2012


Teresa Jeanne Calpino
Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation
http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/335

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2012 Teresa Jeanne Calpino
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

"THE LORD OPENED HER HEART":
WOMEN, WORK, AND LEADERSHIP IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

TERESA J. CALPINO

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2012
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am not one of the lucky ones to whom a dissertation topic came easily. For help in bringing my ideas to form and for all of her careful reading and unfailing encouragement, I would like to thank my Director, Dr. Wendy Cotter CSJ. This project would not have made it off the ground or reached a conclusion without her sure guidance and midwifery. I would also like to thank my readers, Dr. Thomas H. Tobin SJ and Dr. Jacqueline Long. Both provided careful and detailed critiques that have certainly enriched my work here and have also made me a much better scholar. I am so grateful for their wisdom and patience.

The staff of the Department of Theology, Mrs. Catherine Wolf and Mrs. Marianne Wolfe, were always ready to assist me, to keep me on track, and sometimes to pick up the pieces. And to all of my fellow graduate students at Loyola University Chicago, thank you for your camaraderie and collegiality; it has been an honor. I would especially like to thank my dear friend and brilliant colleague Jenny DeVivo. The disciples were sent out two-by-two for a good reason: it is not possible to do such hard work without the support and laughter of a true friend. I am so lucky to have had you as part of my cohort.

On the home front, this work would not have made it to the page without my parents and anchors, Violet and Dominic; I dedicate this dissertation to you both. My sisters, Mary and Joan, always listened to my troubles (even when I am sure they were bored by the topic) and kept my spirits up through the difficult times. My dear friends
have been there for the long haul and were always gracious and understanding when I “dropped off the map.” Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my wonderful husband, Barry, for his unfailing belief in me and my beautiful children, Virginia, Benjamin, and Jacob, for putting up with me when I was not at my best and loving me in spite of it. I could not have asked for better fellow travelers. I love you all so very much.
To Violet Faletti Berta and Dominic Berta – You were the inspiration to begin this journey and the reason that I made it to the end. With all my love, thank you.
Time will pass, and we will be forgotten, our faces will be forgotten, our voices, and how many there were of us; but our sufferings will pass into joy for those who live after us, happiness and peace will be established on earth, and they will remember us kindly and bless those who have lived before. Oh, dear sisters, our life is not ended yet. We shall live!

–Olga, “The Three Sisters” by Anton Chekhov

In our family an experience was not finished, not truly experienced, unless written down or shared with another.

–Anne Morrow Lindbergh
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ ix

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ................................................................................................. x

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... xiii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1

CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP ................................................................. 6
  From Irenaeus to the Reformation ................................................................................. 6
  Seventeenth to the Early-Twentieth Century .............................................................. 40
  Late-Twentieth Century to the Present ........................................................................ 54
  “New” Literary Criticism ............................................................................................. 56
  Feminist Scholarship .................................................................................................. 61
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 65

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN IN THE GREEK EAST ....................................................... 67
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 67
  Method ...................................................................................................................... 73
  Women and Marriage .............................................................................................. 74
  The Guardianship and Legal Rights of Women ....................................................... 93
  Women’s Right of Inheritance ............................................................................... 102
  Women as Managers and Owners .......................................................................... 111
  Women and Honorary Titles ................................................................................... 121
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 123

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN IN THE ROMAN WEST ............................................ 125
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 125
  The Roman Woman: Wife and Mother ................................................................. 126
  The Roman Marriage .............................................................................................. 129
  Dowry ...................................................................................................................... 136
  Women under the Law and Guardianship ............................................................ 153
  Women in Commerce ............................................................................................ 157
  Women and Inheritance ....................................................................................... 173
  Women as Benefactresses ..................................................................................... 177
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 178

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESUSCITATION OF TABITHA ........................................ 180
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 180
  Text Critical Issues ............................................................................................... 185
  Joppa ....................................................................................................................... 188
TABLES

Table 1: Acts 16:2. “A leading city of the district of Macedonia.” ................................. 292

Table 2: Acts 16:13. “Where we expected there to be a place of prayer.” ......................... 292
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAT</td>
<td>Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABD</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Dictionary. 6 vols., Doubleday, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACW</td>
<td>Ancient Christian Writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>L'année épigrique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANRW</td>
<td>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTC</td>
<td>Abingdon New Testament Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>W. Bauer; <em>Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>British Archaeological Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASP</td>
<td><em>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEFAR</td>
<td>Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Calvin Commentaries Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIG</td>
<td>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIJ</td>
<td>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIL</td>
<td>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJD</td>
<td>Discoveries in the Judean Desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNT</td>
<td>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEF</td>
<td>Israel Exploration Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGR</td>
<td>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILS</td>
<td>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae; H. Dessau, (Berlin, 1892-1916)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMT</td>
<td>Inschriften Mysia &amp; Troas: Lacus Appolloniatis &amp; Miletopolis, eds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LApollon/Milet</td>
<td>Matthias Barth and Josef Stauber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFSR</td>
<td>Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS</td>
<td>Journal of Hellenic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJS</td>
<td>Journal of Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNT</td>
<td>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAMA</td>
<td>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua, 4 volumes, Manchester, 1928-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIS</td>
<td><em>Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes</em>, L. Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovTsup.</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum Supplement Series</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Notizie degli scavini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTD</td>
<td>Das Neue Testament Deutsch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖTK</td>
<td>Gütersloher Taschenbücher Siebenstern; Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Graecae</em> (Migne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue Biblique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPhil</td>
<td>Revue de Philologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Sources Bibliques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCI</td>
<td><em>Scripta Classica Israelica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEG</td>
<td><em>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</em>, Leiden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIG</td>
<td><em>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJSJ</td>
<td>Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNT</td>
<td>Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAM</td>
<td>Tituli Asiae Minoris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDNT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDOT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEAS</td>
<td>Twayne's English Authors Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThHK</td>
<td>Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLG</td>
<td>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPE</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This dissertation will explore two women in *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tabitha (Acts 9:36–42) and Lydia (Acts 16:11–15), women who have routinely been ignored by scholars or mentioned only in praising the apostle associated with their story. As a result, stereotypical categorization has swept these important characters from their rightful place into relative obscurity. In fact, an examination of their stories set against the expectations of women in Greco-Roman antiquity reveals their unconventional situations. In particular, this dissertation takes special notice of the ways in which representations of the “ideal woman” in the Greco-Roman world are at variance with the portraits of Tabitha and Lydia. Both women are portrayed as independent, support themselves financially, and are regarded as benefactresses in their own right. Of course, benefactions from women were commonplace among elite women of the dominant class, but neither Tabitha nor Lydia belong to such select families.

First, the dissertation will focus on the social location of women in both the Greek East and Roman West of the Imperial Period. This is not done with the aim of arguing for a historical Tabitha or Lydia, but simply to explore the types of images and expectations that may have influenced an audience’s perceptions of these women. Second, the dissertation will examine the characterization of Tabitha and Lydia within their discrete biblical narratives, and also how placement within the macro-text of Acts has bearing on the interpretation of these pericopae.
INTRODUCTION

There are approximately thirty stories in *The Acts of the Apostles* that involve female characters or cite women, making it a topic of no small importance to the author.\(^1\)

Jane Schaberg has observed:

> The author of Luke (and Acts) is interested in the education of women in the basics of Christian faith and in the education of outsiders about Christian women…One of the strategies of this writing is to provide *female readers with female characters as role models.*\(^2\) (emphasis mine)

Schaberg rightly calls for a conscious critique of transporting this educational strategy into a contemporary setting, but it is crucial to stand back and assess the impact of the above emphasized words. If one of the strategies of the author of Acts is to reach, educate, and edify women, then what we have contained in Acts are invaluable traditions about the roles of women in the Greco-Roman world through the eyes of early Christians, specifically their role in the society and church of the early second century.\(^3\) This, of

---


\(^3\) Although my dissertation will not delve into the arguments of dating and authorship, I do assume the second century date of the material based on the convincing arguments of Richard I. Pervo, although of
course, does not assume that the portrait of women’s lives that Acts provides is not an idealized picture without rhetorical and literary embellishment, but that it is precisely in the choice of virtues that are awarded to women that one has evidence of the ideals of the early Church. The author’s favor or disfavor toward women is not the focus of this study, although this will be clarified as a result of this particular analysis of two important but often overlooked pericopae, “The Resuscitation of Tabitha” (9:36–43) and “The Conversion of Lydia” (16:13–15). This is the first attempt, to my knowledge, to analyze these stories and women as a pair.

Although these stories are distinct, they also share some important literary and social similarities that invite their analysis as a pair. First, and quite significantly, both Tabitha and Lydia are presented as working women who are not at all dependent on any man in their intimate circles. Both are without a husband, male guardian, or lawyers. Neither woman is shown as a mother with children. Their “single” status, or better said, independence, is remarkable given the ordinary conventions of the day. Notably, the author has situated both women in a primary position: Tabitha is the first woman to receive a healing miracle in Acts (Acts 9:36–43) and is the final miracle in the Petrine section of Acts (Acts 1:15–12:18). Lydia is the first woman to be “called” (Acts 16:11–15) in the Pauline portion of Acts (Acts 9:1–28:30), and her story bookends the Philippian narratives (Acts 16:11–15; 16:40). In addition, both women are in charge of a household: Tabitha is resuscitated in her home in Joppa, and Lydia—while she is called
in a “place of prayer” (προσευχή)—requests that her entire household be baptized and then invites Paul and Silas to her home, where they stay as guests while in Philippi.

Significantly, both stories evince a similar introductory phrase: Lydia is introduced by the phrase τις γυνὴ ὄνοματι (Acts 16:14), and Tabitha with τις ἴδι μαθήτρια ὄνοματι (Acts 9:36). (Here we should notice the only instance of the feminine μαθήτρια in the New Testament). Although this may appear to be a standard character introduction, in Acts it signals the introduction of an important character who is a believer, or who will be soon. Many men are introduced with this formula, both married and unmarried, but the same can only be said for a select few women. Tabitha, Rhoda, Lydia, and Damaris are the only women who are introduced with this formula; we should note that all are portrayed without a spouse. Both stories are built around the thematic words ενοίγω, παρακαλέω, κύριος, and μένω, an examination of which will be featured in the dissertation itself. Yet here one might make the observation that first Peter, in the case of Tabitha, and then Paul, with Lydia, will be urged strongly (παρακαλέω) to enter the women’s respective households, in which they will remain for some time afterward.

4 Mary is introduced as “the mother of John.” Sapphira, Priscilla, and Drusilla are all introduced in relation to their husbands. The man in each of these cases is introduced with the formula “a certain man named…,” but the wife is then introduced by “with his wife.” Queen Candace and Queen Bernice are both introduced by their names alone, which may be due to their royal status.

5 The implications of these thematic words will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

6 In Acts 9:38, the two men urge Peter strongly to come to Tabitha’s home immediately (ὁδὸν ἄνδρας πρὸς αὐτὸν παρακαλοῦντες· μὴ ὀκνῆσθε διελθεῖν ἐκεῖ ἡμῶν), and in 16:15, Lydia urges Paul and Silas strongly to come to her home (ὡς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ ὀίκος αὐτῆς, παρεκάλεσαν λέγουσα). Indeed, in Lydia’s story, there is an added force to the request when she prevails upon the men further (καὶ παρεβαίλασεν ἡμᾶς). These connections suggest that the author may have shaped the stories to reflect the structural device of mirroring the actions of Peter and Paul.
Although neither Tabitha nor Lydia is identified as a widow, scholars have presumed this based on the fact that no men are featured in either woman’s intimate circle and based on the demographics of that time period. More recent investigations of Greco-Roman social systems, however, point to a greater variety of roles for women and their opportunities for independence in the Romanized Mediterranean world. Even married women could inherit and run businesses and retain use and usufruct of the wealth gained from these ventures without intermediary lawyers.

All these factors combine to invite a thorough investigation of the accounts themselves and in their placement in the document of Acts; to uncover their meaning for the listener; to reveal the significance these stories held for the earliest Christians, such as the audience of Acts; and to better gauge the service these stories provided, the message they announce, and their place against the landscape of Act. In particular, the independent situation of both women, while possible, but still unconventional with regard to the ideals of the perfect woman, call out for careful scrutiny. How did the portrayal of Tabitha and Lydia signal the orientation of the Christian message? What significance was being given, and what ideals were being supported?

---


Chapter One will survey the important scholarly literature from the time of the church fathers up to the present, which offers exegetical comment concerning Tabitha or Lydia, although my preliminary investigations show this to be minimal at best. This review will fall into three sections: (1) from Irenaeus to the Reformation, (2) the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, and (3) the mid-twentieth century to the present. Chapters Two and Three will focus on the social, economic, and legal capacities of women in the Greek East and Roman West, respectively, and discuss how this affects the interpretation of the narratives of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts. Chapters Four and Five will engage in a phrase-by-phrase analysis of both stories with particular attention to the linguistic and narrative elements of the text. Finally, Chapter Six will summarize the function of the accounts of these two women and make an assessment of the importance of their particular roles in the document, suggesting implications for further study.
CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

From Irenaeus to the Reformation

Irenaeus (Lydia only)

In the first explicit reference to the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:13–15),\(^1\)

Irenaeus (2nd–3rd c. CE), in his work *Adversus Haereses*,\(^2\) states:

> And then he [Luke] carefully indicates all the rest of their journey as far as Philippi, and how they delivered their first address: “for sitting down, he says, ‘we spoke to the women who had assembled’; and certain believed, even a great many.”\(^3\)

---


\(^2\) *St. Irenaeus*, ANF, vol. 1, eds. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Hendrickson, 1994). The longer title to which both Irenaeus and Eusebius refer is translated as *On the Detection and Refutation of That Which Is Falsely Called Knowledge*. The Greek version of the text, which is the original, has been lost except for portions of the original Greek quoted in Epiphanius, mainly Book II. Other snippets are found in Eusebius, Hippolytus, Theodoret of Cyrus, John of Damascus, and in Oxyrhynchus 405 and the Jena payrus. The disappearance is a mystery since the Greek appears to have been available into the ninth century. The Latin text that remains is a quite literal translation that seems to indicate that the translator knew Greek well but the frequent retention of the syntactical structure from the Greek indicates that the translator did not know Latin as well. For a cogent discussion of the manuscript traditions and issues, see John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyon against the Heresies*, Book 1, vol. 1 (Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1992), 11–15. The Latin text used here is found in *Patrologiae Graecae (PG)* vol. 7a. The first quotation that Irenaeus makes of Acts is in 1.23.1, when he describes the meeting between Peter and Simon Magus in Acts 8, but the exposition of the importance of Acts on questions of apostolicity are found in 3.12–14. The discussion of Lydia’s conversion is found in 3.14.1.

\(^3\) *Et deinceps reliquum omnen ipsorum usque ad Philippus adventum diligenter significavit, et quaemadmodum pimun sermonem locuti sunt: sedentes enim, inquit, locuti sumus mulieribus quae convenerant; et quinam crediderunt, et quam multi, PG, 3.14.1.* It should be noted, of course, that this is in fact a paraphrase of the biblical account of the conversion of Lydia and that Lydia’s name is not explicitly
Here the nameless “certain woman” and the “great many” are Lydia and her household, who are baptized. This citation is embedded within a larger argument that maintains the apostolic authority and truth of Luke’s version of Paul’s missionary activities. Very little is known about Irenaeus except that he was a bishop (presbyter) in Lyon in the late second century CE. It is speculated that he directed his treatise to Rome during a time of stability that lacked persecutions. It has also been suggested that the treatise is directed to the churches of Asia Minor that had been influenced by the Gnostic teachings that had proliferated in Alexandria. These two differing points of view suggest the divide that had already come to exist between the eastern and western communities of the early church in both their liturgy and scriptural interpretations. The importance of the work is not only Irenaeus’ description of the various Gnostic sects of his time, but also in his systematic presentation of Christian doctrines that were prevalent in the Western church of his day.

In his own testimony, Irenaeus states that he has listened to Polycarp’s teachings in Rome, thereby stressing the importance of apostolic witness and foundations. In Book mentioned, but it is clear from the context that Irenaeus in using the word “certain” (et quinam crediderunt) to mean Lydia and the “great many” (et quam multi), that is, the women present or her household.

Here it must be remembered that Irenaeus presumes that the author of the Gospel of Luke is also the author of Acts, who is “the dear and beloved physician” of Col. 4:14 and, therefore, can be counted on to be in continuity with Paul. Also, the fact that Irenaeus cites the text of Acts authoritatively so many times is proof of, as André Benoit observes, the fact that “Irenaeus is not just familiar with the text of Acts, but recognizes it as Scripture.” André Benoit, Saint Irène: Introduction à L’Étude de sa Théologie (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 122.

Dillon, Against the Heresies, 3–6.

III, in which he discusses the text of Acts most fully, Irenaeus is not as much concerned with exegesis as with providing an exposé and refutation of Gnosticism, especially Valentinian Gnosticism, based on reason. By linking Luke’s gospel to Acts, Irenaeus can demonstrate the unbroken line of apostolic authority beginning with Jesus’ command in Luke 10:16 and continuing on to Peter and Paul as narrated in Acts. Irenaeus argues that Paul and Luke were “inseparable companions” and if Paul had known of any mysteries that were not revealed in his letters, then Luke would have known these mysteries and written them down in Acts. In essence, the Lukan gospel and Acts can lay claim to apostolic authority through relationship to Paul even though the author “Luke” is not an apostle himself. Also, the fact that Irenaeus uses the narrative of Lydia’s conversion to make these claims is proof that the text was well known by 180 CE since Irenaeus assumes that his reader will know the object of his reference without the benefit of direct citations or names. Of course, the detailed descriptions of the characters that Paul (and by corollary Luke) encountered in Acts help Irenaeus demonstrate that Luke

---


9 This fact, coupled with the focus on building, stabilizing, and protecting communities from internal and external threats along with the omission of Luke or Acts from the fragments of Papias suggest a date in the second century (prior to 115 CE) for Acts. Margaret Y. MacDonald, The Pauline Churches, SNTSMS 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Richard I. Pervo, Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists, (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006).
was the constant companion of Paul and, therefore, all of his writings have equal validity and apostolic authority. Irenaeus’ use of Lydia’s story is instrumental to his larger project as is evidenced by the fact that he does not even call her by name, only, “a certain woman.”

St. Cyprian (Tabitha only)

In his work, *De opera et eleemosynis* (5–6), St. Cyprian cites the Tabitha narrative as an example of the importance that works of mercy play in cleansing one of sins committed after baptism. Tabitha’s good works are not only the reason for her resuscitation, but also the merits of her good works were “stored up,” and “such was the miracle wrought by the merits of mercy, such was the power of just works.”

---

10 *Non enim conceditur eis, ab his qui sensum habent, quaedam quidem recipere ex his quae a Luca dicta sunt, quasi sint veritatis; quaedam vero refutare, quasi non cognovisset veritatem.* (3.14.4) Here Irenaeus is specifically refuting the “corrupt” interpretations Marcion and Valentinus give of Luke-Acts.

11 All texts and translations are from Edward V. Rebenack, *Thasci Caecili Cypriani de Opere et Eleemosynis: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962). Rebenbach makes clear that his translations are based on the work of W. Hartel in the *Corpus Scriptorium Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (3.1. 373–94). The work is dated between 250–56 CE and was written early in Cyprian’s episcopacy during a time of extended peace in order to call his congregation out of apathy and to remind them of their duty to tend to the poor and needy. The subject of *eleemosyna* is taken up by later writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa (the brother of Basil of Caesarea, see below) and John Chrysostom. Although it is uncertain that any of these writers was directly influenced by Cyprian’s work, it seems evident that the subject of *eleemosyna* and their role within the Christian life was an important topic for these writers of the third to fifth century. Rebenback, 1–21.

12 *Tantum potuerunt misericordiae merita, tantum opera iusta valuerunt. Quae laborantibus viduis largita fuerat subsidia viviendi meruit ad vitam viduarum petitione revocari.* (Cyprian, 6.12–13) Tabitha’s good works during her lifetime have been stored up and are cited as the reason for her resuscitation because *nec defuturum Christi auxilium viduis deprecantibus, quando esset in viduis ipse vestitus.* Tabitha’s good works done on behalf of the widows are recognized by Christ and on account of this he grants Peter the power to perform the miracle. This meaning is also supported by Cyprian’s statement in 7.3–6, *inter sua mandata divina et praecepta caelestia, nihil crebris mandat et praecipit quam ut insistantem eleemosynis dandis, nec terrenis possessionibus incubemus, sed caelestes thesaurus potitus recondamus.* By corporeal works of mercy, Christians like Tabitha lay up treasures in heaven. *Et quae matrona locuples et dives es, unganoculos tuos non stibio diabolico sed collyrio Christi, ut pervenire ad videndum Deum possis, dum Deum et moribus et operibus promeritis.* (Cyprian, 14.12–15) Rebenack, *De Opere Eleemosynis*, 63–75.
emphasis in the story for Cyprian is not on the things done or produced for the widows, but on the very doing or giving itself. That is, the action itself is what is stored up and saves the Christian from a second death, not in any way the monetary value of what is given (6.3–5). For Cyprian, Tabitha’s role as a disciple is not highlighted, only her value as role model of Christian charity. It is important to notice that Cyprian does not count Tabitha as one of the widows as she is in the later work of Basil, but as the one who provides alms to them. Based on Cyprian’s exhortations to rich matrons elsewhere in this work, he seems to use Tabitha as an example tailored to this audience.

St. Basil of Caesarea (Tabitha only)

In a brief, but important, citation, St. Basil of Caesarea (329–379 CE) views Tabitha as a widow even though the text makes no mention of this status. It would seem that this is due in large part to the absence of a husband. Moreover, it reflects Basil’s own enthusiasm to see models of the holy widow figure as a sort of consecrated cenobite since he himself was focused on the ascetical, monastic life. For example, he writes:

And before all things my care was to make some amendment in my character, which had for a long time been perverted by association with the wicked. And accordingly, having read the Gospel and having

\[Et\ quod\ eleemosynis\ non\ tantum\ a\ secunda\ sed\ a\ prima\ morte\ animae\ liberentur,\ gestae\ et\ impletae\ rei\ probatione,\ conpertum\ est.\]

\[Ibid.\]

\[St.\ Basil:\ Ascetical\ Works,\ trans.\ Sr.\ M.\ M.\ Wagner, (New\ York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 191–92.\]

\[Besides\ growing\ up\ in\ a\ staunchly\ Christian\ household,\ which\ boasted\ of\ several\ bishops, monks\ and\ nuns,\ his\ eldest\ sister\ Macrina\ was\ one\ of\ the\ most\ famous\ ascetic\ women\ of\ the\ fourth\ century\ and\ his\ brother\ was\ St.\ Gregory\ of\ Nyssa.\ The\ Ascetical\ Works,\ ix.\]
perceived therein that the greatest incentive to perfection is the selling of one’s goods and the sharing of them with the needy of the brethren, and the being entirely without thought of this life, and that the soul should have no sympathetic concern with the things of this world, I prayed that I might find some one of the brethren who had taken this way of life, so as to traverse with him this life’s brief flood.  

This propensity toward renunciation of wealth and adherence to a strict moral and ascetic code led Basil to create what was probably the first true coenobitical monasticism open to all socio-economic classes and both genders.  

A widow who enjoys sufficiently robust health should spend her life in works of zeal and solicitude, keeping in mind the words of the Apostle and the example of Dorcas (Basil, *Herewith Begins the Morals*, 74).

It appears that Basil was the first to explicitly name Tabitha a widow who was a member of an order of widows devoted to charity by the conflation of two texts, Acts 9:36 and 1 Tim. 5:9–10.  

---


1 Tim. 5:9–10 Χήρα καταλειπθεῖσα μὴ ἔλαβεν ἑαυτὴν ἐξήκοντα γεγονοῦσα, ἐνάυς ἀνδρὸς γυνή, ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυροῦμεν, εἰ ἐκτελοῦσαν, εἰ ἐξευδόχησαν, εἰ ἐγκλιτοῦσαν, εἰ ἐνεπιληκτεῖσαν, εἰ σιγαῖν ἐνπεφυγαν, εἰ θλιβομέναις ἐπήρξασαν, εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολουθῆσαν.
herself a widow and, what is more, she is drawn into the Eastern fervor for women to adhere to the ascetical rules of “prayer and supplication with fasting.”

St. John Chrysostom (Lydia only)

While it is not clear that the late imperial work of St. John Chrysostom (347–407 CE) was influenced directly by the writings of Basil, it can be stated that Chrysostom shared Basil’s enthusiasm and dedication to the precepts of the Desert Fathers and their asceticism. Chrysostom’s homily on Acts 16 (Homily 35) is the first extant exegesis of Lydia’s story, and his homiletic portrayal of her was to have a lasting impression upon commentators for centuries. While Irenaeus’ main concern was setting down clear boundary lines between orthodox positions of “Truth” as opposed to those held by Gnostic groups, here Chrysostom was not combating heresies but rather writing within a young episcopacy to a wide range of interest groups both within and outside the church.

---


21 However, John does not seem to share Basil’s interest in the mortification of the body. Cf. St. Basil: The Letters, 294–95. ἐγὼ δεικνύω τὴν νεκρασίαν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέρόμενος.


23 Of course, John did at times address issues of heresies, but in his homilies, he sidelines these issues to highlight more pastoral concerns. It was the negotiation of these groups and factions that absorbed much of John’s time in Constantinople and to which he came into conflict with on a regular basis. It was to these sometimes contentious groups that John addressed in his homilies on Acts, warning against the dangers of wealth, pride and power, and extolling the virtues of humility and service to the poor. Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, John Chrysostom (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11–16. Mayer and Allen are dependent upon the work of J. N. D. Kelly, Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1995). For a broad overview of Chrysostom’s time period
In the late imperial period, there was a growing number of Christian women who consciously chose to eschew marriage (first time or after being widowed or divorced) and childbearing in favor of an ascetic life that advocated humility, renunciation of the physical body, and a spiritual devotion to charity. Chrysostom is quite interested in and supportive of this phenomenon for two reasons: first, in his own self-interest, these women generally had some means of financial independence that they were willing to share generously to support both Chrysostom and his church; second, Chrysostom was tapping into social trends that allowed for greater self-determination and power that was available to women, especially to the growing number of wealthy women, who were part of his audience. These two influences meet in John’s homilies on Acts with their praise

---


25 See, John Chrysostom: On Virginity and against Remarriage, trans. S. R. Shore; intro. E. A. Clark (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1983), vii. Chrysostom produced more on this topic than any other Greek-speaking father of the early church, and this interest in the ascetic life seems to have started at a very young age (Socrates, Historia ecclesiastica 6.3, PG 67.668). In the 380s CE, when Chrysostom wrote these treatises, the celibate life was considered the most exalted life for Christians. Chrysostom supports this view when he describes the horrors of marriage and the glories of virginity that go far beyond Paul’s own treatment of these topics in 1 Cor. 7. John speaks directly to his intended audience (wealthy, independent women) when he rails against the “slavery” of marriage and its attendant woes from the position of its injustice to the wife as opposed to the husband as is most often found in the topoi of classical literature. On Virginity, 55, PG. For a discussion of Chrysostom’s use of classical topoi, see Antole Moulard, Saint Jean Chrysostome: Le Défenseur du Mariage et l’apôtre de la Virginité (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1923), 202–17. On
of female characters resounding with ascetic themes and imagery. Chrysostom interprets Lydia as follows, “She a woman of low stature, evident from her trade, but see also her high-mindedness.” He equates Lydia with women of low social stature (ταπεινή) because she is a “seller of purple goods” (πορφυρόπωλης) and so she is assumed to be a craftsperson (τέχνη). The upper class prejudice against those who engaged in manual labor to earn their living was prevalent in Chrysostom’s time, but here Lydia’s low stature and her endeavors in manual labor mark her not as a person to be scorned or pitied, but as a person of elevated mind and virtue (φιλόσοφος). Lydia is being used here as an example of the virtues of hard work and hospitality that is directed toward the affluent and powerful audience in Chrysostom church. In his recapitulation of the passage, John urges his audience:

Therefore, let us not seek languid and soft lives (ὑπογόν καὶ διακεχυμένον)…for there is nothing more worthless than a person who spends all his time in listlessness and luxury (ἀνέσει καὶ τρυφῇ)…Nothing is more injurious than leisure, neither laziness. Therefore, God has established working as a necessity for us; for everything is harmed by laziness.


26 E. A. Clark, John Chrysostom (Introduction), x.

27 Γυνὴ καὶ ταπεινὴ αὐτὴ καὶ δῆλον ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης ἀλλ’ ὄρα τὸ φιλόσοφον αὐτῆς, PG, 253.

28 Μὴ δὴ τοῦ ὑπόγον καὶ διακεχυμένον ζητῶμεν βίον...Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀρχηγοτέρων ἀνθρώπου γενοῖτ’ ἢν ἐν ἀνέσει καὶ τρυφῇ τὸν ἑαυτῷ διακεκλίστος χρόνον...Οὐδὲν σχολής μοχθηρότερον, οὐδὲν ἀργίας. Διὰ τοῦτο εἰς ἀνάγκην ἡμᾶς κατέστησαν ἔργαιας ὁ Θεός. Πάντα γὰρ ἡ ἀργία βλάπτει PG, 255–58.
Lydia, even though she is a woman of artisan status, behaves in a way that is both faithful and honorable, first because she asks for baptism and second because “she does not say, ‘stay with me’ but ‘come into my house and remain there.” Lydia’s intention is to extend hospitality to Paul, and so she is judged “Indeed a faithful woman!”

This somewhat lengthy exegesis of Chrysostom homily brings out an important new twist in the understanding of Lydia. First, she is being contrasted against the social elite of Constantinople and their class prejudices against manual laborers. Although she is interpreted as a laborer and therefore a non-elite, in John’s homily she is intimated to be more virtuous, faithful, and charitable in her hospitality than the affluent and aristocratic members of John’s own church audience. Since purple goods were a luxury item with a high-end market in late-Roman Constantinople, it is interesting that John characterizes a porphyropolis like Lydia as one who makes the goods that she sells. Lydia’s socio-economic and marital statuses are not specified in the biblical text, and Chrysostom uses

---

29 Kai ouk eipe, par’ emoi, all’ Eic ton oikon mou meinaste woste deixe, osti meta pollh to to poioi proboimias. Onus epithe ighti w ginvh. PG, 254. John also notes, To men ouw anoixe, tov theou to ek proseichin, avth. PG, 254. This is a gloss that gets little notice from commentators and is further evidence of John’s particular interest in the role of unattached women in the biblical narratives.

30 This type of scathing sermon may have won John followers in Antioch, but in the seat of Christian power in the East the criticism was not received as kindly. What the Antiochene church interpreted as moral guidance, in Constantinople was seen as a challenge by a portion of the local clergy, visiting bishops, local monks and ascetics, women at court, and the aristocracy. For an excellent treatment of the rift between John and these factions at Constantinople see, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 195–222. For an erudite discussion of the literary and rhetorical portrait that Chrysostom paints of Paul in his homilies and letters, see Margaret M. Mitchell, The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

31 The social gaps that the biblical text allude to, occupation, prosperity, and citizenship rights, will be discussed in Chapter Five below. John is one of the few early exegetes to discuss Lydia’s occupation in any detail.
this ambiguity in the service of persuading his audience of the nobility and superiority of women who lead an engaged, celibate life.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Arator (Tabitha only)}

Arator's epic Christian poem \textit{De Actibus Apostolorum},\textsuperscript{33} written in the sixth century CE,\textsuperscript{34} is a significant work that interprets the story of Tabitha.\textsuperscript{35} Both books of Arator’s poem were composed while he was a subdeacon in Rome in the midst of a bitter war between Justinian and the Gothic rulers of Italy (536–54 CE). The \textit{Historica Apostolica} (as the text within the poem is designated) is divided into two books that follow the natural division of Acts itself: Book I is comprised of the interpretation of Acts 1–12 and Book II with the interpretation of Acts 13–28. The first public reading of the poem took place on April 6, 544, when Rome was bracing itself not only for an attack by the Gothic leader Totila, but also for a challenge to the primacy of the papal see from the Emperor in Constantinople. The reading of this poem was staged to bolster confidence in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32] The social and cultural contextualization of the author/commentator continues to play a major role in the interpretation of both the Tabitha and Lydia passages up to the present time.
\item[35] Arator does not comment on Lydia, which is odd since her story contains an actual baptism. Richard Hillier comments: "Lydia occurs only briefly in the narrative of Acts and is of little interest for Arator: she is not of the significance of, say Cornelius, nor does her name provide him with an excuse for digression in which to exercise his ingenuity." If this assessment is correct, then Arator's dismissal of the passage is shared with a great many exegetes. Hillier, \textit{Arator on Acts of the Apostles: A Baptismal Commentary} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 23.
\end{footnotes}
the city and to assert Petrine primacy in the narratives, and consequently, the primacy and legitimacy of the papacy in Rome. Since none of the Latin Fathers wrote exclusively on Acts, Arator’s work is valuable in its presentation of conventional interpretations of Acts prior to Bede the Venerable.\footnote{36} That Bede’s commentary \textit{Expositio Actuum Apostolorum (et Retractio)} cites, and is stylistically and interpretively dependent upon, the work of Arator is cited by numerous scholars.\footnote{37} While his poem ostensibly follows the narrative of Acts, Arator is most concerned with interpreting the biblical text within an allegorical and mystical framework.\footnote{38}

In the dedicatory letter that begins the poem, he clearly states his aim and method:

\begin{quote}
Therefore, I shall sing in verses the Acts which Luke related, and following his account I shall speak true poetry. I shall disclose alternately
\end{quote}

\footnote{36} It should be noted that Arator’s contemporary Cassiodorus also wrote a paraphrase of Acts, but Cassiodorus does not offer extensive interpretations of the text and does not comment on either the Tabitha or Lydia narratives. The question of what works and authors Arator read and influenced his work is a question that is unresolved as none are made explicit in his work.

\footnote{37} For example, Hillier, \textit{Arator on Acts of the Apostles}: (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), vii; and Johannes Schwind, \textit{Arator-Studien, Hypomnemata} 94; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 12–14. Arator’s work also seems to have been available in Anglo-Saxon as it was used by Aldhelm, Commission for Editing the Corpus of the Latin Church Fathers 72:xxvi–xxviii, which, as Martin notes, “may have been an important but neglected factor in the development of the Old English Caedmonian tradition of biblical epic poetry.” Lawrence T. Martin, \textit{The Venerable Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles} (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 8.

\footnote{38} As an example of a rhetorical epic, the poem is filled with digressions, meditations, and gnomic passages. When Arator glosses the text, he assumes that the reader is familiar with the text of Acts. For example, when he indicates that the tears of the mourners washed Tabitha’s corpse, Arator seems to assume that the reader is aware of the detail in the biblical passage that indicates both that the corpse was washed and that the mourners present were weeping to mourn Tabitha’s death. Arator conflates the text of Acts 9:37 (λούσαντες & ἐθηκαν [αὕτην] ἐν ὑπερψάω) and Acts 9:39 (καὶ παρέστησαν ἀυτῷ πάσας αἱ γῆραι κλαίονσαι) to create the scene. For a discussion of the genre and characteristics of rhetorical epic poetry see, M. P. O. Morford, \textit{The Poet Lucan: Studies in Rhetorical Epic} (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 3–4, 87; F. J. E. Raby, \textit{A History of Christian Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 119. See also, C. Witke, \textit{The Old and the New in Latin Poetry from Constantine to Gregory the Great}, Mittellateinische Studien und Texte (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 5:222–23. For the opposing view on genre, see Hillier, \textit{Arator on Acts of the Apostles}, 12–19.
what the letter makes known and whatever mystical sense is revealed in my heart. (Ep. Ad Vig. 19-22; emphasis mine)\(^3\)

Arator announces the intention to write an interpretation of Acts that declares the book’s theological importance and further suggests that it should be read in light of both Petrine primacy and baptismal themes.\(^4\) Episodes that have no explicit connection to baptism, such as the resuscitation of Tabitha (Acts 9:36–42), are interpreted as holding a hidden baptismal symbolism and meaning.\(^5\)

In accordance with the technique of rhetorical paraphrase, Arator opens the story of Tabitha’s resuscitation with both an abbreviation of the narrative detail in Acts and an amplification of the spiritual meaning of the text.\(^6\) The main details of the biblical

\(^{39}\) Versibus ergo canam quos Lucas rettulit Actus./Historiamque sequens carmina uera loquar./Alternis reserabo modis, quod littera pandit et res si qua mihi mystica corde datur.


\(^{41}\) This baptismal interpretation seems especially suited to the catechetical instruction of the newly baptized. Both Augustine and Chrysostom give evidence that the lectionary required a reading from Acts during the time period between Easter and Pentecost and would of course be addressed to those who were to be baptized on Easter. This is not to suggest that Arator’s work was primarily liturgical, but instead to show that his interpretations of the passages support this common practice in the church of his time. J. A. Lamb, “The Place of the Bible in Liturgy,” in The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 573. For the dissenting view see, F. Bovon, “The Reception of Acts,” 89–91.

\(^{42}\) Arator is more systematic in his use of the technique than his predecessors Juvenecus and Sedulius. Arator’s particular method of biblical interpretation is evident here in his strict division of the literal material and the mystical interpretation into distinct sections. He even applies different interpretive techniques to each section. The ornamental style of poetry is applied to the literal paraphrase of the biblical text, but, in the mystical expositions, “he relies exclusively on the mnemonic properties of verse, which are largely inherent in the metrical form, without recourse to literary embellishment.” Michael Roberts, Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), 92. See also Julius Ziehen, “Zur Geschichte der Lehrdichtung in der spätrömischen Litteratur,” Neue Jahrbücher für das
account are included, but Arator quickly introduces his two main moralistic themes (18.807-808), *ille gerens divini pignus amoris, Ut nunquam pietate vacet, quod vota requirunt*. This wording achieves two aims: first, the purity of intention in Peter’s motives for going to Joppa and, second, the connection between Tabitha’s charity and her resuscitation as a demonstration of the importance of Christian charity for all.\(^\text{43}\) In fact, Arator specifies that it is precisely Tabitha’s charity to the poor that assures her resuscitation from the dead.\(^\text{44}\)

Arator cites Tabitha’s position as benefactress to the needy in both the heading and the body of the text for emphasis.\(^\text{45}\) The title of this section is “Concerning the occasion on which blessed Peter summoned from Lydda to Joppa, raised up the dead

\[\]


\(\text{43}\) The use of this more abstract moral language (*fides, pietas, divines amor*) elevates the miracle from a specific historical situation and places it in the realm of eternal truth: faith evokes piety, which leads to the salvation of the soul. This same expansive technique is used to characterize Peter’s prayers on behalf of Tabitha. Peter kneels close to earth, but his prayers reach all the way to heaven, to “The Thunderer” (*Tonanti*); all of this mirrors an ascent to heaven theme that is prominent in the epic poetry of this time. Cf. Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, 5:429–30; *Opus Paschale*, 5, 38 (302.16); Virgil, *Aeneid* 9:657–58; and Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, 305–06. For a discussion of this topic see Thomas Greene, \textit{The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity} (New Haven: Yale University, 1963).

\(\text{44}\) Roberts, \textit{Biblical Paraphrase}, 173.

\(\text{45}\) Although he does not specifically use the term \textit{benefactress}, Arator’s emphasis on Tabitha’s good works is indisputable. \textit{Instrumenta precum: qui, quod bona facta merentur, Officis uolvere loqui uocisque repulsam/ Elegere suae, lateant ne uulnera cordis,/ Quae lacrimis fecere uiam}. (18.815–818)
Tabitha, also called Dorcas, a giver of alms.”⁴⁶ Within the interpretation of the story he states, “Tabitha poured forth riches that shall endure and by her work was always mother to the needy.”⁴⁷ (emphasis mine). Here—as opposed to Basil—there is no presupposition that Tabitha must herself be a widow or even one of the needy. Instead, and quite opposite, she is seen to be the patroness of the needy. It must also be noted that Arator ignores the title of “disciple” to focus instead on Tabitha’s good works and charity. Like Chrysostom’s Lydia, Dorcas (Tabitha) is a craftswoman who engages in manual labor, as noted in the following quotation, “which the hands of Dorcas had woven and given to them.”⁴⁸ Notice how Arator creates a distinction between Dorcas and those around her whom he styles as “the paupers,”⁴⁹ those who beseech Peter to come to Joppa on Dorcas’ behalf, and “the poor and crowds of widows.” Dorcas is both their “mother” and their patroness, and it is due to both of these roles that she is deemed worthy of her resuscitation: “That hand which was bountiful to the poor has deserved to touch Peter’s right hand.”⁵⁰ Tabitha moves from death to life, the crowd moves from grief to joy, and Peter is the hero and agent of transformation for both.⁵¹

---

⁴⁶ De eo ubi beatus Petrus Tabitham elemosynarium, quae et Dorcas vocabatur, inuitatus a Lydde in Ioppe, mortuam suscitauit uiduis eam pauperibusque consignans. Qui tacentes manu eius facta monstrauerunt per uestimenta, Arator, 18.801–804.

⁴⁷ Tabitha/Mansuras fundebat opes et semper egenis/Munere mater erat. Arator, 18.802–04.

⁴⁸ Quas Dorcadis ipsis/Texuerant dederantque manus. Arator, 18.811–812, a reference to Acts 9:39. Like Chrysostom, Arator indicates that Dorcas was a craftswoman, but says nothing about her marital status.

⁴⁹ For Arator, the men who come to Lydda to ask Peter to come to Joppa are paupers, although there is no indication of their social or economic status in Acts (Acts 9:38).

⁵⁰ Illa manus meruit Petri contingere dextram./Pauperibus quae larga fui,. Arator, 18.834–835. The roles of mother and benefactress rather than disciple are highlighted here.
In the gloss that follows, Arator uses allegory to show how the story demonstrates that a soul—even one in the ultimate darkness of death ("in the bosom of the dark law") like Dorcas—can be called back to light "because grace undertakes to give gifts of eternal life to those reborn in the font." Tabitha’s story is not simply a “resuscitation” story, but is to be understood as a symbol for the gift of eternal life conferred upon Christians when they receive the sacrament of Baptism. Also, Peter prays for Tabitha’s return to life just as we find in the text of Acts, but here Arator makes explicit what was implicit in the text of Acts: “Peter senses that the gifts of God are present, by means of which she who lies there wept over is to be returned to health.” Namely, that it is not by any special powers of Peter’s that Tabitha is returned to life, but only through the action of God who heard Peter’s prayers. The hand also becomes a symbol for good works and action as Tabitha’s hand, “which was bountiful to the poor has deserved to touch Peter’s right hand.” Peter’s hand is the conduit through which life enters and courses through Tabitha’s body, “by means of it (Peter’s hand) the returning life raises the other limbs, and since it is going to flow through the whole body, life enters that hand of hers which was the cause of her

---

51 Arator then insists on the ecclesiological significance of the miracle: Peter is the Holy Roman Church who, as the earthly representation of God’s authority, brings salvation to those who possess faith and piety and practice good works. It is interesting to note here that the crowd rejoices (gaudentibus, 833) when Tabitha is presented to them, but Arator leaves out the connection between the joy of the crowd and the instigation of faith that the miracle brings, as does Acts 9:42.

52 Legis in obscurae gremio, Arator, 18.841. Although “Law” is capitalized in some English translations, it is only capitalized in the Latin text because it begins the line. Therefore, there is no explicit suggestion that in this instance it refers to Mosaic Law, but, instead, it is the natural law that all humanity is subject to decay and death. However, in lines 843–44 the reference may be to the Mosaic Law when Arator states, quae legis ab ore/Non fuerat promissa salus. Arator seems to stress that Baptism as a means of new life was not promised by the Mosaic Law, but was unique to Christianity.

rising.” The hand by which Tabitha provided clothing for the poor and the widows is connected to Peter’s right hand, his hand of power, and is the means by which her life is returned. This interpretation is clearly at variance with the preceding text—both Arator’s own and the text of Acts—Peter does not touch Tabitha until after she has been resuscitated and only does so to help her to stand. It seems that Arator wants to stress the importance of the hand in the administration of the baptismal sacrament since in the following text Tabitha is no longer portrayed as an individual person, but as an “Every soul” who, when baptized, is brought from darkness and death to light and renewed life.

The church, through the sacrament of Baptism, moves the soul from darkness/death to eternal light/life. Arator thus ends his account in the form of an exegetical sermon that intends to instruct and exhort. Arator’s use of rhetorical paraphrase moves the interpretation of Acts away from its use as an exposition of the virtues and merits of the evangelist or the works of the apostle toward its worth as a theological treatise meant to illuminate the spiritual meaning of Christian sacramental and ecclesiological life.

54 It is also interesting to note Arator’s choice of wording just prior to this: “The light of works, the companion of faith, drives away the shadows.” It seems that the emphasis is placed on works as opposed to the primacy of faith; works are a companion of faith implying that without works faith is not complete (cf. James 2:14–26).

55 G. L. Leimbach, “Über den Dichter Arator,” Theological Studies 46, no. 1 (1873): 225–70. Arator has limited interest in the historical situation of Tabitha; he instead narrates her story to demonstrate the resuscitation’s part in a universal and timeless soteriological plan that found its truest witness in the authentic church at Rome.

56 While Origen insisted upon the importance of both the literal and allegorical levels of the text, Arator seems to privilege the allegorical over the literal. This tendency is made even more explicit in the work of Bede, pp. 23–27.
St. Bede the Venerable (Tabitha only)

It is clear that Bede the Venerable (673–735 CE) is heavily influenced by Arator’s *De Actibus Apostolorum* from the evidence in his *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*.\(^{57}\) Arator’s sacramental, especially baptismal, emphasis is replaced with Bede’s new manner of interpreting the text by “hook” words and phrases and by elucidating the meaning of names, numbers, and actions in mystical and eschatological terms.\(^{58}\)

Bede’s works were not only highly influential within his community during his own lifetime, but also in wider monastic and ecclesial circles following his death up to the fifteenth century.\(^{59}\) Although he is best known as the author of *An Ecclesiastical*.


\(^{58}\) Bede does deal at times with sacramental issues; however, the emphasis is almost always on the esoteric aspects of the sacrament rather than the exoteric. For example, see the treatment of the baptism of the Roman jailer in Acts 16:33. *Lavit plagas eorum et bapizatus est ipse. Pulchra rerum varietas; quibus plagas vulneris lavit per eos ipse plagas criminis amisset*. 16.33; 64–65 (emphasis mine). When the jailer washes the wounds of Paul and Silas, he expunges his own guilt.

\(^{59}\) George Hardin Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, TEAS 443, (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 97–103. Brown also points out that Bede’s influence continued long after this and can be found even in secular works. Cf. William Wordsworth’s *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, ed. A. F. Potts (New Haven: Yale University, 1922), 1.23:117. For further biographical information on Bede and his writings, see Peter Hunter Blair, *The
History, a list of Bede’s writings show that over 80% of his works are exegetical in nature. Further, Bede himself claims that the illumination of the biblical texts is the centerpiece of his writings and occupied the majority of his life’s work. With respect to Acts of the Apostles, his method is to probe the deeper meaning of the text with special attention to how this assists the saintly, contemplative life.

If Arator has limited interest in Tabitha as a historical woman, Bede has even less. While Arator views Tabitha as a soul in need of sacramental regeneration in the baptismal font, Bede sees Tabitha as a soul in need of spiritual regeneration through the virtues of the contemplative life. As in his interpretation of Christ’s miracles in Luke’s


Bede’s commentary on Acts (709–716 CE) is less allegorical than some of his later works. Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1964), 36.

Bede’s continuing interest in Acts is evidenced by the fact that he returned to the subject again later in his life when he wrote Retractio in Actus Apostolorum (731–735 CE). This later work shows a better grasp of Greek, an interest in correcting small errors in his previous work, and refuting the critics of his earlier work. C. E. Whiting, “The Life of the Venerable Bede,” in Bede: His Life, Times and Writings, 16–17. Also, Martin, Commentary on Acts, xxiii.

This is not surprising since Bede’s audience were contemplatives themselves. G. H. Brown, Bede the Venerable, 20.

Arator at least situated Tabitha as the resident of a community with specific functions and auspices, but when Bede interprets the story, he does not stipulate her position within the community or her worthiness as a recipient of the miracle, and he only briefly mentions her good deeds. Martin, Commentary on Acts. These details seem to be of little interest to Bede, who from the beginning wants to show Tabitha as a symbol for the state of the human soul afflicted with the spiritual ailments endemic to humankind. Bede does say, concerning Tabitha’s good works, “for almsdeeds free one not only from the second death, but from the first.” However, he does not indicate that good works are the reason for resuscitation as does Arator. William D. McCready, Miracles and the Venerable Bede (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1994), 108. See also, Bertram Colgrave, “Bede’s Miracle Stories,” in Bede: His Life, Times and Writings, 211–29.
gospel, Bede understands the resuscitations performed by the apostles in Acts as spiritual regeneration of the soul that is dead from the burdens of sin. Since Tabitha has not yet been removed from her home for burial, she represents those who, “without having committed sinful acts, have sinned in their hearts.”

Bede begins his exegesis of Tabitha’s story with an explanation of her name which means “deer” or “fallow deer” (caprea). Bede states, “Luke would not have provided the meaning of the name if he had not known that there was a great mystery (magnum mysterium) in it.” This mystery is that the deer is endowed with sharp vision, which here means a spiritual sight. In addition to keen spiritual sight and peacefulness,

65 In this, Bede is more influenced by Gregory than Arator. The cosmic weight and pervasiveness of sin are not found in Arator’s work. For example, Gregory states, “And so the life of good people is filled with sorrows until the darkness, because for as long as the time of corruption continues, it is struck by afflictions coming from inside and outside, and it finds its health guaranteed only when it departs for good from the day of temptation.” It is clear that, no matter how hard one may try, liberation from sin and corruption only comes fully in the afterlife.” Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, ed. and trans. J. Moorehead (London: Routledge, 2005), 131.

66 Bede the Venerable, *In Marci Evangelium* 2, 120:525–34. See also the raising of Eutychus in Acts 20:7–12 Operosior enim est resuscitatio eorum qui per neglegentiam quam qui per infirmitatem peccant, et haec Eutychum, illa per Tabitam quam Petrus suscitavit exprimatur...iste praesente et docente, illa absente magistro; ad hunc Paulus descendit, ad illam Petrus suscitaturus ascendit; illa mox viso Petro resedit, hic nocie media defunctus tandem mane resurgit et iustitiae sole adflante redivivus adducitur. Bede attempts to explain the differences between the two resuscitations in Acts.

67 Neque enim beatus Lucas interpretationem nominis augeret, nisi magnum eidem mysterium inesse cognosceret. 9.36.2–4) Bede here seems to rely upon Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.1.15. “They [deer] dwell on high mountains, and they see all who approach no matter how far away they may be...dorcades indicates their sharpness of vision.”

68 Dente timetur aper, defendant cornua cervum, /Inbelles dammae, quid nisi praeda sumus? 9.36.12–13. Bede explains that this clear sight is indicative of the saints who dwell on a higher plain than the rest of humanity “due to the merits of their works,” and this attunes their attention to the pursuit of wisdom, “while always watching out for themselves with prudent discretion.” For a discussion of the spiritual senses and the priority of sight/see Bertram Colgrave, “Bede’s Miracle Stories,” in *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings*, 201–29. The virtuous quality of the deer is further emphasized when Bede states that the deer is timid and unwarlike in its nature; he quotes Martial, “The boar is feared because of his tusks; the stag’s horn’s defend him. What are we unwarlike fallow deer except prey?" Martial, *Epigrams*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 3, Bk 8, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 94,
Bede also cites that the deer is clean according to the law and its split hoof means that it ruminates (*ruminare*) continually on the word of God. Tabitha is portrayed within the ideal monastic life in which one pursues wisdom, discretion, a life of nonviolence, and continually contemplates the Holy Scriptures.

Tabitha is clearly identified as a woman of virtue; however, due to “the frailty of her mortal nature, the abandonment of her good works, and the weakness of her holy thoughts,” she suffers a spiritual death. When she hears Peter’s voice, Tabitha acts as the repentant soul should; “she would sit up and receive the light of her discretion, which she had lost, and live according to the teaching of those who had come to her aid.”

---

26

Bede also cites that the deer is clean according to the law and its split hoof means that it ruminates (*ruminare*) continually on the word of God. Tabitha is portrayed within the ideal monastic life in which one pursues wisdom, discretion, a life of nonviolence, and continually contemplates the Holy Scriptures.

Tabitha is clearly identified as a woman of virtue; however, due to “the frailty of her mortal nature, the abandonment of her good works, and the weakness of her holy thoughts,” she suffers a spiritual death. When she hears Peter’s voice, Tabitha acts as the repentant soul should; “she would sit up and receive the light of her discretion, which she had lost, and live according to the teaching of those who had come to her aid.”

---


70 “…just as it is shown to have happened through Peter to that woman [Tabitha] to whom we can rightly apply what is written [above] concerning deer.” (*sicut Petro ipsi contigisse probatur, cui rectissime quod de dorcade scriptum est aptari potest;* Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 9.36.18–19. Therefore the qualities of wisdom, contemplation, peacefulness, and discretion are attributed to Tabitha.


72 *Iustissimus ordo resurgentis, ut prius oculos mentis aperiat et agnita deinde Petri voce resideat et lumen suae circumspectionis quod perdiderat recipiat et ad doctrinam eorum qui se adiuvant vivat.* 9.40.5–7. The Christian’s only guide for a moral life is the sanctioned teaching of the Church. The heresy that Bede is most concerned with in his writings is the presence of pseudo–Christians who profess the faith and receive the sacraments but do not absorb its true spirit. The pagan gods may have disappeared in Bede’s time, but the traditions of the Germanic heroes (e.g., *Beowulf*) and the set of values associated with them still held strong in the culture. McCready, *The Miracles of Bede*, 122–23. Also, E. W. Watson, “The Age of Bede,” in *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings*, 44. Note that Bede does not include the text about Peter’s prayer on behalf of Tabitha while Arator does. Bede clearly acknowledges the relationship between prayer and change in physical circumstance (e.g., *Vita S. Cuthberti* 14, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.7 and 3.16); however, here he avoids this detail of the biblical account (Acts 9:40).
Further, Bede interprets Peter’s touch as follows: “Tabitha rose again, since there is no better way for the soul which has become weak because of its sins to regain its strength than the example of the saints.” Bede shows that Tabitha’s soul was weighed down not by a specific act of sin, but through the waning quality of her virtue. She may at one time have vigorously pursued the life of the saints, but the fact that the widows must pray for Tabitha indicates to Bede that “They (widows) must pray for the soul which has done wrong.” Tabitha is a soul that has fallen into sin and must be redeemed by the “example of the saints.” Moreover, in Bede’s interpretation, she becomes even more closely linked to the order of “praying” widows present at her mourning (9.39a).

Desiderius Erasmus (Tabitha and Lydia)

The Renaissance produced many positive changes in epistemology, but in the notion of women as both person and gender these same changes produced the “Renaissance gender gap.” Two authors demonstrate this tension clearly in their

---

73 *quia languescens anima peccatis nullo melius ordine quam sanctorum exemplis convalescit.* 9.41.9–10 Bede uses Acts 9:41 φωνήσας ὃς τοὺς ἀγίους καὶ τὰς χήρας παρέστησαν αὐτὴν ἐκθέειν to demonstrate that the saints and widows were present the entire time at Tabitha’s mourning.


75 The phrase is used to articulate the gap identified between the writings of the academic and religious intellectuals of the Renaissance period and the actual role that women played in the political, religious, and social arenas. For a very cogent description of this gap and the “three steps forward, two-and-a-half steps back” progression in female autonomy and expression, see Merry E. Weisner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially her discussion of women and religion on pp. 179–258. Also, Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1–27.
exegesis of Acts: Desiderus Erasmus\textsuperscript{76} and Jean Calvin.\textsuperscript{77} Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Acts* was written in the sixteenth century during the height of the Reformation. \textsuperscript{78} Although he was a Catholic writer, Erasmus was sympathetic to many of the basic concerns of the Reformation, especially to the emphasis on the biblical text as foundational and the need for a translation to be made available to the common people.\textsuperscript{79} For Erasmus, the biblical text, but especially the text of Acts, was to serve as an irenic model for the fractured church of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} For a discussion of this tension in Erasmus’ works and how he uses female characters to chasten and exhort men in their behavior, see Elizabeth MacCutcheon, “Erasmus’ Representation of Women and Their Discourses,” *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 12 (1992), 64–86. For an opposing view on this issue, see Anne O’Donnell, “Contemporary Women in the Letters of Erasmus,” *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 9 (1989) 34–72.

\textsuperscript{77} It should be noted that Martin Luther did not write a commentary on Acts, nor does his correspondence address the text. Therefore he is not included in this review.


\textsuperscript{79} Erasmus shared with the Reformers a commitment to Scripture as the norm (although Erasmus would qualify this as Scripture studied in conjunction with the tools of the Classics), the rejection of clerical practices that had no basis in the New Testament, and the need for a translation of the biblical text in the vernacular. Margaret Mann Philipps, “Some Last Words of Erasmus,” in *Luther, Erasmus and the Reformation*, eds. J. C. Olin, J. D. Smart and R. E. McNally (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969), 87–113, esp. 90–92; *CWE, Acts*, xiii. The most vehement critique that the Reformers made of Erasmus was the undue emphasis that he placed on maintaining the unity of the church at the expense of needed dissent and reform. Erasmus’ advice to Luther to “keep the peace” would have been inimical to the Reformer’s cause. See Desiderus Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, eds. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906–58), 5, 469–506, esp. 498–99. Also, Robert E. McNally, “The Reformation: A Catholic Reappraisal,” in *Luther, Erasmus and the Reformation*, 26–47.

\textsuperscript{80} Peter and Paul were to be viewed as models for the virtues of the prelates and the secondary characters (like Tabitha and Lydia) and as models of Christian harmony and unity, so lacking in the church of his own time, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, xiv. For a discussion of Erasmus’ irenic ecclesiology, see Hilmar M. Pabel, “The Peaceful People of Christ: The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam,” in *Erasmus’ Vision of the Church*, ed. H. Pabel (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995), 33:57–114.
In his writings, Erasmus both affords women a prominent place of honor in his interpretations of the text and yet reinforces the teachings of their inferiority.\(^81\) This is especially true in his expositions on the sanctity and godliness of marriage\(^82\) and his treatises on widowhood.\(^83\) On the one hand, Erasmus’ treatises advocating marriage were positive in their attempt to show that women were meant to be companions, not servants, to their husbands. On the other hand, these same treatises support common stereotypes of women as deficient in reason and fortitude, and they reinforce traditional “categories” for women, such as those found, for example, in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.\(^84\) Where he

---

\(^81\) Especially in how he reinforces the viewpoint that women may be spiritually superior to men, but they are socially inferior and, therefore, must submit to male authority. *CWE*, 66:193, and its discussion of the husband as enlightened tyrant.

\(^82\) Erasmus’ contention that marriage was superior to celibacy flew in the face of patristic and medieval literature and placed him in line with Reformers such as Luther, thus inviting sharp criticisms from his Catholic contemporaries and placing many of his writings (posthumously) on the “Index of Prohibited Books” by Pope Paul III in 1559. Craig Thompson, *The Colloquies of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 256–305; 628–29. Erasmus’s humanism called him to reject the prevalent Aristotelian notion that woman was a deficient male in favor of a claim that both men and women are made in the image of God. This is not meant to suggest that Erasmus refuted scholastic claims of female inequality, but only that he does not seem to follow Aquinas (*Summa, Ia* 93.4) in his assertion that woman is made in the image of God by grace but not by nature. Also, Erasmus does not seem to subscribe to Tertullian’s notion of woman as temptress or corollary treatment of woman as witch, which were both widely held during his time. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women*, 13; and Erika Rummel, *Erasmus on Women* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 3–6.

\(^83\) In Erasmus’ time, there were a large number of women who claimed celibacy as a way of maintaining their sexual and economic autonomy, but the growing trend to cloister and prohibit the work of women by ecclesial authority gave women in convents fewer opportunities to pursue autonomous goals. However, there were alternatives to sanctioned religious orders for women who were interested in both intellectual and charitable pursuits, such as the many groups of “widows” (i.e., unmarried women) who attempted to live and work communally without formal vows or rules. It seems that Erasmus is using these informal groups as his inspiration in the exegesis of the Tabitha story. Although there is a downturn in vows during Erasmus’ time period, there was also a later resurgence when convents once again became viable and less restricted. Diane Willen, “Women and Religion in Early Modern England,” in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private Worlds*, ed. S. Marshall (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 140–65.

\(^84\) Women were routinely divided into categories and defined according to their sexual activity. Erasmus commonly defines and describes female characters as unmarried women (virgins), wives, or
finds a very positive category of women is that of the older widow, a role to which Erasmus gives special attention and accolades on the basis of their charitable works as well as their ability to give wise counsel to both young women and men.\(^8\) The aging woman, unlike the young woman/widow of marriageable age, takes on something of a grandmotherly character, and, as a result, her authority and teaching virtue is never seen as usurping male authority, only supporting and supplementing it. Therefore, even though she is portrayed positively and lavishly, she is still plays a passive and submissive role. It is not surprising that Erasmus presents both Tabitha and Lydia as elderly widows. On the one hand, he praises their behavior and example while on the other he ensures that they are shown to be properly submissive and, therefore, of exemplary virtue.

Paraphrase of Acts is the first work thus far that treats the stories of both Tabitha and Lydia.\(^8\) For Erasmus, Tabitha’s primary virtue is her dedication to acts of charity. Unlike Bede’s widows. He also indicates that this is the “normal and appropriate” progression of roles in every woman’s life. Rummel, Erasmus on Women, 11–12.

\(^8\) Works of charity may soften the hierarchy between men and women, but they do not dissolve it. Therefore even older widows must remain under the authority of the male church to ensure their proper behavior. There also is some suggestion that older widows are praised due to their perceived waning sexuality, which makes it possible for them to act as mentors to both young men and women without possibility of temptation or scandal. Rummel, Erasmus on Women, 1–31. This is expressed most explicitly in “Berta Heyen: An Obituary for a Christian Widow,” (CWE 29, 18–28), where Berta is praised for her years of “saintly” marriage, childbearing, rearing her children within the Catholic tradition, and then in her widowhood continuing her saintly behavior through acts of charity and her humble and submissive behavior.

\(^8\) The work of various exegetes on the Glossa Ordinaria does address the text of Acts, but this is largely a reiteration of the work of influential patristic authors such as Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory. The notes on the text of Acts are mainly drawn from the work of Bede. Lesley Smith, The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2009). See also the excellent work of Beryl Smalley, “Les commentaires bibliques de l’époque romane: Glose ordinaire et gloses périmées,” Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, 4 (1961), 15–22; and “Glossa Ordinaria,” in Theologische Realencyclopaedie, 13 (1984), 452–57.
interpretation, Erasmus does not mention Tabitha’s other virtues, and she becomes primarily the instrument of good works. “She abounded in every kind of good work, but especially in the duties of charity by which she supported those in need.” Although he does not cite the passage specifically, Erasmus seems to base his description of the widows and Tabitha on 1 Tim. 5:10. “Here are all the widows—whose special commendation at that time was that they served the needs of the saints.” Based on this allusion, he implies that Tabitha is not only a widow, but a member of an order of Christian widows whose primary duties entail acts of charity on behalf of the Christian poor.

When describing Peter’s quick departure from Lydda to attend to Tabitha (Acts 9:39), Erasmus adds, “thus giving us an example of a good shepherd.” Erasmus uses the story of Tabitha’s resuscitation as an example of proper ministry for his young clerical audience with the result that the focus is no longer on Tabitha’s virtue, but on Peter’s.

---

87 CWE, 68. Haec abundarat cum omni genere bonorum operum, tum praecipue caritatis officiis, quibus sublevabat egente., 9, 36.

88 CWE, 68. Hic circumstetere Petrum omnes viduae, quarum commendatio praecipuatum erat, necessitatibus sanctorum inservire. IX, 39. Cf. 1 Timothy 5:10, “She (the widow not less than sixty years old) must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way” (ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρουμένη, εἰ ἐκκενοδόθησαν, εἰ ἐξενοθησαν, εἰ ἄγιων πόδας ἔνυψεν, εἰ διδασκόμενος ἐπήρκεσεν, εἰ παιτὶ ἔργον ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησαν).

89 CWE, 69. See also Erasmus’ treatises “The Christian Widow” and “An Obituary of a Christian Widow,” both of which extol the virtues of widows who devote themselves to charity and good works. Rummel, Erasmus on Women, 187–94.

90 CWE, 68. Petrus nihil cunctatus venit ad illos boni Pastoris exemplum exhibens, 9, 39.

91 Cf. Cyprian and Basil above. This is one of the passages that illustrate the “gender gap” (see Weisner, Women and Gender.). On the one hand, Tabitha is an example of a virtuous woman due to her numerous good works, but on the other hand, women are described as “the weak sex,” prone to hysteric
The chief virtue of this miracle is not the restoration of Tabitha to her good works on behalf of the needy, although this is surely a side benefit, but to raise up the weak, or more precisely the sinful, to godliness and to lead others to a confession of faith. Therefore, the importance of Tabitha’s story is its symbolic value as a story of the centrality of faith to renewal and the crucial role of the good cleric in this process.

When Erasmus discusses the story of Lydia, he describes her as a woman who is marked out for special honor. He states, “Among the many who heard Paul discoursing about Christ, it was she [Lydia] whose heart God opened to heed what Paul was saying.” Further, Lydia recognizes the important role her Baptism played in her full acceptance of Christianity. Acts 16:15 has Lydia ask, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come stay at my home.” Erasmus reworks this text to read, “If you have judged me worthy of this honor—to have received me into the fellowship of the

92 “News of this event spread throughout the whole city of Joppa and led many to confess the name of Jesus. This is the chief benefit of miracles. For it is of little importance otherwise, when so many thousands are born and die in turn, to summon one or two back to life who will a little later die in any case”  
93 “Inter multas autem quae Paulum de Christo differentem audiebant, huic Deus aperuit cor, ut animum adverteret ad ea quae dicitur a Paulo, 16.14. This is the first time that a commentator has specifically recognized God’s direct intervention in opening Lydia’s heart.
gospel through baptism and your teaching.”\textsuperscript{94} Thus, Lydia is not only open to Paul’s preaching, but her behavior here becomes for Erasmus a model for the relationship between convert and teacher:

An example has been provided for evangelical teachers not to avoid services spontaneously offered by recent converts to Christ…it might appear that they do not acknowledge the converts as their own. The example shows that they should not thrust themselves upon the covert lest they appear to demand a reward for communicating evangelical doctrine. But whoever has received a spiritual benefit would compel their benefactors to accept corporeal benefit, should there be the need.\textsuperscript{95}

It has been shown, then, in his accounts of both Tabitha and Lydia, Erasmus focuses on exemplary behavior and proper conduct of the individual Christian, whether they are clergy (Peter), teachers of the faith (Paul), Christians engaged in works of charity (Tabitha) or converts (Lydia). By following these exemplars, Christians can not only conduct themselves in a seemly manner, but they can maintain harmonious relations with one another and, therefore, demonstrate the honor and virtue of the Christian faith to a fractured and vice-ridden society.

\textsuperscript{94} Acts 16:15 ędzi̱ de evbapti̱sθh kai̱ oîkoς aŭ̱tῆς, parakalēsoν λέγουσα· eî kekríkatê me pustê̱n tâ kuriw eî̱ni, eı̱so̱klê̱ntes eî̱s tŏn oukôn mou mê̱nê̱tê kai̱ parē̱mba̱sato ἡμᾶ̱s. Note the lack of reference to fellowship and teaching of the gospel in the text of Acts. This same emphasis on teaching, Baptism, and the role of the evangelical pastors is made in Erasmus’ comments on Acts 2:40–42.

\textsuperscript{95} CWE, 102. Interim vero doctoribus Euangelicis exemplum praebitum est, ut nec refugiant officium ultero delatum ab his, qui nuper conversi sunt ad Christum,…ne videantur illos parum pro suis agnoscer, nec rursus ingerant sese illis, ne videantur pro communicata doctrina Euangelica praemium reposcere. Sed qui spiritualè beneficium recipiendum, si forsane opus sit, compellere 16. 15. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:11 as the basis of this principle, such as in the Glossa Ordinaria.
Jean Calvin (Tabitha and Lydia)

Jean Calvin’s commentary on Acts was published in approximately 1555, about thirty years after that of Erasmus. While Calvin follows Erasmus in his style of glossing the text, he does not adhere to his exegetical techniques. Calvin does not share Erasmus’ interest in the irenic nature of the text or its value in demonstrating proper behavior of clergy; rather, he uses scripture as the sole normative authority by which all other writings and theories must be tested. In many of his commentaries, and especially in his commentary on Acts, Calvin often cites exegesis by the church fathers (especially Chrysostom), not to shore up his own exegetical position, but to bring out the contrast between the purity of the early church and the polluted and corrupt sixteenth-century Catholic church. In addition to his use of the Fathers of the Church, Calvin frequently

---

96 Both men employed humanist methods in their work, but “it was Calvin who first made it the very basis of his exegesis and in doing so founded the modern science of exegetics.” Calvin did not give blind favor to humanism in his commentaries, but does note the continuing influence that it played in all of Calvin’s writings. “Humanist culture was not only, in Calvin’s eyes, a torch bearing the light of the Gospel, but in spite of his strict Biblicism, his humanist mind was in some degree harmonized with the Gospel. The mental formation and the religion, the culture and the morality, went hand in hand.” François Wendel, Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought, trans. P. Mairé (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 31. Although Calvin appears to have used Erasmus extensively as a source, he does take exception to his “historical criticism” used to diminish the importance of certain books or topics of Scripture. In this way, Calvin moves away from the trend to assess Scripture as both inspired and historically conditioned (cf. Luther). Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch des Dogmengeschichte, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Bk.2 (Leipzig: W. Scholl, 1920), 558. Also, Jean Calvin, Opera Selecta: Institutio Christianae Religionis, eds. P. Barth and G. Niesel (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1931), 4: 8–9.

97 Anthony N.S. Lane, John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 29. For Calvin, knowledge of God is not to be gained by looking to Nature or other signs, but to be found in the study of Scripture. This is where Christians can find the “verity of God.” T. H. L. Parker, Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 21.

98 It has been demonstrated that Calvin had access to, and knew well, the 1536 Paris edition of Opera Omnia that contained the complete works of Chrysostom. Lane, John Calvin, 29–75. Lane notes that Chrysostom was Calvin’s hero, at least on matters that related to New Testament exegesis.
illustrates the evils of the Church by critiquing the work of his contemporaries, but
nothing more vehemently than Erasmus’ Paraphrase on Acts.99

Calvin sees in the stories of Acts not only a historical account of the Spirit-led
early church, but a glimpse of “pure Christian faith” and a mirror and source of
inspiration to strengthen him for the struggles of his own reforms against the Catholic
Church.100 In his interpretation of the story of Tabitha, for example, Calvin makes sure to
emphasize that the two titles for Tabitha—disciple and one who gives alms—are
descriptive of the temporal as well as the theological progression of Christian life. First,
regarding her discipleship he states, “This [discipleship] is the chiepest praise, this is the
beginning of the holy life, this is the root of all virtues…The fruits of good works
proceed afterward from faith.”101 Tabitha’s holy life is rooted in the holiness of her
person due to her acceptance of the light of Christ. This innate holiness is the reason for
her title, not the works that she has performed on behalf of the church. Calvin also is the
first exegete thus far to make clear that this “holy life” can take root in women and men

99 Wendel, Calvin, 130.

100 “…that was the best form of the Church that began then, when as the apostles, having new
power given to them from above, began to preach.” “And we must learn patience by such examples (as
found in Acts), seeing the Son of God hath pronounced that the cross and tribulation shall always
accompany his gospel; we must not pamper and cherish ourselves with the vain hope, as though the state of
the Church should be quiet (prosperous) and flourishing here upon earth.” Both quotations from Jean
Calvin, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (Calvin Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

101 Calvin, Acts, 397–98. Haec prima laus, hoc sanctae vitae initium, haec omnium virtutum
radix…Ex fide postea emergent bonorum operum fructus. All Latin quotations from Joannis Calvini Opera
Exegetica, 12.1–2; Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum, ed. H. Feld (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2001),
287. Erasmus hints at this when he does not link Tabitha’s good works to the reason for her resuscitation,
but Calvin makes this distinction explicit.
equally. Calvin goes on to explain the fruits of this miracle: God comforted the poor, a Godly matron was returned to the Church, and many were called to faith. First, God raised Tabitha because he pitied the poor. In this action, God not only declares Christ as the author of life, but the power of his action is also meant to reestablish and renew the faith of the widows. The ambiguity in Calvin’s description leads the reader to assume that Tabitha is either one of the widows, one of the poor, or both. Second, God raises Tabitha not for her own sake, but for the sake of the Church. This ensures that Tabitha’s good works will not be interpreted as the reason for her resuscitation and act as a lesson for Calvin’s students. Even though good works on behalf of the poor are godly and expected of Christians, they gain nothing for the doer with regard to salvation since they only benefit the church on earth. Further, Calvin insists that the reason God brought Tabitha back to life was “that she might be a more excellent instrument of God’s

---

102 “He hath oftentimes already put this word disciple for a Christian man; and lest we should think that that name was proper to men only, he attributeth the same to a woman.” Calvin, Acts, 397. Iam aliquoties discipuli nomen pro Christiano posuit. Ne putemus id solis viris congruere, idem tribuit mulieri, Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum, 286–87.

103 Almost all of Calvin’s commentaries were originally extemporaneous lectures to his students. He then relied on his students’ notes to provide him with a transcript of the material covered, which he then published. This practice was also used by Luther in the production of his Table Talk. Michael Mullett, Calvin (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 53–54. See also, T. H. L. Parker, John Calvin: A Biography (Philadelphia: Westminster University Press, 1977).

104 This is most explicitly aimed at the practice of indulgences. This practice is at the core of Luther’s critique and was no less so for Calvin. It must be noted that the Catholic Church never sanctioned the purchase of indulgences for the remission of sin in either heaven or on earth; however, the practice of purchasing an indulgence to release either the buyer’s soul or another soul from Purgatory or to secure salvation was practiced by not a few clergy. In addition to this, particular prayer was also thought to release either one’s own or another’s soul from Purgatory. Both practices were denounced and lampooned by the Reformers.
goodness and power.” Finally, the miracle is meant to call many to faith in Christ. Calvin explicitly shows that even though Peter is a minister of great power, the real power of the miracle is the power of Christ. In this way, Christ is the focus of the story and not Peter. Both Calvin’s and Erasmus’ audiences were young clergy, but Calvin emphasizes the humble, servant-like role of the cleric: all the learning, preaching, exhortation, and pastoral care are useless unless the light of the Spirit is present in the individual. This principal comes through even more forcefully in the exegesis of Acts 16.

The story of Paul’s entrance into Macedonia and his progression to the place of prayer where he finds Lydia is framed as an apparent failure. “When they enter the chief city, they find none there with whom they may take any pains…Yea, even there they cannot have one man which will hearken to their doctrine; they can only have one woman to be a disciple of Christ, and that one which is an alien.” Rather than this being a slight against Lydia, it is more an attempt to show the rough progression of the gospel in


The in-dwelling Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture and continued to inspire its readers. The interior witness of the Spirit “is the supreme criterion upon which the authority of the Scriptures is founded.” This definition disregards both the external authority of the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and the “spiritualists,” who claimed continuing authoritative witness outside the Bible. The Spirit also is the means by which the Christian understands her or his adoption and is the means of contact between Christ and person in the sacraments. Wendel, Calvin, 158–60.

an apparently unfriendly territory and the need for an indefatigable spirit on the part of those who spread the Word. \(^{108}\) Calvin builds on Erasmus’ observation that God specifically opens Lydia’s heart by discussing why this occurred. It is not on account of Lydia’s godliness or superior intellect that she is chosen for this honor, but rather it is a “peculiar gift from God.” This gift allows her mind to be opened to hear not just Paul’s words and teaching, but “Lydia was brought by the inspiration of the Spirit, with the affection of heart to embrace the gospel, [and] that her mind was lightened, that she might understand it.” \(^{109}\) Due to this “gift,” Lydia is not only able to understand the “bare letter” of the gospel, but also a “reverence of his word…endued with heavenly light.” \(^{110}\)

While Tabitha is resuscitated to be of even greater service to the poor and to the Church as a whole, Lydia’s mind is opened by God because she was praeordinata to life, that is,

\(^{108}\) The later praise that Lydia receives from Calvin leads me to assume that the language “they can only have one woman” is a rhetorical device directed toward the young clergy in his lecture hall rather than invective against women. “Luke will shortly declare Lydia the first fruits of that Church,” (Quia paulo post ostendet Lucas, Lydiam fuisse primitias ecclesiae) and, “But afterward there sprung a noble Church of that one small graft, which Paul setteth out with many excellent commendations,” (Atqui postea ex illo tenui surculo prodiit nobis ecclesia, quam Paulus praeclaris encomiis celebrat.) are examples of Calvin’s approval of Lydia. Calvin, Acts, 101–02; Commentarii in Acta Apostolorum, 75–76. Also, as has been noted by Wendel, in this passage Calvin praises the religion and practices of the ancient Jews but does not hold the same view of the Judaism of his own time. Calvin’s insistence on the equal authority of the Old Testament and the continuity of the promises of the Jewish covenant with the Christian covenant was one of the points on which he was most soundly criticized. Wendel, Calvin, 208–14.

\(^{109}\) CC, 103. Quare videmus non fidem modo, sed omnem intelligentiam spiritualiam rerum peculiare esse donum Dei, nec quicquam proficere ministros loquendo, nisi interior Dei vocatio simul accedat…Ita et hoc loco non modo significant Lucas instinctu Spiritus adductam fuisset Lydiam, ut cordis affect amplitudeetur Evangelium, sed illustratum fuisset eius mentem ut intelligeret. Commentarii in Acta Apostolorum, 2–76.

one of the elect in whom the Spirit could work and plant a deep knowledge of Christ.\textsuperscript{111} In his exegesis, Calvin attributes a sign of Lydia’s godliness to the fact that she “consecrates her family to God.”\textsuperscript{112} Even though Calvin makes the concession that Lydia may not have been able to compel all the members of her household to be baptized, he does state, “But the Lord did bless her with a godly desire, so that she had all her household obedient.”\textsuperscript{113} In this statement, he does not assume Lydia’s marital status or discuss the absence of her husband, but recognizes that Lydia was both able to have her household baptized and to invite Paul and his companions to stay in her home without another’s consent.\textsuperscript{114} Even in his strict Biblicism, Calvin did not assume—as did other exegetes—the social role or status of the female characters in the text. Calvin’s positive contribution is that he awarded Lydia control over her religious life and, to a great degree, over the religious life of her household. In addition, both Tabitha and Lydia

\textsuperscript{111} The question of the role that predestination and election play in Calvin’s theology is a matter of debate not to its presence but to the degree of importance it played. F. C. Baur insisted that it was the centerpiece of Calvin’s theology and what made it unique; however influential this assertion may have been on future scholarship, it appears to have been somewhat overstated. Although Calvin did give predestination (both as election and reprobation) more importance in his later writings, he did so as part of a defense and response to his critics and for ecclesiological and pastoral reasons only. In the 1559 edition of The Institutes, Calvin only speaks of predestination in those four chapters (3.21–4) devoted to the topic, and it is, therefore, not the central point of his theology. Baur, Lehrbuch der christlichen Domengeschichte (Leipzig: Fues, 1867), 302–04. For an extended discussion of the role of predestination in Calvin’s theology, see Richard A. Muller, Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986).

\textsuperscript{112} Sanctus etiam et pietas in eo se proferunt, quod suam familiam simul Domino consecrat... Sed Dominus pio eius studio benedixit, ut morigeros haberet domesticos. Commentarii in Acta Apostolorum, 2–78.


\textsuperscript{114} CC, 105. Commentarii in Acta Apostolorum, 2–78. In hoc guidem, sicii iam diximus, incumbere decet pios omnes, ut arceant a suis domibus omne superstitionum genus. Deinde, ne profanas habeant familias, sed eas contineant sub timore Domini.
deserve special mention due to the presence of the Spirit within them and being called to a life in Christ equal to and on the same terms as men.

As humanists, Erasmus and Calvin represent the midway point between medieval supernaturalism and the rational critique of the Enlightenment that was to follow. This “new” approach of Erasmus and Calvin constituted a separation from Bede’s allegorical, supernatural interpretations of Acts, but also a separation from the scholastic interpretations of the text found in the Glossa Ordinaria. Like their predecessors, however, neither man questioned the authority of scripture, the historical character of Acts, or the centrality of faith to the enterprise of exegesis. Therefore, both Erasmus and Calvin fully assume that Tabitha and Lydia are historical women, but unlike later philosophical movements that would focus on the women as individuals, these Renaissance scholars continue to find the worth of Tabitha and Lydia, not primarily in their actions or historical situation, but in their worth as examples of proper Christian conduct.

The Seventeenth to the Early-Twentieth Century

While none of the scholars from this period wrote a commentary or work specifically addressing Acts, one of their most important contributions was to move the

115 Erasmus does, of course, revere the pagan philosophers and writers such as Cicero and Plato in what seems to be on a par with the gospels; however, he still asserts the authority of scripture through claims that the highest meaning of the text and Christianity itself are expressed eloquently by these non-Christians. In many ways, this is a reiteration of the apologies made by the early Christian fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr, First Apology, PG 6:21–22; 54–55; 59–60,) to claim Christianity’s absorption and sublimation of the high points of “pagan” philosophies.

116 Cf. Machiavelli and Rabelais. See also Michel de Montaigne, Essais de Montaigne, (London: Jean Neurse & Vaillant, 1771) as the most comprehensive expression of the principle of individualism.
perception of Acts as a factual, historical account of the early church to a rhetorical history. While it is true that Baur and the other Tübingen scholars were not the first to apply the historical critical method to the New Testament, they were the first to systematically evaluate Acts according to this method without harmonizing it with the Pauline epistles or the gospels. It is in making these distinctions between the aims of the epistles and Acts that Baur and the Tübingen School make their greatest contribution.

One difficulty with this position is that, by focusing solely on the apologetic interests of Acts as a whole, the secondary characters and their stories are swept up into this and never really dealt with on their own terms. In other words, characters like Tabitha and Lydia serve the rhetoric of Acts through their encounters with Peter and Paul and not on how these stories function aside from apostolic authority.

There was wide variety in how Baur and the Tübingen school interpreted the rhetorical strategy, but they all generally agreed that Acts was a Tendenzschrift. For Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), Acts is part of a group of irenic writings of the early second century meant to mediate between Jewish and Pauline Christianity.

---

117 It is important to emphasize that, although there is a shift from the ideals of the early humanism of Erasmus to the Enlightenment-based principles of Baur and the Tübingen school, it is a shift, not a radical break. The empiricism and rationalism that pervades the Enlightenment scholarship is rooted in the humanistic values it shares with Erasmus, which emphasize a move away from supernatural interpretations to an emphasis on the importance of understanding the text unencumbered by piety or doctrine. Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanistic Strains (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

Because Acts is written by and for Gentile Christians, it is an attempt to reclaim and come to terms with Christianity’s Jewish origins and to confirm its attachment to the great founder of Gentile Christianity, the apostle Paul. Although Baur’s results were continually challenged and revised from both inside and outside the Tübingen School, his basic premise of tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians still informs even the most current studies of Acts.

In 1841, Matthias Schneckenburger, Baur’s own student, challenged the conclusions of Baur’s 1838 article. While Schneckenburger does not refute Baur’s claim regarding the apologetic interests of Acts, he does challenge his conclusions about its purpose, dating, and audience. Schneckenburger argues that the audience is primarily Jewish Christians living in Rome. He was the first to discuss what he saw as the

---


120 *Theologische Jahrbücher*, eds. F. C. Baur and E. Zeller (Tübingen: L.F. Fues, 1848–1851) and Bruno Bauer, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Eine Ausgleichung des Paulinismus und des Judenthums innerhalb der christlichen Kirche* (Berlin: G. Hempel, 1850), 121. The most salient modern critique of Baur’s project is its overly defined boundary line between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, namely the restrictiveness and provinciality of Judaism versus the freedom and spirit-driven nature of Gentile Christianity. This portion of Baur’s argument was to have serious implications for Jewish-Christian relations for many generations. However, Baur himself does not seem to have been driven by an animosity toward Judaism as much as an appeal to freedom from a law that did not promote rationality and social consciousness. In this sense, Baur did not hold a positive appraisal of the ethical character of Jewish law or practice. Baur, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi*, esp. pp. 3–4; and in his discussion of Paul’s relation to Judaism and the law, pp. 343–408.

121 See for example, Pervo, *Acts*, esp. 367–70 and his discussion of the tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

symmetry of Acts, namely, how the author shaped the character of Peter to be like Paul and Paul to be like Peter. By emphasizing the continuity between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, Schneckenburger asserts that Acts is meant to defend Paul’s apostolic authority and political legitimacy and to demonstrate that his message was decisively rejected by Jews.\textsuperscript{123}

The historical “unreliability” of Acts that was championed by the Tübingen school was challenged by Adolph von Harnack, who wrote a series of monographs published between 1906 and 1911.\textsuperscript{124} There were two significant developments between the death of Baur and the publication of Harnack’s work that must be mentioned: the development and solidification of the two-document hypothesis and the scholarly interest in rabbinic literature as a means of understanding the teachings of Jesus and the life of the early church.\textsuperscript{125} Although, Harnack rejects, or ignores, the importance of rabbinic


\textsuperscript{124} Adolf von Harnack, \textit{Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament; Lukas der Arzt der Verfasser des dritten Evangeliums und der Apostelgeschichte} (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1906), \textit{Die Apostelgeschichte} (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1908), and \textit{Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte} (1911), (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1911). Harnack said of Ritschl, “The future of Protestantism as a religion and a spiritual power lies in the direction that Albrecht Ritschl has indicated.” As quoted in Martin Rumscheidt, \textit{Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height} (London: Collins, 1988), 12.

\textsuperscript{125} Baur worked under the assumption that Matthew was the first gospel. Albrecht Ritschl argued that Mark instead had priority; however, the formulation of the two-document hypothesis was not solidified until Heinrich Holtzmann’s synthesis of the varying threads of scholarship in \textit{Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter} (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1863). Also, on the importance of rabbinic literature to the study of the historical Jesus and early Christianity, see Abraham Geiger, \textit{Übersetzung der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der inneren Entwicklung des Judentums}, (Breslau: Julius Hainauer, 1857). For a discussion of both these influences on Luke-Acts scholarship, see Joseph B. Tyson, \textit{Luke, Judaism and the Scholars}, esp. 30–42.
literature, the two-document hypothesis is clearly important for his analysis of Luke-Acts. Harnack strongly refutes Baur’s claim that Acts was written in the early second century and instead argues that Acts was composed along with the gospel shortly after Paul’s death. Harnack bases this conclusion on a linguistic analysis of the gospel and Acts, which he claims demonstrates that both works are not only written by the same author, but are written to be read as a single work. He also suggests that Paul was involved in the composition of Acts, especially in the transfer of the traditions and “we” passages. This not only ensures the historical accuracy of Acts, but also makes the rejection of Judaism Paul’s own historical position.

---

126 Joseph Tyson rightly points out that von Harnack’s position changed from his early work—where he proposed a terminus ad quo of 93 CE for Acts—to his later work where he dates Acts to the beginning of the seventh decade of the first century. He also claims that Luke’s name was originally part of the title of both the gospel and Acts and not a later addition as previous scholars had argued. Harnack, *Lukas der Artz der Verfasserdes dritten Evangeliums und der Apostelgeschichte* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906), 104–120. See also, Tyson, *Luke, Judaism and the Scholars*, 30–42.


128 Harnack claimed that Luke was more anti-Jewish than Paul since Paul, a Jew, could not be anti-Jewish. This is why there are some anti-Jewish passages in Acts. However, Harnack never fully explains the presence of the passages in which Jews are portrayed positively. On the one hand, Luke is anti-Jewish, but on the other he has great reverence for the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, and his writing style and vocabulary are likened to the author of 3 Maccabees. Further, for Harnack, Luke represented the second stage in the rejection of Judaism that continued with John, the Apologists, and Barnabas, which then climaxes in Marcion. However, all of these have their roots in Paulinism. Harnack claims that Acts demonstrates the historical reality that the Jewish nation increasingly hardened its heart against the open appeal of Christianity, which does not suggest a defect in the gospel, but in the Jews. Even more troubling than this assessment is the language Harnack uses to explain this theory: “Der Jude ist der Gegenspieler in dieser dramatischen Geschichte, aber nicht, wie im Johannesevangelium und der Apokalypse, der abstrakte
the historical traditions of Acts are indisputable,\textsuperscript{129} so also is the historicity of its characters, including Tabitha and Lydia.\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, for Harnack, Acts serves as a window onto the earliest traditions of the late-apostolic church, its great leaders, and those people who were present during the early movement.\textsuperscript{131} As Gerd Lüdemann astutely observes, “Baur and Harnack have remained the classic antipodes in the question of the historical value of Acts.”\textsuperscript{132}

Form Criticism: Martin Dibelius

One of the great biblical exegetes of the early twentieth century, Martin Dibelius took up the study of Acts with a method learned from his teacher at the University of

\textsuperscript{129} This is qualified by the presence of the unhistorical “source B” that is contained in such spurious passages as Acts 2:1–47 and 5:17–42, in essence those passages that have metaphysical or supernatural material. Source A, which in its longest version is located after Acts 15, was written prior to Paul’s death and is unimpeachable in its historicity. Harnack, \textit{Die Apostelgeschichte}, 194.

\textsuperscript{130} Harnack does not discuss either character in his work probably because both fall below his criteria of importance: Other than the apostles, Acts only gives extensive treatment to characters like Stephen, Phillip, and Cornelius, which indicates their importance and prominence in early Christianity. When other characters only have “bald details” recited, it indicates their minor status and relative unimportance to the narrative. Harnack, \textit{Die Apostelgeschichte}, 12.

\textsuperscript{131} Harnack assigns traditions of Acts a \textit{terminus ante quem} of 70 CE. Just as Baur’s work has informed contemporary interpretations of Acts, Harnack’s work has also continued to find a home in contemporary scholarship as well. See David Pao, \textit{Acts and the Istanic New Exodus} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), who in his preface assigns the authorship of Luke-Acts to Luke the physician and companion of Paul with a composition date near 70 CE.

\textsuperscript{132} Gerd Lüdemann, \textit{Early Christianity According to the Traditions of Acts}, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 16–17. Lüdemann himself suggests an alternative that only discusses the historical value of the traditions in Acts, but while he does not suggest that the events and chronology of Acts are indisputable, he too assumes that many of the traditions in Acts are “historically reliable” and when read alongside the Pauline epistles give us a window into the early church.
Berlin, Hermann Gunkel. Form criticism focuses on the “history of the tradition before it took its literary form.” In his essay on Acts, first published in 1923, Dibelius classifies the form of stories like Tabitha’s and Lydia’s as personal legends, namely, religious narratives with an aetiological interest. The concern of the personal legend is the secondary characters and background material that provide the backdrop and exposition for the primary character or interest of the story. Dibelius concludes that the legend is a less historical form than homiletic material and should not be counted on to

---

133 Gunkel was the most prominent member of die religionsgeschichte Schule who had left the comparison of religious texts on the criterion of content and instead turned to the similarities of their type or “form.” As one of the pioneers of form criticism (Formgeschichte), he illustrated how the similarities between the form of traditions found in the Hebrew Bible and those prevalent in the Ancient Near East pointed to a similarity in function that their composers used. Gunkel’s first work, Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. Jon. 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), demonstrated the efficacy of this method by showing the similarities in the creation/destruction myths found in Genesis and Revelation and similar myths in Babylonian cosmogony. His findings were controversial because they challenged the prevailing consensus that considered biblical traditions to be the unique creations of God’s chosen people. See also his most well-known work, Die Sagen der Genesis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). In spite of critiques of his method, Gunkel’s contribution that the traditions found in the Hebrew Bible had forerunners in other Semitic cultures, as well as a shared a common function, has withstood the test of time.

134 Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. J. Marsh (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1963), 4. Bultmann was perhaps the most well known form critic of the twentieth century; however, for the purposes of this study the focus will remain on the work of Martin Dibelius because of his particular interest in Acts.


137 Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 132.
provide historical data. Because the legends could not provide historical information about the characters or their circumstances, the secondary characters like Tabitha and Lydia are pushed into the background in Dibelius’ work, except where they illuminate more important pericopae such as the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18). Dibelius stipulates that while the traditions found in these legends may go back to some actual historical event or person, what we find in Acts is simply a remembrance. “Luke has abandoned an exact reproduction of history for the sake of a higher historical truth.” For Dibelius, the “truth” and controlling interest of Acts is found in how God-fearing Gentiles were converted and then incorporated into the Christian church. Therefore, the redacted version of the resuscitation of Tabitha and its role in the conversion of many in Joppa is not included by the author to demonstrate the faithfulness or virtue of Tabitha, but to confirm the central role that the acceptance of the gospel played in the narrative of Acts. Once again, Tabitha and Lydia are pushed to the side to

138 These types of strict divisions are one of the main critiques of Dibelius’ work (and form criticism in general) by later scholars. The reasoning itself is problematic. What makes homiletic material any more or less likely than a legendary narration set in another context to have historical value? The very fact that the material was preserved is proof that it was interesting and important to someone, and more specifically, to the readership of Acts.

139 This is evident even from a quick glance through Dibelius’ The Book of Acts. Although Tabitha is cited three times, in each case her story is only used to prove the historical unreliability of personal legends or to compare it to the more developed legend of Cornelius. This is also evident in his treatment of Chapter 16 where he does not even note Lydia’s presence in the story, only the stages in Paul’s journey. Dibelius, Book of Acts, 39, esp. n. 25; p. 123. See also his Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, ed. H. Greenen (New York: Scribner, 1956), 2; 12–13.


141 Ibid., 40, 140–50.

142 Ibid., 140–41. Dibelius does note that there are far more details in Tabitha’s miracle story than those found in the gospels. Based on the inclusion of her name and a description of her character, he
highlight prominent “historical’ characters” (Peter and Paul) or important male characters like Cornelius and the Roman jailer.

Redaction Criticism: Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Haenchen

While historical criticism tests the degree of probability for the authenticity of certain of the traditions and form-criticism tests for the history of the traditions and how this reveals a *Sitz im Leben*, redaction criticism focuses on the additions to the form that point to the particular tendencies and concerns of the redactor, who is not a historian recording facts, but a theologian, writing to edify and influence his audience.\(^{143}\) Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Haenchen are two of the foundational and, therefore, influential advocates of this methodology.

**Hans Conzelmann**

For Conzelmann, Acts represents the third epoch in the history of the early church, namely the apostolate that culminates in the acceptance of the decree of the Apostolic Council (Acts 15:19). In this schema, the decree of the Apostolic Council becomes the hinge point of the entire work, with all prior events pointing forward to the decree and all following actions coming as a result of it. The decree is also the dividing

---

line between the mission to the Jews and the mission to the Gentiles. Conzelmann suggests that the author intended to write a historical monograph, but he denies that the controlling interest of Acts was apostolic succession or authority (cf. Dibelius). Instead he argues that Acts was meant to place Christianity in continuity with the Mosaic Law and the God of Israel and, thus, can be used by the Christian community in both its evangelization and its internal catechesis.

For Conzelmann, both Tabitha’s and Lydia’s stories are examples of “local legends” that circulated independently prior to their use in Acts. He bases this conclusion on the presence of an opening formula for each and the fact that the name and “pious” characterizations of both women were likely added later as embellishments. Conzelmann argues that neither woman is historical, but instead each is a legendary character whose story is used to create the appearance of an orderly historical monograph. In his introduction to the story of Tabitha, Conzelmann describes the purpose of the pericope, “The instrument [Paul] is now ready. These two local legends serve as

\[144\] Conzelmann considers 15:1–35 to be the high point of Acts and therefore the hermeneutic key to interpreting the document. Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, xli–ii.

\[145\] Conzelmann, Acts, xlv.

\[146\] Conzelmann bases this conclusion on the presence of the opening formula in the Tabitha pericope (ex. Ἐν Ἰόππῃ δὲ τις ἦν μαθητὴς Ὀνοματ Ὀφειλόμενος) and the fact that the story serves as a connecting link between the “preparation” of Paul and the beginning of his mission, Acts, 76–77. However, if the controlling interest in this section is to highlight Paul and his preparation, why include a section that focuses entirely on Peter and his works? The composition of the community in Lydda and Joppa will be discussed in Chapter Four below.

connecting links.” In other words, the author uses the miracle stories only to link the “conversion” of Paul (Acts 9:1–19) to the more significant account of Cornelius’ vision. In Conzelmann’s estimation, the author focuses on creating positive models like Tabitha and Lydia to magnify the apostles and primary characters (Cornelius), not on their own merits.

**Ernst Haenchen**

While Ernst Haenchen generally agrees with Conzelmann’s three-stage historical schema, he disagrees about the primary motivation of the author. He stresses that the intention was to demonstrate the continuity in salvation history between Abraham and the Parousia and to reveal the continuity of God’s presence with his chosen people throughout. God’s continuing presence is demonstrated through his gifts, first of Jesus and then the Holy Spirit, creating continuity between the apostles in Galilee into the post-apostolic age. For Haenchen, the discussion of sources and the attribution of particular pericopae to discrete source material are irrelevant to the real meaning of Acts. He states:

148 Ibid., 76.

149 The same can be said of Lydia’s account. Conzelmann does little to explain Lydia’s role in the story other than to note the prevalence of the purple dyeing trade in Thyratira and the “strangeness” of a place of prayer that includes only women. He notes, “It is even stranger that only women were there. Is the author thinking of a place of prayer out in the open?” Conzelmann, Acts, 130.

150 Conzelmann, Acts, xlvi.


152 Against the source critics such as H. Holzmann and J. Wellhausen. Haenchen, Acts, 81–90.
Now we can see with what thorough deliberation Luke has ordered his material. It is a feat of which not every writer would have been capable. *For history does not write itself, as the source-critics have often thought.*\(^{153}\)

In other words, the author of Acts was not a collector, but a true author who shapes, defines, and deliberately constructs a narrative with theological intent.\(^{154}\) Haenchen follows Dibelius in designating Tabitha’s and Lydia’s stories as *local legends*. He also echoes Dibelius in this statement: “All characters and events are subordinated to the larger message of Acts; the progress and acceptance of the Christian message to the Gentiles.”\(^{155}\) The primary importance of the stories of Tabitha and Lydia is in demonstrating the spread of Christianity to the ends of the earth.

For Haenchen, Tabitha’s resuscitation shows the reader that the apostles could “stand comparison with the great prophets of the Old Testament,” and that Christianity had spread beyond Jerusalem throughout Palestine and was now poised to move even farther afield.\(^{156}\) In addition, he attributes this story to a Jewish-Christian source, which accounts for Tabitha’s Jewish name and location and the parallels to the OT miracles stories found in 1 Kgs. 17 and 2 Kgs. 4. When dealing with Lydia’s account, Haenchen notes that Lydia is not Jewish, but more likely a wealthy pagan woman who “has joined


\(^{154}\) Just as Baur first suggested, Haenchen concurs that the author of Acts was less concerned with verisimilitude and more with shaping and influencing her or his audience and, therefore, was not just creating a “patchwork” of stories but a purposeful and orderly document designed for a specific response from its audience.


\(^{156}\) Ibid., 340–42.
the small Jewish congregation as a listener." However, when describing this congregation he notes:

But only a few women come to pray. The foreign messengers are not discouraged. They speak to the women and deliver the good news of the Lord Jesus.

In spite of his important contributions to the discipline of redaction criticism, Haenchen adds little nuance to understanding the function of either Tabitha’s or Lydia’s story in the narrative of Acts, especially with regard to why the author chose to include these two particular stories and highlight the values they espouse.

Jacob Jervall

The work of Jacob Jervall provides a counterpoint to the redaction criticism of Haenchen and Conzelmann. Jervall argues that when writing Acts, the author does not want to demonstrate that the Christian church was the “new Israel”—which implies an improvement upon or break with Judaism—but the reunification of a divided Israel. For Jervall, the mission to the Jews does not fail, as is witnessed by the many Jews that did convert. Indeed, it is a great success since these same Jewish converts bring the

---

157 Ibid., 499.

158 Ibid. Note the pejorative tone present in the commentary that is entirely absent from the text itself. See also the similar treatment of the detail by Calvin, page 27–28 above! Like Conzelmann, Haenchen here ultimately subordinates Lydia to Paul when he says, “In spite of the presence of ‘the Lord opened her heart,’ the conversion is ultimately attributed to Paul.” Her importance to the community is overlooked.


gospel to the Gentiles in the second half of Acts. Jervall notes that the author of Acts uses the term “people” (λαός) rather than “church” (ἐκκλησία) to describe both Christians and Israel, indicating that the author understands both groups as constituting the chosen people of God:

There is no specific mission to the Gentiles, separated from the mission to the Jews. It is striking that in their speeches to the Jews the apostles emphasize the sharing of the gentiles in salvation, while in their speeches to the Gentiles, they mention the commission to Israel.

Therefore, in Jervall’s schema, both Tabitha’s and Lydia’s stories are pertinent examples of this bond between Jew and Gentile believers. Tabitha is a Jewish-Christian woman living in Joppa who exemplifies the successful reception of the gospel and whose own resuscitation incites many Jews living in the area to “believe in the Lord.” (Acts 9:42) Lydia, a worshipper of the God of Israel, represents another key group; those Gentiles who were already adherents to Judaism but came to accept the full Christian kerygma.

---

161 Clearly, Jervall’s use of Romans 9–11 in this argument indicates that he understood it to mean that Israel was a vital and important part of the salvation of Christians. In contrast, other scholars, such as Haenchen, read this same passage as proof that the mission to the Jews was over and the mission to the Gentiles was the future of Christianity as the new Israel. Jervall, Luke and the People of God, 41–69. Haenchen, Acts, 100.


163 Jervall claims that in Acts the mission goes not from town to town, but from synagogue to synagogue. It is only through this association with the synagogue or on the way to a synagogue that Gentiles are also converted. Jervall, Theology of Acts, 41. He also makes this claim in Luke and the People of God, 46–49: “It is also to be noted that it is those Jews who are faithful to the law, the real Jews, the most Jewish Jews, that become believers.” He also stated that the most receptive Gentiles were also those who were already receptive to the God of Israel, namely the “God-Fearers.”

164 Lydia’s conversion also results in the conversion of her entire household. Jervall, Theology of Acts, 42. Jervall makes the claim that Luke himself was a “God-Fearer” who subsequently converted to Christianity. This explains Luke’s use of the Septuagint, his appeals to Scripture, and his intention to demonstrate that the Christian church is “the unbroken continuation of the people of God in the time of the messiah Jesus,” Jervall, Theology of Acts, 4.
In Jervall’s exegesis, the positive qualities of both women are acknowledged as well as how instrumental they were in the progression of the gospel message as portrayed in Acts.

Late-Twentieth Century to the Present

Narrative Criticism: Charles Talbert

Charles Talbert agrees with the redaction critics that the author of Acts was more than an editor or collector and argues that the author is a “literary artist.” Although his interest is primarily on a narrative criticism, Talbert acknowledges and incorporates the contributions of F. C. Baur, M. Schneckenburger, and H. J. Cadbury in his delineation of the formal patterns and parallels in Acts. Talbert’s “architecture analysis” is an attempt to wed historical criticism, redaction criticism, and narrative criticism into an approach that identifies (1) the conventional literary patterns at work in the organization of the material, (2) the implications of where the pattern is found, in either redaction or tradition, and (3) the cultural or historical roots behind the various aesthetic tendencies.

---

165 Charles H. Talbert, Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts, (Missoula, MT: Scholar’s Press, 1974), 7–8. Talbert makes this argument even more strongly than Conzelmann and Haenchen. He stresses the artistry and literary finesse of the author more than the author’s being an adept historian. Talbert does concur with the redaction critics that the author of Acts is a theologian whose creative handling of the material has a religious and didactic purpose.

166 Talbert, Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, 1–2.

167 Ibid., 5–8. Although I will use Talbert’s methodology, especially in Chapter Four, my aim is somewhat different. This dissertation will attempt not only to place Tabitha’s and Lydia’s stories within the architecture of the text, but also to illuminate their place within the social world of the second-century Roman empire.
Talbert’s signal contribution is his insight that biblical literature has *continuity* with culture, rather than opposition to it.\(^{168}\) This insight has important implications for the analysis of the stories of Tabitha and Lydia. These women are in continuity with their cultures, and represent a historical, social trend that allowed women in both the Greek East and Roman West in the first centuries under Roman control a greater diversity of roles and individual expression than under previous conditions.\(^{169}\)

While Talbert’s approach has much to commend it, focusing only on the larger patterns of the text results in missing some important details. For example, his analysis of Tabitha’s story confines itself to its placement as the second in a series of three stories (9:32–11:18) about Peter, all having links with the Old Testament, with Luke’s gospel, and within the same text of Acts and paralleling the material in the Pauline section.\(^{170}\) Thus, Tabitha is only viewed as her story serves the parallels Talbert notes in his compositional analysis between Acts and the Lukan gospel.

\(^{168}\) This is not to suggest that Talbert was the first scholar to suggest this premise. Indeed, Talbert gives credit to many classical scholars who came to these same conclusions in their own fields of study, for example, G. E. Duckworth, Cedric Whitman, and John Myres. However, Talbert made his claims in contrast to the prevailing trends in biblical scholarship, especially the redaction critics, who emphasized the distinctive theological content of the biblical texts and its opposition to the dominant culture. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes*, 5–8.

\(^{169}\) A thorough analysis of the text in this light brings to the forefront the ways in which women navigated these barriers and found ways around them rather than simply quietly submitting to them. In addition, architectonic analysis then indicates where Christian authors supported these trends and which positive or negative traits they transferred to female followers of the risen Christ. In essence, it allows for a portrait of how these authors envisioned ideal femininity.

Although Talbert at times provides cultural and historical context for the actions and situation of the characters, he does so most thoroughly in the major episodes like the conversion of Cornelius. (Acts 10:1–11:18) For the smaller accounts like Tabitha and Lydia the discussion is minimal, cursory.171 For example, Talbert points out that Acts 9:36–43 “functions both literarily and theologically in the narrative of Acts…to get Peter from Jerusalem to Joppa where he is accessible to Cornelius and they continue the Lukan emphasis that miracles may serve as a catalyst for faith…however, the third story [Acts 10:1–11:18] is the crucial one for Luke.”172

Again, by only looking for the larger pattern, Talbert misses the small, but important traditions. But the fact that the stories of Tabitha and Lydia survived at all until the writing of Acts indicates that in their own right they were treasured as important stories for the Christians who predated Acts. Their function as discrete narratives is found within their own boundaries, a function that was achieved without the one they served once placed in the parallel setting in Acts.

“New” Literary Criticism

Richard Pervo

In his book Profit with Delight, Richard Pervo wishes to more precisely delineate the genre of Acts:

One cannot rest upon the observation of Dibelius, followed by Conzelmann, that Luke was a preacher. Vital as this insight is, it will not excuse every error, nor does it obviate the need for form-critical

171 The discussion of Tabitha’s story is approximately one page, while Cornelius’ story covers nine pages (104–13).

172 Talbert, Reading Acts, 104.
research…comparison with ancient historiography produces limited results for the simple reason that Luke did not write a learned treatise. He was a popular writer…popular works were doubtless edifying, but they were also quite frequently intended to entertain, an object that did not diminish their value for illumination and improvements.173

Pervo uses numerous examples from Hellenistic romances to demonstrate that as an example of the ancient historical novel, Acts can provide entertainment value while at the same time teaching important lessons and communicating virtues and ideals. Like Talbert, he grounds his analysis of Acts in the literary forms of the second century rather than relying solely on the tools of modern literary analysis. Pervo is especially adept at demonstrating that literature such as Acts can serve more than one purpose and fulfill multiple needs for its audience. Tabitha’s resuscitation can provide pathos in her death as well as a happy ending and relief in her resuscitation. Lydia’s story can provide “color” by fulfilling the interest that second century readers had in the exotic and foreign as well as the account of a conversion to Christianity.174 Lydia is from Thyatira in Asia Minor and would be considered a foreigner in the Roman colony of Philippi and a “noble outsider” within the narrative context of Acts.

Pervo claims to be engaged in the discipline of classical form criticism. For example, he is skeptical of the early origins of Tabitha’s story because it portrays the

173 Richard I. Pervo, Profit with Delight, 11. Pervo also makes the following important point: “Rather than attempt to extricate Luke from his situation or revile him for misrepresenting facts, I wish to let Acts speak for itself.” This dissertation attempts to follow the same path with regard to the situations of Tabitha and Lydia. Ibid., 10.

174 Pervo, Profit with Delight, 69–72. Lydia is an example of what Pervo calls the “noble outsider,” who is popular in the work of Chariton, Artapanus, and in biblical books such as Rahab, Ruth, Jael, the Shunamite woman, the Syro-Phoenician woman, and the Samaritan woman. See also, Lawrence M. Wills, Not God’s People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 1–20.
widows as a specific group that is differentiated from the saints. He concludes that this type of representation is more in line with the Pastoral Epistles and Apocryphal Acts of the late first and early second century than earlier material.\textsuperscript{175} He does note that among the three stories occurring in Acts 9:32–11:18, both Tabitha and Cornelius are benefactors based on their acts of charity (\textit{ποιεῖν ἐλεημοσύνας}, 9:36; 10:2). Therefore, her resuscitation would have addressed a social as well as a theological dimension. Tabitha is revivified not just for her own sake, but for the sake of her community.\textsuperscript{176}

Lydia, too, represents the product of authorial composition. Pervo argues that even if the author used source material, it has been substantially revised to suit the needs of the narrative and represents an attempt at verisimilitude rather than historical accuracy.\textsuperscript{177} Lydia, like Tabitha, is a patron and a woman of some means who is the head of her own household, a household that must be large enough to accommodate not only extended family, but also a number of guests (Acts 16:15). Rather than simply designate Lydia as a widow or as divorced, Pervo allows for the possibility that she is a single woman of independent means, although he does intimate that this is the least likely

\textsuperscript{175} Richard I. Pervo, \textit{Acts}, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 252–54. Also, Robert M. Price, \textit{The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist-Critical Scrutiny} (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 85–100. Pervo did attribute the story to tradition based on the presence of the translation of Tabitha’s name into Greek (Δορκάς), but he also adduces ample evidence for authorial composition. The differentiation between the saints and a group named “the widows” reflects a change in the social circumstances of the church that is reflected in its literature.

\textsuperscript{176} Pervo, \textit{Acts}, 255. This communal aspect of Acts also reflects the emphasis on community found in both biblical and extra-biblical Jewish texts.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 401. This is evidenced by the pairing of the female convert (Lydia) with the male convert (the jailer in Acts 16:27–32). Cf. the pairing in Acts 9:32–43. However, Pervo does allow for the presence of local traditions, especially in Lydia’s case.
These important insights based on social conventions of the Greco-Roman world are not only helpful in discerning the trajectory of the narrative, but also in underlining the values that second century Christians held with regard to women, since the stories clearly approve of both women and hold them up as ideals.

Mikeal Parsons

Mikeal Parsons follows Pervo in assessing Acts within the framework of the literary traditions from the first-to-second-century Greco-Roman world, but Parsons maintains that the author of Acts situates his story within the larger debate on Jewish self-identity of that time. Parsons suggests that rather than designating the author as a historian (Dibelius), theologian (Conzelmann), or author of literature (Tannehill), he is instead best understood through his rhetorical and compositional strategies. By situating Acts, both its speeches and its narratives, within the rhetorical tradition of the pro gymnasmata, Parsons moves his discussion away from the genre of Acts toward a discussion of how the author fashions the account. That is, he focuses on the decisions about the presentation of the story, not simply the content. Parsons observes that Acts

---

178 Ibid., 403.


180 Ibid., 8.

181 Ben Witherington III also focuses on the rhetorical strategies of Acts but places much more emphasis on the call for social change in Acts. He states that Acts was written to describe the “remarkable historical phenomenon, early Christianity, which he (Luke) believed was the result of divinely initiated social change.” While I agree with the rhetorical approach that Witherington adopts, I am less convinced of his assertion that a social agenda is the foremost driving force behind the composition of Acts. Ben Witherington III, The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), esp. 21–24.
focuses on creating a bond with the audience through an *ethos* argument, namely, a representation of events as historical detail rather than through an appeal to the emotional quality of the events and characters in the story.\(^{182}\) Through these observations that rest on the techniques of the Greco-Roman author, the reader saw that Acts was a blend of genres that ultimately served as the charter document of the early Christian movement akin to the charter documents of other Greco-Roman religious and philosophical associations.\(^{183}\)

What is especially salient in Parsons’ work for the current study is his observation that the author of Acts used this ethos argument not just to gain the audience’s trust and confidence, but to inculcate values meant to shape the moral character of his audience. However, instead of strictly promoting the values of Roman society, which idealized the free Roman citizen, Parsons suggests that the stories of both Tabitha and Lydia serve as bold examples of how the author subverted this paradigm. By highlighting two female characters who were not free citizens but more likely former slaves and tradespeople, neither characteristic is held up as exemplary in the dominant literature of the time period, Parsons points out for the Christian author that these types of characters “more

---

\(^{182}\) One develops this type of argument through the use of language appropriate to audience and subject, a restrained, sincere, fair-minded presentation, an appropriate level of vocabulary, and correct grammar. This then demonstrates the author's reliability, competence, and respect for the audience's ideas and values through reliable and appropriate use of support and general accuracy. For further discussion of this concept, see George A. Kennedy, trans., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition Introductory to the Study of Rhetoric* (Fort Collins, CO: Chez l'auteur, 1999).

faithfully imitate the founder, Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{184} This, of course, does not take into account that these women are not necessarily slaves; instead, both can be free citizens with citizenship status in their respective cities since both control their respective households independently. Therefore, the moral values that the author meant to inculcate may not be in subversion of Roman values but in support of them but with a particular interest in demonstrating how Christians embodied these values in ways that were either equal to or surpassed others.

**Feminist Scholarship**

Feminist scholars have long been involved in the struggle to interpret Acts outside of the constraints of gender bias and androcentric interpretations of the text.\textsuperscript{185} The genesis of modern feminist biblical scholarship began in the Enlightenment, and from the beginning has been concerned with how to read the biblical texts in light of the fact that the texts were largely interpreted by and for men.\textsuperscript{186} Feminist approaches to the text exist on a wide continuum. In one approach, feminist scholars insist that it is their goal to locate, the best they can, the original intention of this author or redactor. For other scholars, the text is viewed as a finished product that is interpreted outside of any attempt

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 21. It is under this same rubric that I understand the stories of Tabitha and Lydia, but even further, that the stories reflect and positively evaluate the trend within Greco-Roman culture toward greater autonomy and diverse roles for women, even those who were not members of the elite classes.


\textsuperscript{186} It is sobering to note that women were not allowed admission into SBL until 1894, but even then were not allowed to present papers or publish journal articles until the 1920s. This exclusion has certainly had an effect on the history of interpretation and biblical scholarship.
to recover the meaning or intention of the author. Or, in yet another approach, feminist scholars focus on neither the author nor the text, but on the reader’s response to and understanding of the finished text. Those with a concern for the author or editor pose mainly historical questions, those whose primary interest is the text address literary questions, and those who eschew questions of author and history, tend to focus on the social location and interests of the reader. However, as Alice Ogden Bellis observes:

In reality, the rigid distinctions between the ends of the interpretive continuum cannot and should not be maintained. Whether our focus is on what the authors or editors intended or on what we understand the text to mean, we are dealing with historical texts in ancient languages that cannot be understood at all without a knowledge of how the ancients used text and language. Thus, all interpretation of biblical texts must be somewhat historically oriented.

---

187 Bellis, “Feminist Biblical Scholarship,” 29. There are obviously shades of gray in this schema, such as those who seek a canon within a canon (liberation, African American, womanist, Asian, and post-colonial interpretations) and scholars who blend a variety of these interpretive lenses.

188 One of the most influential modern, feminist biblical scholars is Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. Her exegesis is in essence historically based, but she shifts the focus away from the authority of the text to the interpretive community. The “four moments” of Schüssler-Fiorenza’s work—suspicion, historical interpretation and reconstruction, ethical and theological evaluation, and creative imagination—describe her approach to the text. This hermeneutic has much to offer as it calls into question long-held assumptions about the interpretation of the text. However, her tendency to focus primarily on the interpretive community rather than the historical situation of the text gives an overly pessimistic evaluation of the Greco-Roman world, as will be demonstrated later in the dissertation. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, In Memory of Her (New York: Crossroad, 1983). See also her other major work on this topic, Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Both books are focused as much on questions of church and patriarchal authority and a return of the power of the laity (i.e., interpretive community) as they are with biblical exegesis. Schüssler-Fiorenza poses important questions about how to interpret the text in light of injustice and oppression carried out using the biblical text as a witnessing authority.

An example of one scholar who nuances Schüssler-Fiorenza’s work is Gail O’Day, who assigns to both Tabitha and Lydia important roles as women who hold places of some authority and honor within Christian community. Although O’Day assumes that the focus in both pericopae is on the male character, Peter in the case of Tabitha and Paul in the case of Lydia, she acknowledges that neither of these women is a “stock character,” rather they are presented as complex and meant to provide models to the reader. She points out here that both women appear to be the heads of their respective households, and engage in acts of benefaction to others.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa

Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes that Tabitha and Lydia are described in ways that are at variance with the way in which female characters are described in literature contemporary with Acts. Neither Tabitha nor Lydia exist in the story merely as the


191 O’Day does, however, fall into the pattern of assuming that Tabitha, and more than likely Lydia as well, are widows. This interpretation appears to be widely held in feminist circles. Scholars interpret the lack of husband to mean that the woman is a widow, which identifies her as belonging to an oppressed class that is meant to be protected and supported by the members of the Christian community. While this may indeed be the case, there are more interpretive options available that allow for a more nuanced interpretation. O’Day, “Acts,” 398–99. See also, Bonnie Bowman Thurston, The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 28–35. Thurston’s work is based on reading the texts through the lens of Acts 6:1–7 and 9:36–43. Thurston’s goal seems to be to include as many women as possible under the umbrella of widowhood so as to include them as part of the widow order that was an “exemplary figure” in the early church.

192 Gaventa notes that female characters in literature contemporary with Acts, such as The Roman Antiquities of Dionysus of Halicarnassus and Chariton’s novels, are largely portrayed as the possessions of their fathers and husbands. In addition, they are generally described as virgins or mothers and in terms of their physical appearance. The women in Acts do not follow this pattern and, therefore, are at variance with one literary and cultural norm of this time. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Acts, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon
possession or instrument of men, nor are they described according to their social status or in their roles as mothers, virgins, or in their physicality. Although the majority of women in Act do not speak, Lydia is one of three women that have recorded speech. But even though Tabitha does not speak directly, neither does she have a male figure speaking on her behalf.\footnote{Gaventa, “Whatever Happened to Those Prophesying Daughters?” 60. See also, Gaventa, \textit{Acts}, 159–61; 236–37.} Both women are described as believers and as acting with independence, generosity, and concern for others. In addition, Gaventa notes that the level of detail in Tabitha’s story demonstrates Tabitha’s importance to her community: (a) she is a disciple, (b) her works of charity, (c) the inclusion of both her Aramaic and Greek names (9:36), (d) the washing of her corpse (9:37), (e) the urgent appeal for Peter to come quickly (9:38), and (g) the presence of the mourning widows (9:39).\footnote{Gaventa, \textit{Acts}, 160.}

Lydia is portrayed with somewhat less detail, but the details that are recorded present her as an independent woman who operates without a male protector and has control over her household and its functions.\footnote{Ibid., 236–37. Gaventa’s observation that Lydia is most likely divorced or widowed is correct. However, the possibility that she is single and has inherited her home and business also exists. See Chapters Two, Three, and Five.} Further, Lydia is a woman who seems to have some importance to her community as Paul and Silas later return to her home before

Press, 2003), 44. Literary productions influenced by the Second Sophistic, such as novels, retained many of the tropes of classical literature in authoritative positions for a population that aspired to those marks of literary cultural sophistication. However, this was not everyone. Letters, inscriptions, and other practical documents indicate that women had other options and freedoms than is suggested in “elite” literature
leaving Philippi (16:42). Lydia also exhibits the proper response to God, who “opens her heart” (16:14). Gaventa notes:

The human characters who inhabit the story—many and intriguing though they may be—are subsidiary to the larger story of divine activity…What makes human characters interesting or important for Luke pertains to their response or resistance to God.  

It is true that Acts seems interested in the response that a particular character has to God or the gospel, but this does not mean this response is the only worth that the character has to the narrative. To limit the study of a complex work such as Acts to only one issue narrows the interpretive lens so substantially that the reader potentially loses an appreciation for the details of the setting and nuances of the characterizations. In addition to their obedience to God and the gospel, Tabitha and Lydia are both shown to be independent, self-sufficient women whose generosity serves their respective communities well. By their very presence in the text, the author is affirming that independence, success in business ventures, being forthright and asking for what you need (9:38–39;16:15), and generosity to others were qualities held in esteem by the men and women of the early church.

Conclusion

This review of scholarship has demonstrated that the stories of Tabitha and Lydia have been generally overlooked and undervalued. Indeed, they have been interpreted according to the biases of their time, but, even more so, they are based on the biased understanding of the roles that women were allowed to inhabit in the second century.

196 Ibid., 27.
This dissertation aims to reopen the analysis of these accounts against the backdrop of the Greco-Roman conventions and culture that prevailed in the late-first and early second century. The evidence of the importance of these two women requires the combination of both cultural and rhetorical analysis in order to reconstruct, as far as is possible to do so, the message each account held for those early Christians who made sure that these accounts survived until the final assembly of the Acts of the Apostles text.

A variety of issues and questions must be addressed in order to do this, such as (a) How are these women, separately and together, portrayed in the text in relation to the conventions of the day? (b) How does the answer to this question affect the message each brings to the community of that time? (c) How does the apostle’s role in each story shed light on the character of each woman? and (d) How do these stories offer a glimpse of the early Christian communities and the early women and men converts who treasured these accounts so that they survived?
CHAPTER TWO
WOMEN IN THE GREEK EAST

Introduction

The task of recovering women's voices in ancient texts is a daunting, uphill battle. One barrier is that classical literary sources almost exclusively represent an elite male discourse, at least in those texts from the ancient world that have survived. Even when women themselves author texts or male authors did not set out to target this elite male audience, masculine norms still prevail. Another barrier is that, because of the pervasive androcentrism of classical culture, there is less information available to us in the documentary and literary sources about women in general. This latter barrier is the more difficult to overcome. When discussing the evidence in this chapter, it will be necessary at times to bridge time periods (republic and imperial), cultural milieu (Roman and Greek), and genre in order to gather a sufficient pool of data to make reasonable conclusions. I will make my best effort to note and explain the reasons for these shifts.

In historical works, characterizations of both sexes are exemplary; namely, they are used as objects of praise or blame. It is true that men function as literary foils more often than women do, especially in ancient historiography and oratory, and therefore are the object of universalization even more than women.\(^1\) However, when women are

---

\(^1\) In his *Poetics* (1451b), Aristotle remarks, “The real difference [between poetry and history] is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts.” LCL, trans. W. H. Fyfe. ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἶα ἂν γένοιτο.
included, they are praised most often for being loyal wives and mothers and censured for their lack of sexual self-control. Characterizations of women in elite literature are constructed in a way that highlight and reinforce dominant values.²

Many of the assumptions about women in the Greek East seem to be based on an overly literal reading of some classical literary texts. One persistent view in scholarship is that women in the Greek East existed in relative seclusion and were not allowed to act except under the power of husbands, male relatives, or male guardians. This seclusion in the East is then contrasted against the greater freedom and gradual emancipation of Roman women.³ In spite of these perceived liberties, Roman women were at the same time portrayed as repressed by men and the patriarchal institutions of patria potestas and manus mariti.⁴ More recently, Bruce Winter has argued that women in the Greek East in

---


³ In his influential study of Roman women, J. P. V. D. Balsdon remarks, “They [women] acquired liberty; then with the late Republic and early Empire, they enjoyed unrestrained license.” Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their Histories and Habits* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 15. In this same discussion, Balsdon asserts that in the late republic some women had tired of being the proper Roman matrons and became courtesans. This is seems based on an overly literal reading of Sallust’s Sempronia. Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 25, LCL, trans. Rolfe.

⁴ For a discussion of the presence of the clichés of female sexual corruption and its link to social chaos in Roman literature, see Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The move away from the practice of manus marriage occurred as early
the imperial period appeared in public settings with greater regularity than their counterparts in the Hellenistic period. In evaluating the literary data on the *new woman*, Winter notes that although Cornelius Nepos writes about the seclusion of Greek women, he is writing during the Republic and reflects on a different set of circumstances than those in the imperial period. Further, when Valerius Maximus discusses spousal control and the modesty required of a Greek wife, he is reporting about a time far removed from as 200 BCE. Therefore, while the concept continues to be discussed in the literary sources, it was not limiting the scope of women's activities in practice. See the definitive study of Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 21. Also, for the ways that social-anthropological methods can help temper the readings of excessively normative texts, see David Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of the New Woman in the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 10. The women are critiqued for pursuing their own interests (usually involving some sort of immoral behavior, usually sexual) to the detriment of their proper domestic and matronly responsibilities.

Winter follows the work of Elaine Fantham in his use and understanding of the term, "the new woman." This is a constructed, ideological *woman* rather than real women and their experiences. Fantham, "The 'New Woman': Representation and Reality," in *Women in the Classical World*, eds. E. Fantham et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 10. Winter states, "For want of another term I have used it to describe the wives and widows who embraced new social mores." Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 5. Winter does not distinguish between representation of women in the literary sources and the social practices reflected in non-literary sources in his work.

"No Roman would hesitate to take his wife to a dinner party or to allow the mother of his family to occupy the first rooms in his house and to walk about in public. The custom in Greece is completely different: a woman cannot appear at a party unless it is among her relatives; she can only sit in the interior of the house, which is called the women's quarters; thus, no man can enter unless he is a close relative." *Quem enim Romanorum pudet uxorrem ducere in convivium? Aut cuius non mater familias primum locum tenet aedium atque in celebritate versatur? Quod multo fit aliter in Graecia. Nam neque in convivium adhibetur nisi propinquorum, neque sedet nisi in interiore parte aedium, quae gynaeconitis appellatur; quo nemo accedit nisi propinquorum cogitatione coniunctus. C. Nepos, Lives of Foreign Generals*, praef. 6–7, LCL, trans. Horsfall.

Valerius Maximus, *Mem.* 6.3.7–12, LCL, trans. Shackleton Bailey. "The frightful marital severity of Sulpicius Gallus who divorced his wife because he learned that she had gone about in public unveiled. He justified his actions thus, to have your good looks approved, the law limits to my eyes only. For them assemble the tools of beauty, for them look your best, trust to their closest familiarity. Any further sight of you, summoned by needless incitement, has to be mired in suspicion and crimination." *Horridum C. quoque Sulpicii Galli martiale supercilium: nam uxorrem dimisit, quod eam capitae aperto foris uersatam*
his own.9 What Valerius is, in fact, critiquing is not that women appeared in public nor is he advocating the universal veiling, but the lack of public *pudicitia*.10 The rather minor infraction of the ex-wife of Sulpicius Gallus is made much of by Valerius, who wants to underline the need for this same control over spousal behavior in his own time. The nonliterary sources of the time period tell a somewhat different story. Ramsay MacMullen's study of the iconographic, numismatic, and epigraphic data in the Greek East during the late republic and imperial periods suggests that women were not routinely veiled, nor were they barred from the public forum in the Greek East. While there are

---

9 Valerius (early 1st century CE) was using his interpretation of the events in the Republic to demonstrate that the past was the repository of good men, women, and deeds in contrast to the more liberal practice of his own time. Like Tacitus, looking to the past for examples of the 'best' in society and people is a commonplace in historical writings of the Roman period. As Suzanne Dixon notes, "While not always reliable as history, it [Memorabilia] provides interesting insights into Romans' ideas about their own past." Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres, and Real Life* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 181, n.24.

10 Hilton and Matthews note, "Valerius Maximus is writing during a time of heightened awareness of female modesty and the importance of dress shapes his discussion in conformance with his own views on the subject...Plutarch on the other hand, was attempting to answer the question of veiling practices in early Rome about which he evidently had little knowledge. The contradiction between Valerius and Plutarch is an indication of the complexity of the issues of the veiling of women in Roman society." J. L. Hilton and Lydia Matthews, "Veiled or Unveiled? (Plut. Quaest. Rom. 267B–C)" *Classical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2008), 343. Online version consulted. http://dx.doi.org/flagship.luc.edu/10.1017/S0009838808000323. This evidence suggests that the issues of veiling of women in both East and West was complex and may have been situational rather than more widely normative.
statues of Roman women during this time period who are veiled in a variety of circumstances, none of the evidence depicts Greek women who are veiled except in funerary reliefs.  

The growing financial autonomy and the increased freedoms in the social and legal spheres of women in many of the wealthy Eastern provinces may have contributed to the literary critiques of female immorality. However, since charges of female sexual immorality were initiated reflexively, it is probably more correct to state that any perceived changes in social roles would have spurred these types of charges. Laws like the Augustan marital legislation may have been enacted to control female behavior and give incentives to women to continue in their traditional roles as wife and mother, but it is unclear how effective these laws were in regulating established behaviors. Further, these laws only applied to Roman citizens and, therefore, would have affected only a tiny portion of the population. In the provinces, the laws would have affected even fewer people. Critiques of the lack of social controls over women, especially by their husbands, should not be read as evidence for rigorous controls on women in the Greek East, but


12 For example, see Valerius Maximus, Memorabilia 6.3.7, 13.3.8, LCL, Shackleton-Bailey; Tacitus, Annales 2.85, 13.2. LCL, Jackson; Sallust, Catiline 25, LCL, Rolfe; Cicero, Pro Caelio 32, LCL, Macdonald; and ad Atticum 6.1.24–25, Shackleton-Bailey, LCL; Plutarch, Moralia 1.7, 15, LCL, Cherniss.

pointing toward widespread social freedoms for women. There would be no reflexive critique without the prevalence of and acceptance of freedoms for women.

The documentary sources show women in a variety of social roles other than wife and mother. Women are routinely engaged in activities outside their home. Women are not excluded from commerce, held down by marital restrictions, or barred from asserting their legal rights. The women in these sources own property, bring lawsuits, and will their estates to both their male and female children and, further, do so with and without dependency on a male authority in her family or recourse to a male guardian. This evidence of women's greater involvement in the business and social world of the first century opens the way for the discussion of the portrayal of women in Acts, especially Tabitha and Lydia.

Although Acts most likely still addresses a primarily male audience, female characters like Tabitha and Lydia are not praised for their domesticity or their sexual control. Instead, they are praised for their piety and reverence for the God of Israel, their work on behalf of the movement of the risen Christ, and for their acts of charity and hospitality in their communities. Just as we find in the documentary and inscriptive sources of this time period, women in Acts are portrayed as independent and engaged in the social, financial, and religious realms of their day. Female characters that are held up as exemplary are those who lack the outward social control of a spouse and, therefore, act independently both inside and outside the domestic sphere. If women were part of the audience of Acts, and one of the strategies of the text is to reach, educate, and edify women, then what we have contained in Acts are invaluable traditions about the social
and religious roles of female followers of the risen Christ and what virtues were deemed commendable.

**Method**

This study will first divide the data on women in the ancient world geographically between data from the East and West (Chapters Two and Three, respectively). This is especially helpful as this division corresponds to the locations of the stories of Tabitha and Lydia. Tabitha’s story takes place in the port town of Joppa on the coast of Palestine, and Lydia’s story occurs in Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia. My discussion of data from the East relies more heavily on papyrological, numismatic, and epigraphic data, since, as I have suggested above, the literary evidence does not seem to address the audience and concerns of Acts. For example, the rather large body of literary evidence in the Greek novels of the second and third centuries CE has numerous parallels to the plot and structure of Acts; however, their usefulness for understanding the characterizations of women like Tabitha and Lydia is more limited.\(^{14}\) In spite of the prevalence of adventures

---

and exotic locales, the women in these novels are restricted to the object of male sexual attention or to the roles of potential wife, and/or obedient daughter.\textsuperscript{15}

These roles are not found among the women in Acts.

To address some of the assumptions already noted, my discussion of the relevant evidence from the Greek East will be divided among the following headings: (1) Women and Marriage, (2) The Guardianship and Legal Rights of Women, (3) Women’s Rights of Inheritance, (4) Women as Managers and Owners, and (4) Women and Honorary Titles. I will use papyrological data found in the Babatha and Salome Komaise archives from Palestine; the extant letters written by and for women from Roman Egypt; funerary, dedicatory, and honorary inscriptions; and numismatic and other relevant material evidence. All of these sources taken together will demonstrate that, while distinct from women in the Roman West, women in the Greek East in the imperial period cannot be uniformly portrayed as withdrawn from involvement in commerce, held down by marital restrictions, or barred from asserting their legal rights.

\textbf{Women and Marriage}

Evidence from papyrological, inscriptional, and literary sources will demonstrate that the laws and customs of the day provided for the welfare of wives and their children. Evidence from three distinct types of marriage contracts will demonstrate the provisions that Jewish and Eastern laws made for women and children and show that these same laws attempted to protect against unfair treatment by spouses and their families. In each

\textsuperscript{15} For a discussion of these roles and their limitations, see Brigette Maria Egger, "Women in the Greek Novel: Constructing the Feminine" (Ph.D. diss., University of CA, Irvine, 1990), esp. 148–71.
case, the bride seems to derive the greatest benefit from the arrangement and, in this way, exerts a degree of control over her circumstances and future.

Babatha

The Babatha archive, which supplies evidence of women's lives and rights before the law in the early second century CE, was discovered by an archaeological team led by Yigael Yadin on the western shore of the Dead Sea near Nahal Hever. This and other documentary archives demonstrate that women, and their children, were acknowledged and protected by the laws and customs of the time. This acknowledgement and protection of both their financial and physical well-being was provided for under both Jewish (ketubba) and non-Jewish marriage contracts. The thirty-five papyri in the archive, dating between 97 and 132 CE, are legal documents such as marriage contracts, bills of sale, and loan documents. The care with which these documents were preserved, carefully wrapped in a water-tight skin and hidden in a cave, points to the value that these documents held for the family. Perhaps there was the hope that they would return after the Bar Kokhba uprising and retrieve this important family archive. Based on comparisons with other archives of the same time period, the evidence suggests that women in general may have


17 The authoritative collection of this archive is Naphtali Lewis (ed.), The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri, with Aramaic and Nabatean signatures and subscriptions, eds. Y. Yadin and J. Greenfield (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989). For a discussion of the other documents in the archive, see also Yigael Yadin, Jonas Greenfield, Ada Yardeni, and Baruch Levine, eds., The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2002).
served as the archivists for family records. One female family member retained the
documents for the female side of the family, including marriage contracts, deeds of gifts,
and all documents pertaining to the children from the marriage. Since so many of the
documents deal with her marriages and legal proceedings, it is possible that Babatha was
the archivist for her own family documents.

_A Ketubba (P. Yadin 10):_

The evidence from the archive reveals that Babatha was born into a wealthy
family and through gifts from her father and two husbands, she became a wealthy
woman in her own right. Babatha’s father Shim’on came from En-Gedi to Maḥoza, and
when he died in 120 C.E., his daughter apparently inherited his property in Maḥoza,
which consisted of several date orchards. Babatha first married Jesus, son of Jesus, and
they had one son also named Jesus. After her first husband's death, Babatha eventually

---

18 Sigrid Peters, “Caves, Documents, Women: Archives and Archivists,” in _The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after their Discovery 1947–1997_, eds. L. Schiffman, E. Tov and J. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in cooperation with the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2000), 761–72. From the same volume, see also Tal Ilan, "Women's Archives from the Judaean Desert," 755–60. Men's archives were distinct and were kept by the male head of the family.

19 Magen Broshi, “Agriculture and Economy in Roman Palestine: Seven Notes on the Babatha Archive,” _IEJ_, 42 (1992): 230. It seems that Babatha was illiterate in Greek and Aramaic, but this has no relationship to her financial status or on her ability to navigate the legal system to her best advantage. Many people relied on others to handle their written communications, and societies afforded a variety of resources for people who did not read or write themselves. William V. Harris, _Ancient Literacy_ (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Harris has been criticized for discounting ancient literacy rates too severely, but he shows how personal incapacity to use the resources of the written text did not hold people back. See Mark DePauw, “Autograph Confirmation in Demotic Private Contracts,” _Chronique d’Egypte_ 78 (2003): 99, n. 204. Also, Hannah M. Cotton, “‘Diplomatics’ or External Aspects of the Legal Documents from the Judaean Desert: Prolegomena,” in _Rabbinic Law in Its Roman and Near Eastern Context_, ed. C. Hezser, TSAJ 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 61.

remarried a man named Judah, son of Eleazer Kthousion. The latter marriage contract (P. Yadin 10) is the earliest example of a civil Jewish marriage contract (ketubba) containing all the required elements as described in the Mishnah. The contract stipulates the mohar, separate from the dowry, which the groom's family was required to pay to the bride's family.\footnote{Mohar is distinct from dowry in that mohar is paid by the groom's family to the bride's family, and dowry is vice versa. I.5, \textit{"And I will give you for your mohar and ketubba."} Hebrew text from, Mordechi A. Friedman, "Babatha's Ketubba: Some Preliminary Observations," \textit{IEJ} 46, nos. 1–2 (1996): 55–76, cit. 64.} Judah was required to pay this price in addition to his obligation to provide "fitting provision for a free woman."\footnote{2.7–8 \textit{"together with the due amount of your food, and your clothes, and your bed [?], provision fitting a free woman."} In this case, the price was 400 silver denarii (zuzin). Y. Yadin, J. C. Greenfield, and A. Yardeni, "Babatha's Ketubba," \textit{IEJ} 44 (1994): 75–101.} First, the language of the contract establishes that Babatha was a free woman and not a slave. Second, the use of \textit{yd} suggests that the contract was between the bride and groom and not the groom and Babatha's family. This detail, in addition to the high bride price that Judah paid, indicates that Babatha's family was not poor and, further, that Babatha herself seems to have had a good deal of control over the contract since she is the individual who stands to benefit most from the arrangement.\footnote{The importance of the amount is verified by its repetition in lines 11 and 16. Oudshoorn, \textit{The Relationship between Roman and Local Law in the Babatha and Salome Archives} (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 385. The high amount, in spite of this being her second marriage, suggests that Babatha was a bride from the upper classes. Friedman, "Babatha's Ketubba," 60.} By 127 CE, Babatha's second husband, Judah, had died, but according to the terms of her ketubba, as long as she remained unmarried she was entitled to maintenance by Judah's heirs or the heirs repaid the amount stipulated in her ketubba.
in full.\textsuperscript{24} Further, the contract also made provisions for the continuing maintenance of any female children from the marriage, as the mother's ketubba money was generally inherited by the male children.\textsuperscript{25} The importance of this marriage contract and its binding nature becomes highly clear when read against the other, later documents in the archive. Babatha cites her ketubba in at least three cases as the basis of a legal claim.\textsuperscript{26} Babatha, although “illiterate” was savvy enough, nevertheless, to safeguard documents that would have been crucial to retain her claims to property and rights in potential and actual future legal disputes.\textsuperscript{27}

A Nabatean Marriage Contract (\textit{P. Yadin} 18)

In \textit{P. Yadin} 18, Shelamzion, Judah Khthousion's daughter from a previous marriage, is the subject of another marriage contract to Judah Kimber. Here, however, the contract is not an example of a ketubba, but a contract that reflects the use of local, Nabatean customs.\textsuperscript{28} The document is structured as a contract between the father of the

\textsuperscript{24} 2.14–16 ḳem lāribbēhā ma ḥe‘erēh min ‘āmnēhā; “You shall dwell and be provided for from my movable and immovable property.” For a discussion of the legal ramifications of this clause, see \textit{P. Yadin} 21–22 below under “Women’s Legal Standing” below.

\textsuperscript{25} 2.13–14 ḳem lāribbēhā ma ḥe‘erēh min ‘āmnēhā; “…and if you have daughters by me, they shall be provided for from my possessions.” This \textit{benan nuqban} clause is part of other ketubbot and should be read as standard language in Jewish marriage contracts. Friedman, "Babatha's Ketubah," 72–73. Also, Yadin, \textit{Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period}, 129–30, 138.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{P. Yadin} 12–15 for her son’s maintenance, \textit{P. Yadin} 26 for her dispute with Judah’s first wife over property, and \textit{P. Yadin} 21–22, 23–24 for the sale of dates from her husband’s orchards.


\textsuperscript{28} Oudshoorn, \textit{The Relationship between Roman and Local Law}, 398.
bride and the groom rather than between bride and groom as in P. Yadin 10. Rather than signify that her father was attempting to usurp authority or control her finances, this structure instead suggests that Shelamzion's father was acting on behalf of his daughter.

After the contract stipulates that her father was giving her in marriage, Judah Khthousion is only mentioned one other time, where Kimber acknowledges that he had received the wedding gift (prosphora) from both Shelamzion and Khthousion. The contract was styled in this way to ensure that if the wife died the money would be returned to her family rather than remain with the husband. However, directly following this is a statement that Kimber owed the money to Shelamzion, not her father. All references to financial liabilities and penalties are applied only to the bride and groom. If Judah was required to return the dowry or pay any penalties, he would owe that money to Shelamzion, not her father. This ensured that if Khthousion died, Shelamzion's dowry money would remain with her and provide for her needs even if widowed or divorced.

---


30 For example, ὀφείλειν αὐτὸν τῇ αὐτῇ Σελαμψιώνῃ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ (lines 12–13). Therefore, Shelamzion (or any party acting on her behalf) is the focus of the document.

31 ἤν τιμογραφίαν ὀμολογήσειν ὁ γῆμας Ἰούδας Κίμβερ ἀπειληφέναι παρὰ τῆς αὐτῆς Σελαμψιοῦς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ χειρὸς παραχρῆμα παρὰ Ἰούδου πατρὸς αὐτῆς (lines 10–12).


33 καὶ ὀφείλειν αὐτὸν τῇ αὐτῇ Σελαμψιώνῃ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ (lines 12–13)
Further, the inclusion of the phrase, "according to Greek law/custom" in line 15 is less a Hellenizing influence upon a Jewish family than a choice that this Jewish family made to secure the greatest benefits for their daughter and themselves. The substantial dowry and wedding gift (500 silver denarii) that Shelamzion brought to the marriage was secured through this language under both substantive/local law (ἐλληνικῷ νόμῳ), and Roman formal law, as indicated by the addition of consular dating at the beginning of the document. According to the contract, Shelamzion was ensured the return of her dowry from Judah Kimber's estate in cases of both widowhood and divorce. So although her father enacted the contract, Shelamzion is the beneficiary.

An Agraphos Gamos (P. Hever 65)

The Salome Komaise archive consists of six to eight papyri that span the time period between 125–131 CE, a chronological overlap with the Babatha archive. Similar

34 προσφορᾶς αὐτῆς πάντα εἰς λόγον προικὸς αὐτῆς ἀκολούθως αἱρέσει τροφῆς καὶ ἀμφιασμοῦ αὐτῆς τέ καὶ τῶν μελλόντων τέκνων (lines 15–16). The proximity of this stipulation to the language of dowry and the penalties for non-payment further suggests that “laws/customs” invoked are those meant to protect the wife's financial stake in the marriage as it is her name that is attached to the dowry. τρέψο γὰρ ἄν α[β]/ρήται Ἡλε[λαμψίων]<η> γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἢ ὃς δι’ αὐτῆς ἢ [ὑ]π[έ]ρ αὐτῆς πρ[α]τερίας τε καὶ τῶν μελ[λόντων] τέκνων αἱρέσει (lines 19-20) There is nothing to suggest that the family was more 'secular' by utilizing this type of contract since the choice could also be due to local customs.

35 Substantive law defines the legal relationship between people, or what is sometimes referred to as private law. Formal law comprises the rules by which a court hears and determines what happens in civil or criminal proceedings, sometime referred to as procedural law. The evidence suggests that in the eastern provinces, local, substantive law (Völksrecht) was allowed to prevail over Roman, formal law (Rechtsrecht) especially in civil matters. See, Ludwig Mitteis, Rechtsrecht und Völksrecht in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Kaiserreichts, 2nd unrev. ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1935). For a more recent discussion of this question, see Martin Goodman, "Babatha's Story" JRS 81 (1991): 169–75. For an opposing view, see Glen W. Bowersock, Roman Arabia, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

36 ἐπὶ ὑπάτων Πουβλίου Μετειλίου Νέπωτος τὸ β καὶ Μάρκου Αντίοχου Λίσκωνος νόνας Λαρδίας, ἀρθρῳ δὲ τῆς νίκᾳ ἑπάρχεις Ἀραβίας ἦτος τρίτου εἰκοστοῦ μηνὸς Σανθ[ί]γοβ πεντε[κατάκτη, ἐν Μαωζα περί Ζωραν (lines 1-3).
to the contents of the Babatha archive, this collection of legal documents includes a tax receipt, two land declarations, a writ of seizure, a sale, a dispute settlement, a gift, and a marriage contract.\textsuperscript{37} The documents act as a double attestation to the conventional practices concerning the inheritance of married women at the death of their fathers.\textsuperscript{38} Like Babatha, Salome entered into a second marriage after the death of (not divorce from) her first husband. Again, like Babatha, Salome received a gift from her parents. In Salome's case, however, this gift was given to her not by her father in advance of his death, because her father had already died, but on the authorization of her mother. (\textit{P. Hever} 64).\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{P. Hever} 65 is an example of a formal marriage contract being enacted upon an \textit{agraphos gamos}, an “unwritten marriage.” Naphtali Lewis points out, based on comparisons with texts from Egypt and Elephantine, Salome's marriage was “unwritten” but still valid because marriage in the East did not require a formal, written contract to be considered legal.\textsuperscript{40} Although \textit{P. Hever} 65 represents yet another distinct type of marriage contract, it still contains the same features, such as the stipulations to feed and clothe the


\textsuperscript{38} For example, the marriage contracts in \textit{P. Yadin} 10, 18 and \textit{P. Hever} 65 represent the different ways that Jewish women formally recorded their marriages. Salome's brother was also deceased during the period the archive covers (cf. \textit{P. Hever} 61, 63).

\textsuperscript{39} For a discussion of this document, see section on “Inheritance Rights” below.

\textsuperscript{40} N. Lewis, ed., \textit{The Documents from the Bar Kohkba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri, with Aramaic and Nabatean Signatures and Subscriptions}, ed. Y. Yadin and J. Greenfield (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 130. Uri Yafitch-Firanko, \textit{Marriage and Marital Arrangements}, 104. From Elephantine, see K2. From Egypt, see \textit{P. Oxy.} II. 267.
wife and any future children from the marriage, and penalties for nonreturn of her dowry.\textsuperscript{41}

Here the contract was written after the marriage was already in effect and Salome was in her majority,\textsuperscript{42} and although it had no bearing on the legal validity of the marriage, the contract would have served as legal proof of the obligations of the groom to the bride. The formal contract verified that Judah was in receipt of dowry monies from Salome and was meant to ensure that her money would be secured and returned to her in full in case of widowhood or divorce.\textsuperscript{43}

The evidence from these three distinct types of marriage contracts suggests that the use of different marriage contracts was situational. The type of contract chosen was based on the size of the dowry, local laws and customs, and what would best protect the bride's and family’s interests. The groom would benefit from the dowry in the form of a noninterest-bearing loan, but the documents all ensure that the bride, not her family, can ask for the return of her money at any time, and that it would be returned to her in full upon the termination of the marriage either through death or divorce.


\textsuperscript{42} Cotton and Yardeni, Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts, 227.

\textsuperscript{43} Oudshoorn, The Relationship between Roman and Local Law, 432–33.
The Egyptian Letters

The letters from Egypt provide yet another witness to marriage in this time period. The letters suggest that although a wedding was a time of celebration,\(^{44}\) it was also an important life event that held some anxiety for both parties.\(^{45}\) Many marriages did end quickly in divorce or death,\(^ {46}\) but this anxiety was also likely rooted in the financial obligations undertaken by the new couple. On the one hand, the groom was charged with the equitable management of his bride's dowry money. The money was in essence on loan to him, and any mismanagement on his part could result in divorce, legal suit, or both, which could cause him significant financial difficulties. On the other hand, the bride was charged with the responsibilities of bearing children, managing the household, supporting and participating in her husband's business interests, and the managing any other assets she brought into the marriage.\(^ {47}\) Because of her power over a substantial portion of the financial resources of the marriage, either through ownership or management, women in the Egyptian letters held significant authority in the marriage. Jane Rowlandson observes that women's roles were much more than the stereotyped wife and mother; women played, "[a] role which went far beyond that prescribed for the ideal

\(^{44}\) P. Fuad. 1 Univ. 7; P. Oxy. 3.524; P. Fay. 132; P. Oxy. 12.579, 1487; P. Oxy. 46.3313.

\(^{45}\) For example, see inquiries to oracles for potential marriages. P. Oxy. IX.1213; W. Chr. 122; G. Botti, "Biglietti per l'oraculo di Soknebtynis in caratteri demotici," in Studi in memoria di I. Rosellini II, (Pisa: University of Pisa, 1955).

\(^{46}\) Rowlandson, Women and Society, 312.

\(^{47}\) See below, "Women as Managers" and "Women as Property Owners." This could include either a woman’s property or a business of her own.
wife by Xenophon in his idealized overview of household management in fourth-century BCE Greece."  

The fact that nearly all women married at least once also affects the interpretation of the letters. Women generally married in their mid- to late teens in Egyptian towns and villages. Those who lived in the larger cities tended to delay marriage until their late teens and early twenties. For those who delayed marriage, more than one-half of women had lost their fathers by the time of their first marriage. And as was demonstrated in the documents from the Judaean desert, even nonelite women came into their first marriages in the possession of substantial monies and/or property from their fathers' estates, either through inheritance or gifts. In addition to these gifts and testaments, many women's dowries also included fine clothing and jewelry that was not for everyday use but was used as a financial reserve to be drawn on by pawning the goods. In many marriages, women provided the financial capital needed to establish or maintain family business interests.


51 P. Giss. 2 and P. Mich. 7.434.

52 For example, P. Coll. Youtie, 2. 96; BGU 4.1105, 8.1848; P. Kron. 52. The latter three documents cite the husband's misuse of the dowry money as the reason for divorce.
Moreover, most women married men roughly 2–13 years their senior, with approximately one-quarter marrying men 20–30 years older. Because of this age differential, those women who survived childbirth would have likely been widowed at least once. Women gave birth approximately six times, but on average only two of the infants survived to adulthood. Household composition varied, ranging from a widow with her children, unmarried women living with their parents or relatives, minor children living with a grandparent or other adult relative, or a widow living with her parents or relatives. Women and children living with relatives could also be because of the spouse/father being away on business for extended periods of time or military service. This variety of circumstances could lead women in many cases to act as the de facto heads of their households.

P. Oxy. II.267 is a contract written between a couple (Tryphon and Saraeus) who were living together without a formal marriage contract or prior dowry arrangement (cf. P. Hever 65). There were several troubling circumstances associated with this particular marriage. First, Tryphon had only been separated from his first wife, Demetrous, for a short time, and, second, shortly after this contract was written, Demetrous attacked a pregnant Saraeus and her mother. In spite of the tenuousness of the marriage, the

---

53 Babatha was widowed twice (see above).

54 For soldiers, their marriages and offspring, see, Richard Alston, "Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: A Social History" Ph.D. diss., University of London.

55 Tabitha and Lydia seem representative of this type of female head of household.

56 Rowlandson, Women in Society, 178.
couple was certifying a dowry contract guaranteed through the bank of the Serapion in the amount of seventy-two silver drachmas. As with P. Hever 65, the contract was only drawn up upon the receipt of the dowry even though the couple had been living together for some time.57 The dowry benefited the husband by providing needed capital but also gave the wife increased financial leverage in the relationship and a strong incentive for the husband to avoid divorce.58 In this case, if Tryphon did not repay the seventy-two silver drachmas then he promised the following: "I [Tryphon] will pay to you the said principal with the addition of half its amount, for which you have the right of execution upon me and upon all my property, as in accordance with a legal decision."59 In essence, Tryphon would pay a fifty-percent penalty and potentially be subject to a legal action that could put any property holdings at risk. Even in the nonelite classes, women could hold significant power in marital relationships.60

In another example, P. Oxy. II.237 (col. 6.4-8.7), a daughter (Dionysia) and her father (Chairemon) dispute over property rights and her right to remain with her husband 


58 Rowlandson, Women and Society, 177.


60 In Roman satires and comedies one of the common tropes is the forceful or bossy wife who overpowers her husband through economic domination. The men are portrayed as emasculated and the women de-feminized by this inversion of prescribed gender roles. This expresses male anxiety over the expanding economic power of women as they gained more property rights and marriage sine manu became more and more prevalent. For a discussion of this phenomenon and its social repercussions, see Annalisa Rei, "Villains, Wives and Slaves in the Comedies of Plautus," in Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations, ed. S. Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998, repr., 2001), 92–108.
in spite of Chairemon's disapproval. Chairemon states in his letter to the prefect, "I claim to exercise the right given me by the law...of taking her away against her will from her husband's house." However, the legal opinions rendered in the text unanimously decided to allow Dionysia to remain with her husband. Each cited substantive, local "Egyptian" laws as the basis of their decision. In fact, one magistrate stated that unless the marriage had been previously annulled, Chairemon had no authority over Dionysia's dowry or her marriage rights. Here the legal opinion uses the local Egyptian laws as precedent, where "the minutes of trials secure the rights of the daughter against her father in respect to the dowry."

The Egyptian letters further demonstrate that many women held significant financial power in their marriages. Further, in many cases, local laws supported a women's right to retain her dowry and choose her marital state even when contested by her own father.

---

61 ἀξιῶ τοῦ νόμου διδόντος μοι ἐξουσίαν οὗ τὸ μέρος ὑπέταξα ἵν' εἰδής ἀπάγοντι αὐτὴν ἄκουσαν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οἰκίας 6.17–18.

62 Προβατιανός ὑπὲρ Ἀντωνίου προσέθηκεν, ἐὰν ἀπερίλυτος ἦν ὁ γάμος, τὸν πατέρα μήτε τῆς προικὸς μηδὲ τῆς παιδὸς τῆς ἐκδεδομένης ἐξουσίας ἐχειν. Τιτιανός· διαφέρει παρὰ τίνι βούλεται εἶναι ἡ γεγαμημένη. 7.28–29

Funerary Inscriptions: Beth She'arim

The inscriptions from the necropolis at Beth She'arim provide the largest corpus of inscriptions from a single site in Palestine. In the first part of the second century CE, Beth She'arim was a large Jewish, agricultural settlement, which, after the Jewish Revolt of 132–135 CE, became the refuge of many Jewish leaders who were forced to flee their homes in Judah. The importance of this city as a center of learning grew in the third and fourth centuries CE, as archaeological evidence for several large synagogues suggests. It is during this time, according to Talmudic sources, that Rabbi Judah Ha-Nassî was buried in the cemetery, making it a central, sacred burial ground for Jews from Palestine and the throughout the Diaspora. The settlement appears to have been significantly reduced at the end of the fourth century and finally abandoned during the Byzantine period.

The necropolis at Beth She'arim is spread across the northeastern, northern, and western slopes of the tell. There are eleven catacombs that are similar in style and structure. Most of the 280 inscriptions are brief and are written in Greek (80%), Hebrew

---

64 Although most of the inscriptions are dated to the second through the fourth centuries CE, the evidence can be used to cautiously suggest earlier and on-going practices of previous generations. The text of all the inscriptions included are from http://library.brown.edu/cds/projects/iip/. The city of Beth She'arim is known through literary sources beginning with Josephus’ Vita (188–89) written around 100 CE. Flavius Josephus, Life and against Apion, LCL, trans. Thackeray, 70–71.

65 Pal. Tal. Kelaim 9, 32a–b; Ketubot 12, 35a; and Eccl. Rabba 7, 11. For the importance of Beth She'arim as a burial site, see Pal. Tal. Mo'ed Qatan 3, 81c. ”Behold for they lead them from place to place like those who are buried at Beth She'arim.” B. Mazar, Beth She'arim I: Report on the Excavations During 1936–1940 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press on behalf of the Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1973), 6.

66 The excavators speculate that this reduction was due to the destruction of Jewish congregations during this time period. S. Assaf, BJPES 6 (1931): 60. B. Mazar, Beth She'arim, 7.

67 Only five catacombs were cleared and studied in the initial excavations. Catacomb 1 is the largest of the five excavated and has 16 burial halls. Each has a courtyard entrance with steps cut out from
(16%), or Palmyrene/Aramaic (4%). In addition to the funerary inscriptions, there are numerous decorative images carved into the limestone walls such as menorahs, rosette patterns, animals (horses and lions), synagogue representations, and ships. Seventy-four of these inscriptions include women (26%). Of these, sixty-three are written in Greek (85%), nine in Hebrew (12%), and two in Aramaic (3%). In some Greek inscriptions, the woman's name is a Hebrew name, and in Hebrew inscriptions there are instances of the rock leading down into the main hall and lateral burial rooms. There are also numerous pools and cisterns located throughout the necropolis complex. Each catacomb has burial chambers and smaller niche openings for bone ossuaries. One unique part of the burial patterns is that a stone “pillow” is cut across the entire width to support the head of the burial. Excavations continue on the remaining burial halls to date. The Greek inscriptions are catalogued in M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, Beth She'arim, II: The Greek Inscriptions (New Brunswick, NJ : Rutgers University Press on behalf of the Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1974). Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions are catalogued in B. Mazar, Beth She'arim, I, 197–209 (Catacombs 1 and 3) and in N. Avigad, Beth She'arim III: Report on the Excavations during 1953–1958, (Jerusalem: Massada Press on behalf of the Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1976).

68 The Palmyrene inscriptions are always written vertically. Some of the inscriptions are bilingual, in Greek and Hebrew.

69 The most intriguing of these symbols are the ships and the rosette patterns that are found not only in burial caves at Beth She'arim, but in other art of the Second Temple period as well as ossuaries and burial halls of the Herodian and Roman periods. There are also some “pagan” decorative motifs such as Leda and the Swan and Winged Nikae. Mark A. Chancey and Adam Porter, "The Archaeology of Roman Palestine," Near Eastern Archaeology 64, no. 4 (December 2001): 164-203. See also E. R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, 8.2 (New York: Pantheon and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953–68), 184–97.;Goodenough, "Evaluation of Symbols Recurrent in Time, as Illustrated in Judaism," in Goodenough on the History of Religion and on Judaism, eds. Ernest S. Frerichs and Jacob Neusner (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 285–319; Graydon F. Snyder, Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine (Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 2003), 35–40; 90–94. For examples outside of Palestine, see J. B. Frey, CIJ, (New York: Ktav, 1975), 1: 44.

70 Similar percentages are found in the funerary inscriptions at Rome. See, David Noy, Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe, vol. 2. The City of Rome (Cambridge [UK] and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). These percentages are based on my own rough/hand count.

71 There is one Greek inscription that includes a short Hebrew word (shalom) at the end of the inscription. This does not suggest that that the individual was bilingual, only that the term shalom had particular resonance for the Jewish person buried there or her family and was a common term known in the community.
Greek or Latin names, suggesting that name alone does not conclusively prove the ethnic or religious identity of the individual.72

Although many of the inscriptions depict characteristic marriage and family relationships—wives and daughters identified by their fathers’ or husbands’ names or both, or by titles73—there are other inscriptions that do not follow this pattern.74 One inscription that runs counter to this pattern is Beth.237 (200–400 CE), which reads, "Here they lie, Atio, the daughter of Rabbi Gamaliel, son of Nehemiah, who died a virgin at the age of 22 years…" (italics mine).75 In spite of the evidence that most women married at an early age, clearly, there were women who did not marry.76 Also, based on the commemoration of her status, the fact that Atio did not marry was not embarrassing to her family, instead it is remembered as something that brought her honor and, as Bernadette Brooten describes, transferred this honor to her family.77 What is most

---

72 For example, inscription 246 names Lady Mega, a Greek name, as "the wife of Rabbi Joshua, son of Levi." The entire inscription is written in Hebrew and her name is transliterated (hgm). This same phenomenon also occurs in Greek inscriptions.

73 For example, Beth. 36, 85,120, 125, 129, 128, 147, 149, 202, 246, 251.

74 For example, Beth. 184, 192, 252. Cf. Zoora 22 and Jerusalem 115. (discussed below)

75 כן הן מנחות אטיו בתו של רבי גמאליאל בן נחמיה שמתה בת עשרים ושתיים בתולה

76 For the meaning of betulah, see TDOT, 2.338. In most cases, this term merely refers to age and marital status. The Septuagint renders this term as parthenos, an unmarried daughter. See also TDNT, 5:826.

77 The idea of “derived honor” is discussed by Benadette J. Brooten in her book Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 68. She argues that information included in funerary inscription not only honors the deceased, but also brings honor to the family that remains. Therefore, the family would only include information or titles in the inscription that would carry some form of honor for either party.
striking is not that the family would have recognized that an unmarried daughter was a 
virgin, as this would have been a requisite, but that they recorded the title with the age of 
twenty-two years attached to it. Atio is well beyond the usual age that girls married and 
she continued to live in her family home.\textsuperscript{78} Literary evidence provides further evidence of 
the presence of adult, unmarried daughters who lived with their families, but, in spite of 
the harsh tone and assertion that these girls were a financial burden, this particular 
inscription shows that this was not a universally accepted truism.\textsuperscript{79} At least in this 
particular case, an unmarried, adult woman had a place of honor in her family.\textsuperscript{80}

Moreover, there are also numerous inscriptions that only include a woman's 
name.\textsuperscript{81} In addition to these inscriptions, there are several more that identify the woman 
as “daughter” but not wife. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the past or current 
marital state of many of the women in these inscriptions. For example, \textit{Beth}. 243 reads, 
"Miriam the daughter of Rabbi Jonathan with her two daughters.\textsuperscript{82} Here it is not known 
if Miriam was married or widowed because only her father's, not her husband's, name is

\textsuperscript{78} For example, Gen. 24:16; Ex. 22:15; Lev. 21:3, 14; Deut. 22:19; Judges 19:24; 2 Sam. 13:2; Job 

\textsuperscript{79} See n. 52 above.

\textsuperscript{80} This is further supported by the unpublished inscription \textit{Beth}. 202, which identifies the deceased 
as \textit{נכד} נב. If this designation were embarrassing to the family, it would not have been included in the 
inscription.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Beth}. 2, 3, 8, 52, 54, 55, 56, 78, 88, 99, 112, 113, 122, 123, 135, 146, 151, 153, 155, 233, 280.

\textsuperscript{82} מרים בתו של רבי יונתן 
עם שמי בן יהודה
recorded.\textsuperscript{83} Further, \textit{Beth.} 147 reads, "Here lies Esther, daughter of Anthos, from Tyre."\textsuperscript{84} In this case, the absence of children's names makes it impossible to know her age or if Esther was ever married. \textit{Beth.} 166 simply lists a name, "Lady Mikke."\textsuperscript{85} The honorific title \textit{kura} indicates that the woman was held in high esteem within her community, but her marital status and function cannot be determined from the text of the inscriptions or through generalizations.\textsuperscript{86}

While it is likely true that most women married, the inscriptive evidence also suggests the possibility that some women did not. Depending on the individual woman's situation, it was also possible for unmarried women to continue to live with their families without stigma. The large number of inscriptions that do not name a husband suggest that assumptions about a woman's marital status must be made with caution. This will have direct bearing on discussions of Tabitha and Lydia since the marital status of neither woman is specified in the text.

\textsuperscript{83} This may indicate that her father, Rabbi Jonathan, was the more recognizable and honored connection.

\textsuperscript{84} Ἐνθάδε κῖτε Ἀσθήρ Ἀνθὸν Τυρία

\textsuperscript{85} ΑΑΑ Κυρᾶ Μικκή Ν ANYA ΑΘΙΣ

\textsuperscript{86} The honorific title \textit{kura} was denied by the original editors of the inscriptions because "the title was only used for married women," with little data to back up this statement. Also, the editors deny there were any honorific titles for women due to, "this same epithet is also attributed to women hence it cannot be connected with any particular office and was also conferred upon people who were not qualified scholars." Schwabe, \textit{Beth-She'arim II}, 13 and 24. For a more balanced discussion of the role of women in this time period, see Tal Ilan, \textit{Integrating Women into Second Temple History}, (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2001).
The Guardianship and Legal Rights of Women

The Papyrological Evidence

Based on the legal contents of the documents from the Judaean desert, Jacobine Oudshoorn argues cogently that women in the Eastern provinces may not have been as dependent on the services of a legal guardian as has been previously assumed. She states, “The ambiguous picture painted by the documents themselves shows that the guardianship of women might not have been a clear and undisputed matter in the provinces.” Jennifer Sheridan, in her study of female guardianship practices in the papyri, determined that of all the women who acted without a guardian, only twenty-two percent are unquestionably from the bouleutic class, fifty-percent are clearly non-elite, and we are not sure about twenty-eight percent. This means that at least fifty percent of the women who acted without guardians came from the nonelite classes of Egyptian provincial society. Further, in approximately fifteen percent of the papyri, no husband or other male relative is listed, suggesting that these women acted independently. In Acts, both Tabitha and Lydia are shown without a husband or male relative.

---


89 In neither of these cases can the socio-economic class of the woman be determined. Where male relatives are listed on the document, they tend to be bouleutai. It is possible, then, that if the women had elite male relatives they would use this to their advantage. The absence of men may indicate that the women are not bouleutic.
While the use of legal guardians for women in Rome was gradually abolished during the first century CE,\textsuperscript{90} in the provinces it seems to have been introduced under the influence of Roman law. Provincial governors and judges had to constantly balance the requirements of formal Roman law with indigenous, local, substantive laws that were normative in a particular region. Simply because local magistrates followed Roman courtroom procedures does not necessarily mean that Roman law trumped local law in all cases. In fact, based on an analysis of the legal decisions in the archive, it seems that in the majority of cases, local laws and customs superseded Roman laws. So, while women in the provinces had guardians, this in essence was a formality.\textsuperscript{91}

Neither language nor ethnicity seems to be a determining factor in whether or not a woman needed a guardian when conducting legal business. Aramaic and Greek documents were equally enforceable in a Roman court. In \textit{P. Yadin} 21–22, Babatha uses a precedent found in her Aramaic marriage contract (\textit{P. Yadin} 10) as the basis of her right to sell dates from her deceased husband’s orchard. These legal documents were drawn up to conform to local law, but at the same time they also conformed to formal Roman legal and procedural standards. This flexibility allowed judge and litigant to stand on solid ground together when dealing with legal issues and effectively straddle these two sets of legal standards.\textsuperscript{92} It also suggests that in spite of perceived restrictions, such as the

\textsuperscript{90} Dixon, \textit{Reading Roman Women}, 79.

\textsuperscript{91} This will be discussed in greater detail below. Oudshoorn, \textit{Relationship between Roman and Local Law}, 88–92.

\textsuperscript{92} Oudshoorn, \textit{Relationship between Roman and Local Law}, 88–92. This is contrary to Hannah Cotton’s treatment of this question in “The Languages of the Documents from the Judaean Desert,” \textit{ZPE}
presence of a guardian to endorse a legal document, women were aware of and regularly utilized both sets of legal standards to their best advantage.

For example, from a Roman census document (P. Yadin 16), we learn that Babatha owned four date groves at the time of her second marriage, totaling approximately four acres (“1.54 hectares”). Babatha herself paid taxes on these holdings and sold the produce from the groves as a means of income in addition to owning the water rights to these plots (P. Bab. 7). The point is made even more explicit when these same documents take certain rights for granted that are clearly oriented to a non-Roman legal context. Specifically, the rights of a widow to her husband’s estate call upon precedents from Jewish rather than Roman law. Babatha based her right to sell the dates from Judah’s orchard not on direct ownership, but on the rights afforded to her by her Jewish marriage contract regarding dowry and debt. Jewish law states that upon the death of her husband a widow is entitled to the return of her dowry and any other gifts promised by the bridegroom. In lieu of this, the widow is paid a maintenance allowance

125 (1999): 219–31. Cotton argues that the language of the document definitively suggests the background of the parties involved and the law involved in resolving the dispute. This categorization is clearly disputed in documents such as P. Yadin 5, where two Aramaic-speaking Jews use Greek in a legal document that addresses questions of non-Roman law.

93 The three additional groves that were added after the death of her second husband were of unknown size. P. Bab. 21–22. Broshi, “Agriculture and Economy in Roman Palestine,” 234–35.

94 P. Yadin 21: 11–12 ἃ κατέχεις, ὡς λέγεις, ἀντι τῆς σῆς προικός καὶ ὀφειλῆς. εἰς τὸν προγεγραμμένον ἐνιαυτὸν τελέσω σοι εἰς τοὺς αὐτοὺς πατητοῦ πρώτου καὶ δευτέρου τάλαντα τεσσαράκοντα δύο, καὶ 22: 9-10 Ἰούδου Χθουσων ἀνδρός μου ἐπογεγομένου ἐς τὸν Μαλχιίου ἐν ἔτος ἔνεστος ἔτος

from her husband’s estate, which is generally managed by his heir(s). Babatha appears to have received neither her dowry nor payment from the heirs and is using the sale of the dates as her compensation. She refers specifically to her dowry from the marriage contract with Judah where, according to her ketubba, Judah’s estate was entailed to meet financial obligations to her. Hannah Cotton and Jonas Greenfield argue that when Babatha used the term ἀπογραφή she does not refer to a census, but to the official registration of the orchard property to her late husband. Babatha does not claim to own the property outright—if this were the case then there would be no need for a court to investigate her rights to the dates. She claims rather that the orchard is registered in the same public archive as her marriage contract to Judah. This combination of documents would have effectively informed any prospective buyer that the property was previously entailed and to whom. In making its decision, the court used the evidence from both the ketubba and the precedents of local law in seemingly equal measure.


97 The text of this document stipulates the liability of the groom to return the dowry to the wife on the occasion of divorce or death. In addition, this is set within the framework of Jewish law by the use of the phrase “according to the law of Moses and the Judaeans.” Oudshoorn argues that this indicates that the right of return that Babatha claims is based in Jewish law. However, even she indicates that this right may not have been exclusive to Jewish law as there is evidence for the same practice in both Nabatean and Egyptian local laws. This indicates to me that this was a practice common in the East that needed to be interpreted and allowed for within the Roman, formal legal system. Y. Yadin, J. C. Greenfield and A. Yardeni, "Babatha's ketubba," Israel Exploration Journal 44 (1994): 75–101. Also, Oudshoorn, The Relationship between Roman and Local Law in the Babatha and Salome Komaise Archives, 176–78.

98 See Cotton and Jonas Greenfield, “Babatha’s Property and the Law of Succession in the Babatha Archive,” ZPE 104 (1994): 211–24. “In Egypt, wives were ordered to deposit a copy of their marriage contract in the same public archives in which their husbands’ properties were registered in order
In addition to this understanding of Babatha’s legal rights to her husband’s property, these two documents also give us information about the role of the guardian in such proceedings. In *P. Yadin* 21, Babatha acts without a guardian. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that this document is written from the viewpoint of the purchaser and, therefore, Babatha may not need a guardian since she is not the petitioner. Cotton follows this assumption when she concludes that the presence or absence of a guardian is based on the type of role that the woman plays in the legal proceeding. When she is the petitioner (i.e., the *homologia* is written in her name), then the woman appears with a guardian, also signified by the phrase διὰ ἐπιτρόπου αὐτῆς. When she is the respondent (i.e., the recipient of the *homologia*), the document merely records that the ἐπίτροπος was present as a witness. For Cotton, the presence or absence of the guardian denotes which type of law is being applied. When the document uses the woman's name with the phrase διὰ ἐπιτρόπου αὐτῆς, then Roman law is being used, but when the guardian is absent, then the court is dealing with a question of local law.99 However, the documents themselves attest to a much more complex picture. Sometimes when the woman is the petitioner, only the presence of the guardian is recorded (*P. Yadin* 16), or there is no indication that a guardian is present (*P. Yadin* 19, 21, 23, 24, 26). In other cases, when the woman is the respondent, διὰ ἐπιτρόπου αὐτῆς occurs (*P. Yadin* 20). Therefore, it seems

---

more likely that the presence of a guardian is only required under particular circumstances.\textsuperscript{100}

This distinction between formal and substantive law also explains why the role of the guardian was much more prominent in the documents concerning minors than women. The guardianship of a minor is a matter of substantive law and the guardianship of a woman is a matter of formal law.\textsuperscript{101} As Hans Julius Wolff notes, just because the term for the guardian of a minor and for a woman is covered by the same Greek word, it does not mean that the law makes no distinction between the two offices. It simply means that the Roman system is the only one that does not make a \textit{terminological distinction} between the offices;\textsuperscript{102} however, there is still a distinction based on the laws they cite (substantive or formal). The orphan needs a legal representative to oversee and advocate for her rights of inheritance, while the adult woman in these documents acts independently, and the presence of the guardian simply validates the legal act.

To further illustrate this distinction, in Aramaic, the term for guardian of a minor (אפרפ) and guardian of a woman (אפרניא) are two distinct terms and offices with

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{100} The absence of the guardian has no correlation to the citizenship status of the woman since Babatha is not a citizen, and there are documents where there is a guardian present and others where there is no guardian mentioned.
  \item\textsuperscript{102} This indicates to Wolff that the papyri that use this single term are following Roman legal sources. Hans Julius Wolff, “Römisches Provinzialrecht in der Provinz Arabia,” (Rechtspolitik als Instrument der Beherrschung), in \textit{Aufsteig und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II}, 13 (1980), 796–805, esp. 796.
\end{itemize}
completely different functions. Cotton and Oudshoorn both note that Babatha acts with
different legal guardians at different times, which indicates that women's guardians in the
East take on the same role as witnesses that are paid for their appearance.103 P. Yadin 14
and 15 both deal with an issue of guardianship, but they deal with the guardianship of a
minor and a woman respectively, and they clearly deal with two different concepts and
procedures.104 The terms for guardian were only combined into a single, all-
encompassing term in the Greek text (ἐπίτροπος). The fact that the distinctions in
Aramaic stands side by side in the same document along with the single Greek term
demonstrates that the Greek term is being translated into Aramaic rather than the other
way around. The writers of the document are trying to indicate to an Aramaic audience
that the term ἐπίτροπος in this case does not mean the guardian of a minor but is referring
to a witness for a woman, which had no equivalent term in Aramaic.105 P. Yadin 21–22
indicates that women are property owners who make their own petitions and appear in
court with and without a guardian. In many cases, the guardian acted only as a witness.

103 Oudshoorn, Relationship between Roman and Local Law, 362; Cotton, “Guardian of a
Woman,” 268. For a discussion of the role of the guardian being similar to that of a witness, see Tal Ilan,

104 In P. Yadin 14, the guardian of the minor takes a proactive role in the proceedings and is
mentioned in the first lines of the document while in P. Yadin 15 the guardian is only mentioned in the
subscription of the document as a witness.

105 Moreover, Eastern law has no precedent for the guardianship of a woman. In P. Yadin 27, for
example, the scribe is not merely copying the text from the official source, but attempts to translate the
meaning for an Aramaic audience. The subscriber in the Aramaic text indicates only that he is subscribing
or validating the act, but in the translation, the scribe specifies that the subscriber is also the guardian of the
minor child. In Aramaic, P. Yadin 27:13–14 simply says that Babelis is writing for Babatha since she is not
able to write in Aramaic herself. It says nothing about his role as her legal guardian. In the Greek
translation in line 18, it states, ”being present with her guardian and subscribing for her.” It is only in the
Greek translation that Babelis is given these two functions. Oudshoorn, Relationship between Roman and
Local Law, 375–77.
For example, in P. Yadin 15, Babatha is in a position to dispute with her son’s guardians and offers to take over his maintenance at three times the rate of the guardians. She personally calls the guardian’s work into question and summons them to court. Because Babatha is the petitioner, the subscription uses !wda, but again, this seems to have been a requirement of formal law rather than a barrier to Babatha pursuing her case. In P. Bab. 20 and 25, which deals with this same case, Julia Crispina acts without a guardian or subscriber. Further, neither Miriyam (Babatha's adversary) nor Babatha appear in P. Bab. 26 with a guardian or subscriber. All of this evidence taken together indicates that at least in certain proceedings, women could act without the presence or subscription of a guardian, and not just women of the elite classes who had attained the right of ius trium liberorum, but also nonelite women like Babatha and Miriyam.

106 The presence of a guardian for a woman should not be read as the remnant of an older, substantive institution found in the Egyptian office of the kurios, but as an adherence to formal Roman law that required legal validation of the act. Against Cotton, who argues that the kurios found in Egyptian law is the same as the guardian of a woman found in the Judaean desert material. Cotton, “Guardian of a Woman,” 268. The kurios in Egypt was generally the woman’s husband and was a measure taken to keep women from owning property. As this practice was abolished and women became property owners, the kurios became an assistant who had a formal, rather than substantive, role in the legal process. The kurios could even be the other party in the suit, which is clearly impossible in the Judaean desert material, for example, P. Yadin 17 and P. Hever 65. Oudshoorn, 363–65. Cf. women's contracts from Dura Europos and Mesopotamia that follow this same process. P. Dura 28–32 and P. Euph. 6–7; C. Bradford Welles, R. O. Fink and J. Frank Gilliam, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report 5.1: Parchments and Papyri (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959); D. Feissel and J. Gascou, Documents d’archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (IIIe siècle après J.-C) (P. Euph. 6 à 10) (Paris : De Boccard éd., 1995).

107 One could argue that this is because of Julia's elite status. However, other non-elite women also act without a guardian, so this cannot be the only reason for the guardian's absence in these documents. Tal Ilan, "Julia Crispina, Daughter of Berenicianus, a Herodian Princess in the Babatha Archive: A Case Study in Historical Identification," Jewish Quarterly Review 82 (1992): 361–81.

108 The ius trium liberorum (right of three children) is the Augustan law that freed freeborn women with three children (and freed slave women with four children) from the need for a guardian (tutela). This was the first in a series of laws that diminished the presence of the tutela. Dixon, Reading Roman Women, 76–81.
Although Babatha is not a member of the elite classes, she is neither destitute nor powerless. The evidence demonstrates a much more complicated picture of the rights of women like Babatha to take legal action and secure their rights and property. Taken together, the evidence indicates that the solely subordinate role of women to male guardians in legal matters, be they business or even personal, cannot be universally upheld. Rather the evidence suggests that women could initiate proceedings, defend their causes, and take charge of business enterprises. The plain fact is that women could own property and make claims against their husband’s property for maintenance without the presence of a male intermediary. Especially women who did not have a living husband or father were able to make these claims on their own behalf and needed a guardian only to subscribe or validate the action.\textsuperscript{109} That Babatha could call others in a lawsuit and demand a change in guardianship for her son is evidence that she was not a "poor, weak widow," but a woman who actively pursued her rights and was prepared to use the legal and financial means at her disposal to ensure that these rights and privileges were maintained, with or without a husband or guardian.\textsuperscript{110} The prevalence of these practices may explain why Acts can present women like Tabitha, without explanation or

\textsuperscript{109} Cotton, “Guardian of a Woman,” 273.

\textsuperscript{110} CD 16.10–12, which is based on Num. 30, suggests that when women who still live in their father's household and those who are married make a votive offering, their father or husband has the right to annul their offering. However, since widows or divorced women are not under any male authority, "But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her." This reflects an understanding of widowed and divorced Jewish women as independent of male authority, at least in these situations.
qualification, who operate a business and household independently without male oversight.

**Women's Right of Inheritance**

Documents from the Judaen Desert

The text of *P. Yadin* 19 and 20 gives evidence of the rights of a daughter to inherit her father's and her grandfather's estate. In *P. Yadin* 19, Judah’s daughter from a previous marriage, Shelamzion, is presented with the gift of a courtyard. Shelamzion is the only child from Judah’s previous marriage to Miriyam. The internal evidence in the document supports the conclusion that the deed of gift for the courtyard was written within two weeks of Shelamzion’s marriage (cf. *P. Yadin* 18).

As attested in many Eastern law codes, the marital status of the daughter is crucial in determining her rights to a share in her father’s estate. If the daughter is married at the time of her father’s death, as in Shelamzion’s case, and there are male heirs, then she has no right to her father’s estate. In this case, Shelamzion has cousins, so Judah’s nephews are named as his heirs, not Shelamzion. However, fathers did take measures to ensure that even married daughters could receive their share of their estate. While still alive, fathers would give their daughter a gift on the occasion of her marriage. This “gift,”

---

111 Oudshoorn, *Relationship between Roman and Local Law*, 246–99. This includes a discussion of inheritance rights from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Levant, and Elephantine, all of which suggest that a woman's right to inheritance is dependent upon her marital status.

112 Judah gave Shelamzion property rights to a courtyard. Women also received substantial gifts from their mothers and other relatives at the time of their marriage. See the discussion of *P. Yadin* 20 below. All these gifts seem to serve the same purpose of providing income and security for the daughter's future needs.
usually property, then belonged to the daughter in perpetuity and remained separate from her dowry and, therefore, outside of her husband's control. This practice seems to act as a remedy to inequities in the legal system that would prevent a daughter from receiving her share of her parent's estate.\textsuperscript{113} Also, these gifts to the daughter at the time of her marriage would help ensure that the daughter would have a place to live or a source of income in case she was divorced or widowed.\textsuperscript{114}

\textit{P. Yadin} 20 discusses the legal arguments over Shelamzion’s rights to retain the gift of a courtyard from her grandfather. Her rights to this property were upheld in court because the gift was deemed a benefaction from her grandfather and would not have been part of his estate. The grandfather's courtyard as deeded to Shelamzion could not, therefore, be passed down with the rest of his estate to her father, Judah, and his heirs after him.\textsuperscript{115} The fact that the family went to court over the ownership of the courtyards suggests that these gifts were not nominal, but had significant value.\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Oudshoorn, \textit{The Relationship between Roman and Local Law}, 240–45.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Yosef Rivlin, “Gift and Inheritance Laws in the Documents from the Judaean Desert,” \textit{Law in the Documents from the Judaean Desert}, SJSJ 96, eds. R. Katzoff and D. Schaps (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 165–83. For example, the Mishnah states that daughters are preferred heirs over the brother of the deceased and his offspring. \textit{M.B. Bat.} 8:2.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Cotton, “Courtyard(s) in Ein-Gedi: \textit{P. Yadin} 11, 19, and 20 of the Babatha Archive,” \textit{ZPE} 112 (1996): 197–201. The guardians of the heirs (Judah’s nephews), Besas and Julia Crispina, are investigating Shelamzion’s rights to the courtyard as part of their duties to ensure the proper management of Judah’s estate. The court finds in favor of Shelamzion, and Julia Crispina concedes this decision (\textit{P. Bab.} 20:27) and subscribes the document herself (20:43).
\item \textsuperscript{116} See Cotton and Greenfield’s argument that the courtyards in \textit{P. Bab.} 19 and 20 are not the same. They prove this through the differing descriptions and abutments described in the two documents. “Babatha’s Property,” 200–201.
\end{itemize}
Therefore, the laws of succession as witnessed in the Judaean Desert documents do recognize the rights of men to the inheritance, but, in effect, do not sever a married daughter from sharing in the property of the family. The documents show how families circumvent standing laws to ensure that their married daughters receive a portion of the estate, are protected in case of divorce, and, at the same time, the family is able to look after their own interests.¹¹⁷

_P. Hever_ 63 presents another interesting case. The document addresses a gift from a mother (Salome Grapte) to her daughter (Salome Komaise), which is quite important for this study because it illustrates the legal recourses available to women when there was no male heir. With both Salome Komaise's father and brother deceased and no other male heir mentioned, the law allows the mother, as in _P. Yadin_ 20, to bequeath property to her daughter. This alone does not indicate that Salome is the heir to her father’s estate since she is not explicitly named as such; however, the fact that the issue of succession is being handled exclusively between mother and daughter without the intervention of a male relative is unique.¹¹⁸

As we notice in _P. Hever_ 64, Salome receives a gift from her mother, Salome Grapte, of a date orchard and its water rights as well as "half a courtyard which opens to

---


¹¹⁸ _P. Hever_ 63: 4–7. It seems that the διαλόγειας described here is due to the sale of some property, and it acts as the receipt for both women of this transaction. Cotton, DJD, 196. On the unique language of these lines and their interpretation, see Oudshoorn, _Relationship between Roman Law and Local Law_, 234–37, and Cotton, “The Archive of Salome Komaise Daughter of Levi,” _ZPE_ 105 (1995): 177.
the south with two half-rooms and the upper story rooms therein.” The gift comes into Salome Komaise's possession immediately and remains in her possession in perpetuity. Based on the dating of the document, the gift is presented shortly after Salome’s marriage to her second husband. In marriage contracts, real estate and slaves are never included in the dowry contract. Generally, a second document is drawn up that stipulates the disposition of these matters. Once again, this gift seems to benefit the daughter in two ways. First, it allows her to receive a portion of the family estate that would not be allowed under the law due to her marriage. Second, because the gift was separate from the dowry and was her own property, the daughter would have her own source of income separate from that of her spouse (the orchard and water rights) and financial security in the event of her widowhood or divorce.

As in the Babatha archive, Salome Komaise is a property owner who receives her wealth through gifts from her parents and relatives. These gifts provide income and shelter separate from the provisions of her dowry. The purpose of the gift so close to the

---

119 ὁμοίως καὶ ἡμισὺ αὐλῆς ἀνοιωγμένον εἰς νότον σών ἡμισὺ ὀικοίματα δύο καὶ ὑπὲρῶν ἐνσώη (lines 33-34)

120 ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον δὸσιν ἀλονίου (line 6, emphasis mine).

121 Cotton and Greenfield, “Babatha’s Property.”


123 The courtyards and rooms could also serve as income if the daughter rents them out while living in her husband’s home, or the rooms could serve as the couple’s home in the absence of other accommodations. The latter does not seem to be the case here since the marriage contract states that Salome would be living on her husband’s property.
occasion of her marriage contract suggests that parents found ways to circumvent the legal system, which did not allow women to inherit, and ensure that their daughters were financially secure with or without a spouse. These two archives from Palestine demonstrate that contrary to the stated preference for sons over daughters in some Jewish sources, the parents in these documents display a sense of obligation to their daughters as well as concern for their future needs. Indeed, the parents in these documents consciously work within the legal system to protect their daughters and ensure that they receive their portion of the estate as would be done for male family members.

The Egyptian Letters

The epistolary evidence from Roman Egypt refers to women in a range of economic roles of authority and management. Here the evidence is clear that even as early as 30 BCE women bought, sold, and maintained legal ownership of property. The presumed necessity of the male guardian is proven to be a matter of formal law just as in the case of the documents from Palestine. Clearly, the reality is that women experienced no serious impediment to enact their own legal and financial transactions and are able to

---

124 In Chapters Three and Four, I will discuss how this may be relevant to understanding the stories of Tabitha and Lydia.

125 Ben Sira 22:4b-5, 42:10; Test. Joseph 3.7; Leg. All. 3.3; and Yeb. 6.6, for example. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Léonie J. Archer, *Her Price beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine*, JSOT Supp. 60, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 9–122.

126 As will be discussed in further detail below, funerary inscriptions from Beth She'arim demonstrate that daughters are also remembered. The tombstones of deceased mothers record that they gave birth to both sons and daughters. Pregnancies producing daughters were also part of the mother's legacy that is recorded on her tombstone.
provide inheritances to their children of both sexes either through a formal bequest or gift.¹²⁷

In Egypt it is common for women to give a gift to a daughter on the occasion of their death in lieu of a formal will (donatio mortis causa). In SB 8.9642, a mother, Tamystha, makes a gift to her daughter, Taorsenouphis, of a house, a courtyard, and its contents located in the village of Talei.¹²⁸ The gift would take place upon the mother's death and remain the property of the daughter.¹²⁹ The mother only stipulates a small payment (20 silver drachmas) be made to her son Heron as well as provisions for her own proper burial. Tamystha utilizes the legal system at her disposal to ensure that Taorsenouphis receives a portion of the estate in spite of the presence of a male heir. Just as in the case of the documents from Palestine, this practice seems to have been enacted to ensure the daughter's financial security.

In P. Köln 2.100,¹³⁰ Taarpaesis certifies a will that divides property she owns (through previous transactions as inherited from her father [πατρικοῦ μου]) between her son (Ptolemaios) and two daughters (Berenike and Isidora). She bequeathes arable land


¹²⁸ τὴν ὀμολογούσαν Ταμύσθαν μετὰ τὴν ἐαυτῆς τελευτὴν εἶναι τῆς γεγονυίας αὐτῆ ἐκ τοῦ μ[ε][τά]λλαχοτος αὐτῆς ἀνδρός [. . .] αὐτῆς ἀνδρὸς Ἥρωνος θ[ο][ν] γατρὸς Ταο[ρ][σ][ε][ν][θ][ε][ο][ς] υπάρχον αὐτῇ Ταμύσθα ἀγοραστῶν παρὰ Πτολεμαίδος καὶ Διόνυσος καὶ Τα[. . .] ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἡμισὺ μέρος κοινὸν καὶ ἀδιαιρέτων οἰκίας παλαιᾶς καὶ αὐλῆς καὶ τῶν συνκυρόντων πάντων ἐν τῇ προκιμένῃ κώμῃ Ταλεί (lines 2-7)

¹²⁹ [ὁμολογοῦσαν] ςυγκεκρίμεναι μετὰ τῆς ἐν τῇ μεν τελευτήρην εἶναι τῆς θυγατρὸς μου Ταο[ρ][σ][ε][ν][θ][ε][ο][ς] υπάρχον μέρος τῆς οἰκίας καὶ αὐλῆς καὶ τὰ ύπ’ ἐμοῦ καταλειψθήσομεν[α]. Lines 21–23.

¹³⁰ Dating: 133 CE from Oxyrhynchus.
and buildings in Oxyrhynchos and surrounding villages. Taarpaesis also leaves an inheritance for her grandson, Isiaon, which in case of his death would be passed to Ision's mother Berenike. The document states, "And from the time that Psenesis also called Ision dies, my daughter Berenike alone for the duration of her life shall have the usufruct after the taxes of the one aroura bequeathed to her son Ision." Further, if Ptolemaios dies and is childless at that time, then his share of the estate will be shared equally by Berenike and Isidora. The evidence in this document is distinct from what was found in the Nabatean documents (ex. P. Yadin 20). There, if the son dies childless, his inheritance passes to other male relatives whereas here it explicitly states that Ptolemaios' property would go to his sisters alone. Taarpaesis seems to understand this practice because she stipulates that the land and buildings are to stay within her immediate family, and "to no one else do I leave a single one of my possessions." This mother went to great lengths to protect her property and the financial security of her children, both male and female.


134 Another example of mother obtaining land holdings for a daughter is P. Turner 24. This papyrus is dated to 148–54 CE. The mother consolidates property in her daughter's name presumably to increase the girl's provision for a future marriage.
P. Turner 24 (148–54 CE) is a bid by a mother, Ptolemais, to purchase sixteen arouras (approximately eight acres) of public land on behalf of her daughter Claudia Areia. Here Ptolemais acts without a guardian. She does employ the services of a “scribe” named Hermes, who has written the bid for her. Further, Ptolemais pays the entire purchase price of the land on behalf of her daughter in the amount of 3,600 drachmas. It appears that the purchase would have augmented an adjacent portion of land that was already jointly owned by Ptolemais and Claudia Areia. This would increase Claudia's holdings for both her dowry and for future financial security. Clearly, Ptolemais was a wealthy woman who was able to purchase large pieces of property for her daughter, but here she does so while still alive and before Claudia's marriage. This suggests that the practice of donatio mortis causa was not the only way for mothers to provide for their daughters. They were also able to give gifts to their daughters at any time in order to secure their future well-being.

Finally, P. Cair. Isid. 64 (298 CE) is a petition by two sisters, Aurelia Taësis and Aurelia Kyrillous, to reclaim land that was bequeathed to them by their father, Kopres. However, their inheritance has been partially confiscated and misappropriated by their Uncle Chairemon. The two women write to the strategos of Karanis on their own behalf.

---


136 κλήρου καὶ τοικικάς (ἀρούρας) ὧν γείτονες ἐμοῦ καὶ τῆς θυγατρός μου Κλαυδίας Ἀρείας. Lines 8–10.

and ask for the return of the usable portion of their land. The women claim that they
inherited both public and private land from their father, but Chairemon kept the more
usable, private land and only turned over the public land, which required high taxes and
rents.\textsuperscript{138} The women prove their claim to the land by a previous petition and demand not
only its return, but their right to the income from its produce.\textsuperscript{139} In this case, a father, not
a mother, is able to formally will land to his adult daughters to provide income and
security.\textsuperscript{140} All of this evidence suggests that there were a variety of ways that fathers and
mothers passed along land to their daughters: at the time of their marriage, as a gift at the
time of their death, and through formal bequests. It is most likely that in each case, the
parents chose to use the set of laws that gave them—both parent and child—the best
advantage.

\textbf{Women as Managers and Owners}

The Egyptian Papyri

According to village records in the Fayum, it is estimated that women owned as
much as one-third of the property in that region.\textsuperscript{141} Moreover, women in these papyri are

\textsuperscript{138} Rowlandson, \textit{Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt}, 239. ὁ ἡμέτερος ἡμῶν πατήρ,
ἀριστε τὸν στρατηγόν, τὸν βίον τελευτῶν κατέλειψεν κινητὰ εἴδη. ὁ δὲ τούτου ἁδελφὸς Χαιρήμων ἅπαντα
τὰ κατέλειψεν ἐνκολποσάμενος καὶ παρέσχετο ἡμῖν σιτικὰς δημοσίας ἀρούρας ταῖς μὴ

\textsuperscript{139} [δ]εόμεθα καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν τὴν σὴν φιλανθρωπίαν ὅπως κελεύσῃς αὐτῷ τῷ Χαιρήμονι ταῦτα

\textsuperscript{140} From the text we do not know the marital status of the daughters, but since they bring the
petition on their own behalf, they are in their majority.

Also, Hobson, “The Role of Women in the Economic Life of Roman Egypt: A Case Study from First-
moneylenders as well as borrowers; they lease properties to secure loans and they buy and sell goods not only for private use, but for the trade. These business ventures are important to acknowledge as they point to the variety of advantages and opportunities available to women in the imperial period. As Jane Rowlandson observes, “The actual share of work of all kinds performed by women was very much greater than formal documentation will ever tell us.”

In contrast to the stereotyped understanding of the silent, passive, and secluded woman of the Greek East, there are several letters that suggest that women were not hesitant to command men. In *P. Bad.* 2.35, Joanna orders Epagathos to repay the principal of a loan that she herself has made to him. The ubiquity of command forms and abruptness of the letter suggest to Bagnall and Cribiore that Epagathos was Joanna's slave based on the presence of τῷ ἰδίῳ in the greeting and ὅτι οὐπόθελε Επάγαθον ἐλεύθερον περιλαμβάνειν in lines 11–12. However, the relationship between the two is unclear and the letter does not stipulate whether or not Epagathos has already been

---


142 *BGU* 6 1273; *P. Tebt.* 2 389; *P. Ryl.* 4 662; *P. Grenf.* 2 45a, respectively.

143 Rowlandson, *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, 247. *P. Count* 3 identifies these occupations. For sellers of beer and wine see *P. Lond.* 7 1976.

144 For example, see quotation from Cornelius Nepos in n.165 below.


146 Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 292. There are eight command forms in the letter.
Joanna is a lender, she makes demands on her own behalf, and she feels free to make clear threats of future action, such as "Do not compel me then..." (μὴ μ’ ἀναγκάσῃς ὦν ...). Johanna informs Epagathos that she is the owner kuria of the twenty drachmas and interest, further asserting her authority over him. Here Joanna acts without a guardian in this matter and, moreover, states that she is herself a kuria.

In P.Mich. 8.507, Artemis requests that Socrates send her a legal representative so that she can bring a lawsuit against an unnamed party for damages. Artemis and Socrates are clearly business partners who share the responsibilities and profit of their business. Although we do not know the nature of their business, we do know that Artemis did not hesitate to request a legal representative from Socrates or to move forward with the lawsuit in his absence. Moreover, the document does not use the customary terminology for a legal guardian such as evpitro, poj or ku,rioj; here the word used is δικάσασθαι. This suggests that while Artemis requires an advocate to argue her

---

147 Bagnall and Cribiore, Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 292. It is also possible that Joanna is Epagathos' patroness or he is employed by her in some capacity.

148 με κυρίαν εἶναι (δραχμῶν) καὶ τῶν τόκων (emphasis mine). Based on the discussion in the previous section on the Nabatean documents, the term kurios is a legal term that suggests that Joanna was the guardian of the money and is establishing a legal claim that may have be part of a dowry, gift, or other inheritance that would be hers alone to dispense and reclaim. Oodshoorn, Relationship between Roman and Local Law, 363–65.

149 ἐρωτῶ σε ἐὰν δυνασθῇς πέμψον μοι ένα εξ ὑμῶν ὅτι γὰρ χρείαν ἔχω ἵνα ἐκδίκος μοι γίνηται, ἐπὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐξετάσῃ γυνὴ χωρὶς ἐκδόκου δικάσασθαι. Lines 4–8, (emphasis mine). The action of arguing before a judge is suggested by the use of the middle form of δικάζω.

150 Lines 11–14: μάθετε οὖν ὅτι ἐὰν βλάπτω καὶ ύμεῖς μέλλετε βλάπτειν, ἐὰν δὲ κερδήσωμεν ύμῶν ἐστιν τὸ πράγμα.
case in court before a judge, she does not seem to need a guardian or subscriber: she
could certify the documents herself.\textsuperscript{151}

Funerary Inscriptions from Beth She'arim

One of the persistent features of the necropolis at Beth She'arim as a whole is the
presence of familial burial tombs.\textsuperscript{152} While burial patterns show the presence of multi-
generational family structures, they also demonstrate that craft or profession were
important parts of the commemoration of the individual in both funerary and dedicatory
inscriptions.\textsuperscript{153} In women's inscriptions the titles are mainly wife and mother,\textsuperscript{154} but there
are two inscriptions that demonstrate that women held other positions besides these
domestic roles. \textit{SEG} 8.624 names Kalliope, the steward (μιζότερας),\textsuperscript{155} and \textit{CIJ} II.945

\textsuperscript{151} It is also possible that as in the Judaen desert documents, professionals were available to certify
the documents at court (cf. p. 95 and n. 109 above).

\textsuperscript{152} Zeev Weiss, "Social Aspects of Burial in Beth She'arim," in \textit{Galilee in Late Antiquity}, ed. L. I.
Examples of familial ownership of burial tombs are inscription numbers 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 150, 168, and
220.

\textsuperscript{153} Hayim Lapin, "Palestinian Inscriptions and Jewish Ethnicity in Late Antiquity," in \textit{Galilee
through the Centuries: A Confluence of Cultures} (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 239–68. \textit{CIJ} 928
(small wares dealer); 929 (fuller); 902, 940 (bakers); 931 (linen-seller). \textit{BS} II.61 (goldsmith); 79 (perfume
seller); 92 (banker); 173, 188 (cloth dyer); 189 (fine linen dealer) and 200 (woman steward). Ruth Roth-
Gerson, \textit{The Jews of Syria as Reflected in the Greek Inscriptions} (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2001), 4
(artisans); 6,7 (kloubas, oven makers?); 14 (marble worker); 21 (wood dealers). J. Naveh, \textit{On Stone and
Mosaic—The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues}, (Jerusalem: Carta and Israel
Exploration Society, 1978), 3, 47 (artisans); 75 (scribe).

\textsuperscript{154} This is true of all the inscriptive corpses in the East. The comparative evidence from Egypt
does not suggest that women did not have professions, but that the burial practices did not record them.

\textsuperscript{155} μνήμα Καλλιόπης μιζότερας καὶ ἀπελευθέρας τοῦ τῆς λαμπρᾶς μνήμης Προκοπίου. In some
translations, \textit{mizotera} is rendered as \textit{elder}. \textit{Mizotera} is a term that does not have wide usage and is not
listed in the LSJ, TLG, or DDbDP. Other uses in the inscriptive evidence suggest that it was a leadership
role within the community. Other examples include: \textit{SEG} 29.250 (Εὐφιμίας τῆς μιζότερας γυναικὸς νέας),
\textit{IK Anazarbos} 649 (Μαρία ομισωτερας μιζότερας); \textit{IG} 14.187 (αι μακάρι παρθένοι Φωτινη κε Φιλοσμηνη
ἐνθάδε κίνε, σεμιν, ἀγνε παρθένοι, ζήσασε βιου καλοὺ Ἡ μιζότερα); \textit{Corinth} 8.3604 ([- - - - -]ης
μιζότε[ρας]).
names a woman (Κύρας) connected to an organized fishing guild in Joppa. The inscription suggests that she had some sort of leadership role within the association. Kalliope is also designated as the “freedwoman of Procopios.” The inscription suggests that Procopios freed Kalliope either before or on the occasion of his death (perhaps as part of his will), and Kalliope seems to have prospered after her manumission as she is buried with an expensive marble slab memorial and a lengthy inscription.

There are also several inscriptions in which the woman's name is rendered in both Greek and Hebrew. One example is Beth.101, which reads, "Sarah from Meishan, who is also called Maxima." Here Sarah is clearly a Hebrew name, but she is also known by the Latin name Maxima, which is written in Greek characters. The women in these “dual name” inscriptions (and the family members who buried them) make a conscious decision to commemorate both names as this most fully expressed the family and community roles and the identity of the deceased. The women with dual names in their epitaphs seem to be known by, and use, both names interchangeably. In the papyri, dual names are used frequently to identify the parties involved in the legal matter. Using both

156 CIJ 945 Παρηγορίου καὶ Κύρας τῆς τῆς ἐς τὸν βόλον συνγενικής τοῦ Λυσιά Εἰσοπτών. The editors note here (pg. 143), "Le substantif συνγενική se rencontre ici pour la première fois. Il ne signifie pas, sans doute, une corporation selon le type prévu par le droit romain, mais plutôt une association dans le genre de celle qu'on constate dans l'Evangile de S. Luc 5, 1–11 entre Simon et les fils de Zébédée." This final correlation to the gospel is tenuous, but the inscription does point to the presence of fishing guilds in this region.

157 Maxima could also be an honorific title, but there is no way to distinguish this conclusively. See also inscription 102 (another attributed to Sarah Maxima), 200 (Theodosia/Sarah), and 88 (Esther/Amphaitha).
names indicates that the person was known by both names either by his or her family or in his or her civic role.

Does this suggest that these women were exceptional in having a title, or is it simply that the extant evidence does not provide enough data? This will likely be made clearer with the publication of additional funerary inscriptions from the region.  

However, based on the presence of these two inscriptions that record the occupation of women, it is clear that women's civic work even in smaller cities in Palestine was not unheard of. Indeed, if women in commerce were unusual or frowned upon, their professions would not have been inscribed. It does, however, seem to be the case that women's professional titles were less prevalent in the inscriptional corpus outside of Egypt.

The Textile Industry

As stated previously, women engaged in a variety of businesses both inside and outside the domestic sphere.  

---

158 J. J. Price, "Five Inscriptions from Jaffa," SCI 22 (2003): 215–31. Anna Veronese is currently completing a master’s thesis containing all of the Jaffa inscriptions under the direction of Hannah Cotton at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. When published, it will be the first comprehensive study of the entire corpus to date.

159 P. Gref 1 2.45a (women in the camel business; cf. BL 3.75, IX.96; M. Chr. 260); P. Lond. 7.1976 (a female beer shop owner); P. Mich 8.464 (March 99 CE) women (δέσκαλα). Several examples from the third and fourth centuries CE show that women operated in the capacity of teacher within the Christian church. The History of the Church, (Socrates), trans. and ed. H. Valois and E. Walford (London: H. Bohn, 1883), 7.15; SB 14.11532; P. Lips. 43. Women's roles in education are also corroborated by the mummy portrait of Hermione grammatike (14–37 CE) discovered in Hawara in the Arsinoite nome and the limestone statue of a woman holding a book roll (3rd c. CE) from Oxyrhynchus. For a full discussion and listing of the instances of female teachers, see R. Cribiore, Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt (American Studies in Papyrology: Atlanta, 1996), (Appendix I). See also, Robert A. Kaster, Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), and Rowlandson, Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt, 246.
were employed as wet nurses, it may be surprising for some to recognize that second to this more domestic service was the business of weaving and textile production. There are numerous examples of apprenticeship contracts for women in the cloth trade\textsuperscript{160} as well as examples of wealthy families who include female offspring and relatives in the management and profits of their textile businesses.\textsuperscript{161} Given the cultural expectations that the “proper” woman would remain inside the home, as distinct from the public, or male, world of the street, the classic job of spinning generally took place in a domestic setting and would be one that any woman, traditional or “new” could perform. But weaving and dyeing generally took place in workshops and other commercial spaces. The domestic and the commercial spheres seem to have interconnected as women initiated such enterprises. Our knowledge of whether women dyers were simply accepted in the open during the imperial period is incomplete on so many levels due to the lack of writing about these customs in the literature of the day. Therefore, we must rely on the legal documents, which in the end testify to the expansion of the commercial world of the imperial period, when borders blurred and a blend of customs East and West mingled all around the Mediterranean. What one can say is that although networks of weavers and dyers could include both men and women, the evidence favors the conclusion that women largely had charge of these enterprises and maintained their businesses with success.

\textsuperscript{160} Stud. Pal. 22 40; BL 2.2, 167, 3 238, 5 145, 6196, 8 481.

In some cases, the work of spinning (νήθω) and carding wool (μαλλουργω) is performed on an estate by both family members and male and female slaves. However, we have other examples of situations in which women contract out jobs and of commercial operations that employ large numbers of women who work professionally in the wool business. In BGU 10.1942, the editors estimate that this one commercial textile operation alone employs over forty women. In P. Cair. Zen. 2.59295, the registration numbers for three villages record almost 800 female wool workers who claim ἔρια ἐργαζόμενον as their “profession.”

In Stud. Pal. 22.40, a female slave named Taorsenouphis is contracted to a weaver, Pausiris, in the Arsinoite nome. The girl is contracted for one year and two months for the purposes of learning how to weave, and then, upon the completion of her education she would return to her mistress's household or be hired out for wages (cf. P. Wisc. 1.5). However, the language in the contract suggests that it was also possible, depending on the girl's skill and disposition, that Pausiris could retain her services at the end of the apprenticeship for the price of 200 silver drachmas.

---

162 For example, the documents in the Zenon archive, esp. P. Mich. 1.16; PSI 4.341.

163 P. Cair. Zen. 2.59295; BGU 10.1942; Stud. Pal. 22.40; P. Oxy. 31.2593.

164 I use this term to suggest that the women were compensated for their work and that they were under commercial contract for their services rather than these being part of their regular domestic duties. This does not mean that I am asserting that these women had careers in the contemporary sense of the term. Rowlandson, Women & Society in Greek and Roman Egypt, 218.

165 See also, P. Wisc. 1.5; C. Pap. Jud. 2.442; BL 2.2, 167, 3.238, 5.145, 6.196, 8.481.

166 Lines 24–26: ἐὰν δὲ μὴ παραστήσῃ δόσει ἴσας τῶν ἐπίτιμου ἄργυρίου δραχμάς ἑκατὸν καὶ αἷς τὸ δημοσίου τῆς ἱπποὺς. This could simply be an incentive to return the girl, but it could also be the means by which the exchange could be facilitated.
In this document, Taorsenouphis is clearly a slave. Although there is no evidence for freeborn girls being contracted out as apprentice weavers, there is evidence of freed women working in the commercial weaving and dyeing industry as well as female business owners accepting a young slave girl as an apprentice, such as Aurelia Libouke of Karanis (SB 18.13305). This may suggest that women use their work in the textile industry as a way of obtaining their freedom, as the servant's desire for freedom is a widely accepted trope and cultural model in antiquity. Many women who work in the textile industry appear to be of servile status receipts for payment of the weaver's tax listed women's names without a patronymic.

The prevalence of commercial weaving and dyeing operations is also verified by documents like P. Oxy. 31.2593 (2nd century CE). Apollonia gives an account of what she has spent on yarn and other materials to make clothing for Philotes. In the list of items and prices, Apollonia states that she had “sent out three minas of wool to be spun” at a cost of one obol per stater weight. This means that Apollonia outsources certain

---

167 This occurred with some regularity in the evidence from Ostia, as will be discussed below. It is likely that this would also be the case in Egypt.

168 For example, BGU 14.1141.24–25 is a private letter that uses this trope to express the deepest desires of the writer which reads, ὃς δοῦλος ἑλευθερίας ἔχει μὴ γενέσθαι κλωσθῆναι τρεῖς μνᾶς ὀβολοῦ τοῦ στατῆρος ὀλκῆς. The sentence is used to show how the desire of the servant for freedom had become an established conception for describing the intensity of inner feelings. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce (University of Bologna), "Domestic Slavery in John: The Metaphor of the Slave's Liberation," Paper delivered at an International Colloquium on Johanine Literature, 2011 (used with permission).

169 Rowlandsen, Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt, 268–269. Cf. BGU 3617; O. Mich. 1.11; P. Coll. Youtie I.36; PSI 9.1055. Of course, the lack of patronymic is not conclusive proof of servile status, but it is the most likely explanation.

170 ἐκδέδωκα γενέσθαι κλωσθῆναι τρεῖς μνᾶς ἀξίωμα τοῦ στατῆρος ὀλκῆς, Lines 17–19.
portions of the job, likely to a commercial operation of the kind found in BGU 10.1942.\textsuperscript{171}

Although from a later time period (4th century CE), SB 14.11881 gives evidence for two unmarried woman who play an important role in dispensing charity to their community. Allous writes to "my lady mother Faustina" to enlist Faustina's charity for Allous' brother's orphaned children.\textsuperscript{172} Allous tells Faustina that she is unable to afford the children's upkeep,\textsuperscript{173} and requests σίππης λίτρας δύο\textsuperscript{174} so that she can spin it (νήσω) and use the proceeds to obtain provisions for the orphans.\textsuperscript{175} Allous asks for the materials, not to make clothing for the children to wear, but to be traded as a valuable commodity. In addition to evidence for the continuing importance of the textile industry for women, this document is also one of many documents that attests to the substantial role that women of means played in using their resources to support members of the

\textsuperscript{171} She herself has spun the remaining wool and has soaked it as well. Although this document does not mention it, dyeing was commonly outsourced. καὶ ἐγὼ τὰ ἄλλα τέσσαρας μνᾶς ἐκλώσα καὶ βέβληκα εἰς αὐτὰ σπάρτον χρωμάτινον μελανὸν καὶ ξένη αὐτῶν βάλε εἰς τὸν ἄβολλη τῆς στολῆς τρεῖς μνᾶς ἀσπαζόμεθα σε λείαν. ἔρρωσο. ὁ δὲ στήμων παρ' ἐμοὶ βέβρεχται. (lines 20–26) P. Oxy. 31.2599 strongly suggests either a Jewish or Christian context and discusses both weaving and purple dyeing.

\textsuperscript{172} κυρίᾳ μου μητρὶ Φαυστίνῃ Ἀλλοῦς ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ χαίρειν. Lines 1–3. Here it seems that Faustina is not Allous' actual mother, but a woman of high esteem in the church since she later (lines 29–31) refers to another woman as "mother" as well (ἀσπαζόμεθα Κυριακὴν τὴ[ν] μητέρα). Bagnall and Cribiore, Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 357: Rowlandson, Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt, 16–18, 70–83.

\textsuperscript{173} μὴ δυνα[μ]ένη αὐτοῖς ἐπαρκεῖν γυνὴ οὖσα. Lines 20–21.

\textsuperscript{174} σίππης is generally translated as tow, referring to the bundled filaments that have come off the loom before they are cut into useable fibers for spinning. This most likely refers to linen since this is a much more common staple textile in Egypt than cotton. Bagnall and Cribiore, Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 355. See also, R. J. Forbes, Studies in Ancient Technology (Leiden: Brill, 1956), 2–62, esp. 31–32.

\textsuperscript{175} ἀπόστειλον μοι διὰ τοῦ γραμματηφόρου σίππης λίτρας δύο ἰνα νήσω καὶ δαπανήσω εἰς αὐτά. (emphasis mine)
community in need. None of the women here (Allous, Faustina, or Kyriake) are named as widows, even though this is the assumption of most editors since no men are mentioned in the text. In truth, we do not know their marital status, but we do know that Faustina and Kyriake both have honorific titles (μητρὶ) and that they served as benefactresses to their community. This has implications for the way that Tabitha seems to function in the narrative of Acts 9:36–43. There the text does not address Tabitha's marital status, but describes her engaging in acts of charity on behalf of those in her community.

The evidence from Egypt demonstrates that women held numerous jobs, were educated, and were comfortable asserting authority both in the domestic and public sphere. Moreover, it appears that many freedwomen were engaged in the textile business in a variety of capacities as both workers and owners/managers. These same women may have used their service in these businesses to gain the monetary and legal connections to work toward their manumission. In later documents, we have evidence that women of means, not necessarily widows, engaged in charitable practices for the benefit of women and children in their community, something which appears to have been unique to Jewish and Christian communities.

176 See also, P. Wisc. II.64 (the donation of a cloak for a widow) and P. Oxy XVI.1954 (donations of wine for widows). For hospitality in the early church, see Historia Monachorum in Aegypto 5.1–6. Of course, caution must be exercised in using these examples since the dating is much later, but these documents do suggest some practices that seemed to have been common among early Christians.

177 Bernadette Brooten, Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1982), 57–72; here she discusses the literary and inscriptive evidence for the presence of this title in Judaism and the continuation of its usage in Christianity. She concludes that the title had administrative functions in the synagogue and was bestowed upon women of the leading families in the community.
Women and Honorary Titles

Beth She'arim

The inscriptions from Beth She'arim attest to a number of different honorific titles for women: Κύρα, ὀσία, ματρώνα, and λαμπράν.\textsuperscript{178} Ten inscriptions include the title “kupa” along with the name of the deceased woman.\textsuperscript{179} The original editors conclude that these titles are not honorifics, but rather only designate that the woman is married. They conclude, “[t]he epithet is attributed to women, hence it cannot be connected with any particular office and was also conferred upon people who were not qualified scholars.”\textsuperscript{180} This type of reasoning is circular and also misogynistic. It assumes that women could not hold offices in Judaism and that women would likewise not receive honorific titles except if they are married.

Two inscriptions, \textit{Beth.66} and 68, give an account of the honor daughters held for their families. The two inscriptions are similar and read, "Sarah, daughter of Nehemiah, mother of the priestess, the lady Maria, lies here."\textsuperscript{181} In this case, it is both father \textit{and} daughter who transfer honor to the deceased mother Sarah.\textsuperscript{182} Clearly, the daughter's title

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{178} Cf. n. 92 and the discussion on the title above.
  \item \textsuperscript{179} \textit{Beth.} 39, 57, 121, 130, 151, 166, 220, 241, 242, 246.
  \item \textsuperscript{180} Schwabe, \textit{Beth-She'arim II}, 13 and 24. For a more balanced discussion of the role of women in this time period, see Tal Ilan, \textit{Integrating Women into Second Temple History} (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001).
  \item \textsuperscript{181} I have included the text for inscription 66. Inscription 68 reads, "And Sarah daughter of Nehemiah, and mother of the priestess Maria."
  \item \textsuperscript{182} Brooten, \textit{Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue}, 68.
\end{itemize}
and position is an honorific that is purposefully included in the inscription. Although there is a long history in scholarship that denied that women could have held positions of leadership in their communities, titles existing in inscriptions in both the East and West demonstrate otherwise.\textsuperscript{183} It is unclear what this office entailed, but based on her exhaustive analysis of inscriptions throughout the Empire, Bernadette Brooten concludes that \textit{priestess} is a title that is more than merely honorific or designating the woman's Aaronite lineage. It is one that had leadership capacities analogous to those of a male priest.\textsuperscript{184} She maintains:

\begin{quote}
It is my view that they [the titles] were functional, and that if the women bearing these titles had been members of another Graeco-Roman religion, scholars would not have doubted that the women were actual functionaries…what the male rabbis said about women does not necessarily reflect who the women were, what they did and what they thought. Rather it reflects who the men making these statements were.\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{183} Samuel Krauss bluntly stated, “A genuine office could not have been associated with the distinction for the simple reason that it was also bestowed upon a woman.” Samuel Krauss, \textit{Synagogale Altertümer} (Berlin: Harz, 1922), 166. The same type of argument is made with regard to \textit{CIJ} 315, which reads, “Here lies Gaudentia, priestess (\yclerion), aged 24 years. In peace her sleep!” Harry Leon and J. B. Frey both dismiss the possibility of a female priestess outright since they cannot conceive of such an office being allowed in ancient Judaism. \textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum}, rev. by Baruch Lifshitz (New York: Ktav, 1975), 1: 85. Leon, \textit{The Jews of Ancient Rome} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 193. Even when these scholars do assign duties to this office, they are things that would be “appropriate” for a woman, such as caring for the sick or compassionately helping the poor.

\textsuperscript{184} Brooten, \textit{Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue}, esp. 73–94. See also Beth 136 and 137, which include the title \textit{mother}, which is used not to designate a biological mother, but is a functional title such as the “mother of the synagogue” discussed in Brooten, 64–71.

\textsuperscript{185} Brooten, \textit{Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue}, 149–50.
Maria's title and her position were so important to the family that they chose to include the information in the funerary inscription by which both they and the deceased would be remembered by their community.186

The inscriptions from Beth She'arim give evidence of honorific titles for women. Although not as widespread as the evidence from the West, these inscriptions demonstrate that many women were honored members of their communities who were remembered by titles of respect.

Conclusion

Overly literal readings of classical texts have led some scholars to presume that women in the Greek East lived more secluded lives than their counterparts in the Roman West. One persistent viewpoint is that women in the Greek East were not allowed to act except under the power of husbands, male relatives, or male guardians. This oversight is assumed then to limit the legal rights, rights of inheritance, business functions, and social roles of women. All of these assumptions are mitigated by the evidence in letters, papyri, and funerary inscriptions from Egypt and Palestine.

Although literary texts define women primarily according to the roles of wife and mother, in the nonliterary documents discussed in this chapter women operate within the much wider context of work, legal transactions, and ownership. These same sources also show that while the vast majority of women did marry, at least in some cases they did not. Moreover, as women began to hold an increasing share of the land and wealth in the

---

186 The same case can be made for the inscriptions Beth. 136 and 137, "Calliope the matrona." Harry J. Leon, The Jews of Ancient Rome (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 188.
region, they were also able to designate how that wealth would be used. Their dowry
to their children, women also used their means for acts of charity and public benefaction. Namely, over
time women were increasingly in command of how they used their wealth. In spite of
legal norms that suggest that women were not allowed to inherit, the papyri give evidence
of mothers and fathers passing along their wealth in the form of gifts and formal bequests
to their daughters. Although women in the East may have adhered to different customs of
dress and behavior and existed under different legal customs than women in the West,
they operated businesses, inherited, appeared in court, held notable titles, and were not
excluded from the public social and commercial spheres of their communities. The
perceived restrictions do not appear to have been a serious impediment to women's
activities.

All of this suggests a certain verisimilitude in Acts 9:36–43, where Tabitha is
described as a business owner who is also the head of her household. She does not appear
under the oversight of a father, husband, or guardian. Further, Tabitha acts as a
benefactress to her community through her good works and acts of charity. While this is
not meant to prove the existence of a historical Tabitha, it does provide a background for
the discussion in Chapter Four that allows the text to be read against the primary
evidence presented here in Chapter Two.
CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN IN THE ROMAN WEST

Wife, if you like to be staid and proper, you're welcome to be virtuous Lucretia all day, but I want a lascivious Lais at night.

–Martial, Epigrams, 11.104

Introduction

In the previous chapter on the Greek East, several conclusions were reached concerning the relative freedoms of women in society. First, the women in the East, although living under specific legal constraints and social restrictions based on proper feminine mores and expectations, were not isolated or prevented from engaging in public activities and business ventures. Second, even though there is some literary evidence to suggest that daughters were thought in some cases to be a financial burden and to some degree less advantageous for social advancement than a son, there is also a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that fathers and mothers did not simply see their daughters for the advantage they might create through a successful marriage or as a burden to be handed over to the responsibility of another family. The many wills that attest to parental concern for daughters’ financial stability by the circumvention of existing laws so that the daughters might be assured of money, property, or both, testify to genuine interest and affection. Finally, women in the East engaged in a wide variety of business activities at both the highest and lowest levels. Indeed, they were substantial property owners as we have seen, in some cases, holding the major share of property in their regions.
What the previous chapter illustrated is that, despite the moralistic rhetoric and even the legal restrictions on the books, other papyrological evidence proves that in the Greek East, the actual latitude for women to inherit, to own land and property and to conduct business counters that rhetoric as more idealistic than unilaterally descriptive of women in society. That is, the Eastern evidence suggests that there is a gap between the ideal woman of the literary and epigraphical sources and reality. As this chapter will demonstrate, this gap exists in the Western sources as well.

The Roman Woman: Wife and Mother

The ideal woman in Roman culture is first and foremost a mother, one who should act as a firm moral guide to her children, and a nurturer, especially one who nurses her children from her own breasts. Maternal affection is not meant to emotionally nurture the child, but to discipline the child to uphold tradition and follow the wishes of the family. The ideal Roman matron or wife is domestically industrious, sexually modest, and acts according to the expectations of her gender. Namely, she is not publically outspoken, she demurs to the power of her husband, and she avoids morally ambiguous situations such as public festivals and dinner parties unless accompanied by

---

1 I use the term reality loosely here since it is impossible to understand fully what the reality was of the daily life of women in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. My intention is to suggest that there is a tension in the source material in the portrayal of women.

2 For example, CIL 6.19128, where Graxia Alexandria is held up as an outstanding example of womanly virtue. Also, Tacitus, *Germania*, 20 on the virtues of breastfeeding. This, of course, is an ideal since it was customary among the elite to use the services of a wet nurse and among the lower classes to foster children to others for care. Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London: Croom Helm/Routledge, 1988), 1–7.

her spouse. And while it may be true that Roman women enjoyed more public freedom than their counterparts in the Greek East, it is difficult to determine what, if anything, these ideals signify about the actual lives of Roman women of any class. What they do point to is a propensity on the part of elite, male authors of the imperial period to render for didactic purposes the moral decline of Roman society through the behavior of women. In essence, women (and slaves) are used instrumentally to promote the author's particular moral agenda, and this may or may not reflect actual relational or social practices. In this literature, husbands who do not assert the proper control over their wives essentially allow their wives’ innate licentious and extravagant behaviors to manifest. Outside the proper locus of control of home and male authority, women revert to their natural state of sexual weakness and excess. In this literature, women act as the

---

4 For example, CIL 6.9499 discusses Aurelia Philematium and her not knowing the crowd (volgei nescia [sic]. This does not mean that wives did not attend parties with their husbands and dine alongside them, in contrast to practices in the East, but only that the expectation was that wives should avoid dubious situations, especially if unaccompanied by her spouse.


7 Tacitus, *Germania*, 19.1. “And so they [German women] preserve an unassailable virtue. They are not corrupted by the licentious atmosphere of public festivals or the excitement of dinner parties. Men and women alike are innocently unaware of clandestine notes.” The simplicity of the primitive culture is meant to critique the more advanced, prosperous, and morally deficient culture of the Roman capital. See also, Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 7.141–43 (Cohoon, LCL); C. Nepos, *Lives of Foreign Generals*, praef. 6–7; and
vehicle for the display of the vice or virtue, but men are the primary audience meant to absorb and follow the moral program.\footnote{Valerius Maximus, \textit{Mem.} 6.3.7–12 (Shackleton Bailey, LCL). For an excellent discussion of the theme of womanly weakness (\textit{sexus infirmitas}), see Suzanne Dixon, \textit{Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres, and Real Life} (London: Duckworth, 2007), 73–88.}

The \textit{new woman} of the imperial period is routinely contrasted with the superior behavior of women of the Roman past and rustic foreigners. The new woman is sexually aggressive even when she is well past her prime, financially independent, outspoken in public situations, in short, a symbol of all the ills of Roman imperial society. When a woman becomes masculine—outspoken and assertive in the male venue—she is labeled a \textit{dux femina} or \textit{meretrix}. But she retains the feminine virtues of modesty and deference, she is praised as an ideal woman (like Lucretia, Cornelia, and Hortensia), who gives the male authors hope for a return to traditional values, gender roles, honor, and the reassurance of their own authority and superiority.\footnote{This statement is not meant to suggest that women did not read these authors, it is certain that they did, but only that the writer's ideal reader is male. Even Plutarch's "Advice to the Bride and Groom" is addressed to Eurydice, but the public nature of the document suggests that it also targeted the male reader, who could be edified by it and learn what to expect from his current or future bride (see below for detailed discussion of this document).}


\footnote{For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Suzanne Dixon, \textit{The Roman Mother} (London: Croom Helm/Routledge, 1988), where she lists examples from Valerius Maximus, \textit{Mem.} 6.1.1, 8.4.3 and Quintilian, \textit{Inst.}, 1.6. See also Dixon's more recent work, \textit{Reading Roman Women}, which expands on this discussion, especially her section on "Reading the Female Body," which surveys and analyzes all these representations of women in the literature. Also pertinent, the recent work by Rebecca Langlands, \textit{Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome} (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Also, Bruce W. Winter, \textit{Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of the New Woman in the Pauline Communities} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). Lucretia is found in Livy, \textit{Ab Urbe Condita} 1.57.6–11, 58–60; Cornelia in Cicero, \textit{Brutus}, 104, 211; Livy, \textit{Ab Urbe Condita}, 38.57.5-8; Plutarch, \textit{Vitae Parallelae: Tiberius Gracchus} (1.4–5; 4.1–3; 19.1–6; 21.3–4) and \textit{Gaius Gracchus} 4.1; 13.2); Polybius, \textit{Hist.} 31.27; Valerius Maximus, \textit{Mem.} 9.4.4; Pliny the Elder, \textit{Nat. Hist.} 34.31; Hortensia in Appian, \textit{Bell. civ.} 4.32–34; Valerius Maximus, \textit{Mem.} 9.8.3.3.; and in the challenged fragment preserved in Cornelius Nepos, "Letter of Cornelia." Ward, Eileen F. de. "Mourning Customs in 1 and 2 Samuel II." \textit{Journal of Jewish Studies} 23 (1972): 145–66.}
The Roman Marriage

When music is played in two parts, it is the bass that carries the melody. So it is in a good and wise household, while every activity is carried on by the husband and wife in agreement with each other, it will still be evident that it is the husband who leads and makes the final choice.  

This quote from Plutarch's "Advice on Marriage" is representative of the ideal Roman marriage and household: harmonious, agreeable, and stratified. Each member of the household is important but has a particular function and responsibility that is unique to his or her gender and position in the family. Of course, as was already mentioned, passages such as these express an ideal rather than a strict reality. Wives should be agreeable, attentive, and obedient to the head of the household, but the fact that this public, didactic letter exists demonstrates that the reality of marital relations was much more diverse. There are certainly norms in marriages, but there likely is also a great deal of variety in how husbands and wives interact and understand the boundaries and practices of their relationship.

Embedded within the Roman word for marriage, *matrimonium*, is its intention, namely, that a man *takes* a woman as a wife, not the other way around. A woman enters into marriage, not the man, she is the one who is dismissed from the marriage, and it is her exit that is the sign of the dissolution of the bonds. There are essentially two types of Roman marriage, *in manu* and *sine manu*. Most marriages of the early republican

---


12 Susan Treggiari outlines in more detail the types of Roman marriage, including early patriarchalism, *manus* and *matrimonium*, *usus*, *confarreatio*, and *coemptio*. Here the intention is only to
period were marriages *in manu* in which the wife legally passes into the “hand” of her husband and relinquishes all claims to her familial estate and alliances with her natal family. In these cases, the woman's dowry becomes the sole possession of her husband.\(^{13}\) However, by the middle of the first century BCE, the more common type of marriage was *sine manu* in which the wife retained her natal family status, did not legally become a member of her husband's family, and, therefore, could retain her own property, dowry, and claims to her parent's estate.\(^{14}\) It is important to note that these shifts are not limited to the privileged classes; they seem to occur throughout the social system.\(^{15}\) If the woman is *sui iuris*, in cases in which her father is deceased or has legally declared her so, if she acquires any property after marriage (through wills, gifts, or purchases), this is her own and not her husband's. In marriages *in manu*, the woman is no longer answerable to the family *consilium*, but in marriages *sine manu*, she continues to be subject to and discuss the most common and longstanding type, *manus*. It is not my intention to suggest that there was a linear development between the older types of marriage and those *sine manu*, only that marriages *sine manu* predominated from the late republican period onward. This seems due to changing necessities and priorities rather than any specific reforms that improved the position of women. The move away from marriages *in manu* occurred somewhere between 200–100 BCE. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 15–28.

\(^{13}\) This form of marriage cannot simply be labeled as lacking any advantage for women because, even if a woman relinquished claims to her natal family's estate, she held the same rights as a daughter to intestate succession in her new home. In some cases, this may have proven to be more advantageous to the woman. Even *in manu*, a woman remained a free person (*capitis diminutio minima*). Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 1–36. See also Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Law and Roman Society* (London: Croom and Helm, 1986), esp. 31–80 for a discussion of the types and effects of Roman marriage patterns.

\(^{14}\) Dixon, *Roman Family*, 73–74. If her father was deceased then she was *sui iuris*. The dowry is on loan to the husband during the marriage. See discussion below in "Dowry."

\(^{15}\) Gaius, 3.39–46; Ulpian, 29.1.
participate in the *consilium* of her natal family. In such cases, even after marriage, a 
woman still maintains close ties to her natal family and is dependent upon them when 
making important decisions. Under the system of marriage *sine manu*, more than under 
the previous system (*in manu*), many woman are not entirely dependent on their husbands 
for their financial well-being and, therefore, could accrue and maintain personal wealth.

J. A. Crook points out that there were only two criteria necessary to establish a 
legitimate marriage in the Roman world: (1) the permission of the *paterfamilias* for the 
formal, legal right to contract marriage (*ius conubii*), and (2) the intention to live together 
as man and wife (*affectio maritalis*). Roman marriage is primarily a private affair that 
only is brought into a public or legal forum when injustices or anomalies occur. Moreover, in Rome's upwardly mobile society, marriages are meant to produce legitimate 
children (*liberorum quaerundorum causa*), cement political or business alliances, and 
create financial efficiencies. However, as Susan Treggiari notes, the bearing of

---

16 The *consilium* consisted of the adult members of the extended family, both men and women. In 
addition to marital decisions, the *consilium* also officiated over all major political and financial family 
decisions, was responsible for negotiating the terms of divorces and return of dotal monies, and determined 
the legitimacy of children born to all members of the family.

17 *Consortium*, the sharing of property in marriage, happened automatically in marriages *in manu* 
but was a matter of convenience, morality, and mutual assent in marriages *sine manu*. This means that 
couples may still have shared property apart from the dowry, but this only happened through their mutual 

matter of intention; if you lived together 'as' man and wife, man and wife you were."


20 This does not mean that illegitimate children could not attain citizenship or inherit, but that the 
status of the parent at the time of birth was crucial in determining status for each ensuing generation. 
Military marriages add yet another layer to understanding marriage in the Roman world. Although soldiers
legitimate children "is the purpose which defines the woman as legal wife and the union as marriage." This principle of marriage is ingrained into Roman consciousness and is prominently represented in Roman founding myths. Marriages are also a means to expand, secure, and control family wealth and property. Even though legal advantages are generally skewed toward the husband and his family, just as the evidence from the East has shown, the wife and her family took measures to ensure that their assets would be secured and that the authority over them remained with the woman in perpetuity, regardless of the success or failure of the marriage.

In light of the potentially significant financial stakes, spousal selection is of crucial importance to ensure that family wealth is protected. A spouse is chosen for the woman by the family consilium and is not a matter of personal attraction or self-selection. Younger women who marry for the first time seem to have little say in the selection of their spouses, but those who are widowed or divorced have a greater voice in spousal selection. However, even in subsequent marriages, the woman's selection is rarely a romantic one, but takes into account the family status, financial situation (both her own and the man's), and public reputation of the potential spouse.

could not legally form marriages while in camp, this, of course, occurred with some regularity and required some permutations to the law to accommodate the legitimization of these marriages once the soldiers were discharged. See Beryl Rawson, "Life among the Lower Classes at Rome in the First Two Centuries of the Empire," Classical Philology 61 (1966): 71–83. Also, P. Watson, "Filastur: Privignus or 'Illegitimate Child'?” Classical Quarterly 39 (1989): 536–48.

21 Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 8.

Although the final decision and authority in all legal matters pertaining to betrothal and marriage rests legally with the *paterfamilias* alone, legal canons cannot tell the whole story. In practice, mothers are actively involved in the selection of spouses for their sons and daughters. In spite of their lack of formal, legal standing in the matter, mothers routinely determine the proper spouse, but could also cast the deciding vote in the family *consilium*. The prominent role of mothers seems due at least in part to the unique status of the mother in the Roman household as distinct from her role in the Greek East. The Roman matron not only has guardianship over the entire household as *domina*, but also over the virtue of all those who reside or work there. In contrast to the Greek home, where there were distinct women's and men's quarters, Roman domestic space was not divided according to gender. Even *private* space, such as bedrooms, was used at different times for diverse purposes such as storage, entertaining, or conducting business, as needed. Therefore, “private” space inside the home was actually much more public than in our own culture, and women had custody of the entire household and

---


24 Wives and especially mothers were considered foundational to the Roman state itself and play a prominent role in historical discussions of its founding including the grant of citizenship status for wives. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.9.14–16. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 3–4.

25 Wendy Cotter, "Women's Authority Roles in Paul's Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?" *Novum Testamentum* 36, no. 4 (1994): 359. The household size could have been quite substantial, including slaves, childcare personnel, non-kin children, extended family, and others visiting short term or on an extended stay. This household arrangement would not have been unique to the elite, even the free poor seem to have had slaves and childcare workers in their more modest homes. Suzanne K. Dixon, *Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 8–9. This has bearing on the discussion of Lydia's role as *domina* of her household in Acts 16. See discussion in Chapter Five below.

moved through it freely without exclusion. Moreover, as is the case in the Egyptian letters, the Roman bride also had a substantial say in establishing and continuing the marriage in spite of the legal dominance of patria potestas. The jurist Paul affirms that a father does not have the power to end a daughter's harmonious marriage, with the judgment of what is considered harmonious resting with the bride and groom alone.

Legally, the primary function of a wife is to give her husband legitimate children. While it might appear that marriages sine manu are quite businesslike, with the wife acting as a “childbreeder” who, once she has fulfilled her purpose, could be dismissed to return to her natal family, this does not appear to be the case. The evidence does not uphold that in these pre-arranged marriages sine manu that the spouses are emotionally or physically detached or hold less mutual affection. Of course, there are marriages in which adultery and emotional or physical distance are the norm; however, literary and epigraphic evidence suggest that the majority of marriages are patrilocal and, in many cases, wives and husbands express genuine affection for one another. For example, Cicero’s letters to Terentia while in exile, Pliny the Younger’s letters to his wife while abroad, and even the normally reticent Seneca’s affectionate words to Paulina, show that


28 For example, P. Oxy. 2.237

29 Paulus, Sent. 5.15. This also seems due to the gradually diminishing of the power of patria potestas throughout the first and second centuries.

30 Dixon, Roman Family, 83–90.
husbands and wives love, honor, and seek sexual fulfillment from one other.  

Furthermore, as was discussed in the previous chapter, although funerary inscriptions use conventional, formulaic language to honor the deceased, in many cases, the language goes above and beyond convention to display a greater degree of intimacy and affection. For example, in CIL 6.29580, a husband remembers his wife through a description of her virtues so that everyone who passes by will know how much he loved her. As also discussed in the previous chapter, lengthy inscriptions are expensive and necessarily only contain information that is deemed in the eyes of the person choosing its contents. Therefore, this husband's love certainly displays the conventional virtue of marital harmony, but it goes beyond this by citing love as its impetus.

In conclusion, Roman marriages are a private matter, and they are chosen and arranged by the family consilium primarily for the production of legitimate children or for the political, social, and financial advantages they afford. In many cases, husbands


32 CIL 6.29580 URBANAE·CONIUGI·DULCISSIME·et castissimae ac rarissimae cuius praecelarius nihil fuisse certis hoc ita mecum cum summa iucunditate adque simplicitate in diem vitae suae legiti qua, afectioni coniugali tam industria morum suorum haec ideo adieci ut legentes intellegant quantum nos dilexerimus paternus·B·M·F. One of the most notable (and lengthiest) examples of a husband praising his wife is ILS.8393, also called the "Laudatio Turiae." For a discussion of this text, see Marcel Durry, Eloge funèbre d'une matrone romaine: Eloge dit de Turia, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002); also Erik Wistrand, The So-Called Laudatio Turiae (Lund: Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1976), 19–33.

33 Other examples include: CIL 3.8451, 6.25678, and 6.26776. The problems encountered in unrequited, fickle, or problematic love relationships are recorded in all their varieties in the inscriptions and graffiti in Pompeii. For a careful discussion of these inscriptions, see Antonio Varone, Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the Walls of Pompeii, Studia Archaeologica trans. R. P. Berg (Rome: <<L'Erma>> di Bretschneider, 2002), 116.
and wives also hold genuine affection for one another and look to their marriages for their emotional and sexual fulfillment. Also, under the prevailing practice of marriage in the imperial period (*sine manu*), wives are able to maintain their own monies and property independently from their husbands’ and accrue greater personal wealth than in the past. These conclusions will serve as the background for Chapters Four and Five and their discussions of Tabitha’s and Lydia's supposed marital status. It will also serve to highlight why these women can appear and act independently in the text.

**Dowry**

One of the primary concerns after spousal selection is the arrangement and agreement upon the dowry. Women do bring large dowries and, in many cases, enter into the marriage with both cash and property that either enhance the social status of their husbands, or at least enhance his cash flow, and allow for the expansion of his business ventures and improvements to property. As Jane Gardner observes, "The provision of the dowry was basically a contribution, customary though not compulsory, from the wife's household to the expenses of the household of the husband."\(^{34}\) The basic parameters for the disposal of dowry are established in 230 BCE, stipulating that the dowry is to be paid at the time of the formalized, contractual marital arrangement. Then once the initial, legal transfer of the land or property takes place, the actual cash payments are made in annual installments.\(^{35}\) The repayment of the dowry is stipulated in this contract and roughly

---

\(^{34}\) Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 97.

mirrors the annual payment method of the original agreement.\textsuperscript{36} In cases of divorce, if repayment is required, the bride's family uses a neutral intermediary, many times a slave, to negotiate the terms of repayment and to ensure that privacy is maintained by all parties. Although in general this private system works successfully, the sheer amount of material regulating dotal agreements in the \textit{Digest} suggests that in many other cases, parties utilize the legal system to ensure that the monies are returned properly and obligations met.\textsuperscript{37}

Even though, technically under Roman law, the dowry becomes the full legal property of the husband from the moment the marriage begins, practice indicates that the husband uses these monies under the watchful eye of his wife and her family.\textsuperscript{38} In essence, his use of the dowry in \textit{manus} marriages becomes more of a duty of stewardship than ownership. The husband could not use spend dowry monies for “useful” improvements or for “pleasure” without the formal consent of his wife.\textsuperscript{39} In essence, even though the husband owns the dowry under the law, in practice he does not.


\textsuperscript{37} There are 135 extant legal opinions given on matters related to the law of the dowry and its many permutations in the \textit{Digest}, esp. bks 23–25.

\textsuperscript{38} Women kept account books of the use of and balance of their dotal monies. Gardner, \textit{Women in Roman Law and Society}, 100.

\textsuperscript{39} These guidelines are from the Digest and are upheld time and again by the jurists, who seem to all agree that in these cases the woman has the right of final say on these matters and if not consulted is empowered to stop the work in progress, have what has been accomplished removed, or seek monetary remedy. A clause in the Augustan legislation (\textit{lex Julia adulteriis}) prohibited the sale of women's dotal lands and the manumission of her dotal slaves without her consent. In Rome, as opposed to the Greek East, both movables and immovables were routinely part of a woman's dowry. Gardner, \textit{Women in Roman Law and Society}, 100.
Apart from the dowry, the wife's property is entirely her own and remains separate from her husband's assets. She is able to engage in business transactions, and the profits from these endeavors are to be used according to her needs.\textsuperscript{40} This is self-serving in part since there is no obligation on the part of the husband to provide for the wife's maintenance in cases of divorce. Indeed, the dowry would be returned in most cases, but this does not occur in one lump sum, except in cases of gross misconduct. The ex-husband makes tri-annual payments until the debt is paid in full. In cases of divorce, the woman's maintenance falls to her father, if he is still living, and, if he is deceased, then she is required to live off any remaining monies from her dowry supplemented by her own, personal assets.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, the careful administration of her business interests and the account books she maintains of her husband's use of her dotal monies is insurance against an uncertain future.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Tacitus and Juvenal on Dowry}

Under the system of marriage \textit{sine manu}, many women bring a great deal of money and property to the marriage, and the continuance of the marriage is as dependent upon the power of her natal family as on her husband. This may appear to the husband as a loss of power or that the marriage itself is not within his authority to control. This lack

\textsuperscript{40} This is not to say that women were free to do whatever they wished, but only that in their financial dealings outside the dotal arrangements, their guidelines were not drawn by their husbands per se, but by the legal, social, and moral standards of society.

\textsuperscript{41} Gardner, \textit{Women in Roman Law and Society}, 114.

\textsuperscript{42} This does not negate the possibility, or even likelihood, that women found pleasure in their business dealings. I simply point out the practical end of the arrangement.
of control may be one of the reasons that various writers critique women with large dowries. For example, in *Germania*, Tacitus describes that among the Germans, it is not the wife who brings the dowry to the husband, but the husband to the wife. Tacitus' approval of this practice suggests that he thinks this reversal would correctly realign the power dynamics of the household. In Chapter Eighteen he explains the German dowry:

The dowry is brought not by the wife to her husband, but by the husband to the wife. Parents and relatives are present and approve the gifts, and *these gifts are not meant for the delight of the women or for the decoration of the new bride, but are oxen, a bridled horse, a shield with a German spear, and a sword*. The bride is taken in exchange for these gifts and in turn she brings some weapons to her husband: this they consider the greatest bond, these the arcane ritual objects, these the sacred marriage gods.43 (Italics mine)

First, Tacitus approves of the husband bringing the dowry to the wife so that from the very first moment of their marriage she will recognize that it is her husband who holds the purse strings and, consequently, the power. In contrast to the Roman practice, among the Germans, a husband takes a wife not for financial, social, or political advantage, but for more practical purposes such as partnership and childbearing. Second, the marriage gifts presented to brides in Rome are critiqued as extravagances and luxuries that corrupt the women. In contrast, the Germans do not “spoil” their women, instead the gifts of oxen and bridled horse act as symbols of labor pointing to the woman's proper role in the marriage, namely to toil in service to her husband. The implements of war that are presented as the sacred gods of marriage remind the woman that she must fight and

die alongside her husband, if necessary. Both the service animals and the weapons act as a bond between them, not cash or property. Through the incorporation of this imagery, Tacitus not so subtly signals his disapproval of the marriage practices in Rome and also (likewise, not so subtly) links women to the service animals through her duty to breed (sic vivendum, sic pariendum). Indeed, he lays the root and responsibility for Rome's problems squarely at the door of women's excess and financial power. When a woman brings an inordinately large dowry, and when she expects and accepts expensive and luxurious marriage gifts, she is setting the wrong tone for future marital relations. She should instead recognize the mastery of her husband and be grateful to him even for her very life, a life that is inextricably tied to him in every way.44

In Juvenal's Sixth Satire, the author lampoons the institution of marriage and critiques the foibles of the female sex with exaggeration to great humorous effect.45 Juvenal addresses the satire to a friend, Postumus, who is contemplating marriage, and Juvenal intends to point out to him all of the hazards of this decision. He begins the treatise by laying out all the different reasons that a man may want to marry and then systematically shows the folly of his logic. Juvenal's thesis is that there are no chaste or

---

44 This is made evident a few lines later in the same passage (18), "Lest the woman should think that reflection on virtues and the circumstances of war are beyond her, she is warned by the very auspices which begin the marriage that she should become an ally of her husband in toil and in danger, to suffer and dare in peace as in war: the yoked oxen, the battle ready horse, the arms that are handed over all proclaim this. So she must live and so she must breed." (emphasis mine) ne se mulier extra virtutum cogitationes extraque bellorum casus putet, ipsis incipientis matrimonii auspiciis admonetur venire se laborum periculumque sociam, idem in pace, idem in proelio passuram ausuramque: hoc iuncti boves, hoc paratus equus, hoc data arma denuntiant. sic vivendum, sic pariendum.

45 The text and all translations come from Juvenal, The Satires of Juvenal and Perseus, (Ramsay, LCL).
virtuous women left in the world. Indeed, he claims that all women of his own time period would sooner run off with a famous actor or gladiator than be a chaste Roman matron or faithful wife. If a man mistakenly thinks that he has found the one virtuous woman left in the world, all he need do is look to the wife of the Emperor Claudius to see that even society's best women are promiscuous.

When Juvenal begins the next section, he specifically lampoons women who bring large dowries to a marriage. In these cases, men must submit to female authority. Not surprisingly, women who are the most praised by the husbands for virtue and chastity are the women who bring the largest dowries. In Juvenal's estimation, this demonstrates that women with large dowries ruled the household, so much so that it buys their freedom to commit adultery. However, the inclusion of the satiric trope is also evidence that cases in which women are the wealthier partner in marriages was not an uncommon occurrence. Juvenal's underlying discomfort here is the power disparity that wealthy women bring to marriage.

46 Lines 82–113. In Juvenal's estimation, the fact the Eppia would leave her respectable, senatorial husband and run off with a gladiator, even risking death on the open seas, is proof of the insatiable lust and susceptibility of women to the charms of famous men.

47 Lines 114–32. "Do the concerns of a private household and the doings of Eppia affect you? Then look at those who rival the gods, and hear what Claudius endured. As soon as his wife perceived that her husband was asleep, this august harlot was shameless enough to prefer a common mat to the imperial couch." *Quid privata domus, quid fecerit Eppia, curas? respite rivales divorum, Claudius audi quae tulerit. dormire virum cum senserat uxor, ausa Palatino tegetem praeferre cubili.*

48 Lines 136–41. "But tell me why is Censennia, on her husband's testimony, the best of wives? She brought him a million sesterces; that is the price at which he calls her chaste." *Optima set quare Censennia teste marito?* bis quingena dedit: tanti vocat ille pudicam.

49 This is supported by statements in Plutarch as well as the large number of legal opinions in the Digest that deal with the disposition of women's dowries on the death of or divorce from their husbands, especially bks 23–24.
For Juvenal, this power disparity is not just reserved for women who are too rich, but also for those who are too beautiful or even too virtuous. The beautiful wife, in short, "rules the roost," at least as long as she retains her beauty.\(^{50}\) The virtuous wife shows up her husband by "forever reckoning her merits against" his and emasculating him.\(^ {51}\) In Juvenal's presentation of marriage, when the male is subordinated to the female, the natural social order is upset.\(^ {52}\) This imbalance within the home and marriage ultimately affects society as a whole. He describes marriage as the ultimate loss of masculinity and authority up until the point that the man becomes no better than a service animal, the lowest of all beings.\(^ {53}\) In a key section, Juvenal gives his comic solution to the problem: "Keep your women at home under lock and key!"\(^ {54}\) In this way Juvenal reckons that this will at least prevent women from exercising their natural lust and libido. He suggests as a remedy to these social problems that if men must marry, then they should never allow

\(^{50}\) Line 149. "But till that day comes, the lady rules the roast [sic]." *intera calet et regnat*. Lines 146–48 discuss what to do with the wife who has lost her beauty. "Pack up your traps and be off! you've become a nuisance; you are forever blowing your nose; be off, and be quick about it! There's another wife coming who will not sniffle." *collige sarcinulas,* *dicet libertus,* *et exi. iam gravis es nobis,* *et saepe emungeris. exi oeci* *et "propera, sicco venit altera naso."

\(^{51}\) Lines 178–79. "For is any dignity in a wife, any beauty, worth the cost, if she is forever reckoning up her merits against you?" *qua tanti gravitas, qua forma, ut se tibi semper imputet?* Further in line 224 he states, "Thus does she lord it over her husband." *set mox haec regna relinquit?"

\(^{52}\) This is made especially clear in the beginning of the treatise when he recalls the golden era of the world when Saturn ruled and Chastity still dwelled on earth. In this golden era, men and women followed their proscribed roles and were the better for it in Juvenal's estimation. The introduction begins with, "In the days of Saturn, I believe, Chastity (Pudicitiam) still lingered on earth, and was to be seen for a time," lines 1–2. *Credo Pudicitiam Saturno rege moratam in terrisvisamque diu.*

\(^{53}\) Lines 207–08. "Then bow your head and submit your neck to the yoke." *summite caput cverce parata ferre iugum.* Based on Tacitus' use of this same imagery in the discussion of *Germania* 18 above, Juvenal seems to imply here that by linking the man to a service animal he is implicitly also lampooning his masculinity.

\(^{54}\) Line 346. *"Pone seram cohibe"*
women to have the upper hand; however, men's lives and society as a whole would be better served if only men could do without women entirely. All of this is of course comic exaggeration on Juvenal's part, but the best comedy touches upon recognizable characters and situations to connect with its audience. This suggests that discomfort with female power in marriage was prevalent enough to be lampooned to great effect.\(^5\)

**The Man of Letters: Plutarch**

Rather than a treatise on the equality of the sexes, in "Advice to the Bride and Groom" Plutarch sets out to show that the virtues of women are the same as men’s virtues. He addresses this treatise to Pollianus and Eurydice, a newly married couple who were also his students. In a variety of examples drawn from the heroic past, Plutarch situates himself in the tradition of peri gamou. Rather than explicitly critiquing the present state of marriage, he offers his examples to demonstrate the wisdom that the traditional advice continues to hold even for people in his own time. Cynthia Patterson points out:

Plutarch's academic arguments come from a wide range of philosophic traditions…he views the marriage through a philosophic lens, but the aspect of marriage that he is interested in is not marriage conforming to natural law…his advice is intended for a husband and wife living together on the basis of traditional gender structures and values.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Plutarch too suggests, albeit in a very different way, that women who are not under male authority are prone to licentious and vice-ridden behavior. In Plutarch, this behavior included religious rites, astrology and other forms of divination, and extra marital affairs. All Greek texts and translations are from S. Pomeroy, *Advice to the Bride and Groom, and A Consolation to His Wife*, ed. and trans. S. Pomeroy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) unless otherwise noted. Here the reference is to the text on page 48 of Pomeroy's work.

\(^6\) Cynthia Patterson, "Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom: Traditional Wisdom through a Philosopher Lens," in *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom*, ed. and trans. S. Pomeroy, 137.
Plutarch is not proposing a new model for marriage that has equality between the sexes, but an appreciation of the wisdom of the traditional values available to educated people of his own time.⁵⁷

Plutarch addresses the majority of his advice to Eurydice, not Pollianus, suggesting that the greater onus is placed on her for the success of the marriage. The rhetoric focuses on convincing Eurydice that acceding to her husband's wishes, seeking to please him, and submitting to his greater wisdom and authority will bring her the satisfaction and pleasure of a good marriage. For example, if her husband commits adultery she should not question him or become angry. Instead, she should exercise self-control and be patient with her husband as her self-mastery and virtue will call upon his best self and bring him to his senses once again. It is through submission to her husband that the woman achieves her own personal happiness.

[There] is a concept of womanhood whose real happiness lay in finding a man strong enough to master her. He [Plutarch] acknowledged her agency, her moral choice, her otherness…Urging her to think of herself as his mirror, she would reflect what she chose to emulate in him. She is not to be equal but is to choose her inequality.⁵⁸

This view of femininity was not woman as a defective man, but of the female as the natural dependent of the masculine, whose virtue was an adornment to innate

---

⁵⁷ Examples from Plutarch's text include: the Trojan women who created a permanent home for their people to avoid wandering and the Phocian women and women from Chios who, like Lucretia, would die rather than be captured and suffer rape and slavery. When Philip tries to entice the slaves to abandon their masters by promising freedom and marriage to their domina, the women held firm and supported and assisted the men, and the slaves did not abandon their masters. All of these stories are meant to demonstrate and exemplify the type of unwavering loyalty that men desired and women should display toward their husbands.

masculine authority. One thing that can be said about Plutarch's work is that in spite of its obvious defects for modern relationships, he envisions a different type of marriage that is at least in form egalitarian.\(^59\) He assumes that Eurydice has an intellectual, social, and emotional dimension that may be different from Pollianus' but is equally developed.\(^60\) In asking her to bend to her husband's will and authority, he assumes that Eurydice is Pollianus’ moral equal, but she must sacrifice this for the good of the marriage and the harmony of society.

The stories of women's virtue in Plutarch's treatise are always placed in relationship to male virtues, and, moreover, they are emphasized as being harmonious with the wishes of their husbands and societal norms. In his introduction, Plutarch begins by suggesting an amendment to Thucydides 2.45 where the best women are those of whom little is said.\(^61\) Plutarch suggests that the best women are those who are unknown

---

\(^{59}\) I use this term loosely not to suggest that Plutarch envisioned husbands and wives as equals, but that he allowed wives to be independent moral agents who were capable of making decisions and contributing to the overall functioning of the marital relationship.

\(^{60}\) Eurydice and Pollianus were both students of Plutarch, and he enjoins both to remember what they learned in their philosophical studies and to use it wisely to create harmony in their marriage. For example, "Familiarize yourself Eurydice, in particular with the sayings of good and wise persons (ζωὸν σοφῶν), always have on your lips the remarks you learned with me as a girl. That will please your husband and earn you the admiration of other women, because you will be so splendidly and grandly adorned at no expense." *Plutarch’s Advice to the Bride and Groom*, trans. and ed. S. Pomeroy, 13, 31.

\(^{61}\) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.45, (LCL, C. F. Smith). "If again I must say anything on the subject of woman's excellence (ἀρετά) also, with reference to those of you will now be in widowhood, I will express it all in a brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of the natural character that belongs to you; and great is hers, who is least talked of among the men; either for good or evil." Plutarch, "On the Bravery of Women," in *Moralia* 3.242E (LCL, F. C. Babbitt). "Regarding the virtues of women, Clea, I do not hold the same opinion as Thucydides. For he declares that the best woman is she about whom there is the least talk among persons outside regarding censure or commendation, feeling that the name of the good woman, like her person, ought to be shut up indoors and never go out."
for their physical features or attributes and are well known for their virtue. He identifies this as a Roman custom and declares that it is superior to the Greek way of commemorating women. When he puts the lives of men and women side by side, he declares that the virtues are one and the same. Women who use reason, fortitude, bravery and self-control are the best women; however, these women do not use their virtue for their own sake, but to support, save, and honor the men around them. Here women's “virility” is linked to a woman's capacity for loyalty and commitment to virtue.\(^62\)

In philosophical discussions, especially among the Stoics, there was a call to renounce marriage in favor of the pursuit of intellectual life. Plutarch, although a follower of Stoicism, does not follow Stoic principles in this matter. Marriage is still a “good” because when women are controlled within in a properly stratified marriage, this brings harmony to her person and to the home, which will consequently be reflected in a harmonious society. While it is true that both “manliness” and femininity are defined by self-control (\textit{sophrosyne}), when applied to women, this self-control is centered almost universally on sexual self-control. In Stoic discussions, male self-control covers a wide range of topics, such as eating, drinking, anger, pain, empathy, and actions. However, when the same principal is applied to women in Roman literature, it is almost always relegated to \textit{pudicitia} or its loss.\(^63\) Plutarch urges Eurydice to use her self-control

---


\(^63\) This was both a mental and physical virtue in Rome. It required women and men (theoretically) to conform to the mental attitude of modesty and to represent themselves physically in a way that enhanced and telegraphed this modesty to others. This encompassed dress, physical appearance, actions, and
(sophrosyne) in the bedroom and not to press her innate advantages there, but to let her modesty shine most brightly. In essence, he urges her not to attempt to control her husband through sexual means, but once again to subjugate herself to her husband's needs for the sake of their marriage. He makes no similar injunction to Pollianus. The assumption is that women are the ones who can control men through sexual means, not the other way around. Implicitly the wife becomes responsible for the sexual health and functioning of the marriage.64

Christian texts praise women both for their renunciation of marriage and for their submission within properly sanctioned unions. For example, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* praises female celibacy when Thecla renounces marriage and is willing to embrace death rather than submit to sexual relations.65 On the other hand, the Pastoral Epistles take a more traditional stance by advocating marriage and childbearing within a traditional, stratified household, even going so far as discouraging celibacy among young widows by relationships. Even the suggestion of *impudicitia* among women was enough for it to be considered true. If a woman spent time alone with a man who was not her husband, then it mattered less what actually occurred and more what it appeared to signal. Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, esp. 281–318.

64 Plutarch's representation of female chastity, receptivity, and understanding has little to do with the virility and free choice of many of the women in the apocryphal Acts. In Plutarch, religious rites become a problem area in which women can be led astray and engage in the most shameful practices, but in a work like the Acts of Thecla, religion is the arena in which women's virility and free choice is exhibited to its greatest degree. By the time of Nero, Christian women had been martyred in the arena for their beliefs and shown the willingness to die for their faith. This may have led some writers to praise these women as exemplars for their independence from their husbands' authority and religious life (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.43; cf. Tertullian, *ad Uxorem*, 4). But whether or not the actions of these female martyrs had an influence on Plutarch's work is not known.

requiring their remarriage. Acts represents yet another voice in the conversation by showing Tabitha and Lydia as engaged in the social and religious lives of their towns outside male control. Both women are praised for their adherence to virtues of work and service. Indeed, the virtues that they display are most closely linked to virtues found in Jewish texts.

Plutarch's conception of Eurydice and Juvenal's female targets are informed by their knowledge and experience of women of this time period. In the salons and dinner parties of the Roman West, women participated in philosophical and political discussions, played music, and wrote poetry; namely, they seem to participate fully in these activities, assuming their equal knowledge and ability to do so with men. What seems to trouble both Plutarch and Juvenal is not that women were educated and literate conversational partners, but that they would outshine the men in their company and therefore upset the “natural” order of the sexes.

---

66 1 Timothy 5:9, for example. Later Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian praised Christian marriage as a good. Clement encouraged husbands and wives to dine together (Christ the Educator, 7), and Tertullian highlights the importance of shared religious experience between husband and wife in ad Uxorem, 2.8. However, just as we find in Plutarch, neither man is advocating marital equality, but rather a properly stratified marriage in which the husband is in control.

67 See Chapters Four and Five for a detailed discussion of these details of the Tabitha and Lydia narratives. For a discussion of the themes in

68 Juvenal, Satires, 6., LCL, Ramsay, 448–56. nec historias sciat omnes, sed quaedam ex libris et non intellegat. odi hanc ego quae repetit volvitque Palaemonis artem servata semper lege et ratione loquendi ignotosque mihi tenet antiquaria versus nec curanda viris opicae castigat amicae verba; soloecismum liceat fecisse marito. "Let her not know all history; let there be some things in her reading which she does not understand. I hate a woman who is forever consulting and poring over the 'Grammar' of Palaemon, who observes all the rules and laws of language, who quotes from ancient poets that I have never heard of, and corrects her unlettered female friends for slips of the speech that no man need trouble about: let husbands at least be permitted to make slips in grammar!"
The Historians: Tacitus and Suetonius

*Exempla* and foundation tales play an important role in creating history and in relaying the foundations of sexual ethics in much of Roman literature.69 This is especially true of the work of historians such as Livy and Valerius Maximus, who draw upon Roman moral tradition to tackle questions of sexual ethics and make women's bodies the boundary line between proper use of power and excess.70 Like earlier historians such as Livy and Valerius, Tacitus uses the past as a repository of virtue, which he uses to express his attitudes and opinions about the state of affairs in Rome of the second century CE.71 This tendency is nowhere more explicit that in his description of the German women in *Germania* 17–20.72 Rebecca Langlands notes that Tacitus uses the term *impudicitias* far more frequently than *pudicitia*, which indicates his emphasis on vice rather than virtue.73 Rather than direct Roman men (or women) to look to the rustic German culture for their model, Tacitus uses the examples to scold excesses among Romans. If people in a barbarian culture can follow a strict moral code, then it should be

---


70 Livy, *ab Urbe Condita*, 1.57–59; 3.44–52; 38.24.2–9; 39.8–19. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, 2.praef.-1.7; 2.5.6; 6.1.1–2; 7.3.10; 7.7.4.

71 Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 320. She contrasts Tacitus' focus on moral perversion and "the salutary accounts of past deeds in Livy's history," where problems are resolved and moral stasis is achieved at the end of each example.

72 Latin texts and translations are all from Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 321–23.

73 Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 320. Tacitus uses *impudicitia* 16 times in contrast to the 6 times that he uses *pudicitia*. 
far easier for Romans to do so.\textsuperscript{74} Literacy among Roman women has led to sexual intrigue and promiscuity, and the pursuit of luxury has led to moral corruption and the disappearance of \textit{pudicitia}.

\textit{Pudicitia} offered publically (\textit{pudicitia publicata}) is contrasted with \textit{pudicitia} protected (\textit{pudicitia saepta}), which is uncorrupted by public spectacles and dinner parties.\textsuperscript{75} The contrast between public and private runs throughout this section. Tacitus asserts that women are biologically suited to the private realm and that once a woman enters her husband's home she should not leave unless she has been turned out of the marriage, namely divorced.\textsuperscript{76} Once the woman is in the street, she is never taken back inside the family structure by another husband, no matter how beautiful or wealthy she may be.\textsuperscript{77}

Roman women are also critiqued for their lack of maternal skills. German women breastfeed their own children and do not pass them off to a wet nurse, they do not limit the number of children that they have through abortion or birth control, and they are firm moral guides and models for their children when passing down traditions rather than

\textsuperscript{74} For a discussion of the use of this trope, see Dixon, \textit{Reading Roman Women}, 56–65.

\textsuperscript{75} 19. \textit{ergo saepta pudicitia agunt, nullis spectaculorum illecebris, nullis conviviorum irritationibus corruptae…publicatae enim pudicitiae nulla venia} (bold mine)

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Germania} 19.4. \textit{expellit domo maritus}.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Germania} 19.5–6. \textit{publicatae enim pudicitiae nulla venia: non forma, non actate non opibus maritum invenerit} This indicates that once the woman is cast out of the home, she is forever an outsider without remedy.
relying on laws to limit bad behavior.\textsuperscript{78} German fecundity is contrasted sharply against Rome's deliberate sterility; indeed, the entire critique is set upon the shoulders of women. However this is not simply a straightforward discussion of the childbirth/rearing practices, but a symbolic jab at the deliberate “sterility” of Rome's golden past in influencing moral behavior in Tacitus' time.\textsuperscript{79} He stresses that because the good traditions of the past are not being passed on to daughters-in-law and children, vice and corruption are rampant in Roman society.\textsuperscript{80} In another passage, Tacitus claims that a society's ills are directly linked to the deterioration of proper sexual roles and male authority. When men are ruled by a woman they live in a state of being "lower than a slave."\textsuperscript{81}

Suetonius echoes many of the same themes found in Tacitus, especially the assertion that although Roman may pass public laws aimed at curbing immorality or even

\textsuperscript{78} Germania 20.2- sua quemque mater uberibus alit, nec ancillis ac nutricibus delegantur. Also, 19.11–12, numerum liberorum finire aut quemquam ex agnatis necare flagitium habetur, plusque ibi boni mores valent quam alibi bonae leges. For other examples of the critique of deliberate childlessness, see Ovid Ars Amatoria 2.14; Pliny, Natural History, 10.172; and Juvenal, Satires 6. 595–97 (see directly below). For a discussion of the possible reasons for this, see Dixon, Roman Family, 119–22.

\textsuperscript{79} Ellen O'Gorman's fine work on this imagery in Tacitus points out that women are used figuratively as the embodiment of family and a symbol of both what is best about the past and a better future. Women are also used pervasively as symbols of the moral problems of the present as they are in this passage. O'Gormon, Irony and Misreadings in the Annals of Tacitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 60.

\textsuperscript{80} Germania 19.6–7, nemo enim illic vitia ridet, nec corrumpere et corrumpi saeculum vocatur. 18.12–13 is even more explicit: sic viviendum, sic pariendum: accipere se quae liberis inviolata sc digna reddat, quae nurus accipiant rurusque ad nepotes referantur (emphasis mine). The woman's life is linked directly to her ability to produce children, and then in the very next line, what she breeds (her progeny) will be un tarnished (or tarnished as the case may be) by what example she passes down.

\textsuperscript{81} Germania 45.9, "The tribe of the Sitones (?) is like the Swedes in every way except that they are ruled by a woman and therefore, they fall not merely below the position of freedmen, but even beneath that of slaves." Suetonius Sitonum gentes continuantur. cetera similes uno differunt, quod femina dominatur; in tantum non modo a libertate sed etiam a servitute degenerant. Once again, women and slaves are linked negatively in the literature (cf. n. 3 above). Cf. Juvenal 6.207-208. See introductory paragraph to the current chapter.
promoting *pudicitia*, they engage in and promote *impudicitia* in their personal lives.\(^8^2\) For example, Vespasian enacts “good” legislation that prohibits sexual relations between slaves and freewomen, but in reality women are routinely and openly having sex with slaves.\(^8^3\) The fact that the most vigorous critique is for Domitian indicates that Suetonius wanted to demonstrate that the emperor's grip on moral leadership was ever weakening and that the state of society had been in a steady state of decline until it reached its nadir in the present.\(^8^4\) Even Martial, whose work could be interpreted as praising Domitian, takes a dim view of the laws to regulate *pudicitia*.\(^8^5\) The recurring theme in each of these writers is that women are the most vulnerable to *impudicitia*, but they are also the ones who *should* be exemplars of this virtue. Although *libido* was a problem in the work of

\(^{8^2}\) For example, *Claud.* 43.1. "Shortly before his [Claudius'] death he gave some quite clear signs of regretting his marriage to Agrippina and his adoption of Nero; when his freedmen were reminding him of and praising him for the case in which he condemned a certain woman for adultery, he declared that it was his own fate to have marriages that were *impudica* although not unpunished." *sub exitu vitae signa quaedam nec obscura paenitentis de matrimonio Agrippinae deque Neronis adoptione dederat, siquidem commemorantibus libertis ac laudantibus cognitionem, qua pridie quandam adulteriæ ream condemnarat, sibi quoque in fatis esse tactavit omnia *impudica*, sed non *impunita* matrimonia.* In this case, Claudius' positive action was to deal with the external problem of the adulterous woman, but in his familial relationships he was blind and ineffective to the adulteries. Langlands, *Sexual*, 359.

\(^{8^3}\) *Vespasian*, 2.1.

\(^{8^4}\) Domitian was the emperor that both Tacitus and Suetonius lived under, so even though they both published their work in the succeeding regime, their writing reflects the most recent experience of this moral decline. Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 360. She also points out that in spite of these moral reforms and numismatic representations of the imperial household as *Pudicitia*, the reality of Roman society was one of moral decline.

\(^{8^5}\) *Martial*, *Epigrams* 6.7. "It is fewer, or certainly no more, than thirty days, Faustinus/Since the Julian law was revived for the people/And *Pudicitia* was ordered to enter homes./And already Telesilla has married her tenth husband./A woman who marries so many times is not really marrying; she is a legalised adulteress./I am less offended by an ordinary adulteress." In essence, the reinstatement of the *lex Iulia* is good in theory, but does little to influence actual behavior.
republican historians, imperial historians focus almost exclusively on the excesses of female libido without any suggestion or hope of redress. Rebecca Langlands observes:

*Pudicitia* was instrumental in regulating this system [Roman hierarchy and social relations] keeping some individuals apart, drawing boundaries and emphasising differences and distances between individuals…Female *pudicitia* is a focus for the expression of anxiety about the misuse of many of the instruments of power in Roman culture.”

What is striking is the absence of this same type of critique in Acts in which women are praised or critiqued for different reasons.

**Women under the Law and Guardianship**

The Roman jurist Gaius reports, “For the ancients wished women, even if they were of age, to be in *tutela*, on account of the levity of their nature (*propter animi levitatem*)” (Gaius 1.144). However, he also states, “For women who are of full age conduct their own business for themselves and in certain cases the tutor applies his permission for form’s sake” (Gaius 1.190). This type of tension in the sources suggests that the history of the *tutela mulierum perpetua* was one of fairly steady decline.

---


87 The Greek equivalent of *pudicitia*, *sophrosyne* does not appear in Acts. Neither good nor bad women are discussed in relationship to their sexual virtues or vices. This will be discussed in more detail in Four and Five below. I in no way mean to suggest that there is a moral superiority or moral high ground in Acts over against pagan literature. Women are used instrumentally in Acts as well, but they are praised and critiqued in different ways. Acts seems to avoid the topic of sexual morality entirely.


of formal law (such as in making wills, taking out loans, or contracting marriage and dowries), in practice, women managed their own affairs without a great deal of oversight or impediment. However, it should be noted that these guardians did exist and did have a function in any legal dealings, wills, or dowry arrangements. In actuality, the reason for the presence of the tutor was most likely for the preservation of land holdings and other capital by the wife's family. Nonetheless, even with all caution in place, the number of wealthy women attested in the sources suggests that, at least in these cases, women were able to work within the established system to create and preserve wealth in spite of the legal limitations placed on them.

There is no presumption in Plutarch that Eurydice is need of a guardian or other male authority. Plutarch instead urges her to submit to her husband's guidance and authority for the good of her marriage. In section 48 of Advice he describes the husband's role: "You are her father, lady-mother, and her brother." The inclusion of mother in this list is important since mothers were the primary moral guides and disciplinarians of their male and female children. Therefore, the ideal husband is not just the legal authority of the wife (as a father would be) but also the moral authority. Eurydice's response to this should be, "Husband, you are my guide, philosopher and teacher." Plutarch does not

---


91 Gardner, Women in Roman Law and Society, 5–30.

92 Advice to the Bride and Groom, 48.9–12. The term used here for guide is καθηγητής and not the usual terms in Greek for a woman's legal guardian as found in the documents from Egypt. See Chapter Two.
argue that Eurydice, as an independent moral agent and an educated woman, is legally
required to submit to her husband's authority, but she does so because it is for the sake of
harmony and an expression of her innate reason.

Juvenal says little about the actual office of guardianship, but he does allude to
the lack of authority that guardians held and the lack of husbands’ guardianship over their
wives. He suggests that perhaps the presence of women in the law courts is ubiquitous
perhaps because they do not have guardians with the authority to prevent them from
doing so.93 Further, he also states, "If Manilia is not a defendant, then she'll be the
plaintiff; she will herself frame and adjust the pleadings; she will be ready to instruct
Celsus himself how to open his case and how to urge his points."94 Here the supposition
is that women were able to bring legal actions, but more than this, they were also very
involved in these cases and knew their rights under the law by directing the actions of the
litigator. Juvenal does not make any mention of the presence of a legal guardian here who
could perhaps have checked these “overbearing impulses,” and he assumes that the
woman herself without husband or guardian brings, guides, and is concerned with the
outcome of the case.

In spite of the fact that the law requires the majority of women to obtain the
consent of a guardian to engage in legal action, the reality is that most women are not
seriously impeded or disadvantaged by this requirement. As Gardner wisely points out,

94 Satires 6.243–45. accusat Manilia, si rea non est. conponunt ipsae per se formantque libellos,
principium atque locos Celso dictare paratae.
"What the law says people (the guardian) may do is not the same as what they actually do."\textsuperscript{95} When \textit{manus} marriages pass out of favor, the guardian's consent becomes little more than a formality. Women outside of \textit{manus} also seem to have access to a \textit{peculium} in many cases.\textsuperscript{96} The evidence suggests that both sons and daughters have access to this resource. The jurist Ulpian assumes that the masculine gender employed in the language of the law encompasses both men and women.\textsuperscript{97} Pomponius specifies that women can draw on their \textit{peculium} for a dowry.\textsuperscript{98} Finally, Gaius emphasizes that the use of the \textit{peculium} by women is to be allowed especially in cases in which the daughter or female slave is engaged as a \textit{sarcinatrix}, weaver, or in some other common trade.\textsuperscript{99} Gardner suggests that the need for a \textit{peculium} on the part of daughters would be far less common than sons since the daughters have access to their dowries, and most evidence of women in the cloth trade is of slaves and women who earn a meager living.\textsuperscript{100} However, this does

\textsuperscript{95} Gardner, \textit{Women in Roman Law and Society}, 5.

\textsuperscript{96} Those women under \textit{potestas} could legally own nothing. The \textit{peculium} was a way around this issue. Fathers or grandfathers could give a sum of money to a child to use for contractual or business obligations. For a further definition of \textit{peculium}, see Crook, \textit{Law and Life of Rome}, 119–20.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Digest}, 15.1.1.2–3. "The words of the edict are as follows, ‘When a transaction has been entered into with a person in the power of another.’ Although the edict uses the masculine and not the feminine form of the word 'person,' an action in respect of woman nevertheless lies under this edict."

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Digest}, 23.3.24. "Where a daughter in power, who is about to marry, gives a dowry to her future husband out of her \textit{peculium} which she has the right to administer and while her \textit{peculium} is in the same position, there is a divorce, the dowry can be lawfully repaid to her, just like a debt from the \textit{peculium}, of any other debtor."

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Digest}, 15.1.27. "An action on the \textit{peculium} lies in respect of slave-girls and daughters-in-power, especially if they ply some common trade such as sewing or weaving. Actions of deposit lie on their account, as Julian says."

not account for the evidence of women who engaged in these businesses not just as workers but as overseers and owners. Moreover, fathers did give grants of varying sizes to their daughters in addition to their dotal monies, as suggested in *Digest* 24.1. These types of grants, like the gifts (*dons mortis causa*) in the documents from the Judaean desert, allowed fathers and grandfathers to provide for their daughters’ and granddaughters’ future maintenance. In summary, although laws require a guardian for women, in most cases it seems that women act with a good deal of legal autonomy. Even in cases in which a guardian is used, this does not appear to be a serious impediment to women's freedom.

**Women in Commerce**

If we are to believe the literary sources, a woman involved in business is bad enough, but men and women engaged in business transactions are suspect and, worse, could be concealing something illicit. For example, in *Pro Caelio*, Cicero uses the fact that money is exchanged between the Clodia and Caelius as proof of illicit sexual relations between the two. This might lead one to believe that “proper” women do not

---

101 *CIL* 6.9496, 9497, 34273 for examples of women overseers in the urban wool trade. Also, for an instance of a *lanarius negotians*, see *CIL* 2.862. I will argue that we can add Lydia to the list of women in higher level positions in the cloth industry.

102 Gifts between husbands and wives were prohibited but not between parents and daughters and daughters-in-law, which seemed to occur with some regularity over and above the dowry. See also *Digest* 24.1.3.7. "There is no prohibition against gifts between mothers/in-law and daughters/in-law or vice versa because parental power is not involved here," and 32.16, "For example, where a father/in-law makes a gift to his daughter/in-law…the spirit of the oration allows all these people to make gifts as well."

103 See Chapter Two above.

engage in business transactions for fear of what it might signify. However, in another of Cicero's letters, Atticus warns Cicero that taking a large loan from his friend Caerellia might "produce gossip."\footnote{Cicero, \textit{Att.} 12.51.3, LCL, Windstet, vol. 3.} This suggests that in spite of appearances, these types of transactions between men and women did occur. One century later, Pliny the Younger discusses business transactions with women in his social circle. In \textit{Epistle 7}, Pliny describes a business dealing with Corellia as a friendly matter between co-heirs.\footnote{Pliny the Younger, \textit{Epistles}, 7.11, LCL, Melmoth.} Pliny also benefits from the will of the very wealthy Pomponia Galla over against her natal son.\footnote{Pliny the Younger, \textit{Epistles}, 5.1, LCL, Melmoth.} Rather than a prohibition or reticence, this evidence instead suggests that women

\begin{quote}
Muirier, quid tibi cum Caelio, quid cum homine adolescensulo, quid cum alieno? Cur aut tam familiaris fuisti ut aurum commodares, aut tam inimica ut venenum timeres?
\end{quote}

"Woman, what business have you with Caelius, with a mere stripling, with a stranger? Why have you been so intimate with him as to provide him with gold, or so hostile that you were afraid of being poisoned?"

\begin{quote}
Cicero, \textit{Att.} 12.51.3, LCL, Windstet, vol. 3. de Caerellia quid tibi placeret Tiro mihi narravit; debere non esse dignitatis meae, perscriptionem tibi placere: hoc metuere, alterum in metu non ponerere. sed et haec et multa alia coram. sustinenda tamen, si tibi videbitur, solutio est nominis Caerelliani dum et de Metone et de Faberio sciamus.
\end{quote}

"Tiro told me what you thought ought to be done about Caerellia: that it was unbecoming to me to be in debt; that you were in favour of an assignment: Fear this and not the other? passing strange! But this and much besides when we meet. However, we must suspend the payment of the debt to Caerellia till we know about Meton and Faberius."

\begin{quote}
Legatum mihi obvenit modicum sed amplissimo gratius. Cur amplissimo gratius? Pomponia Galla exheredato filio Asudio Curiano heredem reliquerat me, dederat coheredes Sertorium Severum praetorium virum aliosque splendidos equites Romanos. "A small legacy which was lately left me, has given me greater pleasure than I could have received by a very large one. How so, you ask? Pomponia Galla, having disinherited her son Asudius Curianus, made me her heir and appointed Sertorius Severus, a man of Praetorian rank, together with
\end{quote}
dispose of their wealth and transact their business without serious impediment, with both other women and men. But there was some degree of difference between the genders, as Dixon points out:

Vertical social relations were, on the whole, less likely to give rise to gossip. It was expected that upper-class women, like their male counterparts, held audiences of petitioning *clientes* and accepted the social and economic obligations and benefits of patronage to their former slaves.  

In essence, business dealings between the different social classes arouse little suspicion, but those between social peers could be problematic and may require some explanation.

Inscriptions give evidence that women own ships that are involved in the risky business of large scale maritime import/export. In addition, amphoras stamped with women's names indicate their managerial involvement in capital-intensive businesses like viniculture and wine export. In both these inscriptions, the evidence shows that women not only have the available capital to run these businesses, but also the managerial skills

---


109 *CIL* 15.3691, 3729, 3845–3847 for women ship owners. For the well-known risks involved in maritime trade see Cicero, *de Officiis*, 1.150–151, LCL, Miller.

and ability to conduct necessary business transactions and legal matters associated with these functions.  

Pompeii

A large body of evidence for the role of women outside the home comes from inscriptions in southern Italy. The first major source of information comes from Pompeii. In a town that has a population of approximately 20,000, there are numerous inscriptions to and about women who held public positions and owned businesses. One of largest and most impressive buildings in all of Pompeii is the uniquely designed structure donated to the city by Eumachia. Eumachia's father, L. Eumachius, was one of the Greek colonists who came to Pompeii in the latter half of the first century BCE. At the time of his death, his estate was extensive and his wine exportation business was spread across the entire Mediterranean region. Eumachia appears to be his only heir and so carries on the family business with her husband, M. Numistrius Fronto. However, the inscription on the building bears only her name as the donor. Eumachia is also designated as a priestess of Ceres. This title is given to Eumachia herself; she does not receive this title from her husband's civic office as happens in some cases. Indeed, the

---


112 Arellia Tertulla, Aesquillia Polla, Mulvia Prisca, Servilia, Alleia Decimilla, Istacidia Rufilla, and Mamia are all remembered publically in the inscriptive evidence from Pompeii at great expense.

113 Wine amphorae and stamps that bear his insignia have been found in Spain, Carthage, France, Athens, and Rhodes. The family's estate included a pottery factory that also produced bricks, shipping jars, and dishes for international export. Elizabeth Lyding Will, "Women in Pompeii," *Archaeology* 32, no. 5 (September/October 1979): 37–38.
evidence suggests that Eumachia is the one in the public foreground not her husband, who held his own separate civic office of duovir. As Dorothy Irvin points out, "Any title attached to her name in such a context is her title because it serves to identify her as the one who is performing a legal, public act." The building is located in one corner of the forum, and the dedication states that Eumachia erected the building in her own name and dedicated it to Concordia Augusta and Pietas in the early first century CE. Donating a building of this size to the city is a public act of social and financial significance, one that would draw attention to the social status of the donee and her family.

Another dedication is found on the statue of Concordia Augusta in the central apse and states that it has been dedicated to Eumachia by the fullones of the city. The question of why the fullers/launderers would dedicate this statue to Eumachia and what her connection was to them is tendentious. The most interesting and logical suggestion, based on the central position of the statue in the building, is that the structure is a combination market and “business club” for the merchants of Pompeii, particularly those who have ties to the shipping and export trade. This accords well with Eumachia's family's position as leading members of this guild and her own dedication of the site; it appears that "she may have been more aware of the need for such a center where high


115 The inscription also bears the name of her son, but the letters are smaller and beneath Eumachia's name. The date is roughly determined by the style of the structure and the statue of Concordia Augusta in the central apse.

116 Irvin, 78.

level business discussions and arrangements could take place.”118 The size and central location of the building argue against its use exclusively by the *fullones*, and it seems more likely that it was used by a more generalized group. Eumachia is not a worker, but a local and international business owner whose family has made a prominent name and fortune for themselves. Although she inherits the business from her father, her own efforts and management allow the business to continue to thrive and flourish so that she possesses the means to dedicate a large public building for the merchants of her city. Doubtless, she also manages and runs her household, which would include children, slaves, and clients, who may also participate in her business. This type of model is not unusual according to the inscriptive evidence from Pompeii and so may be able to be extrapolated to the rest of the urban, commercial locations throughout the empire, including the Roman colony of Philippi.

Eumachia's tomb also gives clues to her prominence in the city. The tomb is located near the city gate and contains ornate columns, a central altar, and a large semi-circular recess making it the largest and most sumptuous tomb in the entire region. Her tomb, the dedication of the public building, a statue dedicated to her by the *fullones* of Pompeii, and her title of priestess of Ceres all suggest not only Eumachia's wealth and business interests, but her status as a civic patroness. This evidence shows that women of means could support business, civic, and religious functions all at the same time and may

118 Lyding Will, "Women in Pompeii," 39. She notes that excavations have not uncovered any building in Pompeii that could have been used for this purpose and based on the extensive presence of shipping and other commercial industries, it would seem logical that there would need to be a place that could accommodate the numerous business men and women who had interests there.
provide a background for Tabitha's characterization as a businesswoman and patroness in Joppa.

Another example of a prominent woman in Pompeii is Naevoleia Tyche, who seems to be a freedwoman who has risen to a high level of success in her business field. Her burial tomb's dedication states that Naevoleia erected the family tomb herself at her own expense (ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου), and she included her portrait on the tomb as well. A second representation on the tomb may give us clues to the nature of her business. A woman sits in the prow of a ship and gestures toward a group of sailors in the foreground.\(^\text{119}\) Even if, as it is argued, this picture is a representation of the Goddess Fortuna, it may also be a portrait of Naevoleia in the form of the goddess. This is suggested by Naevoleia's own name of Tyche, which is the Greek equivalent of the Roman goddess Fortuna. Therefore, this may suggest Naevoleia's involvement in the shipping industry that is so prevalent in the city. It seems no stretch to suggest that based on the impressive tomb and the elaborate inscription and carvings that Naevoleia was among the many women who had grown wealthy due to her own business dealings. She does not simply reside in her husband's shadow as his accomplishments are recorded on the opposite side of the tomb, which suggests that they recorded their accomplishments equally and publically.\(^\text{120}\)

Based on an examination of the inscriptions found at Pompeii, Dorothy Irvin concludes that even women who were among the less privileged classes of society in

\(^{119}\) Lyding Will, "Women in Pompeii," 42.

\(^{120}\) The insight and conclusion was originally presented by Johannes Overbeck, the first excavator of Pompeii, in 1884. *Pompeji in seinem Gebäuden Alterthümern und Kunstwerken*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1884).
Pompeii still made their interest and voices heard. Among the many informal inscriptions scratched on the walls in Pompeii are women named Caprasia, Appuleia, Lollia, Petronia and Statia, who all request that their political candidate be elected. Other inscriptions and dipinti show female shopkeepers, waitresses, prostitutes, actresses, painters, and musicians all being an active part of, and making contributions to, the civic economy of the city. As Elizabeth Lyding Will concludes, "If one multiplies all the female inhabitants of Pompeii by the number of women in the Roman world…it is clear that their activities, both major and minor, communal and domestic, had a direct bearing on the economic and social events." It also seems to be the case that the stories of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts preserve the business and social accomplishments of women in the early church.

The Occupational Inscriptions and Reliefs

Iconography and inscriptions from Rome and Pompeii offer evidence that women are active workers, especially as artisans and cloth workers. Many times they are part of groups of colliberti who all have the same occupational title. Sometimes, women are represented with their husbands with whom they share a particular artisanal title. An interesting inscription from Rome (CIL 6.9435) lists a group of these colliberti

121 CIL 4. 207, 171 (Caprasia); 4.3527 (Appuleia); and 4.1053 (Lollia).
122 Lyding Will, "Women in Pompeii," 43.
124 Colliberti is defined as a group of freedpersons all manumitted by the same master that in some cases formed a de facto working family in the inscriptive evidence. Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status, 171. Examples include CIL 6.9435, 33920, 9398.
125 CIL 6.37826 (tailors); 6.37781 (goldsmiths); 6.9435 (jewelers).
without mentioning their patron. Sandra Joshel points out that this is not uncommon, especially among groups that are associated with a specific shop location.\textsuperscript{126} These same men and women who labor together are also buried together, presumably by each other since there is no patron listed on the tombs. In the Babbia inscription (\textit{CIL} 6.9435), there is a mix of slaves and freepersons listed indicating that this mixed group worked together and further, that some of the freedpersons listed were originally employed prior to their manumission.\textsuperscript{127} Even though there are cases in which there is evidence for intermarriage within the groups, in other cases, business partners make no claim to marriage partnership. For example, in \textit{CIL}.37820, Veturia Fedra is listed among a group of freed dyers (\textit{purpuraria}), and it states that she erected the tomb for her own use; for her patron, "her \textit{collibertus} Nicepor, and the freedman she shared with her fellow ex-slave." Veturia uses the expression \textit{Nicepor conlibertus vixit mecum annos 20}, which may indicate marriage, but could also simply be a way of expressing their shared work and living environment.\textsuperscript{128} Joshel concludes that it is more likely that Veturia and Nicepor are not married, but are instead coworkers. She also notes,

Their [\textit{colliberti}] original constitution as a group lay in their ex-master's hands, yet shared work meant conversation, interaction, and cooperation as well as time spent together, and the shared activity and time are commemorated in their epitaphs and frame their identities at death.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} Joshel, \textit{Work, Identity, and Legal Status}, 134. This occurs in about 33\% of the inscriptions of this type.

\textsuperscript{127} Cf. \textit{CIL} 6.9398, 33920.

\textsuperscript{128} For example, \textit{NS} 1922, 144, where the \textit{purpuraria} Veturia Tryphera dedicates the epitaph to her \textit{purpurarius} husband, a fellow freed slave of Decimus Veturius, "in accordance with her judgment (\textit{arbitratu})." See also, Moeller, \textit{The Wool Trade in Ancient Pompeii}, (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 29–56.

\textsuperscript{129} Joshel, \textit{Work, Identity, and Legal Status}, 136.
None of these individuals shows reticence in naming his or her craft or in stressing their familial bonds. The individuals represented in these inscriptions are proud both of the work and the bonds they shared with their co-workers.

Purple Dyeing and the Purple Trade

In most studies of the Roman economy, women are mainly absent from the discussion, but when they do appear they are relegated to household businesses and domestic responsibilities.\footnote{130 For example, W. Moeller, *The Wool Trade in Ancient Pompeii* and "The Male Weavers at Pompeii," *Technology and Culture*, 10 (1969), 561–66. Also, Tenney Frank, *An Economic Survey of Rome*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1933–1940). Less so, Duncan Jones, *Economy of the Roman Empire*.} In the literary sources, cloth work is considered both a base trade of the lower classes and the virtuous work of the upperclass Roman matron, which was celebrated in her epitaph.\footnote{131 Cicero, *de Officiis*, I. 151–152. See also the use of spinning and cloth production as signs of virtue (esp. chastity) of Lucretia (Livy, *History of Rome*, I.57) and in the epitaphs of Turia (*CIL* 6.15271) and Amymone (*CIL*.6.11602).} However, as was discussed above, this type of rhetoric is not indicative of the daily life of most people in either the East or West. When there is literary or epigraphic evidence that shows women in cloth production in a home, the assumption is generally that this means that women are producing cloth for domestic consumption alone. Archaeological evidence suggests otherwise. In a study of the homes in Pompeii, domestic spaces could span both the domestic and commercial spheres. Even large-scale cloth production could take place within a residential setting in both large and...
smaller homes. Domestic cloth production is not only meant for the residents' use, but it was likely also meant for commercial sale.

In some reliefs preserved from Ostia and Pompeii, women salespersons and craftswomen are depicted. In one relief from Pompeii preserved on the left doorpost of a dye shop, Verecundus shows the tools of the dye trade on a table while a woman sits at the table and touches the objects. The scene on the opposite doorposts shows the dyers at work and the owner (presumably) Verecundus proudly pointing out the quality of his wares. Natalie Boyle Kampen concludes that these two scenes represent “advertising” that would draw customers into the shop. This seems plausible, but Kampen's other conclusion, that these reliefs somehow attest to the general lower status of working women in the cloth trade seems to go too far. The women behind the tables do give signs that they are not wealthy based on their clothing and hairstyles, but this does not mean

---

132 The homes that seem to have been converted, at least in part, to the industrial production of cloth, dyeing, or fulling are in illustration nos. 6.8. 20–21, 6.14.22 in W. Jashemski, The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius, 2 vols. (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1979–1993), 50, 134. See also, W. Jongman, The Economy and Society of Pompeii (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1988), 163, 178–179. For the opposing view on these identifications, see R. Laurence, Roman Pompeii: Space and Society, (London: Routledge, 1994). The critique seems to rest on the principles that upperclass women disdained work and would have passed this work off to slaves and other tradespeople. For example, P. Oxy. 31.2593 suggests that women did do some of their own work and in other cases gave the work to a “shop” to be completed or to perform some portion of the work. See Chapter Two, above, for the discussion of this text.

133 A discussion of these reliefs is found in Natalie Boymel Kampen, "Social Status and Gender in Roman Art: The Case of the Saleswoman," in Feminism in Art History, eds. N. Broude and M. D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 63–77, esp. 66–67 concerning this particular relief.

134 The image is presented, described, and analyzed in V. Spinazzoli, Pompeii a la luce degli scavi nuovi di via dell'Abbondanza (Rome, Libreria della Stato, 1953), 189–10; 237–38.
that all women who were involved in this industry were necessarily poor.\textsuperscript{135} In other inscriptions, where the title *negociatores* or *mercatores* is used without listing a specific shop address, the men and women in these inscriptions appear to be involved in business dealings involving large-scale trade and importing of cloth goods.\textsuperscript{136}

Another source of information is the wax tablets discovered at Murecine near Pompeii that record various business activities in Puteoli concerning borrowing, lending, and recovering debts.\textsuperscript{137} These tablets list a number of references to women as borrowers and lenders and in the process of recovering their loans from both men and women.\textsuperscript{138} In one example, the extant text reads: *sunt interrogante Titinia Basilide fide sua esse iussit N. Castricius Agathopus pro Faecia Prima*.\textsuperscript{139} In this particular case, both the borrower and the lender are women. Even though tutors were required when women took on debt, N. Castricius Agathopus acts not in the capacity of Faecia Prima's tutor but only as her guarantor. The two roles are legally distinct as tutors were not required to act as guarantors. At least in this case, Faecia does not appear with a tutor, but only appears

\textsuperscript{135} The women do not wear the stola, and their hairstyles are quite simple. Both of these are recognizable distinctions in depictions of wealthy women. Kampen, "Social Status and Gender in Roman Art," 72–75.

\textsuperscript{136} Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, 112. For example, *CIL* 6.9677, 9682. The epitaphs and the honorary inscriptions of Eumachia and Naevoleia Tyche from Pompeii also suggest that women were involved in trade at high levels.


\textsuperscript{138} For example, *TP* 69, *TPSulp* 54, 73 all reference wealthy women, Domitia Lepida in the former document and Lollia Saturnina in the latter two. *TPSulp* 40 records the transaction of two women, one slave (Tyche) and one free (Pactumeia Prima).

\textsuperscript{139} *TPSulp*. 64, dated 2 February CE 53.
with a guarantor to assure her creditworthiness.\(^{140}\) Both men and women are required to give guarantees and assurances for the repayment of their loans, so this evidence does not suggest that women are not in any way considered less creditworthy than their male counterparts.\(^{141}\)

In her article discussing this material, Jane Gardner finds that the women represented in these tablets come from a variety of social classes, and they borrow both small and large amounts of money.\(^{142}\) Although there is no firsthand statement of acceptance of the contract from women (*chirographum*), from internal evidence, the women were present to accept the return of the loan and to acknowledge that they were receiving a loan through the use of a *nomina arcaria*.\(^{143}\) This is not, as has been previously suggested, due to the illiteracy of the women,\(^{144}\) but due to social conventions. Gardner concludes that this is not based on any known legal stipulation, but on the social attitudes that may have discouraged women from being involved in these types of transactions, although of course their presence itself indicates that they engaged in these

\(^{140}\) It is certainly possible that Faecia had the *ius liberorum*, but this is not made as explicit by the document as it is in some of the papyrological evidence from Egypt. For example, *P. Oxy*. 4.720; *P. Oxy*. 12.1467; *P. Oxy*. Hels. 26; and *P. Coll. Youtie* 2.83.


\(^{143}\) For example, *TPSulp* 82, where there is a receipt from Patulcia Erotis releasing a man from the debt he owed her. There is further acknowledgment that this release was finalized verbally (*habere se dixit*), which would definitively require the woman's physical presence.

\(^{144}\) W. V. Harris, "Literacy and Epigraphy," *ZPE* 52 (1983), esp.107.
activities with some frequency. However, the fact that women require the services of a
tutor or a guarantor or the fact that they did not sign the document themselves does not
diminish the fact that they still openly participated actively in the business life of their
city without serious hindrance.

A group of inscriptions from Rome indicate that there was a group of freed men
and women who participated in the purple-dyeing trade. The Veturii and the Plutii were
two competing family businesses in which some of the women started out as slaves but
continued working for the business even after their manumission. Although it is
difficult to trace the lines of development and the relationships between the two families,
it is probable that they both emerged from a single family at one time. The term “family”
here does not designate the usual blood ties that it does in modern society, but instead
indicates connections to an extended family that includes relatives, slaves, clients, and
blood relations, which was common in the Roman world. In her excellent book on these
occupational inscriptions, Sandra Joshel discusses the pattern of freed slaves continuing
to work for their former masters. Roman matrons trained their daughters how to run a
household and also trained (or at least oversaw this training) the female slave girls in


146 The women in these tablets may very well be the very type of woman lampooned by Juvenal,
women who "are rushing boldly about the entire city, attending men's meetings, talking with unflinching
face and hard breast to Generals in their cloaks with their husbands looking on!" Juvenal, Satires 6, LCL,
Ramsay, 398–402. Although some women did require a tutor, in at least one case, a woman (Faecia) did
not appear with a tutor.

71–72.

domestic trades that could eventually earn them manumission. These former slaves then pass these same skills on to their own daughters and coworkers.149 Women's participation in both the domestic and commercial spheres demonstrates their importance in the perpetuation and growth of many sectors of the Roman economy.

Women shop or factory owners would employ slave women (and free women), and when the slaves are able to obtain their freedom, they either stay on and continue to work in the same shop or, in some cases, go into business for themselves. If they have enough money, women might start their own shop and bring on employees as needed.150 When Papinian states, "A freedwoman is not considered ungrateful when she practices her trade in competition with her patron," this would certainly be relevant to these examples of women in the cloth trade. The inscriptions also suggest that there was cross-pollination between these trades and that, at least in the urban environment of Rome, through manumission and intermarriage these networks grew larger and more diverse as time went on.

**Domestic Space**

It has long been noted that in commercial centers like Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia, *insulae* contain a blend of public and private space. For example, in Pompeii, these multistory, open front structures combine retail and domestic space in ways that would be

---

149 Dixon, "Women in the Roman Economy," 70.

150 Ibid., 67. She notes that in the case of the Veturii, the shops were most likely established after the manumission of key parties: "It is clear that the women were involved as slave owners and—as far as we can see—as shop owners throughout the process of transmission, whereby slaves would be trained in a more prosperous household and, if manumitted, eventually train and manumit a successor in their own business."
uncomfortable for many modern Westerners. However, what has not been widely noted is that these spaces were not just inhabited by the lower class business owners, but were interconnected with some of the larger and wealthier homes in the city. A structure in Pompeii and one in Rome suggest that the home of a wealthy person is connected to a block of *insulae* homes through a common public bath structure. The connection between the large *domi* and the *insulae* appears to go beyond the use of the same bath house; it may also suggest that they may be connected through work ties as well. Based on this and many other examples of this type, David Balch questions if this type of intermingling would affect our understanding of the development of the early Christian family and community. He further observes that many of these homes were owned by women. The *lararium* inside of these homes seems to be shared by slaves/servants and owners and that the owners of the home enter the service areas near the kitchen. This suggests that even in opulent homes, space and religious worship seems

---

151 Bedrooms were not only places to sleep; they were also used as public work spaces. “Private” kitchens and dining rooms could be entered as public space as well during business hours. The grand villa of Julia Felix at Herculaneum contains a tavern that served heated wine at one entrance and a public bathhouse at another entrance. See David L. Balch, "Rich Pompeiian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 1 (September 2004): 27–46, esp. 29.


153 This is deduced based on the common water and drainage system to both structures. Wallace-Hadrill, "Archaeology of Domus and Insulae," 11–14.

to be shared by both servants and owners.\textsuperscript{155} If so, the implications for understanding the stories of Tabitha and Lydia are manifest.\textsuperscript{156}

\textbf{Women and Inheritance}

In spite of Augustan marriage legislation (\textit{leges Juliae}) and the incentives to bear children (\textit{ius liberorum}), there is scarce evidence to suggest that women (and their spouses) conceive more children or are hampered in bequeathing their wealth to whom they chose.\textsuperscript{157} This legislation was aimed at a very small portion of the population, namely the senatorial ranks. In spite of the legislation, many couples continue to remain childless by choice; they practiced contraception, abortions, and exposure of unwanted infants.\textsuperscript{158} The limitation of family size could serve both spouses financially, but women physically as well.\textsuperscript{159} The legislation is not meant to encourage marriage as much as it is intended to discourage childlessness. Finally, one additional intention of the law seems to


\textsuperscript{156} Both women are shown in relationship to a large group associated with their household and both stories are related to work and religious practice. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four and Five below.

\textsuperscript{157} For a discussion of the legislation and its effects on marriage, children and inheritance see S. Treggiari, \textit{Romen Marriage}, 3–82; 509-10.

\textsuperscript{158} Juvenal, \textit{Satires}, 594–601. \textit{sed iacet aurato vix ubera puerpera lecto. tantum artes huius, tantum medicamina possunt, quae steriles facit atque homines in ventre necandos conduct. gaude, infelix, atque ipse bibendum porrige qui quidque erit; nam si distendere vellet et vexare uterum pueris salientibus, esses Aethipopis fortasse pater.} "But how often does a gilded bed contain a woman that is lying in? So great is the skill, so powerful the drugs, of the abortionist, paid to murder mankind within the womb. Rejoice, poor wretch; give her the stuff to drink whatever it be, with your own hand: for were she willing to get big and trouble her womb with bouncing babes, you might perhaps find yourself the father of an Ethiopian."

\textsuperscript{159} Pregnancy and childbirth were the leading causes of death among women. Jane Rowlandson, \textit{Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook} (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84–87. See also, Bagnall and Cribiore, \textit{Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt}, 75–77.
be to regulate inheritance and the transmission of wealth and property between the powerful families in the empire.  

The primary means of passing on money is through family connections, not through marriage. The laws of inheritance are the section of the Roman law code that is most complicated. The many entries included in the Digest pertaining to inheritance indicate how situational inheritance could be and the need for a variety of solutions to the problems and obstacles that mixing family relationships and money can create. Women never experience a historical period in which their rights as heirs are severely limited, but there are periods during which they had greater or less control over their ability to bequeath wealth. However, as always, law does not tell the entire story. Even though women in marriages sine manu have very few rights of inheritance from their husband's estate, in practice it seems that men routinely left substantial bequests to their widows. Daughters have legal rights of inheritance, but in practice they sometimes receive a reduced portion of the estate due to the provision of their dowries. Based on

---

160 Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Law and Roman Society*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 77. She notes that these laws also did not limit the incidence of divorce and remarriage.

161 Books 28–36 are devoted to inheritance and legacies. This represents a substantial portion of the material.

162 For the following discussion of the laws and practices of inheritance, I follow the outline of the arguments made by Gardner in *Women in Law and Roman Society*, 163–203.

163 For example, *P. Ludg. Bat.* 13.14, where a husband lists his three sons and his widow as equal heirs to his estate. Although from Egypt, *P. Oxy.* 52.3692 also shows a wife as sole heir to her husband's estate.

164 Gardner, *Women in Law and Roman Society*, 164. In one reference from the Digest, a daughter is to receive yearly maintenance payments while she is unmarried, but as soon as she is married the payments are to stop and her dowry is to act as her final payment, *Digest* 33.1.22.
his analysis of the relevant papyrological and passages from the *Digest*, Friedrich von Woess' foundational work on the subject concludes that there were two equally prevalent customs of bequeathing money to a daughter: the daughter is an equal heir with her brothers, or the will preferences the eldest son. The two are used equally and the choice for which is used seems to rest solely on the preference and custom of the family and especially the *paterfamilias*, who is free under the law to follow either path or to leave nothing at all to either his widow or his daughter(s).

The fact that all women require the consent of a tutor to create a will does not seem to seriously hamper their ability to bequeath their estate in the manner of their choosing. As Gardner observes, "The consent of tutors, except *tutores legiti*, could be compelled; thus probably most freeborn women had virtually free capacity of testamentary disposal." Freedwomen may be required to name their patron as their tutor and to obtain his consent when naming heirs; however, if the patron gives his consent to a will that does not name him or his children as heirs, he does not have legal recourse to break the will at a later date and claim the estate of his female client. Therefore, even the patron's legal sway over his client's will is limited. Just as in the examples from Egypt and the Judaean desert discussed in Chapter Two, in the West,

---


166 Gardner, *Women in Law and Roman Society*, 168. Examples of subordinate tutors include Herculaneum Tablet 13 and 14; 149.6.2650, 7468. See also Cicero, *pro Cluentio* 178, 179, 181; *pro Caelio* 31, 68; *ad Atticum* 2.4.5, 2.15.4, 12.32.2, 12.44.2; *ad familiares* 14.1.5.

167 Gaius rules that in these cases the patron's consent indicates his approval of this exclusion and his rights are then void: "He only had himself to blame." Gaius, *Digest*, 3.43.
mothers and fathers also find ways to circumvent the law and to leave money to their children and ensure their maintenance. In one example, Murdia evaded the restrictions of the *lex Voconia*, which forbids the institution of women as heirs, by using the *legatum partitionis*. This allows a person to leave a single legacy of up to half the estate (in essence to a maximum of 49.9%) that is separate and distinct from the legal heir's portion.\textsuperscript{168} One of the most common ways that women receive inheritance is through direct bequeathal (*res nec mancipi*) of land, buildings, and slaves.\textsuperscript{169} Hobson concludes that women gain the greatest foothold into wealth through the transmission of property and the inheritance of the family business. Even in cases in which brothers may hold primary claims to an estate, the evidence suggests that provisions to ensure a daughter's share in the property are customary. When Acts portrays Tabitha and Lydia as property owners, this would likely have come through family inheritance rather than through marriage.

\textsuperscript{168} FIRA III.70. Salvatore Riccobono, *Fontes iuris Romani anteujustiniani* (Florentiae: Apud S. A. G. Barbèra, 1968). This privilege was, of course, only accorded to those in the highest property class, but its presence exhibits in some way parental concern for the state of the female child. Murdia's legacy leaves half of her estate to her daughter and then names her sons as heirs to the remaining half of her estate.

Women as Benefactresses

One example of a prominent female benefactress is found in Roman Corinth. Five inscriptions describing and honoring Junia Theodora attest to the public character that women's service could take in Roman colonies.\(^{170}\) Junia is honored as follows: Λυκίων το κοινόν ᾿Ιουνία Θεοδώρα ῾Ρωμαία γυναικί καλή και ἁγαθή καὶ ἕυνόωι τόι εὐνεῖ.\(^{171}\) She seems to be a Greek woman who is both a citizen of Corinth and a Roman citizen.\(^{172}\) In none of the five public decrees/inscriptions to Junia Theodora, is there mention of the usual public works projects (buildings, aqueducts, theaters, or pavements) that benefaction inscriptions usually contain.\(^{173}\) Junia is specifically honored for her commercial and political patronage to her native Lycia, not just a single city, but to the federation of some thirty-six cities.\(^{174}\) She welcomes ambassadors, exiles, and citizens of

---

\(^{170}\) The inscription can be reliably dated to the first century CE. Hans Josef Klauck deduces that the inscriptions in Corinth represent a summary of originals that were in Lycia. The final redaction was completed at the time of Junia's death, as indicated by lines 11 and 64f. Klauck, "Junia Theodora und die Gemeinde von Korinth," in Religion und Gesellschaft im frühen Christentum, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 232–50.

\(^{171}\) "From the Lycian league to Junia Theodora, a Roman, a woman good and capable and well-disposed to the people." Document 1, lines 12–14. As cited in Klauck, "Junia Theodora," 234.

\(^{172}\) Klauck, "Junia Theodora," 237. He also notes that Junia may have been born in Rome and merely residing in Corinth like other cives Romani consistentes and negotiatores.

\(^{173}\) A. S. Henry, Honors and Privileges in Athenian Decrees: The Principal Formulae of Athenian Honorary Decrees (Hildesheim and New York: G. Olms, 1983). Henry discusses the origin of dedicatory inscriptions in classical Athens and how this tradition changed but continued to be popular throughout the Roman imperial period. The inscriptions all contained three elements: (1) what the benefactor had done, (2) what honor the council/people awarded, and (3) what the reason was that the person deserved praise. The Junia Theodora inscriptions contain all the elements of this form.

\(^{174}\) Winter, Roman Wives, Roman Widows, 183–92.
Lycia into her own home and advocates for their concerns while they are in Corinth.\textsuperscript{175} Her influence with the Roman authorities in Corinth is honored by the citizens of the cities of Telemassos and Patera. Junia used her wealth and influence to ensure that the needs and concerns of her native land were heard within the Roman political world of Corinth and that the citizens of Lycia had safe haven in her home.\textsuperscript{176} Junia's presentation in the inscriptions and the stories of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts are numerous. Junia's ties to her Lycia, her business ties to trade, her advocacy, and the honor that she receives for her hospitality all recall Lydia's characterization in Acts 16. Further, Junia's goodwill (φιλοσειμία) and generosity by drawing on her own livelihood (φιλολύκος) for the benefit of her community (ἐκκλησία) recall the actions and commemoration of Tabitha in Acts 9:36.

\textbf{Conclusion}

As was found in the East, the divide between the ideal woman and reality of women's daily life is great. Although literary sources suggest that marriage is a battleground between men and women, inscriptional sources and other literary sources suggest that husbands and wives love and honor one another. The power of the \textit{patria potestas} and the \textit{tutela mulierum perpetua} had both significantly eroded by the late republic. And in spite of legal texts that suggest that women are prohibited from


\textsuperscript{176} The specific parallels between Junia and Lydia will be discussed below in Chapter Four.
bequeathing their wealth to whom they choose, the reality is that children of both sexes regularly inherit from their mother. The perpetuation of these stereotypes in the masculine sources demonstrates a need to continue to show women as subordinate and dependent upon men in the face of women's widespread independence.  

Indeed, when Juvenal or Tacitus critique the problems associated with women’s bringing large dowries to the marriage, there are the other examples, like Cicero, where even when the wife was wealthier than the husband the balance of the marriage was not thrown into disarray and divisiveness. Finally, even though there is a tendency to downplay the presence of women in the business world and the pride that they feel for their accomplishments, there are the examples from Pompeii and occupational inscriptions from Rome that demonstrate that women are neither ashamed of their trades and businesses or reticent to “advertise” their success. Indeed, women choose to commemorate their accomplishments and to leave behind not only inscriptions but visual art to show their involvement in the social and financial culture of their day. As we move on to the texts in Acts, all of this information will serve as the background for the narratives that represent Tabitha and Lydia. Both women are shown to have trades, they employ others in these ventures, and they use the profits from their businesses as means of service to others. Acts does not hesitate to praise these women for their public accomplishments and, indeed, holds each of them up as an example of an ideal follower of the risen Christ.

---

177 Dixon, “Women in the Roman Economy,” 70.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESUSCITATION OF TABITHA

Introduction

As Chapter One has demonstrated, the story of Tabitha’s resuscitation (Acts 9:36–43) has been largely ignored in the history of scholarship except as it aids in the interpretation of Peter. In some readings, Tabitha is a member of the group of widows who mourn her, which leads to her characterization as a needy or impoverished woman.¹ In other interpretations, she is simply a good, but unimportant, woman who is the object of Peter’s miracle, and the focus is instead on the charismatic authority of the apostle.² In either of these cases, little is made of Tabitha’s designation as disciple or of how Tabitha functions as a discrete character in the narrative.

Chapter Two on the status of women in the Greek East showed that women in the East were no more sheltered nor did they enjoy less freedom than their counterparts in the Roman West. Although there were distinctions between rights and practices under both indigenous and Roman law, these differences did not hinder women in any significant

¹ For example, Ivoni Richter Reimer, Women in Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective, trans. L. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 31–70. These interpretations of Tabitha as a widow seem founded in the tradition of Basil of Caesarea, who appears to be the first writer to make this explicit identification. See discussion of Basil’s exegesis in Chapter One.

² For example, the influential commentary of Ernst Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, ed. And trans. B. Noble et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 337–42. Regarding Tabitha’s resuscitation he states, “The second story he [the author] has left relatively untouched. It showed the reader that where miracles were concerned the Apostles could stand comparison with the great prophets of the Old Testament—indeed, as was foreseen in John 14.12, could do the same mighty works as their Master, if not mightier still!” Even recent commentators focus very little on the significance of the character of Tabitha. See, Richard I. Pervo, Acts (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 251–57.
way from purchasing property, exercising legal claims, or as business owners. For
example, in the Mishnah (*Ket. 7.6*), the regulation states that women could not weave in a
public space such as the marketplace. However, the very presence of this prohibition is
proof that women were weaving in public, and, moreover, the fact that women weaving
in a business or workshop environment is so prevalent that they have to be cautioned
from taking their looms to the public marketplace. If women could and did only weave in
the house for domestic purposes, then the idea of prohibiting them from weaving in the
marketplace would be unnecessary. Women's work was not simply confined to the
household, but extended into a variety of public spaces as well.³

The papyrological evidence from Egypt and the epigraphic evidence from Asia
Minor attest that women held a significant amount of wealth in the form of both real
estate and commercial interests. Even in rural Palestine, women like Babatha and Salome
Komaise owned property, exercised their rights within the legal system, and ensured that
their assets would be handed down to the heirs of their choosing, both daughters and
sons. Women, regardless of marital status, retained autonomy over their inheritances,
properties, and business interests separate from their husband's assets before, during, and
after the marriage.

After the more general analysis of Chapter Two, this chapter will focus on how
these findings function within Acts 9:36–43 using a phrase-by-phrase examination of
each pertinent verse. Following this will be a narrative analysis of how, based on the

³ See the discussions of women's work in Chapters Two, esp. Women as Managers and Owners,
and Chapter Three, esp. Women in Commerce, and their discussions of women as workers, managers, and
owners in the Greek East and Roman West.
findings of the exegesis, this narrative serves the macrotext of Acts both literarily and thematically. I will focus on three questions that are not being asked by interpreters: first, why is this specific female character included in the narrative? Second, why is Tabitha portrayed with these particular qualities rather than any number of other possibilities? Finally, how does Tabitha's character and story serve the macrotext of Acts? Namely, why is Tabitha an important character within her own right?

Although many commentators assume that Tabitha is a widow due to the absence of a husband, the author seems to remain deliberately silent on her marital status. The reader does not know if Tabitha is a widow, divorced, married, or unmarried. If Tabitha is indeed a widow, then her house in Joppa is her own property, not her husband's. If she is divorced, then the property, wealth, or commercial interests that were in her possession prior to the marriage would have been returned to her upon its dissolution. Finally, although most scholars suggest that it is the least likely scenario, if Tabitha is married, then the author does not acknowledge her husband and still chooses to portray Tabitha as the head of her own household. Because there are examples of both married and unmarried women in Acts, it seems most likely that this lack of specificity serves an important literary purpose. Tabitha is neither wife nor mother, the most common female virtues found in inscriptions. Here an independent woman is applauded for her virtuous

---

4 If it were her husband's property, it would have been returned to his family upon his death and Tabitha would have returned to her family home. Inheritance practices would not have allowed the husband to leave this property to his wife, only to his male heir.

5 If her husband was not a follower of the risen Christ, then the author could have chosen to leave him out of the story. There are no “mixed-religion couples” in Acts, namely, Christians with non-Christian spouses.
actions on behalf of her community rather than on behalf of her father, husband, or children.

In addition, Tabitha's role as disciple will be explored in detail. The title of disciple is not used in a systematic way in Acts, but, as we will show, when the title is used in conjunction with a named individual it intimates the elevated status and importance of that character within the community of the risen Christ. Rather than simply being a disciple to women, as might be assumed due to the specific mention of the widows, the text suggests that there are men present as well. First, the presence of men who go to Peter with the news of Tabitha's sudden death lead one to assume that they are very close by or even in some part of what might be a rather large household. Second, the use of *the saints* is a general designation fitting for a gathering of men and women. In fact, one might say that the narrator's choice of the term may be used to impress on the listener the certain propriety that one should assume for the mixed group, women as well as men, gathered around Tabitha, their leader and benefactress.

Few commentators discuss the socioeconomic background that suggests Tabitha’s role as an independent, female head of household who is also a business owner.6 This type of woman was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world, even in the Greek East.7 As Chapter Two concluded, these female business owners came not only from the privileged classes, but from a variety of socioeconomic classes who, through inheritance,

---

6 One exception to this is Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 194–243, esp. 230.

7 See the discussion of demographic data from the Greek East in Chapter Two.
manumission, or cooperative business practices, were able to purchase, maintain, and even expand their businesses. The inscriptional and epistolary evidence also shows that many women used their participation in commerce as a means of social advancement. For example, although a female-owned business may have employed female (and male) slaves, eventually some of these slaves were manumitted and in many cases these women subsequently became business owners themselves.  

8 This process then created small, cooperative business networks that were loosely bound together by their shared beginnings. 9 This seems to be the most plausible explanation for the group of individuals who gather in Tabitha's home since they are not identified as family members. 10

Because the cloth industry was dominated by women who both owned and worked in their shops, Tabitha appears to be an example of one of these small business owners. 11 The widows who mourn her and the other characters present appear to be linked to Tabitha through her business, her discipleship in the community of Joppa, or, more likely, both. The author specifically names both Tabitha's service as a disciple and her trade, making these details of vital importance to the interpretation of the story.

8 The seminal work on this subject is Sandra Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992). Although she focuses on the city of Rome, her findings also illuminate many of the letters and inscriptions from Egypt and the Eastern provinces, which suggest that these practices occurred outside of Rome as well. See for example, Stud. Pal. 32.40, discussed above.

9 Päivi Setälä, "Economic Opportunities for Women in the Roman Empire," in Female Networks and the Public Sphere in Roman Society, eds. Päivi Setälä and Liisa Savunen (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 1999), 1–10.


11 See the discussion in Chapter Two, Women as Managers and Owners and Chapter Three, Women in Commerce. The cloth industry here comprises spinning, dyeing, fulling, sewing and distribution of textiles.
Tabitha uses her home, her means, and the profits of her business in service to her community. Therefore, the characterization of Tabitha and the virtues that are attributed to her are suggestive of the values and virtues espoused for Christian women and held in high esteem in Acts.

Therefore, in the text of Acts 9:36–43, Tabitha is remembered as a community leader, a business owner, and a woman who, in spite of her status, worked alongside other women for the benefit of the entire community. These characteristics are being highlighted over against the more common roles of wife and mother. This portrait suggests that work and service, at least in the macrotext of Acts, are the values that would constitute an ideal female member of the cult of the risen Christ.

Text-Critical Issues

The text critical issues in Acts are well known and highly controversial. That which A. F. J. Klijn noted in 1966 is still true today: "There has never been so little agreement about the nature of the original text of Acts."¹² The textual history of Acts is not certain and this has led to a variety of theories, none of which has achieved dominance.¹³ The main controversy concerns the presence of a “Western” text type that represents not only a distinct textual family, but a quite different thematic and theological

---


¹³ The background for this debate is laid out well in E. J. Epp, The Theological Tendency of the Codex Bezae Cantabrigienses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), esp. 1–34. Although this text is three decades old, the issues discussed remain significant and current. Many studies still cite Epp as the inspiration for their work. For example, Josep Ruis–Camps and Jenny Read–Heimerdinger, The Message of Acts in the Codex Bezae, 3 vols (London and New York: T and T Clark, 2006); they come to different conclusions but cite Epp as their main conversation partner.
Tendenz. The most promising work being done in this area is in the analysis of patristic witnesses. The series *The New Testament of the Greek Fathers* explores these witnesses and comes to some interesting and relevant conclusions. First, there is no solid textual evidence for a purely Western text type as no uncial exists that represents a purely Western text.\(^{14}\) What has previously been identified as Western is, in fact, a mixed text family that relies most heavily on Byzantine sources with very limited Western readings.\(^{15}\) What is most salient for the current study is that the patristic evidence suggests that when the text of Acts is analyzed in two distinct sections (chapters 1–12 and 13–28) the results show that two different and distinct textual families are present. In the first half of Acts, which includes the “Peter traditions,” the strongest witness is from the later Egyptian textual families (A, C, 81, 1175), where there is a higher polish and corrections on the manuscript, such as is noted in Codex Alexandrinus.\(^{16}\) However, in the second part of Acts with its “Paul traditions,” the strongest witness is from Family 1739 (630, 945, 1704, 1739, 1891). We cannot escape the logical conclusion that either the Patristic Fathers had separate manuscripts of Acts 1–12 and 13–28 or that the copyist

---


\(^{16}\) Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraemi (C), Minuscules 81 and 1175, both dating to the tenth century CE.
relied upon different manuscripts of the two sections of Acts.\textsuperscript{17} Tabitha's story is almost entirely free from significant textual variants, but when the two minor variants are discussed below, greater weight will be placed on the text of manuscripts A, C, 81, 1175.\textsuperscript{18}

Acts 9:36a: Εν Ἰόππῃ δὲ τις ἦν μαθήτρια ὄνοματι Ταβιθα ἡ διερμηνευομένη λέγεται Δορκάς

*Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas.*

The setting for the story is Joppa, a seaport town that is located approximately thirty miles south of the larger Roman port of Caesarea Maritima. The setting of Joppa operates on both a historical and symbolic level within the Tabitha narrative. Tabitha is first called a *disciple* even before she is named, which suggests the significance of this title. Tabitha's name is given in both Aramaic and Greek, which suggests the mixed-ethnic population of both the town of Joppa and the Christian community there shown in Acts 9:39.\textsuperscript{19} The double name may also have served her public role in the textile industry in Joppa.

\textsuperscript{17} This evidence would perhaps even explain why it is not until Chrysostom that the stories of Tabitha and Lydia are discussed in the same manuscript. See Chapter One, on Chrysostom.

\textsuperscript{18} The two minor variants will be discussed in Acts 9:38 and 9:40 below.

Joppa

Joppa was a seaport town that served Jerusalem and had a mixed ethnic population that included Jews and non-Jews from a variety of Greek-speaking backgrounds. Joppa was a center of import, export, and production for a variety of textile goods. Jacob Kaplan notes that Joppa was essentially a Greek city as early as the second century BCE, epitomized by the name change from Jaffa to Joppa (IOPPE). Kaplan also analyzes grave markers from nearby cemeteries and reports that the majority were inscribed in Greek. Based on the names and inscriptions, a large number of residents of Joppa came from outside Palestine, from Alexandria, Cyrenaica, Tarsus, and Cappadocia.

Economic information on Palestine and Joppa is limited. However, a number of more specialized books have been written in recent years that analyze the economy of the

---

20 Although I am using this data to “reconstruct” Joppa, I am well aware that the narrative world of the text is not meant primarily to evoke absolute historical reality. I am using this data to suggest that the text provides an “intentional realism, or verisimilitude, even in historiographical narratives.” L. Michael White, "Visualizing the 'Real' World of Acts 16: Toward Construction of a Social Index," in The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks, eds. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 234–61. Here I am focusing on what White calls the “socio–graphic contexts” of the narrative. In the section that follows, I will deal with the “cultural–symbolic contexts,” and in the exegetical material I will address the “functional semantic context.” This approach correlates literary, historical, and archaeological data to create an appropriate social context for the narrative.


empire with specific attention to regional differences. One such work is Hayim Lapin's thorough economic analysis of Palestinian cities and their trade practices. Lapin demonstrates that although there may have been a greater priority given to the major urban commercial centers, mainly Rome and its port Ostia, that in the provinces, cities like Joppa specialized in and were known for the production of certain trade goods. Joppa and the surrounding area were best known for textiles, most notably, wool production and purple as well as other plant-based dyes.

Although many of the textiles produced in Joppa were meant for local and regional use, a significant percentage was also marked for export. While it is true that Joppa dropped in prominence as a seaport after the construction of, and preference shown to, Caesarea Maritima, information from recent excavations points to the fact that Joppa continued to be an important conduit for trade goods to Jerusalem. A passage in the Tosefta (t. Dem. 1:15) assumes that people regularly purchased food and other goods

---

23 For example, Léopold Migeotte, *The Economy of the Greek Cities: From the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) and C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994). On Palestine, see Zé'ev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1994). What is most helpful about these various volumes is their ability to demonstrate that the Roman Empire was not a monolithic entity with one homogenized and centralized financial structure. The various regions had somewhat different policies and practices as they related to the various economic segments such as agriculture, mercantilism, or production. The current study will focus most specifically on small scale production operations and their relationship to the mercantile segment as this most specifically addresses Tabitha’s context in Acts 9.


directly from ships anchored in the port of Joppa. "He who purchases from the ship [anchored] in Jaffa or from the ship in Caesarea is liable."27 Here the rabbis are concerned with tithing practices. The text assumes that people regularly purchased from both ports. This passage indicates that Joppa was a seaport that both imported and exported goods to other parts of the empire.

However, Joppa was not only a conduit for goods but also a producer of textiles, pottery, paper, glass, and food products. Although it is regularly assumed that Joppa was seriously hampered as a commercial center after it suffered damage during the war with Rome, the commercial and residential areas of the city quickly rebounded.28 The conclusion of most archaeologists is that Joppa, or at least major portions of it, were continuously occupied and remained a productive seaport from the Late Bronze Age onward.29 This seems at least in part due to Joppa's location in proximity to many of the main cities in southern Judaea.

In smaller urban areas like Joppa, even the poor regularly bought ready-made garments from a local producer.30 To keep the cost of these garments low for the local

27 Quotation is taken from Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 79. Also, Lapin, who points out this same parallel, *Economy, Geography, and Provincial History*, 174. Lapin acknowledges the issues associated with the dating and compilation of the rabbinic literature. He dates the Tosepta to the third c. CE, but the particular rules and passages are of much earlier dating.


trade, production was clustered in nearby medium-sized towns and cities that had ready access to roads and ports. Joppa had both of these attractive qualities. Joppa's use as a seaport is well-known, but the work of Moshe Fischer, Benjamin Isaac, and Israel Roll has called attention to the frequency that the routes between Joppa and Jerusalem and other urban centers were used for trade and personal travel rather than administrative and military purposes.

Garment production was both labor and resource intensive. Transporting goods over land was expensive and dangerous. Besides the agricultural labor needed to provide the raw materials, labor was also required to prepare, spin, dye, and produce the materials and garments that eventually were sold in the market. Women provided the bulk of this labor. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the majority of these women were slaves. As the evidence from Egypt suggests, the laborers were of mixed social and economic status and included apprentices and free wage earners along with slaves.

Cloth production during this time period was mainly organized around small to medium-sized workshops dispersed throughout the larger cities in the provinces. In

---

31 Luxury goods that required more labor and better materials would not be sold in any great quantity in the local markets. These products were either exported or sold directly to wealthier consumers.


33 Safrai, Economy of Roman Palestine, 194–195.


35 Jones, Roman Economy, 359.
later sources, there is evidence for large-scale production workshops and textile factories, which suggests a continuing growth of the industry and in its production spaces. These workshops, depending on size and production specialties, produced both ready-made garments for the local trade and more specialized garments that would be transported to other cities regionally and abroad. In towns the size of Lydda and Joppa, these workshops would have been located either near or in the central marketplace. In many cases, these shops were grouped according to trade specialty, which operated loosely as an informal *collegium* by sharing labor and dealing with other trade issues as a collective.

All of this information accords well with the setting of the Tabitha narrative and helps to explain not only her trade, but also the presence of the others who are not identified as family members in her home. If Tabitha ran one of these workshops, then the widows and the other members of the community would be present because of their work affiliation, either within Tabitha's own workshop or other local *collegia*. Many, if not all, of those present would have been involved in the cloth production business that is specified in 9:39. In summary, based on being well known for its textile production, its proximity to roads for transportation, and a useable port, Joppa would make a “realistic”

---


choice for the setting of a narrative that describes the resuscitation of a prominent female textile producer and benefactress to her religious community.

Joppa in Its Cultural Symbolic Context

In addition to Joppa as a plausible historical setting of the narrative, it also holds the symbolic significance of rescue from death. Joppa is one of the most familiar settings for the story of Perseus and Andromeda.\textsuperscript{40} One version of the myth reports that Andromeda was lashed to a rock that jutted out over the ocean in Ethiopia as a sacrifice to the sea monster. However, in many other versions of the myth, Joppa is also attested as the location as early as the fourth century BCE.\textsuperscript{41} In addition, Pliny the Elder and other first-century authors designate Joppa as the place where Perseus slew the sea monster and rescued Andromeda.\textsuperscript{42} The ubiquity of the location in the first-century sources and the popularity of "Andromeda's Rock" as a “tourist” destination at this time suggests that Joppa was most commonly associated with this myth. Further, coins from the Roman era

\textsuperscript{40} This discussion uses the common story as found in Apollodorus' (1st–2nd century CE) \textit{Bibliotheca}, 2.4.3–5. Another influential account of the myth is found in Ovid (8 CE) Ovid, \textit{Metamorphoses}, 4.607–5.268. See D. Ogden, \textit{Perseus}, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 149–52, for a list of sources for the Perseus myth.


period feature Perseus' curved sword on the reverse, thus, reinforcing Joppa as a known
and widely recognizable location for the myth.43

Joppa not only has cultural resonance through associations with Greek
mythology, but also through the Book of Jonah. In Jonah 1:3, Jonah sets out from Joppa
to Tarshish to escape the presence of the Lord. One of the motifs of Jonah's story is
rescue. When the men throw Jonah from the boat into the raging waters, the sea becomes
calm.44 Instead of drowning, God rescues Jonah by providing a ketos to swallow him.
(2:17)45 It is while Jonah is in the belly of the ketos that he speaks his prayer of
thanksgiving for God's rescue (2:1–10).46 But the resonance of Jonah's story is greater
than any literary parallels that can be drawn. Jonah in the boat and his rescue from the sea
monster are one of the most ubiquitous images in the iconography of early Christianity.47

The sea monster (ketos) has certain symbolic associations with death in both biblical and

43 This insight is from Ecker's article in which he cites Y. Meshorer, City Coins of Eretz–Israel
as the basis of his findings.

44 Jonah 1:15 καὶ ἐλαβον τὸν Ἰωναν καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ ἔστη ἡ θάλασσα
ἐκ τοῦ ἀλοῦ αὐτῆς

45 Jonah 1:17 καὶ προσέταξεν κύριος κῆπει μεγάλῳ καταπελγὴν τὸν Ἰωναν καὶ ἤρν Ἰωνας ἐν τῇ
κολύμῃ τοῦ κῆτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας

46 Jonah 2:9 σωτηρίου τῷ κυρίῳ ἐμπιστοσθα μνη. Also in 4:8–11, when Jonah asks to die, God
spares his life and assures Jonah that his life is sacred, just as sacred as the lives of the Ninevites whom he
has just spared. This reaffirmation signals that only God has the wisdom and power to decide matters of life
and death.

47 Graydon T. Snyder, Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine
(Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 2003), 54.
extra-biblical sources. Rather than strictly narrating the biblical story, the art and symbol evoke deliverance and God's concern, assuring believers that hope exists even in the face of persecution, rejection, or danger. By placing the story of Tabitha in Joppa, the author alerts the reader to these symbolic associations, and Tabitha's miraculous resuscitation death occurs in an apt location.

Discipleship (μαθητρία)

One of the most important terms in this narrative is Tabitha's designation as "disciple" as it is the first descriptor that is used, even prior to her name. It is continually noted by scholars that this is the only instance of μαθητρία in the NT, but surprisingly, little more is said than this. Mikeal Parsons does point out that the phrase "a certain female disciple" (τις γυναίκα μαθητρία) indicates that Tabitha was not the only female disciple in the Joppa community and, therefore, should not be considered a unique or singular case of female discipleship. Tabitha may have been one of many women disciples, but she is the only one who is given the title specifically, which attests to her prominence and

---


49 Snyder, Ante Pacem, 28. On p. 24 Snyder aptly states, "It is assumed here that a sign or symbol, like a polyvalent verbal metaphor, reflects the multiple social conflicts or paradoxes in which the producing group finds itself. Symbols are much more than immediate means of communication."


51 Mikeal C. Parsons, Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 138. This is discussed further in Acts 9:38, and the distinction is made there between disciples and men.
importance in the tradition. To understand the meaning of \( \text{μαθητής} \) it is necessary to understand both the generic term disciple as it was used in the Greco-Roman world and how the term operates within the macrotext of Acts.

Disciples in the Greco-Roman World

The general term disciple in Greco-Roman philosophy describes an individual who accepts the teaching of a particular school and then lives his or her life in accordance with that philosophy's precepts.\(^52\) Because \( \text{μαθητής} \) occurs in Diodorus Siculus (\textit{Hist.} 2.52.8) and Diogenes Laertius (\textit{Vit. Phil.} 4.2.1, 4.2.4, 8.42.3) describing women's involvement in philosophical movements, the following definition of disciple encompasses the requirements for both female and male followers. Diodorus and Diogenes demonstrate that female disciples existed, and that, in spite of cultural stereotypes, women participated in a wide range of philosophical and religious movements.\(^53\)

The root \( \text{μαθητής} \) certainly indicates a student-teacher relationship, but this is not the word's entire meaning. Discipleship involves a set of relationships—teacher, student, and fellow disciples—and a specific mind set. In terms of relationship, this entails more than simply following or imitating a teacher or master. Even though \( \text{μιμησία} \) was part of the requirement of discipleship, the ubiquity of related terms such as \( \text{μιμολογούντες} \)


\(^53\) In addition to the references above from Diogenes Laertius and Diodorus Siculus, there is the reference in Plutarch's \textit{Advice to the Bride and Groom}, 48, where Plutarch recommends that a wife study philosophy with her husband to keep away from problematic behavior. See discussion of this text in Chapter Three under Plutarch.
γνώριμος, and ζηλωτής express that the relationships were both reciprocal and hierarchical. Disciples would surely imitate or follow their teacher in word and action, but only when that word or action was in congruence with the virtues and principles set forth in the philosophy. When disciples imitated the virtuous behaviors of their teacher, this was a sign of the teacher's character and competence. In Lucian's *Passing of Peregrinus* there is an example of the converse:

Even of his disciples themselves not one would imitate him? In fact, the thing for which one might blame Theagenes most of all is that although he copies the man in everything else, he does not follow his teacher and take the road with him.\(^{54}\)

Here, the fact that Peregrinus' disciples do not imitate him in what Lucian perceives as his finest act is an intimation of the lack of character on the part of the teacher. Admittedly, Lucian is making a comic point about the willingness of disciples to commit suicide alongside their master, even so, the lack of ζηλωτής on the part of the disciples indicates the lack of character and virtue of the master. The disciples of Peregrinus will follow their master when it is easy or suits their purposes, but not when it is a true test of principle and conviction.

Emulation is not a matter of wallet, staff, and mantle; all this is safe and easy and within anyone's power. One should emulate the consummation and culmination, build a pyre of fig-wood logs as green as can be, and stifle oneself in the smoke of them.\(^{55}\)

---

\(^{54}\) Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 24.6–7., LCL, Harmon. ὅπου μηδ' αὐτῶν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ζηλώσειν ἄν; τὸν γοῦν Θεαγένη τούτῳ μάλιστα αἰτιάσατο ἄν τις, ὅτι τάλλα ζηλῶν τάνδρός οὐχ ἔπεται γοῦν διδασκάλῳ.

In a similar manner, in the gospels, especially the Gospel of Mark, the importance of any follower of the risen Christ being willing to emulate Jesus in all ways, including death, is repeatedly stressed.\(^{56}\)

As important as imitation is, it is not the only criteria for discipleship. Just because a disciple can recite the words of the teacher or perform the recommended acts, it is not enough to demonstrate mastery. For example, in Plutarch's *Moralia*, a student gives a carefully performed oration that on appearance would suggest his mastery of the method, but when asked for further clarification, the student is silent, causing Antigonus to remark, "What is your answer? Or is this the content of the written page?\(^{57}\) In other words, performance or outward mimesis is not sufficient; there must also be a true intellectual understanding of the principles.

These references suggest that a disciple is one who not only imitates the word and deed of the master/teacher, but also one who uses the added discretion of choosing a master that has a good character and engages in practices that are ethically sound. The disciple is judged by the character and standards of the teacher just as the teacher is judged by the actions and standards of the disciple. If Tabitha is designated as a disciple and then lauded for her exemplary actions on behalf of her community then she is being

\(^{56}\) For examples in Acts, see 8:1; 9:1; 11:19; 14:22; and 15:10, where the point is explicitly made that following Jesus' example will entail hardship, persecution, and suffering. Cf. Mark 8:31–38 and parallels.

\(^{57}\) Plutarch, *Moralia: The Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, 182.13, LCL, Cherniss. "τί λέγεις;" εἶπεν ἦ ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ τῶν δελτοισιν ἐγγεγραμμένα;"
shown as a positive model of the principles of the leader of her religious movement, namely Jesus.

Disciples in Acts

Suzanne Dixon has noted that women are a “marked” category in dominant discourses, so unless the language is gender-specific or the context unequivocally suggests a particular gender, we may assume, that in many cases, the masculine plural case can refer to mixed gender groups.58 This caution is certainly relevant to the use of “disciple” in Acts. Of the twenty-nine times this word appears in Acts, only four references refer to specific individuals who can be identified as male or female (9:10, 36; 16:1; 21:16).59 In all other instances, the term is rendered in the masculine, plural case, and, therefore, it cannot be determined what the gender composition of the group was. Acts uses the term disciple in absolute terms to designate those individuals, both men and women, who follow the teachings and actions of the risen Christ.60 In each use of disciple, there is no distinction made between the responsibilities or consequences of discipleship for men and women. For example, in 9:1–2:


59 Those named are Ananias (9:10), Saul (9:26), Tabitha (9:36), Timothy (16:1), and Mnason of Cyprus (21:16), respectively. The other more ambiguous cases occur in Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 19, 25, 38; 11:26, 29; 13:52; 14:20, 28; 15:10; 18:23, 27; 19:1, 9, 30; 20:1, 30; 21:4, 16. In each of these cases the group was more likely a mixed gender group.

60 TDNT, 441. Specifically, the appended language, disciple of… is not used in Acts since it appears that the author means to stress that all disciples follow only one individual, the risen Christ. On the other hand, μαρτυρομαι is used only twice in Acts (20:26; 26:22) in Paul's speeches. It does not seem to be a component of discipleship in Acts.
Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.\(^{61}\) (emphasis mine)

Then, in 13:52 the phrase "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" suggests that both men and women shared equally in the trials and benefits of being disciples of the risen Christ.\(^{62}\)

Although we do not learn about Tabitha in great detail in this text, this in no way diminishes her importance to her community or the author of Acts. For example, in Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, the pattern is to focus on some detail of the leader of the philosophical school and then to give less detail about the disciples of that individual.\(^{63}\) In both Diogenes and Acts, the lack of detail does not diminish the disciples, it simply suggests that the focus is less on personality and more on how the individual represents the movement. By designating Tabitha as a disciple, the author cues the reader that she is someone who is an exemplary follower of the leader, in this case, Jesus Christ.

Other references to disciples in Acts also shed some light on what duties disciples fulfilled. The disciples are the object of Saul’s *persecution* in Damascus and are thought

\(^{61}\) Acts 9:1–2 Ὅ δὲ Σαῦλος ἦτε ἐμπνεὼν ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ ἠγάπησεν παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολάς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγὰς, ὡς ἐὰν τινὰς ἐὑρῇ τῆς ὀδοῦ δυνατάς, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγη εἰς Ἡροοσαλημ. (emphasis mine).

\(^{62}\) Acts 13:52 οὗ τε μαθητὰ εὐηρεῖτο χαρᾶς καὶ πνεύματος ἐγίου.

to be found in the synagogues (9:1). Ananias, a disciple, is the one chosen by the Lord to lay hands on and *cure* Paul’s blindness. The disciples *protect and speak on behalf of* others (9:19–25, 26; 19:30). They *send relief* to those who are experiencing famine (11:29). They can *revive* those who appear dead (14:20). When properly commissioned, the disciples *speak in tongues and prophesy*. Disciples *receive, accompany, and accommodate* Paul during his stay in their regions (14:28; 16:1; 18:27; 19:9; 21:4, 16).

Tabitha cannot be excluded from serving in any of these capacities simply because she is a woman.

**Tabitha's Names**

Prosopographic studies assume that names operate as social, cultural, and, in some cases, political indicators.64 The name *Tabitha* is not well attested in the literary or inscriptive evidence of this time period. The only example of the name is found in a first-century CE inscription from Rome naming a Flavia Tabita.65 In this inscription, Tabita is a freedwoman of the Flavian house.66 She sets up a memorial in honor of her husband, a freedman, near the site of the largest Jewish cemetery at Rome, the Via

---


65 The name Tabitha does appear in Talmudic sources as "Tabitha the serving girl." However, these two references do not constitute strong evidence that Tabitha is a standard slave name. Further, these examples are of a much later dating, that is from third century rather than the first. J. Neusner, *The Talmud in the Land of Israel*, vol. 4–Horayot and Niddah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 160, 175.

Portuense. Although Tabita is a former slave, at the time of her husband's death she is in a position to purchase a substantial and public memorial for him, which indicates that she is not a poor woman. In spite of her freed status at Rome, her status in her native land would not necessarily be servile. Namely, if we can assume that this Tabita was brought from outside Rome to serve as a slave in the Flavian house, we may not conclude that she was either a slave or poor in her own homeland.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the inscriptive and epistolary evidence shows that the double names, one Greek or Roman name and one Semitic or Egyptian name, are not uncommon in Palestine. In the double-name epitaphs from Beth She'arim, the Semitic name and the Greek name are preserved side by side; however, the Semitic name generally comes first. Since Beth She'arim was a cemetery where important rabbis and were buried, the Semitic name may have had greater significance in that particular location than the Greek name. In Acts 9:36, the Semitic name is also mentioned first, which would seem intended to emphasize Tabitha's ethnic roots to the mixed-ethnic audience.

Tabitha's Greek name, Dorcas, is quite common throughout the empire with no specific ties to religious or social status. The narrator “translates” Tabitha's Semitic

---

67 See David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe: The City of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2:1–9 for a description of the cemetery and its contents. The proximity to the Jewish cemetery is not conclusive proof that Tabita is Jewish; in fact, since this inscription is not included in Noy's book, it seems tenuous at best to assume the ethnicity and religion of Tabitha.

68 For example, *Beth* 101 and 102 Sarah/Maxima; *Beth* 192 Semnous/Sirikis.

name for the audience, which suggests a group that is more familiar with Greek. Notice, for example, when the grieving widows show Peter the clothes Tabitha made for them, the text uses the name Dorcas; yet when Peter's command raises Tabitha, the text reads, "Tabitha, get up!" The fact that both names are preserved and used throughout the story suggests that the audience would have known Tabitha/Dorcas by either or both of these names as a prominent disciple and community benefactress. In fact, adopting Greek names became popular among Jews and non-Jews of all social strata during the Hellenistic period, but they never completely replaced their Aramaic names. During the Roman period, Greek and local names co-existed in both Palestine and throughout the Greek East. For this reason, the detail of Tabitha’s two names is not unusual in a city whose trade and society was dominated by Greek language and customs. Tabitha may have been her Aramaic name, but the name that she used in business and social situations would have been the Greek, easier to pronounce, and more widely recognizable name Dorcas. Based on the demography of Joppa, Tabitha's religious community also would most likely have been composed of both Jewish and Greek members. So the name Dorcas may have been adopted in her business dealings and social communication with Greeks. It was more easily pronounced by them, and also easy to remember since it was a more widely recognized woman's name.

---

70 See the discussion of Tabitha as benefactress below in the analysis of verse 9:38.


72 Kaplan, “Archaeology and History of Tel Aviv Jaffa,” 92.
Acts 9:36b αὐτῇ ἦν πλήρης ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐλεημοσυνῶν δὲν ἐποίει.

She was full of good works and mercies (almsgiving) which she did.

The text specifies that Tabitha the disciple is devoted to both ‘good works’ and ‘mercies,’ namely, service-oriented acts that involve benefaction and almsgiving. The terms ἔργων ἀγαθῶν and ἐλεημοσυνῶν are not in common usage in Greco Roman literature. The strongest witness for either is in Jewish and Christian literature. As Ivoni Richter Reimer notes, the meaning of ἐλεημοσύνη cannot be restricted to acts of charity because in Judaism the concept of righteousness is closely intertwined within its meaning. So rather than simply ‘giving money to the poor’, an individual's practice of 'charity' is both meant to ameliorate physical suffering and enact God's righteousness within the community.

In the Septuagint, ἔργων ἀγαθῶν or its equivalent, εργον καλον, is used almost exclusively to refer to the good works of God. Ἐλεημοσυνῶν is used often in the Hebrew Bible, but the closest equivalent to its use in Acts is found in Sirach, Tobit, and Proverbs. For example, Tobit 1:3 professes,

---

73 In Diogenes Laertius, Lives, LCL, trans. R. D. Hicks, 7.115.2, Zeno describes ἐλεημοσυνῶν as one of the negative passions that have negative effects on the soul. καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος ἐφεμπτοσιά τινὲς λέγονται, οἶνον κατάρρους καὶ διάρροια, οὕτω κἀπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς εἰσὶν εὐκαταφορίαι, οἶνον φθονερία, ἔλεημοσύνη, ἔριδες καὶ τὰ παραπλῆσια. “And as in the body, there are tendencies to certain maladies such as colds and diarrhea, so it is with the soul, there are tendencies like enviousness, pitifulness, quarrelsomeness, and the like” (emphasis mine). Diogenes uses εὔμενειαν for benevolence. 7.116.8

74 Richter Reimer, Women in Acts, 36–44. Although she uses a great deal of later Rabbinic references to shore up parts of her argument, Richter Reimer's references to the biblical and Second Temple Jewish sources provide sufficient proof to recommend her overall conclusions.
I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity for my kindred and my people who had gone with me in exile to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians.  

Here the righteousness of the individual is a necessary precursor to the actual performance of the acts of mercy. Sirach 12:3 goes even further exhorting, "No good comes to one who persists in evil or to one who does not give alms." The citations from this Hellenistic material explicitly link individual and community righteousness to almsgiving. This concept perdures in Tabitha's portrayal. One of the reasons that the reader can identify Tabitha's righteous character is because the narrator identifies her generous almsgiving.

In the New Testament, Matthew 6:2–4, part of the special Matthean material, focuses specifically on the meaning of almsgiving,

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
Almsgiving is a requirement, but it should not be performed for the purposes of praise or recognition. Instead, it should be done because it is deemed righteous by God. In Matthew, righteousness is reckoned only by God, not by community standards. In addition, Luke 11:41 and 12:33 both link almsgiving to the morality and righteousness of the individual. As François Bovon notes concerning Luke 11:39-41, “[This story] proves that the evangelist does not expect a vow of poverty from each faithful follower but liberality without restriction.” In both uses in Luke, almsgiving is a means by which the followers of the risen Christ become detached from earthly security. Almsgiving is used not as the means of idealizing or spiritualizing poverty, but rather orients the giver toward the justice and charity rooted in both Judaism and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This concept is reflected in Tabitha’s story in which her righteousness is based on her ability to do good on behalf of others. The fact that she herself is prosperous is not at odds with her role as a benefactress; in fact, it suggests that the readers of the text should use Tabitha as an example of the proper response to those in need. What Wendy Cotter notes about the Synoptic miracle stories is equally true about stories in Acts, such as the resuscitation of Tabitha:

78 Sirach's morality is Deuteronomistic; God rewards the good and punishes the wicked, whereas Matthew clearly does not follow this line of thinking. In Matthew, the focus is on the recipients of alms. The righteous person gives alms with God in mind, while the Pharisees give alms for the benefit of community recognition.

These stories (*exempla*) were not only meant to reveal the remembered face of Jesus but also to inspire his followers in their own responses. The fact that these stories survived until the gospel accounts were written show how effective they were, both in asserting the divine power of Jesus in his miraculous acts and in modeling his great virtues for the edification and imitation by the community.\(^8^0\)

Acts exclusively links almsgiving to its most righteous and virtuous characters. Both Cornelius and Tabitha are noted for their ἐλεημοσύνη.\(^8^1\) Paul, in his speech before Felix, uses his almsgiving as a way of establishing his character, "Now after some years I came [to Jerusalem] to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices."\(^8^2\) Because this verse is sandwiched between two statements of Paul's righteousness—that he strives to always be free of offenses before God and that he was making his vows in the Temple in a state of ritual purity—it suggests that Paul defends his actions and his character on the basis of adherence to these important Jewish ethical standards. Tabitha, Cornelius, and Paul are all characterized as upstanding members of their communities, but when they are assigned virtues or praised for their behaviors, it is always with an eye to what would have been assessed as righteous by Jewish standards. Acts may portray a mission to the Gentiles, but that mission remains rooted in Jewish ethical practices. The text of Acts 9:36 simply tells us that Tabitha was known for good works and acts of charity; it does not specify the recipients of her charity. This intimates that Tabitha's charity is not given


\(^8^1\) Acts 10:2, 4, 31. εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβοῦμενος τῶν θεῶν σὺν παντὶ τῷ ὅικῳ αὐτοῦ, ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλᾶς τῷ λαῷ καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντὸς

\(^8^2\) Acts 24:17 Δι’ ἔτων δὲ πλειόνων παρεγενήσθην ἐλεημοσύνας ποιήσων εἰς τὸ έθνος μου καὶ προσφοράς (emphasis mine).
exclusively to believers, but to Christian and non-Christian alike. In dispensing
benefactions, Tabitha did not discriminate between insider and outsider. The text portrays
her as a benefactress in Joppa who offers not only monetary aid, but her home and gives
toward the up-building of those around her.

Acts 9:37 ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἀσθενήσασαν αὐτὴν ἀποθανεῖν·
λούσαντες δὲ ἠθηκαν [αὐτὴν] ἐν ὑπερώφ.

At that time she fell ill and died. Having washed her, they laid her in an upper
room.

After learning about Tabitha's prominent role as disciple, her good works, and
almsgiving on behalf of her community, we now hear that the benefactress has died after
an illness of unknown length. The use of the ingressive aorist here suggests that Tabitha
fell ill and that both the onset of the illness and her death were sudden.83 The text does
not specify who prepares Tabitha's corpse for the funeral rights, but since this was
generally “woman's work,” we can assume that some portion of the women who are
mentioned in 9:39 perform these functions.84 Pervo points out that the report of Tabitha's
death verifies its actuality and finality,85 but I would add that more important is that it
provides the core pathos of the story. Tabitha's death is a source of sorrow and great

83 F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (Grand
Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 249.

84 Kathleen Corley, Maranatha: Women’s Funerary Rituals and Christian Origins (Minneapolis,
MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 21–64. Corley has decisively argued that in spite of social critique and
legislative attempts to restrict their involvement, women continued to play an important role in the rituals
surrounding death.

85 Pervo, Acts, 255.
concern to her community. Just as the people in Mary's house in Jerusalem later lamented Peter's assumed death in prison (Acts 12:11–17), here the members of Tabitha’s household and community lament their own patroness’ sudden demise.

**Mourning Rituals**

Richter Reimer notes that the detail of washing of the corpse is a specifically Jewish feature of the text. However, there is no evidence for this practice in Second Temple Jewish literature. In spite of a later reference to washing a corpse in the Mishnah (*m. Shabbat* 23:5), the practice appears to have been performed more universally throughout the Greco-Roman world. Jocelyn Toynbee has argued that during both the republic and the imperial period, washing a corpse was one of the necessary and universal practices in preparation for burial. Death was characterized by two factors: (1) it incurred pollution and (2) this pollution required ritual purification and expiation. Toynbee concludes that washing a corpse prior to burial is one of the most

---

86 The parallel to Peter's story is that the assumed death of their leader/patron causes the community to gather together and share their grief and concerns. When the leader returns, *stasis* is restored. This same pattern seems to be at work here in Tabitha's story. This aspect of the narrative will be discussed below in the discussion of Acts 9:41–42.


common practices in Roman society is meant to address the need for this ritual purity.92

Once the death has been confirmed, the body would be removed from the bed and set on the ground (deponere) where it would be washed and anointed.93 These actions address purity but also show care and concern for the loved one who has died. The ritual of washing and laying out Tabitha's body in Acts 9:37 shows both attention to the rituals of burial and sincere care and concern for Tabitha, further proof that she was both a valued and loved member of her community.

After its preparation, the family would place the body on a mattress or cushion, which either remained on the floor or was elevated on a couch. This would allow family members, relatives, friends, coworkers, and all other members of the household to view the body and participate in mourning rituals. In cases in which the home and the business were housed in the same structure, workers would be considered part of the household and, therefore, also be present to mourn the deceased.94 The scene in Tabitha's home parallels the depiction of the mourning on the "Tomb of the Haterii," where relatives, children, slaves/freedwomen surround the matron's deathbed mourning her loss. This

92 Ibid., 45. She cites examples from Virgil, The Aeneid, 6.219: "corpusque lavant frigentis et unguant," and Lucian De luctu 11.

93 For the use of deponere in this context, see Ovid, Pont. 2.2.45: "iam prope depositus, certe iam frigidus." For further information on the mourning and burial practices of Romans, see Pliny the Younger, Ep. 7.24 on the funeral of Ummidia Quadratilla.

94 In a sarcophagus relief from the Domitianic period named the Tomb of the Haterii (or Haterii fragments), there is a variety of individuals present. These include relatives (portrayed on the bottom of the couch), three women with pointed caps (pileus) shown at the head of the couch, who are most likely slaves. Toynbee posits that they are slaves who have been freed by the deceased woman's will. Toynbee, Death and Burial, 45. For a specific discussion of the art and its context, see Eleanor W. Leach, "Freedmen [sic] and Immortality in the Tomb of the Haterii," in The Art of Citizens, Soldiers and Freedmen in the Roman World, eds. Eve D'Ambra and Guy P. R. Métraux, BAR International Series 1526 (Oxford, : Archaeopress, 2006), 1–18.
suggests that the practice of gathering all those associated with the household at the time of the *domina's* death was not an uncommon practice.

The ὑπέρθον is a feature of many homes in this time period.95 Recent excavations in Joppa have uncovered the remains of a two-level structure with plaster floors from the reign of Trajan.96 The upper level consists of a small glass factory and the lower level is a domestic dwelling that seems to have been destroyed by fire.97 This structure is different from the remains of a house uncovered from the Hellenistic period that is a smaller, one-story, two-room structure without commercial space. Tabitha's home as described in Acts could reflect the former type of structure with one floor being used for her living space and the other for her workspace.98 Based on this assumption, Tabitha is laid out and resuscitated, not in her private space, but in the more public workshop space surrounded by her coworkers and fellow believers. This detail, together with other references to Tabitha's work, may highlight her work as a community good and her resuscitation as a restoration of this work and service.

---

95 See the discussion in Chapter Three on the excavations at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia, all of which have second stories.

96 Kaplan, “The Archaeology and History of Tel Aviv Jaffa,” 92–93.

97 Besides the upper and main levels, there is also a below-ground storage area that seems to have been used for materials and overstock.

98 This does not mean that other parts of the empire did not have two-story structures similar to this; it is only to suggest that the text attempts to reflect historical *realia* of the types of structures one might find in Joppa and the type of structure a business owner like Tabitha might inhabit. Similar types of buildings that housed both a private residence and a place of business have also been found in Pompeii and Ostia, but in those cases, the public storefronts are at the street level.
Mourning rituals would have begun almost immediately following the preparation of the corpse and continued at intervals up until the time of the funeral. These rituals could have been more or less elaborate depending on the wealth and social position of the deceased, but most people had a funeral of some kind regardless of their social status. Depending on the prominence of the individual and their means, professional mourners along with musicians and singers were used to enhance the experience. However, this was not the case for Tabitha. The narrator stresses that the women present in Tabitha’s story were not professional mourners, but those women who knew Tabitha personally and directly benefited from her generosity.

Acts 9:38 ἐγγύς δὲ οὖσης Λύδδας τῇ Ἰώππῃ οἱ μαθηταί ἀκούσαντες ὅτι Πέτρος ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπέστειλαν δύο ἀνδρας πρὸς αὐτόν παρακαλοῦντες· μὴ ὁκινήσης διέλθειν ἐως ἡμῶν. ἀναστᾶς δὲ Πέτρος συνῆλθεν αὐτοῖς· ὃν παραγενόμενον ἀνήγαγον εἰς τὸ ὕπερημον

[Since Lydda was near Joppa], the disciples, [having heard that Peter was there], sent two men to him, begging [him] "Do not hesitate to come up to us!" And Peter got up and went with them; arriving, they took him into the upstairs room.

99 Seneca, Ad Marcium, 3.2.

100 This is based on a careful word study of funus and its Greek equivalent by Toynbee. She finds that the word is used in relation to all of the following: the poor, ordinary citizens of both moderate and considerable means, soldiers, heroes, and members of the ruling class. Death and Burial, 43.

101 The grieving widows clearly had prior knowledge of Tabitha and were familiar with her work. (See further discussion below in verse 9:39) The presence of prohibitions and cautions to curb the excess of women's crying and mourning keens was evidence of women's presence and prominence in these events rather than proof of women's emotional excesses. Corley, Maranatha, 22–27.
This portion of the text begins with an addition that joins together two stories from separate traditions. Conzelmann notes that this miracle story shows signs of a discrete narrative in that all that connects it to the chronology of Acts are the two explanatory insertions: verse 38a, “For the city was not distant,” and 38c, “having heard that Peter was there.” That is, the previous narrative relates Peter’s healing of Aeneas in Lydda (Acts 9:32-35) and, therefore, some clarification is necessary to explain how he could be in Joppa at Tabitha’s bedside the same day that she died. The insertions solve this problem by first explaining that the two cities are close, and second, that the friends of Tabitha knew that Peter was in Lydda and so could send for him. Further, these additions attempt to explain why Peter would be called upon to come to Tabitha’s deathbed, namely, since he was close by.

102 Pervo, *Acts*, 255. The proposed additions are highlighted in boldface type above.


104 Codex Baeze presents this as indirect speech and the Coptic manuscripts (esp. Middle Egyptian versions) expands the text to include, "For the city was not distant. When the men arrived there, they importuned him to come with them without delay." This redundancy is evidence of different traditions seeking to clarify a part of the text that may not have made good sense. Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraemi (C), and most minuscules include δόο ἀνδράζ and, as Bruce Metzger in *Text Criticism* notes, the omission of these words from other sources (esp. Codex Wolfii [H], Codex Regius [L], Codex Porphyrianus [P], and Codex Athous Laurae [Ψ]) is most likely due to the influence of Acts 10:19: Του δε. Πετρου διενεργόμενου περὶ του οραμάτου εἶπεν Πνεῦμα Ἰ δοὺς. ανδρεὶς τρέφουντε, περὶ του πνεύματος ἴδος. For a detailed discussion of the text critical issues here, see M.–E. Boismard, *Le texte occidental des actes des Apôtres: Reconstitution et réhabilitation*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilizations, 1984), 168. Also, Metzger, *Text Criticism*, 324.

105 The proposal that the emissaries go to Peter with the hope that he will raise Tabitha from the dead seems unlikely. Parsons, *Acts*, 139. The purpose and power of resuscitations is that they are not expected by anyone except the thaumaturge. Therefore, if the disciples sent for Peter with the explicit purpose of resuscitation, then the force of the miracle is blunted. In that scenario, Peter would simply fulfill the expectations of the community rather than amaze them, and there would be little reason for the resulting belief on the part of the witnesses (9:42).
Acts places Peter within the prophetic lineage of Israel. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead, recalling the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. Yet unlike these prophets, Jesus does not need to pray, but with his own divine authority commands Jairus’ daughter to return from the dead. In Tabitha's story, Peter's actions are more like the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Like them, he must pray first, knowing that he himself does not have divine power, but is serving as an apostle of the risen Christ and relies on that power for the completion of the miracle.

Charles Talbert has already shown that just as Jesus is presented as the Elijah/Elisha figure in Luke’s gospel; so, too, are those who follow the pattern of Jesus’ life found doing miracles that imitate Jesus as well as recall the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. Conzelmann argues that Tabitha's pious characterization was a later addition so that this story conforms to those of Elijah and Elisha, especially 1 Kings 17:17–24 and 2 Kings 4:32–37. The problem is that in both the Elijah and Elisha stories, the woman prays for her son; she does not die herself. Moreover, in the Elijah account, the woman fears that it is the contrast between herself and the holy prophet that brings down the penalty of death on her son, an interpretation that Elijah does not contradict. Instead the prophet brings to his prayer for the boy the way this woman has helped him and how ungracious of God it would be were her son to be taken away. In contrast, Tabitha is a


believer and a benefactress to others, and there is no son to die, for whom she will plead.

Rather, this story carries the elements that are usual in any raising of the dead story: the death of someone loved, the grief of those who love that person, and the benefaction of the one whose prayers or plain power will raise the dead person.

**The Emissaries in Acts 9:38**

The group designated *disciples* (οἱ μαθηταί) is contrasted against a separate group of *two men* (δύο ἀνδρῶν) who act as emissaries and travel to request Peter's help. The use of emissaries links Tabitha’s story to the Cornelius narrative, 10:7–8:

> When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.¹⁰⁸

The emissaries from Tabitha’s household are not identified as slaves as they are in 10:7, nor are they identified as fellow disciples or male relatives. There is the possibility that these men are part of Tabitha's household or coworkers in her business. These men may or may not have been part of the group of disciples, but they are clearly connected to Tabitha and concerned about the situation and the consequences of her death to make the approximately three-hour journey from Lydda to Joppa on her behalf.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Acts 10:7–8 ὡς δὲ ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν αὐτῷ, φωνῆσας δύο τῶν οἰκετῶν καὶ στρατιώτην εὐσεβῆ τῶν προσκαρτεροῦντων αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐξηγήσαμεν ἅπαντα αὐτοῖς ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν Ἰόππην. Two men from Tabitha's household are sent to Peter in Lydda, in contrast to the three sent out by Cornelius.

¹⁰⁹ The ancient literary feature of sending two male emissaries seems also to affect the story here, but in this case the men are not given a specific title or function, but generically called men associated with Tabitha's household. J. Jeremias, "Paarweise Sendung im Neuen Testament," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 136–43.
When the emissaries arrive in Lydda and tell Peter that Tabitha has died they request that he come to Joppa with them. Peter complies with their request immediately. The request may be polite; however, it may also be that the request is an example of the type of "bold speech" that petitioners use in synoptic miracle stories. At least, the urgency behind the request is clear, and Peter goes to Joppa without hesitation. The emissaries do not even have to mention Tabitha, just that they need Peter to come to Joppa immediately, and Peter complies without the need for further explanation. The fact that the narrator does not need to lay out the specific relationships between Peter, Tabitha, and the community at Joppa suggests Peter’s prior knowledge of, and closeness to, the community at Joppa and their benefactress.

Acts 9:39a ἀναστάς δὲ Πέτρος συνήλθεν αὐτοῖς· ὄν παραγενόμενον ἀνήγαγον εἰς τὸ ὑπερῴον

So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him up into the upper room.


111 Cotter, The Christ of the Miracle Stories, 79–136. Cotter points out using the examples of the story of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12) and the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1–10) that, in spite of any shame or social barrier, the urgency of the situation calls for boldness on the part of the petitioner to approach Jesus and request his assistance. Here too, the emissaries have an urgent situation. Smyth points out that μὴ plus the aorist subjunctive (ὁκνήηη) with a verb of urgency (ὁκνέω; to delay/hesitate) in many cases is used to indicate warning or danger. This further suggests that the request, although respectful, is nevertheless forward. Herbert Weir Smyth, Greek Grammar, rev. G. M. Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 404, n. 1802.

112 One practical reason for the urgency could be the need to bury the body before decomposition set in. This seems more likely than Parson's suggestion that the group anticipated the resuscitation. Parsons, Acts, 139.
Once again, the fact that Peter immediately complies with the emissaries’ request (Acts 9:38) and goes directly to Joppa is both an indication of Tabitha’s importance and Peter’s knowledge of and connection to the Joppa community. This familiarity is also clear when the emissaries take Peter directly to the upstairs room to Tabitha’s bedside without any explanation of the circumstances.

Acts 9:39b καὶ παρέστησαν αὐτῷ πᾶσαι αἱ χήραι κλαίουσαι καὶ ἐπιδεικνύμεναι χιτῶνας καὶ ἰμάτια ὅσα ἐποίει μετ’ αὐτῶν οὕσα ἡ Δορκάς

And all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing the tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

The presence of the widows does not necessarily suggest a formal, ecclesiastical order,113 but neither does it demonstrate that widows are "the natural recipients of charity."114 C. K. Barrett concludes, “The group in Joppa includes a clientele of widows; they are not an order; they are not said to perform any service for the church; they are rather its beneficiaries.”115 In many contexts in the Hebrew Bible, widows and orphans are a category that is synonymous with the need for social and economic justice.116 However, as the analysis of the Elijah and Elisha resuscitations stories has shown, in both:

113 Pervo notes, “The text does not identify them [the widows] as ‘believers’ or the like because it assumes an organized group.” Acts, 256, n. 46. Pervo is right to suggest that the widows may or may not be believers since Tabitha’s charity does not appear to be limited to followers of the risen Christ; however, the assertion that they form an organized group or order is not found in the text.

114 Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, 249.


116 Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19; 26:12; 27:19; Job 22:9; Pss. 68:5; 94:6; 146:9; Isa. 9:17; 10:2; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; 49:11; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5; Jas 1:27; Tob. 1:8; 2 Macc. 3:10; 8:28, 30.
cases the female characters in those accounts are not poor but instead act as benefactresses to the travelling prophet. Moreover, the papyrological and epigraphic data from the Greek East and Roman West provide further evidence that, far from being economically needy, many widows are prosperous through their own financial and real estate holdings. If we assume that Tabitha’s charity is not limited to followers of the risen Christ, then it does not follow that the widows here are an order of “helpless Greek-speaking Jewish Christian widows.” Perhaps the widows are dependent upon Tabitha’s benevolence, but the reason for their weeping is not confined to potential financial loss, but also appears to come from love and sincere sadness.

Many commentators assume that Tabitha is a widow; however, her marital status is not made clear. Often, the assumption that Tabitha is a widow is meant to harmonize this text with 1 Timothy 5:10. The lack of a male relative or guardian further clouds this question. Although there are some interesting parallels between the two texts, Acts

---

117 See data in Chapters Two and Three above. For example, *P. Gen. 2.103; OGIS 2.675; C. Pap. Jud. 2.442; P. Flor. 3.332; P. Giss. 21; P. Mich. 6.370; BGU 4.1104; P. Coll. Youtie 2.67; SB 8.9642; P. Oxy. 22.2342. Even language of womanly (or widowly) weakness should not be taken literally, but instead understood as standard language used in formal documents and petitions to persuade and influence the magistrate. The assumption of a primarily Greek–speaking audience for Acts makes the claim even more tenuous since, based on socioeconomic data, this group would not automatically assume the stereotype of the weak, impoverished widow.

118 See discussion of 9:36b above.


120 1 Tim. 5:10 Χήρα καταλεγέσθω μη ἐλαττων ἢ τῶν ἔχοντα γεγονοῦσα, ἐνός ἀνήρος γυνης, ἐν ἐργαις καλοῖς μαρτυρομένη, εἰ ἐκενοτόφησεν, εἰ ἐξευνοδήχθησεν, εἰ ἀγίων πόδας ἐνυήσκησεν, εἰ θλιβομένοις ἐπηρίκησεν, εἰ παντὶ ἐρχῇ ἄγαθῷ ἐπηρίκησεν. The text in bold are those words that are most often linked to the Tabitha episode. For example, Parsons, *Acts*, 139.

121 There are other places in Acts where a woman’s marital status is made clear, such as in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11) or Priscilla and Aquila (18:2, 18, 26). It is impossible to prove
does not make Tabitha’s status clear and, therefore, does not call attention to this parallel. As Ivoni Richter Reimer notes, “The text in question is not interested in that agenda [defining Tabitha’s ‘womanly status’]. It is more concerned with the social-missionary activity of the disciple Tabitha.” In other cases, Tabitha's widow status is reached through default, being presented as the most likely option or by parallels with the Lukan gospel. As the text stands, Tabitha is set apart from the widows (as well as the saints in 9:40) and is given a separate and elevated status through her title of disciple, the designation of good works and acts of charity on behalf of her community, and through the attention from the disciples, emissaries, and Peter who respond with urgency to her death.

Tabitha is not lauded for the typical female virtues of chastity, motherhood, or domesticity. Her good works are not described as being directed toward her husband or children, but on behalf of others beyond family and relatives. One of these good works is her participation in making garments. Tabitha not only helps other women by giving

---

122 In 1 Timothy, the widows are judged according to the number of their good works and their hospitality. Tabitha is indeed noted for her good works, but she is also portrayed as a benefactress who, rather than needing to be enrolled to receive aide, is the individual who dispenses aide to others in the community.


125 This does not mean that this was the extent of Tabitha's service to the community.
them clothing, she appears to have made these items of clothing with her own hands (ὅσα ἐποίει). In spite of a prejudice against involvement in a trade, numerous inscriptions commemorate women for their professions and their patronage. For example, there is no shame displayed in Septimia Stratonice’s epitaph from Ostia that stipulates both her profession (sutrix/shoemaker) and her patronage (benefacta) to those in her service. Further, brick stamps and amphorae inscriptions from various parts of the empire give the names of women who owned and took an active interest in the financial and logistical aspects of their businesses.

Barrett dismisses the possibility that Tabitha worked alongside the widows in a workshop by interpreting the phrase “while she was with them” as while she was alive. This is one possible interpretation. However, based on its use here and other uses in Acts, it appears to mean more than mere physical presence; it means that Tabitha was

---

126 “All trades are considered a low category of skill. If it is on a small scale, commerce should be considered base; but if it is grand and ample, transporting many goods from all over the world and passing them on to many recipients without flummery, it should not really be put down.” Cicero, Off. 1.151, LCL, Miller.

127 CIL supplement14.4698. See pictorial representation in Kampen, Image and Status, fig. 47; discussion of inscription 64–69. hoc·sepul[crum]·Macilius·isc·cessit·don[a]·Septimia [e·Stratono]·su·trici·amica·ca·ris·me·ob·bene·facta·ab·se·dimidia·parte·et [—aci—] li·fort·[unati—]·ano·filio

128 CIL 15.3691, 3729, 3845–47; 6.4.3.37828. In this latter case, the wife attests that she has manumitted her husband, suggesting that she was the owner and manager of their business since she is the one who had obtained the freed status necessary to be recognized in this capacity. For a discussion of this, see S. Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status, 92–122, esp. 112.


numbered “among them.”¹³¹ The proximity of ποιέω to μετ᾽ αὐτῶν οὖν links the concept of work with Tabitha's presence among the widows and more convincingly points to her work alongside of the widows rather than that she was a widow herself. In addition, the use of ἐπιδεικνύμεναι suggests that the widows displayed the garments openly and with a certain sense of pride.¹³² Therefore, it seems more likely that by showcasing these garments for Peter, the widows were demonstrating Tabitha’s skill and her character as a generous benefactress.¹³³ Barrett also suggests that Acts presents the weeping widows only to demonstrate Peter’s compassion and the reason for the resuscitation.¹³⁴ However, as Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes,

Nothing in this passage draws attention to Peter; apart from his name, nothing in the text identifies him or qualifies him, so that it is misleading to refer to these incidents as demonstrations of Peter’s authority or power.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Of the fifty uses of μετὰ in Acts, approximately twenty-five of them are used with the genitive case. Of this group, twelve have the meaning of presence “with” others. Instances such as Acts 1:26 and 7:38 suggest that this is more than mere physical presence, but it means more that the person is counted among the group. Acts 1:26 καὶ ἔδωκαν κληροὺς αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐπηκατηγορήσαντας metὰ τῶν ἑπτάκοσαν τῶν αὐτῶν ἐπὶ Μαθώνα καὶ τῶν ἀντικυρίων ἑτερῶν. Acts 7:38 οὖν ἔστων ἐν τῇ ἕκκλησιᾷ ἐν τῇ ἑρήμῳ μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ δρεῖ Σινᾶ καὶ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ὡς ἔδεξατο λόγια ἥσεις τῷ ἑμῖν.

¹³² The use of ἐπιδεικνύμεναι in Plutarch suggests the meaning of showing off what is one’s own with pride; especially regarding character traits. Plutarch, Pyrrhus 8.2.6; Phaedrus 258.a.7; Alexander 35.3.1. This interpretation is further supported by uses in Musonius Rufus, Dissertationum a Lucio 9.108; 18B.10.18.

¹³³ I do not think with Parsons that Tabitha is an example of a poor woman who “out of her poverty put in all the living she had…Perhaps her ministry had literally cost her ‘all the living she had.’” Parsons, Acts, 139. There is nothing in this story to suggest Tabitha’s poverty since she is praised as a benefactress rather than one of the needy.

¹³⁴ Barrett, Acts, 148. “The picture of the weeping widows has the effect of representing Peter as not only powerful, but compassionate.”

The focus here is on Tabitha, who receives the description in greater detail. The women gather not just to mourn Tabitha’s loss, but to show the garments and, by doing so, praise her and express their admiration for their benefactress and her exemplary character.

Work seems to hold a special thematic place in this story and, as we shall see, in the later story of Lydia. In both cases the female characters are discussed in relation to their professions.\textsuperscript{136} In both stories, the trade is used not only to amass personal wealth or to advance social standing, but also in to serve the community.\textsuperscript{137} Likewise, Tabitha's home is used for work as well a gathering space for her network. If Gaius (Acts 18:8) is a wealthy man based on his title and the fact that he has a house large enough to accommodate Paul and his travelling party,\textsuperscript{138} then certainly Tabitha's home, with its space large enough to accommodate a group of widows, disciples, saints, and Peter, must be of a similar size and status. However, it is not my intention to argue for Tabitha's elite


\textsuperscript{137} Tabitha and the widows seem closer to the cooperative networks found in the epigraphic data, small units of individuals of differing status who worked together in a common trade and who shared in its benefits. One could also characterize the relationships here according to the formation of collegia that were formed around a patron deity; concerned with a single craft, here cloth production; looked after the needs of its members; and provided for funeral arrangements. Women acted as the patronesses of these collegia in many cases (cf. Eumachia and Junia Theodora, Chapter Three,Women in Commerce and Women as Benefactresses.)

However, according to the author of Acts, the patron of the Christian communities did not claim financial remuneration from the members of the community since the ethos was that all within the group shared their resources equally while still having discrete functions and responsibilities.

\textsuperscript{138} For example, Haenchen, \textit{Acts}, 535, who assumes Gaius' elevated status because of Gaius' title in Acts 18:8, the fact that he was among the first baptized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), and Paul wrote Romans in his household (Rom. 16:23). These same arguments may be brought to bear on discussions of Tabitha's status as well.
social status, but to argue that the text shows that in spite of her comfort, she also chose to use her assets for “good works and acts of charity.” Tabitha is not a municipal benefactresses, such as we found in the inscriptions in the East, but a community benefactresses. One of her benefactions is that she does not facilitate the work through her financial contributions or gifts, but engages in the work along with the women in spite of any differences in social or financial status. Work is the means of equalizing status as well as forming deep emotional and cognitive bonds between the members. Insiders in Acts, like Tabitha, represent diverse backgrounds, but for the most part they are persons with weak social status (i.e., without political power or familial clout), but they have moderate wealth and high community status. Holding up characters of this type as ideals suggests that these characteristics would have formed a bond with the audience of Acts and may have even mirrored their own social situation in some way.

Acts 9:40a ἐκβαλὼν δὲ ἔξω πάντας ὁ Πέτρος καὶ θεὶς τὰ γόνατα προσήχα

Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed.

139 Acts 4:32. See also the discussion above of the text of Acts 6:1–7 for an example of the different functions of community members. The negative example of this principle, and the role of women in the community, is found in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), in which the wife follows her husband in his attempt to conceal and withhold monies from the community.

140 Meeks, First Urban Christians, 190.

141 Ibid., 51–73.

Acts 9:40–42 represents the first phase of the resurrection miracle that in some ways mirrors gospel resurrection stories, but in other ways is quite distinct. Just as the comparison with the resurrection stories from the Hebrew Bible indicates, the text here does not copy any one account closely but instead uses a variety of elements from each of the sources to create a distinct account. As James Dunn observes, “They [the details of Tabitha’s resuscitation] echo the account of the raising of Jairus’ daughter in the Gospel [Luke]…, but still more closely the Markan account.” In Acts, Peter puts everyone outside (ἐκβαλὼν δὲ ἔξω πάντας ὁ Πέτρος), leaving him alone in the room with Tabitha’s corpse. In the Lukan account, Jesus does not allow any of the observers to enter the room except for the parents and Peter, John, and James. In Mark 5:40, when the observers laugh at Jesus, he puts them all outside. The verbal similarity between the text of Acts 9:40a and Mark 5:40 are much closer to each other than either is to the Lukan account. All three accounts incorporate the element of privacy; however, in Acts and Mark the expulsion is more pronounced through the use of ἐκβαλω. The need for privacy seems


145 Luke 8:51 “And when he came to the house he permitted no one to enter with him except Peter and John and James and the father and mother of the child” ἐλθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν οίκιάν οὐκ ἀφῆκεν εἰσέλθειν τινα σὺν αὐτῷ εἰ μὴ Πέτρου καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ τὸν πατέρα τῆς παιδός καὶ τὴν μητέρα

146 Mark 5:40 “And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. Then he put them all outside.” καὶ κατεγέλασαν αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς δὲ ἐκβαλὼν πάντας παραλαμβάνει τὸν πατέρα τοῦ παιδίου καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τοὺς μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰσπροέται ὧδε ἢ τὸ παιδίον.

147 In Mark, Jesus puts everyone outside after they laugh at him. In Acts, the laughter is absent, but Peter still casts everyone outside, which indicates an action of some force. In Acts, this may not be a
more to do with dependency on the Markan text than, as has been suggested by Haenchen, Peter’s hesitancy to heal a woman. In contrast, in Greco-Roman examples of resuscitations, the events more often take place with witnesses present. The one example that Pervo cites in the *Ethiopian Story* that occurs in private and with some secrecy is criticized as an obvious sham. Here Tabitha’s resuscitation is being presented in a wholly positive way, and both Peter and Tabitha are portrayed as honorable characters.

Acts 9:40b καὶ ἐπιστρέψας πρὸς τὸ σῶμα εἶπεν· Ταβιθά, ἀνάστηθι

*He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up."*

In the first action, Peter turns toward Tabitha’s body, which means that he had turned away while he prayed. The use of ἐπιστρέψω both here and in 1 Kings 17:21 suggests a further parallel between the two stories. Peter then directs his command to

---

148 Haenchen notes that Peter could not have proceeded with a woman as Elijah and Elisha had with the dead boy. He seems to mean that Peter could not have had the same type of physical contact with Tabitha. This may be true, but in most New Testament accounts of resuscitations, physical contact with either gender is downplayed in favor of the word or command. Haenchen, *Acts*, 341. The same can also be said of the Greco–Roman sources. For example, Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, trans. C. P. Jones; LCL, 2005), 4.45.1; Apuleius, *Florida*, 19. Cf. Celsus, *On Medicine* 2.6.16–18 concerning Asclepiades’ resuscitation of a girl thought to be dead.

149 Diogenes Laertius, *Empedocles*, 8.67 and Lucian, *Alexander*, 24. In both accounts, there is an implicit skepticism about the veracity of the claims. Resuscitations are dealt with tentatively in the Greco–Roman sources, while in Acts the events are presented without apology.


151 1 Kings 17:21–22 21 καὶ ἐνεφώσκεν τῷ παιδάριῳ τρὶς καὶ ἐπεκαλέσατο τὸν κύριον καὶ εἶπεν κύριε ὁ θεός μου ἐπιστραφῆτω δὴ ἡ ψυχή τοῦ παιδάριου τούτου εἰς αὐτὸν 22 καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως καὶ ἀνεφώσκεν τῷ παιδάριῳ (emphasis mine). The proximity of ἐπιστρέψω αὐτῷ ἡ ψυχή is paralleled in
Tabitha to “get up.” The presence of this healing command is similar in form to Luke 8:54 and Mark 5:41, but the verb used in Acts is different. In Luke 24:7, \(\alphaν\iota\sigma\tau\iota\mu\) is used to describe Jesus’ resurrection.\(^\text{152}\) Acts uses \(\alphaν\iota\sigma\tau\iota\mu\) forty-five times, seven of these are in the imperative.\(^\text{153}\) This could be due to semantic preference, but when the text uses the imperative, it is almost always in a miraculous setting to demonstrate divine power. Of course, the parallel between Tabitha's story and Aeneas' healing (9:34) and Cornelius' story (10:26) are clear, but the wider usage in Acts shows that these are not the only texts in which this occurs. In Acts 9:6 and 26:16, the risen Christ commands Paul. Also, in Acts 8:26, the angel commands Philip in this manner after his conversion.

As was already pointed out in the discussion of Tabitha's name above, when Peter commands Tabitha to get up (\(\alphaν\iota\sigma\tau\iota\thetai\)), he uses her Semitic name, not her Greek name, Dorcas. Several possibilities are suggested. First, the use of the Semitic name here after it was previously translated in 9:36a could represent an earlier version of the story.\(^\text{154}\) Hans Josef Klauck presents evidence that foreign words or names were used in magical

\[\epsilon\pi\sigma\tau\rho\acute{e}\varphi\acute{a}ς \pi\rho\acute{d}ς \tau\delta \sigma\omega\mu\alpha\; in\; Acts\; 9:40b.\] In 1 Kings 17:22, the child cries out when his life returns (bold text), but in Acts Tabitha is silent.

\(^\text{152}\) Also, Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:34 (and parallels) when Jesus foretells his death and resurrection. However, in Mark 16:6, when the young man tells the women, “He has risen,” the verb there is \(\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\rho\omega\). Dunn, \textit{Acts}, 129. \(\alphaν\iota\sigma\tau\iota\mu\) is also used in the story about Peter’s mother-in-law in Luke 4:39. Luke did not copy \(\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\rho\omega\) from Mark 1:31.

\(^\text{153}\) Acts uses \(\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\rho\omega\) seven times, only once in the command form.

\(^\text{154}\) Haenchen, \textit{Acts}, 340. Against this proposal, Pervo, \textit{Acts}, 254. Pervo suggests a date concurrent with the Pastoral Epistles and the Apostolic Fathers based on his perceived presence of an order of widows. The presence of an order of widows in the present story is conjecture as the text does not make this claim; see discussion below for verse 9:39.
commands to show the antiquity and, therefore, the efficacy, of the formula. To avoid the appearance that Peter is involved in any magic manipulations, the apostle is shown to pray first (9:40a). Further, Peter does not look for financial reward but acts only out of his concern for Tabitha and the community. Clearly then, the narrator has not given any signal that Peter is a magician. Another interpretation, and the one that seems most likely in my view, is that the story of Tabitha's resuscitation is intended to show Peter as Jesus’ apostle filled with the Holy Spirit and, after praying, being able to raise the dead. This story allows us to recall Jesus' raising to life Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-55). In doing so, Peter is shown possessing the virtue of philanthropia, just as Tabitha is praised for her philanthropia of good works and charitable actions.

In the previous story of Aeneas, Peter uses Jesus’ name as part of the healing formula (Ἀνέγει, ἰάται σε Θεοῦς Χριστοῦ, ἰάσασθη), but here in the Tabitha narrative,

---


156 These distinctions were first suggested by W. J. Goode, “Magic and Religion: A Continuum,” Ethnos 14 (1949): 172–82. At the same time, most scholars today would claim that the differences between magic and miracle in great measure depends on the lens of the audience and their view of the hero, since for many people of the first century magician is a negative label. It is clear that the narrator has not invited that interpretation here.

157 Wendy Cotter points out the importance of this virtue in the synoptic miracle accounts. I would simply add that in Acts, this virtue is extended not only to the portrait of Peter, but to Tabitha as well. Cotter uses the work of Jacqueline de Romilly on Greco–Roman virtues in La doucer dans la pensée grecque (Paris: Société d'Édition, "Les Belles Lettres", 1979). Wendy J. Cotter, CSJ, Christ of the Miracles Stories, 9–13.
the name of Jesus is conspicuously absent. Mark 5:41 and Luke 8:54 both show Jesus taking the girl’s hand and then issuing the healing command. However, Acts separates these two elements, which again is more reminiscent of 2 Kings 4.

Acts 9:40c ἡ δὲ ἤνοιξεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῆς, καὶ ἰδοῦσα τὸν Πέτρον ἀνεκάθισεν.

Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.

Here the demonstration does not begin with the action of standing up as in the Aeneas story (Acts 9:34), but with the report that first Tabitha opened her eyes. Why include the details that Tabitha opened her eyes, saw Peter, and only then sat up? I would suggest the answer may be in the detail that she sees Peter. Namely, the resuscitation is not verified only by physical means, but Tabitha also is able to perceive Peter's presence and recognize him. Therefore, the miracle restores not only her physical sight, but the corresponding state of perception and understanding. This links Tabitha’s story to Saul’s call story in Acts 9. Paul’s healing is complete when the scales fall from his

---

158 Several manuscripts (Old Latin [it], several Vulgate manuscripts [vgmas], Syriac [Harklensis/syh], Middle Egyptian manuscripts[mae], and Sahidic [sa]) add “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” but this seems an obvious conflation with Acts 9:34.

159 Aeneas stands up directly after Peter’s command. Here, the command and its demonstration are separated by two actions: Tabitha opening her eyes and then sitting up.

160 It is interesting to note here the importance of Isaiah 6:10 to the narrative of Acts. "Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds." For example the juxtaposition of physical sight and perception in Acts 28:26–27 λέγων· πορεύθησαι πρὸς τὸν λαόν τοῦτον καὶ εἶπον· ἀκοῇ ἄκοισετε καὶ οὐ μὴ σαυτῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ θέτητε. ἔπαγγείλῃ γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις παρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν· μὴ πάσην τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις ἀκούσασιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνώσαν καὶ ἐπιστρέψαν, καὶ ἰόσωμεν αὐτούς. (emphasis mine).

161 Sight is referred to six times in that narrative, making it an important motif. Acts 9:7,8,9,12,17,18.
eyes and he is able to see once again. Here Tabitha the disciple's eyes are central to the narrative; it is only when her perception returns that her healing is complete.

Acts 9:41a δοῦς δὲ αὐτῇ χείρα ἀνέστησεν αὐτήν

He gave her his hand and helped her up.

In this final phase of the resuscitation, Peter gives Tabitha his hand and helps her to stand. The hand is clearly borrowing from the gospel miracles (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54), but there Jesus grasps (κρατέω) the girl’s hand and here Peter gives, offers, Tabitha his hand (δοῦς δὲ αὐτῇ χείρα). The parallel is not only to Mark 5:41, but also to Mark 1:31 as well, where Jesus helps Peter's mother-in-law up after he heals her.

Acts 9:41b φων,σαὶ de. του. α`γι,ου καὶ. τα. χρ,αί η παρ,εστ,ει σαλτα.ν ζω/ς

Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

It is only after this rather extended recitation of the terms of the resuscitation that the actual public demonstration occurs. In most Greco-Roman miracle stories, the healing takes place in public and is verified in public. Here in Acts, Tabitha's healing takes

---

162 Acts 9:18 καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψεν τε καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη

163 Mark 1:31 καὶ προσελθὼν ἦγερεν αὐτὴν κρατήρας τῆς χειρὸς καὶ ἀφῆκεν αὐτήν ὁ πυρετός, καὶ διηκόνει αὐτοῖς. Λουκ 4:39 ομιτὸ τῆς ελευθερίας καὶ ἐπιστάσας ἐπάνω αὐτῆς ἐπετίμησεν τῷ πυρετῷ καὶ ἀφῆκεν αὐτήν παραχρῆμα δὲ ἀναστάσας διηκόνει αὐτοῖς.

164 Mark 5:41 καὶ κρατήρας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου λέγει αὐτῇ· ταλίθα κομί, ὦ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον· τὸ κοράσιον, σοί λέγω, ἔγειρε. Further, if Tabitha is on her mourning cushion, then it is logical that Peter would offer her his hand to assist her in to make the transition from a prone position to standing.

place in private and the verification takes place in the semi-public setting of Tabitha's house, where she is surrounded by her community, which includes the saints and the widows. Saints is a new title in this account and may or may not include the same individuals that are designated in 9:40. In addition to Acts 9:40, there are three other instances in Acts where the term saints is used to designate followers of the risen Christ.

In 9:13, Ananias resists laying hands on Paul because κύριε, ἦκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἄνδρος τούτου ὡσα κακὰ τοῖς ἁγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἰερουσαλῆμ. This signals that being a saint sometimes involves being the subject of persecution. In 9:32, Peter διερχόμενον διὰ πάντων κατελθείν καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους τοὺς κατοικοῦντας Λιδόδα. Not only are there saints in the central city of Jerusalem, but also in other towns, including Lydda and Joppa. In 9:32, we have, one notes, the juxtaposition of πάντων meaning all the believers in Lydda, and τοὺς ἁγίους who have a special status in the community. Namely, the saints are a category distinct from the believers. Finally, in 26:10, Paul recounts his persecution of the church and specifically of the saints ὁ καὶ ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἰεροσολύμων, καὶ πολλοὺς τε τῶν ἁγίων ἐγώ ἐν φιλακαίς κατέκλεισα τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐξουσίαν λαβὼν ἀναρριμένων τε αὐτῶν κατήνεγκα ψῆφον. Although persecution is not mentioned specifically in Acts 9:41, the saints seem to be accorded a special status in the narrative that is distinct from the rest of the believers gathered in Tabitha's home.

Acts 9:42 γνωστὸν δὲ ἐγένετο καθ’ ὅλης τῆς Ἰώππης καὶ ἐπίστευσαν πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον.

This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.
Tabitha’s is “shown to be alive” to her close inner circle gathered in her home, but the after effect of the resuscitation becomes “known throughout Joppa.” There is a progression here from private to public: the resuscitation takes place in private (only Peter and Tabitha are present), the demonstration takes place in a semi-public setting of the home (the widows and saints are present), but when the news reaches the entire region and becomes public knowledge, it causes many people to believe in the risen Christ. This wording echoes Acts 9:35 where, based on Aeneas’ healing, many “turned to the Lord.”

This type of rapid dissemination seems to be the very nature of the message as described in Acts. When good is done in the name of the risen Christ or on behalf of the community, it quickly spreads, having a life of its own.

Acts 9:43 'Ἐγένετο δὲ ἡμέρας ἴκανὰς μείναι ἐν Ἰώππῃ παρά τινι Σίμωνι βυσσαῖ.

*Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.*

Peter remains in Joppa for an extended period of days. This phrase acts as a seam that joins Tabitha’s story to the Cornelius episode that follows. Pervo is most likely correct to suggest in his argument that the profession of Simon the Tanner is not meant to

---

166 Acts 9:35 καὶ εἶδον αὐτῶν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες Λιδὰ καὶ τὸν Σαρώνα, οὕτως ἔπεστρεφαν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον. It is interesting to note that this same progression from private to semi–public to public is one of the structural elements in Mark’s gospel. Mark 1:9–11//9:7//15:33–39. This, of course, takes on a different character in the Markan gospel, but the movement is similar.

167 This spread of the message and its ability to win over converts seems to take seriously the imagery in Mark 4:30–32 and the imagery of the mustard seed. In this parable, the standard of comparison is the mustard plant’s own seed, relative to which the size of a grown mustard plant is amazingly large. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 234. See also, Pervo, *Acts*, 256. There are twelve instances in Acts where the dissemination of good news leads to a multitude of new believers. Acts 4:4; 5:14; 8:12; 11:21; 13:12; 13:48; 14:1; 16:34; 17:12, 34; 18:8; 19:18.

168 This is suggested by the use of the phrase ἡμέρας ἴκανὰς. Haenchen, *Acts*, 340.
introduce the issue of Jewish ritual impurity for, as he states, "Were Peter lodging with someone the reader considered ritually impure, the vision of chapter ten would lose its force." Tanning was, of course, an unenviable profession that involved urine for processing. The smells that came from these shops were overwhelming, if we believe Martial, who attested to the pervasive stench that came off the section of Rome where tanners plied their craft. By indicating Simon’s profession, Acts once again highlights work as part of the identity of believers. In spite of Martial's disgust for the craft, Peter does not show any hesitation to stay in Simon’s household, nor does the text suggest any bias against Simon or his trade.

### Conclusion

Although the story of Tabitha’s resuscitation has been largely ignored, it is a rich portrait of discipleship in the early church. Tabitha is not only a disciple of the risen Christ, but a woman who is commemorated because of her charitable and merciful work

---

169 Pervo, Acts, 257. See also, Weiser 1:245.

170 Martial, *Epigrams*, 6.93 Tam male Thais olet quam non fullonis avari testa vetus media sed modo fracta via. Also, 12:59 which recounts Martial's disgust at the greetings he receives from various tradesmen upon returning to Rome. te vicinia tota, te pilosus hircoso premit osculo colonus; hinc instat tibi textor, inde fullo, hinc sutor modo pelle basiata, hinc menti dominus periculosi, hinc dextrocholus inde lippus fellatorque recensque cunnilingus. iam tanti tibi non fiat redire.

171 Artemidorus says that tanners lived outside of the city limits, and here Simon is said to have his house "by the sea" (10:6). Artemidorus, *Onirocriticon*, 1.51.30. τὸ δὲ βυρσοδεψεῖν πᾶσι πονηρόν νεκρῶν γὰρ ἀπεται σομάτων ὁ βυρσοδέψης καὶ τῆς πόλεως ἀπόκειται. For the location by the sea, see Haenchen, *Acts*, 347. Peter Lampe also notes that fullers and tanners occupied Trastevere, the district of Rome that was next to the sea, as it would have ready access to the harbors and the ships. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. M. Steinhauser, ed. M.D. Johnson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 50.
on behalf of those in need. The story of Tabitha’s resuscitation is narrated with care, affection, and attention to detail. As Beverly Roberts Gaventa observes:

Luke frequently presents pairs of scenes, one of which involves a male character and the other a female character, so it is not surprising, at this point, to find a story involving a female character. What is unusual in this instance is that the story of Aeneas is told with such brevity and the story of Tabitha in considerable detail. Another unusual feature of the story is that healings generally involve individuals about whom little information is revealed, but here substantial information emerges about Tabitha.\textsuperscript{172}

This attention to detail together with the picture of sincere loss and grief on the part of those present show that Tabitha as not only a generous benefactress to her community, but one who is sincerely loved. The network of disciples, emissaries, widows, and saints that surround Tabitha are witnesses to her generosity of resources and spirit. Moreover, when the emissaries request that Peter come with them to Joppa immediately, he complies, needing explanation or qualification. This, too, is a sign of Peter’s prior knowledge of the Joppa community and his respect for their benefactress.

Various readings of Tabitha’s narrative focus on her status as a woman, namely her marital status. However, the text is silent on this issue. There is no husband, male relative, guardian, or children present; the narrator portrays Tabitha as an independent woman who has oversight over her business and household affairs, in spite of any prevailing social expectations. Further, Tabitha is engaged in the cloth trade, and based on the structure of the narrative, the women who are present to mourn her are also likely engaged in this business with her. Tabitha made the garments herself with her own hands (9:39), which rather than being an indication of her servile status, indicates that in spite of

\textsuperscript{172} Gaventa, \textit{Acts}, 159.
her own personal financial resources and social prejudices against manual labor, she chose to work with her hands.

Looking forward to Chapter Five and the story of Lydia, a motif is suggested. Work, rather than being downplayed, is held up as one of the ways that women could participate meaningfully in the emerging religious movement. Lydia, too, is positively portrayed as an independent woman who is a distributor of cloth goods. Tabitha and Lydia’s stories are sandwiched between two stories of named, married women—one negative example (Sapphira) and one positive example (Priscilla)—and show that in Acts, women who are independent and righteous are held up as positive examples of behavior and response.\footnote{This pattern and its significance will be discussed further in Chapter Five.}
CHAPTER FIVE
LYDIA OF THYATIRA’S CALL

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the account of Lydia’s call and support of Paul as found in Acts 16:11–15.\(^1\) However, in order to contextualize the significance of the narrative, it is necessary to include the narrator’s story of Paul’s vision of the Macedonian man who asks him to cross over to their country to help them (Acts 16:9–11). The episode of the Macedonian man indicates that Paul's mission is being divinely guided toward Philippi, and when Paul responds, the first significant encounter is with Lydia. This guidance toward Philippi is worthy of note since it was not the most prominent city in this region, but here takes pride of place within the Macedonian portion of Acts. (Acts 16:11–17:10)\(^2\)

The shape of this chapter is largely determined by the conflicting portrayals of Lydia found in scholarship. For example, Ernst Haenchen describes her as a “European wholesaler” although Lydia is from Thyatira (16:14), which is course in Asia Minor.\(^3\) On the other hand, Ivoni Richter Reimer portrays Lydia as a laborer, who along with her

---

\(^1\) I refrain from using the more common title for this passage, “The Conversion of Lydia,” due to the problematic nature of this language. Just as Paul's call is not a conversion from one religion to another, here Lydia is not so much converted to Christianity as she is called to discipleship of the risen Christ. This is not a break with former practices as much a continuation of religious practices within a new framework. The seminal articulation of this principal is Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles: And Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 7–22. This will be discussed in more detail below.

\(^2\) The narration of Paul’s time in Thessalonica is shorter and the city receives a less favorable review. Acts 17:1–9; 11.

household, is among the poorest of the poor, which is difficult to support if Lydia is described as a dealer or seller in the purple goods trade (πορφυρόπωλες), a business usually associated with wealth.4 The fact that both Haenchen and Richter Reimer are important scholars indicates the degree to which there is a need to revisit this account in order to situate Lydia within her social and cultural context, as the listeners of Acts are being invited to do.

The various questions of context require this chapter to be divided into three sections. First, the particular understanding of Philippi that would have been ordinary for the narrator’s listeners needs to be better clarified. Second, the evidence of women’s presence in Philippi’s society and cultural and religious life requires examination, which will include the literary and inscriptional evidence pertaining to Philippi of the imperial period. This will allow for the proper backdrop for the third section, which will feature a phrase-by-phrase analysis of Acts 16:9–11 (Paul’s vision calling him to Macedonia) and then Acts 16:13–15. This makes it possible to carefully reconstruct the significance the narrator intends to convey about the providential character of Paul’s visit to Macedonia, that is, Philippi, and the significance of Lydia’s response to him. In this way, I hope to reveal the impact of the person of Lydia for the narrative of Acts.

---

The City of Philippi

There has been a tremendous amount written on the city of Philippi and its designation here as "the leading city of the district of Macedonia."

This section will deal with the favorable terms under which Paul and his travelling companions arrive in Philippi as well as the background on Philippi as a Roman colony. In spite of the greater prominence of Amphipolis and Thessalonica among Macedonian cities, Paul interprets the vision and oracle in Acts 16:9 as compelling him to go to Philippi directly.

Philippi is located 14 kilometers northwest of Kavala, the ancient port of Neapolis. The Via Egnatia runs directly from Neapolis through Philippi from east to west. The city's natural boundaries are formed by a steep hillside on the north topped by a fortified acropolis and what would have been in the first century a large marshy area to the south. The majority of the city was built south of the Via Egnatia, the only major exception being the theatre complex, which was built into an area sandwiched between the road on the south and the hillside on the north. Prior to 360 BCE, the region of Philippi was dominated by eastern tribes all with Thracian names and who practiced

---

5 I use the most common translation of the Greek text (NRSV, Nestle–Aland, etc.). This preferred translation has some difficulties as it assumes an error on the part of the author. I will discuss this issue in more detail in the section titled “Text Critical Issues” below.


7 Oakes points out that the area designated as Philippi would include the plain named the Pangaion (lies between Philippi and Amphipolis), the Symbolon hills (south of the Pangaion), and the port of Neapolis itself. The eastern edge of Philippi would abut the boundary with Thrace. Oakes, Philippians, 11 (map).
Thracian religions. In 356 BCE, the territory became a dependent ally of Philip of Macedon, who over the next ten years fortified the city, added new colonists, drained areas of the marsh, and built the theatre. Just as in other cases, Philip created a city based on an Athenian model with an acropolis, central agora, Greek style temples, and classical Greek symbols on its coinage.

In 167 BCE, Rome defeated the Macedonians, and Aemilius Paulus, who was twice consul of the Roman Republic and a military victor, divided Macedonia into four regions or districts. After the decisive victory of Antony and Octavian over Cassius and Brutus in 42 BCE, the city was established as the Roman *Colonia Victrix Philippensium*. Then, after his historic victory at Actium, Octavian re-founded the colony and demobilized a large number of soldiers and other colonists to the area. In 27 BCE the colony was given its official name, *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis*, and a

---


10 Livy, *History of Rome* 44.17–XLV.41; Polybius, *Histories*, 32.8; See “Text Critical Issues” below for a discussion of “district” terminology. If we accept Plutarch's version of the events, Aemilius Paulus killed 500 Macedonians who were suspected of opposition and sacked 70 towns in Epirus that had previously surrendered, leaving much of the kingdom bankrupt and 150,000 people enslaved, including the Macedonian king. Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 6, LCL; trans. B. Perrin.

second wave of colonists arrived. The outlines of the city remained relatively unchanged, but the center of the city was dramatically changed to showcase a Roman-style forum with statues and monuments to honor its Roman citizenry and highlight Roman social and political values. The second wave of colonization also brought in a large influx of craftspeople, traders, free migrant workers, and slaves. Of those groups that came willingly, they seem to have been drawn by the revitalized city and a new consumer base for their products and services.

Appian called the city “the gateway between Europe and Asia.” Both Paul and Lydia travelled through this gateway, he on his circuitous journey from Asia Minor to Philippi, and Lydia between her birthplace in Asia Minor and Macedonia. The fact that the text mentions Philippi’s status as a Roman colony suggests that the reader is to assume that all of the same laws and mores would be in practice there as in other Roman

---

12 Archaeological information from Paul Collart and compiled in Philippes was later challenged and revised by Paul Lemerle, Philippes et la Macédoine orientale à l’époque chrétienne et byzantine: Recherches d’histoire et d’archéologie, 2 vols., BEFAR 158 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1945). Since that time, there have been other excavations that have refined and contested these two foundational studies, but all of them are dependent on these two groundbreaking works. Some of the most influential are Demetrios Lazarides, Philippi: rŏmaïke apoikia, Ancient Greek Cities 20 (Athens: Athens Technological Organization, Athens Center of Ekistics, 1973); Papazoglou, La villes de macédoine à l’époque romaine; and more recently, Peter Pilhofer, Philippi: Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 1995), and Lukas Bormann, Philippi: Stadt und Christengemeinde zur Zeit des Paulus, NovTsup. 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

13 The influence of this influx is most readily seen in the three-block building project parallel to the Via Egnatia and south of the forum. One large block is a row of Roman style shops built into the south wall. The west block contained an exercise area, a small amphitheatre, and a large underground lavatory. The middle block was a retail market. Therefore, over two-thirds of the new building projects during this time period were for retail and trade. Abrahamsen, Women and Worship, 12.

14 Appian, Civil Wars., LCL; trans. H. White, 4: 105–106. Διοδός... ἐς τὴν Χόλαν τε καὶ Ἑυρώπην καθέπηρ πολαί
colonies. This would include the status of and involvement of women in the business and religious life of the community.

**Women’s Involvement in the Society of Philippi**

The inscriptive material from Philippi demonstrates that women engaged in many of the religious cults of the city in leadership roles. Gatherings of women for religious purposes would not have been uncommon. Peter Pilhofer has compiled the large corpus of inscriptions from Philippi into one volume. Many of the inscriptions included show that, just as in other places in the Greek East, women donated public statues and inscriptions in their own names and set up funerary inscriptions to honor husbands, children, parents, slaves, and other loved ones also at their own cost or through their own testamentary trusts. They also held offices in the religious cults, here in the cults of Livia Augusta and Diana. These inscriptions also show that different kinds of women, not just those from the elite classes, paid for these inscriptions, statues, and other honorary monuments. Scandillia Optata, a non-elite, donated a niche and a statue of Venus “to fulfill a vow, freely, willingly.”

---

15 This volume represents a great gift to the scholarly community. It is the second volume of Pilhofer’s work on Philippi. Pilhofer, *Philippi: Katalog der Inschriften von Philippi* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). The translations of the inscriptions from German are my own, as are any errors.

16 These names are included in inscription 226: Julia Auruncina, the daughter of Caius; Julia Modia, the daughter of…; Maecia Auruncina Calaviana, the daughter of Caius; Octavia Polla, the daughter of Publius; and, finally, Maecia Auruncina Calaviana, the daughter of Caius has this [monument] made (fecit).” For another example see, 002, “Cornelia Asprilla, daughter of Publilius, Priestess of the deified Augusta, 35 years old, lies buried here.” Cornelia P(ublili) fil(ia) Asprilla, sac(erdos) divae Aug(ustae), ann(orum) XXXV h(ic) s(ita) e(st). In the final portion of the inscription, Maecia Auruncina Calaviana is credited with donating the monument.

17 All numbering is from Pilhofer. 057 Scandilia Optata, Venerei, aedicule et sigillo, vot[um] sol[vit l(ibens) m(erito)]. The inscription was discovered in Dikili-Tash about 1.5 kilometers east of
Libera, Thracian agricultural deities, such as those dedicated by Salvia Pisidia and Pisidia Helpis. Inscription 341 reads, “Salvia Pisidia for Liber Pater 1000 sesterces.” These and other dedicatory inscriptions to gods and goddesses in Philippi suggest that women displayed their piety publically and held positions of some authority in these same cults. Funerary inscriptions donated by women also show that women held enough monetary power not only to pay for the inscription, but to claim this explicitly in the inscription. For example, inscription 300 states, “Caius Annius Fuscus, eight years old, lies buried here. Annia Secunda, the daughter of Caius, had this made for her son and for herself and for her husband, Manius Secundus, the freedman of Manius, during their lifetime at her own cost.” Annia claims both her own dedication of the inscription at her own cost and her husband's freed status.

Both the Roman citizens of the forum and the more humble environs of the acropolis hillside both attest to the donations of women and their honorary titles. Both groups publically honor their loved ones while at the same time claiming their own status and positions in society. These examples suggest a backdrop for Lydia's own

---

18 Salvia Pisidia Lib(ero) Pat(ri) MN. 1,000 sesterces are equal to about 250 denarii. Pilhofer notes, “Diese Summe läge durchaus im Rahmen dessen, was in vergleichbaren Inschriften aus Philippi an Summen gennant wird.” "So the sum is an average amount given for a dedication of this type based on the data from Philippi." Pilhofer, Philippi, 2:348.

19 C(aius) Annius Fuscus an(norum) VIII l(ibens) e(st). Annia C(ai) f(ilia) Secunda filio et sibi et [M(anio)] Cassio M(ani) l(iberto) Secundo viro v(otum) s(olvit) m(erito). Similarly, 184 reads, “Aelia Atena ex votum fecit,” which lies next to a Diana/Artemis relief.
involvement in the religious life of Philippi. Lydia’s narrative could, of course, be a rhetorical strategy with little or no basis in historical reality,\textsuperscript{20} or the text could be a window onto the historical reality of a woman named Lydia.\textsuperscript{21} But it seems that this strict dichotomy is unnecessary. Lydia’s characterization as a pious, Gentile woman who participates in public prayer to the God of Israel is supported by both the inscriptional evidence and the rhetorical focus of Acts to bring pious Gentiles to be followers of the risen Christ. In the following verse, when we learn about Lydia’s occupation, this connection becomes even more explicit. As Shelly Matthews observes, “Such an audience would view a character 9 [like Lydia] involved in trade, who had achieved a measure of respectability, as mirroring their own social and economic aspirations.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Exegesis}

\textbf{Paul's Vision of the Macedonian Man}

Acts 16:9-11 \begin{quote} Καὶ ὁ ὄραμα διὰ τὴν Παύλῳ ὅφθη, ἀνὴρ Μακεδὼν ἦν ἐστὶ καὶ παρακλὴν αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων: διαβάζεις εἰς Μακεδονίαν βοήθησον ἡμῖν. ὅτε τὸ ὄραμα εἶδεν, εὐθέως ἐξητήσαμεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς Μακεδονίαν συμμιμαζόμενοι ὅτι \end{quote} 


\textsuperscript{21} For example, Richard Ascough, \textit{Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 82–95.

\textsuperscript{22} Matthews, \textit{First Converts}, 88. Matthews endorses this mediating strategy while stressing the rhetorical strategies of the text. She points to the public inscriptions in the Greek East to demonstrate that women like Lydia would be common enough in this environment and, therefore, a realistic character for Acts conversion narrative.
During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following day to Neapolis,23

The path of the second missionary journey (beginning in Acts 15:36) has been observed to be less than straightforward and comprehensible.24 As Pilhofer notes, “The path is described…as a crisscross route that would take some effort (and time!), even using modern methods of transportation."25 This suggests to the reader that until divine guidance was received, the mission did not have an unimpeded course.26

---


26 In *Oneirocritica* 2.23, Artemidorus states, "Dreaming that one is at sea and, indeed, that one has a safe voyage is good for everyone…but ships that are landing and putting in port signify that the good fulfillsments will come true more quickly." Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. R. White (Park Ridge, IL: Noyes, 1975), 103–04. Richard Pervo notes this passage as well in *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. By H. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 694–95.
The intervention of the “spirit of Jesus” (τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ) in Acts 16:7 and the nocturnal vision (ὄραμα διὰ ἃ [τῆς] νυκτὸς) of the Macedonian man (ὅνηρ Μακεδών) in Acts 16:9 stress that the mission to Macedonia is divinely ordained and supernaturally guided.\(^{27}\) Of the eleven times that ὄραμα is used in Acts, in each case it is a divine vision that asserts the authority and authenticity of the recipient.\(^{28}\) The relative ease with which Paul and his travelling companions arrive in Neapolis stands in contrast to the resistance that Paul receives in 16:5–8, where there is a divine mandate and obstruction against preaching.\(^{29}\) In response to Paul's vision, the narrator reports in 16:10, "When he had seen

\(^{27}\) While it may be true that this vision took place at night and so could be interpreted as a mere dream, the vision (ὅραμα) employs the technical language of a dream vision that imparts information about future events emanating from a divine source. Artemidorus, relying on the work of Artemon of Miletus (who wrote during the reign of Nero) and Phoebus of Antioch (1st c. BCE), distinguishes between the enhypnion and the oneiros (of which ὥραμα is one type). In Book One of the Oneirocriticon Artemidorus explains, “The enhypnion indicates the present state of affairs. To put it more plainly, it is the nature of certain experiences to run their course in proximity to the mind and to subordinate themselves to its dictates...the operation of the enhypnion is therefore limited to the duration of one’s sleep. But the oneiros, being an enhypnion (something in one’s sleep) is also active during that period, but calling to the dreamer’s attention a prediction of future events, and after sleep, it is the nature of the oneiros to awaken and excite the soul by inducing active undertakings...this includes the ὥραμα and its oracular response.” He goes on to indicate that he will not discuss the ὥραμα in detail since, “I suspect that any man to whom these things are not immediately evident will be unable to follow them closely...For it is contrary to reason unless the dreamer is a king, a magistrate, or τις τῶν μεγιστάνων that he would understand such things." (1.2.120) The ὥραμα is reserved only for those who are worthy of and can properly interpret such visions. Artemidorus, Interpretation of Dreams, 16–17. This information is based on my own research and conference presentation “Resistance in Acts” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Society of Biblical Literature, Valparaiso, IN, February, 2010), 9–12.

\(^{28}\) Acts 7:31 (Moses/Stephen's speech); 9:10 (Ananias); 12 (Paul); 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9 (Peter); 16:9–10; 18:9 (Paul).

\(^{29}\) The pattern of Acts 16:6–40 is similar to other resistance myths in antiquity. Resistance is associated with the establishment of or transfer of the religious worship of a foreign god(ess) to a new region. These myths generally begin with a divine vision similar to Paul's night vision in 16:10. Examples of this type of resistance myth are Euripides, Bacchai 1–87; Ovid, Metamorphoses 597–718; Plutarch, Marcellus 17.9; Cicero, de Legibus, 2.37; Demosthenes, Orationes, 19.281. For a discussion of this material see, Parsons, Acts, 227–28; John B. Weaver, Plots of Epiphany: Prison–Escapes in Acts of the Apostles, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter , 2004), 53–54. For more in–depth treatments that include a history of scholarship, see Clare K. Rothschild, “God in Transit: Luke Transfers Christianity to Rome,” publication forthcoming in a collection of essays from the SBL section on Bible and Myth; James Hanges, “Paul,
the vision (τὸ ὀράμα), we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.\textsuperscript{30} The immediately (εὐθέως) is realized in the very next verse, when Paul and his companions sailed out from Troas to Samothrace on a straight course (εὐθυδρομήσαμεν).\textsuperscript{31} As Beverly Roberts Gaventa observes, "When Paul and his colleagues attempt to steer the course, they are corrected. It is almost as if they wander around Asia Minor until God grants them a direction."\textsuperscript{32} As verse 16:11 suggests, Paul and his companions arrive quickly and safely in the port of Neapolis and proceed directly to Philippi.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Acts 16:10 ὡς δὲ τὸ ὀράμα εἶδεν, εὐθέως ἐξητήσαμεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς Μακεδονίαν συμβιβάζωντες ὅτι προσκύλησαι ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εὐκερείας ζητῶν, (emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{31} Acts 16:11 Ἀναχθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ Τροάς εὐθυδρομήσαμεν εἰς Σαμοθράκην, τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ εἰς Νέαν πόλιν (emphasis mine). The straight course contrasts with the zigzag course of the previous episodes. The sense of this verse is reflected in the translation: Paul and his followers set out from Troas immediately taking the direct sea route to the next port of Samothrace. This journey is approximately 419 miles. The text does not specify how long it took the group to make the trip. What the text does stress, is that they did not stay in Samothrace, but, instead, set sail for Neapolis on the day after their arrival in Samothrace.

\textsuperscript{32} Gaventa, 	extit{Acts}, 235. She also notes that this is the only place where followers of the risen Christ are prevented from entering a region.

\textsuperscript{33} Acts 16:12 κακεῖθεν εἰς Φιλίππας suggests that the group spent little if any time in Neapolis and instead went directly to Philippi without delay. Barrett is one of the few commentators who notes that the use of διατρίβοντες ἡμέρας τινὰς indicates a continuous, but not extended, stay in Philippi before the group ventures out to find the place of prayer. Barrett, 	extit{Acts}, 780. He notes that the periphrastic imperfect with the auxiliary ἦμεν separated from the participle διατρίβοντες emphasizes this continuous, but compact, length of time. He uses the example of 9:19 as a relevant comparison. Also, he suggests that the use of ἡμέρας ἵκανας elsewhere in Acts (9:23, 43; 18:8; 27:7) suggests a longer stay. Haenchen interprets διατρίβοντες ἡμέρας τινὰς to mean the number of days between the group’s arrival and the first Sabbath (16:13). Haenchen, 	extit{Acts}, 494.
Acts 16:12 κάκειθεν εἰς Φιλίππους, ἦτις ἐστὶν πρώτης τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις, κολονία. Ἡμεν δὲ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει διατριβοῦμες ἡμέρας τινὰς. 34

And from there [Neapolis] to Philippi, which is a city of the first district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

Acts 16:13a τῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐξήλθομεν ἐξω τῆς πύλης παρὰ ποταμὸν οὗ ἐνομίζομεν προσευχήν εἶναι,

On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we expected there to be a place of prayer;

34 The argument over what is meant by “a leading city in the district of Macedonia” has a long history in Acts scholarship. (See Chart A for listing of textual witnesses) The oldest form of the text in the extant Greek witnesses appears to be πρώτη τῆς μερίδος Μακεδονίας πόλις, “a first city of the district of Macedonia,” which is also the variant (b) with the strongest list of witnesses. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 393. However, the problem with this reading is that, based on the lack of an article before Macedonia and the presence of the article before μερίδος τε suggests that it is demonstrative, i.e. "the first city of that part of Macedonia." However, Philippi was not the first city of any of the four districts of Macedonia. In spite of this, it is difficult to suggest that any of the other variants provide better readings or are supported by better witnesses. For the many and varied arguments over this passage, see F. J. A. Hort, "Notes on Select Readings," in The New Testament in the Original Greek, rev. by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort( London: MacMillan, 1881), 585; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non–literary Sources, (London: MacMillan, 1930), xvi; Kirsooll Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, The Beginnings of Christianity, P.t 1; The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 6, eds. F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake (London: MacMillan, 1933), 187–88; Theodor Zahn, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lucas, Zweite Hälfte Kap. 13–28, KNT 2; Leipzig: A. Deichert Werner Scholl, 1919), 569, n. 78. More recently, an inscription from Beroea (dated to 79–84 CE and cited in F. Papazoglou, Les villes de macédoine à l’époque romaine, 65) concerns a Lucius Baebius Honoratus and uses the term συνέδρων πρώτη μέρες which closely mirrors the use in Acts. This suggests that this type of designation for cities other than capital cities was not uncommon in that region. Pilhofer, Acts, 161–62.
The City Gate

The identification of the city gate in Acts 16:13 has been heavily influenced by Collart's proposition that it is the western gate of the city.35 For Collart, this confirmed his theory that this gate and the archway outside it marked the boundary of the city's pomerium. As a Roman colony, Philippi was, as Aulus Gellus puts it, "a miniature as it were, and in a way a copy."36 Just as the great city of Rome had its sacred pomerium to impose a restriction on the worship of foreign gods in the city, so did its "miniature," Philippi. There are two problems with this theory: distance and the presence of gravesites in this area. The Keimer arch lies two kilometers west of the Amphipolis Gate, which would require a trip of five miles for worshippers to travel on the Sabbath. In addition to being impractical, the size of this pomerium would be unprecedented.37 In Collart's defense, the gravesites were not uncovered until after he had published his findings. As Pilhofer notes, "This [the finding of the gravesites] constitutes the final blow to the pomerium theory: graves within the pomerium are something that is impossible."38

35 Collart bases this on his observation that shortly after leaving the city proper, after a few hundred meters the road crosses a river, shortly after this there are the remains of an archway structure, the arch of Kiemer. He interpreted this archway as the πολή mentioned in the text here. He states, "If the Jews of Philippi went there to meet ἐξω τῆς πολῆς they were compelled to do so by law. We have already indicated what the monument [archway] signified: it belongs to a category of colonial arches that were erected when the city was established at the precise point where the main route intersects the sacred line of the pomerium." Collart, Philippes, 319–25; quote from 495, n.1.


37 Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:169. A rendering of the area to scale shows that the pomerium would be approximately four times the size of the city proper. Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:68.

38 Ibid. "…was die pomerium-Theorie endgültig erledigt: Gräber innerhalb eines pomerium sind ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit."
Similarly, the area outside the Neapolis gate was used for gravesites and, therefore, is equally untenable. There is a third however, that was not discovered until the final phase of the French excavations in 1937 and was not the subject of serious discussion until Pilhofer proposed this as the gate in question.\(^{39}\) Lazarides named this “The Marshes Gate”; it leads directly into the drained marsh area near one of the rivers.\(^{40}\) Based on these findings, the better translation of this passage may be "We went out, outside the gate by the river," which does not mean that the place of prayer is located by a river. “By the river” modifies “the gate,” so the phrase specifies the name and location of the gate.\(^{41}\)

**Excursus I: Text Critical Issues Acts 16:13**

Bruce Metzger writes concerning verse 16:13, "In view of the wide range of variables in lexicography, syntax, paleography, and textual attestation, the difficulties presented by this verse are well nigh baffling."\(^{42}\) Metzger and the United Bible Society

---


\(^{40}\) Lazarides, I,II,III,IV, V, 45, Map 9. The advantages to this gate are that it lies a mere 300 meters to the south of the Amphipolis Gate and no gravesites are likely to be uncovered in this location. Further, there is a river just fifty meters outside the gate and this forms a *cul de sac* that is 500 meters at its widest part.

\(^{41}\) Haenchen points out, "That synagogues usually stood near water is not proven. Billerbeck knows of no rabbinical proof for this." *Acts*, 494. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.258 suggests that this was a customary practice. The decree of Halicarnassus, "They [the Jews] may make their *proseuchē* by the sea as was the custom of their forefathers." kai. ta. j proseuca. j poiei/sqai po. j th/| qala,th| kata. to. pa, trion e:qoj. Also, Ep. Aristeas, 305, "Following the custom of all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea in the course of their prayers to God." in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1:33; P. Tebt. 1.86.17 includes the registry of a Jewish synagogue in the Arsinoite capital situated on a canal or ditch of some sort. προσευ(χὴ) λι(βὸς) περίστασις πό(λεως) ἀπη(λιώτου) Ἀργα(ίτιδος) διῶρυ(ξ). βο(ρρᾶ) [ἐ]χο(μένης) προσευχῆς Ἰουδαίων διὰ Περτόλλου. διὰ μι(σθωτοῦ) Πετεσούχου τοῦ Μαρρήους ἱερᾶς παρα(δείσου) γ δ´ ιϛ´, [σ]τεφά(νοις) καὶ λαχά(νοις). None of this presents strong evidence for this being a custom that was universally followed by all Jews. Rather than specifying that the place of prayer was by a river in accordance with Jewish custom, the text suggests its specific location (emphasis mine).

\(^{42}\) Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 395.
(UBS) committee accept the reading ἐνομίζομεν προσευχὴν εἰναὶ with a decided lack of enthusiasm, calling it the "least unsatisfactory solution." This reticence can be better understood after looking at Chart B, which illustrates how deeply the sources are divided. The reading preferred by the UBS committee is supported by the largest number of textual witnesses (A5, C, 33, 81, pc, bo, Ψ); however, the two strongest textual witnesses are split. Codex Sinaiticus uses ἐνόμιζεν προσευχὴν εἰναὶ, and Codex Vaticanus supports the reading ἐνομίζομεν προσευχὴν εἰναὶ, both of which have significant difficulties associated with them. Sinaiticus' use of ἐνόμιζεν does not correspond to the use of the first person plural in the previous verses and probably testifies to an earlier ἐνομίζομεν. Vaticanus' reading, which can be translated as, "Where we were accustomed to pray," would involve an unusual, but not unheard of use of the dative in this type of construction. It is, of course, possible that since arriving in Philippi and staying ἡμέρας τινάχ, Paul and his companions had ventured out to this spot to pray before, but this does not seem to be what is indicated within the context of the story. However, the most convincing evidence against this reading is that in each of the seven times that Acts uses the impersonal verb νομίζω, the verb is paired with an

43 Ibid., 396.

44 Codex Alexandrinus with correction (A5), Codex Ephraemi (C), Minuscules 33 and 81 (Alexandrian type), a few manuscripts that do not agree with the majority reading (pc), Bohairic (bo) which were translated independently and directly from the Greek manuscripts, and Codex Athous Laurae (Ψ).

45 Metzger, Textual Commentary, 396.

46 Barrett, Acts, 2:780–81. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 395. This reading is supported by the use of the imperfect; however, the unusual use of the dative case and the context makes it less likely.
infinitive and the accusative case. The weight of this evidence favors of the reading οὐ ἐνομίζομεν προσευχὴν εἶναι as well as the translation "where we expected there to be a place of prayer."

**The Proseuche**

Acts 16 envisions the proseuche as a sort of central meeting place or base of activity for Paul and his travelling companions. (cf. 16:16) Paul travelled repeatedly between Lydia’s home (16:15) and the proseuche, and it is there that he encounters the girl with the Pythian spirit.

Many of the arguments for the proseuche being an informal gathering place base their claim on the fact that only women are gathered there. For example, Haenchen

---

47 Acts 7:25; 8:20; 14:19; 16:13; 16:27; 17:29; 21:29. Barrett points out that Luke 3:23 is an exception to this pattern; however, the usage in Luke is a genuine passive that does not mean “to be accustomed to.” Luke 3:23 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος ὥσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα, ὡν γὰρ, ὡς ἐνομίζετο, Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἡλί. Barrett, Acts, 2:781. As a rule, I have refrained taking into account evidence from the Lukan gospel in this analysis of the patterns in Acts and, therefore, do not cite this exception here.

48 Acts 16:16 Ἐγένετο δὲ πορευομένων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν παιδίσκην τινὰ ἑξοσκούσαν πνεῦμα πῦθωα ὑπονήματι ἡμῖν, ἦτες ἐργαζόμενοι πολλὴν παρείχετε τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτῆς μαντευόμενη. "One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling." This suggests that the group went to the proseuch more frequently than just on the Sabbath and argues against Haenchen's reading of the passage: “The going to the proseuch, which makes sense only on the Sabbath, is now strictly superfluous.” Acts, 495. Pilhofer states, "The troubles on the part of the παιδίσκη do not only take place this one time, but instead as stated explicitly, many times. This is much easier to imagine if Paul and his companions took a certain route with particular reliability. For Philippi is not so small that Paul and his companions would have been able to run into the παιδίσκη simply by coincidence. Die Belästigungen seitens der paidi,skh erfolgen ja nicht nur dieses eine Mal (v. 16), sondern, wie es ausdrücklich heißt, viele Male (v. 18: τούτο δὲ ἑποίει ἐπὶ πολλάς ἡμέρας). Dies ist viel eher vorstellbar, wenn Paulus und seine Begleiter mit einer gewissen Regelmäßigkeit einen bestimmten Weg gingen; denn so klein ist Philippi nicht, daß Paulus und seine Begleiter täglich der paidi,skh einfach zufällig begegnen könnten." Pilhofer, Philippi, 173.

49 This argument has been cogently outlined by Richter Reimer, Women in Acts, 79–92. For examples of this presumption, see Jürgen Roloff, Die Apostelgeschichte, NTD 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), 244; and Gottfried Schille, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, ThHK 5 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 341. Their presumption seems based in large part on a reference in
states, "But only a few women come to pray. The foreign messengers are not
discouraged. They deliver the good news of the Lord Jesus." This demeaning statement
assumes that the missionaries were forced by default to speak to the women rather than
that they chose to do so.

Literary sources use the terms *synagogue* and *proseuche* somewhat
interchangeably. In Philo *Legat.* 156, referring to the Jewish gatherings at Rome, it states,
"Therefore he knew that they had *proseuchas* and they were in the habit of visiting them,
and most especially on holy seventh (days)." Also, in Josephus *Vita* 277, "On the next
day, therefore, they all gathered into the *proseuche* it was a large edifice, and capable of
receiving a great crowd/multitude" (emphasis mine). In five other references in this
same work and two references in *Antiquities*, Josephus calls the edifice that is meant to

---

*Billerbeck to Megilla 23b: H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud
repeated, nor does one pass before the ark, nor do [the priests] lift their hands, nor is the Torah read
[publically], nor the Haftarah read from the prophet, except in the presence of ten (*πατρίου*)." Although
Billerbeck translates *πατρίου* as ten persons, Roloff and Schille interpret this as ten *men*, thus negating any
value that the gathering of women in Acts 16:13 would have for the narrative. Bernadette Brooten cites the
companion passage in tractate *Megillah* (23a) as mitigating proof that women could be counted toward the
necessary number of people needed to begin readings. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptio*

---

51 Philo does not suggest that these are informal synagogues, but that they are proper communities
that adhere to the customs of *τὴν πάτριον*. Philo of Alexandria, *Legatio ad Gaium*, ἡπίστατο οὖν καὶ
*προσευχὰς* ἔχοντας καὶ συνιόντας εἰς αὐτάς, καὶ μᾶλιστα ταῖς ἱεραῖς ἑβδόμαις ὅτε δημοσίᾳ τὴν πάτριον
παίδευον τὴν ἐν τῇ ἱερᾶς ἀρχῆς συνάγοντας ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπαρχῶν ἱερά. (TLG) Other uses in
Philo include *Legat.* 132–38 and *Flacc.* 6–7, 14, 41–54.
52 Josephus, *Vita*, κατὰ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ὦν ἤμεραν συνήγαγεν πάντες εἰς τὴν προσευχήν μέγιστον
οὐκέτα καὶ πάλιν ὄχλοι ἐπεδέξαντες δυνάμειν εἰσελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἑωπάθης φανερώς μὲν περὶ τῆς
ἀπαστάσεως οὐκ ἐτάξαμα λέγειν ἐφι ἐκ στρατηγοῦ κριτώνος χρείαν τὴν πάλιν αὐτῶν ἔχειν
house the formal gathering space of the Jewish community a *proseuche*. Finally, *P. Tebt.* 1.86 uses the term *proseuche* to refer to the building that housed a Jewish place of worship in Krokodilopolis, the capital of the Arsinoite nome in Egypt. These literary and papyrological cases show, at least in some cases, the terms *proseuche* and *synagoge* were synonymous; however, *proseuche* is the much more common term for the building.

However, as Barrett has noted, the term *proseuche* is not used to refer to a formal synagogue. *Proseuche* is used at other places in Acts but generally to denote the more general act of prayer. Acts16:13 and 16:16 are the only places where *proseuche* is used as an accusative indicating that it is a specific place rather than an action. Based on its usage in Acts, it is likely that the *proseuche* is not a building, but a gathering space where the women congregate on the Jewish Sabbath to worship to the God of Israel. As Richard Pervo notes, "It is equally possible that Luke has varied the terminology. In any event, this place of prayer plays the same role as synagogues do elsewhere. It is Paul's first..."
missionary target."\textsuperscript{57} The missionary target in this case is a group of women and their leader, Lydia.

Suggestions that the \textit{proseuche} is an \textit{al fresco} place of prayer\textsuperscript{58} are supported by the work of Valerie Abrahamsen and her extensive investigation of the archaeological remains of the rock reliefs at Philippi. Abrahamsen shows that there were two main cults active in the city of Philippi during the imperial period, the cults of Diana and Silvanus.\textsuperscript{59} The cult of Silvanus is a traditional indoor temple with statues and paintings, while the Diana sanctuary was completely open-air. The cult of Silvanus only allowed the participation of men, but while the cult of Diana may have been dominated by women, there is evidence that men were also allowed to take part.\textsuperscript{60} Abrahamsen's findings are helpful because they confirm the information found in the inscriptional sources, namely, the concern for piety and the widespread involvement of women in the religious life of Philippi. Further, the fact that the cult of Diana was practiced outdoors rather than in a temple has some resonance with the women in Acts, who gather outside to participate in their own form of worship. In spite of the evidence in the literary and papyrological

\textsuperscript{57} Pervo, \textit{Acts}, 402, n. 19.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 402–403 and n. 22.

\textsuperscript{59} Valerie Ann Abrahamsen, "The Rock Reliefs and the Cult of Diana at Philippi: A Thesis" (PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1986). This research was then expanded and published in \textit{Women and Worship at Philippi}, 1995.

\textsuperscript{60} Abrahamsen correctly points out that these pagan cults would have been far more popular than the worship of the risen Christ during this time period. In spite of this, Acts shows pious women being attracted to the \textit{correct} form of worship, the worship of the God of Israel and the risen Christ. Abrahamsen, "Women and Worship at Philippi: The Pagan and Christian Evidence" \textit{JFSR} 3, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 17–30.
sources, based on the internal evidence in Acts, the *proseuche* in Acts 16:13 would more likely be an informal space rather than a synagogue building.  

Acts 16:13b καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλαλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθοῦσιν γυναιξίν.

*and sitting down, we were speaking to the women gathered [there].*

The use of συνέρχομαι here suggests a formal, purposeful gathering. In literary uses during the first and second centuries CE, συνέρχομαι refers to gathering armies as well as sanctioned political assemblies. The uses in Acts mirror this, but in many cases they refer to a religious gathering. Paul and his companions "sit down" and speak with the women, further suggesting an instructional and religious setting. In Acts, καθίζω is used in 8:31 when Philip explains the scripture passage to the eunuch by εὐθείᾳ ἐλεύθερον αὐτῷ τὸν Ἰησοῦν. (Acts 8:35). In Acts 13:14, Paul and his followers ἔλθουσιν ἐκάθισαν. As discussed in Chapter Four, in Acts 9:39, the women gather in Tabitha's home to participate in the formal mourning rituals.

---

61 This does not preclude that the gathering could have taken place in a home, shop, or other similar space, only that there is no evidence for a formal synagogue.

62 For example, *Cato Minor* 59.5.1 and *Caesar* 21.5.3. Appian uses the term to describe lawful gatherings with civic benefits such as *Mithridatic Wars* 7.46. A reference in *Publicola* 19.8.1 is meant to critique a nonsanctioned, secret gathering with nefarious purposes.

The use of λαλέω here with καθίζω and συνέρχομαι further reinforces the formal nature of the gathering. In Acts, there are numerous places where λαλέω has a more specific meaning than “to speak.” It is used to describe the speech of those who are infused with the Holy Spirit. 65 It is also used in situations in which important characters possess inspired or prophetic speech. 66 Λαλέω also describes angelic speech (7:38; 8:26; 10:7) and what was spoken by the risen Christ (9:6, 27; 18:9). Specifically, in Paul's narratives, whether λαλέω is used with the attachment of “the word of God/the Lord” or without, it carries the meaning that the content of the speech inspires the hearers to become adherents of the risen Christ. 67 In spite of the lack of εὐαγγελίζω here, the content of the message in Acts 16:13b is not different from other situations in Acts in which Paul teaches and proclaims the gospel in the synagogues of other cities.

Acts 16:14a καὶ τὶς γυνὴ ὄνοματι Λυδίᾳ, πωρφυρόπωλης πόλεως Θυατείρων σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, ἠκούει,

A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple [cloth] from the city of Thyatira, a worshiper of God, was listening;

Thyatira, a worshiper of God, was listening;


66 For example, in Acts 8:25: “Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.” Here, the apostles do not speak on their own behalf, but what comes from a divine source. Οἱ μὴν οὖν διαμαρτυρώμενοι καὶ λαλῆσαντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου ὑπέστρεφον εἰς Ἰεροσολύμα, πολλάς τε κώμας τῶν Σαμαριτῶν εὐηγγελίζοντο. Other similar uses include Acts 4:20, 29; 5:20, 40; 6:10.

67 In Paul and Silas' encounter with the jailer in 16:32, "They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house."καὶ ἔλαλησαν αὐτῷ τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου σὺν πάσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. (emphasis mine). However, in Acts 14:1, "The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers."Τῇ γείτονῃ δὲ ἐν Ἰκωνίῳ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ εἰσῆλθεν αὐτῶς εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ λαλῆσαι οὕτως ὡστε πιστεύσας Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολύ πλῆθος.
Lydia’s Name

Although the name Lydia does appear in Horace to designate a courtesan, that is, a woman of slave status, there is nothing to suggest that Lydia in Acts should be read through this same lens. Richard Pervo concludes, based on her name, that "Lydia represents one important type of early Christian convert: a possible former slave who operates a business." Pervo bases this conclusion on several criteria. First, because the name Lydia is also a geographic region, it represents a remnant of her servile origins.

Lydia's name is indeed etymologically an ethnicon, and, were the city not named, it would then be logical to call her “the Lydian woman,” as one refers to a slave. But the addition "of the city of Thyatira" comports better with citizenship status there. The appellation Λυδία, πόλεως Θυατείρων better reads, "the Lydian lady, [a citizen] of the city of Thyatira." Second, since Lydia is referred to by only one name and not the

---

68 Horace, *Odys*, 1.8.1; 1.13.1; 1.25.8; 3.9.6–7, 20; 4.15.30; Haechen, *Acts*, 495.

69 Pervo, *Acts*, 403. Here he follows the assumption of G. H. R Horsley, (New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity [North Ryde, N.S.W.: Ancient History Documentary Research Center, Macquarie University, 1981], 2:26–28), who bases his conclusion on a funerary inscription from Rome (CIL 6.4.3) of Veturia Fedra, a *purpuraria* who set up the inscription for herself, her *patronus*, her *collibertus*, and another *libertos* she shared with her *collibertus*. Horsley then cites numerous other inscriptions of *purpurarii* (CIL 6.2.9843–9848; 14.2433 ) and assumes that they are all of freed status although this is not explicitly stated in the inscriptions themselves. What is important to note here is that Veturia Fedra set up the inscription for everyone out of her funds, so she was not a poor woman, and the inscription does not make clear her marital status. It is equally possible that her *collibertus* is her coworker and not her husband. See the discussion of Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity and Legal Status in Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 136.


71 I am grateful for this insight from my reader, Dr. Jaqueline Long, who notes, "Had she [Lydia] been enslaved it would have been silly to call her the Lydian woman in a place where virtually all women were Lydian. So if she had come to Philippi from somewhere else and had only the name referring her back to her land of origin. The addition of (poleos Thyateiron) comports better with her citizenship status there.”
traditional double name used for higher status Roman women, she is more likely of freed status.72 First, his assumptions rely on the naming practices of female Roman citizens. However, Acts does not indicate that Lydia is a Roman citizen. As a Greek woman from Thyatira in Asia Minor, certainly a region under Roman sway, her family may or may not have followed Roman naming practices. Second, Pervo assumes that the conventions of formal inscriptions, those that utilize the full name and all the honorary titles of an individual for public display, would also apply in literary uses. As to naming with a geographic reference, this could be an informal reference to an individual based on her family's place of origin. For example, the daughter of a man from Lydia could be named for her mother and her father’s place of origin. For example, in the inscription from Sardis (1st c. CE), Julia Lydia is named as the person who restored the temple after an earthquake in 17 CE.73 In another inscription from Ephesus dated to the first or second century CE, Julia Lydia Laterane is named "high priestess and daughter of Asia."74 Finally, an inscription from Termessus names a woman Lydia* as a high priestess.75

---

72 This was the feminine form of the father's *nomen* followed by the genitive form of the father's (or husband's, if married) *cognomen*. However, by the late Republican period, naming practices were becoming more fluid and a woman could take on the feminine form of her father's *cognomen*. Lawrence Keppie, *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), 19–20.

73 Ιουλια Λυδία ἡ ὀφιη ἀυτοῦ μετὰ τὸν σειμαν ἐπεσκεύασεν Σηι τὴν γραοδαντηρον οφ της μαν ωσο σετ της τεμπε το Ηερα ιν Σαρδοί Σωκράτης Πολομος Παρδαλας. Here the naming of a female family member has changed in two generations. Based on her name, the lavish plaque, and her donation of temple repairs and a statue of Hera, Julia Lydia is a woman of means who, in spite of this, is named for a geographic region. L. Robert, "Documents d'Asie Mineure," *BCH* 102 (1978): 405.


75 *TAM* 5 (2) 1284.3. The history of the name is complicated by much earlier references to a queen with the name Lu,dh from Sardis(*FGriH* 767 F 1) and a slave by the same name from Lydia (*IEG*2, pg. 37 t 14).
Therefore, based on the inscriptions evidence, the fluidity in the naming process outside of elite Roman citizens, the presence of geographic names for women and the addition of "the city of Thyatira" to her name all suggest that Lydia is not a former slave, but more likely a free, foreign woman.

**Lydia’s Occupation (Πορφυρόπωλης)**

Richter Reimer and her mentor Luise Schotroff have argued that Lydia and the women who assemble with her are among the poorest of the poor. Based on this assumption, they adduce liberation readings of the text that suggest that this community of women forms a resistance to the dominant, Roman structure of the colony, a *Gegengesellschaft,* or “contrast-society.” However, the text of Acts does not seem to call attention to Lydia's participation in “dirty work,” but to her piety, her proper response to her call, and her willingness to open her home to the missionaries and their cause.76 Shelly Matthews correctly states, "Most importantly, readings that foreground Lydia's lowliness do not take into account Luke's rhetorical strategies concerning class and status in the Acts."77 Namely, those characters identified by a trade are portrayed in terms that suggest their status, if not to the literary elite of the time period, certainly to the listeners of Acts.

---

76 “Dirty work” is Richter Reimer's term to describe Lydia's profession in the purple trade. She adduces this through her interpretation of Cicero (*De Off.* 1.42, 150–51). This text contains several problems that make it difficult to shore up this line of argument. Richter Reimer, *Women in Acts,* 105–09.

77 Matthews, *First Converts,* 87.
Lydia's native city of Thyatira was known for its involvement in the cloth trade and its large and active representation of professional collegia. Although there are no inscriptions from Thyatira itself that suggest ties to purple selling or dyeing, there is evidence for a substantial cloth industry and to an active marketplace for selling those goods. The archaeological and inscriptive remains give evidence for a large, commercial space that seems to have housed cloth merchants from Thyatira and others who travelled to the region to sell their goods.

However, rather than a general cloth merchant, Acts more specifically locates Lydia within this industry to be a specialist in purple goods (πορφυρόπωλις). It is

---

78 Richter Reimer rightly notes that Thyatira was known for more than purple goods, and more likely produced a wide range of dyed products. She calls attention to the fact that CIG 3496 and 3497 do not make mention of purple goods specifically, Women in Acts, 99–100. However, Acts 16:14 clearly associates Lydia's profession and native city by virtue of their pairing. Indicating that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira and that she was a “seller of purple goods” suggests that Thyatira's reputation would not have been unknown to the listener of Acts. Of the one-hundred three (103) inscriptions that contain references to the purple trade (porfu,ra), twenty-nine percent (29%) are from Asia Minor. For a discussion of the economic landscape and background of the city, see T. R. S. Broughton, "Roman Asia," in An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, vol. 4, ed. T. Frank (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1938), 818–22. See also, M. Stern, "The Jewish Diaspora" in The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions, 2 vols., eds. S. Safrai, and M. Stern (Essen: Van Gorcum, 1974–1976), 143–53. Stern finds evidence for at least one synagogue in Thyatira. According to Schneider, Jews were active in the dyeing and cloth industry of Thyatira, K. Schneider, "Purpura," Paulys Real–Encyclopädie der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft, 46:1959.

79 CIG 3495 (bakers), 3485 (potters), 3499 (tanners), 3504 (linenweavers), 3480 (tailors), 3422, 3496, 3497 (dyers). BCH 10.422 (leatherworkers and shoemakers), 407 (blacksmiths). Richter Reimer, Women in Acts, 99–100, n. 144–152. In addition to these inscriptions, there are six additional inscriptions from Thyatira that attest to groups of βαφεις (TAM V.2.935, 945, 965, 972, 978, 991). However, all are dated to the reign of Caracalla and relate to the imperial control of the cloth industry, which is a different situation than the one represented in Acts.


81 IGRR 4.863 discusses a large "cloth hall" that is reminiscent of the large mercantile hall in Pompeii donated by Eumachia that contained a statue dedicated to her by the fullones of the city. See discussion in Chapter Three.
important to determine the meaning of this professional term in order to situate Lydia more precisely within her social and cultural context. Richter Reimer cites a text from Plutarch’s *Pericles* as evidence that Lydia's occupation in the purple trade is a reviled profession,

> Often we take pleasure in a thing, but we despise the one who made it. Thus we value aromatic salves and purple clothing but the dyers (βαφεῖς) and salve makers remain for us common and low craftpersons [because they do what is unworthy of a free person].

What Plutarch actually refers to here are dyers (βαφεῖς), those workers who actually dip the cloth in the vats and apply the pungent, concentrated dyeing agents. As further proof, Richter Reimer suggests that the plant-based dyes from Thyatira would be known to be of inferior quality to the more highly valued marine purple dyes. For her this evidence shows that rather than being a woman with a prosperous business, Lydia is one of the oppressed poor within Roman society. However, what Richter Reimer does not take into account is that, at least by some, this plant-based dye from Asia Minor was

---

82 Plutarch, *Pericles*, LCL, trans. Perrin, 1.4. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ τούτων χαίροντες τῷ ἑργῷ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καταφρονοῦμεν, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν μύρων καὶ τῶν ἁλουργῶν τούτων μὲν ἡδόμεθα, τούς δὲ βαφεῖς καὶ μυρεψοὺς ἀνελευθέρους ἡγούμεθα καὶ βαναύσους. Here τῶν ἁλουργῶν refers to a type of sea purple that was of the highest quality and worn by those of the elite classes if we are to believe Cicero and his account of the lesser quality purple (*purpura plebia*) that was used in slaves clothing and bedding. Cicero, *Phil.* 2.67 conchylatis Cn. Pompei peristromatis seruorum in cellis lectos stratos uideres. Sext. 19, vestitus aspere nostra hac purpura plebeia ac paene fusca, capillo ita horrido ut Capua, in qua ipsa tum imaginis ornandae causa duumviratum gerebat, Seplasiam sublaturus videretur. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 16.77, non nisi in aquosis proveniunt salices, alni, populi, siler, ligustra tesseres utilissima, item vaccinia Italiae in aucupiis sata, Galliae vero etiam purpurae tinguendae causa ad servitiorum vestes.

considered to be of an excellent quality that rivaled the marine dyes. If Lydia is using dyeing techniques from her native Thyatira in Philippi, then it is just as likely that her purple goods are of sufficiently high quality for the citizens of Philippi.

But more to the point, the citation from Plutarch gives voice to an elite prejudice against work that says more about this particular worldview than the self-presentation of those actually involved in this trade. For example, in an inscription from Mysia (1st–2nd c. CE), Euschemon, the πορφυρόπωλης, dedicates a shrine and statue to Agathe Tyche on behalf of the demos of Miletopolis from his own funds. In another example, a marble sarcophagus from Hieropolis in Phrygia bears an inscription of good quality that suggests that the πορφυρόπωλης who lies there and publically commemorates his profession is not among the poorest of the poor. An epitaph from Tyre for an unnamed woman attests that her father is a πορφυρόπωλης. Because this woman chooses to publically call attention to her father's occupation suggests she does not think it a shameful one, but

84 Strabo, Geogr. 13.4.14.31–35. ἐστι δὲ καὶ πρὸς βαφὴν ἔριων θαυμαστῶς σύμμετρον τὸ κατὰ τὴν Ἱερὰν πόλιν ὅδορ, ὡστε τὰ ἐκ τῶν ρίζων βαπτόμενα εὐαίσθητα ἀναμίλλα ἐννια τοις ἐκ τῆς κόκκου καὶ τοῖς ἀλοιφασθέντων σύντοι ἐστὶν ἀφθονόν τὸ πλῆθος τοῦ ὕδατος ὡστε ἡ πόλις μεστὴ τῶν αὐτομάτων βαλανείων ἐστὶ. "The water at Hierapolis is remarkably adapted also to the dyeing of wool, so that wool dyed with the roots rival those dyed with the coccus or with the marine purple. And the supply of water is so abundant that the city is full of natural baths." Richter Reimer uses this text to reason that since dyeing required large quantities of water, then Lydia is by a river outside the city due to her involvement in dirty work. However, Acts does not support this reading of the text since Lydia and the women are gathered in the place of prayer on the Sabbath, not to ply their trade. Richter Reimer, Women in the Acts of the Apostles.

85 Of course it is possible that Lydia is linked to dyers as part of her business. As discussed in Chapter Two, the papyri from Egypt suggest that agricultural workers, weavers, dyers, and sellers worked cooperatively to bring finished cloth products to the marketplace.


87 AAT 101.313,37 πορφυροπωλης κείμενος
rather viewed it as honorable and wished to be remembered in association with it. 88

Finally, in a funerary inscription from Cos, a husband and wife of freed status are both named by the title πορφυρόπωλης. 89 There are two interesting notes on this final parallel. First, that in contrast to this inscription from Cos, Lydia is not named in connection to a husband or male business partner. Second, she not designated of freed status by the use of a patron's name. In summary, none of these inscriptions suggest that the persons named within them should be designated as the poorest of the poor, nor does it appear that they held their profession in low esteem.

When scholars suggest that there is some equivalency between the Greek πορφυρόπωλης and the Latin purpurarius, it does not mean that they are completely interchangeable terms. Purpurarius could designate either a purple dyer or one who sells purple goods. 90 However, in Greek it seems that this would not be the case. If the text envisions Lydia as a dyer of purple goods, then it would follow that she would hold that specific title (πορφυροβάφης) rather than πορφυρόπωλης. 91 Again, Acts presents characters

88 BE (1970), 625. Λεοντία θυγάτηρ Ευγενίου πορφυροπόλου. Also, BE (1955), 305.

89 IGRR 4.107. Μάρκου Σπείδου Νάσωνος πορφυροπωλου Ἐλπίδος Σπείδαις πορφυροπωλίδος. In addition, there are two later papyri that use the title πορφυροπώλης neither of which would be deemed poor. P. Herm. 1.52 is the petition to the nicostrategos of Hermapolis by a Aurelius Annas Joses, an vΙουδαίου πορφυροπωλου (4 July 398 CE). The second in O. Tait. from the Byzantine period. However, both are too late to be considered in this analysis.

90 Evidence from Rome and other parts of the empire suggest that the production and sales of dyed goods was not a home-based industry, but one that required a group of workers. Therefore, it is not unusual that Lydia would be at the proseuche with a group of women who were most likely her coworkers. For the insessional evidence from Rome, see Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status, 135–36.

91 An inscription from Thessalonica names Menippus, who is a member of the local collegia of purple dyers and a native of the city of Thyatira. IG 10.2.1.291 ἡ συνήθεια τῶν πορφυροβάφων τῆς ὀκτωκαιδέκατης Μένιππον Αμιουτὸν καὶ Σεβῆρον Θυατειρηνὸν μνήμης χάριν. The memorial is of good
involved in trade as respectable and as mirroring their own social and economic aspirations. Lydia is identified according to her profession in wholly positive terms. She is the only one of the group of women who is singled out to have her heart opened by the risen Christ. Lydia, as a seller of dyed goods, may not be one of the elite Roman citizens of Philippi, but she has sufficient means and background to be portrayed as an ideal example of one called to be a follower of the risen Christ. As a merchant and a householder, Lydia represents a particular type of person in Acts rhetoric: an independent woman who is both pious and of sufficient means to support the mission and of sufficient authority to bring her householders into the new religious practice with her. This does not mean that Lydia is accorded leadership status in the community. In this, the text follows the conservative lines of its contemporaries such as the Pastoral Epistles and Polycarp by suggesting that Lydia's role is limited to her household and hospitality.

quality and was found in the central city of Thessalonica, the governmental seat of Macedonia. Therefore, in spite of critiques of the profession and its members by the literary elite, this elaborate stele dedicated to Menippus and the collegia of purple-dyers in Thessalonica shows that the profession was not without honor. Further, we have another example of a person who travelled from Asia Minor to Macedonia to pursue a business and becomes a member of a professional organization in this new home.

92 Matthews, First Converts, 88.

93 Polycarp, Philippians, 4.2; 5.1–3. These sections deal with widows, virgins, and asceticism among the women of Philippi. The section in 5.3 dealing with asceticism suggests that this was a practice that was predominant enough to come to the attention of the bishop. Abrahamsen, suggests that Polycarp felt the need to critique this because women living together in ascetic communities upset the balance of the Roman household.” Abrahamsen, “Women at Philippi,” 18.
Worshipper of God

The literature on this one aspect of Lydia's story is vast and divided. In his seminal work, Kirsopp Lake uses the argument that both "God-fearer" (φοβοῦμενος τὸν θεόν) and "God-worshipper" (σεβόμενος τὸν θεόν) are not necessarily technical terms, but based on their usage in Acts are synonymous and to be trusted as representative of terms found everywhere in the Mediterranean world.94 So his considerations are not about the object of the phrases, but whether or not they are “technical”:

There is no reason whatsoever to doubt that there were non-Jews who went to the synagogue. It is so intrinsically probable that the onus probandi would be on those who maintained the opposite. The question is merely whether φοβοῦμενος τὸν θεόν and σεβόμενος τὸν θεόν were technical terms to describe this class and whether it had a recognized status within Judaism. In favor of such a theory is the fact that the words are applied at least most often to this class in Acts. Against it is the fact that they are perfectly well-known Old Testament phrases which do not have any technical meaning.95


Maximally, then, God-fearers/worshippers are a group of semi-proselytes who were attached to almost every Jewish synagogue in the first century. Minimally, they are the fictional, literary creation of the author.

A. Thomas Kraabel, writing as recently as 1982 held that to assume that there were groups of Gentile adherents in every synagogue is to go beyond what the extant evidence can support. Kraabel points out the absence of inscriptive references to either God-fearers or God-worshippers among the archaeological remains of six Diaspora synagogues. Based on this absence, he concludes that God-fearers/worshippers in Acts are an authorial creation. However, Kraabel's is an argumentum ex silentio that limits itself to only six synagogues, and only one synagogue from the first century CE.

More recently, the research of Reynolds and Tannenbaum has uncovered inscriptive evidence from the synagogue at Aphrodisias where similar terminology (θεοφόβος) is used to describe some of its members. Moreover, many other inscriptive examples from both East and West—from Rhodes, Cos, the Capitolina at Tralles, Lydian Philadelphia, and Sardis—as well as literary references in Josephus, Horace, and Juvenal, combine to suggest that this term referred mainly to any pious non-Jew who was either a


99 Horsley, New Docs. 3, 54.

100 In all fairness to Kraabel, this discovery postdated his publications. Kraabel's cautions are still important in order to resist the temptation to see God-fearers as being a ubiquitous phenomenon rather than something that should be examined on a case-by-case basis.
patron(ess) or a person who was associated with the practice of Judaism in some way.\footnote{For example, Euphrosyne from Rhodes (\textit{NIS} 44), Eirene from Cos (\textit{BE} 1952.31), Capitolina at Tralles (\textit{CIG} 2924), Eustathios in Lydian Philadelphia (\textit{NIS} 45), Aurelius Eulogios and Aurelius Polyhippus from the synagogue at Sardis (\textit{NIS} 39–40). For texts from Josephus (\textit{C. Ap.} 2.282; \textit{B.J.} 2.463, 2.560, 7.45; \textit{A.J.} 20.34–35, 41, 195), and for Latin texts where \textit{metuens} appear to be the equivalent of the Greek \textit{σκοβόμενος/φοβομένος} For example, Juvenal \textit{Sat.} 14.96–101, \textit{Quidam sortiti metuentem sabbata patrem nil praeter nubes et caeli numen adorant nec distare putant humana carne suillum, qua pater abstinuit, mox et praeputia ponunt Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges Judaicam ediscunt et servant ac metuunt ius. See also, Horace, \textit{Sat.} 1.9.68–72. In addition, \textit{CIL} 6.390a; \textit{CIJ} 1.5, 285, 524, 529, 642. Reynolds and Tannenbaum state, "This means that the remaining inscriptions in which \textit{metuens} appears without predicate could be either Jewish or pagan: their epitaphs at Rome are all found outside Jewish catacombs, as one would expect of those who are not full Jews (they would be buried in their family tombs)." Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, \textit{Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias} (Cambridge: Philological Society, 1987), Suppl. 12:52. Also, B. Lifshitz, "Les Juifs de Venosa," \textit{RPhil} 90 (1962): 367–71.}

Thus, relying on this more recent evidence, Reynolds concludes:

What then is a God-fearer/worshipper? He [sic] is someone who is attracted enough to what he has heard of Judaism to come to the synagogue to learn more; who is, after a time, willing, as a result, to imitate the Jewish way of life in whatever way and to whatever degree he wishes (up to and including membership in community associations, where that includes legal study and prayer); who may have held out to him various short codes of moral behavior to follow, but does not seem to have been required to follow any one; who may follow the exclusive monotheism of the Jews and give up his ancestral gods, but need not do so; who can, if he wishes, take the ultimate step and convert, but need not do so, and is, whether he does or not, promised a share in the resurrection for his pains.\footnote{Reynolds and Tannenbaum, \textit{Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias}, 48–66; quote from p. 65. \textit{θοιοβής} appears in the inscription in three places a.19 (\textit{Εμμώνιος}); a.20 (\textit{Λυτονίος}); and b.34 (\textit{Εορτάσιος}), always in connection to a proper name. The inscription is dated to the early third century CE.}

Although Max Wilcox's work predates that of Reynolds, his arguments on the inscriptive evidence from Miletos (esp. \textit{CIJ} 2.748) raises the issue of Greek translation and interpretation.\footnote{Max Wilcox, "God-fearers in Acts: A Reconsideration," \textit{JSNT} 13 (1981): 102–22.} Wilcox translates the phrase "τόπος Ειουδέων τών καὶ
θεοσεβίονας "Place of the God-fearing Jews." He concludes that the terms are synonymous, referring to the piety of Jews rather than two groups: the Jews and pious non-Jewish supporters. This allows for the question, is the presence of the καὶ after the article intended to be partitive, referring to two distinct groups, or is it a pleonasm of sorts for Ἰουδαιοί? 

Based on his conclusion that pleonasm is intended, Wilcox also points to Acts 13:16, where Paul begins his speech to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Ἄνδρει Ἰσραήλ καὶ οἱ φοβούμενοι τῶν θεῶν," He concludes that this is simply a case of Paul rhetorically calling attention to the great piety of the Israelite men present in the synagogue, not to two groups of listeners. He cites other examples of this same articulation in Acts 10:2, 22.

Acts 10:2 describes Cornelius, the Centurion of the Italian cohort, as εὐσεβής καὶ φοβούμενος τῶν θεῶν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς τῷ λαῷ καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός. ("He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.") Wilcox notes that "devout" and "fearing God" both refer to one man. Again in Acts 10:22, where the messengers from Cornelius describe him to Peter, one reads, Κορνήλιος ἐκατοντάρχης, ἀνὴρ δίκαιος καὶ φοβούμενος τῶν θεῶν ("Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man.") Wilcox also makes reference to Acts 10:35, where Peter

---

104 Ibid., 112.

105 The inscription could also be translated, "Place of the Ἰουδαιοί and God–fearers." Horsley, New Docs. 3, 54, calls attention to this discrepancy and prefers this translation.
addresses the Gentiles, stating that God does not show partiality, ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ θευεὶ ὁ φοβοῦμενος αὐτῶν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην ὀδευτὸς αὐτῷ ἐστὶν ("but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right" and "doing what is right" refer to one and the same group: the populace of the world,. These examples combined lead Wilcox to hold that instances of combinations such as Acts 13:16 (αὐνόρες Ἰσραήλιται καὶ οἱ φοβοῦμενοι τὸν θεόν) simply raise two aspects of virtue in one and the same group.

What Wilcox fails to notice is whether the participle is arthrous or anarthrous. In Acts 10:2 and 22, the second participle is anarthrous because it refers to the same man. Similarly, in Acts 10:35, no separation is indicated between those who fear God and those who do what is right. In Acts 13:16, however, the participle following καί is arthrous and indicates a second group.

In Acts 13:16, when Paul addresses the αὐνόρες Ἰσραήλιται καὶ οἱ φοβοῦμενοι τὸν θεόν, the evidence is not sufficient to claim that the use of οἱ φοβοῦμενοι τὸν θεόν is a technical term known throughout the Mediterranean, but it does point to a separate group, and an important feature of this group is that they display proper reverence to the God of Israel. The wide variety of terms used for such people in Jewish circles cannot be known, but in the circles represented by Acts, the term takes on a specific and consistent meaning: God-fearer and/or God-worshipper are two terms that indicate any non-Jewish person who follows the ethical precepts of Judaism, reveres the Jewish God, and is judged favorably on these grounds. Here the application can be seen in Acts 10 with regard to Cornelius the centurion, who is a Gentile, but is still described as pious.
(εὐσεβής) and one who fears the God of Israel (φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν). He also receives the respectful gratitude of the Jews in Caesarea, as the messengers to Peter in Joppa expansively praise him, "well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation." (μαρτυρούμενός τε ὑπὸ ὀλοί τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Ῥωμαίων). Acts first presents Cornelius' piety (Acts 10:3) through his dedication to prayer (δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός) and his generosity to the community through almsgiving (ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς τῷ λαῷ). He is both one who reverences certain Jewish practices and a patron of the community. Here we can turn to the same kind of description afforded to Tabitha in Acts 9:36. Although the specific participial phrase φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν is not used of her, she is assessed in the same way.106 This woman, described as a disciple, is presented as "devoted to good works and acts of charity." This title disciple addresses her dedication to follow the risen Christ, and hence her piety and devotion, while the explicit reference to her charity points to her as a patroness there in Joppa who uses her wealth for the betterment of those in her community. These examples show that in Acts the understanding of true piety and its concrete expression are the same for all lovers of God and followers of the risen Christ, whether Jew and Gentile.107

---

106 Acts 9:36 αὕτη ἐν πλήρῃ ἀγαθᾶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐλεημοσύναις ὠν ἐποίει. For the discussion of Tabitha's religious affiliation and the prevalence of this terminology in Jewish sources, see Chapter Four above.

107 Cf. Wilcox, “God-fearers,”107, who concludes, "In Acts, then, ὁ θεός φοβούμενος σωζόμενος τὸν θεόν would seem to refer to 'the pious' amongst the Jewish community, whether Jew or Gentile, proselyte or 'adherent.' The issue is that there are no uncontested examples from Acts that show that Jews are referred to by these terms.
To turn to the subject of Lydia and her description, in Acts 16:14 she is described as σεβόμενη τον θεον. Like Cornelius, there is no direct indication that she is attached to a synagogue, but rather she is noted for her devotion to prayer in the προσευχή. As she is introduced into Acts, she is present in this place of prayer on the Jewish Sabbath, a sure indication of her piety. Whether or not Lydia is attached to Judaism in some formal way, she worships the God of Israel and she seems to be there to keep the Jewish Sabbath. Since Lydia is a businesswoman, (πορφυρόπωλης), the fact that she has left her work and is instead at the προσευχή on the Jewish Sabbath is a strong sign of her faithful observance of the Sabbath by abstaining from work. Thus, the reader who is introduced to both Tabitha and Cornelius as those who revere the God of Israel and keep the Sabbath, Lydia belongs with them. These positive qualities indicate to the listener that Lydia would make an ideal follower of the risen Christ.

This pattern seems connected to understanding the larger rhetorical strategy of Acts. Those scholars who claim that God-fearers/worshippers are a group entirely distinct from Jews hold that Acts really attests the failure of the message of the risen Christ among devout Jews. Others who conclude that God-fearers/worshippers are so closely

---

108 Cf. Josephus, C. Ap. 2.235.1, LCL, trans. Thackery, πάλιν ἀργίας ὑπομεῖναι τάξιν ἀμετακίνητον. "Or again, the abstention from work for rigidly fixed periods."

109 For example, the highly influential work of F. C. Baur, Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi; sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre. Ein Beitrag zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristenthums (Stuttgart: L. W. Reisland, 1845/1866), which emphasizes the break between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Also, A. von Harnack, who claims that Acts demonstrates the historical reality that the Jewish nation increasingly hardened its heart against the open appeal of Christianity, which does not suggest a defect in the gospel, but in the Jews. Even more troubling than this assessment is the language Harnack uses to explain this theory: “Der Jude ist der Gegenspieler in dieser dramatischen Geschichte, aber nicht, wie im Johannevangelium und der Apokalypse, der abstrakte und gleichsam zum bösen Princip gewordene Jude, sondern ohne jede Verallgemeinerung und Übertreibung der wirkliche Jude in seinem
linked with Judaism that they are indistinct argue that Acts does not seek to present a
negative response from Jews, but rather to illustrate the varied relationship of Jews,
Gentiles, and followers of the risen Christ. In both arguments, the Gentiles are the
focus. Gary Gilbert summarizes the debate:

On both sides of the debate the God-fearers are represented as a, *sui generis* group, which, because of their unique medial position, can best facilitate the expansion of the gospel from its Jewish origins to its Gentile future. Once the bridge has been crossed and the Gentiles have received the gospel, the God-fearers/worshippers have served their purpose and can recede from the narrative stage.

Closer examination, however, shows that the God-fearers/worshippers are not all minor characters who stand passively between the two pillars of Judaism and Christianity. They are, rather, outstanding characters who dynamically receive the message of the risen Christ. When Acts speaks of Gentiles, a group is meant, but individual clusters of believers who stand out are termed God-fearers/worshippers.

---


112 Ibid., 178–79.

113 Indeed, anonymous Gentiles are converted *en masse*, such as 13:48, but there is no example of a named convert who is not connected to Judaism in some way. In Acts 18:5–7, Paul announces that he will go to the Gentiles, but his first “Gentile” acquaintance is Titius Justus, a God-worshipper who lives next door to the synagogue καθώς ἑτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἔλθη ἡ πορεία μου καὶ μεταμόνευσεν εἰς οἶκον τινὸς ὑπάρχοντος τῆς θεότητος, οὗ ἡ οἰκία ἦν συνομοροδία τῆς συνεγωγῆς. Cases such as this weaken readings of Acts that suggest the primary rhetoric is the rejection of the Jews and
Acts does not seem to be a series of negative narratives where Jews fail to understand Jesus or actively persecute those who proclaim his messianic identity. Instead, when the God-fearers/worshippers are read as the terminus rather than a bridge, Acts portrays Christianity as a movement in which the ideal converts are judged worthy of membership by the standards of Jewish piety—such as Lydia's keeping the Sabbath and prayer. Based on her particular Jewish piety, Lydia functions as an example of the ideal follower of the risen Christ.

Acts 16:14b ἤς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου.

*The Lord opened her heart to listen intently to what was being said by Paul.*

Although many scholars describe this passage as “Paul's Conversion of Lydia,” it seems much clearer to identify the focus as the presentation of Lydia, her admirable actions and devotion. When the text uses ὁ κύριος, it here refers to the risen Christ, the same risen Christ who called Paul near Damascus. Although the elements of a call the acceptance of the Gentiles. For a discussion of the text critical issues associated with this name, see Wilcox, "God-Fearers," 114, who argues that both Lydia and Titus Justus are converts to Judaism who subsequently become Christians. This conclusion seems to take the evidence too far.


116 In the episode near Damascus, the risen Lord (ὁ κύριος) is referred to seven times. The presence of the Lord comes mainly through the spoken word, which only Paul and Ananias hear. In 9:17, the text makes clear that the voice is the "Lord Jesus." Paul then uses this same language in 22:8, 10 and 26:15 when he recounts the circumstances of his call. Lord is used over one-hundred times in Acts, and in the vast majority of cases, it refers to Jesus as the risen Lord, who is responsible for increasing the number of believers (for example, 5:14; 11:21), empowering miraculous cures (9:35, 42), and the object of prayer
narrative are muted in Lydia's story, many elements still remain. A. J. Droge lays out the common elements of stories in which individuals are called to discipleship. First, in a successful call story, the initiative must come from the divine; the individual cannot volunteer or bargain for the position (cf. Acts 8:19-24). Second, the success of the call is demonstrated by the unconditional response of the one called. Third, the nature of the discipleship is contained in the saying or pronouncement that follows the call itself. In Lydia's case, the divine initiative is demonstrated in the presence of the risen Lord who directly intervenes and opens her heart. She may hear and understand Paul's words, but her heart is opened and made ready through divine intervention alone, not through the content of Paul’s teaching. Lydia responds promptly and unconditionally to her call both by being baptized and her willingness to have her faith judged by the missionaries (Acts 16:15a). Finally, Lydia's speech specifies one of the important elements of her call (Acts 16:15b), that she will open her home not only to Paul and his followers, but to her community of fellow believers as well (Acts 16:40). The presence of all three elements suggests that rather than this being a conversion from one discrete religious practice to another, Lydia is instead called to discipleship in the risen Jesus that remains in (7:60; 8:22; 9:34). Acts generally makes a clear distinction between the God of Israel (ὁ θεός) and the risen Christ (ὁ κυρίος). (cf. Acts 10:4, 10:33).


118 Against Haenchen, Acts, 495. "In spite of the ἐλαλοῦμεν the conversion is attributed to Paul." This interpretation is not supported by the text.
continuity with her reverence of the God of Israel and the Jewish Sabbath but is set within a new framework.119

Lydia is the only woman in ancient literature to receive this specific type of divine intervention.120 The verb used here (διανοι,γω) is often linked to the episode on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:32) to demonstrate the thematic continuity between the Lukan gospel and Acts.121 There the men say, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Where they differ is that in the Lukan passage the scriptures are opened and cause a burning in their hearts. In Acts 16:14b, Lydia’s heart is opened. Again, in the Lukan narrative, the disciples witness to the others that “he [Jesus] was made known to us in the breaking of the bread (Lk. 24:35).”122 In the Lydia episode, the risen Lord is made known in the “opening of the heart.” Her understanding stems from this direct, divine action in her heart rather than any action associated with Jesus' presence, such as breaking the bread, or of someone interpreting the Scriptures.


120 This is based on my own search of the following databases: LSJ, TLG, DDbDP, and APIS.


A better parallel, in my view, would be found in the narrative of David's anointing. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God explains his rejecting Eliab, David's older brother who is impressive due to his height: "For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." The ideal of the heart being close to that of the Lord, as exemplified in David, is well known to the writer of Acts since this feature is brought out in Acts 13:22 where Paul speaks in Pisidian Antioch, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes." Here the allusion seems to combine 1 Sam. 16:7b and 1 Sam. 13:14b, where Samuel prophesies beforehand to Saul, "the Lord has sought out a man [David] after his own heart." The two passages taken together suggest that the heart is one significant way that the deity judges the moral character of an individual that has little to do with outward appearance or human expectations. According to ancient physiology, the heart is an organ that is intimately linked to the lungs and respiration.

---


124 1 Sam. 16:7 οὐχ ὡς ἐμβλέψει· τις ἀνθρώπος δίψηται· ὁ θεός οὕτως ἄνθρωπος δίψηται· εἰς πρόσωπον· ὁ δὲ θεός δίψηται· εἰς καρδίαν. Cf. Jeremiah 17:10 ἐγώ κύριος ἐπάξων· καρδίας· καὶ δοκιμάζων· νεφρῶν· τοῦ δυναν· ἐκάστοτε· τάς· οὕτως· αὐτοῦ· καὶ· κατὰ· τοῖς· καρποῖς· τῶν· ἐπιτηδευμάτων· αὐτοῦ.

125 Acts 13:22 εὗρον Δαυίδ τὸν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, ἄνδρα κατὰ τὴν καρδίαν· μου, δὲ· ποιήσει· πάντα· τὰ· θελήματά· μου.

126 1 Samuel 13:14, καὶ· νῦν· ἡ· βασιλεία· σου· οὐ· στήσεται· καὶ· ἐστήσεις· κύριος· ἐπάξων· ἀνθρώπων· κατὰ· τὴν· καρδίαν· αὐτοῦ· καὶ· ἐντελεῖται· κύριος· αὐτοῦ· εἰς· ἄρχοντα· ἐπὶ· τῶν· λαῶν· αὐτοῦ· ὥστε· ἐνεπιλατό· σοι· κύριος·

127 Beginning with Hippocrates (Peri, Kapdi,aj 8) this link is made explicit. Galen also discusses this link in several treatises (De usu respirationis, An in arteriis natura sanguis continetur, De usu pulsuum, and De causis respirationis) all of which suggest the link between heart and lungs. However, Galen asserts that the heart is the avrch, of duna,meij that govern the arterial system, which includes the
In Acts 16:14b, the Lord singles out Lydia from the other women present, not based on any external characteristics such as gender, titles, status, rank, or citizenship, but based on the Lord’s judgment of the content of her heart.  

The Vocabulary

Προσέχειν τοῖς λαλομένοις seems to have greater force than simply "to believe what was spoken by Paul." In Acts, προσέχειν is used six times. Three of these instances (Acts 8:6, 10, 11) are from the story of Philip and Simon Magus. In Acts 8:6, the crowd listens carefully to Philip because of the signs he performed.  

128 Acts uses the heart in a very specific way. It can either be a seat of understanding and right action (2:37, 46; 4:32; 11:23; 14:17), or it can be closed and lead to anger, rejection, or even evil actions (5:3–4; 7:39, 51, 54; 28:27). In 7:54, διεπρόσωπο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν literally means, "their hearts were sawn in half." It stresses the violent nature of the scene. The importance of Acts 28:27 and its reliance on Isaiah 6:9 has been discussed previously in this chapter. Again, the importance of this passage is clear. The repetition of heart in the sentence stresses that it is through the heart that one either responds properly or does not respond at all. Acts 28:27 ἐπεξείθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦτοῦ καὶ τοῖς ὁμόλογοῖς· ἡ καρδία τοῖς ὁμολόγοις ἑκάστην ἠκάμμωσεν μήποτε ἰδοὺ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ταύτων ἐαύτοὺς ἑκάστην ἀνοίξοιτο· τῇ καρδίᾳ συνιόσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψοισιν, καὶ ἰδόμαι αὐτοῖς (emphasis mine).

129 Barrett refers here to the translation that appears in Lake and Cadbury, Acts, 2.783. K. Lake and H.J. Cadbury, Acts of the Apostles, vol. IV, The Beginnings of Christianity, (eds. F.J. Foukes Jackson and K. Lake; London: MacMillan, 1933), 192. Based on its use in Strabo and Josephus, it seems to have the meaning of to give careful attention to or carefully study a subject. Strabo, Geogr. 1.1.23.13 [LCL, trans. Jones], καθάπερ τε καὶ ἐν τοῖς κολοσσικοῖς ἐργοῖς οὐ τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον ἀκριβὲς ζητοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς καθόλου προσέχομεν μᾶλλον εἰ καλῶς τὸ ὅλον, οὕτως κἀν τούτῳ δεῖ ποιεῖσθαι τὴν κρίσιν. "In the colossal works of the sculptor we do not descend into a minute examination of particulars, but look principally for perfection in the general ensemble. This is the only method of criticism applicable to the present work." Josephus, Apion, 1.2, LCL, trans. Thackery, Πρῶτον οὖν ἐπέρχεται μοι πάνω θαυμάζειν τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς δεῖν περὶ τῶν παλαιότατων ἐργῶν μόνοις προσέχειν τοὺς Ἑλλήνες καὶ παρὰ τούτων πυκναίσθαι τὴν ἀλήθειαν. "My first thought is one of intense astonishment at the current opinion that in the study of primeval history, the Greeks alone deserve serious attention."


131 Acts 8:6 προσέχειν δὲ οἱ δύο τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλίππου ὀμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἀκούσει αὐτοῖς καὶ βλέπειν τὰ σημεῖα ἡ ἐποίης. (emphasis mine).
8:10-11, this same crowd also gives careful attention to Simon because of his own signs and wonders.\textsuperscript{132} The crowd listens carefully to both Philip and Simon, but in 8:12, the crowd \textit{believes} Philip, and because he “preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”\textsuperscript{133} Lydia's story shares much of the same vocabulary. Lydia listens intently to the teachings (\textit{προσέχειν}), she and her household are baptized (\textit{ἐβαπτίσθη}), and then she asks to be judged based on her faith (\textit{πιστήν}). The key difference between the two passages is when Lydia’s heart is opened and she is then emboldened to speak, she is not only baptized, but demands that the missionaries stay with her as a sign of her faith.

The repetition of \textit{λαλέω} in Acts 16:13 and 16:14 creates an \textit{inclusio}: the missionaries speak to the women gathered (16:13 \καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλαλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθούσαις γυναιξίν), Lydia was listening (\ηκουμεν), but only when the Lord opens her heart can she listen intently and understand what was being spoken by Paul (\προσέχειν τοῖς λαλομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου). This deeper form of understanding inspires Lydia's response in 16:15.\textsuperscript{134}

\textbf{Acts 16:15a} \ως δὲ ἔβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς,

\textsuperscript{132} Acts 8:10 ὃς προσέχειν πάντες ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἐως μεγάλου λέγοντες· οὕτως ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλομένη μεγάλη. “All of them, from the least to the greatest paid careful attention saying, ‘This man is the power of God, which is called great.’”

\textsuperscript{133} Acts 8:12–13 ὅτε δὲ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ Φιλίππῳ εἰσαγγελιζομένῳ περί τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὄντος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἔβαπτίζοντο ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες, ὁ δὲ Σίμων καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπίστευσαν καὶ βαπτίσθησαν ἥν προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ, θεωροῦν τε σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις μεγάλας γινομένας ἐξίστατο.

\textsuperscript{134} Once again, Isa. 6:9 is in the background. Lydia may listen and pay attention, but it is the intervention of the risen Christ that leads to faith (ὁ κύριος).
When she and her household were baptized,

The use of ὡς at the beginning of the sentence stresses that the events happened in a quick succession and links this clause temporally to the main clause which follows in 16:15b. There are nine baptisms in Acts. In each case, the baptism is reported somewhat differently. In 8:36–38 and 10:47–48, water is used in the baptism. In other cases, such as 2:38, there is the participation of the Holy Spirit. In 2:38, 8:16, 10:48 and 19:5, the name of Jesus is invoked during baptism. Finally, 8:12, 16:15, 16:33 and 18:8 simply recount the fact that individuals were baptized without any accompanying details. What seems important to the narrator is the fact that Lydia and her household were baptized, not the manner in which the ceremony was conducted.

135 Pervo, Acts, 404. Barrett, Acts, 2.783. This stands against the idea that some sort of formal instruction was necessary prior to baptism. Just as in 16:33, in Acts baptism follows directly after hearing and understanding the message. Acts 16:32–33 καὶ ἐλάλησαν αὐτῷ τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οίκῳ αὐτοῦ. Καὶ παραλαβόντες αὐτούς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὠρᾷ τῆς νυκτὸς ἔλασαν ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν, καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη αὐτός καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ πάντες παραφρὴμα. Note the use of λαλεῖν prior to baptism there as well. For correspondences between the two scenes, see David Lertis Matson, Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation, JSNT Suppl. 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 135–83.

136 There is nothing to suggest the content of the rite of baptism, so we cannot speculate if the water from the nearby river was used or how the ceremony was conducted. For a discussion of the elements present in the baptismal rites of the early church, see Wayne Meeks, First Urban Christians, 150–57. Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5.

137 It is also probable that water was used in Paul's baptism. Although 9:18 does not give this information, in 22:16 Paul states the following about his baptism, ἀναστὰς βαπτίσας καὶ ἀπόλουσας τὰς ἀμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. Here the use of ἀπόλουσαι could be figurative or factual.

138 Acts 8:15–16 suggests that the baptism with water did not complete the process; the reception of the Holy Spirit was the next necessary step. Acts 8:15–16 οὕτως καταφέρας προσήκειν περὶ αὐτῶν ὡς λάβωσιν πνεύμα ἄγιον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπιποτικοῦ, μόνον ἐν ἐπιποτίσθησιν ὑπῆρχον εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ιησοῦ. 11:16 also suggests baptism by the Holy Spirit.
The Household (ὁ οἶκος)

Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8 are baptisms of named individuals and their households. David Matson suggests that these household “conversion narratives” serve three particular functions: (1) they show the rejection of the gospel by the synagogue, (2) they move the place or worship from synagogue to household, and (3) they move the site of religious instruction from the synagogue to the house.\footnote{Matson, \textit{Household Conversion Narratives}, 179–82.} In the case of Lydia's story, none of these criteria are present. There is nothing in this story to show a rejection of the gospel by the synagogue community, only its reception by a worshipper of God, a woman who prays to and reveres the God of Israel. Similarly, the household does not become the exclusive place of religious instruction or worship, but a place opened to the missionaries for hospitality and refuge. Matson appears to presume that once a person becomes a follower of the risen Christ, all other religious attachments are immediately severed.\footnote{For a discussion of the evidence of Christian syncretism in the material remains of Philippi, see Abrahamsen, "Women at Philippi," 20–23. See also the supporting comments of Graydon Snyder, "Review of Women and Worship at Philippi," \textit{JBL} 116/3 (Autumn, 1997): 557–58.} The line between Christianity and other religious practices, especially Judaism, was not clearly and definitively drawn for many centuries.\footnote{See the cogent discussion of Paula Fredriksen, "The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti–Judaism," in \textit{Jesus, Judaism & Christian Anti–Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust}, eds. P. Fredriksen and A. Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 8–30.} Paul and his companions continue to go to the \textit{proseuche} regularly while in Philippi (16:16). Acts, however, says nothing specific about Lydia's practices following her call, only that her home continued to be a gathering place for fellow followers of the risen Christ (16:40).
The presence of ὀικος αὐτής has prompted a great deal of discussion about what constituted a household as well as discussions of the possibility of infant baptism. The Greek term ὀικος is multivalent and means much more than a physical structure. This is certainly true in Acts. When *household* is used, it is refers to groups of connected human beings rather than the structure itself. When Lydia is baptized, her household is baptized along with her. Based on her occupational title and that her work was generally performed by a group of workers, it is also likely that this household included relatives, coworkers, and other domestic help. Just as in the Tabitha story, whether married, divorced, single, or widowed, Lydia is highlighted here as an independent woman who is employed in a trade. As *domina* of her household, Lydia attends the *proseuche* at her own discretion, decides the religious practices of her household, and extends hospitality to the missionaries without male oversight. Acts is not reticent to show women like Tabitha and Lydia in these capacities.

---


143 Acts 2:2, 36, 46; 5:42; 7:10, 20, 42, 46, 49; 8:3; 10:2, 22, 30; 11:12; 16:15, 31, 34; 18:8; 19:16; 20:20; 21:8. See especially its use with Cornelius (10:2; 11:14), the jailer (16:31, 34), and Crispus (18:8).


146 In contrast to Tabitha’s story, Paul does accept Lydia’s hospitality and stays in her home. However, the text is reticent to show Paul sharing table fellowship with Lydia. In contrast, table fellowship with the jailer and his household is made explicit in Acts 16:34. See Matthews, *First Converts*, 88–89. Matthews relies on Kathleen Corley’s work for her conclusions. See, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 108–46.
Acts 16:15b παρεκάλεσεν λέγουσα· εἰ κεκρίκατέ με πιστὴν τῷ κυρίῳ εἶναι,
εἰσελθόντες εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου μένετε καὶ παρεβιάσατο ἡμᾶς.

She urged us strongly, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the
Lord, come into my house and stay." And she compelled us.

The repetition of οἶκος here emphasizes the importance of this location to the
story. Lydia demands that the missionaries judge her faith in the risen Christ (τῷ κυρίῳ).

Lydia is one of the few women in Acts to have her direct speech recorded in the text,
which makes her words here quite significant.147 Of all the important female characters in
Acts—Mary the mother of Jesus (1:14), Mary the mother of John Mark (12:12), Rhoda
(Acts 12:13–15), Priscilla (18:1–3, 18–19, 24–28), the female prophets in Caesarea
(21:9), even high-ranking women such as Drusilla (24:24), and Bernice (25:13, 23;
26:30)—none of them are given a voice except Lydia.

The Vocabulary

Richter Reimer notes the unique combination of verbs in this clause.148

Παρακαλέω, κρίνω, and παρεβιάζω together with the command μένετε make a strong
statement of Lydia's convictions. The most common translation of παρακαλέω is to call on
or invoke, but it is also used with the meaning to demand or require. In a wide variety of
passages from Appian, Plutarch, and Arrian, the meaning is almost exclusively to
beseech a person in authority, whether a god or a general in charge of an invading

---

147 The others are Sapphira (Acts 5:8) and the mantic slave girl (16:17). Neither is an example of a
'good' believer, so Lydia's speech takes on even greater weight.

army.\textsuperscript{149} For example, in \textit{Italica}, Appian describes the supplication of the Roman women before Marcius.\textsuperscript{150} Conversely, it is also used frequently in courtroom language from the position of one in authority to one of lesser authority. One example of the latter meaning is P. Tebt. 2.297.5, which is an order summoning Marsisouchos to court to address concerns over his failure to execute his office properly. In addition to this example, \textit{παρακαλέω} is used in the papyri in numerous private letters and public documents, for example, in letters between parents and children to argue for particular actions or behavior or between business partners.\textsuperscript{151} In public documents or ordinances it requires set actions and behaviors.\textsuperscript{152} The language of each of these documents is not conversational but instead authoritative, where the one summoning assumes the position of power. In either case, the strength of the request is highlighted both due to its urgency and its prescription of the correct and noble course of action.

\textsuperscript{149} In spite of the wide variety of genre and cultural milieu, the meaning of \textit{παρακαλέω} is quite similar among these authors. I chose these particular authors based on the frequency that they use the verb in their works and that they all fall into a similar date range, namely the first or second century CE.

\textsuperscript{150} Appian, \textit{Hist. rom.} 2.5.4.6 [LCL; trans. H. White]. καί, τὸ Ῥωμαῖος ἔσχατον, παρακαλοῦσι καὶ πρέσβεις πέμπουσιν ὑπάτους καὶ ἱερέας καὶ μητέρα καὶ γυναῖκα τὸ τε ἀδίκημα ἰδόνται ἄμνηστη καὶ καθόδω. Also, \textit{Libyca} 157.5 and \textit{Mithridatica} 195.2. \textit{Bell. civ.} 1.121.22, ὁ δῆμος αὐτῆς αὐτούς μετ’ οἴμωγῆς παρεκάλει πάνω ταπεινῶς, ἔτι τῶν Σύλλα καὶ Μαρίου κακῶν ἀναφέροντες. \textit{Plutarch} \textit{Aem.} 9.6.3, \textit{Alex.} 9.7.2, \textit{Caes.} 37.12; \textit{Mulier. Virt.} 252.F.1; 253.D.2. Arrian, \textit{Anab.} 2.7.3.2, 2.10.2.2.

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{BGU} 1.242, 2.665, 3.895; \textit{P. Oxy.} 55.3806; \textit{P. Oslo} 2.60. The latter is between business partners. All examples are from the first to early second century CE.

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{SB} 1.4224; \textit{P. Oxy.} 58.3917; \textit{P. Ryl.} 2.234.
Parakaleω is also used frequently in Acts. As we saw in Chapter Four, when it is used in Tabitha's story (9:38), it suggests an urgency to the messenger's request that goes beyond mere polite conventions. In fact, parakaleω is used four times in Acts 16. The Macedonian man urges Paul to come to Macedonia and help his people in a nocturnal vision (16:9). The magistrates attempt to compel Paul and his companions to leave the city after their release from prison (16:39). Finally, Paul and the missionaries return to Lydia's house and encourage the believers gathered there (16:40). This final example requires a note. Several times in Acts, parakaleω is translated as encouraged (NRSV) when this does not impart the full force of the word. It is true that Paul may have encouraged the believers to continue in their faith, but it means more than a pep talk. Those present are being “urged” to continue in their faith in spite of any challenges or hardships they may face because of it.

The only time that parabiazomai is used in Acts is in 16:15. The verb more frequently suggests the use of force, even against one's will. Further, the moral quality

---


154 Acts 9:38 ἐγγύς δὲ οὐσίας Λύδας τὴ Ἰότη τι Μαθηταὶ ἀκούσαντες ὀτι Πέτρος ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπόστειλαν δύο ἄνδρας πρὸς αὐτὸν παρακαλοῦντες· μὴ ἀκούσης διελθεῖν ἐως ἡμῶν. As discussed in Chapter Four, this request is not just a polite invitation to Peter, but because of her untimely death, is communicating the urgency of the situation for Tabitha's household in Joppa.

155 Paul's own experience in prison is a clear example of one type of challenge. In several other places in Acts this encouragement follows a challenge. For example, 11:23; 14:22; 20:1, 2. In 28:14, the believers in Rome urge Paul to stay with them and accept their hospitality. The language is reminiscent of 16:15 and reinforces the importance of hospitality in discipleship.

156 This verb is used only twenty-three times outside the Bible in the first and second century CE, making it relatively rare (there are only 249 uses in all ancient literature according to a TLG search). Eleven of these are in Plutarch. It is also used in Luke 24:29 καὶ παρεβιάσατο αὐτὸν λέγοντες· μείνῃ μὲν· ἡμῶν, ὅτι πρὸς ἐσπέραν ἔστιν καὶ κάκλικεν ἡ ἡμέρα καὶ οἰσήλθεν τοῦ μενεῖ σὺν αὐτός. (emphasis
of this verb is highlighted by its use in a number of first and second century texts.\textsuperscript{158} In each of the texts noted, \textit{παραβιαζόμαι} is used to describe how one can force logic or reason to reach a particular end, which in most cases does not have positive outcomes.\textsuperscript{159}

However the meaning is quite apparent in Acts 16:15. Lydia may demand to be judged based on her faith in the risen Christ (τὸν κυρίων) and she may compel or force the missionaries to accept her hospitality, but if we concede that Lydia is being used as an example of proper response and behavior, then her bold speech and her use of force suggests that the narrator did not consider this to be rude behavior.\textsuperscript{160} Lydia's question mine). Here the men compel the risen Christ (his identity is unknown to them at the time) to accept their hospitality so that he will not have be on the road alone at night. Similarly this passage stresses the importance of hospitality as part of discipleship.

\textsuperscript{157} For example, Josephus, \textit{C. Ap.} 2.234.1[LCL; trans. Thackery]."The astonishing spectacle of [Jewish] men [or women, ἄνθρωποι] who believe that the only evil that can befall them is to be compelled to do any act or utter any word contrary to their laws." εἰ τινὲς εἰσὶν ἄνθρωποι μόνον εἰς κακὸν ἄντος πεπιστευκότες, εἰ πράξαι τι παρὰ τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νόμους εἰ λόγον εἰπεῖν παρ᾽ ἑκείνως παραβιασθεῖαν. Also, Philo, \textit{Prelim. Studies} 125.7 [LCL; trans. Colson]. ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐμύλλε παραβιαζόμεθα—καὶ σκοπεῖν, τίς τε ἡ ἐγκεκαλομενή δύναμις εἶναι. Onasander, \textit{Strategicus} 19.2.3 [LCL; IL Greek Club] οἱ δὲ κατὰ κέρας ἔφοδοι τῶν ψυλδὸν πλεύον λοιμαίνονται τοὺς πολεμίους, ἐκ πλαγίων ἀκοντίζοντων καὶ εἰς τὰ γυμνὰ παραβιαζόμενον παῖεῖν.

\textsuperscript{158} This is evidenced in the multiple uses in Plutarch's work. \textit{Rect. rat. aud.} 43.C.1 (LCL; trans. Einarson); \textit{Suav. viv.} 1100.B.3 (LCL; trans. Einarson); \textit{An. procr.} 1013.E.2 (LCL; trans. Cherniss); \textit{Adol. poet. aud.} 19.F.1, 31.E.11 (LCL; trans. Babbitt); \textit{Trans. an.} 472.C.5 (LCL; trans. Helmbold); \textit{vit. pud.} 533.F.1 (LCL; trans. De Lacy); \textit{Comm. not.} 1059.C.3, 1073.C.3 (LCL; trans. Cherniss); \textit{Brut. an.} 990.F.2 (LCL; trans. Cherniss).

\textsuperscript{159} For example, in \textit{Adol. poet. aud.} 19.F.1, "By forcibly distorting these stories through what used to be termed 'deeper meanings', but are nowadays called 'allegorical interpretations', some persons say that the Sun is represented as giving information about Aphrodite in the arms of Ares."οὐς ταῖς πάλαι μὲν ὑπονοίαις ἀλληγορίαις δὲ νῦν λεγομέναις παραβιαζόμεναι καὶ διαστρέφοντες ἐνος μοχλευμένην φασίν Ἀφροδίτην ἢπ' Ἀρεος μηνύειν Ἑλεον." Cf. Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Vitae Philosophorum} 10.86.1 [LCL; trans. Hicks] where he discusses Epicurus' explanations of celestial phenomena.

\textsuperscript{160} Barrett, \textit{Acts}, 784 who stresses the moral constraint of the verb parabia,zomai here. An example of the moral implications of the word are found in a parallel from \textit{The Martyrdom of Polycarp} 4, "But there was a person named Quintus, a Phrygian who had recently come from Phrygia, who was overcome with cowardice once he saw the wild beasts. This person compelled both himself and several others to turn themselves in. But the insistent pleas of the proconsul convinced him to take the oath and sacrifice."
may be framed as a conditional, but the response of the missionaries appears to be a foregone conclusion. If they judge her to be faithful to the Lord, and since the narrator has informed the reader of the direct intervention of the risen Christ it appears that they must, then they are compelled to stay in her home and accept her hospitality. It seems that there was not a negative judgment on Lydia's faith, since the group complies and stays with her for some time and even returns to her home for a final time after their release from prison (16:40). Lydia's force here is to extend hospitality to the travelers that will not only provide them with food and physical shelter, but would incorporate them into her household. In this way, it would afford the missionaries all the rights and protections Lydia herself would have.161

The Narrative Pattern

Stories of women in Acts fall into a discernible pattern. As has been suggested above, Lydia's story is linked to other stories throughout Acts. As one of the few women allowed direct speech, Lydia's story is linked to the other two women who also speak in Acts, Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and the mantic slave girl (Acts 16:16-19). However, the

---

161 For an excellent discussion of the multi-layered nature of the term household see Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedemann, The Roman Household, (London: Routledge, 1991). For a discussion of the household in Egypt, see Rowlandson, Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt, 84–87. The model of the ideal household was not uniform; practices and ideals changed over time and differed based on geography and socioeconomic conditions. In many examples from the first and second century, these authors describe household relationships that went beyond family ties and included “outsiders” who were extended hospitium, which implied the obligation to help your friends, especially when they were in greatest need. Cf. Livy, Ad Urb. 28.18.
connection to Sapphira goes beyond this one detail and is also emphasized through narrative placement. Near the beginning of Acts (5:1–11), Sapphira, a married woman and a believing member of the community of the risen Christ, is presented as a negative example for following her husband in his deception of the community. Even though she is given a separate opportunity to admit her part in the embezzlement, she follows her husband in his lie and perpetuates the deception (5:7–8). Because of this, she suffers the same death sentence as her husband (5:9–10). This married couple deceives the community in an attempt to conceal the value of the sale of their property and to keep that profit for themselves. Sapphira is critiqued for not speaking up independently and, instead, following convention by submitting to the authority of her spouse.

In contrast to this couple, later in Acts (18:1–3, 18–19, 24–28), another married couple is presented that are also believing members of the Christian community. Priscilla and Aquila are portrayed as a positive example of marriage. They also act together as a couple, but this work is described quite differently from the relationship of Ananias and Sapphira. First, like Lydia and Tabitha, Priscilla and Aquila are employed in a trade (σκηνοποιοί). The married couple work together with Paul both in their shared trade and in the work of the gospel. Acts describes this work in the narrative in Ephesus when they encounter Apollos teaching in the synagogue, ἀκούσαντες δὲ αὐτοῦ [Apollos]

---

162 Acts 5:2 καὶ ἐνοσφίσατο ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς, συνειδοῦσί καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς, καὶ ἐνέγκας μέρος τι παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐθηκαν. (emphasis mine).

163 Acts 18:3 καὶ διὰ τὸ ὀμότεχνον εἶναι ἐμὲν παρ’ αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἠγάζετο· ἔστω γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ. Αχθα 18’18 Ο δὲ Παύλος ἐτε προσμέινεις ἡμέρας ἱκανὰς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἀποστάζωντος ἐξεπλεῖ εἰς τὴν Συρίαν, καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ Πρίσκιλλα καὶ Λακίλας.
Pri,skillan gunai/ka auvtou/ (emphasis mine) Then in 18:18, Priscilla is once again mentioned first (kai. su.n auvtw/| Pri,skilla kai. VAku,laj). Acts does not give any of these details or explain this; instead it shows the couple as a pair working together.

Acts is bookended by one negative and one positive example of marriage. In between these two episodes are stories of our two independent women who are the head of their respective households. Both Tabitha and Lydia ply a trade, they both open their homes to fellow believers to gather there, women are gathered around them, and they are judged as positive models based on their adherence to Jewish ethical standards. In Tabitha's case, her almsgiving and her good works in addition to the usufruct of her business are used on behalf of those in need. Lydia worships of the God of Israel and she keeps the Sabbath. Because her heart is opened by the risen Christ and she responds immediately, her faith is judged positively and she can offer hospitality to the missionaries and fellow believers who gather in her home (16:40). Elite women such as Drusilla (24:24) and Bernice (25:13) fall outside the boundaries of this pattern. They are not portrayed negatively, but neutrally, acting more as set pieces than fully formed

---

164 Priscilla's name could also be mentioned first because she is the more important figure or because she is the citizen and Aquila is not. This does not seem to be the case since, in 18:3, Aquila is mentioned first and it is stated tina VIoudai/on ovno,mati VAku,lan(Pontiko.n tw/| ge,nei prosfa,twj evlhluqo,ta avpo. th/j VItali,aj kai. Pri,skilla kai. VAku,laj prosela,bonto auvtw/| evxe,qento th.n o`do.n [toû theou]. Here Priscilla and Aquila work together to ensure that Apollos correctly understands the teachings. When they notice that there is an error in Apollos' teaching, they take him aside discreetly together and correct him together. One does not have precedence over the other. This is especially evident in the fact that Priscilla's name is mentioned first in two instances rather than Aquila's.164
characters. They may have social stature and power, but within Acts they are silent and in the background. Positive examples of work such as Tabitha, Lydia, and Priscilla\(^{165}\) are set against the exploitation of the mantic slave girl and the greed of Ananias and Sapphira.\(^{166}\) In Acts, wealth is meant to be shared, and work is meant to be done together and shared.

**Conclusion**

Lydia's story in Acts 16:13–15 is told with great care and detail. It may be brief, but it is filled with information about Lydia's birthplace, her profession, that she is an independent head of household, and her religious affiliations. Paul and his followers are divinely guided to Macedonia and, upon arriving, have their first significant encounter with Lydia in the *proseuche*. The information from Philippi tells us that it was a Roman colony where the majority of the population was Greek. Among the Greek population was a significant number of merchants and tradespeople who were from Macedonia and of foreign birth. The material and inscriptive evidence from the city also suggests that women were active participants in the religious life of the city through holding offices, patronage, and worship. Lydia, a πορφυρόπωλις, is described as one of these merchants

\(^{165}\) Rhoda the servant could also be added to this list since she is the female character highlighted in Acts 12:12–17. It may be Mary's home, but Rhoda is the one who recognizes Peter's voice and rejoices at his return. The others present do not believe until they actually see Peter. Acts 12:14–15 καὶ ἐπηγγέλειν ἐστάναι τὸν Πέτρον πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου, οι δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἔιπαν· μαίνῃ, ή δὲ διασχυρίζετο οὕτως ἔχειν, οἱ δὲ ἑλέγων· ὁ ἀγγέλος ἐστὶν αὐτού. (emphasis mine). There may be a comic element present here when Rhoda leaves Peter standing at the gate (Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 62–63), but the text highlights her recognition, her joy at Peter's return, and her persistence in her convictions.

\(^{166}\) I would add to this the critique of the artisans in Ephesus that is noted as the reason for the riot. This does not mean the artisans did not have a valid reason to fear for their livelihood, only that the text portrays them as driven by greed, especially in 19:24, Δημήτριος γὰρ τις ὄνοματι, ἄργυροκόπος, ποιῶν νικώς ἄργυρος Ἀρτέμιδος παρείχετο τοῖς τεχνίταις ὅσω ἀλγήν ἐργασίαν. Here Demetrius is driven by preservation of wealth rather than more 'genuine' concerns.
and a worshipper of the God of Israel. Her occupational title designates her as a merchant who is not among the poorest of the poor, but is part of an industry that is associated with wealth. The papyrological and inscriptive evidence suggest that while those employed in this industry may not have been among the elite, they had sufficient wealth to create public memorials and were themselves the honored subjects in some of these inscriptions. Lydia's presence in the proseuche on the Jewish Sabbath indicates that she is a pious woman who reverences the God of Israel. Acts itself suggests tradespeople and those who are attached to Judaism in some way make ideal followers of the risen Christ.

While not one of the elite of Philippi, Lydia is a woman of some means who is an independent householder who also makes the religious decisions for all those attached to her οἶκος, and she can decide to whom she wishes to offer hospitality, all without recourse to male oversight. And rather than her name suggesting her servile origins or her freed status, calling her Lydia from the city of Thyatira comports better with her having citizenship status in that city. Therefore, the text leaves open not only her marital status, but her social status as well. The text wishes to highlight other values and characteristics. Lydia is a “worshipper of God [of Israel].” But this does not mean that she is Jewish, it is more likely that she is not, but that her piety and character are judged according to Jewish ethical standards. Like other stories in Acts, such as Cornelius and Titius Justus, those who worship the God of Israel are positive role models of faith and those who are most fruitfully absorbed into the worship of the risen Christ.

In spite of the propensity to name this story "Paul's conversion of Lydia," the text itself focuses on Lydia and states that it is the risen Christ who calls Lydia and opens her
heart. Lydia is singled out from among the many women gathered there based on the content of her heart. Like God's choice of David (1 Sam. 16 and Acts 13:22), the risen Christ calls Lydia not based on external characteristics or social prominence, but on the content of her heart and her fidelity (πιστὴν τῷ κυρίῳ). Paul may speak the message, but it is the intercession of the risen Christ and Lydia's unconditional acceptance that is highlighted here.

Once baptized, Lydia is emboldened to demand that the missionaries judge her faith. This is one of the few times that a woman is allowed direct speech in Acts, and Lydia's speech is of great importance. Παρακαλέω, κρίνω, and παραβιάζω together with the command μένετε taken together make a strong statement of the type of force and confidence that is used in this request. Her words compel the missionaries to come into her home and accept her hospitality. This hospitium would provide the entire group with any protection or privileges her household would afford. However, even though Paul and the missionaries stay in Lydia's home, the text does not show them sharing table fellowship as is found later in the story of the Roman jailer (Acts 16:34). Lydia may be the Cornelius of the second part of Acts, but Acts is reluctant to show Lydia in table fellowship with her guests.  

Whether or not Lydia is a historical or fictional character, the text holds her up as exemplary: an independent female householder, a native of Asia Minor, a member of the merchant class, and a bold speaker. These characteristics combined with the moral

---

167 Matthews, First Converts, 176.
character of her heart attest to Lydia as both an ideal worshipper of the God of Israel and follower of the risen Christ.
Table 1: Acts 16:12. "A leading city of the district of Macedonia."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant text</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>πρώτη τῆς μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Byzantine manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρώτη τῆς μερίδος Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Bodmer Papyrus (P⁷⁴&lt;sup&gt;va&lt;/sup&gt;), Codex Sinaiticus ( CONSTANTS ), Codex Alexandrinus (A), C, Ψ, Minuscule manuscripts 33, 36, 81, 323, 945, 1175, 1891 (and a few other various manuscripts ) pc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρώτη μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Codex Vaticanus (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρώτη τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Minuscule manuscripts 614, 1241, 1739, 2495, pc, Syriac Harklensis (syr&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρώτη μερίς Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Codex Basilensis (E), Sahidic manuscripts (sa), Coptic manuscripts (co&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; and co&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κεφαλή τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις</td>
<td>Codex Bezae (D), Syriac Peshitta (syr&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Acts 16:13. "Where we expected there to be a place of prayer."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant text</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a ἐνομίζομεν προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Codex Alexandrinus (A&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;), Codex Ephraemi (C), Codex Athous Laurae (Ψ), Minuscule manuscripts 33, 81, pc, Coptic manuscripts (co&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b ἐνομίζειν προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Codex Sinaiticus ( CONSTANTS )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c ἐνομίζομεν προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Codex Vaticanus (B), pc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d ἐνομίζετο προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Codex Alexandrinus (A&lt;sup&gt;va&lt;/sup&gt;), Codex Basilensis (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e ἔδοκει προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Codex Bezae (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f ἐνομίζειν προσευχήν εἶναι</td>
<td>Bodmer Papyrus (P⁷⁴&lt;sup&gt;va&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Until now, the stories of Tabitha and Lydia have always been studied individually. But due to similarities in both their presentation and their social context, they invite analysis as a pair. Both narratives use the same introductory formula (καὶ τις γυνὴ ὀνόματι), which in Acts signals the introduction of an important character. It should also be noted that the only women introduced with this formula are those portrayed without spouses. Further, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the stories are built around a similar group of thematic words all having to do with discipleship and hospitality. With regard to social context, both Tabitha and Lydia are shown as independent women who are involved in a trade. However, neither is employed in this endeavor independently. From the narratives, we can adduce that the groups of women present are somehow attached to Tabitha and Lydia, most likely through their businesses. This type of cooperative network is also found in the primary evidence for the cloth trade in both the Greek East and the Roman West.

As Chapter One demonstrated, the stories of Tabitha and Lydia have been overlooked for the most part except in so far as they aid the discussion of primary characters such as Peter, Paul, and Cornelius. Since most scholars up until the modern period considered women like Tabitha and Lydia to be historical characters, these narratives were used to address the concerns of the scholar’s own time period. Moreover,
their conclusions about the role of Tabitha and Lydia were based on the biased understanding of the roles that women were allowed to inhabit in the Greco-Roman period. In the modern period, scholarship has generally regarded the majority of Acts to be an authorial creation with limited historical basis. While my study does not seek to make a case for a historical Tabitha or Lydia, it does find sufficient evidence for the plausibility and verisimilitude for the stories. The evidence shows that both Joppa and Philippi had active trade markets and diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Chapters Two and Three discussed the social, legal, and financial situations of women in the Greek East and Roman West respectively. Although it is impossible to trace with precision, from the time of the late Republic onward women seem to have held ownership of an increasing share of property. Also, although the legal requirement for a tutor remained in force through the third century CE, the documentary evidence suggests that women in both the East and the West utilized the legal system both with and without a tutor. Women inherited from their own families in spite of formal legal restrictions, owned and manumitted slaves independently, and bequeathed wealth and property to their female and male children alike with and without oversight by husband or other male authority. For example, both Babatha and Salome Komaise passed on property to their children and summoned people to court with relative ease. Since neither woman was of elite status, this evidence implies that these options were available to women of differing social classes and economic conditions. This type of increase in ownership and independence could not have occurred if husbands controlled the wealth or if assets were
passed on to male heirs alone. The social and financial prominence of women and their visible role in society seems to stand behind the stories of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts.

Chapters Two and Three also revealed that large numbers of women throughout the East and West were employed in the cloth trade. Women worked in this capacity both inside and outside the home. The most common situation found outside the home was a workshop setting where groups of women and men worked together who were not necessarily related through family or servile ties. What is also indicative of these workshops is that they seem to have operated as cooperative ventures with minimal hierarchy. Further, the evidence shows that farmers, spinners, weavers, dyers, and sewers formed loose networks that operated cooperatively within local marketplaces. Even though there is a tendency to downplay the presence of women in the business world and the pride that they felt in their accomplishments, documentary and inscriptive sources demonstrate that many women were neither ashamed of their trades/businesses or reticent to advertise their success. In Acts, Tabitha and Lydia are each shown to have a trade, employ others in these ventures, and use their resources as a means of service to others. Acts does not hesitate to praise these women for their piety and their public accomplishments.

Chapter Four showed Tabitha's importance and function within the text of Acts. It is generally assumed that Tabitha was a widow since this would be the most likely option. However, the narrative itself gives no indication whatsoever of her marital status. The text instead highlights Tabitha's status as a disciple and benefactress in Joppa. While it is frequently noted that Tabitha is the only example of a female disciple in the Bible
(μαθητής) and one of the very few examples in all ancient literature, what is missed is
that in Acts when a disciple is named, that character is highlighted for his or her
importance to and status within their community (Acts 9:10, 36; 16:1; 21:16). When
Tabitha is raised from the dead, she is restored to her community to continue her good
works, acts of charity, and discipleship on behalf of the believers in Joppa.

Lydia is also portrayed as a businesswoman, a seller of purple cloth
(πορφυρόπωλης) in the Roman colony of Philippi. Lydia, too, is not designated by her
marital status, and like Tabitha she is shown without a husband or male relative present.
Lydia’s story goes even further in this independence. When Lydia is called to follow the
risen Christ, she requests baptism not only for herself but for her entire household as
well. She then demands that Paul and all his traveling companions stay in her home
without having to ask permission. This indicates that she is domina of her household and
can make these types of decisions on her own authority. Although Lydia is not given the
title of disciple, her story is told in the form of a call narrative, suggesting that she too
should be understood as acting in this role. A unique aspect of her story is that her call is
described as her heart being opened by the risen Christ (ἡς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν
καρδίαν). Lydia is singled out from the other women present to receive this direct, divine
intervention. She may hear and understand Paul's words, but her heart is opened and
made ready through divine intervention alone, not through the content of Paul’s teaching.
In this aspect, her characterization is unique among the stories of women in ancient
literature.
The narratives also serve the rhetorical strategies of Acts as a whole through the characterizations of Tabitha and Lydia and their placement in the document. Although elite authors may have looked down upon those involved in the trades, Tabitha and Lydia are held up as honorable and respectable women. Further, both Tabitha and Lydia are presented as ideal followers of the risen Christ for their adherence to Jewish ethical standards. In Tabitha’s case, it is her good works and her almsgiving, virtues found primarily in Jewish literature. Lydia worships the God of Israel and is present in the proseuche on the Jewish Sabbath, which indicates her attachment to and reverence for Judaism. These highlighted traits may also suggest that these characters in some way mirrored the situations and aspirations of the hearers of the text.

What is clear after comparing the external data with the characterizations of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts is that they are in some ways quite similar and in others entirely different. In documentary sources, there are numerous examples of women who act as heads of households and engage in commerce. However, in the majority of the sources, women are praised in their roles as wife and mother. In Acts, Tabitha and Lydia are not identified in this way but instead are praised for their service in acts of charity and in their willingness to open their homes to provide hospitality. In this way, Acts’ portrayal of women is distinctive.

My dissertation points out a pattern suggested by the placement of the stories of women in Acts. The stories about the independent women, Tabitha and Lydia, are bracketed by stories of two married women, Sapphira and Priscilla. Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) is portrayed as a negative example of a married woman who does not act
independently, but instead follows her husband in his deception. Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26), however, is praised for her work alongside Paul and her husband Aquila in their trade as tentmakers and in their service to the gospel. In each of these cases, female believers are highlighted for their involvement in a trade. Elite married women such as Drusilla (24:24) and Bernice (25:13) may have social stature and power, but within Acts they are silent and neutral. If one of the strategies of Acts is to reach, educate, and edify female hearers, then this pattern and its characterization of female discipleship may have served to inculcate values of work, service, charity, Jewish piety, and independence among its female audience.

This is surely not the only significant pattern among the narratives of women in Acts. This is an area that deserves further study, specifically, how these patterns illuminate the understanding of female virtue and discipleship in the early church. The identification of these patterns and the exploration of how they serve the macrotext of Acts would contribute to a more holistic understanding of Acts as one of the important voices of the early church and its people. I hope that my study has pointed to the precariousness of generalizations about women in the Greco-Roman world, in either the East or the West. We would do well to continue to look more carefully and consistently at the inscriptive evidence that at times runs counter to stereotypes. It would be a productive area of study to analyze the inscriptions by region to determine what additional information they add to our knowledge. This is one way that we can continue to nuance our understanding of the wide variety of ways that women functioned in the ancient world.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bertholet, Alfred. *Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden*. Leipzig:


Chiusi, Tiziana. “Babatha vs. the Guardians of Her Son: A Struggle for Guardianship—Legal and Practical Aspects of P. Yadin 12–15, 27.” In Law in the Documents of


VITA

Teresa Calpino received her doctorate in Theology from Loyola University Chicago in August 2012. Prior to the Ph.D., Teresa received a Masters of Arts degree from Loyola in Biblical Languages and Literature with an emphasis on the Hebrew Bible. She also holds a Bachelor of Science from Northwestern University in Evanston. She has taught a variety of courses at Loyola. She currently resides in Chicago, IL.

Teresa is an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, and the Chicago Society of Biblical Research. She has presented papers and acted as a session chairperson both regionally and nationally. Teresa has also served as the Midwest Representative to the Student Advisory Board of the Society of Biblical Literature and editor of Dialogos, the student newsletter of the Society of Biblical Literature. At Loyola, Teresa was an officer of the Graduate Student Caucus, Chairperson of the 2009 Loyola-Marquette Colloquium, a founding member of “Women in Theology,” and the graduate student representative to the Theology Department’s Graduate Program Committee for two years. Teresa has published articles in the peer-reviewed journals Biblical Research and Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi.