

## BOOK REVIEW

**Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla – Paulusschülerin wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Theklaakten* (NTA 53), Münster: Aschendorff, 2008.**

Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling is known for having worked since a longer time on the Acts of Thecla, especially on the redaction of this work. She has published a number of essays on the topic, like those in the volume edited by Martin Ebner (*Aus Liebe zu Paulus? Die Akte Thekla neu aufgerollt*, Stuttgart, 2005). The present volume is the slightly revised version of her doctoral dissertation.

The main thesis of Esch-Wermeling is that the APTh are a composite work: an initially independent Thecla-tradition preserved in the Antioch-episode, was completed with the more recent Iconium-episode. Through this integration Thecla is deliberately placed in the shadow of Paul. The APTh, as it now stands, has Paul leading Thecla in the Iconium-episode, and a quite independent Thecla in the Antioch-narrative. The redactional re-shaping of the Thecla-story leads to a secondary “taming” on an independent female disciple.

The approach to the ATH is complex, diachronic and synchronic. In the first part, the author assesses the relationship between the Pastoral Epistles and the ATH. The latter function in many respects as a foil and a reaction to the Pastorals. Taking the major passages on women, 1 Tim 2,9-15 and 5,11-16, Esch-Wermeling shows how the Thecla of Antioch is in many ways the opposite of the female ideal of the PE, of the silent, submissive and domestic woman promoted in 1 Timothy, whereas the Thecla of Iconium is much more conform to this ideal. The ATH, the author argues, use the strategy of faked agreement: although the values they put forward apparently agree with the view of the PE, in fact they modify in several ways the standard: after having been instructed by Paul, the previously silent and submissive Thecla will become able and authorised to teach, will gain authority, and will cross the private-public boundary. Whereas in the PE marriage and motherhood is the norm, in the ATH the ideal is sexual asceticism.

In the second and third, extensive part, Esch-Wermeling provides a thorough, mainly redaction-critical analysis of the work, pointing to the doublets (martyrdom, constellation of characters) and to the numerous differences and contradictions between the two main parts. (The discussion of genres is embedded in the third chapter.) This detailed analysis allows Esch-Wermeling to argue for the priority of the Antioch-episode. Moreover, as shown in part four, the author uses certain strategies to guide and steer the reader (“Leserlenkung”). In a synchronic-interdisciplinary investigation, including insights from reception theory, reception aesthetics, psycholinguistics and filmmaking, Esch-Wermeling shows how the framing of a text – in our case that of the Antioch-episode through the Iconium-

#### BOOK REVIEWS

cycle and through the ending – produces a new meaning, and leads the reader to understand and receive the text in a specific manner. The frame will be the lense through which the text is read. Thus the Iconium-cycle will lead the reader to regard the whole work as focused on Paul and on asceticism, and to regard Thecla as the submissive, continent disciple of Paul.

The appendix includes the Greek text of the Lipsius-edition and a German translation produced by the participants of the Münster seminar, revised by Esch-Wermeling, previously published in *Aus Liebe zu Paulus?*.

This thorough, insightful analysis of the ATh will probably become a standard work for scholars tackling with this writing, more generally with Christian apocrypha, and can be consulted with profit by all scholars and students of early Christianity.

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