# A Just Man or Just a Man: The Ideal Man in the Visions of Hermas

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Abstract:
This article examines the Visions, the first part of the Shepherd of Hermas. The starting point is that the Visions is an early text that should be read against a first century background. Once an early date is accepted, this affects the interpretation of the text. It is tempting to read the Visions in a Christian framework, but that clashes with the notion of an early context. I resist such a reading and prefer to keep open the nature of the situation in which the Visions were composed. This is particularly significant in the case of the main revelatory figure, the Elder, identified as Ἐκκλησία. The usual interpretation is that she is the personification of the church, but I argue that the early context does not justify this reading. Instead, she is the personification of the Community in which the Christian way of life is still in its formative phases. My reading highlights the female characters and investigates what they reveal about the narrator Hermas. The Visions portray Hermas as struggling with several interconnecting issues within himself and among others, authority and control of emotions emerging as central concerns. The encounter with Rhoda brings to the fore intersecting questions of desire and slavery, introspection and repentance, but also the struggle for power and authority. The Elder, despite her femaleness, cannot be taken as evidence for women's leadership positions, but rather, must be read against Greco-Roman visual culture that personified abstract concepts as females; both the Elder and Rhoda emerge as primarily fictional women of authority, tools to think with as they hold long discourses with Hermas. The two real women in

Hermas' life, his wife and Grapte, are only briefly mentioned. Hermas' wife and Grapte remain silent and are not given independent roles in the narrative. As the figure of Grapte reveals, Hermas and/or the author preferred to limit women's authority in the community to gender-specific areas.

Key Words:
The Shepherd of Hermas, early Christianity, gender, intersectionality, Apostolic Fathers

The Shepherd of Hermas was one of the most popular works that the earliest Christians read: we know this from the surviving early papyrus fragments that were preserved and from the quotations made by early Christian authors who showed their appreciation of the work. In the fourth century, part of the Shepherd was copied into the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the most important Bible manuscripts there is. In the end, the Shepherd did not attain canonical status, and in the following centuries its popularity appears to have waned. Today the Shepherd is included in the collection(s) of early Christian writings known as the Apostolic Fathers. It remains an intriguing text that takes its readers to first-century Rome. One of the most fascinating aspects of this work is that its first part, the Visions, is written in the first person. The narrator, a certain Hermas, reveals to his readers the cares and concerns of his own life as a family man and someone aspiring to standing in his community.

In this article I examine the protagonist Hermas in the Visions section of the Shepherd.[1] I explore his portrayal in relation to ideals connected

[1] I thank the anonymous reader for his or her thorough feedback and suggestions that improved this work. This article is based on a paper I presented on the Patristic Day at Lund University, 4 April 2019. I thank the organizers for the opportunity to participate and the audience for their valuable comments and questions. As I was working on this topic, Vilja Alanko and Outi Lehtipuu read earlier versions and made many insightful suggestions and comments. In 2017–2020 I led the Apostolic Fathers project with Niko Huttunen and Joona Salminen. Two books resulted from the project. The first is a new translation of the Apostolic Fathers' writings into Finnish, translated by a team of New Testament and early Christianity scholars from the University of Helsinki and published

with manhood/masculinity, revealed in and through his character, but also through portrayals of women in the text: Rhoda, the Elder, Grapte, and Hermas' wife. The first-mentioned two are women of authority who hold discourse with Hermas, whereas the latter two, actual women in Hermas' life, are only briefly mentioned and do not appear as independent characters.

My reading builds on previous discussions of the Visions, in particular those that bring gender and social history to the fore, but there are several points of departure that I take. To begin with, I find arguments for an early dating so convincing that in my reading I distance myself from any straightforward interpretation of the Visions as a "Christian" text. As I approach the figures of Rhoda and the Elder, I find it important to emphasize, in Rhoda's case, the intersection of gender and status (slave/free) and the struggle to control desire, but also how these connect with issues of authority. As Hermas discourses with the Elder, his struggle shifts from the issue of desire to authority. The Elder, I suggest, does not provide direct indications of how Hermas views women and their authority, but as a personification of the community and its leadership she is an image to think with. In contrast with the largely imaginary figures of Rhoda and the Elder, the real women, Hermas' wife and Grapte, are mentioned in passing. How women and gender are portrayed in the Visions connects with ideals about manhood. After discussing the women in the Visions, I consider the aspects that connect with ideals for a just man: what is the manliness that Hermas should exercise and what are its inward and outward forms.

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## The Work, its Dating and Original Context

The Shepherd is a long work that consists of three distinct parts, Visions, Commandments, and Parables.[2] It is an apocalyptic work that combines its visions with ethical instruction, and rather untypically does not focus on end-time expectations.[3] The Shepherd was a popular work in the early centuries as the number of papyrus fragments evidences – it is well known that its early manuscript evidence exceeds that of the gospels of Mark and Luke –, but there is not one manuscript that contains the complete text, and the manuscript evidence on the whole is meagre.[4] Although the majority of scholars treat the Shepherd as the work of a single author who may have revised his work over time, it has also been argued that the long and repetitive text is the result of several authors'

[2] The tripartite structure is visible when I cite parts of the Shepherd. I follow the SBL recommendation and use composite references, e.g., Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.1 (2.1). The first numbering follows the traditional division of the work into Visions, Commandments (Mandates), and Parables (Similitudes). The second numbering, in brackets, treats the three parts as one work that is divided into 114 chapters.

[3] Carolyn Osiek, "The Genre and Function of the Shepherd of Hermas", *Semeia* 36 (1986), 113–121; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses", *Semeia* 14 (1979), 74–75; Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1999, 10–12; B. Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, 23–24.

[4] The most complete early Greek witnesses are Codex Sinaiticus (S) that contains the Visions and some of the Commandments, Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.1–Herm. *Mand*. 4.3.6 (1.1–31.6). The first three visions are included in Papyrus Bodmer 38 (B), Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.1–3.13.4 (1.1–21.4). Papyrus Michigan 129 (M) contains the text from the second parable to the ninth, but not the complete second or the ninth parable, Herm. *Sim*. 2.8–9.5.1 (51.8–82.1). The most extensive Greek text is the 14th–15th century Codex Athous (A), Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.1–Herm. *Sim*. 9.30.2 (1.1–107.2). Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 1–4; Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vol. 2 (Loeb Classical Library, 25), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2003, 162–172; and Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (third edition), Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2007, 447–449; on early manuscripts, see also Thomas Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha (100–400 CE)*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2013, 81–169 and Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2018, 231–232, 279.

work.[5] It is not the aim of this article to discuss these questions. The Visions 1–4 form a clearly defined section, and I limit my discission to that part.

The Shepherd is usually dated to the end of the first and/or the early second century.[6] The stance taken in this article is that the work, the Visions in particular, must be early: a first rather than a second century work. Jörg Rüpke has given several factors in favour of the early dating of the Shepherd. First, many second and third century Christian authors in different geographical locations quote it, which suggests wide circulation. On the other hand, there are no quotations from the Pauline letters or the early gospels in the Shepherd, which suggests that the author possibly did not know or have access to them.[7] When a passage in the Shepherd recalls the gospels, these passages more likely point to oral traditions than literary dependence on written gospels.[8] I find one example in the shepherd figure, identified as the angel of repentance (ó

[5] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas,* 8–10. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers* 2, 165–166; Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2006, 142–143. The most recent discussions are Walsh, "Lost in Revision: Gender Symbolism in Vision 3 and Similitude 9 of the Shepherd of Hermas", *Harvard Theological Review* 112:4 (2019), 467–490 (471, 490) and Walsh, "The Lady as Elder in the Shepherd of Hermas", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27:4 (2019), 517–547 (519–520, 523–524).

[6] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 18–20; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 446–447. Ehrman suggests that the Shepherd was written, "possibly over a stretch of time", in the first part of the second century (perhaps 110–140), Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers* 2, 169.

[7] Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 141–142. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas,* 26; Joseph Verheyden goes through previous discussions of possible knowledge in the *Shepherd* of those writings that came to be included in the New Testament canon: he admits that the evidence is meagre and difficult to interpret, and ends up suggesting that Hermas may have known Matthew and one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians: Joseph Verheyden, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* and the Writings that later formed the New Testament" in: Christopher Tuckett & Andrew Gregory (ed.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* 293–329; 293–295, 322, 329. The earliest quotation from the Shepherd is found in Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.10.2; for a fuller list, see Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 4–7; for a recent discussion on Origen's take on the *Shepherd,* see Edmon L. Gallagher, "Origen on the Shepherd of Hermas", *Early Christianity* 10 (2019) 201–215.

[8] The vineyard and the slave parable in Herm. *Sim*. 5.2.1–11 (55.1–11) is more elaborate than the gospel version. The elaboration need not be based on an extension of a shorter written version, but may stem from oral transmission and Hermas' different perspectives and aims in comparison with gospel writers.

ἄγγελος τῆς μετανοίας), in Vision 5. This figure, dressed in clothing suitable for a revelatory figure as well as an exceptional prophet, brings to mind John the Baptist, characterized in the Gospel of Mark as baptizer, messenger (angel) of repentance, and Elijah figure. John is portrayed as such not only in Mark but also in other traditions stemming from first-century Palestine, including the Q-source.[9]

In contrast to apocalyptic texts, and unlike Christian writers in the second century, the author does not seek pseudepigraphical authority for his work. This seems to be another hint that there were not yet famous Christian works in wide circulation. This lack of pseudepigraphical strategy is important, as it not only gives a hint regarding the possible date of composition but, I think, was possibly one of the factors that contributed to Hermas' waning popularity from the fourth century onwards.[10]

The original context of Hermas and his work is found in first century Rome and in a community where emerging Christian identity is closely connected to Jewish traditions.[11] The author was someone who did not

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[9] Mark 1:2–6 par., Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2007, 135–146. If the gospels were not yet written or in wide circulation, but important events and figures were part of the proclamation of Jesus-believers, it does not seem impossible that traditions about John inspired the ἄγγελος τῆς μετανοίας. Traditions about John need not be considered primarily from the gospel perspective or that of Jesus-belief. Clare Rothschild has argued that Q contained John traditions; see the discussion in Clare Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions and Q* (WUNT 190) Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 6–10. Acts 19:1–7 seems to suggest that some believers had been disciples of John (discussed in Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions,* 33–34), an issue that is relevant for the Visions (or the Shepherd), its possible early context, and the overlap of identities.

[10] For the benefit of those who read Finnish, see my forthcoming article "Melkein pyhiä tekstejä toiselta vuosisadalta: Hermaan Paimen ja Marian syntymä (Jaakobin protoevankeliumi)" in Jutta Jokiranta & Nina Nikki (ed.), *Kirjakääröistä digiraamattuun: Pyhän tekstin idea, muoto ja käyttö*. Helsinki: Suomen Eksegeettinen Seura.

[11] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 18–21; Lampe suggests that the separation from the synagogue may have taken place around the time when Paul wrote Romans, after which Gentile Christianity predominated. This conclusion is primarily based on Paul's letter to the Romans, which is skimpy as a historical source. Lampe's discussion indicates that Gentile and Jewish traditions were closely connected. Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, London: T&T Clark International 2003, 69–76. See also Markus Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity*, London: Routledge 2012, 62–65.

have easy access to books: the only explicit reference to a book is not to the Law or the Prophets, but to a now lost *Book of Eldad and Medat*. This reference suggests that prophetic and apocalyptic/visionary traditions were held in esteem, at least by the writer himself. Women held some positions in the community, at least in the gender-specific sphere of women and children (see discussion below). Martyrs, overseers and servants are mentioned.[12] The work's rather vague manner of referring to God (or Jesus) as the Name closely resembles the Jewish custom of referring to God and appears to point to a situation where a distinctive "Christian" identity had not yet developed. The names Christ and Jesus are so absent in the text that one asks whether it would do justice to the author and his community to characterize this community as Christian, Christ-believing, or Jesus-believing. Members are baptized in the name of the Lord, and while it is possible that this is a baptism of Jesus-followers, the identity of this Lord is not elaborated on in the text. Immersions are known in Jewish contexts, John practised immersion/baptism of repentance, and some of his followers were among the early "disciples", all of which should make us cautious about how we read references to baptism.[13]

In short, we should be cautious about any straightforward assumption of approaching the Visions as a "Christian" text as regards its original context and purpose. I see it as being a product of an early context where a Christian way of life was still in its formative phases. This context was different from later contexts where the writing was read and transmitted.[14] The text itself gives no indication of having any strong impulse towards identity formation or making a distinction between

[12] Overseers/bishops and servants/deacons are mentioned already in Phil 1:1.

[13] What the baptism was and how it related to the new teaching and faith seems to have been hazy. Acts tells about Apollos, who preached and taught about Jesus but knew only John's baptism/immersion (18:24–25), and about some disciples in Ephesus who knew only John's baptism/immersion (19:1–3); cf. Acts 13:24. My point is to highlight the multiple meanings that baptism may take, the Jewish context of early believers, and the ambiguity of identities.

[14] What we know of later, but still early, contexts and readerships are more clearly Christian: this applies to authors who quote from the Shepherd, and manuscripts copied in Christian contexts, such as Codex Sinaiticus, and the papyri with *nomina sacra*, a very strong indication of Christian transmission. For the latter, see, e.g., Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha*, 82, 85, 109.

Jewish and Christian identities – an impulse that is so very visible in some other writings, such as the Letter to the Hebrews and the Epistle of Barnabas. Most of all, one should avoid seeing the Shepherd as a representative of the "Apostolic Fathers", as such a title or collection did not exist prior to the 17th century.[15] The Shepherd was a popular writing, but it seems that it was not part of any one collection. How it was grouped in the early centuries varied, as far as we can judge from the manuscript evidence. The early papyri are, for the most part, too fragmentary to yield information on their manuscript contexts, but when such a context is known, it shows variation and some attention to the genre: the Visions and part of the Commandments follow the Revelation and the Epistle of Barnabas in Codex Sinaiticus, and in the Bodmer Codex of the Visions, the Visions were copied together with the Vision of Dorotheus and Christian poetry.[16]

These notions have a direct impact to how I approach Hermas and his work in this article. The most important revelatory figure in the Visions, the Elder, is identified as Ἐκκλησία in the Greek text. She is usually taken to be the personification of the church in a straightforward manner.[17] However, if we accept the early dating and its implications, as I argue we should, it would be misleading to translate ἐκκλησία in

[15] Only since J. B. Cotelier completed two volumes of early Christian texts in 1672, has the Shepherd been part of collections commonly labelled the Apostolic Fathers. No such title or collection was known in ancient times. For a brief summary of the history of the collection, see Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 5–6, and David Lincicum, "The Paratextual Invention of the Term 'Apostolic Fathers'", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 66:1 (2015): 139–148. It is worth mentioning here the Codex Hierosolymitanus (Panagios Taphos 54), which contains, between biblical paraphrases and a hagiographic text, some of the works that today are included in the Apostolic Fathers collections, namely, the Epistle of Barnabas, First and Second Clement, Didache, and Letters of Ignatius. The Shepherd is not included.

[16] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 1–2; Nongbri, *God's Library*, 174. For Hermas in Sinaiticus, see Dan Batovici, "The Less-expected Books in *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Alexandrinus*. Codicological and Palaeographical Considerations", in: Chiara Ruzzier & Xavier Hermand (ed.), *Comment le Livre s'est fait livre. La fabrication des manuscrits bibliques (IVe–XVe siècle): Bilan, résultats, perspectives de recherche.* Turnhout: Brepols 2015, 39–50.

[17] This is, for example, how Osiek, Ehrman, and Holmes translate ἐκκλησία.

this context as "church". The term is so suggestive of a developed Christian identity that I suggest instead that we approach her as the personification of the Community.[18]

Discarding an emphatically Christian concept and reading the Visions without presupposing a distinct Christian identity has the benefit of keeping us attentive to the situation in which this work was written, in which the content of faith and the identity of its practitioners were evolving rather than fixed. It also reminds us of the complicated processes that were often involved in the formation of early Christian identities. The Visions (and the entire work) came to be read, transmitted and widely appreciated by Christians, but I see it wise to differentiate that situation from the one in which it was initially written. When considering that situation, it seems that to approach the Visions as a Christian work would oversimplify the complex situation in which it was composed and read such ideas into the text that were not there.

## Hermas of the Visions

We now turn to the Visions and its protagonist who presents himself as the former slave Hermas who has risen in the world. It is possible that the information we get about him and his past is autobiographical, and in that way yields valuable information on this first-century person. However, caution is needed. Fictional is mixed with what seems like autobiographical information, perhaps partly because of the conventions of apocalyptic literature.[19] When I discuss Hermas, I recognize that ultimately it is not possible to differentiate between fictional and autobiographical elements in his work. Conventions of the apocalyptic genre and literary purpose may well be behind what we "learn" about Hermas. This, needless to say, in no way diminishes the value of the writing.

Hermas has his own household and some real or, perhaps more likely, aspired standing in his community. Most of the Visions describes and explains his visions and revelatory encounters, particularly with an old woman, or woman Elder. The four women mentioned in the Visions

[18] Cf. Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Reading Real Women Through Undisputed Letters of Paul", in: Ross Shepard Kraemer & Mary Rose D'Angelo (ed.), *Women and Christian Origins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 205.

[19] See the discussion of the opening scene below.

– Rhoda, the Elder, Hermas' wife, and Grapte – relate to and highlight different aspects of Hermas' life and personality: his past slave status, his anxieties, his present role as the head of a household, and his aspirations in the community. This implies that the women do not stand independently in the narrative but reflect Hermas, his life and its questions, and also his striving to be a man. Yet simultaneously this connectedness is mutual, and I argue that not only do the women in the Visions reflect different sides of Hermas, but Hermas the man is revealed through the different female figures he has discussions with. They guide, shape and transform Hermas the man and emerge as important for a reading that seeks to understand how gender and masculinity are discussed in this writing.

It is necessary to consider how other issues intersect with gender.[20] It emerges that the standing of the woman in society and her relation to Hermas, and the issues that she represents, are decisive for how Hermas responds to her. Rhoda was the owner of Hermas when he was a young slave, and above him; the Elder appears to Hermas several times as a spiritual guide and figure of authority; Hermas' wife connects with his role as the head of household that he is accused of performing in an unsatisfactory manner. The wife and Grapte do not appear as independent characters but are only mentioned in the dialogue between the Elder and Hermas. Rhoda and the Elder on the other hand have discussions with Hermas and exert authority over him. It is notable that while the Elder and Rhoda are imaginary women who appear in visions, the wife and Grapte are "real" women in Hermas' life. What does it mean, then,

[20] My reading is influenced by discussions of gender in the context of the New Testament and early Christianity, such as: Virginia Burrus, "Mapping as Metamorphosis: Initial Reflections on Gender and Ancient Religious Discourses", in: Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (ed.), *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, Leiden: Brill 2007, 1–9; Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 67 (1998), 1–31; Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man, Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008; Anna-Rebecca Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation: Gender and Class in Early Christian Childbearing Discourse* (Biblical Interpretation 121), Leiden: Brill 2013, 12–40; Vilja Alanko & Anna-Riina Hakala, "Näkökulmia sukupuolen, uskonnon ja historian risteyksestä," in: Susanna Asikanen & Elisa Uusimäki (ed.), *Sukupuoli Raamatun maailmassa* (Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja 117), Helsinki: Suomen Eksegeettinen Seura (Finnish Exegetical Society) 2019, 19–31.

that the unattainable and unreal women are so much at the focus, while the "real" women are given considerably less space in the narrative and no chance to speak?

## Women of Authority: Rhoda

Rhoda's impact on Hermas is evident from the start: the powerful, and to Hermas (emotionally) agitating, encounter opens the Visions. Hermas the narrator opens his work by referring to how he was raised as a slave and sold to a certain Rhoda in Rome, and many years later met her again and began to love her as a sister. Some time later, he sees Rhoda bathing in the river Tiber and he – her former slave boy – stretches out his hand and helps her out of the water and, seeing her beauty, wishes in his heart that he had such a wife, yet denies wanting anything else. The encounter raises questions about Hermas narration: are his brotherly feelings as genuine as he claims? Doubts are cast on his words, and soon he is accused of having lustful thoughts, first by Rhoda,[21] then by the Elder.[22]

The opening scene is one of the sections in the text that give an impression of being autobiographical, although this cannot be verified. The information given is historically plausible: Hermas may have been a foundling, sold to and raised by Rhoda who at some point sold him further. At some yet further point he was manumitted.[23] Despite the plausibility, the river scene is also reminiscent of fictional scenes in an-

[21] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.8 (1.8).

[22] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.4 (2.4).

[23] Osiek suggests that Hermas may have been sold at least twice, first to Rhoda, then by Rhoda to someone else who appears to have manumitted him. After all, Hermas does not appear to have a patron–client relationship with Rhoda because the encounter seems unplanned. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas,* 42. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus,* 218–220; Marianne Bjelland Kartzow provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of Hermas' slave background on the text (while admitting that the information may not necessarily be historical). Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor and Gendered Enslavement in Early Christian Discourse: Double Trouble Embodied,* London: Routledge 2018, 105–106. It has been suggested that Hermas may have been a foundling; for discussion on exposed children, see also Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2006, 74–77.

cient literature, such as the stories of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2) and Susanna (Susanna 17).[24] Like the stories of Bathsheba and Susanna, the river scene in the Visions also has erotic tones and directs its attention to the wrongness of the male desire involved. As a result, this combination of plausible yet possibly fictional elements immediately captures interest in a manner that appears planned and purposeful. From the start, gender dynamics are brought to the centre of attention.[25] Providing presumed autobiographical or historical information is of course typical of apocalyptic and pseudepigraphical literature.[26] The autobiographical cast makes a strong claim of reliability and may be part of the strategy for claiming readership and authority for one's message.[27] This is not necessarily contradictory to the notion that the Visions appears to reflect genuine experience. It may well be intertwined with fictional elements, all of which were skilfully written into a narrative.

The river scene and Hermas' longing invite the question of not only how gender, but also intersecting factors affect the encounter between Hermas and Rhoda.[28] Although sexual attraction is implied in the scene, that alone does not define what is between Hermas and Rhoda. Since Hermas has revealed himself to be Rhoda's former slave, their encounter cannot be one of a man and a woman of equal standing. The attraction and ensuing discord are complicated by their difference in status. Hermas is a former slave, Rhoda presumably a free woman and therefore of higher social standing.[29] Intersectional reading seeks to highlight different factors that are influential for the identity and standing of a person, and such a reading can be made here as well. Hermas the narrator began his account by referring to the past, thus defining himself and Rhoda by their past and the difference in status that continues to the present. Rhoda, a free and probably wealthy woman, emerges as an

[24] For other examples, see Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 29.

[25] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 34.

[26] See, e.g., Rev 1:9; 1 Tim 4:13 and 2 Tim 4:13; Prot. Jas. 25.

[27] Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 147.

[28] For an excellent recent discussion on the perspective of slavery and intersectional analysis in Vision 1, see Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 105–121.

[29] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 42–43; Mark Grundeken, *Community Building in the Shepherd of Hermas: A Critical Study of Some Key Aspects*, Leiden: Brill 2015, 98–100. See especially Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 106–109.

important figure in Hermas' life; she bought, owned, possibly also sold him in the past, and this is the background of their encounter. Hermas does not give many details about Rhoda: she is beautiful, and probably older than he is – age emerges as a topic later in the narrative and we return to it below. Hermas the freedman, a man with his own household and status, is agitated by this encounter. His standing in the world has changed, he is no longer a slave but a freedman, but the past is not completely erased, as the encounter with Rhoda seems to demonstrate. As Marianne Kartzow notes, Hermas' past slavery highlights the fact that he is now a slave to passion.[30]

Rhoda's response is not elaborated, but the visionary encounter that follows indicates that she has taken offence at him. Hermas, walking in the countryside[31] after some time, is taken by the spirit to a deserted place where he prays and has a vision of a woman who appears from heaven. She is identified as that woman he had desired. The Rhoda from heaven claims that she was "taken up in order that I may accuse you of your sins before the Lord".[32] God is angry with Hermas because he has sinned against her. Hermas takes offence and vehemently denies this, pointing to his impeccable speech when addressing her, but Rhoda laughs at this denial. The prime sin is Hermas' evil desire towards her. She does not accept his point of view, yet she does not focus on Hermas' sexual desire alone but warns him against worldliness and taking pride in one's wealth.[33]

Rhoda's accusation raises questions about how she views Hermas. When she accuses him, is it only because she has perceived his desire? It is certainly possible that his inferior status could be part of the offence. It has been suggested that Hermas' claim to relate to Rhoda as to a sister could indicate that they are a Christian sister and brother.[34] This is not

[30] Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 108.

[31] I follow the manuscript readings (εἰς κώμας, into the countryside), and do not emend, as, e.g., Holmes does, into Cumae (εἰς Κούμας). See Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 43.

[32] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.5 (1.5), trans. Holmes.

[33] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.6–8 (1.6–8).

[34] Some have suggested that Rhoda may be a fellow Christian on the grounds that Hermas first characterizes his feelings towards her as loving her as a sister. Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.1 (1.1). Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 42.

obvious; rather, when Hermas relates himself to her as brother to a sister, this diminishes their status difference, even puts Hermas in a superior position.[35] Such struggles are in evidence in other early Christian literature: while Paul preached the end of difference between slave and free (Gal. 3:28), another Pauline writer reminded slaves not to imagine themselves on the same level as their believing masters, let alone above them (1 Tim 6:1–2). A claim to have brotherly feelings is therefore not as innocent and void of claims as it may first seem. As Marianne Kartzow notes, loving Rhoda as a sister intensifies and develops into sexual desire – and Hermas lapses back to his previous slave self.[36] There could, however, be a further side to the accusations directed at Hermas: is he, a former slave, perceived as unreliable and suspect even if his intentions were not improper?[37] Be that as it may, Rhoda's accusation points to Hermas' desire and his need to be truthful. She also refers to the evilness of desire in a righteous or just man (ὁ δίκαιος ἀνήρ) because it conflicts with the intentions such a man ought to have.[38] I will return to the concept of the just man at the end of this discussion, but before that I turn to the Elder, Grapte, and Hermas' wife, and what they contribute to the image of Hermas the man.

## Women of Authority: The Elder, Community Personified

After Rhoda from above finishes speaking, the heavens close and she disappears from the narrative. The most prominent female in the Visions now enters the scene.[39] Details given about her point to authoritativeness: her robe, her age (or that she is an elder), the white

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[35] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 42; Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 30; Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 107–108.

[36] Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 109.

[37] Ancient literature reveals slave owners' anxieties concerning their slaves and their perceived potential disloyalty and misconduct. Glancy, *Slavery*, 138; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2006, 145–146.

[38] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.8 (1.8).

[39] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.1–2 (2.1–2). The text is ambiguous, and although the woman is not identified as Rhoda, she could be Rhoda in a different form. Or perhaps Rhoda serves to introduce the woman Elder of the Visions. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 46–47.

chair,[40] and the scroll that she holds in her hand. The interpretation of the words γυνὴ πρεσβῦτις has been discussed from several angles in the recent scholarship. Many have read the words as simply indicating that she is old, or elderly,[41] but the words can be interpreted as "woman Elder".[42] There certainly is ambiguity, and both aspects are part of this figure. In Kartzow's reading, her old age emphasizes that, contrary to Rhoda, no sexual attraction is involved. Rather than being cast under the power of disturbing emotions, Hermas can now feel safe in the woman's presence. In this reading there is a shift from sexual desire to Hermas' male role in his community and family.[43] What I consider emphatic in the Elder is her authority, her actions and qualities, age included, that depict her as a leader and an elder.

Advanced age and a position as elder indicate authority, status, and wisdom that are part and parcel of the symbols, the book in the woman's hands and the chair on which she sits. The woman represents a leadership position that is connected with Hermas' community of the faithful. Not just her attire, but her actions – she instructs and guides Hermas – cohere with those of someone with high status in the community.[44] The Elder enters precisely at the moment when Hermas is experiencing self-doubts and sets about redirecting his thoughts away from Rhoda to his family. The Elder reminds Hermas of his good qualities and instructs him to focus on his family, a topic that will be discussed presently. She promises Hermas and his household new strength and consoles him by her reading.[45]

The book as an object receives special attention: the woman carries a scroll in her hands as she first appears, and in the second vision she appears walking and reading from a little scroll.[46] Scrolls and reading play

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[40] In the gospels, Jesus is often portrayed seated or sitting down in situations that emphasize his role as a teacher, even a judge. See, for example, Mark 13:3; Matt 5:1, 13:1. Collins, *Mark*, 602.

[41] This is the translation given by Ehrman and Holmes.

[42] Osiek translates "elder lady," Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 52.

[43] Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor*, 109.

[44] Walsh, "The Lady as Elder", 518–521, 533–541; See also Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 62.

[45] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.2–1.3.4 (2.2–3.4).

[46] According to Richard Bauckham, the words βιβλίον, βιβλαρίδιον (5.3; 8.3) and βιβλίδιον (5.3–4, 8.1) are used synonymously in Hermas. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophesy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993, 243–245.

a significant role in exchanges between Hermas and the Elder. In the first vision she reads to Hermas, and the words are first terrifying, but then bring consolation.[47] In the second vision she appears reading from a little scroll and Hermas asks to have it to copy its words, which he manages to do but he cannot understand the text at first. It takes fifteen days, fasting and prayer, before he is able to understand the message that he copied.[48] The woman appears again later in a night-time vision and amends the initial text and gives instructions as to how it is to be copied and distributed.[49] The book, thus, is a container of wisdom but also of authority that is not easy to reach. In Jörg Rüpke's reading, this prominence of books, writing, and reading indicates how they are seen as part of religious practice.[50]

The book(s) the woman possesses and reads from, and that Hermas copies and amends according to the woman's instructions, illustrate the interplay between written text, knowledge, and revelation in a predominantly oral culture. They point to issues of education and possession of and claims for authority and comprehension.[51] When Hermas receives the book for copying, this can be read as a claim for authority that is not easily obtained. The woman's connection to wisdom and knowledge is strengthened when, towards the end of the second vision, she is identified. Hermas initially draws the conclusion that the revelatory figure is Sibyl. This is not the case, but his suggestion is revealing. It indicates that Hermas sees the woman as a prophetic figure with access to divine knowledge. It also indicates that he held the sibylline traditions in some esteem.[52]

Rather than being the Sibyl, the woman is revealed to be the personification of the Community (ἐκκλησία). Her designation as γυνὴ

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[47] Herm. *Vis*. 1.3.3 (3.3).

[48] Herm. *Vis*. 2.1.3–2.2.2 (5.3–6.2).

[49] Herm. *Vis*. 2.4.2–3 (8.2–3).

[50] Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 156–157. For later Christian cultures, see Derek Krueger, "Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East", *Journal of Religion* 79:2 (1999): 216.

[51] On books and their secret knowledge, see, e.g., Rev 1:11; 5:1–10; 10:8; 22:8–10.

[52] Herm. *Vis*. 2.4.1 (8.1). Osiek takes up the possibility that Sibyl may have been Hermas' model when writing about the ἐκκλησία. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 58.

πρεσβῦτις, woman Elder, connects well with this identification: she personifies the community and the elders who direct it.[53] The question is what this personification implies. It has been suggested that the woman is a further transformation of Rhoda.[54] Perhaps Hermas is used to seeing women as elders in his community: this is the argument Lora Walsh makes.[55] I find it helpful to take my cues from Hermas' surroundings: the visual imagery of the Greco-Roman era. Not only in literature, but in the visual/material culture of the Greco-Roman world, abstract concepts or geographical locations that were feminine by their grammatical gender were personified as female figures.[56] Hermas' imagery draws from visual arts and material culture that would have been visible and accessible, even to someone the author presumably was: a non-elite person in first-century Rome. Personifications were commonly visible in buildings, statues and coinage. Examples include Judaea Capta coins that show a personification of Judea or the Judean people as a seated woman brought to submission, and the statues of Wisdom (σοφία), Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Intelligence (ἐννοία), and Virtue (ἀρετή) in the Library of Celsus at Ephesus.[57] Objects and other details depicted in connection with such a figure would have helped the ancient viewer identify her.[58] This is why Hermas notes the chair, the book, the woman's

[53] In Herm. *Vis*. 3.1.8 (9.8), the woman asks Hermas to sit, but he demurs and replies: "Let the elders sit first" – a remark that points to the woman and, simultaneously, to the elders in his community.

[54] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 46–47, esp. note 4.

[55] Walsh, "The Lady as Elder", 519, 522.

[56] Amy C. Smith, "Personification: Not Just a Symbolic Mode", in: *A Companion to Greek Art,* Dimitris Plantzos & Tyler Jo Smith (ed.), Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2012, 440–455; 443.

[57] R. R. R. Smith, "Cultural Choice and Political Identity in Honorific Portrait Statues in the Greek East in the Second Century A.D." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (2012): 56–93, 74–75; The statues were brought from other locations and placed in the Celsus Library façade in late antiquity. Diana Eidson, "The Celsus Library at Ephesus: Spatial Rhetoric, Literacy, and Hegemony in the Eastern Roman Empire", *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 16:2 (2013), 189–217, 206–207.

[58] Jessica Hughes, "Personifications and the Ancient Viewer: The Case of Hadrianeum Nations", *Art History* 32:1 (2009): 1–20.

age and connects them with who she is. A seated woman would be read as a portrayal of respectability, domestic virtue, and moral authority.[59]

Hermas inquires about the woman's age (διατί οὖν πρεσβυτέρα). Walsh reads Hermas' question as indicating his surprise that the figure personifying the community should be old.[60] I do not think that the question indicates surprise that stems from the assumption that the church should be young (as an institution). If we approach – as I do – the Visions as a writing that stems from a context where distinction from Judaism is not emphatic and Christian identity is not clearly developed, it is not necessary (although not impossible) to expect the members of the community, such as Hermas, to see themselves as part of something new. On the contrary, new religious movements have a tendency to emphasize how ancient they are. This was the case with many cults in the Roman era, including the early Jesus/Christ-believers and early Christians.[61] It is more fitting to read Hermas' question as a device to tease out further explanations about the woman, her identity and meaning,[62] and an explanation is what Hermas gets. The woman is not only the personification of the Community, but she is given qualities that in the Jewish scriptures are associated with God's creative Wisdom: "She was created before all things; therefore, she is old, and for her sake the world was formed."[63] This reference to a feminine being at the origin of creation is significant: its outlook coheres with Jewish scriptures' wisdom traditions.[64] Contrariwise, Pauline letters and the early gospels tend to reverse the feminine qualities of the pre-existent wisdom through association with Jesus as the pre-existent Logos.[65] This is not the case in the

[59] Eve D'Ambra, "Mourning and the Making of Ancestors in the Testamentum Relief," *American Journal of Archaeology* 99:4 (1995): 667–681; 679.

[60] Walsh, "The Lady as Elder", 517–518.

[61] Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity,* New York: Columbia University Press 2005, 63–64.

[62] Hughes, "Personifications and the Ancient Viewer", 8–9.

[63] Herm. *Vis*. 2.4.1 (8.1), trans. Holmes, with one modification.

[64] Cf. Prov 8:22–31; Sir 15:2–10, 24, 51:19–20; 4 Ezra 8:52 and 2 Bar 4.1–7.

[65] Matt 11:25–30; John 1; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–20. For Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as wisdom and a discussion of the gender reversal, see Celia Deutsch, "Jesus as Wisdom: A Feminist Reading of Matthew's Wisdom Christology," in: Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to Matthew,* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001, 88–113; Conway, *Behold the Man*, 115–118.

Visions: the feminine Community is the first of creation, which makes her similar to if not identical with the Wisdom in the Jewish scriptures.[66]

The question of the significance of portraying the Elder (the Community) as the first of the creation and as female still remains. I find Elizabeth A. Clark's classic article helpful for discussing this issue. Clark inquires into presentations of (certain) learned women as wise teachers in the later ascetic literature. In her reading, the personification of wisdom as a woman is not a straightforward sign that reveals recognition of women's intellectual capacities. Female personifications of wisdom rather serve as "inversed alter egos" of the protagonist, a concept that Clark found in David Halperin's essay "Why Is Diotima a Woman?". In other words, these personifications are not true females. This applies to the Wisdom in the Jewish scriptures, a figure that can be read against the background of marital and sexual imagery employed to illustrate the relationship between God and Israel. Wisdom, personified as a woman, enables a safe distance between the male human and male God in a culture that prohibited sexual relationships between men.[67] There are good grounds to read the female figures in the Visions as tools to think with rather than straightforward signs of appreciation of women's qualities. This is also the reading of Steve Young who has proposed that the Elder is female because she signifies Hermas' transformation into full manhood.[68] His masculinity is tied to his freedman status: as a slave,

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[66] Valentinian myth and its aeons serve as another example of the same phenomenon, personification of concepts according to their grammatical gender. The earliest account of the Valentinian myth is from Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1–3, but there are differing versions. The myth stems from the Jewish wisdom traditions; Dunderberg emphasizes the connections with Greco-Roman moral philosophy: Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus.* New York: Columbia University Press 2008, 97–111.

[67] Clark, "The Lady Vanishes", 22–30; David Halperin, "Why Is Diotima a Woman?" in: David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*, London: Routledge 1990, 113–151. See also Outi Lehtipuu & Ismo Dunderberg, "Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity: An Introduction", in: Ulla Tervahauta, Ivan Miroshnikov, Outi Lehtipuu & Ismo Dunderberg (ed.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity,* VigChrSupp 144, Leiden: Brill 2017, 1–18 (2–3).

[68] Steve Young, "Being a Man: The Pursuit of Manliness in *The Shepherd of Hermas*", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2:3 (1994), 237–255 (238–240).

he was not able to be a man, as a freedman he has to fulfil new expectations. The female Elder reveals his struggle to fulfil these expectations and supports him in in his transformation to full manliness – once Hermas is transformed, she is replaced by the male angel of μετάνοια: repentance, but also conversion and change.[69]

I find that the shifting and ambiguous attitudes towards age in the Visions find their explanation in the Elder's role as a tool to think with and to reflect issues from different angles. At first, she is very old and seated on a chair.[70] The second time she has a young face but the body and hair of an old woman, and, while speaking to Hermas, she is stands and appears happier than before.[71] The third time she is completely young and remarkably beautiful, with only an old woman's hair. In this vision, she is happy and seated on a couch.[72] In the fourth vision Hermas encounters her as a beautiful bride: a veiled (controlled) woman at the height of her beauty.[73] The age of the Elder is given different valuations in the first and the third visions because it is employed to illustrate different issues.[74] In the first vision her advanced age holds positive connotations and calls attention to wisdom and the Elder's authority.[75] In the third vision where a male revelatory figure explains her age, it is a symbol of spiritual decay and weariness.[76] The age is transformed from being a sign of authority and one of the characteristics that enables Hermas to recognize the woman, into a sign of weariness that should deepen introspection and make him (and the reader) vigilant of his spiritual state and that of the community.

To sum up, I read the Elder as a personification of the Community and the guidance it provides. She is an image to think with, not a symbol of actual women in the community or a clue to the writer's inclusive views on women's leadership. Different kinds of female figures were

[69] This happens in the fifth and final vision, which also serves as an introduction to the Commandments. Young, "Being a Man", 245–246; Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 34–36.

[70] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.2 (2.2); 3.10.3 (18.3).

[71] Herm. *Vis*. 3.10.4 (18:4).

[72] Herm. *Vis*. 3.10.5 (18:5).

[73] Herm. *Vis*. 4.2.1–2 (23.1–2).

[74] So, too, Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 86.

[75] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.2 (2.2).

[76] Herm. *Vis*. 3.11.1–4 (19.1–4).

visible in the visual culture of the first and the second centuries CE, including personifications of abstract concepts such as wisdom, knowledge, or geographical locations. While it is impossible to determine the extent to which the writer had access to statues and artwork in his surroundings, and how he experienced what he saw, there is no reason to doubt that some such imagery was accessible to him. The Elder, too, is an image that the writer drew before his audience. As we now move on to inquire what he has to say about real women, we notice that it is on a different scale from what is said about Rhoda and the Elder.

## Real Women: Grapte and Hermas' Wife

Contrary to the attention that the unattainable Rhoda and the Elder receive, the real women in the protagonist's life, his wife and Grapte, are mentioned only briefly. Neither is given an independent role in the text, and neither speaks.[77] They remain in the shadow of the imaginary women, Rhoda, the symbol of Hermas' evil desire and his bait for attracting readership, and the Elder who personifies the Community and guides Hermas to introspection and proper conduct. Some scholars have been optimistic about finding information on women in the brief glimpses provided in ancient texts, including the Shepherd.[78] My reading is less optimistic: the information these women yield is on the author's views, not so much about themselves.

Hermas' wife is mentioned among the members of his household and in repeated exhortations to Hermas to show concern for them. After the vision of Rhoda, the Elder directs Hermas to turn away from his thoughts concerning Rhoda to the concern he should show towards his household. He is to guide his children, to remain positive and keep strengthening his household.[79] Once he is able to decipher the message of the scroll he copied, it contains reprimands to his children and criticism directed at his wife (συμβίος) for her evil speech.[80] Hermas' inadequate concern for his household is harmful because it implies that he

[77] Grundeken, "Community Building", 104.

[78] MacDonald, "Reading Real Women", 199–220, esp. 210, 217.

[79] Herm. *Vis*. 1.3.1–2 (3.1–2).

[80] Herm. *Vis*. 2.2.2–4 (6.2–4).

bears a grudge against them.[81] It is emphatic that it is his responsibility to control its members.[82] These passages contain a certain amount of ambiguity: discussion on the household (οἶκος) overlaps with discussion on the community, but I do not think it is necessary to conclude that the household should be interpreted as the community of the faithful, God's household.[83] In a manner similar to discussions in the Pastoral letters, the two households are parallel. Behaviour and performance in one should cohere with behaviour and performance in the other.[84] Instead of brooding over his sorrows, Hermas is to be attentive to his household and the wider community.

Control of his wife and family connects with a change that will take place in the nature of the relationship Hermas has towards his wife: she will be his sister (τῇ συμβίῳ σου τῇ μελλούσῃ σου ἀδελφῇ). If, in the case of Rhoda, perceiving her as a sister implies that Hermas considers himself to be on the same level with Rhoda (or perhaps above), should, by the same logic, the change towards wife indicate that she becomes a companion to him in a different, fuller sense than before?[85] It is questionable whether such a reading can be made. The most likely interpretation is that this refers to their future sexual abstinence.[86] The reference is brief, the wife is not given an independent role in the text, and Hermas is ambivalent about women and sexuality. The reference does not provide any explanation of why celibacy would be necessary or desirable. Mark Grundeken highlights Hermas' preference for sexual abstinence and points out contradictory expectations between religious celibacy and socio-cultural expectations for people to marry.[87] Prophetic call and eschatological motivation have been mentioned, but since celibacy is connected with the wife's lack of control over her tongue, it is probably

[81] Herm. *Vis*. 2.3.1 (7.1).

[82] See also Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.9 (1.9); 3.1.6 (9.6).

[83] On this point, I disagree with Steve Young, who reads references to children and household as references to the community as a household (Young, "Being a Man", 241).

[84] First Timothy distinguishes between one's own household (1 Tim 3:4–5) and God's household (1 Tim 3:15). The ideal that the head of household has control over wife and children is also expressed, e.g., in 1 Tim 3:4 (directed at ἐπίσκοποι), 12 (at διακόνοι); and in 1 Tim 5:8.

[85] Cf. MacDonald, "Reading Real Women", 202–203.

[86] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 54; Grundeken, *Community Building*, 100–102.

[87] Grundeken, *Community Building*, 100–102.

the importance of self-control that is highlighted.[88] Hermas' commonplace claim about women's speech as their vice aligns with the views and expectations typical of many ancient authors.[89] As Grundeken points out, Hermas intends real women to be silent.[90]

That women have a certain limited role not only in the household, but in the community, also applies to Grapte, about whom very little is said.[91] Hermas is to write two little books and send them to Clement and Grapte who then disseminate the message further.[92] Clement's and Grapte's identities are not explained further. Both are literate in the sense that they are able to read in public; both have a role in the community, albeit different.[93] Grapte's role, while acknowledged, is limited by gender and status: she is in charge of widows and orphans. By contrast, Clement and Hermas deal with communities at large, but it will be Hermas that has the more important task. The purpose of the remark on how the book's copying and reading task is to be divided serves to argue that Hermas should be given the prominent position of reading "to this city", along with the elders, while Clement is (merely) to disseminate the book to the outside cities, and Grapte, as pointed out, admonishes the widows and orphans.[94]

This brief discussion on the real women in Hermas' Visions demonstrates that they do not receive the same attention as the imaginary women, and also shows that Hermas' views about women, their place and their speech, appear to be typical of his time.

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[88] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 54–55.

[89] Sir 26:14; 1 Tim 2:11–12; 3:11; 4:7; 5:13; Tit 2:3. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 54–55. Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 164), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2009, 133–137.

[90] Grundeken, *Community Building*, 104.

[91] See Grundeken, *Community Building*, 108–110.

[92] Herm. *Vis*. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[93] It is impossible to reliably identify Clement with Clement of Rome. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 59; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 447.

[94] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 59. Women's care of widows is a topic in 1 Tim 5:16. For discussion, see Kaisa-Maria Pihlava, *Forgotten Women Leaders: The Authority of Women Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings in the First and Second Centuries C.E.*, Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society 2017, 167–169.

## How to Be a Man

Discussions with the visionary figures, Rhoda and the Elder, and the brief references made to Hermas' wife and household, and Grapte and the community, make visible something of Hermas' relations with others and reveal his claims to authority. Yet Hermas' ideas and ideals about manliness do not become visible just through the portrayal of women characters. In this section I briefly consider two aspects that are connected to views on manliness.

The first was briefly mentioned above. As the Elder is leaving the scene after the first vision, she is joyful and exhorts Hermas with the words ἀνδρίζου Ἑρμᾶ.[95] Two aspects are intertwined in her words: Hermas is to be courageous,[96] and he is to be a man.[97] The two meanings of the verb cannot be separated from one another: courageous conduct and behaving like a man are one and the same thing.[98] While the woman's command may emphasize how Hermas is to act, in the third vision he is shown how manliness is connected with self-control. Hermas sees seven women who support the tower, symbol of the community. The women are personified virtues, and the second of them, self-control (ἐγράτεια) is characterized as manly (ἀνδριζομένη).[99] Manliness is also mentioned in the explanation of the Elder's changing ages.

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[95] Herm. *Vis*. 1.4.3 (4.3).

[96] This is how Holmes and Osiek translate: "Be courageous, Hermas" (Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 463); "Be of good courage, Hermas!" (Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 48).

[97] Ehrman: "Be a man [*Or: Be courageous*], Hermas." Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 2, 186. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 51.

[98] In the Septuagint the command to be courageous/manly often refers to acting in a courageous and manly way as a leader or a fighter, often as part of a double command, ἴσχυε καὶ ἀνδρίζου, e.g., in Deut 31:6–7, 23; Josh 1:6–7, 9, 18; 2 Kgs 10:12; 1 Chr 19:13, 22:13, 28:20; Ps 26:14. Hermas is not the only visionary who receives the command to be manly and courageous. It is also given to Daniel (10:19) whose famous vision contains several elements also present in the first two visions of Hermas: riverbank, linen clothes, luminosity of the person appearing, supernatural fear, consolation. Theodotion's version contains a similar connection to the seer's process from desires to manliness (καὶ εἶπέν μοι Μη φοβοῦ, ἀνὴρ ἐπιθυμιῶν, εἰρήνη σοι· ἀνδρίζου καὶ ἴσχυε, Dan 10:19). See also 4 Ezra 10:33. Polycarp is commanded to be courageous/act the man prior to his martyrdom (Mart. Pol. 9.1); this work is later than the Shepherd, and therefore not of direct relevance.

[99] Herm. *Vis*. 3.8.4 (16.4).

In this passage, the effect of the vision on Hermas' community[100] is likened to an old person's resumed will to life at unexpected good news: the person raises himself, becomes very joyful, clothes himself with strength, does not lie down but stands up, his spirit renewed, and he does not sit but is manly (καὶ οὐκέτι κάθηται ἀλλὰ ἀνδρίζεται).[101] Being courageous and manly is connected with joy, appetite for life, strength and upright posture. Each time that manliness is mentioned, it is combined with actions and attitude, virtue and inner strength.[102] Diane Lipsett has argued that introspection and examination of the self and community are key themes in the Shepherd.[103]

Andrew Crislip observes that recommendations concerning emotions and exhortations to joy, happiness, and calls to abandon sadness in the Shepherd are "wrapped up in codes of masculinity".[104] The Elder leaves joyfully, the invigorated person is filled with strength and joy. Visions give ample attention to Hermas' emotions and their intensity from the start: the vision of Rhoda agitates Hermas and her – in his view false – accusations offend him.[105] After the encounter, he is shaken and filled with sorrow, and debates Rhoda's words in his mind. When the Elder first appears, he is sad and weeps to the extent that she remarks on his uncharacteristically gloomy appearance. The Elder points out that usually Hermas is patient, not easily angered, and always laughing (μακρόθυμος, ἀστομάχητος, ὁ πάντοτε γελῶν) and thus reminds him of his good qualities; she further characterizes him as self-controlled, able to abstain from evil desires, full of sincerity and great innocence.[106] Only after attention has dwelt on Hermas' emotions and his characteristics, does it shift to his family and Hermas' performance as head of

[100] A second person plural is used in the text.

[101] Herm. *Vis*. 3.12.2 (20.2).

[102] Manliness is not gender-specific, a woman can be courageous/manly, for instance amidst birth pains; cf. Mic 4:10. For virtues in the Shepherd, see Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 19–53, esp. 34–36.

[103] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 19–23.

[104] Andrew Crislip, "The Shepherd of Hermas and Early Christian Emotional Formation", in: Yannis Papadogiannakis (ed.), *Studia Patristica LXXXIII*: *Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2015,* vol. 9, Leuven: Peeters 2017, 231–250, 245.

[105] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.5–8 (1.5–8).

[106] Herm. *Vis*. 1.2.1–3 (2.1–3).

household.[107] In Crislip's analysis, the attention given to sadness reveals that it is perceived as a negative emotion that should be abandoned to give room for the more desirable cheerfulness and joy.[108]

The second aspect to note is the concept of a just/righteous man (ὁ δίκαιος ἀνήρ). After Rhoda has accused Hermas of evil desire, she responds to Hermas' denial by demanding that he admit that evil desire in the heart of a just man is evil, a sin. If Rhoda's accusation is true, then Hermas fails as a just man. If he succeeds in being a just man, one who aims at just things, his reputation (δόξα) will be established in heaven, otherwise he brings death and captivity upon himself.[109] In this context two aspects of evil and sin are brought up: desire, and pride and reliance on one's wealth.[110] The opening scene thus expands the initial issue, evil desire for Rhoda, towards issues of wealth and worldliness, and the ideal of a just man. Later on, in the Commandments, the topic is resumed with emphasis on desire that leads to adultery.[111] To lead the life of a just man is the ideal often expressed in wisdom literature.[112] Just men are ideal leaders,[113] but sometimes they become victims of unjust enemies.[114] Joseph, Mary's husband, John the Baptizer, and Joseph of Arimathea are characterized as just men in the gospels, as is Cornelius

[107] Herm. *Vis*. 1.3.1–2 (3.1–2).

[108] Crislip, "The Shepherd of Hermas and Early Christian Emotional Formation," 231–250. See also Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 151–155.

[109] Herm. *Vis*. 1.1.8 (1.8).

[110] Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 44–45. There is also a communal aspect: later "the just" are reminded that the days of their repentance have come to an end, Herm. *Vis*. 2.2.5 (6.5). "The just", in the plural and without the qualifying "men", refers to the faithful, the members of the community. It also does so in the discussion of true and false prophets in Commandment 11 where a reference is made to the assembly (or synagogue) of righteous men (συναγωγὴ ἀνδρῶν δικαίων), Herm. *Mand*. 11.9, 13, 14 (43.9, 13, 14), and in the explanation of the tower in Herm. *Sim*. 9.15.4 (92.4), where the second group of stones represents the second generation of just men (δευτέρα γενεὰ ἀνδρῶν δικαίων).

[111] Herm. *Mand*. 4.1.2–3 (29.2–3).

[112] E.g., Prov 10:32; 11:7; 12:25; 29:27.

[113] Exod 18:21.

[114] E.g., 2 Sam 4:11; Isa 57:1.

the centurion in Acts.[115] In Matthew, the just may expect rewards in the future when the evil receive their punishments.[116]

Just as Hermas is commanded to act like a man, the concept of a just, or righteous, man is given to him – and the reader – as an ideal to follow, a mirror against which to reflect himself. First and foremost, the just man resists evil desire. He turns the desire that enters his heart into care of family, ensuring that his household functions as it should. The just man acts in a just way in his community and as regards wealth and business affairs that do not dominate his thoughts, and he is charitable towards the poor.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have read the Visions of the Shepherd of Hermas to investigate the portrayal of Hermas through female characters, and to consider ideal manliness in the writing. My focus was on the first four Visions, independent of the Commandments and Parables. Hermas in the Visions can be observed through what he writes about Rhoda, the Elder, his wife and Grapte. Each relates to Hermas and can only be reached as far as the narrator Hermas sheds light on them, but the same applies to Hermas: he is known through the four women who reveal aspects of him and shape what may be known about him. Since the women are of different standing in the narrative, they reveal different sides of Hermas.

The Visions portray Hermas as struggling with several interconnecting issues within himself and among others, with authority and control of emotions emerging as central concerns. The encounter with Rhoda – autobiographical and fictional at the same time – brings to the fore questions of desire and slavery, introspection and repentance, but also struggles for power and conflict. Hermas is under the past authority of Rhoda and in danger of being subjected to desire and sin. When the Elder enters the scene, authority and signs of status become visible. What Hermas sees highlights the Elder's authority. Her robe, the scroll, the chair,

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[115] Joseph: Matt 1:19; John: Mark 6:20; Joseph of Arimathea: Luke 23:50.

[116] Matt 13:17, 43, 49. In 13:17, δίκαιος is the term preferred by Matthew. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2001, 247. The language in these verses is drawn from Jewish concepts and the scriptures (Luz, *Matthew,* 267, 270, 281–284).

and her age-cum-position belong to revelatory imagery that, as external signs of authority, emphasize her power, the power of the community and its leaders. Although the figure of the Elder has been read as an indication that Hermas could imagine women in positions of authority in his community, my reading is less optimistic. Against Greco-Roman visual culture that personified abstract concepts as females, it is unlikely that such a figure reveals much of the realities behind the text. Like personifications of other abstract concepts, the Elder is a personification of the male-dominated community, a tool to think with.

The primarily fictional Rhoda and the Elder hold long discourses with Hermas, whereas the women that are connected to Hermas' everyday life, his wife and Grapte, remain silent. What little is mentioned about them connects with Hermas' claim to authority. The message of the Elder is that Hermas has not succeeded in being the authoritative head of the household that he should. In other words, Hermas uses the revelation to claim control over his wife and children. His nearly invisible wife should control her tongue (but not others) and be a companion in abstinence. Complaints about children, and about Hermas' kindness and softness towards them, are part of the discussion of household and family in the Visions. In a similar manner, little is said about Grapte, but her task – to read to widows and orphans – at the same time reveals her abilities, yet restricts her sphere of activity and authority. The division of the reading task reveals that Hermas himself aims at a prominent position within his community. The visions and the claim that the scroll he produces is of heavenly origin provide means to claim a more visible role. When the message of the scroll is to be disseminated, Clement and Grapte should play supporting roles.

After discussing the women of the Visions, I briefly considered the call to be a man given to Hermas, and the ideal of a just man. The command to be manly and courageous is connected to virtues and strength, as is the concept of a just man. As in Jewish literature, a just man is someone able to choose the right course for his life. This takes us to where I started my discussion. In the majority of studies, the Shepherd is approached as the work of an early Christian author. I have taken a different course. There are grounds, as discussed at the beginning of my article, to consider the Visions an early rather than late work. Once an early date is accepted, it becomes necessary to consider how to interpret

the Greek text. It is tempting to do so in a Christian framework, but then that clashes with the notion of an early context, and the observation of how little that is decidedly "Christian" there is in the work. In discussing Hermas and the women of the Visions, I have sought to resist such a reading, and to keep open the nature of the initial situation where the text was composed.