

WOMEN AND THE
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WOMEN AND THE
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Edited by

Nicole L. Tilford

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For the women of
the Society of Biblical Literature
past, present, and future

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FOREWORD

On page iv of the thirteenth issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* one finds a seemingly insignificant note. There, nestled between Mr. F. P. Ramsay and Rev. C. W. Rishall in a list of newly registered members, lies the name Miss Anna Ely Rhoads. Today we recognize this name for what it is: the first of many women who have joined the roster of the Society of Biblical Literature over the past 125 years. In the pages of the journal, however, there is no fanfare, no bold or italic font to mark this momentous occasion, no special report. Rhoads is simply a name.

In many ways, that is as it should be. History is made by the daily actions of individuals, regardless of whether they receive immediate recognition for their efforts. Yet there is also a danger to reducing individuals to names in a ledger; that which makes a scholar unique—the personal stories, the multifaceted identities, the frustrating challenges, the hard-earned accomplishments—can easily become forgotten after the field has moved on and the work has become outdated.

This volume is intended to counter that tendency. It sets out to preserve the stories of women who have helped shape biblical studies and related fields over the past century and a quarter. The focus is on those women who have been members of the Society of Biblical Literature, the largest learned society of scholars who teach and research biblical studies. Although not all scholars who study the Bible and related material have been members of the Society, the Society's changing membership provides a clear snapshot of how the field has developed in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The volume begins with a lengthy essay by Marion Ann Taylor that traces the history of women's participation in the Society of Biblical Literature. Keeping with the tone of the volume, Taylor organizes her survey as a series of short narratives, many of which reconstruct the stories of early women pioneers in the field. In doing so, Taylor stands as witness for those women who can no longer tell their own stories.

Following Taylor's essay, the volume is divided into five parts. Part 1 contains the stories of seven of the ten women who have served as presidents of the Society of Biblical Literature: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1987), Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (2007), Carol A. Newsom (2011), Carol Meyers (2013), Athalya Brenner-Idan (2015), Beverly Roberts Gaventa (2016), and Gale A. Yee (2019). Unfortunately, Phyllis Tribble (1994), Adele Berlin (2000), and Carolyn Osiek (2005) were unable to contribute to the present volume; for their stories, readers are encouraged to see the brief bios in Taylor's essay. As representatives of the Society in their respective years, these women are in a unique position to reflect on their experiences of the Society from various perspectives over the course of their careers: as students, as faculty, as members of Society committees and boards, and finally as Society presidents.

The presidents of the Society, however, reflect only a small subsection of the larger membership. Therefore, contributors for the next three sections were selected from a wider pool with a variety of factors in mind. We specifically sought scholars who were established in their career, since, like the presidents, they could reflect on changes in the Society over multiple years of experience. We also sought scholars who were experienced with various facets of Society service (e.g., editorial board membership, committee membership, publication record) and with the different communities that make up the Society's membership. Obviously, such criteria excluded many scholars with fascinating stories that deserve to be preserved (more on that in a moment). Yet the resulting combination of contributors should provide readers with a glimpse into the vibrant diversity of women contributing to the guild today.

In order to provide a basic structure for the volume and ensure that multiple perspectives were included, parts 2–4 prompted contributors to reflect on their experiences from a specific context. In part 2, for instance, contributors were asked to reflect on specific subfields that the Society services: archaeology/history (Beth Alpert Nakhai), Hebrew Bible (Tammi J. Schneider), early Judaism (Hindy Najman), and New Testament/early Christianity (Jo-Ann A. Brant). Part 3 takes a different approach, asking contributors to reflect as members of specific communities: African American scholars (Gay L. Byron), scholars from South America (Roxana Flammini), Latina scholars (Jacqueline M. Hidalgo), LBGTO scholars (Lynn R. Huber and Melissa Harl Sellew), scholars from European countries (Christl M. Maier), scholars from Africa (Madipoane Masenya [Ngwan'a Mphahlele]), Jewish scholars (Adele Reinhartz), and

Asian scholars (Yak-hwee Tan). Finally, part 4 asked contributors to reflect on different aspects of professional life: publishing (Billie Jean Collins), mentorship (April D. DeConick), public scholarship (Amy-Jill Levine), working in a religious context (Vanessa Lovelace), work-life balance (Tina Pippin), and teaching (Elizabeth Struthers Malbon).

Yet, as is well recognized, each individual's identity is multifaceted. One can be a teacher and a public scholar and a scholar who focuses on a specific subdiscipline and a member of a specific ethnic community and so forth. Because of this, we encouraged contributors not to be constrained by their primary focus but to consider their story in light of any context that they deemed relevant. Each of our contributors has a rich, complicated, and complex story, and their stories reflect that.

Moreover, the chapters herein contain the *individual* stories of the women who wrote them. Although writing from a particular context or set of context(s), the contributors do not represent the experience of all women scholars who come from similar contexts. Reinhartz, for instance, reflects on her experience being a Jewish scholar in the Society of Biblical Literature; in doing so, however, she in no way represents the experiences of all Jewish women who have been members of the Society. Each contributor's story is her own and should stand as a testament to *her* unique struggles and accomplishments.

Part 5 concludes the volume by inviting two junior scholars to reflect on the future of women in the Society. Although not representing all of the paths women members now take, the contributors here reflect the possibilities and challenges of two tracks currently common in the profession, namely, the traditional tenure-track professor (Kelly J. Murphy) and the independent scholar (Sarah Sheckman). In doing so, they provide food for thought as we consider how we want the Society to develop for all of its members in the years to come.

Unfortunately, a printed volume can only include so many contributions. Many valuable stories have not been included here simply because we do not have the space to do so. We have therefore created a special section of the Society of Biblical Literature archive designed to preserve the stories of women members. The Society's archive was established in 1982 to house the official history of the Society. However, as this volume demonstrates, the organization's history far exceeds the administrative files, committee reports, publications, and program materials related to the Annual, International, and Regional Meetings. In creating a women's section of the archive, we seek to preserve the unofficial history of

the Society and thereby provide future scholars the resources needed to appreciate the full complexity of the Society's development. In the women's section of the archive, all past or current members who self-identify as women, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, academic rank, institutional affiliation, or geographic location, are invited to share their personal anecdotes, accounts, and memories through video, audio, pictorial, and written reflections (see the About Us section of the Society's website for more information). The present volume can present only part of the story of women's participation in the Society of Biblical Literature. With the help of members, the ongoing women's section of the archive can help preserve the rest.

In the following pages, the reader will find words of encouragement and words of challenge, issues where the Society has made great gains over the past few years and issues that need more attention. Our hope is that readers will leave with a fuller understanding of our common heritage and a greater appreciation for the diverse contexts from which our women members operate. Anna Ely Rhoads began the history of women in the Society of Biblical Literature when she joined over a century ago. It is up to us to determine how this history will develop over the next century and beyond.

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