

Gender Roles in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas

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1. Introduction to the Text and Related Questions

The earliest core of the narrative about the childhood deeds of Jesus (Greek *Paidika*), better known under the undoubtedly secondary title of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas,¹ can be presumably traced back to the late second or early third century. It was rapidly and widely distributed, as shown by the many differing textual editions and versions in a wide variety of languages.² It is evident that this partly astonishingly violent but abundantly miraculous Childhood Deeds of Jesus between the ages of five and twelve enjoyed great popularity.

To the present, only Reidar Aasgaard has dealt extensively with the question of the gender roles in the *Paidika*.³ He quite correctly certifies a “male focus” in the text.⁴ A cursory glance already shows that the fig-

1. A long form of the original title could have been *Tὰ παιδικὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. On the question of the title, see, among others, Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, “Die sogenannte ‘Kindheitserzählung des Thomas’: Überlegungen zur Darstellung Jesu als Kind, deren Intention und Rezeption,” in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities*, ed. Claire Clivaz et al., WUNT 281 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 460.

2. On the dating, see, among others, Tony Burke, *De infantia Iesu evangelium Thomae*, CCSA 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 202; Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 182. On the transmission, text families, and the usual sigla in research, see the overview by Ursula Ulrike Kaiser with Josef Tropper, “Die Kindheitserzählung des Thomas: Einleitung und Übersetzung,” in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1:931–35; and in more detail, Burke, *Infantia Iesu evangelium Thomae* 14.127–71.

3. See Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, especially ch. 7.

4. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 111.

ures discussed in the Paidika in more detail are, in the striking majority, male. They are encountered as fathers, husbands, scribes, and teachers, but also as woodchoppers and construction workers (the last, though, only in later expansions of the text). The children playing with Jesus, insofar as they emerge from out of the anonymity of the group, are also always boys. Mary, on the other hand, is encountered only seldom. In the compilation of episodes in the Paidika as documented by the oldest preserved Greek text form and the Syrian version,⁵ there are only two episodes in which she speaks and acts actively, and a further episode in which she is a passive figure. In respect of the gender roles that influence the text,⁶ and that the text itself contains and promotes, the figures of Joseph and Jesus are thus the most interesting; among the women, this figure is Mary. The following analysis will be limited to these three.

How does one detect gender roles in a text that never explicitly emphasizes certain manners of conduct and characteristics as masculine or feminine? In his study of the masculinity of Jesus in Mark, Moisés Mayordomo points out that in a narrative text, masculinity can “be brought into play most easily as a useful analytical category when [it] is considered as an aspect of the characterization of the figures.”⁷ In a comparable way, Thomas Späth, in his study of masculinity and femininity in the work of Tacitus, begins his analysis with the actions of the persons portrayed and

5. The siglum for the oldest preserved Greek textual witnesses from the eleventh century is Gs. Aasgaard refers essentially to this text, which, for him, goes back to an archetype from the fifth century (*Childhood of Jesus*, 15; see also the appendix with edition and translation). The present essay also refers to Gs as far as the content, the text form, and the numbering of the episodes are concerned, but I do this according to Burke’s critical edition. However, when passages are cited, the translation is in each case my own. The Syrian textual witness, which originates already from the sixth century, will also be cited along with further versions when there are deviations that are significant for gender roles. The Syrian version will be quoted from the translation by Josef Tropper in Kaiser, “Kindheitserzählung des Thomas.”

6. Apart from later added passages, the core narrative of the Paidika undoubtedly belongs in the cultural framework of late antiquity. So also Aasgaard: “It shares the social and cultural values current in late antiquity, such as honor codes and perceptions of gender” (*Childhood of Jesus*, 215).

7. Moisés Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium: Eine Spurensuche,” in *Doing Gender—Doing Religion: Fallstudien zur Intersektionalität im frühen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Ute E. Eisen, Christine Gerber, and Angela Standhartinger, WUNT 302 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 362.

with the relationships emerging in them.⁸ Aasgaard has a similar approach in his analysis of the gender roles in the Paidika: “the issue of gender ... looms large in the writing: in the ideas and values reflected in it, *in the figures involved, and not least in Jesus, its main character.*”⁹

Here I will follow this approach in the analysis of the main characters. In contrast to Aasgaard, I will not only concentrate on Jesus but also and even more on Joseph. I will also direct my attention to reception processes and consider in which ways characters and roles that have become familiar from the later canonized gospels are taken up and changed in the Paidika.¹⁰

As female figures play only a marginal role in the Paidika in its earlier form, as already indicated, the question of masculinity is central in the analysis of gender roles in this text. What constitutes a man in the framework of late antiquity? How is masculinity construed? The “dominant aspects of antique masculinity,”¹¹ worked out by Mayordomo, prove to be useful for my analysis. These aspects can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ Masculinity must be acquired and learned, as a rule primarily from the father.¹²
- ◆ Masculinity is performed in the mode of public self-representation and takes place in competition with others, toward whom strength must be shown.¹³ Preferred possibilities for doing so are

8. Thomas Späth, *Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit bei Tacitus: Zur Konstruktion der Geschlechter in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, GG 9 (Frankfurt: Campus, 1994), 30.

9. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 103, emphasis added.

10. The emphasis here lies quite decisively on figures and roles, not on direct textual dependence. The question of which of the canonical gospels the Paidika may have drawn is disputed in research. See Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, “Jesus als Kind: Neuere Forschungen zur Jesusüberlieferung in den apokryphen ‘Kindheitsevangelien,’” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen: Beiträge zu außerkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen aus verschiedenen Sprach- und Kulturtraditionen*, ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter, WUNT 254 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 260–64.

11. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 362–67; see also Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15–34.

12. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 364; on the role of the man as *pater/paterfamilias* see also Späth, *Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit bei Tacitus*, 306–11.

13. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 365, 371.

offered by the realms of war and the military, sporting competitions, rhetoric, and political office.

- ◆ Masculinity means the exercise of control and supremacy in the political as well as the private sphere.¹⁴
 - ◆ Self-control, moderation, and strength of will are to be demonstrated as the inner side of this control and supremacy.¹⁵
 - ◆ Masculine supremacy is to be exercised also in the area of sexuality, whereby what is specifically masculine is expressed in personal freedom and sovereignty.¹⁶

This brief description in unavoidably general terms of the aspects that formed the measure of masculinity in antiquity is used in the following as a tool in assessing the development of the characters of Joseph and Jesus in the Paidika.¹⁷

2. Joseph: The Tested Father

Joseph plays a central role in the Paidika. He appears in almost all the episodes and is the most important reference point for Jesus. His chief role is that of the father. This role is quite clearly a *social* role. That Joseph is not the *biological* father of Jesus shines through in several passages for the informed reader and is, in my opinion, assumed by the text,¹⁸ even

14. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 366.

15. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 367.

16. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 366.

17. In the part devoted to gender, Aasgaard focuses on comparable parameters: “I take my point of departure from dominance and self-restraint as basic notions.... I break the former down into more specific categories, namely strength, violence, persuasive speech, honor, and female exclusion” (*Childhood of Jesus*, 104). Aasgaard orients himself, above all, on categories that Clines transferred from his studies on David and other OT figures to the analysis of Paul. See David J. A. Clines, “Paul, the Invisible Man,” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore, SemeiaSt 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 181. However, for the Paidika, the construction of masculinity in the late antique world, on which Mayordomo and Späth, among others, focus, is of greater significance than the OT characterization, even though there is some overlap. Aasgaard also briefly touches on the broad research landscape on “ancient masculinity” (see *Childhood of Jesus*, 103).

18. The boy Jesus himself makes reference to his special origin in 6.2b with clear echoes of John 8:58. See also the integration of Luke 2:49 in ch. 17[19].3. (The number

though it is not dealt with directly in any of its passages. In view of the miracles that the little boy Jesus performs and of the words with which he demonstrates a wisdom far transcending his age, the observing crowd at times expresses suspicion that all this has to have something to do with a special origin of the child Jesus. Nevertheless, Joseph's social role as father, with related duties, is in no way infringed upon by it.¹⁹ This takes a quite different form in the Gospel of John, where the knowledge about Jesus's earthly family, in the two passages in which Joseph is at all mentioned in John, interferes with the true understanding about Jesus (John 1:45) or even makes it impossible (John 6:42).²⁰

Somewhat more about the figure of Joseph can be acquired from Luke and Matthew. The connection of the Paidika with Luke is quite clear: the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41–52) serves as the closing story of the collection of Jesus's childhood deeds and functions as a hinge to the narratives around the adult Jesus.²¹ With this pericope, the Paidika also takes up the role that Joseph plays in the canonical text (whereupon Mary is, at the same time, given more significance; see below). However, while Joseph in Luke *always* appears in the shadow of Mary (and not only in this episode, but also in the remaining text of Luke 2), in the Paidika, this is the case *only* in chapter 17 [19].

Thus, the figure of Joseph in the apocryphal childhood stories about Jesus is more comparable with the somewhat more independent description of Joseph in Matt 1–2, even if, in content, none of the incidents narrated by Matthew are taken up as such in the Paidika. In contrast to the Lukan birth and childhood stories, in the Matthean version Joseph is the

in square brackets indicates the numbering of the episodes in the Greek long version, Ga, which in many editions of the Apocrypha still forms the basis of translation.)

19. The child Jesus also criticizes Joseph's physical attempts at education in 5.3. He does not do this, though, by denying Joseph's responsibility as a father. Rather, he questions Joseph's discernment into the situation and, accordingly, the appropriateness of the punishment (see more on this passage below).

20. The issue in John 1:45 is not so much whether Joseph is Jesus's earthly father but whether Nazareth can be the place of origin of the Messiah, which is questioned by Nathanael. The situation in John 6:42 is similar to Mark 6:2–3, although there is no mention of Jesus's father at all.

21. On the relationship to Luke, see esp. Tony Chartrand-Burke, "Completing the Gospel: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a Supplement to the Gospel of Luke," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turescu (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 101–19.

more active person. He doubts and intends to leave Mary (Matt 1:19). He changes his mind after divinely sent dreams and assumes responsibility for the family (Matt 1:20–24). Threatened by Herod in Bethlehem, he leads his family out of the danger to Egypt, and later from there to Nazareth (Matt 2:13, 19–23). In this sense, he fulfills his role as *paterfamilias* and cares for the external security of the family.

He appears in this role as *paterfamilias* in the Paidika, too. In respect to content, however, this role develops in a completely different direction. Not only must Joseph do without the helping guidance of dreams, but also he is asked only once to care for the preservation of the external security of the family (see below). Rather, his responsibility for the *upbringing* of Jesus is central.²² While the canonical gospels, with the exception of Luke 2:41–52, completely ignore Jesus’s adolescent life, that is, the hard school of masculinity, and while Joseph, too, drops out unnoticed from the repertoire of active figures after the infancy of Jesus, it is precisely this part of life that the Paidika describes.²³ Other people repeatedly remind Joseph of his responsibility for the upbringing of Jesus, and he himself takes the appropriate initiatives in this regard.²⁴ A paraphrase of various parts of the text makes this clear.

As the five year-old Jesus, in chapter 2, plays in the mud on the banks of the stream on a Sabbath, forms waterholes, and miraculously cleans the water, then forms sparrows out of the clay, he is observed by a Jew. The observer goes to Joseph and informs him that Jesus is doing something not allowed on the Sabbath. Thereby, Joseph is made responsible for Jesus’s action. Joseph reacts appropriately by going to Jesus and scolding him with the words: “Why do you do these things on the Sabbath?”

The continuation of this episode already begins to indicate that Joseph’s role as Jesus’s legal guardian will not be easy, for Jesus reacts to

22. So too Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 66: “In keeping with ancient practice, Josef as *paterfamilias* emerges as having primary responsibility for Jesus’ upbringing.”

23. See Mayordomo, “Jesu Männlichkeit im Markusevangelium,” 364. See also Späth, *Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit bei Tacitus*, 317–19.

24. On the responsibility of the father for the upbringing of children, see Cornelia B. Horn and John Wesley Martens, “*Let the Little Children Come to Me*”: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 132. Their view of the upbringing of the child Jesus in the Paidika, however, remains limited to formal education and thus concentrates too much on the three episodes with Jesus’s teachers (129–32).

Joseph's scolding plainly and simply by clapping his hands, bringing the birds to life, and letting them fly away. What Joseph thereupon does is not reported.

The miracles performed by Jesus are not all of this rather harmless kind. In the next episode, in chapter 3, he lets the son of the scribe Hannas wither because the child had destroyed Jesus's waterholes willfully.²⁵ When Jesus later (in ch. 4) walks through the village with Joseph, another boy runs by him and bumps into his shoulder.²⁶ This makes Jesus furious, and he curses the boy with the words: "You shall not continue on your way!"²⁷ The boy immediately dies.

While the crowd, still filled with astonishment and dismay, discusses the power that lies in Jesus's words, the parents of the dead boy come and make Joseph responsible for what has happened: "Wherever you have this child from—you cannot live with us in this village! If you want to stay here, then teach him to bless and not to curse!" Here Joseph is questioned not only in regard to Jesus's upbringing. Rather, Jesus's conduct threatens the existence of the entire family within village society.

Joseph at first does not react any differently than he did in the case of the sparrows. He takes the boy Jesus to task and reproaches him because of his deed (5.1). Jesus once again interprets Joseph's disciplinary efforts at first as an understandable and excusable reaction to the threats of the other villagers (5.1) and spares Joseph. All the others who had criticized his conduct, though, he strikes with blindness. Thereupon, Joseph gives up his previously only verbal rebukes and firmly pulls Jesus's ear (5.2). Now the boy Jesus again becomes furious, this time with Joseph, and rebukes him (5.3): "That's enough! You have acted unwisely! Just do not grieve me!"²⁸

25. In the later, in part expanded, Greek textual versions Ga, Gb, and Gd, Joseph is again made responsible by others for this act of Jesus (see ch. 2).

26. The versions differ concerning whether this occurred inadvertently or with evil intention. See Kaiser, "Überlegungen," 464–68, and the synopsis of ten versions of chapter 4 of the *Paidika* in Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, "Jesus als enfant terrible in verschiedenen Versionen der apokryphen 'Kindheitserzählung des Thomas'—Ein synoptischer Vergleich von KThom 4," uukaiser (blog), March 18, 2011, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL6010a>.

27. This is the wording of the Ga variant, which agrees with with Syriac. Gs offers a more difficult text here: the "hegemon" of the boy is cursed. Here Gs appears not to have preserved the older text but more likely has revised it (see also the previous note).

28. The textual transmission of this passage shows clear signs of textual corrup-

This remains the only instance in the Paidika where Joseph exercises physical force against Jesus in his pedagogical efforts. It is also the only time that Jesus so clearly criticizes Joseph. This indicates that the possibilities and limits of the upbringing of the child are explored here. Joseph obviously realizes that he makes no progress with his verbal rebukes of Jesus. For this reason, he resorts next to the means of corporal punishment. Those were in no way exceptional in the upbringing of children in antiquity. In this case, however, the punishment turns out to be relatively moderate. Thereupon, the roles reverse themselves completely. What Jesus says does not belong in the mouth of a five-year-old who answers his father, but rather would be expected the other way around. In regard to the gender roles, Joseph's masculinity suffers a defeat here all along the line. Neither does he adequately fulfill the role of father in relationship to his son, nor is he a match rhetorically for the child. The corporal punishment he applies does not lead to success, either, and thus cannot be interpreted as an indication of strength. Finally, all of this takes place in public.

It is not quite clear how the public audience is exactly to be envisioned, but at least the following chapter (ch. 6) describes an appropriate reaction to this astonishing verbal exchange that presupposes that a certain teacher has witnessed the confrontation.²⁹ On the basis of what he has heard, the teacher concludes that the child has an extraordinary intelligence (6.1). However, he also perceives the lack of respect that Jesus has for other people and for this reason desires to take him as his student and to teach him not only reading and writing but, not least of all, reverence for human beings and, above all, for his elders (6.2). Again, it is Joseph, in his typical role of the father who is responsible for the upbringing of his son, to whom this inquiry is addressed and who must decide about it. Since Jesus is still somewhat too young for a school career that in antiquity

tion. The Greek versions appear to revise in different ways an unclear passage; see the Syriac (5.3) with Jesus's words to Joseph: "Is it not enough for you that you seek me and find me? You have acted unreasonably." In the Greek transmission, these words are negated and used as a reproach against Joseph, who precisely does *not* find Jesus. Subsequently, they are further interpreted, but they aim at the emphasized *affiliation* of Jesus to Joseph: "I am yours."

29. As has become evident from the paraphrase, the individual episodes of the Paidika clearly refer to each other, and Jesus's deeds and the confrontations growing out of them escalate. Thus, this first third of the text does not lack cohesion, as was often the charge leveled at the text, especially in earlier research.

normally began around the age of seven,³⁰ it is not astonishing that Joseph himself already has not taken the corresponding initiative. He does this later in the *Paidika* precisely at the point at which Jesus is seven years old and after his first attempt at schooling in chapters 6–8 has been a thorough failure (see below, section 3). But this second attempt (ch. 13 [14]) is not successful, either. Neither teacher is a match for this special student, and they both are humiliated and punished by him. Thereupon (ch. 13[14].3), Joseph orders Mary not to let Jesus go outside the house anymore, so that no more people might be harmed by him.

Here another aspect of Joseph's role as *paterfamilias* becomes visible. He is not only the father of Jesus but also the husband of Mary and, as such, gives her orders to be obeyed. Mary herself remains the pure object of those orders and is not given a voice or opinion of her own. Since the inside of the house is normally the area for which the wife is responsible, it is quite a matter of course that she receives the task of caring for compliance with the order for Jesus's detention.

Already in the next episode (ch. 14 [15]), though, Jesus is again liberated, for a third teacher asks Joseph to be allowed to instruct the child. By adding one school story directly to the next, there is, on the one hand, the possibility to directly compare the different teachers (the third of whom is finally successful by—literally—doing nothing and letting Jesus do as he wants). On the other hand, though, it becomes clear that the house, as the area for women and girls, is no longer the proper place for the education of a seven-year-old boy.

Another aspect of Jesus's education is highlighted in chapter 12 [13]. Here Joseph actively takes part in the training of his son by introducing him to his own craft. The canonical gospels show only traces of this. Taking Mark 6:3 and Matt 13:55 together suggests that Jesus as well as Joseph is known to the people in Nazareth as a carpenter (τέκτων). In the framework of late antiquity, this implies that Jesus learned his trade from his father,³¹ just as the *Paidika* tells. However, here, too, there is a reversal

30. See further Kaiser, "Sogenannte 'Kindheitserzählung des Thomas,'" 475–77, esp. n. 75.

31. Horn and Martens, among others, describe how in the Jewish context, the future trades of the sons "were learned at the feet of one's father" (*Let the Little Children*, 175). See also Boris Dreyer, "Ausbildung und Beruf," in *Handbuch der Erziehung und Bildung in der Antike*, ed. Johannes Christes, Richard Klein, and Christoph Lüth (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 175.

of roles: Joseph is to make a bed, but one sidepiece is not the same length as the other. Thereupon, Jesus orders him to lay the two boards one on top of the other and to hold them fast. Then Jesus pulls the shorter board to the proper length and asks Joseph to carry out what he had planned to do. Here it is not Joseph who assumes the role of the foreman but rather Jesus. In contrast to the teacher in the first school episode, though, Joseph does not break out in lamentation over his lost honor³² but rather praises God for having given him this child.

A second episode (ch. 11 [12]), which Aasgaard reckons as a further part of the training that Jesus receives from Joseph,³³ describes how Jesus sows grain and achieves a miraculously large harvest. Differently from the Greek tradition, the Syrian tradition does not describe this as a joint action, in which Joseph takes the seven- or eight-year-old Jesus along.³⁴ According to the Syriac text, Jesus, while playing alone and without Joseph nearby, sows one grain (or, depending on the manuscript, a “sea,” a Syrian unit of measure equal to approximately seven liters) and from this harvests a hundredfold.³⁵ An indication of the originality of the Syriac is that the episode in the Greek transmission has gone through a further interpretation that indicates a revision: Joseph gives the rich harvest of grain to the poor of the village, while at the same time he retains some of Jesus’s special seeds.

In sum, one can say that, in his central role as Jesus’s father and teacher, Joseph cannot conform to the late antique ideal of a *paterfamilias*: the roles are reversed twice so that Joseph becomes the one instructed (the same takes place in the school episodes, where the teachers have a similar experience with Jesus). The goal of the Paidika is certainly not to portray *Joseph* as an unmanly man but rather to emphasize the special nature and greatness of *Jesus*. Joseph *must* fail within the typical role models because he has accepted, and attempts to exercise, the role of father, but Jesus does not fit into the role of a typical son. Jesus, rather, is

32. On the honor-shame dynamics, as they become effective in the teacher episode (ch. 7; but not in Syriac), see also Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 106.

33. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 109.

34. The reference to Jesus’s age stands between this episode of sowing and harvesting and the following episode about the bed, and can be applied either to the previous episode or to the following one (in my opinion, the latter is more probable).

35. The Latin text family Lm, the Old Irish tradition, and the Ethiopian transmission also let Jesus sow and harvest alone.

described as one endowed with divine power and divine knowledge. This puts Joseph in a role conflict, which he cannot solve and, indeed, which he does not even recognize as such. Like the other figures in the text who encounter Jesus, he is torn between indignation at Jesus's conduct (see, e.g., ch. 5) and, at the same time, being impressed by miraculous positive changes (ch. 12 [13]). This, however, does not lead him to a deeper knowledge about Jesus.

3. Jesus: The Masculine Child

With the exception of the pilgrimage story in Luke 2:41–52 (see below, section 4), there is little material from the later canonized gospels that the *Paidika* could have adopted for the portrayal of Jesus as a child. Still, the baby Jesus in Luke and Matthew already receives veneration and adoration from those who encounter him (see Luke 2:17–20, 28, 38; Matt 2:11). The *Paidika* takes up this aspect in several stories as an element reminiscent of a so-called *Chorschluss* (see 2.5; 6.2c; 9.3) and adds stories that justify the veneration through miraculous deeds done by Jesus. This adoration, however, is partly mixed with dismay (see 4.1), for, especially in the first few chapters of the *Paidika*, more people come to harm through Jesus's powerful, miracle-working words than have good done to them. Measured against the portrayals of the Jesus figure in the canonical gospels (which also undoubtedly unite different features in themselves), it is hardly possible to overlook in the *Paidika* the one-sided emphasis of a quick-witted, miracle-working Jesus who emerges as the victor in all his encounters—including miracles that produce death or injury. In contrast, the stories of the *Paidika* do not take up features of a Jesus who calls for forgiveness and the renunciation of status, or describe a suffering Jesus.

If one reflects on these observations under the aspect of masculinity in late antiquity, this leads to the paradoxical-sounding thesis that the boy Jesus of the *Paidika* is more masculine than the adult Jesus of the gospels. Several concrete textual observations confirm this.³⁶

In chapter 2, Jesus forms sparrows out of clay on a Sabbath. When he is criticized for this, he lets the sparrows fly away. Instead of complying, that is, admitting to a transgression of a commandment, and even perhaps

36. The examples take up much of what already has been mentioned above (in section 2).

destroying the birds, he creates life. In the framework of the discourses about masculinity in antiquity, this incident shows that Jesus has put up a successful defense against public reproach. At the same time, this story expresses much more in theological terms. Jesus's action shows that he is in no way inferior to God the Creator, who first established the Sabbath as a day of rest. The child, criticized by experts of the Jewish law, stands above the Sabbath.

In chapter 3, the son of Hannas, for no recognizable reason, destroys the waterholes Jesus has built. Thereupon, Jesus publicly berates his childish adversary and punishes him with the same fate that the child himself had applied to the waterholes: he lets the child wither. Once again, Jesus successfully defends himself and proves to be the stronger one. Chapter 4 reports something similar. Another boy, running through the village, bumps into Jesus's shoulder. Jesus takes this as an attack on his person and immediately curses the boy. He is not to continue on his way! At these words of Jesus, the boy falls to the ground and dies.³⁷

In chapter 5, Joseph reprimands Jesus because of the public protests against his behavior but becomes the recipient of passionate rebuttal from Jesus. The roles of father and son reverse themselves (see this in detail in section 2 above). In chapters 6–8, Jesus puts up a defense against the teacher who bores him with his teaching of things Jesus already knows, and knows better than the teacher, who also hits him. Through his clever speech, Jesus corners the teacher and makes him appear ridiculous as a teacher. The teacher finally acknowledges Jesus's superiority and complains about his public humiliation at the hands of a child (the keyword for lost honor [*αἰσχύνη*] is explicitly used in 7.3). The events repeat themselves with the second teacher in chapter 13 [14], although the narrative is shorter. At the end, the teacher is left behind unconscious, or dead (so in the Syrian version), in the schoolroom.

In chapter 9, Jesus is unjustly accused of having thrown his playmate Zenon from the roof. Jesus defends himself successfully against this charge by awakening Zenon to life and letting him testify to Jesus's advantage.

37. Stephen J. Davis reads ch. 4 of the *Paidika* “as an agonistic scene,” where the boy Jesus conducts and defends himself in a completely understandable way. See Davis, *Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 72–87. Davis refers exclusively to the textual version Gs, although the text is known in strikingly different transmissions (see above).

In all of these examples, Jesus successfully defends himself against attacks from others who question his reputation or his actions or judge them as unlawful and inappropriate. In all of these episodes, he gives proof of his strength over against others (men) in the public realm. This occurs above all through words, which then also become deeds, as the crowd repeatedly emphasizes with astonishment.

In his gender-oriented analysis of the Jesus figure, Aasgaard makes similar observations³⁸ and interprets the portrayal of the child Jesus, which, as I have shown, fits into the matrix of antique constructions of masculinity, as a gradually progressive *training* in masculinity: “Step by step, from age five to twelve, the boy Jesus makes it: he becomes a man.”³⁹ This assessment, in my opinion, is not the whole story. It is correct that the stories about the child Jesus do not follow on each other arbitrarily but describe phases of a child’s life, including the informal and formal steps in training belonging to those phases. This has already become clear in the analysis of the Joseph figure above.⁴⁰ The analysis also made clear that Jesus repeatedly reverses the roles and stands as the one who instructs and knows. Thus the stories of the Paidika describe a life path and course of training typical for boys in late antiquity. At the same time, however, it is precisely this boy whose path is described here who repeatedly reverses the typical conditions. Time and again, Jesus makes clear that he does not need advice and instruction. Jesus is portrayed not only as a child but also as divine; he is equipped with the power to create and to destroy through his words and, moreover, has insight into things far beyond the life experience of the other characters in the narrative. In these role reversals, he shows repeatedly that he knows much more than what his father and his teachers can ever show him.

There is only one aspect in which Jesus does not come up to the standard of the antique ideal of masculinity and which shows more distinctly

38. See Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 104–9; on his methodological presuppositions, see above.

39. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 112.

40. Through Joseph, Jesus experiences the introduction into the public world that is appropriate for a boy. Joseph walks with him through the village (ch. 4); brings him to the place where he himself cannot carry out the necessary formal training, to teachers (chs. 6, 13 [14], 14 [15]); introduces him to his own trade; and finally takes him with him on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem (ch. 17 [19]). This last episode, which is taken over from Luke 2:41–52, is the only passage in the text that explicitly mentions a *religious* aspect of Jesus’s education.

Aasgaard's educational idea and the necessity for a development "from boy to man" in the Jesus figure; this is Jesus's lack of self-control.⁴¹ Especially in the first chapters of the *Paidika*, Jesus appears as impulsive and quick-tempered. This becomes clear, for example, in his reactions to the destruction of his waterholes (ch. 3) or to the boy who bumps into his shoulder on his way through the village (ch. 4). Aasgaard interprets this trait in the Jesus figure as one that is not compatible with "ancient masculinity standards." At the same time he determines that "such behavior was acceptable for one particular group of males, namely young males, i.e. boys."⁴² They have to learn in the course of their adolescence to control not only others but also themselves. But does Jesus *learn* this according to the *Paidika*? Certainly, his fits of anger and his uncontrolled reactions diminish in the course of the narrative, but the text does not suggest that this might be the result of a development and increasing internal maturation. Jesus, for example, never shows a critical consciousness for his previous deeds. A conclusive judgment in this case is, for this reason, difficult.

A last point to be briefly considered concerns the boy Jesus who *plays*. He does this at the water ford after the rainstorm with clay, sticks, and water; on the flat roof of a house; with other children; and by himself. This domain of childlike play could definitely be understood according to gender-specific aspects within late antique notions and thus could also serve the (informal) preparation for the boy's later role as *paterfamilias*⁴³ (e.g., with short cart races, or with other competitive games). But the stories of the *Paidika* do *not* exploit this possibility. Jesus's play is not gender-specific, and later additions to the text do not change this, although he plays only with boys.

41. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 103.

42. Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 106–7.

43. "Schon in der Spielphase findet in der Philosophie, die sich ausschließlich mit Knaben beschäftigt, aber auch in der Realität, wie die archäologischen Zeugnisse zeigen, eine Trennung der Geschlechter statt." ("A separation of genders appears already in the playing phase in philosophy, which concerns itself exclusively with boys, and also in reality, as archaeological witnesses show.") What Marieluise Deissmann-Merten describes here for ancient Greece continues similarly also in Roman late antiquity. See Deissmann-Merten, "Zur Sozialgeschichte des Kindes im antiken Griechenland," in *Zur Sozialgeschichte der Kindheit*, ed. Jochen Martin with Klaus Arnold (Freiburg: Alber, 1986), 299; see also Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 193.

4. Mary: The Mother on the Margin

Apart from later expansions and connections of the text with the Proto-evangelium of James, Mary is given a rather marginal role in the Paidika. This is remarkable, especially in contrast to the strong emphasis given to Joseph, since the canonical gospels, especially Luke, show a clearly different position toward the importance of the characters in the narrative.

A limited presence in the narrative does not necessarily mean a lower esteem for the figure of Mary in the Paidika. In comparison with Joseph, her relationship to Jesus is clearly much less marked by conflict. In chapter 10, she sends Jesus with a jug to fetch water, and when the jug is broken because of the jostling crowd, this does not lead to a confrontation. Rather, Jesus brings the needed water home in his spread-out robe, and Mary is astonished at what has happened.

Some versions (Gs, Gd, Lt) attach here Mary's prayer to God for the preservation of the child. In addition, one textual witness (Gs) transmits Mary's fear that someone could "bewitch" (βασκαλίειν) Jesus. Aasgaard compares Mary's fear from a gender-specific point of view with Joseph's concern, who in chapter 14[15].2 prefers to have Jesus shut up in the house so that Jesus can no longer cause any more harm in public (see section 2 above). According to Aasgaard,⁴⁴ the concern of the mother for the well-being of her child is completely limited to the private sphere, which is in contrast to the concern of the father, related to the public sphere. This interpretation, however, works only with the text of Gs, which might not represent the original, and is not supported by the Syriac (or by the other Greek witnesses).

The concluding story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple differs from the Lukan model as it sheds a more positive light on Mary. By not taking over Luke 2:50, the Paidika removes the stigma of nonunderstanding from the parents—and above all from Mary as the spokesperson of the family. Instead, a short dialogue between the scribes and Pharisees and Mary is inserted, in which her status as mother is emphasized and, above all, the wisdom of her child is praised.

If Mary is such a positive figure who appears to understand and accept Jesus and his significance much better than Joseph, why does the Paidika in its earliest form tell so little about her? The reason, in my opinion, is

44. See Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 110.

that in a story of a boy who grows to manhood and who, in many respects, gives impressive proof of his masculinity already as a five- to seven-year-old, the mother has no decisive role. Thus, the *Paidika* tells a story that is to a great extent free of women but in which there are enough masculine figures against whom Jesus can compete. Especially the father, Joseph, strives honestly on behalf of the gender-specific masculine upbringing of his son but fails repeatedly because Jesus is more than just a male child. He is endowed with divine powers and wisdom and thus remains unresponsive to most of Joseph's all-too-human educational attempts.