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Duties of Age: Old Women in New Testament Epistles

Abstract

Obgleich Gruppen von alten Menschen in einigen Briefen vorkommen, werden alte Frauen lediglich in 1 Timotheus 5,2 und Titus 2,3–5 explizit erwähnt. Der Beitrag klärt die Frage, warum alte Frauen erst in diesem späten neutestamentlichen Briefcorpus zum Thema werden. Dazu wird kulturgeschichtlich nach Rolle und Wertungen von alten Frauen in den antiken jüdischen und griechischen Gesellschaften gefragt. Dann werden 1 Timotheus 5,2 und Titus 2,3–5 in diesen Diskurs eingeordnet und schließlich gefragt, ob und in welcher Weise, was spätere kirchengeschichtliche und jüdische Quellen nahelegen, Frauen auch ein Amt, d. h. eine für das Gemeinwesen öffentlich tätige Rolle als Älteste, zur Zeit des Neuen Testaments wahrgenommen haben.

Besides groups of elders are not specified by their gender, only 1 Timothy 5:2 and Titus 2:3–5 refer explicitly to elderly women in New Testament letters. These letters count among the so-called Pastoral Epistles (PE) in modern scholarship. Someone, who was not Paul, wrote them in Paul's name to the young church leaders or pastors Timothy and Titus. Because of major differences in language and theology, most scholars today agree that the PE are pseudepigraphic letters from the middle of the second century CE. Whoever wrote them wanted to add a final word of Paul on community organization, the role of women and men, slaves and masters, and rich members of the church, and on how Paul's legacy had to be secured against opponents who, as one can assume, likely also claimed to have Paul's legacy on their side. 2 Timothy, 1 Timothy and Titus build a small letter-corpus intended to be read together. In an entertaining as well as edifying way, the three letters give their readers a chance to peek over the shoulder of Pseudo-Paul and to watch him teach on community organizing, and finally to see him give a last farewell to his most beloved disciples. But why is it so late that old women are mentioned at all? Have these women grown old, as patrons, apostles, and church leaders, like Phoebe, Prisca, Junia, and Nympha? Is there an arising sense of generativity in the second-century Christ groups? Or do the elders make up an

office, and is their late coming part of a development from a charismatic to an office-based church organization in the second century? Are there officeholders among the *presbyterai* (πρεσβυτέραι) and *presbytides* (πρεσβύτιδες), as inscriptions from later centuries assume? Or do the PE deal only with female elders because they want to explicate specific virtues, ethics, and role-models for this group of women? To answer these questions, I will first present a short cultural and social history of elderly women in Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity. Second, I will locate the two texts from the PE into this cultural, historical context. And finally, I will ask, whether—what later Jewish and Christian sources suggest—female elders hold a public role in the second-century (if not the first-century) CE Christian communities.

1. A Short Cultural History of Females of Old Age

“Women existed in order to serve the males, whether for sexual pleasure or for the higher interest of producing an heir. An old woman resembled an object that had passed its usefulness and could now be discarded.”¹

This disgust and disregard in terms of reproductive capacities, however, led to greater freedom of movement for postmenopausal women.² This influential thesis, phrased by Jan N. Bremmer, has been repeated many times.³ However, against the background of the available sources, the picture has at least to be broadened.

Like old males, elderly women also complain about the decline of bodily strength and health. The most famous Greek female poet Sappho, for instance, sung: “old age already (withers?) all (my) skin, and (my) hair (turned white) from black . . . (my) knees do not carry (me) . . . (to dance) like young fawns . . . but what could I do?”⁴ Quite similar sounds the poem of her male contemporary Alcman: “No longer, honey-toned, strong-voiced girls, can my limbs carry me.”⁵ There is mockery for those elderly people of both sexes who are courting in their late days.⁶ Comedy and satire coin the image of the bibulous old lady.⁷ The Hellenistic epigrammatist Antipatros of Sidon wrote:

“This is the monument of grey-haired Maronis, on whose tomb you see a wine cup carved in stone. She the wine-bibber and chatterer, is not sorry for her children or her children’s destitute father, but one thing she laments even in her grave, that the device of the wine-god on the tomb is not full of wine.”⁸

However, already Plato praises wine as a helper and “a medicine potent against the crabbedness of old age.”⁹ Besides addiction to alcohol, Antipatros also mocks the talkativeness of old women.¹⁰ Old males, on the other hand, are criticized for their avarice.¹¹ Most important, however, old women are not only victims of mockery. Getting older also means an increase of wisdom and knowledge.¹² Indeed, the *anilis prudentia*, the prudence of the elders, becomes a proverbial honorific title for female youth.¹³ Famous is the priestess Diotima, who once hindered the pest and taught Socrates on *erōs* and love.¹⁴ Goddesses reveal themselves as aged women. In the *Iliad*, Aphrodite appears as an old woman, and in the Homeric Hymns, Demeter does.¹⁵ Priestesses of Demeter are often elderly women.¹⁶ Plato determines a minimum age of sixty for priests and priestesses.¹⁷ Famous seers like Pythia and the Sybil are also women of age.¹⁸ In the appearance of an old woman, Demeter joins the house of the king from Eleusis as a midwife and wet nurse. Her midwifery encompasses herbal medicine and apotropaic magic.¹⁹ Wet nurses are also well known for their fairy tales, myths, and family stories.²⁰ Mothers and grandmothers are valued as teachers of their children.²¹ Sometimes, however, wet-nurse tales are blamed as synonyms of lie and deception.²²

The question of who counts as old is hard to answer. The philosophical discussion pays attention almost exclusively to free males of the politically active elite in the cities and to their appropriate engagements.²³ Plato, however, limits official posts to women who are forty years of age or older.²⁴ First Timothy advises the community leader to enroll only those widows who are at least sixty (1 Timothy 5:9). The marriage laws of Augustus oblige women under fifty to be married.²⁵ Two female presbyters known by inscriptions died at the ages of fifty and forty.²⁶ Much discussed is the question of how many people in antiquity get to their sixtieth birthday. On tax lists from Egyptian papyri, Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce Frier count 19 of 337 women and 25 of 350 men older than fifty-nine years. They estimate that 4.5–4.6 percent of the population in antiquity was over sixty.²⁷

Biblical and early Jewish wisdom literature values the wisdom of old age.²⁸ For Philo, the fifth commandment substantiates the general obligation to honor elders as well:

“One who pays respect to an aged man or woman who is not of his kin may be regarded as having remembrance of his father and mother. He looks to them as prototypes and stands in awe of those who bear their image.”²⁹

When the sage in wisdom literature recommends the instructions of senior scholars, he sometimes points explicitly to mothers as well.³⁰ This may stand in the tradition of famous

biblical elderly women: Sarah, Simon’s mother, Judith, and the mother of the Maccabean martyrs.³¹ The PE, as I will argue, stand in this tradition of valuing wise elders.

2. Speak to Old Women as to a Mother (1 Timothy 5:2; 2 Timothy 1:5)!

Timothy and Titus, the leaders of the churches in the PE, are introduced as young men.³² Pseudo-Paul calls them “my child.”³³ However, whereas the historical Paul names Timothy and Titus brothers,³⁴ the PE present Paul as the father of his two most beloved students. The sibling metaphor is reserved for members of the communities led by Timothy and Titus in Ephesus and on Crete.³⁵ The young man Timothy should speak to his peers of age as brothers and to young women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:1–2).

Elders, however, require more respect and honor. The *charisma*, in the PE a kind of office and a gift to fulfill it correctly, was transferred to Timothy through a body of elders who laid their hands on him.³⁶ He is the grandson of Lois and the son of Eunice, two women, who are the prototypes for Timothy having “sincere faith” and who taught him the Holy Scripture since his earliest days of childhood.³⁷ This likely fictive information about Timothy’s family history stands in line with the general Jewish and Greco-Roman valuation of the role of learned mothers and grandmothers in education, or, more broadly termed, in Greek *paideia*.³⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that Timothy is advised not to “rebuke an older man,” but to comfort him as a father, and “elder women as mothers” (1 Timothy 5:1–2).³⁹ Already, Plato says in his *Laws*:

“An outrage perpetrated by a younger against an older person is a shameful thing to see happening in a State, and a thing hateful to God. Therefore let the law stand thus:—Everyone shall reverence his elder both by deed and word; whosoever, man or woman, exceeds himself in age by twenty years he shall regard as a father or a mother, and he shall keep his hands off that person, and he shall ever refrain himself, for the sake of the gods of birth, from all the generation of those who are potentially his own bearers and begetters.”⁴⁰

This duty to honour the elders was expanded by the political idea to describe a whole city or polis as a family. An inscription with an honorary degree, from the city of Olbia at the Black Sea, praises Theocles, son of Satyros, as “bearing himself to his equals in age as a brother, to his elders as a son, to children as a father, being adorned with all virtue.”⁴¹ This inscription

does not only “present the citizens of Olbia as one large family, but also as an educational institution in which *paideia* starts with the ancestors, is intensified with one’s own achievements, and which, in turn, becomes the master model for further generations.”⁴² “Fictive kinship” is in no way original to early Christianity.⁴³ Pseudo-Paul, however, corresponds with or even intends to compete with the highest moral standards of his Greco-Roman contemporaries.⁴⁴ Like the city of Olbia, according to the Theocles’s honorary inscription from Olbia, the community of the PE builds one household that educates its members, because its most prominent leader guides its member as a large family, in line with his ancestors, to achieve its best.⁴⁵

3. The Teachings of the Female Elders (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Timothy 4:6–7)

Pseudo-Paul is famous as the only New Testament author who generally forbids women to teach (1 Timothy 2:12; 5:13). However, as we have seen already, Eunice and Lois had been Timothy’s most important teachers besides Paul.⁴⁶ Old women are generally considered to “admonish” young women, or more literally, to make them wise and prudent.⁴⁷ Their teaching method is their exemplary lifestyle. The old women should

“...be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,⁴⁸ to be self-controlled,⁴⁹ chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.⁵⁰ (NRSV)”

With *kalodidaskalos* (καλοδιδάσκαλος = either “good teaching” or “teaching of good things,”) Pseudo-Paul most likely coined a new word.⁵¹ The old women teach by performing a master-model with their virtues.⁵² They are reverent in behavior or, more literally, have such a mental and bodily condition that they are always ready to enter a temple or holy place.⁵³ The enigmatic phrase likely alludes to the sexual rules concerning the “purity of the marriage bed” in many ancient temples and cults.⁵⁴ The caveat against much wine is typical and directed not only against old women, but also against old men, bishops, and deacons.⁵⁵ The whole list is not original at all, but a standard in contemporary conservative women’s moral instruction.⁵⁶ Yet the meaning of the term *oikourgos* (οἰκουργός) is debated.⁵⁷ It might mean “busy at home,” in terms of “staying at home,” or “managing a home,” in terms of leading a huge

household with agrarian production. Annette Bourland Huizenga favors the second meaning, in the context of the pseudepigraphic letters of Pythagorean female philosophers Melissa, Myia, and Theano.⁵⁸

The letters, written in the name of Melissa, Myia, and Theano to female correspondents, suggest with philosophical reasoning how to behave as a modest wife. They call to modesty on behalf of jewelry and clothing (Melissa to Klearete), advise on how to choose a good wet nurse (Myia to Phyllis), argue against indulgence of children (Theano to Eubule) and against jealousy, even if the husband visits hetaeras (Theano to Nikostrate), and finally, they teach how to make one's slaves tame and submissive (Theano to Kallisto). Whether those letters are actually written by women is not known.⁵⁹ Yet all letters are written in the name of older women to younger ones. The letter of Theano to Nikostrate states this explicitly:

“Indeed, authority has customarily been given to you younger women to rule over the household slaves once you have been married, but the teaching ought to come from the older women because they are forever giving advice about household management. For it is good first to learn the things you do not know and to consider the counsel of the older women the most suitable; for a young soul must be brought up in these teachings from girlhood.⁶⁰”

Governance of slaves or the selection of wet nurses are not topics of the PE, nor are hetaeras in view. The readers of the PE belong to a social milieu different from that of the letters of the female Pythagorean philosophers. Both pseudepigraphic letter corpora, however, share the basic idea that younger women have to be taught by older women's experience and advice. Different from what one can read in the Acts of Thecla, neither Paul nor the young male community leader serves as the master-model, but rather in the PE's communities, old women teach and model for the younger female members.⁶¹

A last reference to the teaching of old women could be detected behind 1 Timothy 4:6–7. As a “good ambassador of Christ Jesus,” Timothy was “nourished” and “raised” by “words of faith and good teachings” that he had followed. Therefore, he should refute the old wives' tales or myths (*graodes mythoi*, γραώδες μύθοι). Earlier research identified these old women's tales as stories that might have been told by old women, collected in the Acts of Thecla and other apocryphal Acts.⁶² More recent interpreters read the phrase as a polemical effemination of an oppositional group.⁶³ As shown above in the short cultural history, old women's fairy tales, myths, and family stories stand in high esteem by some.⁶⁴ Others blamed them as synonyms

for lie and deception. The PE follow the second tradition when they connect them with the attribute *bebelos* (βέβηλος), “profane, worthless.”⁶⁵ The teaching of old women remains a sensitive and controversial phenomenon in the PE.

4. Female Presbyters in the New Testament

In his interpretation of the foot washing in the Gospel of John, Origen gives the following comment:

“Do not wonder that you have to understand ‘washed the saints’ feet’ (1 Timothy 5:10) in a spiritual way. With this, Paul imposes in a similar way that there have to be besides male elders also female elders, especially some who teach well (Titus 2:3).”⁶⁶

Origen, who was himself a presbyter, takes Titus 2:3 as a prooftext for the existence of female presbyters. In this final section, I want to ask how old this institution might be.

“Elders are mostly leaders or patrons of a group and function as adviser or make, affirm, or witness important decisions.”⁶⁷ In the Greek world, a *gerousia* (γερουσία) is known from Sparta as a politically active council of males who are at least sixty years old and from the leading families.⁶⁸ In his comparison of political constitutions, Aristotle is highly critical of this institution.⁶⁹ Yet he mentions another council of *gerontes* (γέροντες), “elders,” also in Crete.⁷⁰ Contrary to Aristotle, however, Plato, Plutarch, and Roman authors consider old age especially appropriate for political offices because of its rationality, prudence, wisdom, and sagacity.⁷¹

Inscriptions and coins attest to similar *gerousiai* in Ephesus and many cities in Asia Minor during Hellenistic and Roman times.⁷² Members from such “councils of elders” travel as ambassadors of their hometowns, help benefactors with loans, serve as benefactors themselves (or as judges), document praise and honor for benefactors, and fill roles in the gymnasium, in the imperial cult or other religions of their cities.⁷³ Papyri from Egypt have elders as majors of some villages or cities, who reconcile disputes, deliver documents, or receive petitions.⁷⁴ The concrete tasks, however, differ from city to city. Coins represent the *gerousia* mostly as an older lady, together with the city council (*boule*, βουλή) and the people (*demos*, δῆμος).⁷⁵ The *gerousia* (γερουσία), the council of elders, could also be called *synhedrion* (συνέδριον), and its members *gerontes* (γέροντες) or *presbyteroi* (πρεσβύτεροι).⁷⁶

There is no general minimum age for those who join the *gerousia*.⁷⁷ And nowhere do all elderly members of the politically elite join the *gerousia*. The Greek term *gerousia* becomes a standard translation for the Roman senate. Senate derives from *senex* “old male.”⁷⁸ The introduction of *gerousiai* in many cities in Asia Minor and Greece belongs to acculturation processes in the eastern provinces during the Roman Empire.

According to Acts, a council of elders is among the governing bodies of the early church in Jerusalem.⁷⁹ According to Acts 14:23 and 20:17–18, Paul appointed elders for the communities he founded in his missionary territory. However, elders appear only later in New Testament letters.⁸⁰ The Letter of James invites the sick to call the elders to “have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). First Peter 5:1–4 exhorts the elders “to tend the flock of God” and to shepherd them correctly by serving as good examples to the flock, not corrupt ones.⁸¹ There is a debate, however, whether James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1–4; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:1–2, 17–22(25); and Titus 1:5–7(9), respectively, have an office or a group of aged people in mind. Moreover, in the PE, a bishop with almost the same duties appears besides presbyters.⁸² The nineteenth-century thesis—according to which the council of elders originated in Judaism, while offices of bishop and deacons had been overtaken from the Hellenistic world—is no longer convincing, considering the prominent councils of elders in many Greek and Roman cities.⁸³ Obviously, there are also councils of elders in ancient Judaism. A *gerousia* of Jerusalem is mentioned for instance in Judith 15:8 and Acts 5:2.⁸⁴ However, also for Jewish councils of elders, the exact duties and privileges cannot be determined.⁸⁵ In the Yachad of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a council of elders is responsible for the administration of justice.⁸⁶ A liturgical text has assemblies of female besides male elders (4Q 502 24,4).⁸⁷ The “elders” or “the presbyters” is a “blanket term for manifold kinds of leading positions,” which develops in the ambit of the Roman senate and in the provinces among the manifold ethnic and religious groups and people.⁸⁸

Sometimes also women are members in the *gerousiai* of some cities in the Roman provinces. For instance, Flavia Vibia Sabina from Thassos is honored by a statue as “high priest and mother of the *gerousia*.”⁸⁹ Another inscription from the year 99 CE from Sebaste in Phrygia lists among seventy-one members of the local *gerousia* three women from Roman families.⁹⁰ The council and city of Thessalonica honor the high priest and *ge[rous]iarissa* (γε[ρους]ιάρισσα) Flavia Julia Sivane.⁹¹ Among the Jews, a certain Eulogia is a presbyter beside her husband, who is the head of the synagogue of the *gerousia*.⁹² Sophia of Gortyn is herself presbyter and *archisynagogissa* from Kissamus.⁹³ Ute Eva Eisen, Kevin Madigan, and

Carolyn Osiek added eight more female presbyters from Christian grave inscriptions of the second through the sixth century CE.⁹⁴ Among them, Ammion, who was remembered by Bishop Diogas,⁹⁵ Martia, who made an offering with Olybrius and Nepos,⁹⁶ Flavia Vitalia, who sells an upper-class burial ground,⁹⁷ and Guilia Runa, who donated a mosaic floor.⁹⁸ Some literary sources mention female presbyters as well. The Acts of Philip have male and female presbyters in a row with male and female deacons, eunuchs, and virgins.⁹⁹ Epiphanius claims that the Montanists argued about Galatians 3:28 regarding the office of a female bishop and a female presbyter.¹⁰⁰ He himself is willing to call only an older widow a *πρεσβυτερίς* (presbyteris).¹⁰¹ The Acts of a council of Laodicea determine that so-called female presbyters cannot be appointed to the church.¹⁰² Considering this manifold evidence, there is a growing consensus in scholarship that there must have been female presbyters in late antiquity.¹⁰³ Yet the duties of this office remain diverse and often hard to determine. This, however, concurs with the general view we have of this office elsewhere.

Do New Testament letters know of an office of female presbyters? The answer to this question has to be yes and no. On the one hand, not even the PE are able to exclude women from active teaching, not only as related to younger women, but also with regard to future male community leaders for whom Timothy is a prototype. There is no success in religious education without mothers and grandmothers, without being nourished with sincere faith and being taught in the Holy Scriptures. On the other hand, there is no clearly defined office of a male or female presbyter in the first and second century CE. The analogies documented by material artifacts from the ancient world, as well as from Jewish literature, demonstrate that functions and duties could vary in manifold ways in growing bodies of councils of elders established at many places and in many groups in the Roman sphere of influence. Besides cultic duties, this could be financial services as well as council and law-court tasks. The New Testament adds care of the sick and education.

5. Conclusion

I hope to have shown that old women in antiquity are not only disguised, mocked, or ignored, but also are valued and held in high esteem for their wisdom and the education of the younger generation. They sometimes even take part in the council of elders of their city or people. The role of old women in the PE reflects this reality in manifold ways. The young community leader is reminded of his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois and is asked to talk to old

female community members as he would talk to his mother (2 Timothy 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:1f.). Besides educating their own children, old women are to instruct young women in household management and point out to them their duties in marriage and childcare. The morality behind this concept is of course on the most conservative side of ancient discourse. It is no wonder that someone who waits for the imminent *parousia* of Christ and a fundamental change of gender roles and all other this-worldly social roles, like the historical Paul, has no specific ethics for socially determined groups like old women.

Recent scholarship debates whether the PE want to exclude women from religious roles in general or whether the emphasis on the cardinal virtue *sōphrosyne*, “prudence and modesty,” allows women some leading roles in the house and thereby emancipates them in a certain, gender-specific way.¹⁰⁴ Both aspects are correct but have to be complemented. The designation “old women” contains in the PE, as well as in all antiquity, an intrinsic and thereby explosive tension. The educational task that comes with the highly esteemed wisdom of the old always diffuses beyond families and private houses into the center of communities’ leadership. It is, therefore, appropriate to read, with Origen, Titus 2:3 as evidence for an office of female presbyters. One should, however, not restrict this office to priestly services, like presiding at the Eucharist. More likely, female presbyters in antiquity, similar to their male counterparts, fulfilled all duties and tasks that are documented for ancient *gerousiai* and *presbyteria*, like political and religious intercessions, representation, and reconciliation, on earth and in heaven. A catalogue of their responsibilities might become visible in the task list of the older widows in 1 Timothy 5:3–10.

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¹ Jan Bremmer, “The Old Women of Ancient Greece,” in *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, ed. Josine Blok and Peter Mason (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987), 191–215, 203.

² Bremmer, “Old Women,” 191–92.

³ Tim Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 246–47: “The depiction of the old woman in Greek and Latin literature was almost monotonously negative and at times grotesque and cruel” (246). For a critique, see Beate Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike: Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Köln: Böhlau, 2012), 157–58.

⁴ Sappho *frag.* 58 Voigt = P. Oxy. 1787 frag. 1. 4–25. Translation by David Campbell, LCL.

⁵ Alcman *frag.* 26PD/94. Translation by David Campbell, LCL.

⁶ Wagner-Hasel, “Alter, Wissen und Geschlecht. Überlegungen zum Altersdiskurs in der Antike,” *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 17,1 (2006), 15–36, mentioning Horace *Epod.* 8.11–17 and Martial, *Epigr.* 3.93.

⁷ Cf. Hans Georg Oeri, *Der Typ der komischen Alten in der griechischen Komödie: Seine Nachwirkungen und seine Herkunft* (Basel: Schwabe, 1948), 13–18, 39–46.

⁸ *Anth. pal.* 7.353. Translation by W. R. Paton, LCL. Cf. *Anth. pal.* 7.423, 455.

⁹ Plato, *Leg.* 666b. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 10.55 (440d).

¹⁰ Oeri, *Typ*, 12–13, 38–39. Plato (*Theaet.* 176b) declares that God is perfectly righteous and that other opinions are old wives’ chatter (γραιῶν ὄθλος).

¹¹ Hartwin Brandt, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar: Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike* (München: Beck, 2002), 133–35.

¹² Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 42–50, 80–81.

¹³ Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 5.16.2.

¹⁴ Plato, *Symp.* 201d–212c. In ancient art, however, female philosophers are always depicted as young women. Cf. Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 41–50.

¹⁵ Homer, *Il.* 3.385–90. *Homeric Hymns to Demeter* 113–251. For old women as revealers in Christian literature, see Herm. *Vis.* 1.2.2–4. Cf. Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 169–70.

¹⁶ Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 44–45.

¹⁷ Plato, *Leg.* 759d. For priestesses of Demeter, see Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.35.7–8.

¹⁸ For Sybil, see Wagner-Hasel, “Alter, Wissen,” 25–36. Homer characterizes the wet nurse Eurycleia as thoughtful because she is the first to recognize Odysseus (*Od.* 19.467–504, 492; περίφρων Εὐρύκλεια).

¹⁹ *Homeric Hymns to Demeter* 225–30. Cf. Louise H. Pratt, “The Old Women of Ancient Greece and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter,” *TAPA* 130 (2000) 41–65.

²⁰ Plato, *Hipp. maj.* 286; vgl. auch *Lysis* 205e–d; *Gorg.* 527a. Plato (*Resp.* 2.377a–c [NW II/1 889]) wants to censor the fairy tales of old women. For the Platonist Maximus Tyrus, however, old women’s tales are the philosophy of the ancients that in former times ranged the souls throughout the world (4:3). For Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.9.2), the *fabulis nutricularum* (‘old wives’ tales’) are a first exercise in rhetoric.

²¹ See: Judith Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8–11.

²² For Strabo (*Geogr.* 1.2.3), poetry is a fable-prating old wife (γραῶδη μυθολογία), who has been permitted to “invent” (as you call it) whatever she deems suitable for purposes of entertainment. Cf. Lucian, *Philops.* 9; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 3.5.12; Apuleius, *Apol.* 25.5 (*anilis fabula*). For Iamblich (*Vita Pythagoras* 23.105), fairy tales of old women are ridiculous. Irenaeus is the first to call the theology of other groups he calls heretics old women myths (γραῶν μύθους; *Haer.* 1.8.1; 1.16.3). Cf. Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 11.2.

²³ Kathrin Schade, “Anus ebria, avia educans und pulcherrima femina: Altersdiskurse im römischen Frauenporträt,” *JdI* 116 (2001) 259–76, 263f.

²⁴ Plato, *Leg.* 785b.

²⁵ Brandt, *Wird auch silbern*, 166; Parkin, *Old Age*, 193–202.

²⁶ *CIL* 10.8079; *ILCV* 1.1192; *AE* 1975.454. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 171.193f; Ute E. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum: Epigraphische und literarische Studien* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 61 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 129–31.

²⁷ Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). Tim Parkin (*Old Age*, 224) estimates that over-sixty-year-old males and females make up 5–10 percent of the whole population. However, for problems of such estimations, see Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 109–18.

²⁸ Proverbs 4:1–9; 20:29; Ben Sira 25:3–6. Cf. Ben Sira 6:34; 8:9; 32:3.

²⁹ Philo, *Spec.* 2.237 Cf. Leviticus 19:32; Ps.-Phoc. 218–20. Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.206) reasons in the commandment that God is the oldest of all.

³⁰ Proverbs 4:3–5 LXX

³¹ Genesis 18:9–14; 21:1–6; Judges 13; 4 Maccabees 16:4; Judith 16:2–23.

³² 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 2:22.

³³ 1 Timothy 1:12, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4. Paul once calls Timothy himself “my child” (1 Corinthians 4:17). He also compares the gospel with his and Timothy’s father (Philippians 2:22).

³⁴ Timothy: 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Philemon 1. Cf. Colossians 1:1; Hebrews 13:12. Titus: 2 Corinthians 1:13; 12:8.

³⁵ 1 Timothy 4:6; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Timothy 4:21.

³⁶ 1 Timothy 4:14 (cf. Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5). The verse contradicts 2 Timothy 1:6, where Paul is said to have transmitted the *charisma* to Titus through his hands. Some interpreters suggest that the two instances refer to two different events. Others see Timothy included in a *presbyterion* or *gerousia* There is also a debate whether this is already a formal rite of ordination.

³⁷ 2 Timothy 1:5: ἀνυπόκριτος πίστις. Cf. 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:12.

³⁸ Quintilian names the grandmother of his son: *avia educans*, “educated grandmother” (*Inst.* 6 pr. 8). Cf. Seneca, *Helv.* 18.8. An inscription praises an Oscia Modesta as *avia carissima et educatrix dulcissima*, “dearest grandmother and most pleasant educator” (CIL VI 1478, third century CE). Schade “Anus Ebria,” 261.

³⁹ The rare Greek word ἐπιπλήσσω means literally “to punish.”

⁴⁰ Plato, *Leg.* 879c. Translation by R.G. Bury, LCL.

⁴¹ *IOSPE P* 40, 27–30 (second to third century CE, Olbia on the Black Sea): πᾶσαν ὁμόνοιαν πολειτευόμενος, τοῖς μὲν ἡλικιώταις προσφερόμενος ὡς ἀδελφός, τοῖς δὲ πρεσβυτέροις ὡς υἱός, τοῖς δὲ παισὶν ὡς πατήρ, πάση ἀρετῇ κεκοσμημένος. Translation Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 312. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, HNT 13, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, ³1955), 57.

⁴² Cf. Heinz Heinen, “Repräsentation von Identität und Zugehörigkeit: eine Einführung” in *Identität und Zugehörigkeit im Osten der griechisch-römischen Welt: Aspekte ihrer Repräsentation in Städten, Provinzen und Reichen*, ed. Altay Coskun, Heinz Heinen, Stefan Pfeiffer (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 9–34, 27f.: My translation.

⁴³ Similar advice is given by the Stoic author Hierocles: “And indeed, even if they should err in something—the kind of thing that tends often to occur with most people who have been brought up rather vulgarly—they should be corrected, to be sure, but not with a rebuke, by Zeus, as it is customary to do with those who are our inferiors or equals, but rather with exhortation, and not as though they had erred through ignorance, but as though they overlooked it because they did not pay attention but would certainly have seen it if they had been paying attention.” (Hierocles in Stobaeus, *Flor.* 4.25.5). Cf. Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics, Fragments and Excerpts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2008), 85 line 4–5. Ramelli concludes that the ethical teachings of the PE are Stoic.

⁴⁴ Roman authors praise the honor of the elders as a standard of the “good old time.” See Aulus Gellius *Noct. Att.* 2.15.1; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 2.1.9, Christian Gnllka, “Greisenalter,” *RAC* 12 (1983), 995–1094, 1035f.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Timothy 3:15.

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:12.

⁴⁷ Titus 2:4: *sōfronizo* (σωφρονίζω), to make somebody *sōphron* (σώφρων) “wise, prudent, modest etc.,” to call a person to his or her senses, chasten (Xenophon, *Anab.* 7.7.14; *Cyr.* 8.6.16) but also “admonish, instruct” (Philo, *Congr.* 172). Cf. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 279f.; 294.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1 Timothy 5:14. Already Dibelius, *Pastoralbriefe*, 105, noticed that these are typical virtues of women, as their grave inscriptions prove.

⁴⁹ *Sōphron* (σώφρων), “wise, prudent, modest” is also mentioned in the list of virtues for old and young men (Titus 2:2, 6), women in general (1 Timothy 2:9), and bishops (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Another writing in the name of the Pythagorean female philosopher Phintys claims: “the most important virtue of a woman is modesty” (γυναικὸς δὲ μάλιστα ἀρετὰ σωφροσύνη). Cf. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 304.

⁵⁰ Titus 3:3–5. Cf. 1 Timothy 3:6–7 (bishop) and 6:1 (slaves).

⁵¹ The term *kalodiaskalos* (καλοδιδάσκαλος) appears here for the first time in Greek literature. The opposite, *kakodidaskaleo* (κακοδιδασκαλέω) reappears in Ign. *Phld.* 2.1; 2 Clem. 10.5. Cf. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 267. Already Dibelius (*Pastoralbriefe*, 105) noticed the tension between Titus 2:3–5 and 1 Timothy 2:9–15.

⁵² Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 321–26. Cf. Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, AnaBib 105 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986), 217.

⁵³ *Katastema* (κατάστημα) is the “bodily or mental condition” (LSJ). *Hieroprepes* (ἱεροπρεπής), “beseeming a sacred place,” is also rare and belongs to the area of religion and cult. See Gottlob Schrenk, “ἱεροπρεπής,” *ThWNT* 3 (1938) 253–54.

⁵⁴ For women in temple cults see: Angela Standhartinger, “Performing Salvation: The Therapeutrides and Job’s Daughters in Context,” in *Re-Making the World: Christianity and Categories, Essays in Honor of Karen L. King*, WUNT 434, ed. Taylor G. Petrey (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 173–196.

⁵⁵ 1 Timothy 3:3, 8, 11; Titus 1:7; 2:2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Plutarch, *Amat.* 769b–c: “So it is ridiculous to maintain that women have no participation in virtue. What need is there to discuss their prudence and intelligence, or their loyalty and justice, when many women have exhibited a daring and great-hearted courage which is truly masculine? And to declare that their nature is noble in all other relationships and then to censure it as being unsuitable for friendship alone—that is surely a strange procedure. They are, in fact, fond of their children and their husbands.” (Translation Paul August Clement and Herbert Benno Hoffleit, LCL).

⁵⁷ The word is again rare. But see 1 Clemens 1:3 “You directed women to accomplish all things with a blameless, respectful, and pure conscience, dutifully loving their husbands. And you taught them to run their households respectfully [σεμνῶς οἰκουργεῖν], living under the rule of submission, practicing discretion in every way.” See 1 Timothy 5:14: οἰκοδεσποτεῖν, “manage one’s household.”

⁵⁸ But see already Dibelius, *Pastoralbriefe*, 105. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 46–52. Cf. Ulrike Wagener, *Die Ordnung des “Hausess Gottes”*: *Der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik der Pastoralbriefe*, WUNT 2.65 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994). The dating of the letters is debated. Holger Thesleff dates them because of their Doric dialect to the third century BCE (*The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period* [Abo: Akademi, 1965]). A late dating in the second century CE is argued by Alfons Städele, *Die Briefe des Pythagoras und der Pythagoreer*, *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* 115 (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1980). Meanwhile, however, a papyrus appeared with two letters, Melissa to Cleareta and Theano to Eubule; the first letter is translated into Koine Greek (P. Haun. II.13). See Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, *Papyri Graecae Haunienses II* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1981), 1–13. Huizenga dates the letters contemporary to the PE.

⁵⁹ Cf. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 116f.

⁶⁰ Thesleff 197, 25–31. Translation Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 73.

⁶¹ Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 258. For the complex relationship between the Acts of Thecla and the PE, which is documented already in the textual witnesses (see 2 Timothy 4:9), see Susan E. Hylen, *A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶² Stephan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980). Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts*, *Studies in Women and Religion* 23 (Lewiston: Mellen, 1987).

⁶³ Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, *BZNW* 164 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 195–96. Huizenga, *Moral Education*, 240.

⁶⁴ See above note **Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert..**

⁶⁵ See above note **Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert..** See also 1 Timothy 1:9; 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:16. Friedrich Hauck, “βέβηλος κτλ.,” *ThWNT* 1 (1933), 604f.

⁶⁶ Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 32.12 (132): Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης εἰ ἀνάγειν σε δεῖ τὸ «Εἰ ἁγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν», ὅπου κελεύονται ἀνάλογον τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις πρεσβύτιδες εἶναι καὶ καλοδιδάσκαλοι. Noted by Ilaria L. Ramelli, “Theosebia: A Presbyter of the Catholic Church,” *JFSR* 26 (2010) 79–102, 86.

⁶⁷ Joseph G. Mueller, “Presbyter,” *RAC* 28 (2018) 86–112, 86.

⁶⁸ Plutarch, *Lyc.* 26; Josephus *Ant.* 13.166. For an at least indirect participation of women in this council in Sparta, see Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 51–52.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Pol.* 1270b35–1271a5.

⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Pol.* 1272b37–8, 34–35. Ephoros at Strabo, *Georg.* 10.14.22. Cf. Karl-Wilhelm Welwei, “Gerousia. Griechisch-Römisch,” *DNP* 4 (1998) 979–80.

⁷¹ Plato, *Leg.* 665d; *Pol.* 328d; Plutarch, *an seni respublica greanda sit* (783b–797f).

⁷² Ennio Bauer, *Gerusien in den Poleis Kleinasiens in hellenistischer Zeit und der römischen Kaiserzeit: Die Beispiele Ephesos, Pamphylien und Pisidien, Aphrodisias und Iasos*, *Münchener Studien zur Alten Welt* 11 (München: Utz, 2014).

⁷³ Bauer, *Gerusien*, 346–48.

⁷⁴ Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 55.

⁷⁵ Katharina Martin, *Demos, Boule, Gerousia: Personifikationen städtischer Institutionen auf kaiserzeitlichen Münzen aus Kleinasien Band I–II* (Bonn: Habelt-Verlag, 2013), 141–51.

⁷⁶ Bauer, *Gerusien*, 91–92, 324.

⁷⁷ Bauer, *Gerusien*, 28–30. However, because of the *cursus publicus*, a Roman senator would be thirty-nine to forty-two years old. See Brandt, *Wird auch silbern*, 117; Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike*, 58–61.

⁷⁸ Plutarch, *an seni respublica greanda sit* 789e; Philo, *Flacc.* 80.

⁷⁹ Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4.

⁸⁰ James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1–4; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17–22(25) and Titus 1:5–7(9). Mueller, “Presbyter,” 99–101. Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elders and the Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁸¹ Similarly Acts 20:17–38.

⁸² Merkle (*Elders*) argues that *bishop* describes an office, while *elder* is a personal characteristic. Others argue for an ongoing differentiation between Titus and 1 Timothy. See Michael Theobald, “Von den Presbytern zum Episkopos (Tit 1:5–9),” *ZNW* 104 (2013) 209–37.

⁸³ The idea was established by Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 96.

⁸⁴ Other sources speak of a *gerousia* of the people of Israel. See Josephus, *Ant.* 12.138–42; 13.166; 1 Maccabees 12:6; 3 Maccabees 1:8.

⁸⁵ Carsten Claussen, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge. Das hellenistisch-jüdische Umfeld der frühchristlichen Gemeinden*, SUNT 27 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 264–73, 268. In imperial rescripts, some Jewish presbyters are mentioned beside heads of synagogues and patriarchs as leading political bodies (Cod. theod. 8.16.3–4. Cf. Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, BJS 36 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 46–50.

⁸⁶ 1QS 6:8; CD 9:4; 11QT. CD 10:6–10 restricts the office of the judge to the age of sixty.

⁸⁷ 4Q502 24.4: [... זקני]ת [ם]בסוד זקני[ם]. Cf. Cecilia Wassen, “זָקֵן,” *Theologisches Wörterbuch zu den Qumrantexten* 1 (2011) 865–69. Sidnie White Crawford, “Mothers, Sisters, and Elders: Titles for Women in Second Temple Jewish and Early Christian Communities,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001*, STDJ 46, ed. James R. Davila (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 177–91.

⁸⁸ Claussen, *Versammlung*, 273.

⁸⁹ Cf. Sheila Dillon, “Female Portraiture in the Hellenistic Period,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 262–77, 275.

⁹⁰ Pierre Paris, “Inscriptions de Sébasté,” *BCH* 7 (1883) 452–56.

⁹¹ *IG X,2* 177. 250 CE.

⁹² Ross S. Kraemer, “A New Inscription from Malta and the Question of Women Elders in the Diaspora Jewish Communities,” *HThR* 78 (1985) 431–38.

⁹³ IJO I Cre 3. Brooten, *Women Leaders*, 11f., 41. Brooten (*Women Leaders*, 41–55) collects more than six inscriptions from the third to sixth century. Walter Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis II, Kleinasien*, TSAJ 99 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 331 Nr. 161 and another inscription of the presbyter Sara (IJO 161).

⁹⁴ Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 162–202. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen*, 112–37.

⁹⁵ *ICG* 1372 100–300 (third century). Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 199–200.

⁹⁶ *CIL* 13.1183; *ILCV* 1191 (fourth to fifth century). Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 195–96; Cf. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen*, 112–14; Giorgio Otranto, “Notes on the Female Priesthood in Antiquity,” *JSFR* 7 (1991) 78–94, 88–89.

⁹⁷ *CIL* 3.14900; 425 CE. Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 196f. Cf. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen*, 134–35.

⁹⁸ *AE* 1953.107 p. 35. Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 187.

⁹⁹ Acts Phil.1.12.8 (fourth century). During his tour through the hell a shortly raised son of an old widow watch the punishment of those “who blasphemed against male and female priests, eunuchs, deacons, deaconesses, and virgins with lies about debauchery and adultery”.

Translation François Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews.

¹⁰⁰ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.2.1–3.

¹⁰¹ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 79.4.1. For widows see: Standhartinger, “‘Wie die verehrteste Judith und die besonnenste Hanna.’ Traditionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zur Herkunft der Witwengruppen im entstehenden Christentum,” in *Dem Tod nicht glauben. Sozialgeschichte der Bibel. Festschrift für Luise Schottroff zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Frank Crüseman et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004), 103–126.

¹⁰² Council of Laodicea canon 11. Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 163f. Cf. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen*, 119–21.

¹⁰³ Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen*, 128, 136. Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 198. Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 58–66.

¹⁰⁴ See Korinna Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God: A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles*, NTOA/STUNT 103 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), versus Hylan, *A Modest Apostle*.

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