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Introduction to the *Shepherd of Hermas*[1]

Regarding the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Robert Hauck puts it clearly: "There are many puzzles in this puzzling little book."[2] First-time readers might view this estimation as an understatement and find it surprising that the book was so highly valued in the patristic period. In this first article we will demonstrate its broad and mostly positive reception through an examination of its early manuscript tradition, unity, use in antiquity, and likely date and authorship. We will cautiously conclude that the *Shepherd* comes to us in its present form after a process of writing and redaction roughly between the years 90 and 140 ce by the hand of the same author, Hermas, who edited his own work throughout his life.

Manuscript Tradition

Concerning the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clayton Jefford echoes the opinion of many scholars when he remarks, "Attempts to explain the sources behind the text and how these sources were brought together are complicated and problematic," especially since the only complete versions are from Latin manuscripts dated to the fifteenth century.[3] The manuscript history of the *Shepherd*, however, reflects both its popularity and the problem of its unity.[4]

1. Though it may deviate from some citation conventions and style guides, we have decided to italicize *Shepherd of Hermas* and *Shepherd* when referring to the title of the writing itself. When we refer to the character and (presumed) author, Hermas, and the character of the Shepherd, the Angel of Repentance, we will use a normal capitalized font. This will avoid confusion, especially in the commentary sections when we discuss both the *Shepherd* as a work and the Shepherd as a major figure in that work. Of course, we cannot guarantee any consistency in the italicization or capitalization practices of quoted sources.

2. Hauck, "Great Fast," 187.

3. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 144.

4. Batovici notes that the Shepherd is better attested in manuscript evidence than

To date, four partial Greek manuscripts are extant.[5] Codex Sinaiticus (ca. fourth century CE) contains Vis. 1.1—Mand. 4.3.6 and is considered the most important document for tracing historical information related to New Testament studies. Codex Athos (ca. eighth or fifteenth century CE) contains 95 percent of the text, from Vis. 1—Sim. 9.30.3, but its late date renders its usefulness debatable.[6] The discovery of P. Michigan 129 and P. Michigan 130 provides twenty-six additional leaves of what are the earliest known Greek fragments. P. Michigan 129 (ca. 250 CE) contains Sim. 2.8—9.5.1, which is about a third of the entire text. The Bodmer Papyrus 38 (ca. late fourth century CE) contains Vis. 1–3, although Antonio Carlini believes that Vis. 4 was attached at one time but was eventually lost.[7] The Greek witnesses reflect significant corruption of the text.[8] Additionally, twenty-two Greek fragments can be cautiously traced to the second century.[9]

Two distinct Latin versions include the Vulgate (L^1), which dates to the late second century and includes the entire text of the *Shepherd.* The fourth/fifth-century Palatine translation (L^2) comes to us via fifteenth-century texts. These latter manuscripts prove invaluable for assembling the final version of the document.[10] Similitude 9.30—10.3 are missing from the Greek manuscripts even after fragments and patristic quotations are assembled.[11]

In recent years, new manuscript fragment discoveries have revealed new variants as well. Several fragments come from the Ethiopic text as well as thirteen leaves and fifteen new fragments from Sinaiticus that demonstrate unique variants of passages throughout the *Shepherd*.[12] An additional frag-

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some of the major New Testament books. Batovici, "A New Hermas Papyrus," 21. For a detailed description of the history of the Greek fragments, consult Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 43–65.

5. Bart Ehrman includes helpful charts indicating which manuscripts are available. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 169–71.

6. Also spelled "Athous." Kirsopp Lake dated it in the eighth to ninth centuries CE. It is considered unreliable due to the mixed character of the text, which contains Byzantine, Alexandrian, and Western text-types. Lake, "Texts from Mount Athos," 97. Holmes dates the document in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries and also provides a detailed list of manuscript witnesses and fragments. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 448.

7. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 1–3.

8. Luisini, "Nouvelles recherches," 81.

9. Carlini warns that dating the fragments as such is uncertain. Carlini, *Il pastore (Ia–IIIa visione)*, 29.

10. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 2.

11. Snyder, *Shepherd*, 2.

12. Luisini discusses several of these variants and provides a list of publications that have published the fragments. Of special interest are those found at the St. Catherine of Sinai Monastery. Luisini, "Nouvelles recherches," 84–86.

ment was discovered to be the bottom half of a codex leaf from B P. Prag I 1 B called the P. Weill I 96; this fragment contains verses from Sim. 6.[13] Batovici notes that a new copy of the Palatine edition surfaced in 1994, and the Vulgate translation was edited to produce two new critical editions.[14]

Manuscript evidence demonstrates its widespread popularity and perhaps relative authority in the second and third centuries CE. Versions include Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Middle Persian.[15] That the *Shepherd*, along with Barnabas, is bound with authoritative New Testament texts raises questions for the history of canon formation.[16] Although many fragments have been discovered over a large geographic area, comparison of the copies displays variances in writing styles, genre, and word choices. Luisini postulates that Hermas possibly produced and circulated several copies over time, later editing them into one text and choosing the variants he preferred.[17]

After compiling the manuscripts, major sections in the critical editions reveal an external formal structure of three sections titled "Visions" (Ὅρασεις), "Mandates" (Ἐντολαί), and "Similitudes," or, sometimes "Parables" (Παραβολαί). However, Holmes concludes that the document contains two major internal parts—Visions 1–4 form the first part, and the second part contains Vis. 5 as the introduction to the Mandates and Similitudes.[18] Snyder discusses the structure at length, pointing out discordant evidence, such as the different revelators, the title of Vis. 5, which differs from Vis. 1–4, and the different Christologies of Sim. 5 and of Sim. 9 to indicate his view that there are two major sections.[19]

To date, no complete copy of the *Shepherd of Hermas* can be constructed from the early Greek manuscripts and fragments. Herbert Musurillo argues that it is "extremely doubtful" that an authoritative text will ever exist, and that perhaps the author never intended to produce one.[20] This may overstate the case, as a compilation of the Latin and Greek versions does provide a document with an overarching storyline that ties the parts together, as will

13. Batovici, "New Hermas Papyrus," 20.

14. For reference material associated with these new finds and editions, see Batovici, "Hermas in Latin," 151–57.

15. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 442. Philippe Henne notes that manuscript evidence reflects exceptional popularity in Egypt. For a detailed description of the history of the Greek fragments, consult Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 43–65.

16. Batovici, "Shepherd of Hermas in Recent Scholarship," 100–105.

17. Luisini, "Nouvelles recherches," 92.

18. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 445. See also Bonner, *Papyrus Codex*, 13.

19. Snyder, *Shepherd*, 3–7.

20. Musurillo, "Need of a New Edition," 382.

be demonstrated in our commentary. Yet the fact remains: the critical text of the *Shepherd of Hermas* that serves as the basis of our translations exists as an imperfect patchwork of Greek and Latin manuscripts of varying quality.

Unity of the *Shepherd*

The *Shepherd of Hermas* exists. And, we will argue, it has come down to us in a fairly coherent and internally consistent form—a remarkable feat for its sheer length and sometimes awkward proportions. The fact that it exists in this form means, of course, that it had to have arrived at this form at some point early in its history, either at the hands of a single individual author, multiple authors with a single redactor, or several authors and multiple redactors.

In light of the variables, it is difficult to construct a history of how the sundry parts—Visions, Mandates, Similitudes—were originally written, circulated, and ultimately compiled. From the manuscript evidence, one plausible answer is that the Visions were circulated separately from the Mandates and Similitudes, especially in the West. Robert Joly, however, considers this conjecture, as there is no conclusive internal or external evidence.[21] He asserts that the Visions served as an introduction to the main document and that portions were later excerpted and circulated separately because of the unwieldy length of the whole work. Of course, there is no conclusive evidence for this theory, either.

Other scholars argue that the document reflects a unified plan by a single author, even if the complete work was loosely developed over time. Philippe Henne constructs a plausible picture of the composition and circulation of the text through the testimony of the fathers.[22] He cogently argues that both Clement of Alexandria and Origen had complete copies in hand, though the document may have been divided and circulated in the West as independent pieces.[23] He further claims that by the fourth century, Athanasius most likely had the full document available to him.[24] Osiek

21. Joly, "Hermas et le Pasteur," 204.

22. Philippe Henne suggests a three-part division. Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 16–41; Henne, "Canonicité," 82–83.

23. Henne notes that Clement of Alexandria quotes literally from Vis. 3 and 4 and compares *Strom.* 1.28.181 to Vis. 3.4.3–5, *Strom.* 4.9.74 to Vis. 3.13.4, and *Strom.* 2.12.55 to Vis. 3.8.3–5. Henne, "Athanase," 69, 73n21; Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 24.

24. This is contra Bonner (*Papyrus Codex*, 14), who concludes that Athanasius, in *Festal Letters* 11, had no knowledge of the Visions. Henne argues that since Vis. 5 is traditionally the beginning of the second section, then the reference to the "beginning of his book" is not a reference to the whole document, but to the beginning of the

furthers this notion by noting that the fathers in both the East and West quoted from all three sections of the document. She observes, "One of the earliest users in the West, Tertullian, quotes from both the Visions and the Mandates"; and in the East, Clement of Alexandria and Origen quote from all three sections.[25] This indicates that even if portions of the *Shepherd* were written and circulated separately, by the end of the second century the text most likely circulated as a unified whole.[26]

Brox concluded that Vis. 1–4 was written first, followed by Vis. 5–Sim. 8, then Sim. 9 and 10. He demonstrates this order by showing that the later sections presuppose information found in the former sections. For example, Vis. 5.5 includes the phrase ἵνα ἃ εἶδες πρότερον πάντα σοι πάλιν δείξω, which refers to the former visions shown to Hermas, thereby tying the Mandates to the Visions.[27] Furthermore, Osiek suggests that the document reflects evidence of oral presentation that was later transcribed, amended, then circulated.[28]

Closely associated with debates concerning the structure, composition, and manuscript circulation is the multiple-author theory. This theory hypothesizes that more than one author compiled and enlarged the document over a significant period. The multiple-author theory was first asserted by nineteenth-century scholars who, after examining the external manuscript evidence, noticed distinct literary breaks in the internal layout of the work. As evidence of multiple authors, scholars cited many factors such as the use of multiple literary genres, inconsistency of word usage, and vague theological construction. For example, scholars noted that the revelators are not the same in all three sections. In the Visions, it is the "Elder Lady," yet in the Mandates and Similitudes, a male angel called the Shepherd, or "the Angel of Repentance" guides Hermas.[29] Also, whereas the Visions section provides substantial and sustained autobiographical and personal

book that comprised the second of two parts. Henne asserts that his method follows Athanasius's teaching style that moved in two stages: the first element relates to the teaching of God, the second locates subsequent moral injunctions in this holy truth. Henne, "Athanase," 70, 72.

25. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 4. For a list of how Clement of Alexandria uses the *Shepherd* which includes references from all three portions, see Batovici, "Hermas in Clement," 42–51.

26. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 4. See also Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 16–41; Henne, "Athanase," 69–76.

27. Brox, *Hirt*, 26–28.

28. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 14.

29. Alistair Kirkland reordered the Visions based on what he perceives are inconsistencies in the appearances of the Elder Lady. Kirkland, "Literary History," 87–102.

information about Hermas, he rarely makes overt appearances in the Mandates, and his presence in the Similitudes is relatively subdued.

Further evidence of a lack of single-author unity relates to numerous inconsistencies, which seem to point to dueling authors and not-entirely-successful redactors. For instance, in Codex Sinaiticus, Vis. 1–4 are titled Ὅρασις α–δ, but Vis. 5 is titled Ἀποκάλθυψις ε.[30] Moreover, the document reflects many shifting genres, such as testimony, apocalypse, narrative, and law. The style of apocalypse fails to follow any sort of form or content when compared to similar Jewish apocalypses.[31] The Visions especially contain references to a coming persecution, yet the references are vague, making it difficult to pinpoint the historical referent or context. Furthermore, discrepancies arise when comparing the image of the tower from Vis. 3 and that of Sim. 9. For example, the tower in Vis. 3 is built on the water, representing baptism, but in Sim. 9, the tower is built on a rock with a gate, interpreted as symbols for the Son of God.[32] These inconsistencies have led to multiple theories concerning the number of authors who may have had a hand in the content that was later redacted into the present form of the *Shepherd*.

J. C. Wilson wrote a historical survey of the debate, a summary of which follows.[33] The nineteenth-century scholar H. W. Thiersch posited a two-author theory, claiming that there were two men by the name Hermas. The first author was the "Hermas" mentioned in Rom 16:14, while the second author was the brother of Bishop Pius referred to in the Muratorian Fragment dated roughly 140 CE.[34] A. Hilgenfeld proposed a three-author hypothesis based partly on the genre and references to persecution.[35] He posited that the earliest section consisting of Vis. 5, the Mandates, and Sim. 1–7—"Hermas pastoralis" proper—was written by the end of the first century. Then, Vis. 1–4, the apocalyptic section, was written after the reign of Trajan. Finally, Sim. 8–10 were added by the middle of the second century by the brother of Bishop Pius. In the early twentieth century, Dibelius conjectured that the composition developed over stages by multiple authors, citing in order of production: Vis. 1–4, Vis. 5, the Mandates through Sim. 1–7, then finally, Sim. 8–10.[36] In 1963, by using linguistic analysis, Coleborne

30. This is found only in Codex Sinaiticus. Codices Athos, Ethiopic, and the Vulgate contain ορασις ά (+initium pastoris). See Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 500.

31. Osiek, "Genre and Function of the Shepherd of Hermas," 113–21.

32. For a discussion of the allegorical problems posed by the two visions of the towers, see Hellholm, "Shepherd of Hermas," 226–28. See also Snyder, *Shepherd*, 3–7.

33. Wilson, *Reassessment*, 14–23. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 9.

34. Thiersch, *Kirche im apostolischen Zeitalter*, 350–58.

35. See discussion, entirely in Latin, in Hilgenfeld, *Hermae Pastor Graece*, xx–xxix.

36. Dibelius, *Hirt*, 420–21.

identified at least six authors based on the different literary techniques, but this theory found few supporters.[37] Those who claimed single authorship included Link, Zahn, and Harnack, who based their arguments on certain stylistic and linguistic elements instead of content.[38]

The issue remained unresolved until the twentieth century, when Giet reopened the discussion to critical acclaim. Using linguistic analysis, Giet's theory focused on the literary structure instead of the vocabulary and style, concluding that the transitions between Vis. 1–4 and 5 remain weak and illogical. He posited that the Visions were published and circulated first by one author. The ninth Similitude was written next to clarify the vagaries of the concept of Son of God in the Visions. Similitude 5 was written lastly by a third interpolator to "drown out" the orthodox explanation with an adoptionistic Christology, while also attempting to fill in the gaps of the narrative. He also posited that Sim. 10 was not part of the other Similitudes.[39]

Joly found Giet's argument illogical, and he pondered why a third author would attempt to drown out orthodoxy with adoptionism. Criticizing Giet's methodology, Joly states, "I am convinced that the unity of very few works would resist the dialectic of M. Giet." Joly asserted that the Visions were circulating by the time Sim. 9 was written, and that it was unusual that no church father remarked on the illegitimacy of its theological expressions.[40] Lage Pernveden agreed, claiming that the differences in doctrine and language do not constitute "a decisive indication of lack of literary unity."[41]

In conclusion, few scholars built solid arguments for the multiple author theory, at least not in a way that would establish anything like a consensus. Brox questions why several authors would attempt to write a story such as the *Shepherd*.[42] He instead asserts that one author developed the document over time in the order of Vis. 1–4, Vis. 5–Sim. 8, and finally, Sim. 9–10. Osiek concurs: "The thematic unity of the book in spite of some divergences indicates a guiding hand throughout."[43] She reasonably asserts that the *Shepherd* was most likely delivered in oral form, possibly

37. Coleborne, "Shepherd of Hermas," 65–70.

38. Adolf Link argued for a unity in the three sections and dismissed the concept that it has been divided. Link, *Einheit des Pastor*, 1–4. Cf. Zahn, *Hirt*, 44–49; Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 257–67.

39. Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 246, 254.

40. Joly, "Hermas et le Pasteur," 202, 218. See Henne, *L'unité du Pasteur*, 64.

41. Pernveden, *Concept of the Church*, 17n2.

42. Brox, *Hirt*, 26–28.

43. Osiek notes that within the text, Hermas hears a verbal proclamation, then is instructed by the woman revelator to record, then to deliver the message to both the local and global church (Vis. 1.3.3–4; 2.1.3–4; 2.2.1). Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 14.

recorded as an aid for delivery, then later edited by a single author or a team of people working closely with him to produce a text for circulation. She demonstrates that the written text reflects oral thought patterns that were "originally intended for oral proclamation."[44] We have adopted the basic contours of Osiek's approach that the *Shepherd* was originally a kind of oral performance, not unlike a one-person sketch or play, though delivered in a way that would not have offended the first-to-second-century Jewish-Christian disdain for the theatre.[45]

Use of the *Shepherd* in Antiquity

That the text of the *Shepherd* is preserved not only in Greek manuscripts but in Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Middle Persian, already demonstrates its widespread popularity in the early centuries of the church. However, references to the *Shepherd* in early Christian writings exhibit a variety of attitudes toward the writing during this time.[46] Some detect a rise and fall of the use of Hermas's writing as the church encountered doctrinal challenges and changes. If true, then tracing the discussion of the *Shepherd* in the chronology of the early church will help situate the document in its historical-theological context. It will also reveal a wide geographical distribution of both supporters and detractors, demonstrating that regardless of one's attitudes toward the *Shepherd*, the work was well known and could not be neglected. In the following discussion, we consider the use of the *Shepherd* in antiquity as a window into both its reception as well as an indicator of doctrinal formulation and the development of the canon.

Irenaeus of Lyons

Around 150 CE, Irenaeus crafted a cento in defense of creation *ex nihilo* comprised of passages from the *Shepherd*, Malachi, Paul, and Christ, in that order. Although the quotation neglects to mention Hermas as the author or the *Shepherd* as the source (*Haer.* 1.22.1; 4.20.2), many view this passage as

44. Osiek observes that it is impossible to reconstruct the method of production of the text. Osiek, "Oral World in Early Christianity in Rome," 151. David Rhoads posits the same scenario. Rhoads, "Performance Event in Early Christianity," 167.

45. Aldo Tagliabue has also examined the Visions in *Shepherd of Hermas* with this same notion of the text as a basis for oral proclamation in mind, both confirming and strengthening Osiek's arguments. Tagliabue, "Experience through Narrative," 137–51.

46. For a discussion of the continued use of the *Shepherd* beyond the patristic era—from the sixth to fifteenth centuries—see Lookadoo, *Shepherd*, 45–48.