marie Odile Goulet-Cazé, "Hipparchia" 6.334–35 in *Brill's New Pauly* (2005).

[39] See Crates, *Ep.* 28–29. Other Cynic epistles, however, praise her (Diogenes, *Ep.* 3).

[40] See, e.g., *Soferim* 18:5 in Debra Reed Blank, "Little Known Rabbinic Texts on Women and Prayer," *Conservative Judaism* 48 (1995) 7–10. Rabbinic sources are later than the NT era but provide evidence of at least one stream of Jewish thought; given the paucity of extant first-century Jewish evidence on the subject, they take us closer to early practice than speculating from silence would.

[41] For women hearing Scripture read at festivals see, e.g., 1 Esdr 9:40; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.209; for men attending Sukkoth, see Josephus, *War* 2.515; cf. *m. Suk.* 2:8; *b. Suk.* 2b; *p. Suk.* 2:9.

[42] On their attendance, see esp. Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 140–41; on their passive listening, see S. Safrai, "Education and the Study of the Torah," in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern with D. Flusser and W. C. van Unnik; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 2.955.

[43] See Brooten, *Leaders* 140–41; Hilary Le Cornu with Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Academon, 2003) 991 (citing *p. Sot.* 1:4, comparing Lk 10:39).

[44] On their quoting Scripture see, e.g., *Sipre Deut.* 307.4.1; nevertheless, so did inanimate objects, as Le Cornu, *Acts* 992, mentions. Although R. Gamaliel II's woman servants knew Torah well (*b. R.H.* 26b; *Meg.* 18a; *Nazir* 3a), they are viewed as exceptional (George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* [New York: Schocken, 1971] 2.128).

[45] *M. Ber.* 3:3; *tos. Ber.* 5:17; *p. R.H.* 3:10; cf. *m. Suk.* 3:10.

unfair judge, was R. Gamaliel II's sister and wife of R. Eliezer (*b. Shab.* 116ab). In a later legend, the wife of R. Simeon b. Halafta refutes R. R. Judah ha-Nasi (*Ex. Rab.* 52:3). Most prominently, Beruria entered into rabbinic disputes and once even persuaded the majority of rabbis about her position on a halakic matter.[46] But as the daughter of R. Hananiah ben Teradyon and the wife of R. Meir, Beruria may have had access to more learning than some of her female contemporaries.[47] Some also suggest a fair degree of fictionalizing in the rabbinic portrayal of Beruria, Imma Shalom, and others.[48] Most importantly, while Beruria achieved skill in Torah learning, she commanded attention precisely because she remained exceptional.[49]

It appears that most of women's Torah knowledge in rabbinic sources seems to involve domestic halakah, learning that could have been acquired from another member of the household, or common and simple Scripture texts.[50] That is, there is little indication that women had access to Torah schools, either on an advanced or elementary level. Women were exempt from many of the commandments, including tefillin.[51] Later rabbis also felt that women were exempt from the obligation for Torah study.[52]

Yet no consensus existed among rabbis as to how much education in Torah was appropriate for a daughter. Some rabbis thought that girls should be taught the Torah; commonly they were expected to learn the passage about the suspected adulteress.[53] By contrast, some others felt that teaching daughters Torah (whether the same passage or as a whole) was dangerous

[46] Safrai, "Education" 955 (citing as examples of her learning, *tos. Kelim B.Q.* 4:17; *Kel. B.M.* 1:6; *b. Pes.* 62b; elsewhere, see, e.g., *b. Erub.* 53b–54a); Moore, *Judaism* 2.128–29 (and sources there). Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976) 97–104, calls Beruria "the exception that proves the rule," noting that (pp. 104–11) other "exceptions" were not clearly learned in the Torah. Talmudic accounts of Beruria suggest that her unconventional role generated dissonance (Rachel Adler, "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies. Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah," *Tikkun* 3/6 [1988] 28–32, 102–5).

[47] On her family relations noted here, see Safrai, "Education" 955. Both sons and daughters raised in rabbinic families stood at an advantage in knowing Torah (see Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A. D. 132–212* [Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983] 78, citing *tos. Kel. B.B.* 2:3; for daughters, *tos. Kel. B.K.* 4:17; cf. Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* [SNTSM 51; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984] 195 n. 232). The situation is analogous to that of some daughters of philosophers, noted above.

[48] Tal Ilan, "The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel, and Imma Shalom," *AJS Review* 22 (1997) 1–17; idem, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 200.

[49] Safrai, "Education" 955.

[50] Ilan, *Women* 190–204 (including in this summary even rabbinic information about Beruria, pp. 197–200).

[51] Generally, e.g., *m. Hag.* 1:1; *tos. Ber.* 6:18 (lest they perform the commandments wrongly and offend the Lord); *b. Men.* 61b; *p. Hag.* 1:1, §7; see further Ilan, *Women* 176–84. For exemption from tefillin, see *m. Ber.* 3:3; *Mekilta Pisha* 17, lines 160–61 (Lauterbach, 1.153); *p. Ber.* 2:2, §5; *Pesiq. Rab.* 22:5.

[52] So *b. Kid.* 34a (perhaps because they had not been properly educated for it).

[53] For Torah, see *m. Ned.* 4:3 (Witherington, *Women* 6); for the adulteress passage, see *m. Sot.* 3:4; *p. Hag.* 1:1, §1.

for their sexual purity.[54] Perhaps they thought only that co-education between both genders could lead to sexual immorality, which may be why girls did not attend schools; presumably they learned the standard blessings and other domestic essentials at the home.[55]

In any case, scholars generally agree that the Tannaim (the early rabbis) required Torah learning for boys, not for girls.[56] Again, girls would learn in synagogues and in the homes, but it was normally boys who were schooled in Torah and trained to recite it.[57] Later sources claim that women secured merit by sending their sons to study Torah and their husbands to study Mishnah (*b. Ber.* 17a; *Sot*. 21a). We do not read of women as formal disciples of rabbis, as is often noted.[58] Regular synagogue learning was less technical and advanced than what was available in the schools, and even elementary education in the Torah would develop recitation skills that mere synagogue listening could not except among the brightest hearers.[59]

VI. WOMEN SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

Whereas women might learn in public in many ancient circles, teaching (and in some circles even speaking) was a different matter. The traditional Athenian ideal was that the public sphere was a masculine domain whereas women concerned themselves with the domestic sphere.[60] This ideal continued in Hellenistic Egypt, and also appears in Jewish sources, though it is more limited there.[61] "Silence," one classical hero warned his concubine, "makes

[54] So *m. Sot.* 3:4. Tradition said that the second rabbi, Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, preferred that the Torah be burned rather than taught to a woman (*Num. Rab.* 9:48; see further Moore, *Judaism* 2.128 n. 4); yet his wife appears well versed in Torah (*b. Shab.* 116ab). Concern about women's sexuality may have eventually led to "protecting" them from Torah study (see Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988] 161–62). Some think this applies only to the suspected adulteress passage (Wegner, *Chattel* 161), but they might be thinking particularly of stories involving immorality (esp. Tamar, Potiphar's wife, and the Midianite women), though they would hear such stories at the synagogue.

[55] See Safrai, "Education" 955.

[56] Ibid., noting that the later OT, apocrypha, Philo, and Josephus also support this picture.

[57] On late second-century Palestinian Jewish boys' training (perhaps hyperbolic or addressing only well-to-families), see *m. Ab.* 5:21 (cf. Jos. *Life* 9–12; *Ant*. 20.264–65).

[58] E.g. J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Jesus's Audience: The Social and Psychological Environment in which He Worked* (New York: Seabury, 1973) 33 (considering the role of women vis-à-vis Jesus exceptional in Luke 8:2; 10:42; Mark 15:41).

[59] On synagogue learning versus the schools, see Goodman, *State and Society* 74 (and also n. 175, on p. 223, to p. 74).

[60] See, e.g., John Gould, "Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens," *JHS* 100 (1980) 47, 50; K. J. Dover, "Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behavior" 143–58 in *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers* (ed. J. Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan; Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984) 145.

[61] For Hellenistic Egypt, see David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) 38. For the ideal in Jewish sources see, e.g., *Ps.-Phoc.* 215–16; Wegner, *Chattel* 18, 150–53; Ilan, *Women* 128–29; for its limitation see, e.g., S. Safrai, "Home and Family" 728–92 in *Jewish People* 752; David A. Fiensy, "The Composition of the Jerusalem Church" 213–36 in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. R. Bauckham; vol. 4 in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 225.

a woman beautiful" (Soph. *Ajax* 293; LCL 1:59).[62] In the traditional Jewish ideal, men should avoid unnecessary conversation with women, to minimize the risk of unchastity or, in some texts, foolishness.[63] Effects of such thinking remained, though the classical ideal had long been weakened in practice.[64]

In the early first century AD, Valerius Maximus emphasized that ancestral custom forbade women to speak in a public meeting, with only the rarest of exceptions (3.8.6, though his wording may suggest that the "custom" was already being flouted at times). Granted, he mentions some women who pleaded cases before magistrates despite Roman custom (8.3).[65] Yet he does so precisely because it was unusual and offers only three examples.[66] These were rare women whose feminine nature and the normal "modesty" attached to it could not make them "silent" (8.3.praef.). One was called manly (8.3.1); another was regarded as impudent, a "monster" to be ridiculed (8.3.2).

Plutarch insists that a wife ought to reserve her speaking for her husband, or through him (*Bride* 32; *Mor.* 142D). Pliny the Younger praises his young wife for enjoying his readings—as she sits privately behind a curtain (*Ep.* 4.19.4). He also mentions an excellent speaker who publicly read eloquent letters from his wife, the wife herself not appearing to read them (*Ep.* 1.16.6). (Pliny expresses uncertainty whether the man composed the letters in his wife's name or instead actually developed her eloquence.) A virtuous woman in a possibly third-century novel prefers that the man with her speak, "for I think it proper for a woman to be silent, and for a man to make answer, before a company of men" (Heliodorus, *Eth.* 1.21). Conventional "wisdom" opined that women's words were untrustworthy.[67]

[62] Similarly, Hera is silenced, though by the threat that Zeus will beat her (Homer, *Il.* 1.565–569). Wives should keep quiet even at home when the husband is in a rage (Plutarch, *Bride* 37; *Mor.* 143C).

[63] For unchastity see, e.g., Sir 9:9; *b. Ber.* 43b, bar.; *Ned.* 20a; *p. Hal.* 2:1, §10; at least some women respected this gender boundary (*b. Erub.* 53b). Regarding folly, God punished Antipas for heeding a woman's (in this case, his wife's) talk (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.252–55).

[64] For its weakening in practice see, e.g., Emily Ann Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," *Classical Quarterly* 54 (2004) 185–97. Even segregation in banquets was beginning to break down among aristocratic Romans (Smith, *Symposium* 208–9, 298 n. 27; John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1988] 207), though Greeks were stricter (Cornelius Nepos, *Generals* pref. 6–7).

[65] See especially Stephen J. Simon, "Women Who Pleaded Causes before the Roman Magistrates," *Classical Bulletin* 66/3–4 (1990) 79–81. Winter, *Wives*, 115, mentions these, without pointing out here that the author himself views them as exceptional (though Winter does know that they are: see *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001] 135–36). Winter mentions more on women in the courts in pp. 176–79, again without pointing out that this was exceptional.

[66] Under duress, women sometimes pleaded before judges (e.g. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 15:9; *Song Rab.* 5:16, §2) and might request or win special consideration on account of their gender (*P. Ryl.* 114, line 5; Alciphron *Courtesans* 4 [Bacchis to Phrynê], 1.31, ¶4; cf. Lysias *Or.* 32.11–18, §§506–511). Under such duress, women likewise pleaded with Marcius to spare Rome in Appian, *Hist. rom.* 2.5.3; Plutarch, *Coriol.* 34.2. Yet Mediterranean laws were prejudiced even against women as witnesses (e.g. Justinian, *Inst.* 2.10.6; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.219).

[67] So, e.g., Babrius, *Fable* 16.10; Avianus, *Fables* 15–16; Phaedrus 4.15; Fronto, *Ep. Graec.* 2.3 (written to a woman!).

We do read of exceptional women who earned wide respect despite social obstacles. Centuries before Paul, Aspasia allegedly taught rhetoric, and Socrates was said to have learned from her.[68] Centuries after Paul, the philosopher Sosipatra was said to be wiser than her famous philosopher husband (Eunapius, *Lives* 466). She held a very famous chair of philosophy (Eunapius, *Lives* 469).[69] Nevertheless, it was believed that she acquired her wisdom by divine revelation, rather than in the normal, male academic manner (Eunapius, *Lives* 467–68). More prominent still was the late-fourth to early-fifth century AD philosopher Hypatia; she became leader of Alexandria's Neoplatonic school. Like some other prominent women, she was daughter of a famous intellectual.[70] In Palestine, we have already mentioned Beruria.

But out of centuries of data, Aspasia, Sosipatra, Hypatia, and Beruria prove to be notable exceptions rather than anything close to the norm. We have already noted that women constituted only a comparatively small proportion of those trained in philosophy; we find far fewer teachers. Granted, the sources often report women teaching their sons at home, but women rarely appear as professional teachers in public, as sages hired by wealthy homes or as heads of rhetorical schools.[71] In fact, in contrast to the few women trained in philosophy, barely any studied in rhetorical schools, which trained students for public speaking and public life. Except for radical Cynics (like Crates regarding Hipparchia), even those who granted women's intellectual equality with men in principle did not suggest demolishing the public/private barrier that divided traditionally most male and female activities. While wealth could surmount this obstacle for certain public offices, it rarely did so for teachers (who had to acquire students). Many people might regard inspired speech as a different situation, but it differed from mere teaching.[72]

VII. CONCLUSION

Scholars may differ in good conscience on the application of ancient sources to NT texts or the reapplication of those texts for different cultural situations today. I believe that most scholars will, however, agree on some

[68] On her teaching rhetoric, see Simon Hornblower, "Aspasia" 192 in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, citing the *Suda*. On Socrates learning from her, see Fronto, *De Fer. Als.* 3.5, if this is not a rhetorical flourish. Hornblower, "Aspasia," mentions only discussions with Socrates (in Plutarch, *Per.* 24).

[69] He claims that she was martyred by monks.

[70] Harper, "Women in philosophy" 1626.

[71] So Winter, *Wives* 115–16, citing the absence of women in such posts in Philostratus' *Lives of Sophists* and in Hemelrijk's work. Aspasia and Sosipatra may be viewed as exceptions, but neither are within even a century of the early empire. We should also exclude lower-level teachers, such as instructors in rudimentary Greek in Egypt's towns, a small minority of whom were women (Lewis, *Life* 63).

[72] For inspired speech, cf. James G. Sigountos and Myron Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *JETS* 26 (1983) 283–95; sacral speech in Terence Paige, "The Social Matrix of Women's Speech at Corinth: The Context and Meaning of the Command to Silence in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36," *BBR* 12 (2002) 231–33.

central premises about what the ancient sources in question indicate: First, there can be no dispute that there were some educated women. Second, women were much less often educated to the same degree as men of the same social class, and this extends also to Jewish learning in the Torah. Third, ancient society rarely allowed teaching roles to women.

Though the application may be more controversial, this is information that some scholars will wish to continue to consider when discussing Paul's injunctions of women's silence in Corinth or Ephesus and whether he would apply them in the same manner in our culture today.