



## JESUS FROM BOY TO MAN

The issue of gender has not been taken up in studies of IGT so far. However, it 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. Focus here will particularly be on the depiction of him: what notions are reflected in him as concerns male qualities? To what degree is he even as a child depicted as male? And do any changes occur from his early childhood as a five year old until he enters his next stage of life as a young adult of twelve?

In recent decades, matters of gender have received much attention within research on early Christianity, and lately the specific issue of masculinity has also come into focus.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have emphasized the strong duality between what was considered male/female character traits (psychology), male/female activities (work), and male/female social context (private/public), and have shown the very hierarchical nature of gender relations (socially and sexually). A fundamental feature of ancient masculinity seems to have been the notion of control: men were—in order to live up to the ideals of masculinity—to display dominance (control of others) and self-restraint (self-control). Males who did not conform to these standards were considered effeminate and soft.<sup>2</sup>

Research on ancient childhood has also taken questions of gender and gender socialization into account.<sup>3</sup> Here, however, I cannot enter

1. See Aasgaard, “From Boy to Man,” which has a broader presentation and discussion of research on children/childhood and gender/masculinity in antiquity. Cf. also Moxnes, “Conventional Values”; Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*; Moore and Anderson, *New Testament Masculinities*; Larson, “Paul’s Masculinity.”

2. See, e.g., Malina, *New Testament World*, 46–48, 78; Halvor Moxnes, *Naturlig Sex*; Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 125–59.

3. For important examples, see Eyben, “Fathers and Sons”; Neils and Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece* (esp. Shapiro, “Fathers and Sons,” 85–111); also Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*.

into a discussion of the scholarly challenges and findings, and must only assume them as a basis for my presentation.

The IGT material will be analyzed from two complementary perspectives. First, the characterization of Jesus and his social relationships will be addressed. Here, I take my point of departure from dominance and self-restraint as basic notions (cf. above). For the benefit of analysis, I break the former down into more specific categories, namely strength, violence, persuasive speech, honor, and female exclusion.<sup>4</sup> Second, I shall analyze the narrative of IGT with a view to its notions of gender socialization, particularly as to how Jesus is adapted to his role as a male person of late antiquity. Here, focus will be on Jesus' ongoing socialization with growing age, and on the depiction of his relations to his parents.<sup>5</sup> Although my approach is methodologically unassuming, it will suffice to reveal basic features as concerns ideas of gender in IGT.

### The Description of Jesus' Character and Social Relations

Let us now turn to the characterization of Jesus and his social relationships. We shall see that antiquity's stock expectations about maleness are generally fulfilled.

First, as for the category of strength: typical of IGT's Jesus is that he is described as powerful. Like the Jesus of the fourth gospel, he is portrayed as the one in charge, the one to take control of what happens.<sup>6</sup> He cannot be dominated (6:3, 7), he knows everything (6:6), and he has the power to do everything, even wake people up from the dead (8:2; 9:3). When violated by others, he does not whine, but takes action and repays offenses against him: he invokes curses upon children and teachers and reprimands his own father (3:2; 4:2). His strength is also evident in the emotions ascribed to him: when hit by the first teacher,

4. I have here developed the elements used by Clines, "Paul, the Invisible Man," 181–82. Although his categories can be seen as somewhat anachronistic, I find them useful, though primarily as heuristic tools. I have, however, added the "honor" category, which he mentions, but has not used. A similar analysis of Jesus in the gospel of John is made by Conway, "Behold the Man."

5. On gender socialization and the life cycle, see Rawson, *Children*, 134–45.

6. See Conway, "Behold the Man," 173–75.

he becomes vexed and angry (6:8–9), he laughs at him and others (8:1), and has a “severe look” (7:2).<sup>7</sup>

One aim of strength is to prevent others from threatening one’s personal integrity or social position. The most visible expression of such strength is violence. A striking characteristic of IGT’s Jesus is his violent behavior. When Annas’ son destroys his pools, Jesus makes the boy wither away (3:3). The child bumping into Jesus suffers the same grim fate (4:1). And when Zacchaeus hits his disobedient pupil on the head, he too is cursed to death (13:2). Thus, Jesus appears as violent, and to a degree that cannot easily be justified from the offenses made toward him. Although the gravity of Jesus’ reactions can be explained in other ways (cf. pp. 160–62), the important point here is that he nonetheless emerges as distinctively male. We should note, however, that Jesus’ violence is defensive; he is always first provoked and does not use his strength to infringe upon the integrity or position of others.

A less physical, but still manifest expression of strength is rhetorical power. For antiquity this was a universally acknowledged value, and a male value. This is also a prominent feature in IGT’s description of Jesus: he emerges as an unusually able speaker. His rhetorical power is most strikingly demonstrated in 1–3 Teacher. When Zacchaeus wants to teach him the alphabet, Jesus with his erudition and speaking ability drives him and the watching crowd to silence (6:7, 9), and finally Zacchaeus to despair (7:1–2). The second teacher displays even less understanding than the first (13:2). The third teacher, however, is presented as the ideal: he does not try to teach Jesus, but acknowledges his oratorical gifts by listening to his “holy words” (14:2). By the end of IGT, Jesus’ rhetorical power is canonically endorsed in his encounter with the learned in the temple: although nothing is related from the conversation, it is clear that they are left awe-inspired, as is his mother (17:3–5).

Jesus’ rhetorical power is most clearly displayed in the miracle stories, however. As appropriate for a being of divine origin, his words turn into reality: clay sparrows become alive and fly away only upon his word (2:4); the bumping boy is cursed to death; and he wakes the boy Zeno by saying his name (9:3).

7. Although such emotions are, for example, far from the Stoic ideal, they emerge as distinctively “male” (and very different from how Paul describes his weakness in his letters). But see *ibid.*, 166–67.

Honor was, as noted earlier (chap. 5), regarded as a fundamental value in the ancient Mediterranean societies.<sup>8</sup> Jesus is accordingly presented as an honorable person: he protects what is his property, for example when his pools, his “area of dominion,” are destroyed by the High priest’s son (3:1–3), and when his physical boundaries are violated by the boy who bumps into him (4:1–2). When accused of causing Zeno’s death, he defends his reputation by resuscitating the boy so as to invalidate the accusation (9:2). Jesus’ honorable status is most explicitly voiced in 1 Teacher (7:1–3). And to the same degree as the teacher is shamed, Jesus is elevated as winner of honor competition. Jesus’ claim to honor is finally confirmed in the temple episode: “we have never known nor heard such wisdom as his, nor such glory of virtue” (17:4).

The final category, female exclusion, means that relationships between males are highlighted, with focus on loyalty, exclusivity, and mutual commitment, whereas cross-gender relationships are minimized and female characters and roles marginalized.<sup>9</sup> Although Jesus in IGT is not an adult but a child, such patterns are largely confirmed. Indeed, the characters Jesus relates to throughout the gospel are almost exclusively male, at least as far as can be judged from indications of gender in the text. All children singled out are boys (3:1; 4:1; 9:3). Joseph, Jesus’ father, has a very prominent role (2; 5–6; 11–14). The teachers—all central characters—are male. Other figures too are male, such as a Pharisee (2:3–5), the High Priest (3:1), a rich man (12:1), Jesus’ brother James (15:1–2), and an anonymous young man (16). In fact, out of the fifteen individuals mentioned in IGT, fourteen are male.<sup>10</sup> The only exception to this male-dominated cast is Mary; she has a central position, and we shall return to her below. But we should also note that she in IGT has a far more modest role than in the canonical gospels. Except for Mary, female characters appear only twice and implicitly, viz., as mothers in parental couples (4:2; 9:2–4).

On one point, however, IGT’s Jesus does deviate from ancient masculinity standards, namely in his limited self-restraint: he becomes vexed (6:8–9), seems to be capricious and unreliable (6:7), and repays offenses in ways dramatically out of proportion (3:3; 4:1; 13:2).

8. See Malina, *New Testament World*, 27–57, esp. 52–56.

9. See Clines, “Paul, the Invisible Man,” 188, n. 12.

10. When groups of more than two are mentioned, gender distinctions are not noted. It may be that the groups of children are assumed to be gender mixed.

Although this behavior can—to an extent—be seen as an expression of strength (cf. above), it does nonetheless conflict with ancient attitudes about moderation and predictability of conduct as central male qualities. How can this deviation be explained? In my view, such behavior was acceptable for one particular group of males, namely young males, *i.e.* boys. Children were, as noted, regarded unstable and irrational. Even though such features were often negatively valued, they were acknowledged as typical of children and as something to be indulgent and even understanding to (pp. 95–99). Thus, what was not accepted in the case of adult masculinity could be approved in male children. In fact, this can be seen as a central differentiating factor—a factor that made boys’ masculinity look different from that of their adult counterparts. Interpreted this way, Jesus in IGT emerges as true-to-life not only as a child, but also as a male child.

### Jesus’ Age and Gender Socialization

In IGT, a development in Jesus’ activities and relationships occurs as he grows older.<sup>11</sup> In the first episodes he is five years old and is playing by a stream, building pools and forming clay birds (2). At this age he is also taken to school for the first time, which would make him an “early starter”—the starting time in antiquity would usually be about age seven.<sup>12</sup> The point seems to be to demonstrate Jesus’ precocity, since his young age is repeatedly stated (5:1; 6:5).<sup>13</sup> The startling nature of his precocity is also underscored through the despair of the first teacher: he, an old man, has been “overcome by a child” (7:3). Some time later, but probably still at the same age, we encounter Jesus playing again, this time on a roof together with other children (9:1). Then at seven, Mary sends him off to fetch water (10:1).<sup>14</sup> An unspecified time later he is together with Joseph sowing seeds (11). In the next episode Jesus has become eight years old (12:1); here, he has joined Joseph in his work

11. This is against, for example, Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 96, who holds that the order of the stories is not important.

12. Rawson, *Children*, 158–59. The age of seven was, according to *ibid.*, 75, “perceived as a milestone in intellectual development.” For ancient perceptions of stages of age, see *ibid.*, 134–45; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 143–70.

13. Rawson, *Children*, 159–60.

14. Here, Gabd and Lm have six years.

as a carpenter, fixing a bed. Now Joseph also thinks it high time to take Jesus to school again—with considerably more success than on the first occasion.

Thus, with increasing age there occurs a slow transformation in the life of Jesus: as a five and six year old, he is playing, together with other children. At seven, he is under the wings of his mother: she tells him to fetch water, a task carried out by females and children.<sup>15</sup> After this, play is not referred to any more. Instead, Jesus gradually becomes involved in household duties.<sup>16</sup> At this point, Joseph—as a representative of the male world—begins to take action, by performing the public task of bringing Jesus to school. Although in some cases schools were also open to girls, learning the skills of reading and writing was viewed as more requisite for boys.<sup>17</sup> After that, Joseph step by step introduces Jesus to male activities, first to sowing in the field and then to his own profession, carpentry.<sup>18</sup> Several male children would about this age—at eight—be engaged in various kinds of crafts, although the starting age for regular apprenticeship would normally be at ten to thirteen.<sup>19</sup>

In the following sections, the adaptation to the male world is completed. In the last two miracle episodes, Jesus assists his brother James in fetching wood in the forest (15), and heals a young man who is performing the male activity of splitting wood—and of splitting his foot (16). His introduction to the male world is finally confirmed in the temple episode, where Jesus as a youth, on the threshold of the male adult world, displays his religious and social maturity in the discourse with the learned and his mother (17).

Thus, what takes place in IGT as Jesus' grows up is his gradual gender socialization: from being occupied with small children's activities, such as playing and performing simple household duties up to the age of about seven, he is led into the male adult sphere, by going to school and by accompanying Joseph and other male family members in their

15. See for example White, *Farm Equipment*, 152; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 153–54.

16. The age of seven was often viewed as an age for the child to take on more responsibility for “adult” tasks, cf. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 152–54.

17. For a good presentation of the educational “system” in Roman antiquity, see Rawson, *Children*, 146–209; about girls, esp. 197–209.

18. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 155–64.

19. Laes, *Kinderen*, 170–74.

male-gendered environment. Thus, Jesus develops from a less differentiated or female-coded state of being to a markedly male-coded. The picture given clearly reflects what would be common notions in late antiquity as concerns gender development.

### **Jesus' Relations to His Father and Mother**

The other aspect, which slightly modifies the impression given above, is IGT's depiction of Jesus' relations to his father and mother. As in real life, these two persons emerge as the main dialog partners in the child's process of maturation.

Joseph is present as *paterfamilias* throughout the story: when Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath and of cursing a child to die, Joseph is made responsible for mediating between him and his opponents (2:3; 4:2), by defending him (2:3) or by defending others against him, particularly the teachers (6:2–4). But Joseph is also the one to correct and punish him (2:4; 5:1–2). In addition, he is the one often leading Jesus when they appear in public space (4:1), at important points in his life such as his first school day (6:8; also 6:2–4), and at work on the field and in the workshop (11:1–2; 12:1–2). Finally, Joseph is present in the temple episode, though only in the periphery (17:1, 4).

Thus, Joseph plays a prominent part as a father in IGT. His role is ambiguous, however. He is depicted as occasionally uncomprehending and critical toward Jesus, siding with his opponents (2:4; 5:1–2; 6:3–4; 14:3), and as falling short of him (as a carpenter, 12:1). But he is also able to see Jesus' potential: he takes him to school because of his "wise and sensible thinking" (13:1); and when witnessing one of his miracles, he embraces and kisses him, and even exclaims, "Blessed am I, since God gave me this child" (12:2). Thus, Joseph is presented as a nuanced figure, able to express emotions, understand and misunderstand, and to react in various manners—in sum, he emerges as a very lifelike figure.<sup>20</sup>

Mary plays a far less visible part in IGT than Joseph. She only appears in the last half of the story, when sending Jesus to fetch water (10:1). She is mentioned a second time when Joseph commands her to

20. Probably, this is very much on a level with general notions in late antiquity about the father role. A father was expected to display authority and firmness, but also to be understanding and relate positively emotionally toward his children, see for example Eyben, "Fathers and Sons," 112–43.

keep Jesus home (13:3). In both cases, she has a traditional female role, as administering female duties within the private sphere of the household, and in a position inferior to her husband. Her final, and major, appearance is in the temple episode. Here, she plays a part that goes beyond the expected and takes over the role elsewhere in IGT ascribed to Joseph, namely of correcting Jesus and of representing him in public (17:3–4).

Like Joseph, Mary is depicted as not fully understanding their son (10:2). Both she and Joseph are concerned about Jesus' well-being, but this concern is expressed in different ways, which reflect their respective gender roles. Whereas Joseph's perspective is that of the public sphere—he is anxious lest Jesus cause harm (14:2), Mary sees the matter from the private sphere—she is afraid that someone may “put a ban on him” (10:2). Mary and Joseph alike are presented as believing figures—both ask for God's blessing of Jesus (10:2; 12:2)—and thus serve as figures of religious identification, for Jesus (within the narrative) as well as for IGT's implied audience. Differently from Joseph, however, Mary's role in the story is—except for her sending of Jesus to fetch water—passive: she is obedient and does not respond to others, unless when being directly addressed (10:2; 17:4).

Thus, as a figure Mary leaves a much fainter impression than Joseph. Only on one point does she diverge from him: she does not, at least not explicitly, display doubts in Jesus or side against him. Instead, her reaction as concerns his singularity is entirely positive. Seeing his miraculous power, she kisses him, exclaiming, “Lord, my God, bless my child” (10:2). And in the temple episode, she is said to treasure up the words about Jesus, pondering “them in her heart” (17:5). Consequently, Mary appears as more of an ideal figure than does Joseph: she is the one to react adequately vis-à-vis their son. This, however, is her only point of precedence; in all other respects the focus is on Joseph.<sup>21</sup>

In sum, Mary and Joseph each have their distinctive profiles, which very much mirror ancient thinking. Stated in modern terms: Mary has the role of a supporting and protecting mother, Joseph of a controlling and advising father. But even though Mary is an ideal of trust in Jesus,

21. In Gb, Mary is mentioned from the start: as Jesus at five goes out to play, he leaves “the house where his mother was” (2:1). In Gd, Mary is called “Mother of God” (11:1–2, Qeotokoj).

Joseph emerges as far more important for his socialization and for the male coding of IGT in general.

## Reflections and Conclusions

The analysis above of Jesus' character and his relations to others reveals IGT's male focus. Its depiction of his personality, words, and actions conforms to conventional patterns of maleness in antiquity, and particularly to values such as strength, honor, and male exclusivity. To a surprising degree, this can be seen in the dominance of male figures in IGT, with men, except for Mary, holding all important roles. It is likely that this reflects the gender-segregated social world of late antiquity, and its prime preoccupation with the male (hemi)sphere of that world.

These features are confirmed in the analysis of the development that Jesus undergoes within IGT and of his parents' roles as catalysts of socialization. Here, the direction in Jesus' development is from the more open, less explicitly gender-coded activity of play, to the child and female activities of a household, and finally to the clearly male-marked tasks in the workshop and in the temple. His parents too act according to expected gender patterns, taking different roles. The prominent role of Mary in Luke 1–2 is in IGT replaced by Joseph: Jesus' father is, at her expense, made the main figure in the socialization of Jesus. IGT seems in this respect to mirror a narrative return to antiquity's traditional male-dominated gender patterns.

At the same time, the picture given is not of a single-track male-focused world. IGT is more nuanced than that. First, there is a distinct awareness in it as concerns the special character of the phases of childhood. Jesus and other children are given room for play, by the river, in the village, even on a roof—tasks and obligations only emerge by and by. Jesus is also allowed to have emotional outbreaks like that of an ordinary child, such as anger and joy, laughing and scorning.<sup>22</sup> Second, there is also in IGT a sensitivity to the processes of human growth and social adaptation. This is clear in the manner in which Jesus' development is described. And although IGT does not explicitly make a point of a mental maturing in the boy, there still seems to take place a change

22. But cf. Conway, "Behold the Man," 166–67, 173, who argues that such emotional outbursts can be signs of "proper anger" on the part of a wise man.

from a more unruly personality in the former half of the story to a more responsible in the latter, summarized in the temple episode, in which IGT joins in with Luke in stating that Jesus “increased (proeokopten) in wisdom and age and grace before God and humans” (17:5). Both these elements appear to reflect realistic glimpses of children’s lives in late antiquity, and thus to substantiate the view forwarded in the previous chapter (chap. 6).

Moreover, IGT bears witness to an openness as to how the male role was construed in antiquity. This is visible in the description of the teachers, but even more so in the case of Joseph. He is far from being a stereotype of a male or of male values. Rather, in his relationship to Jesus he is depicted as a round character, who moves within much of the role spectrum available to a male at that time: he can be stern, angry, and punishing, but also display weakness and bewilderment, tenderness and awe toward his little boy.

Finally, a similar openness can be seen in the Jesus figure, although he very much lives up to the ancient ideals of manliness. The only exception is that he appears not to be showing the self-restraint appropriate of a male. This can be accounted for, however, by the fact that IGT portrays him as a child: although he possesses several adult properties, such as wisdom and strength, he is in his activities and reactions depicted as a true-to-life child, and a male child at that. And whereas self-control was required from adult men, it was not expected to the same degree from male children.

To conclude: IGT gives us a picture of Jesus very much in accordance with what was likely to be the process of maturing and gender adaptation for a male child in late antiquity and early Christianity. As for these matters, there is little in the story to surprise us. In fact, this is one of the most important points emerging from my analysis: except for his divine origin and powers, there is nothing enigmatic or aberrant about Jesus at all. He is quite simply portrayed as an ordinary boy child of the time at issue. IGT’s values are those of a male-focused culture. Jesus’ social context is that of a male-dominated world. And his childhood reflects the customary development for a male: from being a small child belonging to a less differentially or female-coded sphere, Jesus is with growing age and at suitable points of time gradually socialized into a male adult world. Step by step, from age five to twelve, the boy Jesus makes it: he becomes a man.