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**THE AUTHORITY OF WOMEN HOSTS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN
GATHERINGS IN THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES C.E.**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines women hosts of early Christian gatherings and the authority they had in their early Christian communities. Although early Christian home gatherings and early Christian women have been studied extensively, women who hosted early Christian gatherings have thus far been given only occasional attention. The aim of this study is to write women hosts into the narratives of early Christian beginnings more fully than has been done before.

According to numerous early Christian texts, Christ-believers often gathered at homes. Some of these homes had women heads of households (e.g. Acts 12:12, 16:14-15, 40; Col. 4:15). In addition, some early Christian texts may allude to women hosts of early Christian gatherings (e.g. Ign. *Pol.* 8:2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2). Even these few sources imply that gathering at women's homes might have been a more common phenomenon than early Christian writings indicate.

This study utilizes social-historical and post-structural approaches. Accordingly, both the social-historical setting and the literary representations of women hosts will be researched. The research discusses various literary and non-literary ancient sources that pertain to early Christian domestic gatherings, non-Christian women heads of households in antiquity, and women benefactors. While even the most extensive usage of diverse sources does not enable a complete portrayal of women hosts, there are more and less credible reconstructions of their activities and of the settings in which they functioned.

In addition to analyzing the texts that mention women hosts or possible women hosts of early Christian gatherings, this study includes discussions about early Christian communities and non-Christian women heads of households and patrons. Based on the research, it is argued that because of the domestic setting in which women were heads of their households, they also had authority in early Christian gatherings taking place at their homes. The same applies to the position of non-Christian women benefactors according to whose model Christ-believers understood the position and authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

It is argued that women hosts had authority in their early Christian communities because of the domestic setting and the authority that hosts irrespective of their gender had in general. Furthermore, their authority was affected by non-Christian women's comparable roles and their literary and non-literary representations. The authority that women hosts thus gained was not countercultural and was not motivated by a supposed early Christian egalitarianism. There was no striving towards gender-equality in early Christianity. Instead, socioeconomic hierarchy resulted in the authority positions of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Christian communities started to gain distinct gathering places in the late second and third centuries C.E. and at the same time hierarchical structures continued developing. These trajectories resulted in the exclusion of women hosts from authority roles in mainstream Christianity.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöstutkimus käsittelee naisia, joiden kodeissa varhaiset kristityt kokoontuivat ajanlaskun alun kahdella ensimmäisellä vuosisadalla. Erityistä huomiota kiinnitetään siihen, millaisia auktoriteetteja naiset seurakunnissaan olivat. Lisäksi tutkitaan näiden naisten todennäköistä sosioekonomista taustaa ja sitä, millaisia rooleja naisilla saattoi olla kodeissaan kokoontuvissa seurakunnissa. Naisia, joiden kodeissa varhaiset kristityt kokoontuivat, on tähän mennessä tutkittu vain vähän. Väitöskirjan tavoitteena on kirjoittaa nämä naiset varhaisen kristinuskon historiaan.

Naisten kodeissa kokoontuminen mainitaan muutamissa varhaiskristillisissä kirjoituksissa (esim. Ap.t. 12:12, 16:14-15, 40; Kol. 4:15). Lisäksi joidenkin varhaiskristillisissä teksteissä mainittujen naisten kodeissa saattoi kokoontua seurakunta (esim. Ign. *Pol.* 8:2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2). Vaikka naisten kodeissa kokoontumiseen viittaavia tekstejä on lukumäärällisesti vähän, heidän esiintymisensä toisistaan riippumattomissa varhaiskristillisissä lähteissä viittaa siihen, että naisten kodeissa kokoontuminen saattoi olla tavallisempi ilmiö kuin lähteiden vähäisestä määrästä voisi olettaa.

Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään sosiaalishistoriallisia ja poststruktuurialisia lähestymistapoja. Käytännössä tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan sekä seurakunnille kokoontumispaikan tarjonneiden naisten sosiaalishistoriallista taustaa että näiden naisten kirjallisia representaatioita. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan varhaiskristilliset tekstit, joissa mainitaan naisia, joiden kodeissa kristityt kokoontuivat, sekä tekstit, joissa mainittavat naiset ovat mahdollisesti kristittyjen kokoontumistilojen tarjoajia. Lisäksi tarkastelun kohteina ovat varhaisten kristittyjen kodeissa kokoontuminen, antiikin ei-kristityt naisperheenpäät sekä ei-kristityt naiset, jotka antoivat taloudellista tukea muun muassa erilaisille yhdistyksille.

Varhaisille kristityille kokoontumistiloja tarjoavien naisten auktoriteettiasemaan vaikutti se, että he olivat perhekuntiensa päitä, joilla sukupuolesta riippumatta oli ylin auktoriteetti omissa perhekunnissaan. Lisäksi ei-kristityt naisperheenpäät ja naiset taloudellisina tukijoina tarjosivat mallin, jonka perusteella naiset, joiden kodeissa varhaiset kristityt kokoontuivat, olivat auktoriteetteja. Heidän auktoriteettiasemansa eivät olleet heitä ympäröivän kulttuurin vastaisia eivätkä kerro varhaisen kristinuskon pyrkimyksistä sukupuolten väliseen tasa-arvoon. Toisin kuin joissain aiemmissa tutkimuksissa on esitetty, varhaiskristilliset seurakunnat olivat hierarkisesti järjestäytyneitä. Tämän takia kokoontumistilojen tarjoaja, myös silloin kun hän oli nainen, oli auktoriteetti kodissaan kokoontuvassa seurakunnassa. Kun kristittyjen erilliset kokoontumistilat alkoivat kehittyä 100-luvun lopulla ja 200-luvulla, naisia ei enää tarvittu kokoontumistilojen tarjoajiksi. Samaan aikaan kristittyjen yhteisöjen hierarkia jatkoi kehittymistään yhä keskusjohtoisemmaksi. Näiden kehityskulkujen seurauksena myös kokoontumistiloja seurakunnille tarjonneet naiset menettivät auktoriteettirolinsa kristinuskon valtavrassa.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Aim of This Study

It is general knowledge that early Christ-believers typically gathered at homes. This practice is attested in various early Christian writings¹ and it has also been widely researched.² Another extensively studied subject during the past decades has been early Christian women.³ Despite the vast number of studies about both homes as gathering places and early Christian women, right at the intersection of these phenomena are women hosts of early Christian gatherings, who are yet to receive an extensive analysis.⁴

The purpose of this study is to examine women hosts of early Christian gatherings, their identities, and their roles in early Christian communities with a special focus on the authority they had. Early Christian writings present women hosts Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40), Nympha (Col. 4:15), and Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5). In addition, there are possible women hosts Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), the “elect lady” (2 John), the widow of Epitropus (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2), Tavia (Ign. *Pol.* 8:2), and finally, certain women in the Pastoral Epistles.

The sources referring to women hosts are scarce in quantity and quality. Thus, in order to understand the roles of women hosts, this study first constructs a framework for them in chapters 2 to 4. The framework includes early Christian communities as the setting in which women hosts functioned. In addition, as women hosts of early Christian gatherings were likely to be heads of their households, the conditions under which heading a household was possible for women will be examined. These are followed by a discussion of those non-Christian women who

¹E.g. Mk. 2:1, 3:20, 7:17; Lk. 10:1-9; Acts 1:12-14, 2:46, 5:42, 10:22-48, 12:12; 16:32-34, 16:40; Rom. 16:5, 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2.

²E.g. White 1996a, 103-110; Osiek & Balch 1997, 32-35; Clarke 2000, 160-161; Balch 2004; Trebilco 2004, 94-99; Campbell 2004, 120.

³E.g. Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Castelli 1994; Clark 1998; Kraemer & D’Angelo (eds.) 1999; Matthews 2001b; Osiek & MacDonald 2006; Trevett 2006; Cobb 2009; Cohick 2009.

⁴For typical brief references about women hosts of early Christian gatherings, see e.g. Eisen 2000, 206-207; Campbell 2004, 126-127; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 157-159; Trevett 2006, 217-218; Cohick 2009, 307-308.

functioned in positions similar to women hosts in early Christian gatherings in order to shed light on the cultural expectations they encountered.

After constructing the framework, chapter 5 includes analyses of the sources which mention women hosts and possible women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Finally in chapter 6, all of these pieces will be combined for a study of their authority roles, which will exceed the limitations imposed by the brief primary references. This study will present perspectives from which to consider the authority roles of somewhat enigmatic women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

1.2. Previous Studies about Early Christian Women and Women Hosts among Them

Women in antiquity and early Christian women among them have been studied extensively during the past few decades. In addition, theoretical approaches in studying them have been developed. Although at least prototypes of many of these theoretical insights existed already before the 1980's, they were fully developed in studies from this era.⁵ Accordingly, this overview begins with studies from that decade. It is not a comprehensive history of the research on early Christian women⁶ but presents those approaches that have a direct effect on the present study.

In 1983, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's ground-breaking work *In Memory of Her* was published. In accordance with its subtitle, it is "a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins." Schüssler Fiorenza names her approach "a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation."⁷ She proclaims that biblical texts and the history of their interpretation are steeped in androcentrism and therefore are not to be taken as objective accounts of early Christianity.⁸ Accordingly, she declares that "feminist critical hermeneutics must [...] move from androcentric texts to their social-historical contexts."⁹ What is to be achieved is not only "to claim the contemporary community of women struggling as its locus of revelation" but to "reclaim its foresters as victims *and* subjects participating in patriarchal culture."¹⁰

⁵ See Schüssler Fiorenza (1983, 7-28) for some of the major trends in proto-feminist and feminist biblical hermeneutics from the late 19th century onwards.

⁶ For more conclusive accounts, see e.g. Eisen 2000, 1-21; Clark 2001; Matthews 2001b; Cobb 2009.

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 26-36.

⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 27-29.

⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 29. For Schüssler Fiorenza's examples of this, see e.g. pp. 180-182.

¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 29. Italics hers.

Thus, one major goal of Schüssler Fiorenza's work is to empower her contemporary women by giving them ancient foremothers in their struggles toward gender-equality. At the same time, she insists on acknowledging women's roles in co-creating and accepting the patriarchal structures that oppressed them in ancient times and still continue to do so.¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza sets out to prove that the androcentrism of biblical texts does not reflect the whole truth of early Christianity. According to her, earliest Christianity was in reality marked by a gender-equal ethos and one means to uncover it is exploring social-historical contexts of early Christian texts.¹² The echoes of second-wave feminism are as obvious as her intention to liberate 20th-century women by revealing the truth of Christian beginnings.¹³ Although Schüssler Fiorenza's reconstruction of the earliest Christianity as the "discipleship of equals" has proven to be as problematic as many of those studies excluding women,¹⁴ bringing early Christian women to the fore is an achievement that has had a lasting impact on the research of early Christian women.

In a few instances, Schüssler Fiorenza refers to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. She discusses the textual-critical problems relating to the reference to Nympha (Col. 4:15).¹⁵ She mentions Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts. 12:12), whom she describes as one "in charge of the (or a) house church of Hellenists in Jerusalem." However, there is more discussion about the schism between Hellenists and Hebrews than Mary.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Schüssler Fiorenza briefly lists some women hosts of early Christian gatherings, including also possible hosts. She begins her discussion with non-Christian material, none of which in fact relates to women hosts.¹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza discusses Prisca at length although Prisca is not an independent head of an early Christian gathering as she and the gathering are always named in conjunction with Aquila.¹⁸ She also discusses the "elect lady" of 2 John 1, concluding that there is no decisive reason for interpreting

¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 85-86.

¹² Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 35, 140, 147-151. *In Memory of Her* is presented here as the most significant representative of feminist interpretation in the 1980's. Since this ground-breaking work over 30 years ago, Schüssler Fiorenza has continued to develop influential, nuanced, and up-to-date perspectives on early Christian women. See e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza 2011 & 2013.

¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 31, 350-351.

¹⁴ See Cobb (2009, 381) for criticism relating to Schüssler Fiorenza's "discipleship of equals." See also Beavis 2007.

¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 51.

¹⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 162-166, quotation on p. 166.

¹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 177-178.

¹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 178-184. Cf. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19.

her metaphorically as scholars have typically done.¹⁹ Finally, in her discussion about women in 1 Tim. 5 she mentions “[w]omen presbyters who were heads of households and house churches” who “must have taken for granted that they were also eligible for the function of overseer/bishop.”²⁰ The evidence for this statement is not given. As the scope of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work is significantly wider and the references to women hosts are scattered throughout the book, no cohesive picture of them emerges.²¹

Schüssler Fiorenza’s emphasis on using social-historical contexts and material remains in order to uncover a true picture of early Christian women was shared by other scholars in the 1980’s. This is manifested in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, published in 1985. By this time, it was no novelty to examine early Christian women in their Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts. However, the literary sources typically used to sketch these contexts were criticized for their subjective and biased take on ancient women.²²

The solution to this problem was found in the unearthing of various non-literary ancient sources. There was a firm belief that non-literary sources, including papyri, inscriptions, monuments and art, would correct the biases of literary sources and offer the means to retrieve real ancient women.²³ The enthusiasm felt towards non-literary sources is tangible in statements such as: “[a]rchaeological remains afford an enormous opportunity: they are without male bias” and “although scarcity of sources is a problem, lack of ancient evidence is not the reason for our knowing at present so little about early Christian women’s history.”²⁴

The faith in the corrective nature of non-literary sources was not the end of the story. The studies about early Christian women continued to employ methods and approaches from a wide field of historical and literary studies.²⁵ Two relevant studies of the 1990’s were written by Ross Shepard Kraemer and Karen Jo Torjesen.

¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 248-249.

²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 290.

²¹ For Schüssler Fiorenza (1983), see also my discussion on pp. 35-36 and 165-167.

²² See Brooten 1985, 69-79 for a review.

²³ Brooten 1985, 88-91. Although literary, papyri, inscriptions, etc. were also included in non-literary sources in this categorization.

²⁴ Brooten 1985, 89, 91. Since that time, Brooten like many others, developed a more nuanced approach to ancient sources. See e.g. Brooten 1996, 25, 73.

²⁵ For a review of the development and expansion of studies about early Christian women between 1983 and 1994, see Castelli 1994. For the plurality of feminist early Christianity studies, see esp. pp. 76, 95.

Kraemer mentions various women hosts briefly²⁶ and follows Schüssler Fiorenza in questioning the typical interpretation of the “elect lady” as a metaphor for a Christian community.²⁷ Torjesen argues independently and together with Virginia Burrus that early Christian women could be in leading positions in early Christian communities because women were used to leading the daily life of households.²⁸ Women who were heads of households demonstrate this even more. Their activities do not differ from those of male heads of households.²⁹ Thus, the leadership positions of male and female hosts of early Christian gatherings are similar.³⁰ Although I agree with much of Torjesen’s and Burrus’s conclusions, their argumentation concerning the authority of women hosts greatly relies on ancient writings emphasizing married women’s authority over their households. This diminishes the power of their argument in relation to women hosts who were not married when hosting early Christian gatherings.³¹

In general, the goal of feminist social-historical studies of early Christian women in the 1980’s and early 1990’s had been the reconstruction of the lives of these women through a versatile use of literary and non-literary sources. However, the entrance of post-structuralism into feminist history studies and, subsequently, into feminist early Christian studies cast doubt on the meaningfulness of this endeavor. While there are no clear-cut definitions of post-structuralism, it may be described as “a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which ‘positions’ are established.”³² The post-structural epistemology is based on language. There is no world or reality prior to language, but “what we experience as ‘reality’ is but a socially (i.e., linguistically) constructed artifact or ‘effect’ of the particular language systems we inhabit.”³³

This epistemology is at the core of the “linguistic turn,” which can be defined in the following way: “[it] denotes the historical analysis of representation

²⁶ Kraemer 1992, 135, 138, 176.

²⁷ Kraemer 1992, 176-177. In her more recent work, Kraemer is exceedingly skeptical about retrieving women from ancient texts. Accordingly, Kraemer (2011, 5-11) criticizes her own previous work.

²⁸ Torjesen 1994, 304-307.

²⁹ Torjesen & Burrus 1995, 55-56.

³⁰ Torjesen & Burrus 1995, 76.

³¹ See also my discussion about Torjesen on pp. 165-167.

³² Butler & Scott 1992, xiv.

³³ Spiegel 1990, 60. See also pp. 63-64.

as opposed to the pursuit of a discernible, retrievable historical ‘reality’.”³⁴ The potential threat to feminist historiography was evident. In feminist studies, scholars had long recognized that male-authored ancient literature did not reflect ancient reality without bias. However, the logic of post-structuralism and the linguistic turn resulted in a conclusion that there was no historical reality that could be retrieved, no matter how skillfully various sources and methodologies were utilized. After the linguistic turn, many began to view the search for “real women” impossible.

In her 1994 article, Kathleen Canning discusses three different relationships between feminist history research, post-structuralism and the “linguistic turn.” Firstly, some feminist scholars have felt threatened by post-structuralism because it eradicates the prospect of locating women as subjects, instead of objects, in history as post-structuralism removes the subject from discussion altogether.³⁵ Secondly, feminist post-structuralism seeks to reformulate the concepts of subject and agent, not eliminate them from discussion. Thus, this approach presents a more positive attitude towards post-structuralism among feminists.³⁶ A third relationship between feminist study and post-structuralism is the connection that redefines the categories of feminism and post-structuralism themselves, not only certain concepts within them.³⁷

The encounters between feminist history and post-structuralism became visible in the field of feminist early Christian studies. In her 1998 article, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’,” Elizabeth A. Clark discusses, partly following Canning, the relationship between “feminist historiography” and post-structural approaches. She begins with noting the similar premises of feminist and post-structural approaches. Both of these remove the white male from the focus and make room for alternative perspectives by deconstructing the ideology behind notions once thought to be objective. They both conclude that there is no real objectivity.³⁸

In her article, Clark applies Gabrielle Spiegel’s concept of the “‘social logic’ of a text.”³⁹ Spiegel has formulated this concept by combining and adapting post-

³⁴ Canning 1994, 369. See also pp. 369-370 with notes. Especially interesting is Canning’s notion that as a contradiction to “objective” male history, women’s history was making way for the linguistic turn before Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida, who are typically viewed as its fathers.

³⁵ Canning 1994, 372-373. Clark (1998, 3-5) also describes the same tendency.

³⁶ Canning 1994, 373. An example of this is Scott (1991), see e.g. p. 796. See also Clark 1998, 9.

³⁷ Canning 1994, 373. Poovey (1988) argues for the necessity of this position. See e.g. pp. 60-63.

³⁸ Clark 1998, 2-3.

³⁹ Clark 1998, 14-15.

structural theories and their application to theories of historical research. The concept of social logic means taking into account the specific social situation that has produced a text. In addition, texts themselves are seen both as products and as creators of their social situations. Discerning the social logic of a given text entails the awareness of its inherent ideology. The concept of social logic does not presuppose – as post-structural theories typically do – that language precedes reality. It does acknowledge that “‘history’ as the object of our knowledge is, inevitably, absent and knowable only through textually mediated representations.”⁴⁰ Although history is known “only through textually mediated representations,” it nevertheless is an entity by itself and is not reducible to texts. Thus, Spiegel maintains that “[j]ust as we rightly reject the reduction of literature to a reflection of the world, so also must we reject the absorption of history by textuality.”⁴¹

Clark uses the concept of social logic in approaching women ascetics in late antiquity.⁴² According to her, the stories follow the conventions of romances contemporary to them.⁴³ She demonstrates how “historical facts” have been added to these stories to produce a “reality effect.”⁴⁴ Another feature Clark notes is the way these women are portrayed as engaged with philosophy and as teachers of wisdom. This depiction derives from Hebrew and early Christian traditions, and Plato’s writings that represent wisdom as feminine. Thus, according to Clark, the stories do not tell anything about the real women they claim to portray.⁴⁵ Clark illustrates this by a more detailed analysis of Macrina,⁴⁶ whom she presents as an epitome of how male authors use “women to ‘think with’.”⁴⁷

In addition, Clark outlines what the adaptation to the linguistic turn should entail in the study of early Christian women in general. In a passage that has often

⁴⁰ Spiegel 1990, 85. See also p. 77

⁴¹ Spiegel 1990, 77.

⁴² The women discussed are Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, Macrina and Marcella. See Clark 1998, 14-15.

⁴³ Clark 1998, 16-17.

⁴⁴ Clark 1998, 18-20.

⁴⁵ Clark 1998, 21-26.

⁴⁶ Clark 1998, 27-30.

⁴⁷ Clark (1998, 27) refers to Brown (1988, 153), according to whom: “Throughout this period [when the Apocryphal Acts were written], Christian men used women ‘to think with’ in order to verbalize their own nagging concern with the stance that the Church should take to the world.” The idea of men using women “to think with” comes from Lévi-Strauss (1963). See Matthews (2001b, 50-51) for how e.g. Brown and others following him have misinterpreted Lévi-Strauss’s (1963) original idea by quoting only one part of the passage where he discusses men using women to think with.

been cited she argues that “scholars must move beyond the stage of feminist historiography in which we retrieve another forgotten woman and throw her into the historical mix.”⁴⁸ She implies that the search and recovery of “real” early Christian women should be abandoned. Instead, scholars are to direct their attention to linguistic and social constructions of women and gender in early Christian texts.⁴⁹ Although Clark, following Spiegel, makes allowances for the existence of history separate from text, she argues that historical reconstruction had its place in past feminist historiography but is no longer relevant, as its theoretical base has proven unsound.

Shelly Matthews discusses post-structural approaches to early Christian women in her 2001 article. In a post-structuralist vein, Kate Cooper had earlier argued that searching for real women in the apocryphal acts of the apostles was a lost cause as women in these stories are representations used to highlight the conflicts of authority between men.⁵⁰ Matthews confronts Cooper’s argument that women are mere representations through the example of Thecla. She brings Tertullian’s well-known writing to the fore: “But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name, claim Thecla’s example as a license for women’s teaching and baptizing, let them know that [...] the presbyter who composed that writing [...] was removed from his office.”⁵¹ Thus, Matthews concludes that the story of Thecla is not merely an example of how men use representations of women in their contests over authority “but also, at least in its reception history, it had quite a lot to do with women.”⁵²

According to Matthews, post-structural feminist approaches are important as they contradict the “retrieval of women from historical texts about them.” Post-structural reading turns the attention to how women are used as representations in texts, which by itself is also an important task.⁵³ However, as post-structuralism moves the focus away from “real women” to textual representations of women, it is also a potential threat to feminist historiography.⁵⁴ The enterprise of feminist historiography is not to be reduced to the dissection of women as textual

⁴⁸ Clark 1998, 30.

⁴⁹ Clark 1998, 30-31.

⁵⁰ Matthews 2001b, 47-48, referring to Cooper 1992 & 1996.

⁵¹ Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17.

⁵² Matthews 2001b, 53.

⁵³ Matthews 2001b, 49-50.

⁵⁴ Matthews 2001b, 46.

representations. Although male authors use women as representations, there were also real women. While the objectivity of early Christian texts about early Christian women is not to be accounted for, women appear frequently enough to know that women were essential in shaping early Christianity.⁵⁵

In accordance with these notions, Matthews explicitly argues “for the importance of attempting to reconstruct the history of women in early Christianity while acknowledging the growing consensus among feminist historians that such reconstructions cannot presume mimetic relationships between text and reality.”⁵⁶ Thus, while accepting the post-structural view about the inability of texts to directly correspond to reality, Matthews argues that in the case of early Christian women, there are also varying degrees of discernable reality beyond texts. Many scholars share Matthews’s view about feminist historiography ideally entailing both careful historical reconstruction, and acknowledgment and discernment of representations in texts.⁵⁷

In addition to post-structuralism, another challenge to historical reconstruction appeared in the form of questioning the integrity of its sources. It had long been acknowledged that ancient literary sources, including early Christian writings, do not offer objective accounts of ancient life. However by the 1990’s, the previously held faith in the unbiased nature of non-literary sources had begun to shatter.⁵⁸ In her study of Roman women, Suzanne Dixon reviews the development of the usage of various sources in this field in the latter half of the 20th century. The tendency to view non-literary sources as unbiased sources of antiquity, visible in studies about early Christian women in the 1980’s, also prevailed in the studies of Roman women.⁵⁹ Dixon demonstrates how the notion that Roman literature does not tell about women but about “cultural constructions” also applies to other ancient Roman sources, texts and iconography.⁶⁰ Accordingly, she sees all literary and non-literary sources as representatives of their genre. Non-literary sources, too, are

⁵⁵ Matthews (2001b, 51-52) refers to e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, 79-101).

⁵⁶ Matthews 2001b, 40, see also p. 54.

⁵⁷ See below p. 11 n. 72.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Tulloch 2004, 279.

⁵⁹ Dixon (2001, 11) presents several examples, among them Kampen 1981 and Gardner 1986.

⁶⁰ Dixon 2001, 16-17, see also p. 70.

restricted and shaped by their genres and follow their conventions in the presentation of ancient women.⁶¹

Nevertheless, according to Dixon, there is no such thing as a useless ancient source when studying ancient women. How these sources are used defines their worth.⁶² Accordingly, Dixon's approach entails utilizing simultaneously multiple genres of ancient sources in order to gain various perspectives on women.⁶³ She also has a somewhat positive attitude towards historical reconstruction of ancient women's lives: "[I]s it expecting too much to try and extract 'real life', or real Roman women, from them? I think not. As long as we tread carefully." However, Dixon is not too optimistic about this enterprise as she also asserts: "The best we can hope for are flickering glimpses of women's lives which (if we are honest with ourselves) leave us wondering if we really saw anything there at all."⁶⁴ Thus, the influence of post-structuralism is evident but Dixon does not embrace it in a pure form.

The methodological considerations that Dixon applies to the study of Roman women can be generalized to the studies of other ancient women, including early Christian women. In contrast to Roman women, the material evidence about Christian women of the first and second centuries is largely non-existent. There are no inscriptions that refer to early Christian women from that period.⁶⁵ No letters known to have been written by Christian women from this period have survived. Nor is there art that unanimously refers to first- and second-century Christian women.⁶⁶ Thus, all existing sources are literary depictions of them. The problem this poses has been recognized among scholars. As a result, non-Christian sources have been used in order to reconstruct the lives of early Christian women. Dixon's study reminds us of the importance of critical reading of those non-literary sources that form one basis for researching early Christian women.

⁶¹ Dixon 2001, 18-20, 23-24. According to Dixon, in the field of Classical studies, genres include, for instance, lyric poetry, portraits of the deceased in tombs, papyri recording business transactions and Pliny's letters.

⁶² Dixon 2001, 25.

⁶³ Dixon 2001, 22. See e.g. Dixon's discussion of patronage exercised by women on pp. 89-112, where she approaches the topic through literary representations and various non-literary sources. She notes how women who are involved in politics due to their wealth, receive unfavorable portrayals in literary accounts (pp. 103-104). She then contrasts this picture with e.g. inscriptions and letters that indicate that political patronage was also expected from women.

⁶⁴ Both quotes are in Dixon 2001, 25.

⁶⁵ Although it is possible that some ancient sources known to us refer to women who were Christ-believers, it is not explicated in any of them.

⁶⁶ Cf. Jensen (2000) and Snyder (2003) for the earliest non-literary sources on early Christians.

In her book published in German in 1996 and in English in 2000, Ute Eisen utilizes various sources in order to reconstruct women's "official" roles in early Christianity up to the sixth century. She describes the methodological cautiousness in using literary and non-literary sources in the following way: "Yet we must maintain that inscriptions are no more an immediate reflection of the reality of ancient life than are literary sources. If historical facts are derived from inscriptions we must proceed just as cautiously as we would in the analysis of literary sources. [...] Nevertheless, the inscriptions, and with them the papyri, to the extent they can be stripped of their formulaic character, remain unique testimonies to daily life."⁶⁷ Eisen also refers to women hosts of early Christian gatherings but as her focus is on women a few centuries later, these remarks remain brief.⁶⁸

In the 21st century, women hosts of early Christian gatherings have still remained largely uncovered. Perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of women in early Christian domestic settings is Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald's *A Woman's Place*, published in 2006. Osiek and MacDonald discuss women hosts of early Christian gatherings on more pages than many before them, bringing to the fore also the social-historical contexts of these women. However, a comprehensive discussion about women hosts is not provided.⁶⁹ In a similar vein, other studies about early Christian women written in the 21st century leave women hosts of early Christian gatherings largely untouched.⁷⁰

In recent studies, many scholars of early Christian women have followed the lead of Elizabeth Clark in emphasizing the constructions of gender in early Christian texts.⁷¹ In a manner similar to Eisen and Matthews, other 21st-century scholars share a somewhat optimistic stance towards the search for historical early Christian women, not merely constructions about them.⁷² As virtually every scholar attests, the faith in achieving the final say in the reconstruction of lives of early Christian women has vanished. Even the most careful scrutiny of sources offers

⁶⁷ Eisen 2000, 19-20. See also pp. 223-224.

⁶⁸ Eisen 2000, 206-207.

⁶⁹ Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 5, 11-12, 157-159, 214-215, 235-236

⁷⁰ See the brief remarks in Trevett 2006, 217-218; Cohick 2009, 307-308.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Clark 2001, 2004; Hornsby 2006.

⁷² With varying emphases, but still recognizing the need for careful reading of literary and non-literary sources about women and the resulting possibility of reconstructing the lives of early Christian women to some extent. See e.g. Tulloch 2004, 277-280; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 244-245, 249-250; Denzey 2007, xv-xvii, xix-xx; Cobb 2009, 387-391; Cohick 2009, 20-21, 26-27.

only more or less plausible alternatives of the lives of early Christian women, not the definite truth about them.⁷³

Still, one can search for where “the mute are pushing through the fabric of the text”⁷⁴ which, in practice, means for instance imagining what it is about women that is not told in ancient texts or how they would have responded to certain texts.⁷⁵ Another way of searching for “the mute pushing through the fabric of the text” is identifying gaps and distortions between literary presentations of early Christian women and their reality. As their reality is not known, neither is the size and shape of the gaps. This is also manifested in the representations of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. They are referred to briefly and vaguely. Thus, one central presupposition of this study is that while the research of women hosts of early Christian gatherings can no longer hope to achieve objective reconstructions of the lives of these women, there is still both the demand and the methodological justification for analyses of literary representations of women hosts and traces of their possible historical settings.

1.3. The Concept of Authority

This study examines women hosts of early Christian gatherings with a special focus on their authority. Authority has sometimes been discussed interchangeably with power and social power.⁷⁶ Others separate authority and power so that authority means “the right to influence others” whereas power is “the ability to do so.”⁷⁷ Social power may be defined as “relative control over another’s valued outcomes” depending on the social setting.⁷⁸ These valued outcomes may be physical (health and safety), economic (material wellbeing), or social (e.g. belonging; essential to survival).⁷⁹ Some formulations of authority, or social power, emphasize the willingness of those potentially under authority to submit to the authority figure due

⁷³ See also Kartzow 2009, 26-27. Hornsby (2006) is one example of using the insights of post-modern approaches to construct multiple alternative interpretations for Luke’s portrayal of a woman who anoints Jesus’s feet. See esp. p. 86.

⁷⁴ Gold 1993, 84. Cited in Matthews 2001b, 53.

⁷⁵ Matthews 2001, 53; Cobb 2009, 389.

⁷⁶ E.g. Fiske & Berdahl (2007, 679) write about ‘power’ when discussing Weber’s concept of authority.

⁷⁷ Heywood 2015, 118, 122.

⁷⁸ Fiske & Berdahl 2007, 680.

⁷⁹ Fiske & Berdahl 2007, 678-680. Quotation from p. 679.

to the authority figure's social or spiritual status or personal characteristics.⁸⁰ In a way, the concept of social power encompasses both power and authority while it highlights also the social aspect of the exercise of power.

These definitions of authority, power and social power can all be seen as different aspects of what is meant by authority in this study. It refers to social power and influence, which is acknowledged and accepted by those under authority. Authority is context-specific; it occurs in certain contexts in relation to certain people. A person does not necessarily have authority in all areas of his or her life although he or she might be an acknowledged authority in some contexts. Accordingly, it is not an institutionalized position which one person either has or has not.

Early Christian authority discussed in this study does not entail formal leadership roles.⁸¹ This is due to the conditions where authority was negotiated among early Christ-believers. This study is located in the space and time of earliest Christianity in the first century and the first half of the second century. Although authority and leadership started to develop into more structural roles in the first or second century,⁸² most likely in different ways in different places, there were still hosts of early Christian gatherings whose influence could not be overlooked.

Accordingly, if women hosts were authorities, it was because in certain contexts in certain relationships women hosts as heads of households would control the valued outcomes (physical safety, material wellbeing, belonging to a social group) of those belonging to their early Christian communities. In addition, those potentially under women hosts' authority would deem them in control of these outcomes and thus, as authorities. As the definition of authority indicates, it bears no evaluation of whether one uses his or her authority in a positive or negative way. It is self-evident that every human being is capable of using his or her potential authority for good or for bad. There is no reason to surmise that women hosts would have been an exception. However, the evidence does not allow for examining the extent to which different women hosts used their authority in positive or negative

⁸⁰ Weber 1978, 946; Weber 1947, 327, 341-373, 382; Tyler 2006, 376-384; Morselli & Passini 2011, 294-297. One example of authority due to social status is the head of a household (Weber 1947, 346). More recently, Fiske & Berdahl (2007, 682-683) have discussed sources of social power/authority.

⁸¹ Formal leaders typically have authority, but they are not within the scope of this study.

⁸² See my discussion on pp. 34-39.

ways. Moreover, the evaluation of what is positive or negative is never an objective one but always depends on the perspective of those making the evaluation.⁸³

1.4. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches and the Outline of this Study

References to women hosts of early Christian gatherings are scarce in their number and information. Because of these limitations, this study first constructs a framework for women hosts by using ancient literary and non-literary, Christian and non-Christian sources. The use of ancient source materials in this study is based on a conviction that these sources contribute to an understanding of women hosts in general and, specifically, of the authority they might have had. However, in accordance with both the feminist and post-structural approaches presented above, these sources are not treated as objective accounts of ancient life.

The studies about early Christian women have utilized both post-structural and social-historical approaches, sometimes with conflicting conclusions. Nevertheless, their insights can also complement each other.⁸⁴ That is the starting point of this study. Theoretically, it will use both social-historical and post-structuralist approaches in charting the diversity of women hosts and their representations, of the settings where they functioned, and of the possible roles that Greco-Roman cultures offered women.

This study is designed around factors that could affect the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings either positively or negatively. The starting point is that there were real women in real early Christian communities. As authority is defined as a position that those under authority are willing to acknowledge, because the authority figure controls certain valued outcomes,⁸⁵ the factors examined include those that shed light on whether women hosts would be perceived as authorities by those who would have been under their authority. The factors have been selected on the basis of previous studies and theories that are explicated in chapters 2, 3 and 4 when discussing each of them. It will be hypothesized that these factors affect the quality and quantity of the authority

⁸³ See e.g. my discussion about women in the Pastorals in chapter 5. It illustrates that what the author deems as deviant e.g. in relation to “false” teachers is probably natural for certain women.

⁸⁴ Matthews 2001b, 46-53.

⁸⁵ Fiske & Berdahl 2007, 680.

granted women hosts. These factors include the domestic setting where women hosts functioned, the general position of hosts of early Christian gatherings, models provided by contemporary non-Christian women as household heads and benefactors, and ideals and representations of women and their proper roles. In addition, the interpretation of women hosts' authority would have a two-way relationship to the authority of women hosts. While the authority's interpretations would affect the actual authority, the actual authority would also have an effect on its interpretation. All of these factors are illustrated in figure 1.

This approach parallels the social-historical perspective in charting the factors that affected the authority of women hosts while at the same time it uses insights from post-structuralism in its interpretation of various sources. The setting of women hosts is not reconstructed in a definite manner. Concurring with theoretical notions about the biased and genre-restricted nature of all literary and non-literary sources,⁸⁶ none of them are viewed as objective depictions of women. Nevertheless, they provide representations of early Christianity or gender in antiquity and to some extent, at least references to real early Christian communities and women.

Chapter 5 focuses on the texts about women hosts of early Christian gatherings in their possible historical settings and as literary representations in their textual contexts. In addition to historical analysis, this chapter will utilize post-structural insights that emphasize the nature of the representations of women in texts. These representations show how desirable behaviors of women in general and women hosts in particular were seen and constructed by male authors.

The integration of post-structural and social-historical approaches into the study of women hosts of early Christian gatherings are featured especially in chapter 6. The factors that affected the authority of women hosts will be discussed on two levels. Firstly, on the level of historical women, as even with the insight from post-structuralism, there undeniably were real women who hosted early Christian gatherings. Secondly, women hosts' authority will be discussed on the level of representations. Chapter 6 will conclude with a brief discussion about later developments in relation to women hosts.

⁸⁶ E.g. Dixon, 2001. See my discussion on pp. 5-12.

I will seek to show that because of the household and association contexts of early Christianity, women could hold prominent roles that were deemed patriarchal but could nevertheless be occupied also by women who were in suitable positions. One caveat of this study is thus evident. By focusing on women hosts, the focus is on early Christian women who were at least relatively prominent in their social networks. Self-evidently, women hosts compose only a fraction of all early Christian women. Women hosts could use or misuse their authority on other early Christian women although there are no narratives left to recount this. In a way, this study then contributes to the “structures of domination,” which should be deconstructed wherever possible.⁸⁷ To focus on women hosts of early Christian gatherings and, at the same time, deconstruct structures of domination is a task, which is not taken up in this study. It must be stated at the outset that women hosts benefited from “structures of domination” as will be shown in chapter 6. They gained their authority because of socioeconomic hierarchy, but it does not mean that these structures are desirable. However, they were a reality in the world of early Christians.

The extent of the diversity and the unknown in the lives of women hosts prevents us from gaining definite answers, even with the most extensive reconstruction of their social-historical setting. The “grand narrative” of women hosts of early Christian gatherings is impossible to reconstruct.⁸⁸ On the other hand, in addition to researching textual representations of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, there are more and less plausible reconstructions of them. This notion is based on the simple fact that there were real women, no matter how unattainable they are to us today. Likewise, there are more and less plausible reconstructions of non-Christian ancient women and of early Christianity and its social organization. On these grounds, it would be too pessimistic not to even aim at reconstructing the possible lives, roles, and positions of women hosts. Thus, adjusting women hosts within these contexts is also one task of this study.

My aim is to write women hosts into the narratives of Christian beginnings more fully than has been done before. In doing so, my wish is to correct a part of

⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza 2009, 1-23.

⁸⁸ See also Aichele et al. (2009) for the disappearance of grand narratives in early Christian studies.

the pervasive androcentrism of many early Christian writings⁸⁹ and scholarly works that continue the tradition of androcentrism and in so doing, contribute to the continuing invisibility of early Christian women, women hosts among them. When using also non-Christian sources, I will demonstrate how women could be full participants in many of the functions and activities that have sometimes been understood as prohibited to women. In a similar vein, I will demonstrate how the same has been the case with women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Bringing women hosts back into the narrative of Christian origins is not an attempt to search for something that was not there in the first place. Instead, it shows that women hosts could be essential in the formation of early Christianity, and in certain contexts, they were early Christian authorities.

1.5. The Study Design

Taking into account the context-specific nature of authority, this study examines factors that could affect the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. These factors are presented in figure 1. They are the following:

- 1) the domestic setting of early Christian gatherings
- 2) the position of hosts in general
- 3) the models of non-Christian women in comparable positions
- 4) the ideals of women and their proper roles
- 5) the representations of women who defy proper roles
- 6) the interpretation of the authority of women hosts (a two-way relationship with the authority of women hosts)

⁸⁹ Which results from the conventions of the time of their writing, not from specific hostility towards women.

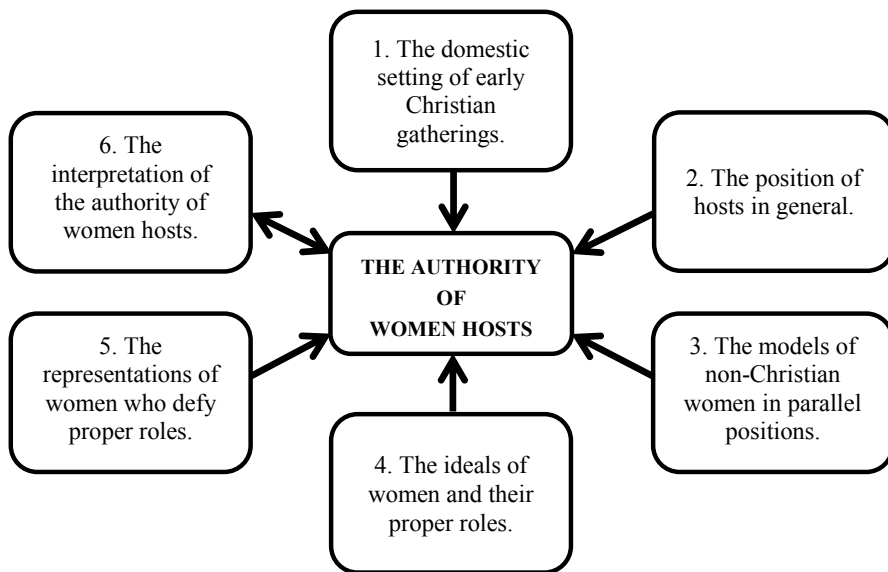


FIGURE 1. The study design

2. Early Christian Communities

2.1. Introduction

There is not much certain information about women hosts of early Christian gatherings. However, one of the rare facts is that they functioned within early Christian communities that gathered at homes. In this chapter, the characteristics of early Christian communities that affected the authority of women hosts are discussed.

In this study, early Christian gatherings are discussed as the main social setting where women hosts could exercise their authority. The choice of the term ‘early Christian gathering’ is a deliberate one.¹ While it has been customary to translate ἐκκλησία as a church,² the term is anachronistic, especially when used of first-century gatherings.³ The meaning of ἐκκλησία is originally an assembly of a group of people. It does not carry a connotation of the place where people assemble.⁴ To call early Christian gatherings “churches” directs one’s mind to buildings and structures. However, the essential characteristic of an early Christian gathering (ἐκκλησία) is the group of people who assemble.⁵ It is also the social group of ἐκκλησία where women hosts would have authority. Other plausible translations are thus an assembly or a community of believers.⁶

Not all groups of Christ-believers necessarily convened at homes⁷ or had a host who would have provided for the gatherings materially. However, as the focus of this study is on gatherings that did take place at homes and did have hosts, the

¹ Used also by Alikin (2010 *passim.*), Dunn (2010, 2, 57); McGowan (2014, *passim.*).

² See, e.g. Osiek & Balch 1997; Osiek & MacDonald 2006.

³ Note, however, that in accordance with NRSV (the translation used in this study), the translation of ἐκκλησία in early Christian texts used in this work is typically “church.” Anachronistic as it may be, it is also convenient to use in translations.

⁴ LSJ, ἐκκλησία. See also Sessa’s (2009, 96-108) similar arguments in opposing the Latin term *domus ecclesia*.

⁵ Typical phrase in early Christian texts is τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς / αὐτῶν / σου ἐκκλησίαν (Col. 4:15; Rom. 16:5; Philem. 1) which entails also the place of gathering. Domestic spaces are discussed later in this chapter.

⁶ For instance, Phoebe is not a deacon of Cenchrea’s gathering but of the group of believers in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1).

⁷ Adams (2014) has recently explored the variety of early Christian meeting places (esp. pp. 135-197). Although he claims to challenge the consensus that most early Christian gathered at homes during the first centuries, his conclusion is to prefer “a wider perspective, which acknowledges the importance of houses as Christian meeting places during this period but insists that Christian groups could plausibly have met in a variety of other available places too” (p. 200).

diverse forms and places of gathering are discussed only to the extent that they are classified as gatherings in domestic space.

To shed light on this setting, the discussion is begun with brief overviews of early Christian texts that depict gatherings at homes and the socioeconomic status of early Christ-believers. Next, ancient domestic spaces and the ancient models of early Christian communities are discussed. This is directly relevant with regard to both the non-Christian comparative sources used and for the understanding of women hosts. Next, hosts will be discussed in the framework of authority negotiation between alternative authority figures. Finally, common meals will be discussed as this was one typical form of early Christian gatherings.

2.2. Christ-Believers Gathering at Homes

In addition to texts about women hosts, early Christian writings illustrate also elsewhere that home gatherings were typical. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches people in his own home (e.g. Mk. 2:1; 3:20; 7:17).⁸ The gospels also portray Jesus and his disciples staying at their sympathizers' homes (Matt. 10:11-4; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-7). These depictions are partly rooted in the reality where not all Jesus-followers first sold what they owned and then followed him (Mark 10:21) but maintained at least parts of their previous life-style even as Christ-believers. Acts portray believers gathering at homes after Jesus's death in several passages (e.g. 1:12-14, 2:46, 5:42, 10:22-48, 12:12, 16:14-15, 16:32-34, 16:40, 17:5-9). Also Paul's letters, the earliest extant Christian writings known, testify to home gatherings in Christian communities. For instance, Prisca and Aquila host Christian gatherings in Rome and Ephesus (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), Gaius in Corinth (Rom. 16:23) and Philemon possibly in Colossae (Philem. 2).⁹ The same theme is visible in John's letters (2 and 3 John). In addition to specific homes, in Acts 1:13 believers are presented gathering shortly after Jesus's death in a room upstairs (ὕπερῶον), where they are also staying in Jerusalem. Perhaps Luke¹⁰ envisions this as the same upstairs room (ἀνάγαιον) where the Last Supper takes place (Luke 23:12-14). Acts

⁸ Osiek & Balch 1997, 32.

⁹ Ryan (2009, 178-179) notes that although Philemon is traditionally located in Colossae, it is not certain whether Philemon lived there or elsewhere in the area of the Lycus River valley.

¹⁰ While calling the author of Luke-Acts conventionally Luke for clarity's sake, I do not mean to imply anything about his actual identity.

20:8 recounts a meeting in Troas in a room upstairs (ὕπερῶον). It is not further identified but the context implies that Paul and his companions are also staying in this room while in Troas (Acts 20:6-11).¹¹

There is literary evidence of convening at homes still in the second century C.E. in various parts of the Roman Empire.¹² In the martyrdom of Justin, dating perhaps from the 160's C.E., Justin is portrayed telling how some Christ-believers meet where he lives, in the upstairs part of a building where there are baths in Rome.¹³ The description of the place where Justin is staying indicates a setting in an apartment building (*insula*).¹⁴ In the story, Justin also communicates that Christ-believers meet “wherever is chosen and it is possible for each one” and implies that it is not possible for all of them to gather in the same place because of the great number of believers.¹⁵ In addition, the apocryphal acts of the apostles depict Christ-believers gathering at homes.¹⁶

2.3. The Socioeconomic Status of Christ-Believers

The perception of homes where Christ-believers gathered is inseparably connected with their socioeconomic status. The concept of socioeconomic status exceeds “social class” by including components of income, education, profession, ancestry and gender.¹⁷ As one’s socioeconomic status is determined by all these factors, one could belong to the lower socioeconomic strata for various reasons in antiquity.¹⁸

¹¹ E.g. Osiek & Balch (1997, 34) and Osiek (2002, 95) suggest that this space was not a home of a Christ-believer.

¹² E.g. 2 and 3 John, *Acts of Justin and Companions* 3.1-4. See also White 1996a, 110.

¹³ *Acts of Justin and Companions* 3.3. The text probably dates from the 160's C.E.

¹⁴ White 1996a, 110; Billings 2011, 563-564.

¹⁵ *Acts of Justin and Companions* 3.1.

¹⁶ *Acts of Peter* 7-8, 19; *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 5-7; *Acts of Thomas*, 131. See Billings 2011, 548 n. 14. While these writings tell about the time of the apostles, they date from the second and third centuries C.E.

¹⁷ See Grusky & Ku 2008, 4-7. Cf. also Crompton 2008, 49-70 for a discussion of some of the components and the history of their study. Hemelrijk (2004, 7-14) discusses ancient Roman women’s lower status in comparison to men in an otherwise similar socioeconomic position. Braun (2002) discusses women’s perceived inferiority in early Christianity.

¹⁸ Theissen 2001, 71-75; Harland 2003, 52. Cf. Stegemann & Stegemann (1999, 57-61, 65-74, 77-78, 85-92), who define the elite as members of the senatorial class, equestrians and “provincial” and “urban aristocracy.” The elite consisted of about 1-5 % of the population of the Roman Empire, while everyone else belonged to the lower socioeconomic classes. Both the elite and the non-elite strata were very heterogeneous groups of people. Generally speaking, non-elite people living in cities were better off than rural non-elite people.

For instance, manumitted slaves could never belong to the highest socioeconomic strata or elite because of their descent while they could be very wealthy.¹⁹

The socioeconomic status of early Christ-believers has been discussed in numerous studies. One of the grimmest depictions is sketched by Justin J. Meggitt.²⁰ Meggitt's thesis is that Christ-believers in the first-century Pauline communities were as destitute as the rest of the 99 % majority of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire²¹ who "could expect little more from life than abject poverty."²² Meggitt points out, for example, that slave ownership – which has often been interpreted as a sign of the wealth of some Christ-believers – was not the privilege of the wealthy in antiquity.²³

Also those who do not share Meggitt's view of the deprived state of Christ-believers nevertheless agree that their majority belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata, not to the elite.²⁴ Close to Meggitt's conclusions is Steven J. Friesen, who constructs a seven-fold poverty scale of antiquity with a range from "below subsistence level" to "imperial elites." He concludes that the probable position of many Christ-believers mentioned in Paul's letters on this scale is near, at or below subsistence level.²⁵ Also Gerd Theissen – who has been criticized for giving too positive a picture of the socioeconomic status of early Christ-believers²⁶ – sketches a picture where the majority of early Christ-believers belong to the lower socioeconomic strata and perhaps some to the elite.²⁷

¹⁹ This is conveyed, for instance, in epitaphs which were dedicated to freedwomen and freedmen. Many epitaphs of people from the lower classes that have been preserved were made for former slaves whereas, not surprisingly, significantly less epitaphs for free non-wealthy people have been found. Epitaphs were a significant part of public presentation and they were meant to emphasize oneself and one's family and friends. Not a few former slaves seem to have been in a position where it was financially possible and appropriate to have epitaphs. There were also women among them. Cf. Saller 2001, 108-109; Van Abbema 2008, 15, 21 n. 7.

²⁰ Meggitt 1998.

²¹ Meggitt 1998, e.g. p. 75, 99, 153, 179.

²² Meggitt 1998, 50. For critical responses towards Meggitt's thesis, see e.g. Theissen (2001) and Martin (2001). Meggitt (2001) also responds to this criticism.

²³ Meggitt 1998, 129-132. See also Pomeroy 1995, 191; Trebilco 2004, 408-409. The relevant passages include e.g. Philem. 15-16; 1 Tim. 6:2; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1.

²⁴ According to Meeks (1983, 73), early Christ-believers were typically free artisans or small traders. Theissen 2004, 69 mentions this to be the situation in Corinth in Paul's time. See also Theissen 2001, 75: "There should be no doubt that the majority of the Christians were common and low people." Cf. also Horrell 2004, 360.

²⁵ Friesen (2004, 341-347) defines the points of the poverty scale and then applies it to named individuals in Paul's letters (pp. 348-358). One of Friesen's respondents is Oakes (2004), who calls for a multi-dimensional assessment instead of Friesen's one-dimensional poverty scale.

²⁶ E.g. Meggitt 1998, 99-100 and *passim*; Friesen 2004, 33

²⁷ Theissen 2001, 72-75; 2004, 69.

Although the issue has been heatedly debated at times, it is somewhat safe to state that the Jesus-movement largely became an urban phenomenon after its beginning. In addition, until the end of the second century, Christ-believers came from various socioeconomic backgrounds with the exception of the highest elite.²⁸ The diversity of the earliest Christian communities is also manifested in early Christian writings. For instance, the membership profiles of Pauline communities could vary widely despite these communities being established within a relatively short period of time.²⁹

2.4. Domestic Spaces

The Greek terms for houses and households are οἶκος and οἰκία. Both words have several meanings. Οἶκος can denote a house, any dwelling-space, room, public meeting hall, home, the property of a household and family.³⁰ Οἰκία has similar connotations, the most common ones including a house, building, home, household and family.³¹ Thus, the meanings of both of these words can be divided into two primary categories: a concrete home (house or an apartment) and members of a household. In ancient Greek texts, the variety of meanings of οἶκος and οἰκία buildings ranges from rented rooms to grand Roman-style houses.³² Also the number of members of households could vary from one to many.³³ Thus, neither of the words indicates the wealth of a house or a household in question. Their usage in early Christian writings is similar when authors write about households headed either by women or by men.³⁴

²⁸ See Meeks 1983, 55-73; Stegemann & Stegemann 1999, 288-316.

²⁹ Cf. Barclay (1992) for differences between Thessalonian and Corinthian communities and Clarke (2000, 173-208) for various leadership models and membership mainly in Paul's authentic letters.

³⁰ LSJ, οἶκος.

³¹ LSJ, οἰκία.

³² See Horrell (2004, 349-360) for a compilation of ancient sources.

³³ E.g. BGU XI 2089; SB XXIV 16207. See my discussion on pp. 44-45, 64. See also Meggitt (1998, 129 n. 271), who, referring to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 8.635, points out that οἶκος could consist of only two people. Relying on Meggitt, Trebilco (2004, 408-409) makes the same point.

³⁴ In Luke-Acts, οἶκος means a house or home in Luke 1:23, 1:40, 1:56, 5:24-25, 7:10, 7:36, 8:39, 8:41, 14:1, 14:23, 15:6, 16:4, 18:14, 19:5 and Acts 2:2, 2:46, 5:42, 8:3, 10:22, 10:30, 11:12-13, 16:34, 19:16, 20:20, 21:8. Οἶκος means a family or people of a household in Luke 1:27, 1:33, 1:69, 2:4 and Acts 2:36, 7:42, 10:2, 11:14, 16:31, 18:8. Οἶκος also occurs in contexts where the two connotations seem to be conflated in Luke 9:61, 10:5, 12:52, 16:27, 19:9 and Acts 7:10, 7:20. On the other hand, οἰκία denotes solely a concrete house or home in Luke-Acts, not people of a household or a family: Luke 4:38, 5:29, 6:48-49, 7:6, 7:37, 7:44, 8:27, 8:51, 9:4, 10:5, 10:7, 10:38, 15:8, 15:25, 17:31, 18:29, 20:47, 22:10-11, 22:54 and Acts 4:34, 9:11, 9:17, 10:6, 10:17, 10:32, 11:11, 16:32, 17:5, 18:7. In Colossians, Nympha's οἶκος is the only one mentioned. In the letters of

As early Christianity developed within the Roman Empire, the Latin terminology pertaining to domestic space has guided perceptions about the settings where Christ-believers gathered. Domestic spaces are typically referred to with the words *domus* and *insula*. Typically, *domus* is interpreted as a self-standing house with at least relative wealth, whereas *insula* means an apartment house.³⁵ However, the archaeological evidence shows that *domus* included shops and other non-domestic spaces. Some of these spaces as well as parts of domestic space could be rented out, which further blurs the line between *domus* and *insula*.³⁶ In addition, *domus* and *insulae* were not situated in different areas of cities but stood side by side in various locales.³⁷ *Insula* could also mean a city block, which would comprise many building units.³⁸ Thus, it is unnecessary to assume that the difference between a Roman *domus* and a Roman *insula* would have been drastic.

Discussions concerning early Christian women and their possible authority in their communities has relied heavily on the notion of a Roman house as a private space.³⁹ However, in domestic spaces, many people moved around, in addition to those who actually lived in those houses. House doors were open to uninvited visitors in a manner different from the modern western custom. Women's use of these spaces was not restricted.⁴⁰ In homes, people were frequently exposed to outsiders. In addition, household worship often took place in more public parts of houses.⁴¹ Thus, homes where early Christian gatherings took place were not unconditionally private spaces and, as a result, nor were the actual gatherings private. Early Christian communities that gathered at homes can be described as being located at "the crossroads between public and private."⁴²

In various parts of the Greek East and the Roman West, domestic spaces were typically used for gatherings of new religious and ethnic associations. In time,

Ignatius, οἶκος occurs once in addition to Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2 and Ign. *Pol.* 8:2. Also this passage (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:1) is in line with other Ignatian usages of οἶκος; it refers to people who belong to a household. See also Elliott 1981, 188, 251-252 n. 110, 111, 112.

³⁵ Storey 2004, 47.

³⁶ Balch (2008, 43-44) argues this specifically on the basis of studies by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. See e.g. Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 67-89, 103; 2003, 4, 11-14.

³⁷ Wallace-Hadrill 2003, 12-14; Balch 2008, 51-52.

³⁸ Storey 2004, 47.

³⁹ E.g. Torjesen & Burrus 1995. See my discussion about the ideals of women belonging to the private sphere and men to the public sphere in chapter 6.5.

⁴⁰ For the development of sharper distinctions between public and private spheres in recent centuries, see Grahame 1997, 138-140. See also Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 5, 45, 47; Osiek & Balch 1997, 24-25; Balch 2008, 43.

⁴¹ Balch 2004, 37-38.

⁴² Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 3-4. See also MacDonald 1996, 30-32.

when associations started to acquire specific meeting places, these were often spaces remodeled from domestic buildings.⁴³ *Mithraea* and synagogues, for instance, were often refurbished homes.⁴⁴ Thus, gathering at homes was not an early Christian innovation but was rooted in various cultural contexts of early Christianity.

It used to be typical to assume that early Christians convened in Roman houses (*domus*) which had multiple rooms, an open space in the middle (*atrium*) and separate dining room (*triclinium*) where participants reclined for the meal.⁴⁵ It was then estimated that in these houses, it was possible that a maximum of 30-50 people could gather at the same time. This number was consequently deduced as the maximum number of Christ-believers gathering in one house.⁴⁶ As the knowledge of the variety of homes and households at the beginning of the Common Era has increased, more modest settings for early Christian gatherings have been envisaged.

Horrell describes the archaeological remains and the reconstruction of Corinthian houses that could have been a setting for early Christian gatherings taking place in upstairs rooms. This is “entirely imaginative,” as Horrell admits. However, these kinds of settings are more likely to have been gathering spaces than spacious villas among first-century Christ-believers.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, Edward Adams argues that Christ-believers often gathered in rented spaces. According to him, Paul’s description of Corinthian communal meals (1 Cor. 11:33-34) implies that Corinthian Christ-believers did not gather at a home of a believer but possibly at a rented space.⁴⁸ Possibly a patron would have paid for the possible rent.

Although the development from domestic meeting space to specific church buildings did not happen uniformly or similarly in different cities, towns and regions, it is generally thought that homes were typical gatherings spaces until the

⁴³ White 1996a, 39-44 presents several examples. Among them are the temples of Adonis, Zeus Theos and Gadde at Dura-Europos. All three were initially domestic buildings that were gradually adapted into temples by the late 2nd century C.E. For the Roman West, see Billings 2011, 562.

⁴⁴ White 1996a, 48-62; Billings 2011, 563.

⁴⁵ Murphy-O’Connor 1983, 153-161. Among others, Fee (1987, 533-534) and Osiek & Balch (1997, 16-17, 201-203) accept a Roman house as a typical setting for the meeting of early Christian groups. For even bigger numbers, see Balch (2008, 43, 47). For the archaeological evidence, see Wallace-Hadrill (1994, 103). But see also Grahame (1997, 138-140) for critical remarks on Wallace-Hadrill.

⁴⁶ Murphy-O’Connor 1983, 156-158; Theissen 2001, 83.

⁴⁷ Horrell 2004, 360-369, quotation from p. 368.

⁴⁸ Adams 2012, 27-35; 2014, 30.

latter half of the second century.⁴⁹ By then, some homes that had also served as Christian gathering places began to be remodeled into buildings specifically dedicated to Christian worship.⁵⁰ In addition, some buildings were perhaps purchased for the use of Christian communities as these communities started to gain institutional wealth.⁵¹ The earliest known remains of a church building date from 240-241 C.E. and are located at Dura-Europos. At this time, a building that had initially been a home was renovated exclusively for Christian usage.⁵²

It is not certain or even probable that the building at Dura-Europos was the first building that was remodeled for exclusive Christian usage.⁵³ For instance, *Edessene Chronicle* recounts that a flood in 201 C.E. in Edessa destroyed a building that is described as “the temple of the church of the Christians.” Possibly, this was a gathering space which was not in domestic use.⁵⁴ On the other hand, for instance in Ephesus, there are very early literary attestations of Christian presence,⁵⁵ but the earliest known building dedicated specifically for Christian usage dates from the fourth century.⁵⁶ Although this may be only an example of a haphazard survival of archeological remains, it also serves as a reminder that the development of Christian gathering spaces was neither straightforward nor concurrent in various locales of early Christianity.

Still in later centuries, apartment buildings were converted into Christian worship spaces. One of them is under the basilica of *SS. Giovanni e Paolo* in Rome. In the second century C.E., there had been at least four separate houses, apparently followed by a construction of an apartment building with shops. The buildings underwent several changes throughout the years. There are possible signs of Christian usage in some of the spaces from the late third century. In the fourth-century structures, the signs are uncontested. By the beginning of the fifth century, the whole complex had been converted into a Christian basilica, still in use today.⁵⁷ Although this building is on the whole later than the meetings of Christ-believers

⁴⁹ White 1996a, 103-110.

⁵⁰ White (1996a, 108-109) offers the plans of some of these buildings. See also White 1996a, 110, 120-122; Osiek & Balch 1997, 35; Lampe 2003, 366.

⁵¹ White 1996a, 111-123; Osiek & Balch 1997, 35; Billings 2011, 544-545, 562-565.

⁵² Osiek & Balch 1997, 35; White 1996a, 119.

⁵³ White 1996a, 110.

⁵⁴ For the original text of *Chronicle*, see White 1996b, 102. Cf. also White 1996a, 118.

⁵⁵ E.g. 1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 18:19-19:20; Rev. 2:1-7; Eph. (deutero-Pauline but it dates from the 1st c.)

⁵⁶ Billings 2011, 546-547.

⁵⁷ White (1996b, 209-218) describes the many phases of the building complex, including also floor plans. See also Billings 2011, 564-565.

in the scope of this study, it serves as an example of a domestic space being transformed into a worship place.

The variety of possible domestic gathering spaces of early Christ-believers indicates that it is not plausible to assume that there was simply one typical type of home where early Christians gathered. The considerations of the socioeconomic status of early Christ-believers imply the unlikelihood of many or even any of them convening in wealthy Roman villas. Homes in various parts of the Greco-Roman cultural sphere varied both regionally and within distinct locations, and thus it is probable that also the homes where Christ-believers convened were diverse.⁵⁸

2.5. Models of Early Christian Communities: Households, Associations and Synagogues

It has been suggested that in addition to concrete gathering spaces being similar to their non-Christian counterparts, Christ-believers adopted social structures from their non-Christian surroundings, specifically from voluntary associations, synagogues and households.⁵⁹ Accordingly, this study utilizes several non-Christian sources that pertain to associations, synagogues and households. These sources concern women in religious associations and the contents of association meetings, their meals and convening places. The similar characteristics of early Christian gatherings and voluntary associations justify using these analogies. Thus, these similarities will be discussed next.

In antiquity, belonging to a voluntary association was often a given. People from lower socioeconomic strata gained social and economic security through membership in associations.⁶⁰ One of the most impressive recent efforts to integrate early Christian communities within the framework of ancient voluntary associations is Philip A. Harland's study, with its overarching argument that early Christian communities were voluntary associations by nature.⁶¹

⁵⁸ White 1996a, 107; Horrell 2004, 349-360; Bergmann 2012, 228-230.

⁵⁹ Ascough 2003; Harland 2003.

⁶⁰ However, belonging to lower socioeconomic strata did not automatically designate poverty as non-elite people were a heterogeneous group with a wide range of wealth and social status. For a more extensive discussion of socioeconomic strata in antiquity, see pp. 21-23 of the present study. Cf. also Osiek & Balch 1997, 95; Harland 2003, 52.

⁶¹ Harland 2003.

Until Harland's study, voluntary associations had usually been divided into three categories: professional, religious and funerary associations.⁶² While Harland agrees on these being the main functions of associations, he argues that associations did not develop on the basis of these functions. Instead, various associations had religious,⁶³ social⁶⁴ and burial functions.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Harland proposes categorizing associations in accordance with the social networks that produced them. Thus in Harland's model, voluntary associations are divided into those formed on the basis of household connections, ethnic or geographic connections, neighborhood connections, occupational connections, and cult or temple connections.⁶⁶ The number of members typically ranged from a few dozen to less than one hundred,⁶⁷ but in some associations there might have been as many as 200-300 members.⁶⁸ Associations typically had patrons, often wealthy heads of households, who enabled the functioning of associations.⁶⁹

In the inclusive association model crafted by Harland, diaspora Jewish synagogues are one expression of Greco-Roman associations. Synagogues were often remodeled from homes or houses.⁷⁰ The earliest archaeological evidence of them dates from the first century B.C.E. By the year 100 C.E., synagogues had developed into diverse centers of Jewish culture and religion,⁷¹ especially as the second Temple had been destroyed in 70 C.E., thus extinguishing the temple-centered leadership.⁷² Diaspora Jews could have been natural contacts for Jewish Christ-believers who preached the gospel in new areas.⁷³ Luke, for instance, depicts Paul going first to a synagogue when he arrives at a new town (see e.g. Acts 9:20, 13:5, 13:13-16, 14:1).⁷⁴

⁶² E.g. Stambaugh & Balch 1994, 125. Kloppenborg (1996a, 18, 26) presents the old consensus and proposes that associations could be divided into "those associated with a household, those formed around a common trade (and civic locale), and those formed around the cult of a deity" (p. 26).

⁶³ Harland 2003, 61-74.

⁶⁴ Harland 2003, 74-83.

⁶⁵ Harland 2003, 84-86.

⁶⁶ Harland 2003, 30-52.

⁶⁷ Meeks 1983, 31.

⁶⁸ Kloppenborg 1996a, 25-26.

⁶⁹ For primary sources about women patrons, see pp. 77-94 of this study. Cf. also White 1996a, 57-58; Harland 2003, 31.

⁷⁰ White 1996a, 62.

⁷¹ Kraemer 1999, 63-64.

⁷² White 1996a, 61.

⁷³ Brändle & Stegemann 1998, 121.

⁷⁴ Although Luke's account of this practice is not necessarily a historical fact, it nevertheless reveals that for Luke, a Christ-believer, it was important to narrate synagogues into the early Christian beginnings.

In some associations, membership could be inclusive with regard to socioeconomic factors. Many associations included both women and men.⁷⁵ In some cult associations, women could be both priests and members.⁷⁶ Associations formed on the basis of household connections could have a very heterogeneous membership as far as gender, wealth and ancestry were concerned.⁷⁷ On the other hand, some occupational associations had quite a homogeneous membership base.⁷⁸ In Harland's model, belonging to an association was not exclusive but people could belong to various associations simultaneously.⁷⁹ For instance, the purple cloth dealer Lydia in Acts 16:14-15 would probably have belonged to both the association of Christ-believers and that of purple dealers.

Not all agree on identifying the early Christian groups as associations. Peter Lampe discusses the outward appearance of early Christian communities. According to him, "the government at best considered the Christian groups as *prohibited* societies."⁸⁰ Lampe bases this claim on two texts he mentions briefly. The first is a letter by Pliny the Younger in which he reports some Christ-believers having quit their meetings when Pliny prohibited the meetings of associations (*hetaeria*).⁸¹ The second text that Lampe uses is written by Tertullian, who demands that Christian communities be considered legitimate associations because they have similar functions; they collect money for burials and for the support of the needy.⁸² In addition to Tertullian and Pliny the Younger, other Christian and non-Christian writers describe groups of Christ-believers as associations.⁸³ While the legality of these Christian communities was contested, their judicial nature is not as relevant

⁷⁵ Kloppenborg 1996a, 24-25; Harland 2003, 30, 34, 37, 43. Pomeroy (1995, 201) notes that women could not belong to men's occupational associations. However, she does not seem to take into account the fact that women also had their own occupational associations from which men were excluded.

⁷⁶ Kloppenborg 1996a, 24-25; Harland 2003, 44-46.

⁷⁷ Harland 2003, 30-31, 43-44

⁷⁸ Harland 2003, 26.

⁷⁹ Harland 2003, 38.

⁸⁰ Lampe 2003, 374. Italics his.

⁸¹ Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96. Lampe 2003, 374.

⁸² Tertullian, *Apologia* 38-39. In his Apology, Tertullian refers to congregations as "a body" (*corpus*, 39.1.), "an assembly" (*coetus*, 39.2.) and "a congregation" (*congregatio*, 39.2.). Lampe 2003, 374. In his study, Lampe focuses primarily on Christianity in the city of Rome. However, he bases his views on the writings of e.g. Tertullian, Pliny the Younger and the author of 1 Tim., neither of whom writes especially on the church(es) in Rome. I thus consider it possible to generalize his argumentation to Christ-believers in general. On Tertullian, see also Harland 2003, 74.

⁸³ Celsus in Origen's *Against Celsus* 1.1; In *Ecclesiastical History* 10.1.8, Eusebius of Caesarea refers to a Christian community as θίασος. See also Harland 2003, 283 n. 1.

as the similarity of the forms and functions between voluntary associations and early Christian gatherings.

Despite this evidence, Lampe argues that early Christian gatherings were perceived by outsiders as private parties of hosts, philosophical schools, mystery cults or groups of Christ-believers formed by slaves or freed former slaves of a household. In Lampe's definition, none of these is an association.⁸⁴ Lampe clearly operates on a more limited concept of association than Harland. Thus, he neglects the fact that associations also often gathered in homes⁸⁵ and their contemporaries still viewed them as associations, not as a host's private parties. On the other hand, Harland's and Lampe's models are not opposite, although Lampe's use of terminology may lead one to think so. Lampe's household model fits inside Harland's model of associations as one of its categories comprises associations based on household connections.⁸⁶

Therefore, it seems that many early Christians probably did not have a conscious intention to distinguish their gatherings from associations. Besides associations, the gatherings of early Christians were influenced by philosophical schools, synagogues and Greco-Roman households.⁸⁷ However, the differences between these models should not be exaggerated. At least it is clear that convening at homes was not an early Christian innovation.

2.6. Early Christian Meals

It is widely agreed that one of the most typical contexts of early Christian gatherings, especially when they took place at homes, was the common meal. In earliest Christianity, the common meal was both a ritual and an actual meal.⁸⁸ In the New Testament, the common meal is mentioned for instance in Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7 and 1 Cor. 11:20-34. Other early Christian writings mentioning the common meal include Ign. *Smyrn.* 8:1-2, *Did.* 9-10 and the *Traditio Apostolica* 27-28.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Lampe 2003, 374-379.

⁸⁵ Stambaugh & Balch 1994, 126; White 1996a, 39.

⁸⁶ Harland 2003, 30-33.

⁸⁷ McCready 1996, 62.

⁸⁸ Smith 2003; Taussig 2009; Smith & Taussig (eds.) 2012.

⁸⁹ The numbering of the paragraphs of *TA* used in the present study follows that of Bradshaw et al. (2002). Bradshaw et al. (2002) is also the edition used for the text of *TA*. See their work (pp. 16-18) for numbering differences in the various editions. For additional references to meals in early Christian texts, see Alikin (2010, 4 n. 9).

The frequency of meetings of first-century C.E. Christ-believers is not known. In Acts 20:7, Paul and his companions gather the day after the Sabbath to break bread, which may indicate that gathering on Sunday was typical from early on. The weekly gathering might partially derive from Jewish Sabbath gatherings. Ignatius may also imply that gatherings took place on Sunday (Ign. *Magn.* 9:1).⁹⁰ In the mid-second century C.E., Justin Martyr writes in Rome about weekly Sunday gatherings when believers gathered at one place whether they lived “in the cities or in the country.”⁹¹

The order of events around the Lord’s Supper in the first century are not clearly described in early Christian writings. It has been proposed that some, if not all, first-century Christian communities structured their meals along the lines of non-Christian banquets, so that there was first a meal followed by “entertainment,” namely worship activities.⁹²

Self-evidently, the usual venue of a gathering would be a space where people dined.⁹³ As already discussed, early Christians could convene at homes that were of various sizes and wealth. Thus, dining does not necessarily indicate a setting of a Roman *triclinium*, as not all, perhaps most, homes had a formal dining room. In general, the functions of different rooms could vary according to varying needs.⁹⁴

In relation to this study, the most important aspect of common meals is the position of hosts in them. At non-Christian meals, a host would decide on the practicalities, for instance on whom to invite and what to eat. Guests, for their part, would choose the leader of a meal (*symposiarch*) from among themselves. The *symposiarch* would then lead the provision of food and drinks.⁹⁵

In the earliest Christian texts, the functions of hosts in common meals are rarely described, leaving one to wonder whether they had any significant role in them. An ambiguous illustration of the matter is provided in the oldest remaining depiction, 1 Cor. 11, which in fact does not support the role of host as a provider of the meal. In 1 Cor. 11:17-34 Paul criticizes the Corinthians for having common

⁹⁰Cf. also Meeks 1983, 143; Llewellyn 2001.

⁹¹ πάντων κατὰ πόλεις ἢ ἀγροῦς. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 67.

⁹² Smith 2003, 200-202, see also 174, 179-180. Smith bases this on 1 Cor. 11:17-34, 14:1-40. See also my discussion about Greco-Roman meals on pp. 82-85.

⁹³ White 1996a, 107; Smith 2003, 177, 179.

⁹⁴ Smith 2003, 177-178; Balch 2008, 8.

⁹⁵ Smith 2003, 33-34.

meals in an unworthy manner. According to Paul, their meals are not true Lord's Suppers as participants have not shared the food but have just consumed their own. In consequence, some participants have become drunk and others have been left hungry (1 Cor. 11:20-21). Paul exhorts the community to take joint responsibility for having the right kind of Lord's Supper.

Gradually, the common meal developed into the separate symbolic Eucharist and actual *agape* meals.⁹⁶ In the early second century C.E., Ignatius of Antioch mentions the Eucharist (εὐχαριστία) and "doing *agape*" (ἀγάπην ποιεῖν) separately.⁹⁷ If the *agape* meal means an actual meal in contrast to a symbolic Eucharist, the meals were separated at least in some parts of Asia Minor at quite an early date.⁹⁸ However, it also seems possible that Ignatius means the same meal but uses different designations. Ignatius also writes that the Eucharist should have a bishop's permission. It is worth noting that he does not indicate that a bishop should lead the meal or even attend it.⁹⁹ It is possible that hosts of Christian gatherings were still at this point adequate leaders for the meals in some communities.

Justin Martyr offers another second-century depiction about the evolving practice of meals. In the 160's, he recounts that when believers convene, the first activity is reading the prophets or the "memoirs" (ἀπομνημονεύματα) of the apostles. This is followed by an instruction and a prayer after which bread, wine and water are served.¹⁰⁰ Thus, there is neither the order nor menu similar to typical Greco-Roman meals. In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria writes explicitly about two separate meals.¹⁰¹ Probably, the division of the meal into two did not happen similarly and simultaneously in different regions.

The *Traditio Apostolica* indicates that hosts are the ones who offer food in common meals. The dating and provenance of the writing remain obscure, especially so as it is probably a compilation of writings originating from various geographical areas written probably on a time scale ranging from the mid-second to the mid-fourth century C.E.¹⁰² Parts of it refer to a phase when believers gather at homes for the Lord's Supper and there are bishops, presbyters and deacons distinct

⁹⁶ White 1996a, 119; Osiek & Balch 1997, 212; McGowan 2010, 189-190.

⁹⁷ Ign. *Smyrn.* 8.1-2

⁹⁸ Osiek & Balch 1997, 212.

⁹⁹ Ign. *Smyrn.* 8.1. Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 161.

¹⁰⁰ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 67.

¹⁰¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.1. On this, see White 1996a, 120.

¹⁰² Bradshaw et al. 2002, 1-6, esp. 13-15. See also Baldwin 2003, 521-529.

from the hosts. It discusses both the duties of hosts of Christian gatherings and the duties of bishops, presbyters and deacons in connection to the Lord's Supper.¹⁰³

The *Traditio Apostolica* seems to imply that hosts can decide who are invited to meals because, without their generosity, believers could not have the Lord's Supper in the first place.¹⁰⁴ However, hosts do not seem to lead the Lord's Supper.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the supper is administered properly only when a bishop, presbyter or deacon leads it.¹⁰⁶ The host is not a bishop as the bishop is referred to as one of the host's guests.¹⁰⁷ The writer also refers to a possibility of a communal meal where none of those eligible to lead it are present. In this case, believers can eat together but they are not to bless the bread and the meal as it is not the Lord's Supper.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the hosts of Christian gatherings were not automatically officeholders¹⁰⁹ when this text was written. Otherwise there could be no instance of believers gathering at someone's home while no officeholder was present, as presumably the host was there.¹¹⁰

In addition to common meals, there were also other ritual meals. Christ-believers living in the first centuries had funeral meals for the deceased in the catacombs. In Roman catacombs, there are frescos representing women and men leading commemoration meals which both women and men attend.¹¹¹ Thus, it does not seem to have been a problem for men to attend these kinds of early Christian meals that women conducted. The frescos date from the late third or early fourth century,¹¹² but probably women led meals at tombs even before that time.¹¹³ This indicates that early Christ-believers did not perceive leading a meal to be a man's duty but could be flexible with regard to the leader's gender. If women hosts led meals at gatherings taking place at their homes, perhaps no-one questioned the state of matters.

¹⁰³ *Traditio Apostolica* 27-28.

¹⁰⁴ *TA* 27:2, 28:3-4.

¹⁰⁵ *TA* 28:4.

¹⁰⁶ *TA* 28:5, 29C.

¹⁰⁷ *TA* 28:4.

¹⁰⁸ *TA* 28:6.

¹⁰⁹ The term 'officeholder' may be anachronistic and imply a more hierarchical and rigid structure than there perhaps was at this time. By officeholders I mean simply those who were titled bishops, presbyters and deacons. This text leads one to surmise that their functions related at least to common meals. It is not my intention to discuss their functions at more length.

¹¹⁰ See also Bobertz (1993), who suggests that *TA* 27-28 mediates a picture of probable controversies between hosts and officials. However, his discussion offers little hard evidence.

¹¹¹ Tulloch 2006, 183-186. Pictures of four frescos: Tulloch 2006, 178-179.

¹¹² Tulloch 2006, 164, 175-176.

¹¹³ Tulloch 2006, 176-177.

2.7. Hosts as Authorities and their Relationship with Other Local and Itinerant Authorities

One factor that affected the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings is the position of hosts in general. In early Christian texts, references to hosts are relatively rare and leave the reader with no extensive picture of their roles. In a manner similar to references about possible women hosts, not all references to probable male hosts are explicit about the hosting of gatherings, although it is implied. Nevertheless, already the gospels portray Jesus and his disciples as wandering preachers who stay at the homes of their supporters, who are thus their hosts (Matt. 10:11-4; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-7). Throughout the early Christian writings, the same motif occurs in various contexts,¹¹⁴ often intertwined with themes of authority in early Christian communities.

The reasons for gathering at specific homes are self-evidently related to hosts as early Christian texts attest. For instance, a house owner could invite an apostle to his or her home, where the apostle would preach to the household. The members of the household would convert, a Christian community would be formed and would start to gather at that home (e.g. Acts 10:22-48, 16:14-15, 33, 40; 1 Cor. 1:16). Some heads of households are depicted as starting to believe in Jesus in his lifetime and thus communities of believers naturally begin to convene at their homes (e.g. Acts 12:12).

There are three groups – itinerants, hosts and local prominent believers who are not hosts – whose spiritual and worldly interests seem to have collided at times. The subject of authority in early Christianity has been approached from numerous different angles in scholarly studies. According to one interpretative tradition, influential itinerant charismatics, for instance Paul, were primary authorities of Christ-believers in matters of faith. In local communities, however, there were no fixed authority structures during the earliest Christianity.¹¹⁵

Gerd Theissen is one of the proponents of this view. Theissen divides itinerants into two main groups: itinerant charismatics and community organizers.

¹¹⁴ Relevant passages are found e.g. in Rom. 16; 2 Cor. 11:4-15; Philem. 2, 2 and 3 John. See also p. 21 n. 12-16 of this work.

¹¹⁵ Earlier developers of this theory were e.g. Harnack (1908, esp. 341-368) and Campenhausen (1969, 55-123).

According to him, the former group originally consisted of Jewish-Palestinian believers, Jesus and his disciples at the forefront. The synoptic accounts of Jesus commissioning the disciples to go and preach the gospel are central evidence for the existence of this group.¹¹⁶

Theissen's community organizers include, for instance, Paul and Barnabas. Theissen argues that this group of itinerants is especially influential in the Hellenistic Christ-movement. In accordance with the typical traditional values of the time, they aim at shaping the local communities in the direction of "love-patriarchalism," which means the leadership of prominent householders. While Paul, most notably in his Corinthian correspondence, is a prime representative of this ethos, it continues, for instance, in the pseudo-Pauline Pastoral Epistles.¹¹⁷ On the whole, Theissen's main emphasis is on inter-itinerant conflicts where householders are in supporting roles, not on the contrasting authority of itinerants and householders.¹¹⁸

Theissen's tendency to emphasize the influence of itinerants is also visible in subsequent theories. The hypothesis of the primary authority of itinerants has often been presented in connection with the idea of the charismatic organization of the earliest Christian communities. Accordingly, it is argued that early Christian communities were organized on the basis of members' spiritual gifts pointing the right place for each individual, not on the basis of socioeconomic hierarchy, thus contradicting traditional social values.¹¹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance, suggests that early Christian local communities were egalitarian. Itinerant apostles were the only permanent authorities, while in local communities authority roles were interchangeable, not fixed to specific believers. This supposedly was a manifestation of the equality of believers in their new faith and was partially due to the models provided by Greco-Roman associations and Jewish synagogues.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Mark 6:7-13, 30; Matt. 10:5-11:1; Luke 9:1-6, 10, 10:1-20. Theissen sees a similar ethos in *Did.* 11, where wandering preachers are exhorted to stay at one place for a maximum of two days. Theissen has written about this theme in numerous books and articles. See e.g. Theissen 1977; 2004, 27-35. See also Uro (2012, 352-360) for an evaluation of Theissen's central theses.

¹¹⁷ Theissen 2004, 35-40, 106-110, 139-140.

¹¹⁸ Theissen 2004, 40-59.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 12:4-11 has probably been the most cited passage when arguing for charismatic communal organization. Sohm (1898, 27-29) was one of the early scholars who specified this trajectory. For more recent proponents, see my discussion below.

¹²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 175-176, 181, 285-286, 294-295. Other proponents of the view that the most focal authority was in the hands of the itinerant charismatics include e.g. Dunn (1994, 111) and Horrell (1997, 323-341, esp. 327).

Schüssler Fiorenza, among others, explains the subsequent development of hierarchical structures by a gradual adherence to a traditional model of patriarchal households, which resulted in the authority of prominent male householders.¹²¹

In a similar vein, David Horrell argues for the primary authority of itinerant charismatics, for instance Paul, James and Peter.¹²² According to Horrell, the idea of authority within the Pauline corpus develops from the primacy of itinerant preachers visible in authentic Pauline letters towards the authority of local male householders, as seen in the Pastoral Epistles. Horrell also notices how outside the Pauline corpus, Ignatius of Antioch emphasizes the authority of bishops, deacons and presbyters, who may be understood as local authorities. This is also a sign of centralization of authority in the hands of local prominent believers.¹²³

Harry O. Maier also merges theories about the primary authority of itinerants and of heads of households. He describes the trajectory of leadership structures in Pauline communities as beginning with the authority of the charismatic leader, Paul. While Paul is alive, the authority structures are not fixed in “his” communities although there are some local authorities as well. These local authorities are probably householders who are naturally socially prominent because of their status as heads of their households. Maier suggests that Paul does not appoint new authorities but rather reinforces the authority of those who already have authority based on prevailing household structures.¹²⁴

In sum, Schüssler Fiorenza, Horrell and Maier date the shift of primary authority from itinerants to local believers to the late first or the early second century C.E. However, there are also scholars who discard the notion of non-hierarchical local communities and date the primacy of the authority of local prominent believers at a much earlier time. Accordingly, in local communities, itinerants could not overrule the authority of prominent local believers, especially when prominent locals provided itinerants with a place to stay and believers with a place to gather.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 287-295. Sohm (1898, 30-36) identifies the need for leading the Lord’s Supper and the resistance of heresies as the two most focal reasons for the development of fixed offices. Sohm’s importance for the development of more current views is evaluated by Campbell (2004, 3-19). For these more recent proponents, see Campenhausen 1969, 63-83; Dunn 1994, 109-115; Horrell 1997, 333-335.

¹²² Horrell 1997, 323-341, esp. 327.

¹²³ Horrell 1997, 333-335.

¹²⁴ Maier 2002, 39.

¹²⁵ E.g. Kloppenborg 1996b; Clarke 2000; Elliott 2003.

Andrew D. Clarke argues that already in the earliest Christian communities, the authority structures were primarily shaped by the household context, which was the most important setting for early Christian gatherings. Thus in early Christian communities, the leadership provided by heads of households was pivotal. The existing authority structures endured in all likelihood when members of a household became Christ-believers.¹²⁶ In addition to households, the leadership models of cities, colonies, voluntary associations and Jewish synagogues influenced the authority structures of early Christian communities. All of these models support the leadership of the most socially prominent individual in his or her group.¹²⁷ Although Clarke insinuates rather than explicates that in the case of individual house churches this meant the leadership of the host, his inclination towards this emphasis is clear.¹²⁸

When writing about various phenomena relating to early Christian gatherings, Clarke uses biblical references that mention women hosts of early Christian gatherings.¹²⁹ However, his discussion mainly excludes women hosts, merely mentioning the possibility of their existence and their social prominence.¹³⁰ Even these exceptions are forgotten in Clarke's discussion, where he adopts the concept of *paterfamilias* as an authority model for hosts of early Christian gatherings and takes it as a given that all heads of households were male. Thus, he ends up excluding women from the discussion of authorities in households and gatherings hosted by them.¹³¹ The inaccuracy of this reasoning will be demonstrated in chapter 3, where the connotations of the word *paterfamilias* are discussed. It will be concluded that a woman could be the head of her household (*paterfamilias*) in the sense of a property-owner, as recognized also by Roman legislators.¹³²

R. Alastair Campbell is another proponent of the importance of the "household matrix" in early Christianity. In a manner similar to Clarke, he argues that early Christian communities adopted the authority structures of households,

¹²⁶ Clarke 2000, 160-172. See also Esler 1997, 135.

¹²⁷ Clarke 2000, 11-77, 103-141, 150.

¹²⁸ Clarke (2000, 160-166). Clarke (2000, 252) also states that "leadership was operative in the early Christian communities. Indeed, it was often determined by social status rather than other 'charismatic' qualities."

¹²⁹ E.g. Clarke 2000, 65, 85 n. 30 & 31, 161 n. 54.

¹³⁰ Clarke 2000, 161.

¹³¹ Clarke 2000, 81, 163-165.

¹³² See my discussion on pp. 43-46.

which were their typical gathering places. Thus, heads of households were the leaders of early Christian communities, which gathered at their homes. Probably many of the believers were also members of the households, which provided the material setting for gatherings and thus they were under the authority of the host in everyday life as well.¹³³ Accordingly, the authority of heads of households was the central authority structure in early Christianity. These people had their leading roles not because of charismatic gifts but because of their status and the material resources they offered to other believers.¹³⁴ This perception permeates Campbell's whole study, causing him not to consider seriously the possible authority of itinerant charismatics.¹³⁵ One example of Campbell's views is that Paul was a lesser authority than local heads of households because he depended on them to secure meeting places for converts.¹³⁶ Campbell takes women hosts of early Christian gatherings sporadically into account but does not discuss them further.¹³⁷

One of the scholars who emphasizes the hierarchical nature of early Christian communities is John H. Elliott. He perceives the hierarchy deriving mainly from the household context of the communities of Christ-believers. He differentiates between an egalitarian ideology that might be detected in some early Christian writings and the reality in which early Christian communities developed.¹³⁸ In addition to households, Elliott identifies voluntary associations as models for early Christian gatherings. He notes that there is no convincing evidence of the alleged egalitarianism of voluntary associations. Instead, there were patronage practices that guided them towards non-egalitarianism.¹³⁹ Both the household setting and the model of voluntary associations thus affirm the authority of patrons of early Christians, perhaps most notably the hosts of their gatherings.¹⁴⁰ According to Elliott, Gal. 3:28, one of the most often cited biblical verses seen as proof of early Christian egalitarian aspirations, concerns the unity rather than the

¹³³ This is indicated e.g. in the passages where a household is baptized along with the head of a household (Acts 10:48, 16:15, 16:33; 1 Cor. 1:16). Cf. Campbell 2004, 117-118, 126. See also Osiek 2002.

¹³⁴ Campbell 2004, 121-122.

¹³⁵ Campbell (2004, 116-118) discusses very briefly the possible authority of translocal preachers and charismatics, but concludes that the authority of local leaders was more central.

¹³⁶ Campbell 2004, 120.

¹³⁷ Campbell 2004, 126-127, 255-256.

¹³⁸ Elliott 2003, 174-176. Cf. also Elliott 1981, 189-190.

¹³⁹ Elliott 2003, 187-189. *Contra* Schüssler Fiorenza 1983. See my discussion on pp. 35-36.

¹⁴⁰ Elliott 2003, 193-194, 203.

equality of Christ-believers. Thus, it cannot be used as evidence of egalitarianism among early Christians.¹⁴¹

Elliott mainly focuses on refuting the idea of the egalitarianism of early Christianity, and thus his take on the possible authority of early Christian women at first seems negative as a whole. However, Elliott takes it as a given that there were also women who could possess authority in spite of their gender, notably including the women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Although Elliott's argumentation concerning women hosts is rather limited, he is on the right track when he argues that these women appear to have been authorities because of their "elevated economic and social status that positioned them, as it did their male counterparts, to serve as patrons and hence as leaders in the churches meeting in their homes."¹⁴²

This theme will be discussed again in chapters 5 and 6 after relevant early Christian texts are introduced. At this point, it may be briefly noted that in my opinion, both perspectives on the primary authority are partially right. However, they may be both partially off the mark when largely ignoring situational variance. On a large scale, developments probably happened in similar directions. But to say that in every Christian community either hosts or itinerants would have been primary authorities is too large a scale. As authority is always situational, it must be independently gained from each community in each setting. As the sources of authority vary from social and personal to spiritual characteristics, and are not exclusively dependent on social status,¹⁴³ it is more credible to say that to some extent there was also variation in authority structures in different early Christian communities. Later in this work, I will argue that the varying sources of authority partially resulted in conflicts between authorities.

2.8. Conclusions

This chapter set out to examine the characteristics of early Christian gatherings that would have an effect on the authority of women hosts. These characteristics dealt

¹⁴¹ Elliott 2003, 179-186.

¹⁴² Elliott 2003, 202.

¹⁴³ See my discussion on pp. 12-14. If authority was only dependent on social status, it would be expected that in every community the host would have been the primary authority. I do not believe this to be the case.

with the domestic setting of early Christian gatherings, the non-Christian models of early Christian gatherings, the common meal as one typical setting of these gatherings, and the authority position of hosts in general.

Relating to the domestic setting, it was concluded that homes that functioned as early Christian gathering spaces could vary from one-room apartments to houses rented or owned by a host. Thus, women hosts were not necessarily, or – considering the socioeconomic status of early Christians – even likely owners of great houses. Hosts were those who nevertheless could provide a group of believers with a gathering space. The host's position at common meals was discussed. Although a definite conclusion about this is impossible to reach, at least in the *Traditio Apostolica* the position of a host is still emphasized. In addition, funerary meals show that perhaps it was no novelty for Christ-believers to have women lead ritual meals.

Concerning parallel social structures, it was noted that the similar features between early Christian communities, associations and synagogues demonstrate that early Christian communities were not unique in their form.¹⁴⁴ It has been suggested that the search for the best model of early Christian communities should be discarded as “a more fruitful approach may be to focus on a particular aspect of group organization or a specific area of group practice and to compare Paul's churches with other first-century groups on this point.”¹⁴⁵ In this study, this approach is implemented, especially in the examination of similarities between early Christian communities and associations including the roles of women benefactors and heads of households who were non-Christian counterparts of women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

Another similar feature between early Christian communities and their non-Christian counterparts, households, associations, and religious communities is that all of these are more or less hierarchically organized and do not offer grounds for viewing the early Christian communities as egalitarian. Accordingly, one central presupposition of this study is that the framework of the egalitarianism of the earliest Christian communities¹⁴⁶ is not valid, and subsequently it cannot explain why women could hold prominent roles in early Christianity. Socioeconomic

¹⁴⁴ See also Clarke 2000, 166-170.

¹⁴⁵ Adams 2009, 77-78. See also his review about models of first-century Christian communities on pp. 60-77.

¹⁴⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983.

hierarchy rather than gender-equality was the rule in early Christian communities. Relating to this, it has been noted in this chapter that women hosts have sometimes been removed from the picture of early Christian gatherings simply by ignoring the fact that women could also be heads of households.¹⁴⁷ This is one factor that has resulted in women hosts' remaining in the shadow in scholarly discussions. This theme will be taken up again in chapter 6.

Two perspectives on early Christian authority, one emphasizing the authority of itinerants, the other the authority of heads of households, affect the way the authority of women hosts is perceived. One trajectory begins with the primary authority of itinerant apostles and concludes with the authority of relatively few prominent men.¹⁴⁸ In this development, women hosts are located in the time before the concentrated exclusive male authority in mainstream Christianity¹⁴⁹. Another trajectory that emphasizes the authority of heads of households¹⁵⁰ furthers the understanding of the authority that women could have as hosts of gatherings despite their gender. Thus, both perspectives offer valuable insights.

¹⁴⁷ See my discussion about Clarke (2000) on p. 37.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Horrell 1997. See my discussion on pp. 34-36.

¹⁴⁹ By "mainstream Christianity," I mean broadly those early Christian groups and communities that later developed into the Catholic Church. A definition through later development is not very satisfactory. However, the diversity of early Christian "beliefs and practices" makes it difficult to assess whether there even was a phenomenon of "mainstream Christianity" in the 1st and 2nd century C.E. Royalty (2013, 5) writes about "orthodox" Christianity when referring to the same phenomenon as the one I refer to as "mainstream" Christianity. He defines "orthodox" core beliefs in the following way: 1) the Hebrew Bible refers to Jesus and is an "Old Testament" 2) Jesus was "a man and the Son of God" 3) Jesus's "death and resurrection" are "salvific acts of God in human history."

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Elliott 2003; Campbell 2004. See my discussion on pp. 37-39.

3. Women as Heads of Households

3.1. Introduction

Early Christian writings depict women hosts of early Christian gatherings as heads of their households. In Acts 12:12, Christ-believers gather at Mary's house. Acts 16:14-15, 40 recount the baptism of Lydia's household, present Lydia inviting apostles to stay at her home and finally, depict Christ-believers gathering there. In Col. 4:15, the Christ-believers who gather at Nympha's home are greeted. Also the references to possible women hosts of early Christian gatherings present women's households. Ignatius greets the households of Tavia (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2) and Epitropus's widow (Ign. *Pol.* 8:2) while the "elect lady" is warned against letting false teachers into her house (2 John 10).

These texts present three functions of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. First, women hosts have concrete homes where people can gather. Second, they are heads of households that consist of other people in addition to themselves. Third, they provide material necessities for gatherings of Christ-believers. However, the references to women hosts do not recount how women have become heads of their households. There is very little information about the kind of property they have. There are no direct references to their possible wealth and its source. Their socioeconomic status is not told.

The purpose of this chapter is to study women heads of households around the ancient Mediterranean in order to outline plausible backgrounds of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. I will discuss households, marriages, divorce and widowhood, the guardianship of women and the origins of women's property. In addition to outlining the general background of women as property-owners, I will present specific examples of these women in ancient sources. Diverse perspectives are secured by using sources from multiple genres, including inscriptions, papyri, letters and legal texts.

Women hosts of Christian gatherings are found in various parts of the Roman Empire. In addition, the customs pertaining to women's guardianship and the ability to own property varied in different cultural spheres. Thus, on several occasions, I will discuss women in the Roman West and Greek East separately.

These terms follow the division between those parts of the Roman Empire where the most generally used languages were Latin and Greek, respectively. Although caution is needed when generalizing, ancient sources demonstrate a degree of similarity within each of the areas.¹ In addition, I will at times discuss Jewish women separately, although they also lived in these areas. However, these three cultures were not independent of, or separate from, each other and accordingly, the differences between them seem to be lesser than often imagined.²

Although the optimism that was once felt towards using non-literary materials to reconstruct accurately the lives of ancient women has faded as feminist approaches have developed and been influenced by post-structuralism,³ the ancient sources presented in this chapter still represent reflections of the ancient past. The position and authority of women as heads of households are factors that affect the way in which the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings was perceived.

3.2. Households

Greco-Roman households included people connected in diverse ways to the head of a household. The head of a household was most often a free man who had legal or social power over the members of his household.⁴ Children, one's spouse, slaves, manumitted slaves, clients and foster children could be members of households. Households also included members of one's extended family, for instance one's parents or the siblings of heads of households or those of their spouses.⁵ Slave ownership was relatively common and families of limited means might also own slaves.⁶

¹ See, however, Prag & Quinn's (2013, 1-13) discussion of the problems of scholarly division between the Greek East and the Roman West. Nevertheless, their conclusions are not detrimental to my research as I do not build on the distinction between the Greek East and the Roman West but rather utilize it as a tool with which to organize the material.

² One example illustrating this is that most known epitaphs about Jewish mothers are written in Greek and located in catacombs in the city of Rome. Cf. Harland 2009, 85.

³ Dixon 2001, 5-25, 69.

⁴ Meeks 1983, 30; Rawson 1986, 8.

⁵ Although e.g. Rawson (1986, 7) argues that households typically included only members of a nuclear family, Barker (1987, 92) demonstrates how this notion is based on literary depictions and formulaic commemorations, whereas other documents indicate that it was common for households to include one's extended family. For more recent reviews of data and scholarship, see Harders (2012, 14-15) and Hin (2012, 28-30). See also Clarke 2000, 83-85.

⁶ Pomeroy 1995, 191.

As already discussed in chapter 2, the words for a home and a household are οἰκία and οἶκος in Greek. Both of these words can mean a home as a place and the people who belong to a household.⁷ In addition to the Greek vocabulary of homes and households, their Latin equivalents are relevant as women hosts lived in the areas of the Roman Empire. The Latin terms for households are *familia* and *domus*. The distinction between the typical usages of *familia* and *domus* is related to legal constructs concerning households.⁸ In Roman law, a *familia* was defined as consisting of a head of a household, *paterfamilias*, and the people who were under the legal power (*potestas*) of a *paterfamilias*. *Familia* also referred to the property or a farm of a *paterfamilias*. Slaves and manumitted slaves of a *paterfamilias* could also compose a *familia* together with the *paterfamilias*. However, an actual family in the modern sense was not a requirement for being a *paterfamilias*.⁹

After the death of a *paterfamilias*, a free person who had been under his legal power became the head of his or her own *familia*. The extent of women's *familiae* was restricted: "[A] woman is the beginning and the end of her *familia*."¹⁰ As women could not have free people under their legal power, women's juridical *familiae* consisted solely of them and their property, including their slaves.¹¹ Despite the limitation of women's *familiae* in the face of the law, it is worth noting that even juridical texts acknowledge that not all households were headed by men.¹²

Like *familia*, *domus* also means both the physical home and the household, which includes both family members and slaves.¹³ *Domus* does not have a juridical connotation. Instead, it is used to denote a group of people who belong to the same family or household in daily life irrespective of the fact that its members possibly belong to different *familiae*.¹⁴ The distinction between *familia* as a legal unit and

⁷ See my discussion on p. 23.

⁸ For the distinction between *familia* as a legal entity and the family unit of daily life (*domus*), see Saller 1984; Saller 1994, 74-101; Gardner 1998; Evans Grubbs 2002, 17-18; Dickmann 2011, 56-60.

⁹ *Digest* 50.16.195.1-5 (Ulpian, early 3rd c. C.E.). See below about the compilation of *Digest*. See Evans Grubbs (2002, 17-18) for other legal texts pertaining to the *paterfamilias*. Cf. also Saller 1994, 75-76, 155; Saller 1999, 184-185, 189-191.

¹⁰ *Digest* 50.16.195.1-5 (Ulpian), citation in 5. Cf. Gardner 1995, 377.

¹¹ Gardner 1995, 377.

¹² See also Gardner (1995, 387) and Saller (1999, 185, 187), who note that as property owners, women had responsibilities that laws imposed on the *paterfamilias*, although the male terminology omits women at the level of vocabulary.

¹³ *Domus* as a house: Cicero, *Against Catilina* 4.12; Valerius Maximus 5.7.3; Pliny, *Ep.* 7.27. *Domus* as a group of people: Pliny, *Ep.* 10.51; Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 5.16.4. For more primary sources and a discussion, see Saller 1984, 342-355; Saller 1994, 80-95. See also my discussion on pp. 24-25.

¹⁴ Examples of this will be discussed later in this chapter in relation to women who were married *sine manu*.

domus as a unit of daily life is especially important in relation to female heads of households. A woman was “the beginning and the end of her *familia*” but in the sense of *domus*, women could be the heads of households that also included also free citizens.¹⁵

While Roman laws were passed by the senate and the emperors, there was also a group of influential commentaries on the laws. In the 6th century C.E., Emperor Justinian ordered a compilation of still valid legal texts. This compilation included texts from the late first century B.C.E. to the late fifth century C.E. The compilation was named *Digesta Iustiniani*, the Digest of Justinian. In it, excerpts from commentaries are collected thematically in fifty books resulting in a work that allows easy access to the views of jurists on specific themes.¹⁶

One section of the Digest deals with gender-inclusive language.¹⁷ It was meant to clarify the terminology of legislation generally, for instance concerning the bequeathing of property and property-ownership in general. The texts in this section show that jurists are virtually unanimous about many male terms encompassing also women. Thus, the male vocabulary used of property-ownership and heading a household in Roman texts does not mean that women could not own property or head households. I will cite relevant jurists at length as they contribute to contextualizing women heads of households and women property-owners.

This expression “if anyone” embraces males as well as females.¹⁸

In the name “patron” a patroness is also included.¹⁹

In the name “son” we understand all children.²⁰

“Whatever other son or (son) of my son shall be my heir”: Labeo (said) it does not seem to include a daughter, Proculus (said) the opposite. Labeo seems to me to follow the literal meaning of the words, Proculus the mind of the testator. He replied: I do not doubt that the opinion of Labeo is not true.²¹

There is no doubt that in the name “man,” the feminine as well as the masculine is included.²²

¹⁵ See pp. 60-62 of this study for the example of Ummidia Quadratilla, whom Pliny mentions in his letter 7.24. She raises her nephew and niece in her home and is the head of her household. After her death, her nephew becomes the head of the household. See also Gardner 1995.

¹⁶ Evans Grubbs 2002, 1-2. Following the composition of the Digest, I refer to each excerpt with its section in the Digest, after which I have added the author and dating of the actual statement in parentheses.

¹⁷ *Digest* 50.16.

¹⁸ *Digest* 50.16.1 (Ulpian).

¹⁹ *Digest* 50.16.52 (Ulpian).

²⁰ *Digest* 50.16.84 (Paulus, late 2nd / early 3rd c. C.E.).

²¹ *Digest* 50.16.116 (Javolenus, late 1st / early 2nd c. C.E.).

²² *Digest* 50.16.152 (Gaius, 2nd c. C.E.).

In the name “boy” a girl is also meant: for they even call women who have recently given birth “boy-bearers,” and in Greek *paidion* is used for both in common.²³

An expression of language in terms of the masculine sex is generally extended to both sexes.²⁴

The gender-inclusive language of Roman legislation has not always been detected and interpreted as such. Andrew D. Clarke, for instance, discusses authorities in early Christian communities, using households as a backdrop. He discerns in detail the characteristics and interrelationships of ancient *familia*, *domus* and οἶκος.²⁵ Surprisingly, however, Clarke uses *paterfamilias* virtually interchangeably with the word ‘father’ although he also identifies *paterfamilias* as a property-owner.²⁶ This leads him to write consistently about the head of a household as a father and bypass completely the fact that women could also head households. As Clarke’s study pertains to authority structures of early Christian communities, he adopts the concept of *paterfamilias* as an authority model for hosts of early Christian gatherings, who all seem to be men in Clarke’s discussion.²⁷ The result is the exclusion of women hosts as authorities in their households and in gatherings hosted by them. This example demonstrates the importance of understanding the nuances of ancient terminology, especially when researching women whom the ancient authors often disregard.²⁸

3.3. Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood

Women who were heads of their households were not married. This meant that they were divorced, widowed or had never been married. In Roman law, the minimum age for a girl to be legally married was twelve years.²⁹ For boys, there was no fixed minimum age of marriage which jurists would have agreed upon, but some thought 14 years a suitable minimum.³⁰ However, it was not typical to get married at such an early age. A Greek physician Soranus maintains that girls are ready for sexual

²³ *Digest* 50.16.163.1 (Paulus)

²⁴ *Digest* 50.16.195 pr. (Ulpian)

²⁵ Clarke 2000, 79-86.

²⁶ Clarke 2000, 86-101. Note especially the chapter titles on pp. 86, 92 and 95 for the direct interchangeability between father and *paterfamilias*.

²⁷ Clarke 2000, 163-165. See also my discussion on p. 37.

²⁸ It is also typical that the groups that included both women and men were referred to only by male terms. See Gardner 1995, 379, 386-387; Saller 1999, 185; Evans Grubbs 2002, 16-17.

²⁹ *Digest* 23.2.4. (Pomponius, 2nd c. C.E.). See also Dio, *Roman History* 54.16.7.

³⁰ Gaius, *Institutes* 1.II.196 reflects the differing opinions about the matter in the second century C.E. For the marriageable age of both girls and boys, see Gardner 1986, 38-39.

intercourse approximately at the age of 14.³¹ According to Epictetus, 14 is the age when girls become interested in male attention.³² The estimates of women's average age at the time of their first marriage vary from 16 to 20 years. The estimates of men's average marrying age vary from 25 to 30 years.³³ Marrying younger was more common in the higher socioeconomic classes and was typically linked to politics, family connections or dowries.³⁴

As women hosts of early Christian gatherings probably did not belong to the elite,³⁵ they did not necessarily marry at a particularly young age. It is also possible that some of them had never been legally married. Only a marriage between two Roman citizens or in some cases between a male Roman citizen and a non-citizen woman could be legal. Other unions were not legal according to Roman legislation, although their *de facto* form could and likely would be similar to legal marriages.³⁶

In rabbinic writings, Jewish women ideally marry in their earlier and men in their later teens.³⁷ However, in reality the typical age at the time of the first marriage was probably higher, for women the mid-teens or higher, for men between 20 and 30 years.³⁸ These ages are consistent with the contemporary non-Jewish population and highlight the problematic nature of rabbinic literature when trying to reconstruct the customs of first and second-century C.E. Judaism.³⁹

The average life expectancy for both women and men was less than 30 years.⁴⁰ Although the average life expectancies and marrying ages seem contradictory at first, they are explicable in terms of the high mortality rate of young children.⁴¹ According to one estimation, approximately 30 percent of Roman girls died before their first birthday. In consequence, the life expectancy of the remaining 70 percent rose to 35 years. Girls who survived until their fifth birthday could

³¹ Soranus, *Gynecology* I.VIII. Soranus lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. in Alexandria and Rome.

³² Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 40.

³³ Treggiari 1991, 32; Saller 1994, 37-38; Saller 2007, 90.

³⁴ Gardner 1986, 38-39; Treggiari 1991, 32; Saller 2007, 90.

³⁵ See my discussion on pp. 21-23.

³⁶ See Evans Grubbs (2002, 143-156) for a thorough discussion including ancient legal sources about the matter.

³⁷ E.g. *m. 'Abot.* 5.21; *b. Sanh.* 76b. Satlow 2001, 104-105. See also Archer 1990, 151-152.

³⁸ Kraemer 1998, 58-59; Satlow 2001, 105-109.

³⁹ Subsequently, e.g. Kraemer (2003, 132) completely discards the use of rabbinic literature when examining Judaism of the first centuries C.E. At the opposite pole, one of the most optimistic attempts to utilize rabbinic sources in the reconstruction of the lives of women in this period is offered by Ilan (1995).

⁴⁰ Gardner 1986, 40.

⁴¹ Saller 1994, 12.

expect to live until the age of 40.⁴² Because of the high mortality rate and the difference between the marrying ages of women and men, women were often widowed.⁴³ It has been estimated that within Judaism, both women and men who survived until the age of 45 had been widowed at least once. Jewish literary sources also support the high frequency of the spouse's death.⁴⁴

While some women heads of households were widows, others were divorcees. In the Roman West, divorces were evidently common. However, their frequency is not known, as they did not need to be officially registered. A sufficient reason for a divorce was that one of the spouses wanted it.⁴⁵ Neither is the frequency of divorces in the Greek East known. However, several papyri containing divorce contracts have been preserved in Egypt and other areas of the Near East. These contracts date from the first century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. In many of them, the divorce is announced as the mutual will of both spouses. The formulaic character of the contracts implies the ordinariness of divorces. In addition, the contracts present how property was divided. They demonstrate that in the case of divorce, women gained property, most typically their dowry, for their independent ownership.⁴⁶

The divorce rate among Jews in antiquity is somewhat debated. According to Tal Ilan, divorces were likely rare and a realistic option mainly for wealthy men because of the *ketubah* agreements according to which husbands were to give their wives significant amounts of their property in the case of divorce.⁴⁷ In Ilan's scenario, the frequency of divorces was lower among the Jewish people than the rest of the population. In contrast, Michael L. Satlow argues that the frequent references to divorces in various Jewish sources indicate that the frequency of divorces was similar to that of the non-Jewish population.⁴⁸ As Ilan's interpretation relies heavily on rabbinic writings that aim to prescribe, not describe reality, I find Satlow's evidence more credible.

Although the Torah and rabbinic texts generally presume that only a husband could initiate a divorce, the rabbinic writings already present some

⁴² Saller (1994, 23-25) has studied Roman life expectancies. See pp. 12-25 concerning his estimates.

⁴³ Saller 2007, 91.

⁴⁴ Satlow 2001, 182-183.

⁴⁵ Treggiari 1991, 34-44; Pomeroy 1995, 158.

⁴⁶ Evans Grubbs (2002, 210-218) and Barker (2012, 114-118) present primary sources and discussions.

⁴⁷ Ilan 1995, 147. *Ketubah* is discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁸ Satlow 2001, 183.

conditions under which a wife could take the initiative.⁴⁹ In addition, various sources show that also in the first centuries C.E., Jewish women divorced their husbands on grounds other than those given in later rabbinic texts.⁵⁰ More than one Herodian woman divorced her husband on her own initiative.⁵¹ Egyptian Jewish marriage contracts in which the wife and the husband are granted a similar right to initiate a divorce have been found.⁵² In addition, some Jewish couples agreed mutually on their divorce as preserved divorce contracts demonstrate.⁵³ A divorce document given by a wife to her husband dating from the early second century C.E. has been found in the Judaean Desert.⁵⁴ Thus, also within Judaism both wives and husbands initiated divorces. This is consistent with other findings that suggest that Jewish families of this time were typically similar to their contemporary non-Jewish counterparts.⁵⁵

Owing to widowhood and divorces, it was not uncommon for a woman to be between marriages. According to Roman laws, women were expected to bear children and thus be married between the ages of 20 and 50. Divorces were generally accepted but the expectation was that divorcees would remarry.⁵⁶ Although at this time, a norm for women was to be married, it was pre-dated by an ideal of *univira*, a woman who was married only once during the course of her life.⁵⁷ In the second and first century B.C.E., women who did not remarry were praised as *univirae* in epitaphs and literary accounts.⁵⁸ It has been suggested that the *univira* ideal had partially led to the devaluation of marriage and family in the first place. This would then have resulted in the Augustan marriage legislation dating from the turn of the Common Era which obligated women to be married and favored those who bore children.⁵⁹ The existence of the *univira* ideal continued to live side by

⁴⁹ See *m. Yeb.* 14:1 for a wife's and a husband's willingness to divorce. According to *m. Ket.* 7:9-10, a man's bodily defects or his bad odour resulting from his occupation granted his wife a right to divorce him on her initiative. *M. Arakh.* 6:5 describes a situation where a woman wishes to divorce and compels her husband to declare the divorce as his will. See Archer 1990, 217-220; Ilan 1995, 143-144; Brewer 1999, 352-353.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ilan 1996, 195-196.

⁵¹ Ilan 1995, 145-146.

⁵² For primary sources, see Brewer 1999, 353-354.

⁵³ BGU IV.1102; BGU IV.1104. Cf. Evans Grubbs 2002, 211-212.

⁵⁴ P. Şe'elim 13. Cf. Ilan 1996; Brewer 1999.

⁵⁵ Kraemer 2003, 131.

⁵⁶ Pomeroy 1995, 166; Portefaix 2003, 154.

⁵⁷ E.g. Propertius, *Elegies* 4.11. Cf. Lightman & Zeisel 1977; Bassler 2003, 128; Collins 2011, 158.

⁵⁸ Lightman & Zeisel (1977, 19-20), Watson (2005, 81-82), and Shelton (2013, 40, 51-52) present ancient sources in addition to discussions.

⁵⁹ Watson 2005, 81-82.

side with the new marriage legislation somewhat modified, as mainly women who had died before their husbands and, as a result, had been married only once, were revered as *univirae* on their tombstones.⁶⁰

Data from the census returns of 300 Egyptian households between the years 12 and 259 C.E. indicate that remarrying after being widowed or divorced became less common for women at the age of 35.⁶¹ The tendency of not remarrying increased as women got older; in their late forties, about 25 to 40% of women were married.⁶² At this age, not remarrying could be due to the high mortality rate, which meant that there were fewer men to marry, and the tendency of men to marry younger women.⁶³ Thus in this age group, the majority of women were not married. Although the Egyptian sample is not extensive, it nevertheless provides the most conclusive data of demography of any Greco-Roman population. If corresponding data had been preserved from other parts of the Roman Empire, the results could be quite similar. It then follows that as heads of households, women hosts of early Christian gatherings were not an anomaly among women. Instead, they belonged to a relatively large group of women who had probably been married at some point, and had gained their perhaps modest property as their own.

3.4. The Guardianship of Women

As women not currently married, women heads of households were affected by the customs of guardianship. Until the Augustan legislation around the turn of the Common Era, every free Roman woman was under the legal power of her husband or *paterfamilias* or had a male guardian. The relevant terminology includes the terms *patria potestas* (father's power), *manus* ("a hand"; husband's legal power over his wife) and *tutela* (guardianship).

Patria potestas signified the juridical and financial power that a *paterfamilias* had over those who belonged legally to his *familia*. In the face of the law, those under *patria potestas* could not own property but their *paterfamilias* also owned the property that belonged to them. *Patria potestas* lasted until the death of

⁶⁰ E.g. CIL VI 31711. More epitaphs are presented in Lightman & Zeisel (1977, 22-24). Cf. also Watson 2005, 82.

⁶¹ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 126-127. The census returns are discussed in detail on pp. 63-66.

⁶² Bagnall & Frier 1994, 113-115; Mueller 2002, 267.

⁶³ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 154.

the head of a household. After his death, those free citizens previously under his *potestas*, including his daughters and sons, would gain their property for independent ownership.⁶⁴

Another form of the guardianship of women was a husband's juridical power, *manus*, over his wife. In a *cum manu* (with *manus*) marriage, a woman became legally part of her husband's *familia* and her husband became her guardian. If a woman was married *cum manu*, she could not own property but her husband owned any property she might have had.⁶⁵ However, at the late Republican time, *cum manu* marriages had become a rarity and were replaced almost entirely by *sine manu* (without *manus*) marriages.⁶⁶ In a *sine manu* marriage, the wife remained under the *potestas* of her *paterfamilias*, not coming under her husband's power. Thus, the wife belonged legally to her childhood *familia* although she lived with her husband's *familia*. In consequence, her possible property was officially in her *paterfamilias*'s, not her husband's, possession. One possible motivator for the increasing number of *sine manu* marriages was the perceived importance of keeping the property in one's own family.⁶⁷

According to one estimate, the probability that a woman's father would have died before her first marriage was approximately 50 percent. The probability that the father of a 25-year-old woman had have died was 70 percent.⁶⁸ If a woman was not married or married *sine manu* and her *paterfamilias* died, she became judicially independent, *sui iuris*. In these circumstances, she would own her property independently.⁶⁹ All women who were *sui iuris* had guardians, *tutores*, until Augustan legislation. In the early form of *tutela mulierum* (the guardianship of women), the guardian was typically the closest agnate, a relative from a woman's father's side. A guardian's task was to oversee how a woman used her property but he was not a co-owner of the property.⁷⁰ The Augustan legislation enabled freeborn women to be freed from *tutela mulierum* after having three children, and freed women after four children. This right was called *ius (trium) liberorum* (the right of

⁶⁴ Gaius, *Institutes* I.48-49, 55. Ulpian, *Digest* 1.6.4. Cf. Evans Grubbs 2002, 20-23.

⁶⁵ Gaius, *Institutes* I.109. Cf. Evans Grubbs 2002, 21-23.

⁶⁶ Saller 2007, 95-96.

⁶⁷ Pomeroy 1995, 152, 155.

⁶⁸ Treggiari 1991, 32.

⁶⁹ Gardner 1995, 384; Osiek & Balch 1997, 5; Saller 2007, 95-97.

⁷⁰ Gardner 1999, 16-19; Evans Grubbs 2002, 24.

(three) children).⁷¹ Further, the legislation of Emperor Claudius licensed freeborn women to choose a *tutor* according to their own aspiration, superseding the agnates as guardians. Subsequently, women could have even their own freedmen as tutors.⁷²

In the Roman Greek East, the customs pertaining to the guardianship of women were largely similar to those of Rome, although there was also some variation from the distinct Roman practice.⁷³ The guardian was called κύριος, lord. In a typical case, a woman's guardian before her marriage was her father, after marrying she was under the guardianship of her husband and after the death of her husband, her adult son or other male relative became her guardian. Women needed their guardians' approval for legal and financial transactions.⁷⁴

Although there were some specifically Greek customs in relation to the guardianship of women, there is also evidence of the utilization of the Roman legislation from the time of the Roman Empire. For instance, there is a papyrus in which a woman asks to be freed from guardianship after having three children on the basis of Roman law.⁷⁵ This same woman is later an independent party of a land sale because of *ius liberorum*.⁷⁶ There are also other financial and legal documents where women refer to themselves as acting without a guardian on the basis of *ius liberorum*.⁷⁷ The inscriptional and papyri sources also attest that women typically referred to Roman laws when requesting particular tutors for themselves.⁷⁸ There is

⁷¹ *Lex Iuliae* in 18 B.C.E., *Lex Papiae Poppaiae* in 9 C.E. Evans Grubbs (2002, 37-43) compiles the relevant legislation. See also Fantham et al. 1994, 303.

⁷² The freedom of women to choose a tutor according to their own will is also attested in Gaius's *Institutes* (I. 115, 173, 178, 180), A Roman handbook of law dating from the second century C.E. *Institutes* (I.190; II.122) also refers to a tutor who is forced to give his consent to a woman's actions against his will. For the texts and a brief discussion, see Evans Grubbs 2002, 24-29. Cicero (*Lucius Murena*, 27) alludes to women whose tutors are their subordinates.

⁷³ Bremen 1996, 206-207, 225-226, 230.

⁷⁴ Bremen 1996, 206; Evans Grubbs 2002, 34-35.

⁷⁵ P.Oxy. XII 1467, see Horsley 1982, 29-30; Evans Grubbs 2002, 38-39.

⁷⁶ P.Oxy. XII 1475, ll. 14-16.

⁷⁷ The Greek expression used is χωρίς κυρίου χρηματίζουσα κατὰ τὰ Ῥωμαίων ἔθη δικαίῳ τέκνων ("negotiating without her lord in accordance with the customs of the Romans in virtue of the *ius liberorum*," transl. Horsley 1982, 29) or similar. See the list of variant forms in Sheridan 1996, 125. Papyri include e.g. P.Mil.Vogl. VI 269, where a woman acting without a guardian sub-leases land and a house in Tebunis in 124 C.E. A list of one first- and several second-century C.E. papyri is in Sheridan 1996, 118. These include P.Oxy. XLI 2959; BGU III 717; P.Oslo II 31; SB III 6292; SB VI 9573; P.Oxy. XII 1451; BGU III 920; BGU VII 1662; P.Hamb. I 100; PSI VI 704. The sources from other parts of the Greek East include SEG. 4.544, an inscription repeating a letter in which a woman grants permission for a man to bury his wife in her *heroon* at Ephesos, dating from 204 C.E. A Spartan example, IG V 1 586, comes from the second century C.E. in an inscription that records a woman's religious offices. IG V I 608 presents another Spartan example. For discussion about the papyri evidence, cf. Horsley 1982, 29-31; Sheridan 1996. See also Youtie 1974, 261-262. For inscriptional evidence, cf. Spawforth 1985, 207-208; Bremen 1996, 226-227.

⁷⁸ P.Oxy. XII 1466 contains several women's requests to have particular tutors assigned for themselves. SB III 6223 is a wax tablet containing the transaction where a woman had a tutor whom

an early third-century Egyptian papyrus in which a woman requests a tutor for one financial transaction only. The reason for the lack of a tutor is not told. The woman is not a Roman citizen and so cannot have been freed from having a tutor on the grounds of having children.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, this case shows that the guardianship of women could be a formality without practical implications for women's decisions about the usage of their property.

Disagreeing with the notion of guardianship having been a mere technicality in the Greek East, Riet van Bremen argues that women likely acted under male control even when the names of guardians are not visible in documents. Bremen's central thesis is that the perceived influence and relative independence of Greek women was due to the power plays of Greek families belonging to high socioeconomic strata. These tactics were played in terms defined by men. Their stake was family honor that called for public benefactions. These were also made in women's names if the situation called for it. Thus, according to Bremen, women's benefactions were motivated by their families and family honor and were not a sign of women's independence.⁸⁰

Bremen perceives the influence of male guardians or relatives as a focal factor in women's actions even when no male guardian or relative is mentioned in documents that would traditionally present also a guardian. She argues that the existence of κύριος was only one expression of the pervasive male authority over women's lives, which was a reality even when men are not represented in women's documents. However, as Bremen herself admits, the evidence can also be simply interpreted as what it appears to be: documents in which women act without male authorities.⁸¹

The guardianship of Jewish women was quite similar to that of other Greco-Roman women. A daughter remained under her father's guardianship until she was married. Possibly, a widow or divorcee did not return under her father's guardianship but became judicially independent.⁸² Family archives preserved in the Judean desert illustrate forms of the guardianship of Jewish women in the first

she herself requested. Cf. Evans Grubbs 2002, 31, 36-37. In P. Enteux. 22 a woman asks for a particular tutor, explaining that her husband and son have died and there are no male relatives to have as a tutor. For the translation of this papyrus, see Rowlandson (ed.) 1998, 164-165.

⁷⁹ P.Oxy. I 56. Cf. Evans Grubbs 2002, 35-36.

⁸⁰ Bremen 1996, 44-45, 259-261. Cf. also Bremen 1983, 225-226, 232-233, 235-237.

⁸¹ Bremen 1996, 219-225.

⁸² However, these customs are *b. Ketub.* 49a. See also *b. Ned.* 89a. Cf. Archer 1990, 45 n. 3.

centuries C.E. One of these is the Babatha archive, which dates from the early second century C.E.⁸³ Its documents present women acting both with and without male guardians in legal and business transactions. They do not indicate that the guardians would have had control over the women's decisions.⁸⁴

Thus, in the first centuries C.E., some women were altogether freed from male guardianship. Those who had guardians could influence who their guardians or tutors would be. Tutors did not co-own women's property but acted as overseers on women's decisions. However, especially when women's freedmen were their tutors, it appears that not all tutors could have any influence whatsoever on women's transactions. To my knowledge, there are no recorded cases dating from the first centuries C.E. where a male guardian would have prohibited a woman under his guardianship from using her property in the way she chose.⁸⁵ In the case of women heads of households, this meant that those women who had gained property could probably control its use independently even if they had guardians.

3.5. Women as Heads of Households in the Roman West

In what follows, I will discuss women as property-owners and present women as heads of households in the Latin West, Greek East and within Judaism. I will begin each section by briefly describing the typical ways for women to gain property in each cultural sphere. Next, I will present women heads of households who appear in inscriptions, epitaphs, papyri and various documents. These women demonstrate that for some women, heading a household was not merely a theoretical possibility but a reality.

3.5.1. The Property of Roman Women

Roman women who were judicially independent, *sui iuris*, could own property of their own. As already mentioned, many of these women had guardians, but that did not affect their ability to own property. Women's own property became especially

⁸³ For general information about the Babatha archive and Babatha herself, see Oudshoorn 2007, 5-12.

⁸⁴ Cotton 1997; Calpino 2012, 99-100. Oudshoorn (2007, 365-366) presents examples of women in the Babatha archive acting without a guardian, but argues that these documents are examples of incomplete assimilation of Roman laws.

⁸⁵ However, according to Bremen (1996, 222) this only tells that transactions that a guardian would not have approved, would not have been documented.

notable from the first century B.C.E. onwards.⁸⁶ Women owned, for instance, slaves,⁸⁷ houses, farms and factories.⁸⁸

Typically, women gained property through their dowries and inheritances.⁸⁹ A judicially independent woman could also receive gifts which were under her control.⁹⁰ The dowries could include money, land and other property.⁹¹ During the marriage, the dowry was in the husband's control but it was considered a part of the wife's property. In the case of a divorce or a spouse's death, a wife or her *paterfamilias*, if she was not judicially independent, was entitled to regain the dowry. However, if a wife initiated the divorce or if a couple had children, the husband was entitled to have a portion of the dowry.⁹²

In addition to dowries as a means of gaining property, women could inherit. When passing on inheritance or otherwise reorganizing the ownership of property, Romans often gave the highest priority to property staying in the right family. As marrying *sine manu* became a norm, women's possessions did not become the property of their husbands upon marriage. This ensured that the property would stay in the right family upon a woman's marriage. Thus, the gender of an heir was considered to be of secondary importance.⁹³ This is apparent in the Roman custom which guaranteed female and male heirs equal shares of the property of the deceased *paterfamilias* if there was no will.⁹⁴ However, not leaving a will was not typical.⁹⁵ Those who had made a will usually favored male over female heirs,⁹⁶ but this did not go to extremes, as it was considered improper to leave daughters without their fair share.⁹⁷

Studies indicate that women owned nearly one-third of the property in the Roman Empire. Saller implies that 30 percent of all property in women's possession would be a reasonable estimate in Rome, and that women owned at least more than 20 percent.⁹⁸ According to the studies conducted on the basis of papyri evidence, it

⁸⁶ Pomeroy 1995, 163.

⁸⁷ Saller 1999, 185.

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Setälä 1977, 38, 50, 60, 211.

⁸⁹ Setälä 1999, vii.

⁹⁰ Crook 1986, 62.

⁹¹ Evans Grubbs 2002, 91.

⁹² Crook 1986, 68; Evans Grubbs 2002, 95-96, 191-192.

⁹³ Setälä 1999, ix.

⁹⁴ Evans Grubbs 2002, 20.

⁹⁵ Saller 1994, 163.

⁹⁶ Saller 2007, 97.

⁹⁷ Saller 1994, 164.

⁹⁸ Saller 2007, 97-98.

has been estimated that women owned about one third of real estate and other property in Egypt in the Roman period.⁹⁹ In addition, it has been assessed that in Roman Spain women owned about one fourth or one third of all property.¹⁰⁰

Women were involved in various businesses, such as the brick industry in Rome. The owners of the land or clay beds from which the material for bricks was obtained were stamped on the bricks. These brick stamps are well documented and the data available about them are unusually conclusive.¹⁰¹ Of 150 known landowners, one third were women in and near Rome in the first three centuries C.E.¹⁰² Near the town of Puteoli, wooden wax tablets dating from the first century C.E. have been preserved. They record transactions made through members of the familia of Sulpicii, who were specialized in various business dealings. Accordingly, these tablets are now called the Sulpicii archive.¹⁰³ There are 137 tablets inventoried. One study uses 97 of the most well preserved of them. In 21 of these, women appear as one of the contracting parties. In two, women participate indirectly in a transaction. Thus, in sum there are 23 documents out of a total of 97 where women are involved in the transaction, which implies women's property ownership. This equals a proportion of 24 percent.¹⁰⁴ The tablets demonstrate that women borrow and lend money in the same way as men do.¹⁰⁵ Although women are typically recorded as acting with tutors, women's and men's actions are similar.¹⁰⁶

Not all women whose names were stamped on bricks or who were parties to financial transactions were heads of their households. However, the percentage in which women were involved in these businesses indicates that women property owners were not a marginal phenomenon in the Roman Empire during the first centuries of the Common Era. They also show that women used their property in the Roman Empire in much the same way as men. As widowed and divorced women were not a rare phenomenon, some of the women in business in all likelihood were

⁹⁹ Hobson 1983, 314-316; Saavedra 2002, 305-311; Barker 2012, 117.

¹⁰⁰ Saavedra 2002, 306-307, 311; Barker 2012, 117.

¹⁰¹ Setälä 1989, 64.

¹⁰² E.g. the following inscriptions present women landowners from whose land bricks were produced: CIL XV 341, 355, 575, 576, 822, 870, 871, 872. See also Setälä 1977, 38, 50, 60, 211, 247, 259; Setälä 1989, 65; Setälä 2002, 184-200.

¹⁰³ Gardner 1999, 11; Jakab 2013, 128-129.

¹⁰⁴ Jakab 2013, 130.

¹⁰⁵ For the texts of some of the tablets and a discussion, see Gardner 1999, 14-22; Jakab 2013, 135-147.

¹⁰⁶ Gardner 1999, 26-27; Jakab 2013, 148-149.

also heads of their households. Next, however, I will present Roman women who were certainly heads of their households and whose property thus consisted partly of their own homes.

3.5.2. Women as Heads of Households in Ancient Sources from the Roman West

One Roman woman head of a household is Sergia Paulina, whose name appears in several second-century C.E. inscriptions. The inscriptions are epitaphs of people who have been members of an association of her household (*collegium quod est in domu / domo Sergiae Paullinae*).¹⁰⁷ Some epitaphs also use the formula *collegium familiae Sergiae Paullinae*.¹⁰⁸ Because the wording “*collegium quod est in domo Sergiae Paullinae*” is a Latin equivalent for ἡ κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησία (Col. 4:15), it has been discussed whether the collegium in Sergia Paulina’s home could have been one of Christ-believers like the early Christian community which convened at Nympha’s home. However, no evidence for this argument has been found.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is simpler to conclude that the similarity between the Sergia Paulina inscription and Col. 4:15 derives from there being a woman head of a household who is also the head of a group whose membership consisted largely of members of the household.

The members of the association are likely to be members of Sergia Paulina’s household, not outsiders.¹¹⁰ Sergia Paulina is presented as the head of the household and there is no mention of a husband. However, in some epitaphs she is identified as a daughter of Lucius. It is also worth noting that some epitaphs mention the *domus*¹¹¹ and others the *familia*¹¹² of Sergia Paulina. It is possible that the distinction between *domus* as the family and *familia* as the legal entity apply here. If this is so, there are both those who are considered members of the legal *familia* and those who belong to the *domus*, although they would not be counted as legal

¹⁰⁷ CIL VI 9148, 9149, 10260, 10261, 10262, 10263, 10264. Cf. Hasegawa 2005, 81; Osiek 2008, 266.

¹⁰⁸ CIL VI 10260, 10263.

¹⁰⁹ Rebillard (2009, 42-43) presents how this possibility has been discussed with the conclusion that the association was not likely to be one of Christ-believers.

¹¹⁰ Hasegawa 2005, 81.

¹¹¹ CIL VI 9148, 9149, 10261, 10262

¹¹² CIL VI 10260, 10263.

members of the *familia*. Slaves would belong to the *familia* and free members of household to the *domus*.¹¹³

The example of Sergia Paulina shows that women could be heads of sizeable households. This evidence contradicts the Roman legal texts that state that “a woman is the beginning and the end of her *familia*.” Incidentally, the legal texts do not consider slaves to be people but property. Women’s households in the meaning of a legal *familia* could include other people, namely slaves. In addition, although women’s legal *familia* could not include free people, these could still belong to a woman’s household in the sense of *domus*.

Pompeian sources also tell about women heads of households. One source mentions a certain Julia Felix, who rented apartments, baths and shops in her building complex in Pompeii after the earthquake of 62 C.E.¹¹⁴ An inscription on the wall of the complex reads as follows:

To rent for the period of five years from the thirteenth day of next August to the thirteenth day of the sixth of August, the Venus Bath fitted for the well-to-do, shops with living quarters above, apartments on the second floor located in the building (*in praedis*) of Julia Felix, daughter of Spurius. At the end of five years, the agreement will be terminated.¹¹⁵

Although the inscription does not mention Julia Felix’s *domus*, the architecture of the building complex shows that there was also a private house with its own entrance.¹¹⁶ There is no reason to suggest that this part would have been inhabited by anyone else than Julia Felix herself. It is worth noting that Julia Felix is presented as a daughter of Spurius, not as a wife, which strongly suggests that there was no husband. In addition, the way Julia Felix’s origin of birth is described implies that she is an illegitimate child, which, in turn, indicates that she did not belong to the elite.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, illegitimacy was common as only two Roman citizens could marry legally.¹¹⁸ Julia Felix did not belong to the elite but she still owned a

¹¹³ See my discussion on pp. 44-46.

¹¹⁴ D’Ambra 2012, 405. For a description of Julia’s building complex, which consisted of apartments, baths, gardens and shops and was richly decorated, see Nappo 2007, 359-361; D’Ambra 2012, 406-407.

¹¹⁵ CIL IV 1136. Translation from D’Ambra 2012, 405.

¹¹⁶ Nappo 2007, 359; D’Ambra 2012, 406. Cf. pp. 24-25 of this study for the diverse forms of *domus*.

¹¹⁷ The inscription uses the expression SP(URII) F(ILIAE), which was a typical way to indicate a person’s illegitimate birth. See Osiek 2012, 44, 55 n. 11; D’Ambra 2012, 407.

¹¹⁸ Rawson 1974, 304; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 23. There were some exceptions; see my discussion on p. 47.

considerable amount of property and used it for profit.¹¹⁹ Her example shows that non-elite women could own property that they could use for their livelihood.

Another Pompeian woman, Eumachia, was a priestess and a benefactor of an association of fullers. The evidence of her benefactions and building activities has been preserved in inscriptions.¹²⁰ She erected a large multi-function building on the Pompeian forum. One of the building's functions was to provide a meeting place for an association of fullers. Her activities date from the early first century C.E.¹²¹ The patronage of the association of fullers is indicated in an inscription placed on the base of Eumachia's statue situated in the Pompeian forum:

To Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess, the fullers (set this up).¹²²

Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess (*sacerd[os] publ[ica]*), in her own name (*nomine suo*) and that of her son, Marcus Numistrius Fronto, built at her own expense (*sua pecunia*) the chalcidicum, crypt and portico in honour of Augustan Concord and Piety and also dedicated them.¹²³

Although these benefactions could also have been made by a married woman, there are two factors that imply that Eumachia was either widowed or divorced. First, in inscriptions she is presented as a daughter and a mother but not as anyone's wife. Thus, at some point she had been married. Second, she also had a tomb complex built. An inscription on its wall announces that Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, has built it for herself and her household (*sibi et suis*).¹²⁴ This is a typical formula in inscriptions to describe someone and his or her household, although neither *familia* nor *domus* is used.¹²⁵ Although in theory, Eumachia might have been in a *sine manu* marriage where spouses had separate property and thus *familiae*, it was not customary even in this situation to present a woman without her husband in inscriptions. Thus, it is likely that Eumachia was the head of her household; she had been married earlier but was no longer at the time of the inscriptions.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Savunen 1997, 56-58; D'Ambra 2012, 407-409.

¹²⁰ CIL X 810, 811, 813. D'Ambra 2012, 401-406; Cohick 2009, 294-296; Ward 1998, 326-327; Cooley & Cooley 2004, 98-101.

¹²¹ D'Ambra 2012, 401-404.

¹²² CIL X 813. Translated by Cooley & Cooley 2004, 101.

¹²³ CIL X 810. Translated by Cooley & Cooley 2004, 100. CIL X 811 is similar to 810 but is very fragmentary. See Cooley & Cooley 2004, 98.

¹²⁴ See Cooley & Cooley (2004, 101) for the original inscription.

¹²⁵ E.g. AE 1909.65 = AE 1912.252; AE 1928.70; AE 1986.166.

¹²⁶ According to Savunen (1997, 55), Eumachia is likely to be a widow. However, Calpino (2012, 160-161) maintains that Eumachia is married but her husband stays in the backdrop, although there is in fact no reason to surmise so.

Eumachia was in control of her own property. Although Eumachia's benefactions were on a more substantial scale, her presentation makes her a parallel of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. In Acts 12:12, Mary is identified as the mother of John Mark, and the widow of Epitropus is identified probably by her late husband (Ign. *Pol.* 8:2). No other woman host or possible women host is identified through a man. The absence of a husband but the presence of a father or a son, or the absence of these, also indicates that the woman in question was not married at the time of the reference made to her.¹²⁷

Ummidia Quadratilla, who lived in the first and early second centuries C.E. and presumably died at the age of 79, was the female head of her household, known from a letter of Pliny the Younger and a body of inscriptions relating to her.¹²⁸ In Pliny's letter, Ummidia Quadratilla is presented as an elite woman who enjoys theater and board games, neither of which Pliny approves.¹²⁹ According to him, Ummidia Quadratilla had said herself that as a woman she needs amusement, hence her interest in theater and games. Nevertheless, Pliny commends her on raising her grandson and granddaughter well. Pliny also mentions Ummidia Quadratilla's freedmen, who were entertainers,¹³⁰ and thanks Ummidia Quadratilla for honorably bequeathing her property to her grandchildren, not to her entertainers.¹³¹ Ummidia Quadratilla was not supervised by a man, but was free to do what she desired with her time and money. She was the head of her household and the owner of her *domus*.¹³² In his letter Pliny rejoices that Ummidia Quadratilla's grandson would be the *dominus* of the house now that Ummidia Quadratilla had passed away.¹³³ The obvious implication is that while she was still alive she was the head of the household.

Pliny's letter recounts the activities of Ummidia Quadratilla from an elite male perspective, and it is unlikely that this account is either objective or conclusive. Another set of sources, namely inscriptions recording Ummidia Quadratilla's material benefactions, has also been preserved. Although they are no

¹²⁷ Irvin 1980, 77-78. Cf. also Kraemer 1992, 137.

¹²⁸ For Ummidia Quadratilla, cf. Dixon 2001, 109-110; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 208; Van Abbema 2008, 76-79; Shelton 2013, 240-255; Hemelrijk 2013, 65-66.

¹²⁹ Pliny, *Ep.* 7.24.3-5.

¹³⁰ Pliny, *Ep.* 7.24.6.

¹³¹ Pliny, *Ep.* 7.24.2, 7.

¹³² Pliny, *Ep.* 7.24.4: Her grandson has not seen theater at home, obviously referring to Ummidia Quadratilla's home.

¹³³ Pliny, *Ep.* 7.24.8.

more objective than Pliny's letter, they nevertheless offer another perspective on this woman. In the inscriptions, Ummidia Quadratilla is presented as the daughter of a certain Gaius. Her husband's name is not given, nor is it known from other sources, although grandchildren are mentioned. According to one inscription, Ummidia Quadratilla has built an amphitheatre and a temple in the town of Casinum.¹³⁴ Another inscription recounts her restoring a theater in Casinum and providing a feast for the people of Casinum in honor of the restoration.¹³⁵

In addition, funerary monuments of two of Ummidia's slaves have been preserved. These funerary monuments demonstrate that her slaves were her own.¹³⁶ Based on the monuments, it has been argued that Ummidia Quadratilla used her pantomime group for business in order to gain profit, not merely for her own pleasure.¹³⁷ This prospect is something that neither Pliny's letter nor the inscriptions mention explicitly. Nevertheless, it serves as a further reminder of the inconclusive nature of the sources in which Greco-Roman women appear. There are whole aspects of their lives that are permanently unattainable even when they are mentioned in more than one source. One may surmise that this is much more so in the case of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, who are only mentioned in passing in sporadic sources.

These inscriptions and Pliny's letter illustrate the influence that genre has on the portrayal of women's activities.¹³⁸ Both genres utilize stereotypes and conventional language. Whereas both of them refer to Ummidia's taste for theater, the descriptions differ notably. As might be expected from a man of his status, Pliny detests it. From the public's point of view, the way in which she uses her wealth to support theater is laudable. On the other hand, the language of inscriptions is formulaic and thus the praise for Ummidia Quadratilla's activities in building and restoring a theater follows the conventions of public honoring. Likewise, the epitaphs of her slaves do not reveal more about Ummidia Quadratilla herself.

¹³⁴ CIL X 5183: "Ummidia Quadratilla, daughter of Gaius, built the amphitheater and the temple for the citizens of Casina from her own resources (*sua pecunia*)"

¹³⁵ AE 1992, 244 = AE 1946, 174: "Ummidia Quadratilla, daughter of Gaius, restored the theater that had been adorned at the expense of her father and had collapsed from old age for the citizens of Casina from her own resources. To celebrate the dedication she gave a banquet to the decuriones, the people and the women." This reconstruction follows one given in Hemelrijk (2013, 66 n.5). Due to the fragmentariness of the inscription, there have been various interpretations. See references in Hemelrijk 2013, 66 n. 5.

¹³⁶ Dionysius in AE 1985, 189 and Venusta in CIL VI 28526. See also Sick 1999, 336.

¹³⁷ Sick 1999.

¹³⁸ Cf. Dixon 2001, 16-25, 70. See my discussion on pp. 9-10.

Ummidia Quadratilla is an example of a woman head of household who is able to decide about the usage of her own property. In addition, the different perspectives in different sources on Ummidia Quadratilla's activities illustrate how one-sided a picture a single source gives and how dependent that picture is from its author's point of views. It is also certain that different individuals or groups of people perceived the activities of women hosts of early Christian gatherings differently. Whereas these women were an essential asset for some Christ-believers, they were disparaged or even rejected by others. This is clear in sources where they appear. Depending on the attitude towards women hosts in the sources, various pictures of them emerge.

3.6. Women as Heads of Households in the Greek East

3.6.1. The Origins of Property of Women in the Greek East

As in the Roman West, so too in the Greek East, women who owned their own property were typically widows, divorcees or had inherited their property.¹³⁹ One source of a woman's property was her dowry. During the marriage, neither of the spouses could use the dowry freely. In the case of a divorce or a husband's death, a wife could gain her dowry to her own possession. However, it was not a given as various agreements about the usage of the dowry might have been made both during and after a marriage. The Roman citizens of the Greek East were under Roman law. Thus, the destination of the dowry depended on whether the marriage was of *cum* or *sine manu* form. In a *sine manu* marriage a woman, if her *paterfamilias* was dead, owned her own property and could claim it for herself after the end of her marriage. Both in the Roman West and in the Greek East, *cum manu* marriages were rare in the first and second centuries C.E.¹⁴⁰

There is little information from the Roman period about the division of property between spouses who were not Roman citizens. According to Riet van Bremen, it is likely that there were somewhat similar arrangements to those of Roman law. Thus, it was possible for women to own property independently during

¹³⁹ Bremen 1996, 259-261. Naturally, these conditions did not rule each other out, but one and the same woman could gain property through widowhood, divorce as well as inheritance.

¹⁴⁰ Bremen 1996, 278-281.

and after the end of marriage.¹⁴¹ The extant primary sources about women property owners in the Greek East typically present elite women. However, there are sources that indicate that also non-elite women could and did own land and other property.¹⁴² This is evidenced also in primary sources about women property owners, which will be discussed next.¹⁴³

3.6.2. Women as Heads of Households in Roman Egypt

During the time of the Roman Empire, Egypt was one part of the Greek East. Despite some distinctive Egyptian features concerning marriage and property ownership,¹⁴⁴ the general lines seem to correspond to the generalized practices concerning women as property owners in the Greco-Roman world. The fairly sporadic inscriptional evidence from the Roman West and Greek East shows that women could be heads of their households. However, in Roman Egypt, more comprehensive data about household structures have been preserved in papyri, with census returns dating from the first to the third century C.E. The Egyptian evidence is unique in the whole Greco-Roman world, as the climate has preserved papyri that would otherwise have vanished.

A household census was conducted every fourteen years for Roman taxation purposes. The most important data for Roman officials was the amount of habitable land and the number of taxable males.¹⁴⁵ Householders were obliged to declare the people living in their households.¹⁴⁶ Although census returns are not without their problems as demographic data, they still comprise the most comprehensive source of any population in the Greco-Roman world.¹⁴⁷ Census data offer a wide cross-section of people from different socioeconomic classes as it also presents those who are less well-off.¹⁴⁸ The extent to which the data can be generalized across the

¹⁴¹ Bremen 1996, 282-296.

¹⁴² Bremen 1996, 269.

¹⁴³ Two women heads of households in the Greek East, Sosinike and Junia Theodora, will be discussed on pp. 77-82 of this study.

¹⁴⁴ One obvious example is marriage between siblings. See e.g. Scheidel 1997, 361-371.

¹⁴⁵ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 57.

¹⁴⁶ Bagnall & Frier 1994, xv, 1-5. For details on the gathering of census returns in Roman Egypt, see Bagnall & Frier 1994, 1-30. See also Barker (1987, 87-93; 2012, 116-117) for census returns in general and returns on women in particular.

¹⁴⁷ Bagnall & Frier (1994, 40-52) analyze biases in the census returns, but conclude that they still provide fairly accurate data. Half of the households were located in metropolises, half in villages (pp. 56-57).

¹⁴⁸ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 49.

Greco-Roman world is somewhat uncertain. However, there is no reason to surmise that the population would have been unique in the Greco-Roman world.¹⁴⁹

Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier have collected, analyzed and reconstructed census returns presenting all of them found up to 1993, resulting in data from a total of 300 Egyptian households dating between 12 and 259 C.E.¹⁵⁰ In these 300 households, about 50 women heads of households are found, although due to the fragmentary data and the uncertainties of ownership relations, the exact number is difficult to calculate.¹⁵¹ Households with women heads vary in shape and size. Some of them include offspring,¹⁵² some other family members,¹⁵³ still others slaves¹⁵⁴ and freed slaves.¹⁵⁵ There are also those households which include all of the above-mentioned¹⁵⁶ and those which consist only of a woman living alone.¹⁵⁷

The Egyptian census returns illustrate how women have become heads of their households. Many of the women heads of households are recorded as having been married before but are no longer, either because of divorce or the death of a spouse. The reason for the dissolution of a marriage was usually recorded only if the declarant had children with her former spouse. Thus, there were probably more widows and divorcees among the women heads of households than is explicitly stated.¹⁵⁸ There were also women who apparently had been married before, as their children and their fathers are reported, but the reason for the marriage ending is not given.¹⁵⁹ Bagnall and Frier suggest that women's apparent aversion to remarriage was largely due to the strain of childbearing.¹⁶⁰

One example of a divorced woman head of a household from the mid-second century C.E. is Herais, a 40-year-old woman who had had three children with

¹⁴⁹ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 51-52, 170-173. On generalizing the data from papyri to the wider Greco-Roman world, see also Bagnall 1995, 11-16.

¹⁵⁰ See the catalog of households in Bagnall & Frier 1994, 181-333.

¹⁵¹ Earlier in this chapter I presented studies according to which in Egypt about one third of the property belonged to women (pp. 55-56). A partial explanation for the difference in numbers is that census data also gives houses owned by women and rented for others, so that not all houses in women's possession have women heads of households. Nevertheless, the census data presents numerous women heads of households.

¹⁵² E.g. SB XIV 11577; SB XXIV 16014.

¹⁵³ E.g. BGU I 302; P.Brux. I 4.

¹⁵⁴ E.g. SB X 10437; P.Berl.Leihg. I 15.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. P.Oxy. II 255.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. P.Tebt. II 480; P.Mil.Vogl. III 194a.

¹⁵⁷ E.g. BGU XI 2089; SB XXIV 16207.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Bagnall & Frier 1994, 123-124; Barker 2012, 116-117. For widows as heads of their households, see e.g. BGU IV 1069 recto; BGU III 971.16-21; ZPE 98, 283-291, col. ii 42-60. For divorced women heads of households, see e.g. P.Mil.Vogl III 193b, 194a, 194b.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. P.Brux. I 15; P. Rein. I. 46.

¹⁶⁰ Bagnall & Frier 1994, 115, 153-155.

her former husband. Her divorce is plainly stated in a formula that records the children of Herais and her divorced (ἀποπεπλεγμένος) husband. The formula indicating divorce is similar in other census returns. Along with these three children, the wife of one of the sons, Herais's mother and a female slave are all declared as members of Herais's household. An adult son is also recorded as Herais's guardian but is nevertheless a member of the household of which Herais is the head.¹⁶¹

One widowed head of a household from early second century C.E. is 64-year-old Kronous, whose household consists of an adult son whose father is Kronous's deceased husband, the son's wife, their three children and slaves.¹⁶² Despite her adult son's residence in the same property, Kronous is recorded as the declarant. She is not recorded as having a guardian. For this household, there are also data from the census return 14 years later. Still alive are the 78-year-old Kronous, her son, and his wife and children. The son is still a member of Kronous's household, and Kronous still does not have a guardian.¹⁶³

The households where women are presented as heads of their households although they also include an adult son,¹⁶⁴ may lead one to surmise that it was simply customary to declare a household through its oldest member. However, there are also households where sons are heads of households although their mothers are household members as well.¹⁶⁵ These differences are not explicable by the variance of date and location in census returns as there are households with the same date and location with a woman head of a household and an adult son as its member,¹⁶⁶ and a household which is headed by an adult son with his mother as its member.¹⁶⁷

In census returns, many women heads of households are presented as being under the guardianship of their male relatives,¹⁶⁸ following the customs of women's guardianship in the Greek East. In contrast, in the contemporary Roman West relatives were not typically women's guardians. According to Tina Saavedra, even women who were not currently married in Roman Egypt were restricted from making independent decisions about their property because their tutors were

¹⁶¹ P.Mil.Vogl. III 194 a.

¹⁶² SB XXII 15704.

¹⁶³ SB XXII 15704.

¹⁶⁴ P.Mil.Vogl. III 194a; P.Stras. IV 257; BGU II 577; P.Tebt. II 480.

¹⁶⁵ P.Mil. I 3; BGU III 706; BGU VII 1580; P.Amh. II 74; BGU II 447, 524; P.Brux. I 17; P.Oslo II 25; SPP II p. 30 no. 3, IV; SB XXII 15704.61-88.

¹⁶⁶ P.Fay. 319.13-19.

¹⁶⁷ P.Amh. II 74.

¹⁶⁸ SB I 5661; BGU VII 1579; PSI I 53.ix; P.Mil.Vogl. III 193b, 194a; BGU I 122, 302; P.Brux. I 20; P.Berl.Leihg. I 16C.

typically male relatives, whereas tutors in the Roman West could be, for instance, friends or freedmen. Saavedra argues that because the tutors of Egyptian women had more interest in the usage of the women's property because of their kinship, they also in effect influenced the usage of women's property per se.¹⁶⁹

However, the existence of male guardians who are relatives may also convey a picture of women's independence. Although these women needed an official guardian, they still had households of their own. They did not belong to households headed by their male relatives. These dynamics are illustrated by multiple households where there are women who do not have spouses but whose adult sons belong to their households. Thus, the property obviously was not always declared either to the oldest member of the household or to the oldest male of the household but apparently to those to whom the property in reality belonged. Accordingly, the instances where women are presented as heads of households do not derive merely from customs according to which property ownership was declared but refers to real ownership of property.

3.7. Jewish Women as Heads of Households

3.7.1. The Origins of Jewish Women's Property

The main sources of Jewish women's independently owned property were gifts, dowries and *ketubah* payments. Gifts were typical means for transferring property from a father to her daughter. When a father gave her daughter property in the form of a gift, he could specify in a document how the gift should be used. Thus, in contrast to a dowry, a husband did not necessarily have a right to use the gift if the father had drawn up a document indicating the way it was to be used.¹⁷⁰ In the Judaeen desert documents, gifts given by parents to their daughters include real estate or other land-related property.¹⁷¹

The Hebrew Bible refers to different payments in connection with marriage but the interrelationships between these payments are not quite clear.¹⁷² One of

¹⁶⁹ Saavedra 2002, 310-311.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. P. Yadin 19. Cf. Cotton & Greenfield 1994, 218-219; Satlow 2001, 204-209; Cotton 2002, 126; Oudshoorn 2007, 244.

¹⁷¹ Cotton 2002, 129-130.

¹⁷² Gen. 24:22, 47, 53; 29:18, 27; 30:25-43, 31:19, 41-42; 1 Sam. 18:23-26. Cf. also Satlow 2001, 200.

these payments was a dowry that consisted typically of moveable goods. Another type of marriage payment relates to a *ketubah*, a settlement that a couple or their parents would make upon a marriage. It determined the payment that the wife was entitled to have if the marriage ended in a divorce or her spouse's death.¹⁷³ In the documents from the Judaeen family archives, both the dowry and the *ketubah* always consist of moveable goods, namely money, jewelry or clothes.¹⁷⁴

Jewish women's rights to inherit were restricted. For instance, according to Numbers, a woman was not to inherit her father's property unless there were no male offspring (Num. 27:1-11). According to some interpreters, a woman was not to inherit her husband's goods, although she did receive her *ketubah* payment in the event of his death.¹⁷⁵ In addition, a husband could give his property to his wife as a gift, which meant that it belonged to her after his death.¹⁷⁶ Despite the texts of Hebrew Bible, there were controversies about women's right to inherit in other circumstances as well. According to some rabbinic interpreters, a woman could inherit her mother's property if the mother had died after her father. Also, a fatally ill husband could shortly before his death bequeath to his wife a bigger share of his property than the *ketubah* would have determined. There was no consensus in Judaism about women's right to inherit.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, despite the seemingly restricted nature of women's ability to inherit, there could perhaps be a variety of exceptions. Thus, also in Judaism in the first centuries C.E., the origins of women's independent property were more or less similar to the surrounding Greek and Roman cultures, although there were also some distinctly Jewish customs.

3.7.2. Jewish Women as Heads of Households in Ancient Sources

Among the best sources pertaining to Jewish women heads of households and property owners in the first two centuries C.E. are documents which were found in the Judaeen desert. One of them is the Babatha archive, which includes documents

¹⁷³ Archer 1990, 173-180, 230-231, 269; Satlow 2001, 202-203.

¹⁷⁴ Cotton 2002, 129-130. See also Satlow 2005, 53-56.

¹⁷⁵ Satlow (2001, 208) refers to Tannaitic law.

¹⁷⁶ P. Yadin 7. Cf. Cotton & Greenfield 1994, 214-216; Ilan 1995, 170.

¹⁷⁷ Ilan 1995, 167-169 presents numerous rabbinic texts discussing the matter. It should be noted, that as Ilan's discussion is heavily indebted to rabbinic writings, the reality of these customs in the first and second centuries C.E. may be questioned. These examples are used here more to demonstrate the variable interpretations of seemingly strict biblical statements.

relating to a Jewish woman, Babatha, and her relatives. The earliest documents of the Babatha archive date from the 90's C.E., the latest from 132 C.E.

Babatha herself was probably born around the turn of the second century C.E. She married for the first time around 120 C.E. In 127 C.E., she declared four date groves as her own property, although she was married at the time.¹⁷⁸ These groves had been purchased by her father in 99 C.E.¹⁷⁹ Although the exact value of the groves is not known, it is nevertheless certain that their size was considerable and they proved to be of value for Babatha.¹⁸⁰ It is also worth noting that soon thereafter, Babatha's father prepared a document in which he declared that he would give the rest of his property to his wife as a gift on the condition that she would still be married to him when he dies.¹⁸¹ Babatha had a son and in 124 C.E. her husband died.¹⁸² Within a few years, Babatha was married again. Her second husband borrowed money from her for the dowry for his daughter from his previous marriage.¹⁸³ By 130 C.E., Babatha's second husband had also died. On this occasion she got three of his date groves but, according to her, it was not enough to cover the value of her dowry and the money her husband owed her. Subsequently, she took legal action against her husband's other heirs.¹⁸⁴

These are not the only turns of events in Babatha's story, but they suffice to illustrate how Babatha gained and used her property. Babatha was an illiterate villager¹⁸⁵ who nevertheless belonged to at least a relatively wealthy family.¹⁸⁶ Babatha's male guardians (ἐπίτροπος) are mentioned in documents written in Greek, but the documents written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean never represent her or other women in the Babatha archive as acting with a guardian. In the Greek documents, the guardians also vary.¹⁸⁷ It has been speculated that this means that male guardians were paid witnesses used when the situation demanded.¹⁸⁸ The documents illustrate Babatha's life cycle; the way she gained her

¹⁷⁸ P. Yadin 16. See Cotton 2002, 127. For a reconstruction of the events relating to Babatha, see Satlow (2005, 53-55), Oudshoorn (2007, 9-11) and Calpino (2012, 76-78).

¹⁷⁹ P. Yadin 3.

¹⁸⁰ Satlow 2005, 53.

¹⁸¹ P. Yadin 7. See Satlow 2005, 54.

¹⁸² P. Yadin 12.

¹⁸³ P. Yadin 17, 18.

¹⁸⁴ P. Yadin 22, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Cotton 1997, 270; Cotton 2002, 124.

¹⁸⁶ Friedman 1996, 61.

¹⁸⁷ See Cotton (1997, 267-273; 2002, 131-133) for primary sources and discussion.

¹⁸⁸ Cotton 1997; Calpino 2012, 99-100.

property, her widowhood, her two marriages and her dealings with guardians, and as such they provide a unique perspective on a Jewish woman's life in the second century C.E. Babatha owned her own property and used it according to her will. Conventions are followed when her guardians are recorded in the Greek documents. On the other hand, the existence of guardians is proved to be a mere convention by their absence in otherwise corresponding Semitic documents.

There are also literary accounts of Jewish women who were not married. One of the most famous ones is Judith, who saves her people from the Assyrian general Holofernes and his troops. The book of Judith is fictional. Its oldest complete version is in Septuagint, written in the second half of the 2nd century or early 1st century B.C.E., although the story takes place in the 7th or 6th century B.C.E.¹⁸⁹ Judith is portrayed as a resourceful pious widow whose οἶκος includes servants and land.¹⁹⁰ She charms Holofernes and tells him how to conquer Israel.¹⁹¹ She stays at Holofernes's camp for four days. On the fourth evening, her dinner with Holofernes ends in his passing out after heavy drinking which she has encouraged.¹⁹² When Holofernes falls asleep, Judith decapitates him.¹⁹³ Subsequently, the Jews are saved from the Assyrian troops.¹⁹⁴ Judith then retreats to living the life of a pious widow. She does not marry again despite living to the age of 105.¹⁹⁵ Although the story offers a fictional description of one widow, one wonders whether there were real Jewish women who might have served as models for, or identified with, Judith. Albeit less radical, there were at least widows who could use their property according to their own liking as the documents from the Babatha archive attest.

Two unmarried adult Jewish sisters, Martha and Mary, are portrayed in the gospels of Luke and John. In Luke's portrayal, Martha invites Jesus to a gathering where she serves the guests and Mary listens to Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Manuscripts present three main variants of where Martha invites Jesus. According to two variants, Martha invites Jesus to her home (οἶκος and οἰκία, respectively). According to the variant chosen in NA²⁷, Martha simply invites Jesus (ὑπεδέξατο

¹⁸⁹ Brine 2010, 7; Gera 2010, 23, 26.

¹⁹⁰ Judith 8:4-7.

¹⁹¹ Judith 10:19-11:23.

¹⁹² Judith 12:7-20.

¹⁹³ Judith 13:6-9.

¹⁹⁴ Judith 14-15.

¹⁹⁵ Judith 16:21-24.

αὐτόν) without mentioning the place. Even if this is the original reading, the context implies that Martha invites Jesus to her and Mary's home.¹⁹⁶ In Luke, no other family members in addition to Martha and Mary are mentioned. In John, however, they are presented as sisters of Lazarus (John 11:1-44). John does not portray a scene where Martha invites Jesus to stay at her house but, instead, Jesus is depicted as having a meal at Lazarus's house, where Martha serves the guests (John 12:1-2). Although the historicity of Luke's narrative is not certain, it is nevertheless a first-century account of a Jewish woman who is able to decide on the usage of her own property.

3.8. Conclusions

There are inscriptional evidence, papyri, literary accounts and other sources that document the existence of women as heads of households in Greco-Roman antiquity. Papyri have preserved information that would not have been inscribed on stones, recorded in steles or recounted in epitaphs. Thus, both Egyptian papyri and family archives from the Judaeian desert differ from inscriptions about Greek and Roman women heads of households as they present non-elite women as heads of households and owners of property alongside men.

All ancient sources, including Egyptian census returns and Judaeian family archives, are representatives of their genre. Nevertheless, the absolute minimum one can infer from sources presented in this chapter is that women could be heads of households. If one dares to surmise a little further, it may be gathered that as women property owners could be portrayed in a manner similar to men, women's property ownership was not viewed as automatically problematic.

The distinction between *domus* and *familia* means that women's households could include numerous people who considered themselves members of these women's households (*domus*), even if they did not belong to women's *familiae* in a strict juridical sense. These people could adopt the beliefs of women heads of their households and consider these women to be their authorities in spiritual matters as they did in everyday life.

¹⁹⁶ Seim 2004, 98.

Especially the documents from the Judaeen desert and the Egyptian census returns illuminate various ways in which women could have access to property. Nowhere are women as heads of households more consistently present than in the census returns. Thus, they confirm the existence of women heads of households on a more general level than the occasional references to women heads of households in other Greek and Roman sources do. Judaeen documents, for their part, capture women's economic activity that one would not have been able to surmise on the basis of the Jewish literary sources of the time. Because of climatic factors, no similar amounts of data have been preserved about women property owners elsewhere in the Roman Empire. However, there is no reason to suppose that there would have been notably different conditions of women's property ownership in the first centuries C.E. in Judaea and in Egypt in comparison to the whole of the Greco-Roman Empire, although some regional variations prevailed. Thus, these documents demonstrate that heading households was not only possible for elite women.

None of the women discussed in this chapter can voice their own side of the story. Women are there but there is not much more that we know about them. We do not know how women felt when gaining property through losing their husbands, parents or children. We do not know which women did not remarry on account of their own will and which because there was no choice. We do not know how women felt about heading households. We do not know how household members perceived women as heads of households. All this considered, is it methodologically justified to use the lives of these women as a context for women hosts of early Christian gatherings? As discussed in chapter 1, some answer no – after all there are only representations of women, not real women¹⁹⁷ – while for others the answer is a cautious yes.¹⁹⁸

I believe that these sources include places where “the mute push through the fabric.” They are made visible when ancient women appear where some scholars¹⁹⁹ still claim it is not possible for women to do so, as heads of households and as businesswomen. If they are ignored, women's presence as essential agents of ancient life continues to be ignored. At least there is a justification for presenting

¹⁹⁷ Clark 2001, 2004; Cooper 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Matthews 2001b; Cobb 2009. See my discussion on pp. 8-9, 11-12.

¹⁹⁹ E.g. Clarke 2000.

the creative imagination of the lives of these women. Accordingly in this chapter, I have created one possible context of women hosts of early Christian gatherings by presenting women in antiquity as heads of households. The contextualization is legitimate, as long as one remembers that the reconstructions are always incomplete. In their casualness about presenting women as heads of households, a picture of women heading households in much the same way as men emerges. The implications this has for the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings will be discussed in chapter 6.

4. Women as Benefactors

4.1. Introduction

Early Christian texts present women hosts as welcoming teachers (e.g. Acts 16:14-15; 2 John) and believers (e.g. Acts 12:12, 16:40) to their homes. Otherwise, the functions that women hosts have in their early Christian communities are rarely touched upon in early Christian writings. With this observation, this chapter sets out to explore women benefactors in antiquity in order to understand the setting of women hosts and gain an insight into the possible functional roles of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. This setting sheds light on the authority of women hosts as it demonstrates what was possible for women in various Greco-Roman communities.

The central theme discussed in this chapter is the phenomenon of patronage and women's participation in it. Various voluntary associations and households were contexts in which patronage took place. More specifically, I will discuss women whose various activities are comparable to those of the women hosts of the early Christian gatherings. The selection of sources presenting women patrons is based on the characteristics of women hosts of early Christian gatherings and the early Christian gatherings themselves.

As women hosts of early Christian gatherings were insiders in the Christian groups convening at their homes, not outside benefactors, I will introduce material that presents similar circumstances in non-Christian settings. As the context of early Christian gatherings is often a common meal, I will also discuss non-Christian women as providers of meals. These illustrate similarities between the activities of non-Christian women and women hosts of early Christian gatherings. In a manner similar to chapter 3, this chapter also discusses the Roman West, the Greek East and Jewish cultural spheres separately while also acknowledging that common characteristics were perhaps more typical than distinctive ones.

4.2. Patronage

In chapter 3, it was established that women could be heads of households and use their own property. This chapter focuses on how women utilized the opportunity to use their property independently. The phenomenon of patronage was one focal factor that had an effect on the authority roles of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Patronage was an essential feature in ancient Mediterranean cultures. In a patronage relationship, the patron typically gave material resources to an individual or a group of people, including for instance professional associations, groups of the poor, religious groups or even whole cities. In return, the patron gained honor manifested either in concrete monuments or in non-material means.¹ Patronage relationships were voluntary for both parties and usually long-standing.² Hosting early Christian gatherings was one concrete example of patronage relationships. Hosts offered other believers material resources and like their non-Christian counterparts, probably presumed to have honor, respect and loyalty in return.

To illustrate the wide variety of settings where patronage takes place, Richard P. Saller defines patronage through three distinctive features of these relationships:

First, it involves the *reciprocal* exchange of goods and services. Secondly, to distinguish it from a commercial action in the marketplace, the relationship must be a personal one of some duration. Thirdly, it must be asymmetrical, in the sense that the two parties are of unequal status and offer different kinds of goods and services in the exchange.³

Three key features of Saller's definition of patronage relationship are that it is reciprocal, personal and asymmetrical. Saller aims at defining patronage as a sociological concept that includes all relationships marked by reciprocity, asymmetry and the personal nature of the relationship.⁴ This broad definition

¹ Osiek & Balch 1997, 50; Misset-van de Weg 1996, 18-27; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 194-209. For studies about patronage in antiquity, see Saller (1982) and Wallace-Hadrill (ed., 1989). Note, however, that Saller mainly examines the patronage relationships of the elite. Eisenstadt & Roniger (1984) discuss patronage as a social phenomenon in general. Cf. esp. pp. 48-49 for key features of patronage relationships.

² Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984, 48-49; Moxnes 1999, 248.

³ Saller 1982, 1. Italics his.

⁴ Saller 1982, 7: "We should not jump to the conclusion that patronage existed only where the words *patronus* and *cliens* were used."

has been widely accepted,⁵ and it is also the starting point for defining patronage in the present study. Although Saller focuses on Roman customs, similar patronage relationships existed throughout the Roman Empire, both in the Roman West and in the Greek East.⁶ Latin terms for a patron are the feminine *patrona* and the masculine *patronus*. Greek terms are the feminine προστάτις and the masculine προστάτης⁷ and especially of a patron of a group εὐεργέτης,⁸ which means a benefactor. In Rom. 16:2, for instance, Paul refers to Phoebe as προστάτις.⁹

As Saller's sociological definition of patronage demonstrates, patronage is not attached to titles. Instead, the activities of a person indicate whether he or she is a patron. If there is a reciprocal relationship between a benefactor and the recipients of beneficence, there is a patronage relationship, even if a patron is not titled as such. This also applies to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. No female (or male) host is called a patron in early Christian texts, with the possible exception of Phoebe.¹⁰ Nevertheless, as providers of resources women hosts were patrons of their fellow-believers. Accordingly, while presenting on the following pages non-Christian women whose activities could be seen as acts of patronage which were similar to those of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, I present sources that describe women's acts of patronage regardless of the titles these women are or are not given. Accordingly, I do not introduce non-Christian women who were titled either *patrona*, προστάτις or εὐεργέτης if the source does not describe their activities more fully.

⁵ E.g. Kloppenborg 1999, 756 n. 3; Nicols 2014, 2-13. However, Eilers (2002, 4-7, 12-13) and Marshall (2009, 43-44) have criticized Saller for taking the definition of patronage away from its original meaning, that of the distinct institution of Roman *patrocinium*, which defines the relationship between a patron and his or her clients. See also Verboven (2003), who explicates the distinction between patronage as a sociological concept and *patrocinium*.

⁶ Wallace-Hadrill 1989, 65-66. Joubert (2001) presents the evidence for this position on pp. 19-21, but tells on p. 23 that in his opinion, Roman patronage and Greek euergetism are nevertheless two distinct phenomena. However, his evidence deals with the attitude of the Greeks toward their Greek and Roman rulers and this is not applicable to the conditions of the patronage exercised by the non-elite. Also, MacGillivray (2011, 188-189) argues that the term patronage should be used only in a narrow sense, i.e. about certain specific relationships within the Roman cultural sphere.

⁷ Horsley et al. 1987, 241-244; Marjanen 2005a, 500; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 196.

⁸ Spawforth 2014, 293.

⁹ However, MacGillivray (2011, 192-195) questions the accuracy of using synonymously the Latin terms *patrona* / *patronus* and Greek προστάτις / προστάτης on the basis of the different definitions of the Latin and Greek words. My choice of referring to women as patrons, benefactors, and hosts instead of patronesses, benefactresses, and hostesses is a deliberate one. I believe that using different words for women and men may lead one to think that women's functions were inherently different from those of men. Although the words are gendered in Greek and Latin, I see no reason to continue that gendering in the present study.

¹⁰ If Phoebe was a host of a Christian gathering. See my discussion on pp. 129-130.

As discussed earlier, early Christian communities and voluntary associations could be parallel phenomena in both form and function.¹¹ Most voluntary associations had at least one patron who financially supported their activities.¹² The material support offered by a patron for a group of people could entail providing common meals and financing the building of meeting places or temples. In return, a patron could be entitled to an honorary place in the meetings or could be appointed with an office in an association.¹³ The recipients of benefactions also had monuments built and praises written for their patrons. The public manifestations of honor given to patrons had two functions: while they were tokens of gratitude for benefactors, they also publicly exemplified what was expected of the wealthy.¹⁴

Hosting early Christian gatherings was one embodiment of patronage as it entailed benefactions by a patron, the host, for a group of believers in the form of a gathering space.¹⁵ Most likely, the Christ-believing patrons of other Christ-believers, including women hosts of Christian gatherings, expected to have respect, influence and authority positions in their Christian communities in return.¹⁶ Furthermore, it was probably also expected by the members of their Christian communities. However, although it has been argued that patrons were the highest authorities in their associations as providers of financial resources that enabled the association to function,¹⁷ the matter of authority is not altogether self-evident. Not all patrons were officials in the associations whose patrons they were.¹⁸ As will be discussed in chapter 6, similar phenomena also affected the authority positions of women who hosted early Christian gatherings

¹¹ See my discussion on pp. 27-30.

¹² Stambaugh & Balch 1994, 140; Osiek & Balch 1997, 50.

¹³ Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 198.

¹⁴ LiDonnici 1999, 86.

¹⁵ White 1996a, 57-58; Harland 2003, 31; Elliott 2003, 188.

¹⁶ Kraemer 1992, 174.

¹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 181.

¹⁸ Seim (2004, 99-100). See Hemelrijk 2008 for women patrons who were not functional members of their associations. Similar data is available for male patrons as well.

4.3. Women's Benefactions in Domestic Settings

There is ample evidence about the existence of women benefactors in antiquity.¹⁹ In what follows, I will introduce women whose acts of patronage are especially apt points of comparison for women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Accordingly, this section consists of three case studies of women who welcomed various groups of people into their homes. Each of the cases utilizes primary sources of different genres which thus ensures a degree of diversity. They are all located in the Greek East and are contemporary to early Christianity.

4.3.1. *The Cult Established at Sosinike's House*

Inscriptions describing the foundation of a cult demonstrate how its origins are contextualized inside the cult itself. Their perspective is that of an insider, not an account of an outsider. In this way, inscriptions about cult-foundation offer relevant parallels to the narratives about the beginnings of communities of Christ-believers. From the point of view of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, one of the most illustrative inscriptions of cult-foundation is a Thessalonian inscription that dates from around the first century B.C.E. or C.E. Below is a translation of a longer section. The italicized part is also given in Greek with the line numbers of the reconstruction.

...to come into the shrine, it seemed that in his sleep Sarapis was standing beside him and instructing him, upon arrival at Opous, to report to Eurynomos the son of Timasitheos that he should receive him and his sister Isis; and to give to Eurynomos the letter which was under his pillow. Waking up he was amazed at his vision and perplexed about what he should do because of the political hostility which he had towards Eurynomos. But falling asleep again, he had the same dream, and when he awoke he discovered the letter under his pillow, just as was indicated to him. When he returned home, he handed over the letter to Eurynomos and reported the god's instructions. Eurynomos took the letter and after hearing what Xenainetos said he was perplexed during the occasion itself, because of the existence of the political hostility between them. But when he read the letter and saw that its contents were consistent with what had been said beforehand by Xenainetos, he accepted Sarapis and Isis. *After he provided hospitality for the gods in the house of Sosinike, she received them among her household gods and performed sacrifices for some time. After her death, Eunosta the granddaughter of Sosibios transmitted the cult and administered the mysteries of the gods among those who also were non-participants in the rites. Later, when Eunosta fell ill [...] performed the sacrifice on her behalf.*²⁰

¹⁹ For primary sources, see Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 199-210; Hemelrijk 2008; Van Abbema 2008, 19-55; Cohick 2009, 291-301; Crook 2009, 607-608.

²⁰ IG X.2.255. Translated by Horsley (1981, 30-31).

18 καὶ μετὰ τὸν ξενισμὸν ἐν ταῖ οἰκίαι ταῖ Σωσινείκας ἐν τοῦς οἰκου-
 19 ροῦς θεοῦς παραλαβοῦσα ἔθυε Σωσινείκα τὰς θυσίας χρόνον τινά·
 20 μετὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτᾶς θάνατον Εὐνόστα ἁ Σωσιβίου θυγατριδᾶ παρε-
 21 δίδου καὶ διεξᾶγε τὰ μυστήρια τῶν θεῶν ἐν τοῦς καὶ ἀμετόχους
 22 τῶν ἱερῶν· Εὐνόστας δὲ ὕστερον ἐν ἀρρωσίαν ἐμπεσοῦσας προέθυε
 23 ὑπὲρ αὐτᾶς τὰς θυσίας -----²¹

In addition to mentioning women heads of households, this inscription describes their activities. It presents Sosinike, who provides a place of worship for the cult of Sarapis and Isis in her home, and is thus a benefactor of the cult. The inscription recounts how a man named Xenainetos receives a vision from Sarapis in his dream. Sarapis tells him to inform a man named Eurynomos that Eurynomos should receive Sarapis and Isis. As the result, Eurynomos provides hospitality for the gods in Sosinike’s house, thus establishing there the cult of Sarapis and Isis. After this, Sosinike begins to perform sacrifices to these gods. After her death, a woman named Eunosta expands the cult to those outside of the household.²²

The historical reliability of the narrative is not known, but its function is probably to legitimize the cult by recounting its divine origins.²³ A similar function is also detectable in other inscriptions that describe cult-foundation.²⁴ One of them dates from around the year 200 B.C.E. and is located in Delos. It recounts how a man named Apollonios first brought with him the cult of Sarapis to Delos from Egypt. He and his son both administer the cult in their turn. Later, the grandson of Apollonios, also named Apollonios, receives in a dream a command from Sarapis to establish a proper temple for him instead of “rented rooms.”²⁵

The inscription presenting Sosinike and the inscription presenting Apollonios both depict a chain of generations administering and transmitting the cult. In the Sosinike inscription, it is emphasized by describing Eunosta as the granddaughter of Sosibios, whose identity is, however, otherwise unknown. In both inscriptions, grandchildren, Eunosta and the younger Apollonios in turn, expand a potential group of believers.²⁶ It is self-evident that the inscription of Apollonios shows that men also administered the cult of Sarapis. It is worth emphasizing that

²¹ Reconstruction according to Sokolowski (1974, 441-442) and Horsley (1981, 29-30).

²² IG X.2.255. Cf. Sokolowski 1974, 441-445; Horsley 1981, 29-32.

²³ Horsley 1981, 31; Edwards 1996, 93.

²⁴ IG XI.4.1299; SIG 3.985. Cf. Barton & Horsley 1981; Klauck 2000, 64-68; Ferguson 2003, 269.

²⁵ IG XI.4.1299. Cf. Ferguson 2003, 269; Moyer 2008; Moyer 2011, 142-207, esp. 156-166.

²⁶ Another much-discussed inscription (SIG 3.985) tells how a man named Dionysius receives in a dream commands according to which the members of his household association are to behave. Cf. Barton & Horsley 1981; White 1996a, 45; Stowers 1998; Klauck 2000, 64-68.

neither Sosinike's nor Eunosta's position is explained by their gender, as there were also men in identical roles. Hosting, administering, transmitting and expanding the cult of Sarapis is in these inscriptions possible for both women and men.

One major difference between Sosinike and the older Apollonios in their respective inscriptions is that unlike Apollonios, Sosinike is not a recipient of a divine vision herself. This distinction emphasizes her compatibility and comparability with women hosts of early Christian gatherings. As I will discuss in chapter 6, the points of contact between the stories of Sosinike and especially Lydia in Acts 16 are obvious. Both of them entail a vision given by a god to a man leading to the establishment of a cult at a woman's home, perhaps consisting mainly of her household.²⁷

The points of convergence between the Sosinike inscription and early Christian writings have also been noticed in the study of early Christianity. The cult of Sarapis offers relevant comparison material for the Christian gatherings as they are roughly contemporary and located in the same geographical area. In addition, Sarapis cults could also consist primarily of the members of a certain household. Subsequently, the narrative of the Sosinike inscription has been compared with early Christian texts that tell about visions from God,²⁸ and depict letters as a means of conveying a divine message.²⁹ The inscription is also mentioned in New Testament studies as an example of establishing a cult on the basis of a dream,³⁰ and as an example of a dream which affirms the right beliefs and piety.³¹

The emphasis of these comparative studies has typically been on the characters of Eurynomos and Xenainetos and their similarities with Paul and Peter in the New Testament.³² In all of these stories, men receive visions while women arrange worship in practice. As the studies have typically focused on the activities of men, the founding of a cult at a woman's home is rarely if ever contemplated, although this is clearly one more common factor. It then follows that, at least as far as I am aware, the story of Sosinike has not been discussed in relation to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. I will discuss the topic in chapter 6.

²⁷ Acts 16:9: a Macedonian man appears to Paul in a dream and asks him to come to Macedonia. Subsequently, Paul leaves for Macedonia and Lydia becomes his first convert there.

²⁸ Horsley 1981, 30-32.

²⁹ Witherington 2006, 55.

³⁰ Dodson 2006, 49-51.

³¹ Strom 2000, 56.

³² Peter in Acts 12; Paul in Acts 16.

It is also worth noting that conventionally women are presented as wives and daughters of men in contemporary inscriptions and other writings.³³ Significantly, this feature is lacking in the portrayal of Sosinike, as it is also lacking when most of the women hosts of Christian gatherings are mentioned. Thus, these women do not seem to have been married at the time and, furthermore, are not presented through their fathers or other male relatives, but on their own. In addition, the households are presented in a natural way as women's households.

4.3.2. *Junia Theodora*

Sources about elite women patrons should be used with caution when contextualizing early Christian women as it is probable that women hosts of early Christian gatherings did not belong to the elite.³⁴ However, there are some elite women patrons who share such similar characteristics to women hosts of early Christian gatherings that discussing them benefits the study of women hosts. One of these elite women patrons is Junia Theodora, who lived in first-century C.E. Corinth.

Junia Theodora was a benefactor of the Lycians, namely people from the various cities of the province of Lycia. Her benefactions towards the Lycians are preserved in five honorary inscriptions inscribed on one stele.³⁵ Notably, she is not presented as anybody's wife or widow, but four inscriptions introduce her without any male. Where one would expect the reference to a man, she is presented as a Roman citizen and an inhabitant of Corinth.³⁶ Only one decree introduces her as the daughter of Lucius.³⁷ Nothing else is known of her family ties. Kearsley proposes that her family is Greek or that her father is Roman and her mother Greek and that Junia herself is both a Roman citizen and a citizen of a Greek city or cities. At least her father's name is Roman.³⁸ Bremen, on the other hand, supposes that Junia

³³ See, for instance, IG V.2.266. Cf. Bremen 1996, 27-28; Connelly 2007, 213.

³⁴ See also Osiek & MacDonald (2006, 199-210). Note that the elite women in ancient sources are not directly comparable to early Christian women. For the social status of early Christians, see my discussion on pp. 21-23. Although Stegemann & Stegemann (1999, 294) conjecture that being a patron might relate to belonging to the upper strata of society, using Phoebe as an example, the usage of the term patron does not in itself require this interpretation.

³⁵ SEG 18.143. For the original Greek texts and their translations, see Kearsley 1999, 204-209. For a discussion, see Kearsley 1999, 191-198; Winter 2003, 183-191.

³⁶ SEG 18.143, ll. 1-2, 13, 22-23, 45, 47-48, 63, 67, 72.

³⁷ SEG 18.143, ll. 16-17.

³⁸ Kearsley 1999, 192-193, 197.

Theodora is a Roman citizen.³⁹ Junia Theodora's family is not emphasized or even mentioned in a manner that would have been conventional. Thus, it does seem that she became a benefactor to enhance her own prestige, rather than that of her family, contrary to Bremen's general conclusion.⁴⁰

According to the inscription, Junia Theodora has received Lycians in her own home (τῆ ἰδίᾳ οἰκίᾳ, line 76) and shown them beneficence (προστασίαν, line 77).⁴¹ In return for her benefactions, Lycians had publicly praised her, as shown in honorary monuments. They also promise to give her a golden crown for her funeral and have her portrait painted after her death.⁴² These functions from both of the parties involved signify a patronage relationship, although Junia Theodora is not titled προστάτις or anything similar. Instead, her beneficence towards the Lycians is recounted, and it is clarified that in return for this beneficence, the Lycians honored her in material forms.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Erlend MacGillivray argues that “[t]here are in fact none of the requisite features of the patronage relationship present in the inscription.” MacGillivray identifies reciprocity and the formation of a client base by the recipients of beneficence as features of the patronage relationship. According to him, neither of these features were present in the relationship between Junia Theodora and the Lycians as the Lycians – the recipients of her beneficence – returned to Lycia, and did not remain in Corinth to show their gratitude in return.⁴³ MacGillivray seems to define patronage in an unreasonably limited manner. Following Saller's definition of patronage,⁴⁴ Junia Theodora's acts are clearly defined as patronage. In addition, MacGillivray fails to see that the honorary decrees themselves are signs of a reciprocal relationship between Junia Theodora and the Lycians: she offers them hospitality, they provide her with honor.

Although the inscriptions portray Junia Theodora's activities in a stereotypical manner, there is no reason to question their focal point; Junia Theodora lived in first-century Corinth as the head of her household and offered hospitality to the Lycians. As a first-century C.E. Corinthian woman who received groups of people in her own home, Junia Theodora is comparable to women who

³⁹ Bremen 1996, 164 n. 73, 165 n. 78,

⁴⁰ Bremen 1996, 219-225.

⁴¹ SEG 18.143, ll. 17-19, 27-30, 50-51, 75-76.

⁴² SEG 18.143, ll. 8-15, 43-46

⁴³ MacGillivray 2011, 196.

⁴⁴ Saller 1982, 1, 7.

hosted early Christian gatherings. In addition, her example also shows that patronage does not presuppose official titles, as is case with the women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

4.3.3. Women Hosting Meals

As the common meal was one primary setting of early Christian gatherings, non-Christian women who hosted meals compose a parallel phenomenon to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Greco-Roman meals can be divided into three main categories. There were meals related to religious functions, meals related to family events, and those that were meant to strengthen social bonds between friends or patrons and clients.⁴⁵ These three were not mutually exclusive categories. All the meals had religious features, for instance libations and prayers offered to a god or gods.⁴⁶ Friends and clients were often invited to religious meals and family events. All of these could be held at homes or at temples.⁴⁷

Generally, all Greco-Roman meals had a similar form that consisted of two main parts. The actual meal was eaten during the first part of the meal.⁴⁸ It was followed by a symposium, a drinking party.⁴⁹ In ancient literature, the symposium is perceived as the most important part of the meal as it offered entertainment that could consist of conversation, music, games and philosophical teaching.⁵⁰

In almost every discussion regarding women's attendance in Greco-Roman meals, it is argued that in the Greek East, respectable women did not attend meals if men outside of the immediate family were present, whereas in the Roman West, women's attendance at meals was a given.⁵¹ It is often also argued that prostitutes and female entertainers typically attended meals, especially during the symposium. This naturally resulted in respectable women's absence. A prime example is Kathleen E. Corley's study that parades to the fore many literary depictions of women's restricted attendance at meals with the exception of *hetaerae*, thus arguing that the attendance of respectable women at meals was typically criticized even in

⁴⁵ Standhartinger 2012, 91-92.

⁴⁶ Smith 2003, 6; Taussig 2009, 26, 32-33.

⁴⁷ Smith 2003, 40, 76-77.

⁴⁸ δειπνον in Greek, *cena* in Latin.

⁴⁹ συμπόσιον in Greek, *convivium* in Latin

⁵⁰ E.g. Plato, *Symposium*; Lucian, *Symposium*. Cf. Smith 2003, 20-31, 34.

⁵¹ E.g. Corley 1993, 25-28. This is often argued on the basis of Cornelius Nepos' text. See my discussion in chapter 6.5.

first-century C.E. Rome.⁵² Corley's analysis of the function of meal ideology remains shallow, as she asserts: "Traditional meal ideology thus limited the actual participation of women in public meals."⁵³ However, her evidence consists solely of literary depictions, thus making it implausible to say anything about "the actual participation of women."

Views like Corley's are supported by ancient literary accounts that depict both Roman and Greek drinking parties of typically elite men. However, this kind of literature characteristically describes those meals that only men attended to strengthen and enjoy their mutual social bonds and friendship. Thus, it is no great wonder that respectable women are not presented at these meals. The depictions of *symposia* are not meant to be comprehensive accounts of all Greco-Roman dining. They do not, for example, discuss family celebrations and religious meals.⁵⁴ Many features that relate to one kind of meal, relate to others as well, but the participation of women is not one of those features.⁵⁵ Ancient sources from both the Greek East and the Roman West indicate that women participated in meals held in conjunction with family occasions, for instance weddings, funerals and religious meals.⁵⁶ Lucian, a Syrian native living in the second century C.E., describes a wedding meal in his satire *Symposium*:

When nearly all the guests had arrived, and we were to take our places, the ladies occupied the whole of the table to the right of the entrance; there were a good many of them, surrounding the closely veiled bride. The table at the far end accommodated the general company, in due precedence.⁵⁷

Juvenal also depicts women participating in meals where typically only men would usually be present:

But she's much worse, the woman who as soon as she's taken her place at dinner is praising Virgil and forgiving Elissa on her deathbed, who pits the poets against one another and assesses them, weighing in her scales Maro on this side and Homer on the other. The

⁵² Corley 1993, 24-66, esp. p. 53, 62.

⁵³ Corley 1993, 78.

⁵⁴ For Roman and Greek examples, see Plautus, *Asinaria* 5.1-2; Juvenal, *Sat.* V; Plato, *Symposium*. Cf. discussions in Roller 2003, 380-393; Wilkins 2003, 359-360, 370-371; Standhartinger 2012, 92.

⁵⁵ Standhartinger 2012, 91-93. Cf. also Smith 2003, 40-41; Taussig 2009, 25.

⁵⁶ Plutarch, *Table-talk* 4.3., discusses wedding meals where both women and men are present. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 237-279 depicts a scene from a Dionysian ritual meal. For other, interestingly older examples, see Burton 1998, 146-150, 154-159.

⁵⁷ Lucian, *Symposium*, 8.

schoolteachers give way, the teachers of rhetoric are beaten, the whole party falls silent, there'll be not a word from any lawyer or auctioneer – and not even from another woman.⁵⁸

Juvenal's satiric text is clearly a representative of its genre. But at the very least, it still seems credible that women could participate in these meals. In addition, women hosted meals, as Egyptian papyrus invitations dating from the first four centuries C.E illustrate.⁵⁹

Herais asks you to dine at the wedding of her children at home, tomorrow, which is the 5th, from the 9th hour.

ἔρωτᾶ σε Ἡραῖς δειπνήσαι εἰς γάμους τέκνων αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐρίου, ἥτις ἐστὶν πέμπτη, ἀπὸ ὥρας θ.⁶⁰

Thermouthis invites you to dine at the wedding of her daughter in her house, tomorrow, which is the 17th, from [...] hour.

καλεῖ σε Θερμοῦθις δεῖπνῆσαι εἰς γάμους τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς ἐν [τῇ οἰ]κίᾳ αὐρίου [ἥτις] ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπὸ ὥρ(ας) [.].⁶¹

Sarapous asks you to dine at the offering in honour of Kyria Isis in the house, tomorrow, which is the 29th, from the 9th hour.

ἔρωτᾶ σε Σαραποῦς δειπνήσαι εἰς ἱέρωμα τῆς κυρίας Ἰσιδος ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ, αὐρίου, ἥτις ἐστὶν κθ, ἀπὸ ὥρας θ.⁶²

All invitations follow a similar format: a verb which means inviting, a woman's name, the occasion of the meal, the place and the time. They include invitations to weddings at the hosts's home and to a meal in honor of Isis.⁶³ The location of the meal in the third invitation is uncertain as its ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ can mean either the house of the host Sarapous or the temple of Isis. The reason for women to be hosting such meals cannot be that women would always have hosted wedding meals or meals in honor of Isis as there are invitations by men to dine for similar occasions.⁶⁴

It is noteworthy that the invitations are made to occasions that are in the immediate future. In all the invitations above, the meal takes place on the following day. As the invitations do not specify the recipients, Chan-Hie Kim suggests that a

⁵⁸ Juvenal, *Sat.* VI 434-440.

⁵⁹ Kim (1975) offers the original Greek texts of 25 Egyptian invitations as well as their thorough analysis. Cf. also Horsley 1981, 5-9; Smith 2003, 22-25.

⁶⁰ P.Oxy. I 111, 3rd century C.E.

⁶¹ P.Oxy. XII 1579, 3rd century C.E.

⁶² P.Fouad. I 76, 2nd century C.E.

⁶³ Invitations have also been preserved where a woman invites guests to her son's wedding held at the temple of Sabazios (P.Oxy. XXXIII 2678) and where a woman invites guests to a meal in Sarapeion (P.Coll. Youtie 1.52).

⁶⁴ Kim 1975; Horsley 1981; Smith 2003, 76-77.

messenger read the same invitation to all those invited.⁶⁵ This could mean that the guests knew in advance of the future celebration and the invitations were meant to remind them and to confirm their attendance. Another reason for the late invitation could be that the meal was organized relatively spontaneously. An occasional, spontaneous character might also fit the early Christian gatherings. If it was known, for instance, that the meeting day was Sunday, an invitation could be sent to remind a group of believers of these meetings. Papyri have been preserved mainly in Egypt for climate reasons, although in antiquity, papyrus was also used elsewhere. Accordingly, invitations may well have been more general than we have records to show.⁶⁶

4.4. Women's Benefactions in Associations and Civic and Religious Settings

In the previous section, I focused on women's activities in their homes. This section will deal with women's benefactions more generally. Thus, the topics under discussion will be women's benefactions in associations and in civic and religious settings.

4.4.1. Women Benefactors in the Roman West

Roman women were benefactors of voluntary associations and cities. Women benefactors came from various social backgrounds. Some of them were relatively wealthy freedwomen while others belonged to the senatorial elite. Elite women patrons are well represented in ancient sources whereas sources concerning non-elite women patrons are rarer. Thus, the preserved examples of non-elite women's patronage are valuable in assessing the roles of early Christian women patrons.⁶⁷

One group of mostly non-elite women patrons consists of Roman "mothers" (*matres*) of voluntary associations. Emily Hemelrijk has examined a group of inscriptions that mention them in order to reconstruct activities of women who were given this title.⁶⁸ The inscriptions date from the first three centuries C.E. and thus

⁶⁵Kim 1975, 397.

⁶⁶Verhoogt 2010, 62-67.

⁶⁷See also Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 201-202.

⁶⁸Hemelrijk 2008. The inscriptions are of diverse origins, for instance membership lists of associations, statues and funerary plates. For associations in general, see Kloppenborg & Wilson

constitute plausible comparative material to women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

Associations where mothers were members were diverse. These included associations formed on the basis of ethnic origins,⁶⁹ for worshipping certain deities,⁷⁰ and professional associations.⁷¹ The variety of associations in which mothers were represented demonstrates that their roles and functions were not restricted to one type of association. Some associations that appointed mothers were mixed-gender.⁷² Most of the mothers were not mentioned with husbands or fathers.⁷³ Specifically, there is not one association where a mother was mentioned as the wife of a man given the title of ‘father.’⁷⁴ This decreases the likelihood of the accuracy of one typical interpretation for women’s titles in antiquity: that they were given titles merely because of the deeds of their husbands in these associations.⁷⁵

Mothers’ names reveal that many of them were freedwomen or their parents had been freed slaves.⁷⁶ Despite their non-elite background, some of their donations to associations indicate considerable wealth. In return for benefactions, mothers received honor from their associations in a manner characteristic to patronage relationships. Typically, mothers were honored by positioning their names high on the membership lists (*alba collegii*), which also indicated the hierarchy within associations. This honor was given within associations and thus represented an internal form of respect. Hemelrijk suggests that this internal respect also indicates that “mothers” did not typically belong to the elite and thus, associating their names with an association in public would not necessarily add to the association’s prestige.⁷⁷ Hemelrijk suggests that at least some of the mothers had risen to authority roles from the ranks of their associations because of their active

(ed.) 1996; Harland 2003; Ascough et al. 2012. For familial titles in ancient settings, see also Harland 2009, 82-96.

⁶⁹ CIL III 870.

⁷⁰ CIL XIV 69; CIL XIV 326.

⁷¹ CIL IX 5450.

⁷² CIL III 870; CIL III 6150; CIL XI 1355; IGBulg IV 1925. Cf. Hemelrijk 2008, 124-125; Hemelrijk 2010, 461.

⁷³ A list of relevant inscriptions with brief descriptions is given in Hemelrijk 2008, 151-159.

⁷⁴ Hemelrijk 2008, 122, 137. This contrasts the women who are given the title of *patrona*, many of whose husbands or other family members are mentioned as patrons of the same associations. Cf. Hemelrijk 2008, 121-122.

⁷⁵ See references to the refutation of this misconception in Hemelrijk 2008, 137 n. 58.

⁷⁶ Hemelrijk 2008, 120-121.

⁷⁷ E.g. AE 2001, 854; CIL III 7532; CIL III 870. Hemelrijk 2008, 126-128.

membership and benefactions. Accordingly, the title of mother was probably connected to functional leadership positions in an association.⁷⁸

In contrast, Roman women who were given the title of *patrona* of an association typically belonged to the senatorial or equestrian class.⁷⁹ Mothers and elite women *patronae* received different forms of honor in return for their benefactions. Whereas mothers were given places of honor in the membership lists, the elite women *patronae* received honor in the form of public statues and other monuments.⁸⁰ In addition, it seems possible that in some cases the women who were titled *patronae* had not given financial resources to associations. Instead, their benefaction would be a public connection with an association which, in turn, would gain honor to the associations.⁸¹

Contrary to most of the Latin inscriptions which mention mothers of associations, an inscription dating from 153 C.E. describes in detail some activities of Salvia Marcellina, a mother of the association of Aesculapius and Hygieia.⁸² The inscription was carved on a marble plaque on the association's clubhouse in Rome. According to it, Salvia Marcellina had made donations to the association in memory of her late husband, an imperial freedman, and a procurator to whom the late husband was an assistant. The donation was sizeable; it included a shrine with a pergola, a marble statue and a space where the members could dine. In addition, she donated another 50,000 sesterces for the association, which had 60 members. Subsequently, she made a series of qualifications about the usage of her donation and thus controlled the activities of the association. For instance, the conditions stated that the association was to have no more than 60 members, the funds were to be used only for banquets on given days and the possible interest from the funds was to be used on gifts to the members.

The association was an all-male association. However, the list of the officials of the association who were to be given a specific sum of money on specific days also included Salvia Marcellina. Thus, to some extent, she was an insider in the association.⁸³ Despite her gender, Salvia Marcellina is presented as

⁷⁸ Hemelrijk 2008, 125-128, 137-139.

⁷⁹ Hemelrijk 2010, 462.

⁸⁰ Hemelrijk 2008, 126-128.

⁸¹ Hemelrijk 2008, 135-136.

⁸² CIL VI 10234. For the original Latin text and a discussion, see Hemelrijk 2010, 460-461.

⁸³ It then follows that Salvia Marcellina was one of the recipients of her own donations for reasons not known to us. Hemelrijk 2008, 137; 2010, 461.

making rules for the activities of the association, which she could do because of her donations to the association. In addition, she was not married but was presented as an independent woman deciding on the usage of her property. Although she was much wealthier than we might expect early Christian women hosts to generally be, her example is still illustrative. She had funds that the association needed and so she could exercise authority over its activities.

In addition to “mothers” and *patronae* of voluntary associations, also other women were civic benefactors in the Roman West. One sample includes 363 women donors from the Roman West, mostly from Italy, dating from the first century B.C.E. until the third century C.E.⁸⁴ The women are presented in inscriptions recording their activities in financing, for instance, various public buildings, banquets and games.⁸⁵ Half of the women are of unknown social status, 13 percent have a background of freed slaves while less than 40 percent are explicitly presented as elite. Despite their ancestry, donations indicate that all women donors have substantial wealth.⁸⁶

The reasons behind women’s benefactions have been debated. According to some scholars, the main reason for beneficence was to uphold family honor. This interpretation perceives women first and foremost to be members of their families, not independent actors in charge of their own activities.⁸⁷ In contrast to this view, Hemelrijk argues that the civic benefactions made by women independently,⁸⁸ including public buildings and other grand-scale donations,⁸⁹ were also made to accentuate their personal status, not just that of their families.⁹⁰ Other possible motives include striving to be remembered, religious reasons and social pressure.⁹¹ Elite women benefactors were expected to give financial support to their cities partially because of their family obligations. However, because they already belonged to the elite, their benefactions did not necessarily significantly add to their

⁸⁴ Hemelrijk 2013, 68-70.

⁸⁵ Hemelrijk 2013, 71-74.

⁸⁶ Hemelrijk 2013, 78-79. In Hemelrijk’s classification, the elite consists of the decurial, equestrian and senatorial classes. See also p. 21 n. 18 of the present study.

⁸⁷ E.g. Fagan 1999, 159-160. For more examples, see Hemelrijk (2013, 66-67), who disagrees with this notion. See also Bremen’s (1996, 219-225) similar interpretation concerning women in the Greek East (cf. my discussion on pp. 90-93).

⁸⁸ Hemelrijk (2013, 68) excludes from her discussion those women’s donations that were given as parts of family donations.

⁸⁹ Hemelrijk 2013, 71-72.

⁹⁰ Hemelrijk 2013, 76.

⁹¹ Hemelrijk 2013, 77.

honor or status. Non-elite wealthy women, for their part, did not come from the higher socioeconomic strata and, accordingly, did not have family responsibilities to supply beneficence. However, they did not have the honor and status of elite women and, thus, their beneficence was more likely motivated by aiming for an honor that was not their birthright.⁹²

One Roman patron was a Pompeian priestess, Mamia. She is identified as Publius's daughter, but not as anyone's wife.⁹³ An inscription declares that she had built a temple to the genius of Augustus on her own land using her own money (*solo et pecunia sua*).⁹⁴ Several inscriptions use the same or nearly the same formula in relation to men's activities. One of them is also located very close to Mamia's temple in the Pompeian forum.⁹⁵ The way she is presented makes it unlikely that she would have been married. The same formula used about Mamia's own land and own money as the one used in relation to men's activities is yet another example of the similar language employed in both women's and men's honorary inscriptions.

As already mentioned, one form of women's benefactions was offering meals to cities and associations. The estimates of the proportion of women donors of large meals range from 10 percent in the regions of Italy and North Africa to 51 percent in the province of Baetica during the Roman Empire.⁹⁶ In inscriptions, women are portrayed as providing an association or a city with the means to organize a feast typically on the donor's or her family member's birthday or on other specified occasions, either annually or only once.⁹⁷ As providers of meals, women are presented in language and in forms that are very similar to representations of men in similar positions.⁹⁸ These inscriptions tell about "grand gestures" but not about the position of women at the meals they provided. In

⁹² Hemelrijk 2013, 79-80.

⁹³ Cf. Ward 1998, 321-323; Cohick 2009, 296-297; Cooley & Cooley 2004, 96-97.

⁹⁴ CIL X 816. The inscription is of course dated to the time of Augustus (Ward 1998, 322). After her death, Mamia was honored by the town councilors with a tomb, see CIL X 998.

⁹⁵ E.g. CIL X 820, CIL X 831 and AE 1961.71 use the same or nearly the same formula in relation to men's activities. CIL X 820 declares that Marcus Tullius built a temple near the Pompeian forum where temples built by Mamia and Eumachia were located. See Laurence (2011, 26-31) for the plan of the forum and the architecture of Pompeii.

⁹⁶ Donahue 2004, 107.

⁹⁷ AE 1954.165; CIL II 964; CIL V 7906; CIL XI 4391. See the list of women donors of banquets in Donahue 2004, 160-161. One example of this kind of patronage is Salvia Marcellina, who is discussed above.

⁹⁸ Forbis 1990, 501.

addition, they do not say that women actually hosted these meals, only that women offered the means to organize them.⁹⁹

In sum, the examples about Roman women's patronage illustrate the wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds of women patrons and of the settings where acts of patronage were presented. When women hosts of early Christian gatherings are set against this background, they are on the same continuum with women benefactors, even when they are not given titles which indicate patronage.

4.4.2. Women Officeholders and Benefactors in the Greek East

Women donors and women with civic titles are encountered in numerous cities in the Greek East during the first centuries C.E.¹⁰⁰ For instance, coins, inscriptions and other material ancient sources mention women who were given the title of *στεφανηφόρος*, *δημιουργός*, and *πρύτανις* in several cities. All of these titles entail religious responsibilities and donations to cities which had given the titles.¹⁰¹ The responsibilities of officeholders could vary in different cities and the customs of some cities are better documented than others. Nevertheless, there are general patterns of functions relating to these titles.¹⁰²

In Ephesus, for instance, the office of *πρύτανις* was held for one year during which the title-holder undertook various religious ritual tasks. There were several women – albeit more men – with the title of *πρύτανις* in Ephesus.¹⁰³ The title of *στεφανηφόρος* usually included responsibility for providing banquets to certain prominent inhabitants of the city.¹⁰⁴ Also the title of *δημιουργός* entailed providing banquets and performing sacrifices.¹⁰⁵ These examples illustrate how in the Greek East, holding various titles was often connected to using one's property for the benefit of one's city and cult. Accordingly, Bremen suggests that in some cases, the

⁹⁹ There are numerous inscriptions of this kind. Cf. Forbis (1990, 508-510) for the original Latin texts of 19 of them. See also Forbis's (1990) discussion about representations of women in Italian honorary inscriptions.

¹⁰⁰ For civic titles and their meaning, see Bremen 1996, 55-76. Pleket (1969, 10-41) has compiled primary sources about Greek women officeholders.

¹⁰¹ Bremen 1996, 57-66, cf. also 31-34.

¹⁰² Bremen 1996, 82-95.

¹⁰³ Bremen 1996, 87.

¹⁰⁴ Bremen 1996, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Bremen 1996, 30-31.

titles were not gladly accepted but, instead, avoided because of the expenditure involved.¹⁰⁶

In Smyrna, both women and men funded the building and renovation of two temples and civic buildings in the 120's C.E. Of the 24 donors in this enterprise, 12 were women.¹⁰⁷ Although the scale of the donation was much larger than that of the activities of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, the activities of generous women donors may be essential in determining how women could perceive themselves and their prospects in Smyrna. This gives another perspective to Smyrnaean women heads of households whom Ignatius greets in his letters, namely Tavia and the widow Epitropus. In Smyrna, women's donations were accepted as well as men's.

Parental metaphors were also used in the Greek East. Mothers in the Greek East were, according to the surviving inscriptions, usually socioeconomically high-standing. Practically all mothers were "mothers" of the people or the city. Accordingly, their donations were directed to large groups of people, which was enabled by their wealth and family connections. Using the title of mother, along with the title of daughter, father and son, was notably a phenomenon of the Roman time in the Greek East, with most of the surviving examples dating from the second century C.E.¹⁰⁸

Although many titles were held by a woman and her husband at the same time, women were also donors and religious actors in their own right. Thus, they were not granted these titles only because their husbands had them.¹⁰⁹ In addition, many women officeholders were young girls who had never been married. Typically, they belonged to the elite families of their cities.¹¹⁰

Widowed women who had titles also appear. One of them was Menodora, who lived in the town of Sillyon in southern Asia Minor in the 2nd century C.E.¹¹¹ She held several offices including priesthoods and civic offices. Her benefactions

¹⁰⁶ Bremen 1996, 53-54, 86.

¹⁰⁷ ISmyrna 697. See Bremen 1996, 37 n. 96.

¹⁰⁸ Bremen 1996, 167-169, 348-357. Harland (2009, 82-96) also discusses the titles of mother, father, daughter and son in the Greek East at the beginning of the Common Era. According to him, these titles existed in the Greek East earlier than in the Latin-speaking Roman Empire. For his list of primary sources which mention Greek "mothers," see p. 88.

¹⁰⁹ Bremen 1996, 115-117, 125-136.

¹¹⁰ Bremen 1996, 87, 91, 93.

¹¹¹ The inscriptions are variously constructed in different editions; see the discussion in Bremen (1994, 43-45) for references to primary sources and pp. 54-56 for excerpts from the inscriptions themselves.

to her town included financing the building of a temple to Tyche and several distributions of corn and money. Her family background is not easily reconstructed, but she had a son and a daughter, and her husband had apparently died. It seems that while her son was alive, she had mainly priestly offices but when her son and thus the last living male in her family died, she also gained civic offices.¹¹²

Another widow was Phaenia Aromation, who lived in the town of Gytheion in the southern Peloponnesos in the first century C.E.¹¹³ She established a foundation by giving money and formulating a specific investment plan aiming at supplying free oil for inhabitants of Gytheion for eternity. She acted with a male guardian (κύριος) who did not belong to her immediate family¹¹⁴ or, perhaps, to her family at all. Instead, it is likely that he appeared as Phaenia Aromation's agent or simply a representative, as she needed one because of her gender.¹¹⁵ Her name indicates that either she or her father was a freed slave and that the wealth of her family derived from trading perfume.¹¹⁶ There are no references to her family members or other indicators of her status and thus her position in her city remains otherwise obscure. However, she had freed slaves and wished to be remembered for eternity. Perhaps she aimed at enhancing her status with her benefactions to the city as at that time she did not possess a religious or civic title.

As in case of the Roman West, the meaning of women's titles in the Greek East has also been debated with the main alternatives being the honorary and functional nature of titles. Nowadays, the titles are rarely seen as purely honorific. However, the kind of activities that commanded titles continue to be discussed.¹¹⁷ Bremen, for instance, argues that women were given civic titles due to financial benefactions given to their cities and other communities, such as religious associations. The financial benefactions were given because of family obligations and in order to achieve or maintain a certain status socially and politically. According to Bremen, women's benefactions and titles did not demonstrate their

¹¹² Bremen 1994, 45-55; 1996, 108-112.

¹¹³ IG V.1.1208; corrected reconstruction in SEG 13.258. The Greek text is presented in Harter-Uibopuu 2004, 4-6, with the English translation on pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁴ Harter-Uibopuu (2004, 3) suggests that the guardian was her husband or son. However, there are no other grounds for this suggestion other than the fact that in the Greek East, the guardian was typically a male relative. But as Phaenia Aromation was a Roman citizen, it is quite possible that her guardian was not a relative.

¹¹⁵ For Phaenia Aromation, see Bremen 1996, 231-233.

¹¹⁶ Bremen 1996, 232-233; Harter-Uibopuu 2004, 2.

¹¹⁷ For the research history, see e.g. Boatwright 1991, 258-261; Bremen 1996, 44-45; Kearsley 2005, 98-121.

independence. Instead, the wealth of women's families and their social connections meant that they were expected and perhaps even required to give financial support to their cities and other groups of people in much the same way as men.¹¹⁸ Women's offices and public roles resulted from the lack of suitable males in their families to acquire these roles. Thus, women were needed in these roles in order to uphold family prestige.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, women's civic titles and public roles did not indicate their independent prominence but were rather another expression of the masculine dominance prevalent in the Greek East.¹²⁰ According to Bremen, civic titles held by women in the Greek East did not mean that these women would have been influential:

It is hard to see, moreover, how offices like the *stephanephoria* could in themselves have been influential in any real sense. [...] [T]he recurrent eponymy was either a civic obligation generated by great wealth, or the result of a positive effort to bolster her family's local importance and visibility – or a combination of both.¹²¹

Influence is always relative as it derives from the social context and the power that others are willing to give to potential authorities.¹²² Bremen does not argue that holding civic titles would not have added to the influence already held by women on account of their prominence. Instead, the overarching argument in her work is that women's possible influence is not theirs but their families'. Their titles do not change the situation.

The circumstances of elite women are not directly related to the non-elite women hosts of Christian gatherings. However, the example of elite women shows that despite their gender, women in suitable circumstances were expected to use their wealth for the well-being and honor of their community also at the time of early Christianity, as well as in the cities where there were likely to be women hosts of Christian gatherings. Thus, opening one's home to Christ-believers may well have been expected also from a woman convert if her home could offer a suitable space for gatherings. This would not be countercultural or specifically Christian but a rational action in the circumstances following the model of a wider society.

¹¹⁸ Bremen 1996, 299-302. See also pp. 96-113, 163-170.

¹¹⁹ Bremen 1983, 225-226, 232-233, 235-237; Bremen 1996, 44-45, 259-261.

¹²⁰ Bremen 1996, 169-170, 301-302; Bremen 1983, 235-237.

¹²¹ Bremen 1996, 85.

¹²² See my discussion on pp. 12-14.

4.4.3. Jewish Women as Officeholders and Benefactors

In 1982, Bernadette J. Brooten's study about women officeholders in ancient diaspora synagogues was published. The primary sources about women officeholders date from the first century B.C.E. to approximately fourth century C.E. Geographically they range from Italy to Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt.¹²³ In the documents, women are given the titles of a head of a synagogue (ἀρχισυναγωγίσσα, ἀρχισυνάγωγος), a leader or possibly a founder of a synagogue (ἀρχήγισσα), an elder (πρεσβυτέρα), a mother of a synagogue (*mater synagogae*) and a priest (ἱέρισσα, ἱέρεια).¹²⁴ Before Brooten, all these titles had been typically interpreted as honorary titles unrelated to the everyday functions of synagogues, but typically given because of these women's male relatives.¹²⁵ According to Brooten, however, each of these titles indicates functional leadership or administrative activities in a synagogue.¹²⁶ Her comment about women priests is worth citing at length:

[I]f the three inscriptions had come from another Graeco-Roman religion, no scholar would have thought of arguing that "priest" does not really mean "priest." The composers of these inscriptions must have been aware that they were employing a term which normally implied a cultic function.¹²⁷

However, Brooten's critics were not convinced that women's titles indicated functional leadership in synagogues. It was pointed out that children could also be given similar titles without it indicating a functional leadership role.¹²⁸ Brooten was also criticized for not contextualizing Jewish women officeholders among non-Jewish women officeholders. According to the critics, Jewish women and men who were given these titles were best understood as financial benefactors of synagogues in a manner similar to their surrounding Greco-Roman culture, not as people in charge of worship and other functions of synagogues.¹²⁹ However, Greco-Roman cultural models were also used to supplement Brooten's thesis.¹³⁰ The sources

¹²³ Brooten 1982, 1.

¹²⁴ Brooten 1982, 5, 35-37, 41-45, 57-62, 73-77. See e.g. Kraemer (1992, 118-121) and Harland (2009, 85) for additional primary sources about Jewish women officeholders.

¹²⁵ See Brooten (1982, 1) and Duncan (2012, 39-40) for a brief description and some examples of the old consensus.

¹²⁶ Brooten 1982, 30-33, 38-39, 54-55, 64-72, 78-98.

¹²⁷ Brooten 1982, 99.

¹²⁸ Rajak & Noy 1993, 86-87.

¹²⁹ Rajak & Noy 1993, 87-89; Harland 2009, 83-84.

¹³⁰ Horbury 1999, 360, 390-391.

mentioning Jewish women officeholders were specifically concentrated in Asia Minor, where also many sources about non-Jewish women with various titles have been found. It has been argued that as women in Asia Minor had functional, not honorary titles, the same applies to Jewish women with titles.¹³¹

While the discussion mostly revolves around the honorary and functional connotation of the titles, William Horbury criticizes this very distinction. According to him, this categorization is not fitting in the case of Jewish officeholders as their titles were given in honor of a function, typically involving financial support to a synagogue. Both women and men were benefactors of synagogues and thus both were given titles that indicate their benefactions. Horbury also argues that these titles are not likely to indicate liturgical functions.¹³²

Ross Shepard Kraemer also scrutinizes the functions possibly attached to these titles. She criticizes using the term “leadership” in connection with these titles. According to her, the various settings where social hierarchy is visible are anachronistically reduced under the term of “leadership” that did not exist in antiquity.¹³³ Kraemer also argues that in reality material benefactions were perceived as more valuable than administrative functions, although modern discussion typically places functional titles before honorary titles in importance.¹³⁴ Thus, Kraemer dismisses the question about functions attached to titles as somewhat irrelevant and instead, raises the question that she finds the most interesting one: were Jewish women officeholders conceived as transgressive within the ancient contextualization of gender? Kraemer’s answer to this question is the following:

[W]omen could hold offices, including that of *archisynagōgos* (whatever, precisely, it entailed) so long as their doing so could be expressed in terms and images of social relations that themselves accorded with notions of gender hierarchy and did not, in practice, involve the violation of hierarchical relations.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Trebilco 1991, 104-126; Levine 2005, 509-517. For Asian women with titles, see also Friesen (2003) and Kearsley (2005). For reactions towards Broton (1982), see Kraemer (2011, 233-236).

¹³² Horbury 1999, 391, 397.

¹³³ Kraemer 2011, 237.

¹³⁴ Kraemer 2011, 237-239. Recall also how elite women and men did not handle their business dealings themselves but left these administrative tasks to their slaves and freed slaves, cf. e.g. Gardner 1999, 14-27.

¹³⁵ Kraemer 2011, 239.

Thus, Kraemer argues that those women's roles that did not defy the traditional gender hierarchy were generally accepted. But what roles did not defy the gender hierarchy and for what reasons? Kraemer argues that the titles and women's activities that accorded to the responsibilities of their families were not generally conceived as culturally transgressive but, instead, rather fitting.¹³⁶ This is evidently similar to Bremen's conclusions.

Carrie Duncan has also recently discussed Jewish women officeholders. According to Duncan, Jewish women title-bearers can be examined only as representations of women, as it is impossible to retrieve the real women who held these titles.¹³⁷ Duncan proceeds to argue that a similar rationale is likely to underlie the representation of the titles of Jewish women as the one argued by Bremen to have affected women's titles in the Greek East, namely the familial and social context of benefactions.¹³⁸ As discussed earlier, the same argument has been presented in relation to Roman women benefactors.¹³⁹ The manner in which Duncan unites the postmodern impossibility to reconstruct the lives of real ancient women and nevertheless reconstructs the motivation behind giving titles to real Jewish women is perhaps questionable. Nevertheless, she is probably right in her conclusions about the shared rationale behind the titles of Jewish and non-Jewish ancient women.

Returning to Kraemer, although she is skeptical about reconstructing the lives of real women, she nevertheless offers some insight into how she sees their roles. She proposes that women who are given titles in Jewish inscriptions might have been considered "sufficiently male, or at least, not female, perhaps by virtue of their being older, widows, wealthy, and the like."¹⁴⁰ Kraemer draws attention to the fact that none of the women heads of synagogues are presented as being married. While this does not exclude their marriages, it suggests that it is more probable that these women were not married. Kraemer thus proposes that these women may have exercised authority as they were not under men's authority themselves.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Kraemer (2011, 239) argues this following e.g. Kearsley 2005. See esp. pp. 113-118.

¹³⁷ Duncan (2012, 41) obviously and explicitly depends on the postmodern feminist insights of Clark (1998 & 2004) and Spiegel (1990). See also my discussion on pp. 5-12.

¹³⁸ Duncan 2012, 42-46.

¹³⁹ See my discussion on pp. 88-89.

¹⁴⁰ Kraemer 2011, 240.

¹⁴¹ Kraemer 2011, 239-240.

4.4.4. The Common Factors between Women Benefactors and Women Hosts

The preceding discussion about women's titles and benefactions in the Roman West, the Greek East, and diaspora synagogues self-evidently focuses mostly on the titles themselves. When, for instance, Kraemer argues that honorary titles were held to be more valuable than functional titles, she is looking at them from the perspective of titles. The same holds true for titles in the Roman West and the Greek East. However, my focus is on women hosts who were *not* given titles. Thus, whether titles were honorary or functional is in fact not relevant in regard to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Instead, the uniting factor between women title-holders and benefactors, and early Christian women hosts, is their place within the ancient systems of gender, as it is certain that both women hosts and women benefactors, many of whom held titles, were financial benefactors.

In addition, a discussion about women's titles sheds light on different perceptions of women in antiquity and indicates the grounds on which women were granted honor. This discussion also illustrates the views held about ancient women in male-dominated scholarship – that women's titles were honorific, not functional, because women could not have authority roles in gender-inclusive associations. Similar views have affected interpretations about women hosts of early Christian gatherings and are thus made visible on this account. The titles in all three cultural spheres discussed in previous sections relate to similar aspects of benefaction and what was given in its return. There is a common rationale behind the titles of women in all three cultural spheres. It is thus worth emphasizing that at least one stream of scholarship strongly argues that the titles of Jewish and non-Jewish women are not markers of the independence of these women but, instead, markers of their family responsibility.

Bremen's conclusion about women's possible influence and its limitations because of women's gender is relevant with regard to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. As discussed, Bremen concludes that women held titles mainly when there were no suitable men in their families. She also emphasizes the importance of familial and social obligation in office-holding and in the benefactions resulting from office-holding. However, there were women benefactors whose families are not mentioned in the commemorative inscriptions

or elsewhere. Nor are women always identified through their male relatives. Although it is possible that women's family members would have been known even if they were not mentioned, women's actions motivated by family obligation is not an inevitable conclusion in all cases.

Instead, it seems that women's beneficence was also motivated by a wish to enhance their own prominence. This recalls Hemelrijk's conclusion about the motives of Roman women benefactors.¹⁴² The same may hold true for Greek and Jewish women, many of whom are also represented without husbands or even family. Although it does not rule out family prestige as one motivator, it seems that women functioned independently in their own right as well.

In all three cultural spheres – Roman, Greek and Jewish – a phenomenon emerges of women who are typically no longer married and who are influential because of their wealth.¹⁴³ Bremen, for example, argues that there is nothing countercultural about this in the Greek East as women function within the familial context, which actually means that women do not have independent influence.¹⁴⁴ Kraemer, for her part, fixes attention to the lesser femininity of Jewish women who hold titles as many of them were unlikely to have been married any longer.¹⁴⁵

In spite of the differences in interpretation of women's benefactions, it is self-evident that women were financial benefactors of various groups of people and their cities. Although the motivation behind women's titles and their donations can be seen in various lights, there were nevertheless women in prominent positions also in the areas of early Christianity in the Greek East. It is also evident that in these areas many women owned their own property. These were likely models for Christ-believing women who owned their own property.

Although there was no doubt about the suitability of certain women having influence in certain occasions, these views were not unanimously shared in antiquity. As many of these views had to do with constructions of gender and thus also affected the way in which women hosts of early Christian gatherings could be perceived, I will next discuss how women who occupied traditionally male positions could be conceived in both a positive and a negative light.

¹⁴² Hemelrijk 2013.

¹⁴³ Bremen 1996, 260-261; Kraemer 2011, 240; Hemelrijk 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Bremen 1996, 299-302.

¹⁴⁵ Kraemer 2011, 239-240.

4.5. Gendered women

In the Greco-Roman world, heads of households were ideally male. As women heads of households were not male, how was their position perceived from the point of view of gender? In antiquity, certain characteristics and behaviors were perceived as feminine and others as masculine. A person's masculinity and femininity could fluctuate on the basis of his or her actions and characteristics, irrespective of sex.¹⁴⁶ Masculine actions included being the head of a household with other members of household in subordinate positions, and property-ownership in general.¹⁴⁷ Masculine virtues encompassed among other things wisdom and temperance, whereas unmasculine vices included insatiability and greediness.¹⁴⁸

It has been more typical to conceive men's gender as susceptible to change while perceiving women as captives of their sex.¹⁴⁹ Some sources about women, nevertheless, seemingly portray them in similar terms to men. In regard to property-ownership, women's gender was not emphasized either in a positive or in a negative way. The formulas in which women are mentioned in honorary inscriptions, census returns and family archives are even strikingly similar to those mentioning men. The only exception is the appearance of a guardian on certain occasions. In these representations of women, they could occupy similar positions as men as heads of households and property owners.

Greco-Roman authors present women heads of households and their potential male roles in various lights. In *Bravery of Women*, Plutarch (c. 46-120 C.E.) presents stories about women who could be perceived as brave. The stories cover the bravery of groups of women¹⁵⁰ and certain individual women.¹⁵¹ In some of the stories, women's masculine characteristics are presented in a positive light. Their masculine characteristics also sometimes lead to the approval of these women undertaking masculine tasks.

¹⁴⁶ Gleason 1995, 59-60, 159; Williams 2010, 151-176, including numerous examples.

¹⁴⁷ Williams 2010, 145-151.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Williams 2010, 145, 149

¹⁴⁹ Rosaldo 1974, 28-32; Kartzow 2009, 178-182.

¹⁵⁰ *Bravery of Women* I-XIII.

¹⁵¹ *Bravery of Women* XIV-XXVII.

A story about Aretaphila presents her as the unwilling wife of a self-made despot of the people of Cyrene.¹⁵² Through numerous events, including her brave endurance of torture and having her daughter married to the despot's brother for the sake of their people, she finally manages to have her husband killed. In return, she is given a chance to lead the government of the city with its best men (συνάρχειν καὶ συνδιοικεῖν τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἀνδράσι τὴν πολιτείαν), but she declines the offer. Subsequently, the story presents her as occupying a position suitable for women, living in peace among her family and friends for the rest of her life.

There are also women who do not decline the masculine power given to them due to their masculine virtues. One of them is the wife of Pythes.¹⁵³ Her husband, King Pythes, exploits his citizens by making them work in gold mines, neglecting other needs of his state. Pythes delights in gold “insatiably and excessively” (ἀπλήστως καὶ περιττῶς). His wife, on the other hand, is described as a wise (σοφὴν) and good (χρηστήν) woman. She manages to stop Pythes from exploiting his people. Later, Pythes loses his sons in war. In his sorrow, he retires to a secluded mausoleum for the rest of his life. On this occasion, Pythes resigns his power to his wife, making her the ruler of the government, the city and its people (τῇ δὲ γυναικὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀναθεῖς ἄπασαν). She rules the city well and fairly.

Although the wife of Pythes is married, she is an interesting parallel to women heads of households as she occupies a place that is normally reserved for men and thus presents masculine characteristics in a manner that Plutarch presents as favorable. The gender roles of her and her husband are reversed. While she is described as in possession of the masculine virtues of wisdom and goodness, her husband is insatiable and greedy, both of which are unmasculine characteristics.¹⁵⁴ Pythes does not express self-control, although that is expected from a masculine man. Instead, self-control is a trait of his wife. Hence, in this story a man who should rule cannot rule because of his unmasculine traits, thus giving an opportunity for a woman to rule. The wife of Pythes is masculine and Pythes unmasculine, and thus it is presented as a rightful rather than a countercultural conclusion that the wife becomes a ruler and that she rules well.

¹⁵² *Bravery of Women* XIX.

¹⁵³ *Bravery of Women* XXVII.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Williams 2010, 145, 149

Plutarch's *Bravery of Women* offers examples of a positive perspective on women's masculinity. However, there were also opposite reactions. Juvenal's sixth satire consists of attacks against women presented as reasons not to marry. Although its stereotypical language does not count as a reliable source of real women's conduct, it at least reveals some reasons why men might be threatened by women. Juvenal first depicts an ideal past when Roman women were modest, faithful and labored in their daily chores (1-18). Subsequently, he depicts contemporary Roman women, whom he attacks on several fronts. He sketches a caricature of women who adorn themselves for their lovers and abuse their slaves (457-507). Juvenal also mocks women who attend men's meetings and converse with generals (398-401). These women are informed about international events as well as about the gossip of their own neighborhood and they share their information with anyone they happen to meet in the street (402-412).¹⁵⁵ The unacceptable masculine behavior of these women is combined with their unacceptable feminine behavior when they gossip about the things they have heard in men's meetings.

Another of Juvenal's attacks is aimed at learned women who discuss philosophy at dinners they are hosting, resulting in the silence of learned men who are present (434-456). He concludes his mockery against learned women in a telling statement: if a woman needs to appear so eloquent, she might as well become a man (454-456).¹⁵⁶ Equally telling is Juvenal's scorn of women who abort their fetuses and his subsequent approval of these actions; without such abortions husbands would end up raising the children of their wives' lovers (595-601).

Laura Van Abbema discusses Juvenal's sixth satire and its depiction of women at length.¹⁵⁷ She concludes that Juvenal's statements are "rhetorical masks" that hide the real reason for Juvenal's satire, namely his indignation towards Roman women's growing influence in the first and second centuries C.E., which makes them transgress the boundaries of their feminine gender. It is this that instigates Juvenal's attack on women and their influence.¹⁵⁸ These representations of women

¹⁵⁵ See also Van Abbema 2008, 276-278.

¹⁵⁶ See also Van Abbema 2008, 280-282.

¹⁵⁷ Van Abbema 2008, 205-304.

¹⁵⁸ E.g. Van Abbema 2008, 206-207, 304. Van Abbema presents a wide selection of women benefactors in inscriptions and in Pliny's depictions of women in his letters, and concludes that these ancient sources together indicate women's growing influence in the first centuries of the Common Era. Winter's (2003) argument is somewhat similar in his comparison of Juvenal's depictions of women with the portrayal of women in the Pastoral Epistles. However, Winter reads both Christian and non-Christian writings about women as objective accounts of women's real behavior. Thus, although he presents interesting parallels, his answer to the question of why did authors write about

and their relationship to the literary depictions of women hosts will be discussed in chapter 6.

4.6. Conclusions

Despite the qualifications one has to take into account when arguing on the basis of ancient sources,¹⁵⁹ the common denominator between women hosts of early Christian gatherings and non-Christian women benefactors seems to have been that if their wealth was notable within their communities, they were expected to use it for the benefit of their group. Accordingly, it is to be noted that despite all the gender stereotypes in Greco-Roman cultural spheres, it in fact seems as if gender was an irrelevant factor when someone's financial resources were needed. However, this has nothing to do with women's emancipation and gender-equality in the modern sense. There were no aspirations towards these goals. Instead, in certain circumstances gender simply did not matter.¹⁶⁰ To put it bluntly: the financial resources that women offered could overcome the boundaries that their gender would otherwise have created.

Some ancient authors deem the male positions of independent women to be both threatening and inevitable. Others write in a positive light about women who occupy these positions. It is worth noting that throughout the period of early Christianity, many literary sources still continued to depict women as inferior, fragile and as belonging to the domestic sphere.¹⁶¹ Behind these depictions, there were strong ideological notions about women's true character and tasks that were suitable to them. This ideology is found in non-Christian literature and abundantly also in early Christian writings, such as the Pastoral Epistles, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5.

women in the manner they did is straightforward: the authors wrote in this way because women behaved in the ways the authors say the women did. For Winter's (2003) presentation of non-Christian ancient sources and their interpretation, see e.g. pp. 3-6, 21-74. For his interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9-15 against this background, see pp. 97-122.

¹⁵⁹ Dixon 2001.

¹⁶⁰ Although there are scholars who argue for gender-equality and women's emancipation in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., their argumentation relies heavily on perceiving male-authored ancient texts as objective accounts of women in antiquity. Cf. e.g. Fantham et al. 1994, 271, 280-289; Winter 2003, 21-28. For a critique, see D'Angelo 2005. 480-481.

¹⁶¹ In addition to Juvenal just discussed, some examples are presented in my discussion in chapters 5.3.1, 5.5, 6.5.

Throughout the ages and up to the present day, there have always been people who have adopted and accepted these notions concerning women as either holding true for all women at all times or at least being objective depictions of ancient women.¹⁶² Accordingly, it has been argued that ancient women who had titles or who are described as acting on behalf of their various communities could not have been in prominent positions. Although the epigraphic evidence in no way indicates that the activities of women were different from the activities of men in similar positions, the different position of women has been taken for granted as the ancient writings depict incapable women who stay silently under the guardianship of men.

We are inevitably compelled to deal with a very fragmentary source base no matter how extensive it might seem at first. In addition, as all sources are representatives of their genre, it is not quite clear what they tell about real women. Nevertheless, they are representations that were likely known to women hosts of early Christian gatherings and the members of their communities. The representations of women benefactors comprise a spectrum which would have affected the way the authority of women hosts was perceived even if it is not possible to reconstruct the functions of women benefactors more fully.

¹⁶² E.g. Winter 2003, 3-6, 21-74, 97-122.

5. Texts about Women Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings

5.1. Introduction

As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, there is evidence about women heads of households who could and would own property and use it according to their own will throughout the Roman Empire. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that in early Christian writings we encounter women who support believers by hosting Christian gatherings in their homes. In this chapter, the early Christian sources about women hosts of Christian gatherings will be analyzed as individual pieces of early Christian literature. Their contexts, genres and origins will be discussed. First, Mary and Lydia, two women hosts of Christian gatherings in the Acts of the Apostles are discussed. Secondly, the presentation of Nympha in Colossians will be analyzed. I will then discuss Prisca who – unlike other women presented here – hosted gatherings together with her husband Aquila. Lastly, the depictions of women who possibly hosted Christian gatherings will be examined. These include Tavia in Ignatius’s letter to Smyrnaeans, the widow of Epitropus in Ignatius’s letter to Polycarp, Chloe in First Corinthians, the “elect lady” in 2 John and finally, certain women in the Pastoral Epistles.

5.2. Women Hosts in the Acts of the Apostles: Mary and Lydia

In the Acts of the Apostles, two women hosts of Christian gatherings are mentioned: Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), and Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40). The parallelism between Lydia’s and Mary’s stories is evident. Peter is imprisoned in Acts 12:3-4, Paul and Silas in 16:23. During both imprisonments there are divine interventions. In Peter’s cell, an angel appears, releasing him from prison (12:7-9). For Paul and Silas, an earthquake occurs which opens the prison doors and causes the prisoners’ chains to fall (16:26). Immediately after their release from the prison, Peter as well as Paul and Silas head to women’s homes, where they meet believers.

These similarities are but one example of parallelism between Peter and Paul in Acts.¹ The parallelism is one factor that may imply that these are not historical events and consequently, Mary and Lydia are not historical figures. While it is a historical fact that Paul visited Philippi,² the story about Lydia is not necessarily historically reliable. It is to be noted that Paul does not mention her in his letter to the Philippians. Mary's apparent connection to John Mark may on the one hand hint that she is a historical character but on the other, the connection might be added for a "reality effect."³ However, it is certain that both women are representations of Lukan women. In this discussion, special attention is paid to Mary and Lydia's function in the narrative context of Acts, in accordance with insights from post-structuralism. It is particularly interesting to view them as representations of female gender, as for Luke gender is a significant category.⁴

5.2.1. Mary, Mother of John Mark

συνιδών τε ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν τῆς Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου Μάρκου, οὗ ἦσαν ἱκανοὶ συνηθροισμένοι καὶ προσευχόμενοι.

As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. (Acts 12:12, NRSV)

A Jerusalem resident, Mary, mother of John Mark, appears in Peter's prison-escape story (Acts 12:3-17). Peter has been imprisoned and is sleeping in his cell when an angel appears to him. The angel sets Peter free and lets him inside the city gate. Then the angel disappears and Peter is left alone in a lane. Until that moment, he has thought that he has dreamt of the angel and the prison escape, but in the lane he realizes that what has happened is real. Following this realization, he heads immediately to Mary's home, where believers have gathered and are praying (Acts 12:12). When Peter leaves Mary's home, he tells the believers to recount the story of his escape to James and other believers (Acts 12:17).

¹Parallelism is evident on a large scale in Peter being in the leading role in Acts 1-12, and Paul in Acts 13-28. Examples of parallel pericopes are healing a lame man (Acts 3:1-10 / 14:8-10) and resurrecting a dead person (Acts 9:36-41 / 20:7-12). Cf. also Talbert 1975, 23-26.

² 1 Thess. 2:2; Phil. 1:3-6.

³ Cf. Clark (1998, 18-20) for adding a "reality effect" in stories about early Christian women. See also p. 7 of the present study.

⁴ D'Angelo 1990 & 1999; Seim 2004; Marjanen 2007.

In Luke’s narrative world, Mary is a Jewish head of her household whose home is large enough to host Christian gatherings. She is probably a widow as her home is presented as belonging to her only and as she is introduced as John Mark’s mother but not as anyone’s wife. The size of Mary’s household is not told but it includes at least her maid, Rhoda. The house itself is not among the smallest of houses as it has a gated outer courtyard (12:13).⁵ This is the only instance where Mary is mentioned in the New Testament. However, John Mark is referred to multiple times as Paul’s and Barnabas’s assistant⁶ and is often identified with Mark in the Colossians, who is presented as Barnabas’s cousin.⁷ As a previously married woman who has an adult son but who nevertheless is the head of her household, Mary’s presentation resembles widowed or divorced women in Egyptian census returns who declare their adult sons as belonging to their households,⁸ not the other way around.

Acts 12:12 tells that many have gathered and are praying at Mary’s home. However, it is not told who these “many” are. Ben Witherington proposes that all those present are perhaps women who are having a “prayer meeting.” This would follow from the fact that Rhoda is a female maid and that Peter asks to tell the brothers and James what has happened, implying that the brothers are not there at the moment.⁹ However, it does not seem credible that Luke would refer to an all-female group using consistently masculine forms: participles in 12:12¹⁰ and 12:16¹¹, and the masculine pronouns οἱ in 12:15 and αὐτοῖς in 12:17. While ancient writers typically refer to mixed-gender groups simply with masculine forms, it would be strange to use masculine forms when referring to an all-women group.¹²

The question about the people present is significant when picturing the group of Christ-believers that Luke envisions convening at Mary’s house. In general, Luke rarely mentions houses where believers gather in Jerusalem. Luke’s earliest reference to a meeting place of believers in Jerusalem, in addition to the temple,¹³ is in Luke 22:11-13, where disciples prepare a Passover meal in an upper

⁵ Witherington 1990, 214.

⁶ Acts 12:25, 13:4-5, 15:37-39. Also Philem. 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11 have sometimes been interpreted as referring to John Mark. Cf. Black 1993.

⁷ Col. 4:10. Black (1993, 235 n. 2) presents these studies.

⁸ E.g. P.Mil.Vogl. III 194 a; SB XXII 15704. See my discussion on p. 65.

⁹ Witherington 1990, 214.

¹⁰ συνηθροισμένοι and προσευχόμενοι

¹¹ ἀνοίξαντες

¹² See my discussion on pp. 45-46.

¹³ E.g. Acts 2:46.

room (ἀνάγαιον) of an otherwise undefined house. Only the nameless head of the house (οἰκοδεσπότης) is mentioned. The next reference to a meeting place in Jerusalem is in Acts 1:13, which again mentions an upper room (ὑπερῶον) where many apostles are staying and Christians are possibly gathering, although it is not explicated.¹⁴ Acts 2:1-2 mentions a house in which believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. Verse 2:46 describes believers breaking bread at a home or from house to house.¹⁵ Verses 4:34-35 tell that the believers have sold their houses and lands and given over the profits to be shared with other believers. However, apparently this statement is not to be taken literally, as again in 5:42 the apostles are teaching at homes.

Acts 12:12 is the first reference to a named host of a Christian gathering in Jerusalem. One could suppose that some of the earlier references to houses where believers gather refer to Mary's home as well, although it is not explicated. Nevertheless, Luke depicts Mary's home as a place where Christ-believers are accustomed to gather. The most persuasive piece of evidence for this is the fact that Peter goes to Mary's home upon his surprising prison escape, implying that Peter knows believers have convened there.

Luke's perception of Mary's possible authority role in the community gathering at her home is clarified by the portrayal of other authorities in the story. The events depicted in Acts 12:1-19 are meant to reinforce and explain Peter's position as an itinerant apostle whose mission is to preach the gospel outside Jerusalem. Peter asks the believers at Mary's home to tell about his prison escape to James and brothers (12:17). In Acts, James is depicted as a local authority in Jerusalem.¹⁶ He is also the only believer whom Peter mentions by name when he says that these events should be told to others.

Evidently, Mary is the provider of a meeting space but Luke does not depict her as an authority among the believers in Jerusalem. In her Christian community, there are certainly other people in addition to the members of her household, as there are connections with Peter, James and still other "brothers." Thus, Mary does

¹⁴ The ambiguity derives partly from the description of the activities of the apostles in the "upper room"; ἦσαν καταμένοντες. While it probably means that the apostles are staying there, it can also mean that the apostles are convening there. When read together with the following verse, 1:14, which tells that the apostles are constantly praying together with Jesus's mother and brothers, the reader may get the idea that they have gathered and are praying in the "room upstairs."

¹⁵ Κατ' οἶκον denotes both of these.

¹⁶ Acts 15:13, 21:18 (Cf. also Gal. 1:19, 2:9, 2:12).

not have authority in the community gathering at her home on the basis of an authority over its members in everyday life. Neither does it seem probable that Mary as presented by Luke could have decided which teachers to welcome.

The prison-escape story in Acts 12:1-19 is discussed in various studies in the context of its parallelism to other ancient stories in the New Testament and elsewhere.¹⁷ Some scholars point to the parallels in Greco-Roman comedy.¹⁸ Peter's prison escape has been viewed as a parallel to Jesus's crucifixion and ascension.¹⁹ There is also a parallel to be found between Peter's appearance at Mary's house and the angel's appearance to Peter in prison.²⁰ However, none of these parallels seems to advance a more profound understanding of Mary's role in the story. Perhaps this has to do with the briefness of the reference to Mary in contrast to other features of the story that are recounted more vividly, resulting in more points of resemblance in other aspects of the story. Consequently, the studies about parallelism between this pericope and other stories only briefly remark on Mary's role in the story. However, there is one parallel that helps in understanding Mary's role as the host of a Christian gathering, and this is the story of Lydia in Acts 16.

5.2.2. *Lydia*

¹³τῇ τε ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐξήλθομεν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως παρὰ ποταμὸν οὗ ἐνομιζέτο προσευχὴ εἶναι, καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλαλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθούσαις γυναῖξι. ¹⁴καὶ τις γυνὴ ὀνόματι Λυδία, πορφυρόπωλις πόλεως Θυατείρων σεβομένη τὸν Θεόν, ἤκουεν, ἧς ὁ Κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου. ¹⁵ὡς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς, παρεκάλεσεν λέγουσα· εἰ κεκρίκατέ με πιστὴν τῷ Κυρίῳ εἶναι, εἰσελθόντες εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου μένετε· καὶ παρεβιάσατο ἡμᾶς. [...] ⁴⁰ἐξελθόντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς φυλακῆς εἰσήλθον πρὸς τὴν Λυδίαν καὶ ἰδόντες παρεκάλεσαν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἐξῆλθαν.

¹³On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira and a worshipper of God, was listening to us. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us. [...] ⁴⁰After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers there, they departed. (Acts 16:13-15, 40, NRSV)

¹⁷ Weaver (2004, 149-159) offers a brief general introduction to Acts 12 and its parallels in ancient stories.

¹⁸ Harrill 2000, 150-157; Morton 2001, 67-69.

¹⁹ Garrett 1990, 670-677.

²⁰ Weaver 2004, 172-177.

Lydia appears in a story that recounts Paul's and Silas's arrival in Macedonia. Acts 16:9-10 depict Paul's vision that encourages him to proclaim the gospel in Macedonia and his subsequent departure from Asia Minor with Silas. In Macedonia, they come to Philippi, where they find women in a prayer place. One of them is Lydia, whom Paul subsequently baptizes, together with her household. After the baptism, she asks Paul and Silas to stay at her home (Acts 16:13-15). While still in Philippi, Paul and Silas are imprisoned (16:23-24). During their imprisonment, an earthquake occurs, giving them an opportunity to escape, but they do not. The jailer is moved by this and, as a result, he and his household are baptized (Acts 16:25-34). Subsequently, Paul and Silas are released from prison. Before leaving Philippi, they visit Lydia's home once more and encourage believers there (Acts 16:40).

Lydia is portrayed as a gentile who believes in Yahweh, and is thus a a god-fearer, *σεβομένη τὸν Θεόν* (Acts 16:14). The existence of god-fearers, gentile believers in Yahweh, has been contested during the last decades by proposing that they may in fact be a Lukan fabrication.²¹ In the present discussion, however, the historical authenticity of god-fearers is not relevant as Luke nevertheless portrays Lydia as a gentile who believes in Yahweh.

This is also implied in 16:13, where Paul and Silas go to a prayer place on the Sabbath day. The word which is used about the prayer place, *προσευχή*, is somewhat surprising in the Lukan context. The pattern is the same as in the rest of Acts when missionaries arrive at new cities and go to synagogues to teach.²² The only occurrences of *προσευχή* in the meaning of a prayer place are in Acts 16:13 and 16:16, which refer to the same place outside the city gates of Philippi. At other times when Luke uses the word it connotes prayer.²³ This is also the meaning in which *προσευχή* is used by other New Testament writers.²⁴ However, inscriptions present numerous occurrences of the usage as a place of prayer.²⁵ In addition, Philo, for instance, refers to Jewish religious meeting places with the word *προσευχή*.²⁶ It has been noted that different terms about synagogue may reflect their variety in the

²¹ Kraabel 1981, 116-123. Cf. also White 1995, 255-256 n. 63; Matthews 2001a, 66-70, 129 n. 53.

²² Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:10; 18:19; 19:8.

²³ Luke 6:12, Acts 1:14; 6:4; 10:31; 12:5.

²⁴ Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:5; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; James 5:17.

²⁵ For primary sources, see Levine 1987, 11, 13, 20-23. Cf. also White 1995, 247 n. 35 and Matthews 2001a, 132 n. 5.

²⁶ Philo, *Embassy* 23.156. Cf. Levine 1987, 16.

Second Temple period, especially in diaspora.²⁷ Thus, Luke portrays Lydia as a gentile who believes in Yahweh and whom Paul and Silas meet at a Jewish place of prayer.

In Luke's narrative, Lydia is a householder whose livelihood derives from dealing in purple dye. Her household includes other people in addition to her as she is baptized along with them. Quite a few factors allude to Luke portraying her as a freedwoman. Many freedwomen dealt in purple cloth and it was even more typical for freedwomen who came from the eastern parts of the Roman Empire.²⁸ In addition, Lydia's name may imply her status as a freedwoman. Slaves were often given names according to the area where they lived or were from and Lydia is originally from Thyatira, a town located in the area of Lydia in Asia Minor. Some scholars also point out that names related to Lydia usually appear as slave names in ancient sources.²⁹ However, others have noted that there are also Lydias who belong to the elite.³⁰ Thus, Lydia's name offers no decisive evidence for determining her social status.

Lydia's portrayal as an at least relatively wealthy freedwoman would not be contradictory. There is evidence about freedwomen and freedmen who were heads of their own households.³¹ Probably, Luke does not envisage Lydia to be married, as a spouse is not mentioned. Perhaps Luke implies that she has children, but it is not certain as the persons in a household (οἶκος) do not necessarily include children. In Luke's story, Lydia does not belong to the higher socioeconomic strata as she supports herself with her own work, whereas elite women would be involved in business indirectly, for instance via their slaves.³²

Lydia has several functions in the context of the story about the spreading of Christianity. Her first function concerns her appearance at a significant turning-point in the narrative of Acts. Until Acts 8, the narrative focus is on Jerusalem. Acts 8-14 recount the dispersion of believers in Judea, Galilee and Samaria, Saul's conversion and the beginning of gentile conversions, in addition to the spread of Christianity to Asia Minor. Acts 15 tells about the Council of Jerusalem, where a decision is reached about gentiles not having to observe most of the Mosaic Law

²⁷ Levine 1987, 23; White 1995, 247.

²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 178.

²⁹ Horsley 1982, 27; Meeks 1983, 203 n. 93.

³⁰ Hemer 1983, 54; Gill 1994, 114; Matthews 2001a, 86.

³¹ Pomeroy 1995, 198; Saller 2001, 108-109.

³² Gardner 1999, 15, 25.

when converting to Christianity. Subsequently, Paul heads to Asia Minor, where he has a vision of a man from Macedonia and decides to leave for there instead. Thus, in the Lukan narrative, Lydia is the first convert in Macedonia. Lydia's other function is to be an example of household conversion through the head of a household. This model follows social conventions which are of importance to Luke.³³ However, this still leaves open the question about Lydia's gender: Why is Lydia a woman when all other householder converts in Acts are men?

Perhaps Luke has in mind Paul's letter to the Philippians and the women there.³⁴ Or perhaps he is otherwise conscious about Philippian women and their prominent roles in religious contexts.³⁵ According to one interpretation, the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi echoes the story of Dionysos's prison escape in Euripides's *Bacchae*.³⁶ Shelly Matthews, for instance, argues that the parallelism between these two stories explains the role of Lydia. In *Bacchae*, the area of Lydia in Asia Minor is presented as the home territory of Dionysos. In addition, Dionysos travels to Greece with Lydian women to spread his cult.³⁷ According to Matthews, this parallelism indicates Luke's conscious fabrication of the character of Lydia as a relatively wealthy benefactor of early Christ-believers who nevertheless is not an authority herself.³⁸

Matthews's interpretation of Lydia's position in Luke's narrative seems correct even if one does not agree with the hypothesis of its parallelism with *Bacchae*. Nevertheless, while Luke probably intends to present Lydia as a woman who offers financial means for Christ-believers but does not assume authority, he offers multiple clues that could indicate Lydia's possible authority role. She is clearly connected to an itinerant charismatic, Paul, who converts her and her household. She is also paradigmatic in the usage of her property for the benefit of itinerant teachers as she insists that they stay at her home while in Philippi (16:15). In Luke's account, there is no community of believers in Philippi prior to the conversion of Lydia and her household and thus no local authorities, which gives Lydia the prospect of an authority position. In accordance with Greco-Roman

³³ Cf. White 1995, 254-255, 257-259. Other head of household converts include Cornelius (Acts 10), the jailer (Acts 16:30-34) and Crispus (Acts 18:8).

³⁴ Euodia and Syntyche have struggled by Paul's side for the Gospel (Phil. 4:2-3).

³⁵ Lamoreaux 2013, 43-100.

³⁶ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 576-676. Cf. Portefaix 1988, 169-171; Matthews 2001a, 72-75.

³⁷ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 13-24, 55-63. Cf. Matthews 2001a, 72-75.

³⁸ Matthews 2001a, 87-89, 94.

customs, her authority would also be reinforced by her being the head of her household, which would mean that at least some of the other believers would have been under her authority in daily life.³⁹

5.2.3. Mary and Lydia as Representations of Women in Acts

Even if not historical women, Mary and Lydia are representations of Lukan women. John B. Weaver discusses the prison-escape stories in Acts, comparing them to other similar ancient stories. He concludes that one of the main goals of these stories is to establish or reestablish a cult.⁴⁰ Establishing a cult is not to be understood in a limited manner – in these instances in two concrete places, Mary’s and Lydia’s homes. However, it is still intriguing that Luke has chosen the homes of two women as focal locations in the events describing the (re)establishment of cults.⁴¹

Luke recounts the stories of Christian gatherings at Mary’s and Lydia’s homes so effortlessly that it seems improbable that Luke or his readers would have questioned convening at women’s homes. Had Luke been writing about something unacceptable or at least peculiar, he would probably have explained the situation for his readers – or narrated a more proper story. Thus, for Luke it was not a problem that Christ-believers gathered at women’s homes. Nor does it seem to have been problematic to those to whom he wrote.

Luke’s motives for presenting Mary and Lydia as hosts of Christian gatherings as well as his conception of their position in these roles is perhaps easier to understand in the light of his general way of portraying women. In his gospel, Luke presents more women than other canonical gospels. This is especially visible in his additions of women as parallels of men.⁴² In Acts, he notes the presence of women in many instances in a way that is not typical in ancient writings.⁴³ By adding women to his narrative of Christian origins, Luke wants to explicate that women really were there during the beginning of the Christ-movement. His portrayal of women is not haphazard. On the contrary, women are carefully woven

³⁹ Cf. chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Weaver 2004, 281-284.

⁴¹ In addition to these two stories, there is a third prison-escape narrative in Acts 5:17-21. This story concludes in a scene where the apostles go to the temple after their miraculous prison escape.

⁴² E.g. Luke 4:25-27; 7:1-17; 15:1-10. D’Angelo 1999, 171-195; Seim 2004, 15-24.

⁴³ E.g. Acts 5:14; 8:3; 8:12; 9:2. Cf. D’Angelo 1990, 445-446 for a complete list of women added as counterparts to men in Acts.

into the narrative at suitable places. This indicates that gender is a significant category for Luke.

Some scholars have regarded Luke as a proponent of early Christian women as he consciously narrates stories where women are involved.⁴⁴ However, others have read Luke in a more critical manner. D'Angelo, for example, analyzes instances where women are presented in Luke and comes to the conclusion that while women are mentioned more often than in other gospels, Luke also restricts their functions when compared to other gospels.⁴⁵ In one scene, Luke depicts women providing for Jesus and the twelve out of their own resources after being cured by Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). It is possible that during the journey of Jesus and the twelve, some women would have provided for them in the women's own homes.⁴⁶ It has been pointed out that when Luke emphasizes the wealth and prominence of some women, he at the same time indicates that they are not missionaries, preachers or leaders in early Christianity. Instead, these women are given the roles of financial benefactors of male preachers and missionaries.⁴⁷

Luke gives women significant roles: the first convert in Macedonia is a woman, women can provide for itinerant teachers and women can host Christian gatherings. There is no reason to suppose that Luke would disdain women. At the same time, however, he continuously offers examples of women's proper behavior which follow the traditional conventions of his time that are visible in ancient writings. These paradigms are assigned for well-to-do as well as for less fortunate women. The picture that emerges is that of women's importance but at the same time their proper silence.⁴⁸

Luke indicates that Christ-believing women have similar roles in their families and communities as those valued by society at large.⁴⁹ One example of this is the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). Not only is Luke's the only synoptic gospel that mentions Martha and Mary,⁵⁰ he also portrays Martha inviting Jesus to her home, where a gathering takes place. In the gathering, Martha serves guests and Mary listens silently to Jesus. The scene is in many ways parallel to

⁴⁴ E.g. Swidler 2007, 45-50.

⁴⁵ D'Angelo 1999, 187.

⁴⁶ See also Luke 23:55-24:1.

⁴⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 49, 161,167. D'Angelo 1999, 185. Seim 2004, 64, 96, 162, 253-254.

⁴⁸ Cf. also Seim 2004, 259-260 and *passim*.

⁴⁹ D'Angelo 1999, 187-190.

⁵⁰ They are also featured in John 11:1-12:3.

Lukan depictions of Mary, mother of John Mark and Lydia. Women are portrayed as enabling gatherings materially. However, in these gatherings, the women's role is to be silent and subservient, not prominent.⁵¹

The brief appearances of Mary and Lydia fit well into the Lukan narrative of Christian origins and women's portrayal in it. These women offer hospitality to the apostles and other believers, thus becoming their benefactors. However, the functions of Mary and Lydia are very restricted in the narratives. Lydia invites Paul and Silas to stay at her house but besides that, Lydia and Mary are not given any active roles. When Peter, Paul and Silas head to these women's homes after their release from prison, Mary and Lydia might as well have not been present (Acts 12:12-17, 16:40). It is their homes, not they themselves, who for a while are in the focus of the narrative.

It is also worth noticing that Luke does not depict a scene where Paul and Silas dine at Lydia's home. While it may be presupposed, as Paul and Silas are staying at Lydia's home, it is not written about. Instead, Luke describes how Paul and Silas eat at the jailer's home in Philippi (16:34). Given the emphasis on dining together in early Christian gatherings and in Greek and Roman culture in general,⁵² it may be significant that Luke does not depict such a scene at Lydia's home. This might be another means to put Lydia in her proper place of a non-intruding, even distant, benefactor. Likely, Luke perceives Mary similarly as a silent benefactor, although the brief reference does not allow for this interpretation directly.

Luke's portrayal of women is also related to the purpose of his work in general. According to D'Angelo, Luke-Acts is designed to evoke in its readers the question repeated in Luke 3:10-14: "What should we do?"⁵³ In the pericope, John the Baptist answers all who ask this question. Although this is the only pericope that explicates the question and its answers, the whole of Luke-Acts is filled with pericopes of exemplary behavior of people in their respective communities. These role models are intended to answer the same question of "What should we do?" presented by believers belonging to diverse social groups. The same Lukan intention is addressed by Kari Syreeni in a slightly different vein. According to

⁵¹ See my discussion about Martha and Mary on pp. 69-70. Cf. also Seim 2004, 98-119. Looking at the narrative from another perspective, Seim (2004, 101) also suggests that Mary's silence marks a pupil's role that is typically reserved to men.

⁵² Smith 2003; Taussig 2009; Smith & Taussig (eds.), 2012. See my discussion on pp. 30-33 and 82-85.

⁵³ D'Angelo 1990, 448.

Syreeni, Luke represents characters that are meant to offer moral paradigms for the readers of Luke-Acts.⁵⁴ By consciously including women in his narrative, Luke wants to ensure that women readers and hearers are also offered relevant – and proper – role models.⁵⁵ As Luke continually presents female figures, the reader might get a picture that he, if anyone, tells about these women objectively, recounting at least the most important aspects of their functions in given contexts. However, the reader should not be too persuaded by the apparent authenticity of Luke's images of women.

The question then is: What does Luke want to teach through his representations of Mary and Lydia? What kind of role models are they and to whom is their example directed? The most obvious answer is that they are an example for at least relatively wealthy Christ-believers, perhaps especially women who could also in Luke's time be hosts of Christian gatherings. Mary and Lydia represent a Jewish and a gentile woman, living in Jerusalem and in Macedonian Philippi, respectively. Although both of them are women, they also add to the image of all householders whom Luke depicts.⁵⁶ Not only women but suitable men could identify with the role of benefactor, whose proper place Luke indicates. Thus, they offer potential role-models to a diverse group of people, in relation to both their geographical locations and their religious backgrounds.

To conclude, I argue that Luke knew that there were women hosts of Christian gatherings, some of them being also his contemporaries. Luke's scanty depiction of Mary and Lydia cannot be used as evidence about women hosts being silent benefactors in their Christian communities. Rather, his portrayal of Mary and Lydia reflects his own ideology of functions suitable for women and at the same time insinuates that it was not self-evident that women would not have had authority in early Christian gatherings taking place in their homes.

⁵⁴ Syreeni 1991, 36-57.

⁵⁵ Parvey 1974, 139-140; D'Angelo 1990, 447-448.

⁵⁶ See p. 111 n. 33.

5.3. Pauline Women Hosts: Nympha and Prisca

5.3.1. *Nympha*

Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν.

Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.
(Col. 4:15, NRSV)

At first glance, this greeting is one of the clearest early Christian texts that attest to a woman hosting an early Christian gathering, as it is the only text that explicitly mentions a gathering (ἐκκλησία) at a woman's home. Beneath the surface, however, there are more than a few obscure aspects which indicate that the existence of a woman host named Nympha may be more questionable than it seems at first. The ambiguities relate to the gender of the person usually identified as a woman named Nympha, the existence of Colossae at the time when Colossians was written and the authorship of Colossians.

Already in early Christianity it was unclear whether the host of the Christian gathering in Col. 4:15 was female Nympha or male Nymphas. The earliest manuscripts were written in majuscules and thus, there were no diacritics. Hence, the accusative ΝΥΜΦΑΝ used in the manuscripts may refer either to a feminine accusative form Νύμφαν or the masculine accusative Νυμφᾶν. While Nympha and the church in her house are well attested in manuscripts, there are also manuscripts that present Nymphas and the church in his house.⁵⁷

It has been suggested that copyists were uncertain about the name because there was no accentuation. This led to the versions in which also the possessive pronoun was changed to masculine αὐτοῦ.⁵⁸ However, the male variants were not necessarily mere mistakes. There is hardly any reason for a male host of an early Christian gathering having been conceived as questionable enough to produce variants which present a woman host, whereas it is easier to comprehend why some early Christians would have had ambivalent feelings about a woman hosting a Christian gathering.

⁵⁷ Νύμφαν [...] αὐτῆς in manuscripts B, 0278, 6, 1739, 1881, rarely: sy^h, sa. Νυμφᾶν [...] αὐτοῦ in manuscripts D, F, G, Ψ, 41, sy^p.^{hmg}. But as noted, in majuscule manuscripts there was no accentuation.

⁵⁸ MacDonald 2000, 183; Grosso 2011, 4.

There are also manuscripts which read “Nympha and the church in their house,”⁵⁹ offering another solution to the same dilemma. This is probably an attempt to include both Nympha and the Laodicean brothers of Col. 4:15 in the same “house church” so that there would not be an independent woman host of a Christian gathering.⁶⁰ Despite the variant readings, multiple factors indicate that the original form is a woman named Nympha.⁶¹ Thus, the variants demonstrate that already some early Christians conceived Nympha’s gender as problematic in this context, implying that hosting a Christian gathering entailed aspects that not everyone thought were suitable for women. In comparison to two other possibly fictional women hosts, Mary, mother of John Mark, and Lydia, the description of Nympha is even shorter. Whereas Mary is the mother of John Mark and Lydia is a woman who deals in purple cloth, Nympha is merely Nympha. Thus, it might be easier to transform her than Mary or Lydia into a man.

Nympha’s place of residence is also ambiguous. Although addressed to the Colossians, the letter does not say that Nympha lives in Colossae. Instead, Col. 4:15 mentions Nympha immediately after the brothers in Laodicea, which may indicate that Nympha also lives in Laodicea. In addition, Nympha is not mentioned in the letter to Philemon, although it includes 9 names out of a total of 12 names presented in Colossians. Philemon is traditionally located in Colossae, and thus omitting Nympha from the letter to Philemon is reasonable if Nympha lived in Laodicea.⁶² Nympha is not mentioned in other early Christian writings.

In addition, the possibility that neither Colossae nor Laodicea existed at the time of writing Colossians casts a further shadow of doubt over Nympha. Both towns were located in the Lycus River valley in Phrygia with a distance of about 20 kilometers between them. This area was hit by an earthquake either in 60-61 or 64 CE. The extent of the damage caused by the earthquake is not known.⁶³ Thus, it is possible that at the time of the writing Nympha’s hometown no longer existed. However, it is also possible that the towns were not destroyed, at least not totally, and a letter could have been written to real, living Colossian and Laodicean Christ-believers.

⁵⁹ Νύμφαν [...] αὐτῶν in manuscripts ⱼ, A, C, P, 075, 33, 81, 104, 326, 1175, 2464.

⁶⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 51; MacDonald 2000, 183; Grosso 2011, 4.

⁶¹ E.g. Dunn 1996, 274, 283-284; MacDonald 2000, 182-183; Sumney 2008, 278-279; Moo 2008, 349; Grosso 2011, 4.

⁶² See also Dunn 1996, 284.

⁶³ MacDonald 2000, 9; Talbert 2007, 178; Sumney 2008, 9-10.

The majority of scholars agree on Colossians being deutero-Pauline. However, there are varying views about the degree of its authenticity.⁶⁴ Some scholars argue that Colossians was fabricated to apply Paul's authority to the author's own situation some decades after Paul's death,⁶⁵ whereas others view it as only slightly pseudonymous. J. D. G. Dunn, for instance, argues that Colossians was written during Paul's lifetime under Paul's approval, but in circumstances where Paul could not write the letter himself. Instead of Paul, Timothy might have been the actual author, while Paul himself would have written the final greeting (Col. 1:1; 4:18). Thus, Dunn perceives Colossians to be a "bridge" between Paul's authentic letters and deutero-Pauline letters.⁶⁶

Margaret MacDonald is close to Dunn's bridge hypothesis but allows Colossians more pseudonymity. She argues that Colossians was written soon after Paul's death or during his final imprisonment in the 60's C.E by someone close to Paul who knew that Paul would not be visiting Colossian and Laodicean communities in the future.⁶⁷ According to MacDonald, especially the portrayal of prominent Christ-believers indicates that the letter is intended to address a situation where a community of Christ-believers is facing the recent or imminent loss of Paul, their "charismatic leader." As the authority of the charismatic leader is lost, the authority of others has to be reinforced. This is done by naming prominent believers and describing them as "fellow-slaves," "ministers" and "beloved brothers."⁶⁸

Even if one does not agree with MacDonald's reconstruction of the context of Colossians and its early date, her theory about the need to reinforce the authority of individual believers is credible. However, in MacDonald's reconstruction, Nympha is not among the prominent Christ-believers whose authority needs to be reinforced as she is not given the epithet of a fellow-slave, a minister or the like, as are those whom MacDonald recognizes as aspiring authorities. This leaves Nympha in an ambiguous position. Nympha is one of the few individuals who are mentioned by name in Colossians but unlike other named Christ-believers, Nympha is not among those whose authority needs to be reinforced.

⁶⁴ See discussions in MacDonald (2000, 6-9), Talbert (2007, 7-11) and Sumney (2008, 1-9).

⁶⁵ Leppä 2003, 262-263. Colossians is identified as Paul's letter in some second-century c.e. writings, which indicates its relatively early composition. See Sumney 2008, 12.

⁶⁶ Dunn 1996, 19, 37-41, 269. See also MacDonald (2000, 185-186) and Sumney (2008, 7).

⁶⁷ MacDonald 2000, 7-8, 185-186. See also Sumney 2008, 8-9.

⁶⁸ Col. 1:1, 1:7-8, 4:7-14. MacDonald's (2000, 186) analysis is partially based on Weber's theory of authority.

If, however, contrary to MacDonald, Nympha is also to be counted among those whose authority the author aims at reinforcing, her portrayal is more intelligible. Nympha is presented immediately after the section where prominent Christ-believers are named and given epithets, such as fellow-workers and ministers.⁶⁹ These people deliver their greetings through “Paul” to the letter’s recipients, whereas Nympha is one of the recipients. In total, Colossians names only four people from Colossae or Laodicea: Onesimos and Epaphras, who are with “Paul” at the time of writing (4:9, 12), Archippus (4:17) and Nympha (4:15). Nympha is not given an epithet. However, her οἶκος is the only one mentioned and she is the only host of a Christian gathering mentioned by name in Colossians, although there were probably others.⁷⁰ Thus, Nympha’s activity or position merits special attention, although the reason for this is not quite clear.

If she was an authentic figure still alive at the time of writing, her socioeconomic status was perhaps so prominent among the Christ-believers in the area of Colossae and Laodicea that, according to Greco-Roman convictions, she was to be singled out. Or perhaps there were controversies about her position as a host of a Christian gathering and the author wanted to show support to her being a host. According to J.L. Sumney, one possible reason for mentioning Nympha and the Christ-believers gathering at her home is that they had not accepted a false teaching that the author opposes (Col. 2:8). Accordingly, the author wanted to show them support while also displaying to the recipients that he had protagonists among them.⁷¹

Although there is no way of verifying the hypothesis of Nympha’s refusal of false teaching, naming Nympha may have the function of showing the author’s support towards her to the letter’s other recipients. It is even possible that naming Nympha is a sign of a reciprocal patronage relationship.⁷² As a benefactor, Nympha provides Christ-believers with a gathering space. One way of returning her beneficence may be this letter, which singles her out as a host of a Christian gathering. If the letter was written in or near the communities mentioned as its recipients, Nympha had possibly been a patron of the author himself.

⁶⁹ Col. 4:7-14; Nympha in 4:15.

⁷⁰ Col. 4:16 and perhaps the “brothers” in 4:15 imply that. Cf. Dunn 1996, 23, 284.

⁷¹ Sumney 2008, 279.

⁷² For patronage relationships, see my discussion on pp. 74-76.

Because no other Laodicean and very few Colossians are mentioned by name in the letter to the Colossians, Nympha may be one of most prominent believers there. The letter does not give information about her relationship with other local authorities, as they are not mentioned. Thus, Nympha may be an authority in her local community of believers, and this is also reinforced by the fact that some believers convene at her home.

While Colossians mentions Nympha, a woman host of a Christian gathering, it is also the earliest Christian writing that contains a household code (Col. 3:18-4:1).⁷³ Household codes were influenced by Hellenistic values pertaining to the proper order of the households. They are found in several ancient writings⁷⁴ It is generally agreed that their function was to affirm the traditional household order among Christ-believers.⁷⁵ This entails women remaining in their proper places, although explicitly they are exhorted only to be subject to their husbands. Also, the household code in Colossians begins with an exhortation to wives to be subject to their husbands, “as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). This exhortation is not directly connected to Nympha as she is probably not married but is nevertheless the head of her own household.⁷⁶ However, it is to some extent inconsistent to affirm traditional household roles and women’s submission in a letter that mentions a woman host of a Christian gathering. This inconsistency has been seen as a sign of Nympha being an authentic woman host. It would have been peculiar if a protagonist of traditional household roles would nevertheless have invented a woman host of an early Christian gathering.⁷⁷ On the other hand, it is possible that the influence of the authentic Paul and the women he names in his letters affected the invention of Nympha.⁷⁸

⁷³ MacDonald 2005, 99-100. Other household codes or similar teaching about households are found in Eph. 5:21-6:9, Tit. 2:1-10, 1 Pet. 3:1-7, *Did.* 4:9-11, Barn. 19:5-7, 1 Clem. 21:6-8, Ign. *Pol.* 5:1-2 and *Pol. Phil.* 4:2-3. In 1 Tim. 2:9-15 a household code is applied to a worship setting.

⁷⁴ E.g. Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 32-33; Josephus, *Against Apion* 25. Balch (1981, 23-62) presents a wide array of Greco-Roman writings with the ethos of household codes. Cf. Bassler 1996, 59; Fatum 2005, 191-193.

⁷⁵ Balch 1981, 81-109; MacDonald 2005, 99.

⁷⁶ See also MacDonald 2005, 102.

⁷⁷ Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 158.

⁷⁸ Phoebe is a diakonos and a benefactor (Rom. 16:1-2). Prisca has risked her neck for Paul, is Paul’s co-worker and hosts early Christian gatherings together with Aquila (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Mary has worked hard for the Romans (Rom. 16:6). Junia is an apostle (Rom. 16:7). Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis have “worked hard in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12). Also Julia and the sister of Nereus are greeted individually alongside of men (Rom. 16:15). Chloe’s people inform Paul (1 Cor. 1:11). Euodia and Syntyche “have struggled beside [Paul] in the work of the gospel” (Phil. 4:2-3).

The pseudo-Pauline authorship, uncertain dating and the damage caused by the earthquake in the Lycus River valley also result in a possibility that Nympha was not a historical person alive at the time of writing the letter. It is possible that the author uses Nympha as a paradigm of a host of a Christian gathering because there were prominent women in Paul's circle. Nevertheless, it is certain that an early Christian author chose to present a woman host of a Christian gathering in Colossians, although it is likely he would not have had to do that. The original feminine name demonstrates that for some early Christ-believers it was self-evident that women could host early Christian gatherings. On the other hand, the masculine and plural variants demonstrate that other early Christians did not regard women hosts of early Christian gatherings in favorable terms. These later variants may also reflect a tendency towards more restricted roles of women in Pauline communities after the earliest Christianity. A similar trajectory is also detectable in depictions of women in deuterio-Pauline Pastoral Epistles that I will discuss later in this chapter.

5.3.2. *Prisca*

³Ἀσπάσασθε Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν τοὺς συνεργοὺς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ⁴οἵτινες ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸν ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον ὑπέθηκαν, οἷς οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος εὐχαριστῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν, ⁵καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν. [...]

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. [...] (Rom. 16:3-5, NRSV)

¹⁹Ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῆς Ἀσίας. ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ πολλὰ Ἀκύλας καὶ Πρίσκα σὺν τῇ κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίᾳ.

¹⁹The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord. (1 Cor. 16:19, NRSV)

Prisca is one of the prominent Christ-believers in the Pauline circle. She is a Jewish woman who together with Aquila hosts a Christian gathering at least in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19)⁷⁹ and Rome (Rom. 16:3-5).⁸⁰ In addition, Luke mentions Prisca's – or Priscilla's as he calls her – occupation as a tentmaker, her marriage to Aquila and their travels with Paul (Acts 18:2-3, 18:18-19), and presents her teaching

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. is likely written in Ephesus.

⁸⁰ Prisca and Aquila had apparently left Rome when Emperor Claudius had expelled Jews around the middle of the first century C.E. (cf. Lane 1998, 203-207). According to Luke, they went from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2-3) and with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). They probably moved back to Rome from Ephesus (Rom. 16:3-5).

Christianity to Apollos together with Aquila (Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 26). Contrary to the rest of the women discussed in this chapter, Prisca is always mentioned together with Aquila.

Although Prisca is not an independent woman hosting an early Christian gathering, her portrayal is indicative of certain aspects relating to women hosts of early Christian gatherings in general. For instance, when one compares Paul's and Luke's depictions of Prisca, Luke's tendency to portray women's activities as non-authoritative and accommodating of men proclaiming the gospel is clarified. Paul does not hesitate to give Prisca a position similar to that of men. Paul calls Prisca and Aquila his co-workers (συνεργοί) who have "risked their necks" for Paul's life and whom "all the churches of the gentiles" thank (Rom. 16:3-4). When writing about Prisca and Aquila as his co-workers, Paul writes Prisca's name before Aquila's (Rom. 16:3).⁸¹ Perhaps Paul wants to emphasize Prisca's role as his co-worker in this way. At least the reason is not politeness towards women, as in antiquity the most prominent individuals were posited first in name lists.⁸²

Other Paul's co-workers include Timothy, Titus and Epaphroditus, all of whom Paul sends to communities in different towns when he is not able to visit them personally.⁸³ Also Euodia, Syntyche and Clement who have "struggled" beside Paul "in the work of the gospel" are Paul's co-workers (Phil. 4:2-3). In addition, Paul calls Philemon his co-worker. Philemon is a host of a Christian gathering (Philem. 1-2).⁸⁴ Thus, both factors according to which Paul calls someone his co-worker are apparent in Paul's portrayal of Prisca. She has proclaimed the gospel in various locations disregarding her trouble like Timoteus, Titus and Epaphroditus. In addition, there is a Christian gathering at her home like that at Philemon's home. Thus, Paul portrays Prisca as a woman equal to men in her activities.

⁸¹ Also in deuterio-Pauline 2 Tim. 4:19, Prisca is mentioned before Aquila, probably due to a wish to imitate Paul.

⁸² Castelli 1995, 279.

⁸³ Paul calls Timothy his co-worker in Rom. 16:21. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17), Philippi (Phil. 2:19) and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul calls Titus his co-worker in 2 Cor. 8:23. Paul sent Titus to Corinth (2 Cor. 8:16-23). Already earlier, Titus had been working among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:6). Paul calls Epaphroditus his co-worker in Phil. 2:25 where he also presses the importance of sending him to Philippi.

⁸⁴ In addition, Paul calls Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Philem. 24), and Urbanus (Rom. 16:9) his co-workers. Also Apollos is together with Paul a co-worker (1 Cor. 3:9). In sum, Paul refers to three women (Prisca, Euodia and Syntyche) and twelve men as *συνεργοί*.

On the other hand, Luke’s depiction of Prisca is nuanced towards his understanding of activities suitable to women. Whereas Paul never explicates Prisca and Aquila’s marital relationship, Luke introduces Prisca primarily as Aquila’s wife.⁸⁵ In Luke’s narrative, Paul initially meets Aquila, who has a wife called Prisca (Acts 18:2). However, when recounting the departure of the three from Corinth to Ephesus, Luke writes Prisca’s name before Aquila’s (Acts 18:18). In addition, when Prisca and Aquila teach “the Way of God” to Apollos, Prisca is mentioned first. However, she does not teach Apollos publicly but takes him aside (Acts 18:26).

It seems that Luke balances between two pictures of Prisca. On the one hand, she is a woman, thus primarily someone’s wife. On the other hand, Luke is familiar with the stories of Prisca, presenting her as an actor in her own right so that he mentions Prisca before Aquila twice. Nevertheless, neither Paul nor Luke indicates that Prisca would be in a lesser role in the gathering taking place at their home while Aquila would be its leader.

5.4. Possible Hosts: Chloe, Phoebe, the “Elect Lady”, the Widow of Epitropus and Tavia

In addition to women hosts of early Christian gatherings, early Christian writings present women who might have been hosts of Christian gatherings. In this section, five of them, Chloe, Phoebe, the “elect lady”, Tavia and the widow of Epitropus are discussed.

5.4.1. Chloe

ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν χλόης ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. (1 Cor. 1:11, NRSV)

In First Corinthians, Paul writes about Chloe’s people. Despite the briefness of the passage, it entitles Chloe to be discussed among possible hosts of early Christian gatherings. Paul connects Chloe and her people simply with a plural possessive pronoun and Chloe’s name (τῶν Χλόης), which means “those of Chloe” or “those

⁸⁵ Kraemer (1992, 136) points out that it is not even certain that Prisca and Aquila were married, as Paul does not mention the marriage.

who belong to Chloe.” The form is similar to Egyptian census returns, where the declarants, women and men alike, register themselves and the people belonging to their households with the phrase ἐμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς.⁸⁶ In addition, there are Latin parallels where heads of households refer to themselves and their households with the phrase *sibi et suis*.⁸⁷ Probably Chloe is also a head of a household whose people are members of her household.⁸⁸

Chloe’s people have informed Paul about the divisions within the Corinthian community (1 Cor. 1:10-16). The Corinthian Christ-believers know who Chloe is, as Paul mentions Chloe’s name but she and her people are not identified further in the letter. It is probably significant to both Paul as the writer and to the Corinthians as the recipients that Chloe’s people have informed Paul. The context does not reveal if Chloe herself is a Christ-believer. It has been suggested that she is, as Paul identifies people through her.⁸⁹ However, it is also possible that she is in some way prominent enough for the Corinthians to know her even if she is not a believer herself. Likewise, her people could be Christ-believers although she herself is not.⁹⁰

It is not known whether Chloe is Corinthian or Ephesian.⁹¹ On the one hand, she is mentioned in a letter addressed to Corinth. On the other, Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). It is possible that Chloe’s people have visited Corinth from Ephesus. Upon their return, they have told Paul what they have witnessed in the Corinthian community.⁹² If Chloe is Ephesian, it is even more probable that she is a Christ-believer. It is unlikely that Chloe is a non-Christian resident of another town and still Paul would identify his informants through her.

According to Theissen, Paul names those Corinthians whom he has baptized as his partisans.⁹³ Among them are Gaius, whom Paul describes as a host (ξένος)⁹⁴ to him and the “whole church” (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας) in Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Crispus. According to Luke, Crispus is a leader of a synagogue (ἀρχισυνάγωγος)

⁸⁶ E.g. SB X 10437; Cf. Bagnall & Frier 1994, 23. See my discussion on pp. 63-66.

⁸⁷ E.g. AE 1909.65 = AE 1912.252; AE 1928.70; AE 1986.166. See my discussion on p. 59.

⁸⁸ MacDonald 1999, 200; Cyss Crocker 2004, 116. See my discussion on women heads of households in chapter 3.

⁸⁹ Cotter 1994, 352.

⁹⁰ E.g. Tit. 2:9-10. Cf. MacDonald 1999, 200.

⁹¹ Fee 1987, 54; MacDonald 1999, 200-201.

⁹² Thus also Fee 1987, 54; MacDonald 1999, 201.

⁹³ Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14), the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16). Cf. Theissen 2004, 54-55.

⁹⁴ The more common meaning of ξένος is a stranger, but here it implies the relationship in which Gaius has shown hospitality to Paul and “the whole church” (LSJ).

who together with his whole household becomes a Christ-believer (Acts 18:8). The third householder whom Paul has baptized is Stephanas. Despite having also baptized the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16), Paul names none of them. Theissen surmises that Paul “is concerned only with the head of the family.”⁹⁵ In Paul’s words, Stephanas and his household (οικία) have put themselves in the service (εις διακονίαν) of their fellow-believers. Accordingly, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to submit (ὑποτάσσω) to them and to everyone who works (together) (συνεργέω) and toils (κοπιᾶω) like them (1 Cor. 16:15-16). In addition to his local activities, Stephanas acts as a representative of the Corinthian community, as he travels from Corinth to Ephesus to deliver a message from the Corinthians to Paul (1 Cor. 16:17). The most natural explanation for Paul’s choice of words is that Stephanas is a head of a Christ-believing household and therefore is probably a host and a patron of a Christian community.

As Paul does not mention Chloe as a person he has baptized, Theissen does not discuss her in this instance. Nevertheless, Theissen’s interpretation of the references to heads of household, especially the case of Stephanas and his household, may be applied to Chloe and her people. Perhaps Paul chooses in 1 Corinthians a strategy of mentioning prominent people, heads of households, because of the schisms among the Corinthians. Those prominent Christ-believers would have been most able to solve the controversies among them because of their authoritative position (1 Cor. 1:10-17). If this is Paul’s mindset when writing 1 Corinthians, his reference to Chloe might be another instance of mentioning a prominent member of the Corinthian community. In Chloe’s case this could mean that Chloe as a householder is more important to name than “her people,” although they are Paul’s actual informants. Chloe’s position may also be hinted at by the fact that Paul in the first place mentions her by name in First Corinthians where not many Corinthian individuals are named and when they are, they typically represent prominent Christians who are heads of their households.⁹⁶

If, however, Chloe’s people are Corinthian, various informal and formal informants who report to Paul on the problems in the Corinthian community may also be distinguished by differences in wording when Paul describes the problems

⁹⁵ Theissen 2004, 54-55.

⁹⁶ Crispus and Gaius in 1 Cor 1:14; Stephanas in 1:16, 16:15, 16:17; Achaicus and Fortunatus in 16:17.

he has been informed about. In 1 Corinthians, Paul covers various problems that the Corinthians have encountered. Paul names explicitly two sources from where his information about these problems comes: Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11) and a letter sent by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:1).

Paul writes that he has been informed or it has been revealed to him (ἐδηλώθη) by Chloe's people that there are divisions among the Corinthians. This term is typically interpreted as a sign of a verbal communication between Chloe's people and Paul.⁹⁷ In addition to the divisions that Paul has been informed about by Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:12), it has been suggested that they informed Paul verbally about other problems as well. One of these would be the case where it is heard (ἀκούεται) that a man "has" his father's wife (5:1).⁹⁸ Also divisions in the meals of the Corinthians could have been reported to Paul by Chloe's people as Paul writes that he hears (ἀκούω) about these divisions (1 Cor. 11:18).⁹⁹ In addition, perhaps Chloe's people would have reported to Paul about the problems he discusses also in the first part of chapter 11 (1 Cor. 11:2-16).¹⁰⁰

Fitzmyer, however, rightly notes that there is also another option concerning the sources of various information. It is not certain whether Paul has heard the information of 5:1 from Chloe's people, read about it from a letter or heard about it from the people mentioned in 16:17.¹⁰¹ Likewise, it is possible that Chloe's people have brought with them the letter mentioned in 7:1.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Chloe's people are likely not the official messengers of Corinthian community as Paul later mentions separately the probable official messengers, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17-18).¹⁰³

Chloe's identity can also be approached through the problems presented in First Corinthians. According to Andrew D. Clarke, many of these problems are related to the behavior of prominent and well-off Christ-believers.¹⁰⁴ Clarke does

⁹⁷ Fee (1987, 54-55, 266-267, 531, 537) implies that the informants might have been Chloe's people. Theissen 2004, 56-57; Collins 1999, 16.

⁹⁸ Collins 1999, 209.

⁹⁹ Theissen 2004, 57. Also Fee (1987, 537 n. 31) and Collins (1999, 421) imply so.

¹⁰⁰ Murphy-O'Connor 2009, 158, 165.

¹⁰¹ Fitzmyer 2008, 229.

¹⁰² Fitzmyer 2008, 273.

¹⁰³ Fee 1987, 54.

¹⁰⁴ Clarke (2000, 175-185), partially following Theissen, sees the inequality between the wealthy and poor Christ-believers and the false expectations of the wealthy Christ-believers as sources of problems within the Corinthian community. According to Clarke, the problems relating to the behavior of wealthy believers include divisions (1 Cor. 1:11-12, 3:4), emphasis on eloquent speech in contrast to Paul's self-presentation (1 Cor. 2:1-5), suing each other in a court of law (1 Cor. 6:1-

not discuss Chloe's role in the Corinthian community. However, Chloe can be fitted to the picture of the Corinthian community where wealthy Christ-believers cause various problems. Although it has been suggested that Chloe herself has no role in relaying the information to Paul but instead her people are the true informants,¹⁰⁵ the option that Chloe is the source of information seems more viable. According to Cornelia Cyss Crocker, Chloe is a Christ-believer who alongside Paul aims at restoring the unity within the Corinthian community. Her people convey her concerns to Paul.¹⁰⁶ This role of Chloe's would be most understandable if she was one of the prominent Corinthian believers. She who dares to stand against prominent Christians is probably a prominent Christian herself.

This also offers one possible solution to the question of why Chloe's people are in Ephesus to inform Paul in the first place. Gordon D. Fee suggests that Chloe is a businesswoman whose business is handled by her agents who travel between Corinth and Asia.¹⁰⁷ This would imply that Chloe is relatively wealthy and is, subsequently, prominent also in her Christian community. Chloe's people are the ones who are mentioned at the beginning of the admonition and their information is one significant reason for it. Chloe is also the first name to appear in the letter after its writers, Paul and Sosthenes. Thus, Paul's reference to Chloe might also be interpreted to mean that Paul wants to employ Chloe's influence in rebuking the Corinthians.

The Corinthian correspondence is an early depiction of conflicts between an itinerant, Paul, and a local community. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to the Corinthians as someone who has the authority to order their behavior.¹⁰⁸ However, in 2 Corinthians, the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians unfolds in a different manner. In the beginning, Paul writes about the postponement of his next visit to Corinth because his earlier visit had caused grief to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:23-2:3). Paul also refers to some who have denigrated his weak face-to-face performance as opposed to his powerful letters (2 Cor. 10:10). In addition, the

11), customs and incidences pertaining to sexual relations (5:1, 6:12-20, 7:1-16), eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-13), and problems at the common meal (11:17-34).

¹⁰⁵ Theissen (2004, 56-57) argues that Chloe's people are her slaves, who view the divisions "from below" as these are brought about by prominent Christ-believers. Subsequently, they have communicated their opinion about the situation to Paul. In Theissen's reconstruction, Chloe herself has no role in supplying the information.

¹⁰⁶ Cyss Crocker 2004, 114, 117 n. 22. See also Wire (2003, 41).

¹⁰⁷ Fee 1987, 54. Note, however, that according to Fee, Chloe's place of residence is more probably Ephesus than Corinth.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Cor. 1:10-16, 4:18-21, 5:1-5, 6:1-8.

Corinthians have accepted itinerant teachers whom Paul himself disapproves (1 Cor. 11:4-5). He implies that these teachers have taken payment for their work whereas Paul himself has not been a financial burden to the Corinthians, perhaps not wanting to be overly dependent on them. However, contrary to Paul's convictions, the Corinthians have interpreted this as a proof of Paul being a false apostle (2 Cor. 11:7-13, also 1 Cor. 9:1-18).¹⁰⁹ Chloe is not mentioned again in the Corinthian correspondence and thus the influence of Paul's contested authority on Chloe remains elusive.

Looking at "Chloe's people" from a different perspective than the majority of scholars, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza remarks that τῶν Χλόης complies with the same grammatical form, consisting of an article following a name in the genitive case as the description of representatives of different parties in the immediately following verse 1:12: ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ. She also compares the wording to Rom. 16:10 and 11, where Paul greets τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου and τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου, observing that when Paul means the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus he adds τοὺς ἐκ in front of the article and the name. Schüssler Fiorenza concludes that Chloe is not a householder but one of the prominent Corinthian Christ-believers who has followers.¹¹⁰ This argument seems quite credible. However, this conclusion is more probable because Chloe is the head of her household and probably the authority of a group of believers that assembles in her home. Thus, Chloe's people may well be her followers, as Schüssler Fiorenza suggests, but that does not mean that they could not also be members of her household. In fact, it seems very natural that they would be both members of her household and her followers, in other words a community of Christ-believers gathering at her home.

Schüssler Fiorenza's argumentation reminds her readers that the phrase "Chloe's people" enables multiple interpretations. However, the argumentation based on the grammatical forms does not take certain nuances into account. Paul does not seem to liken Chloe to the itinerant apostles Paul, Peter and Apollos. Neither does the comparison to Rom. 16: 10, 11 seem decisive as Paul greets the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus in an inclusive manner, whereas in 1 Cor.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. also Theissen 2004, 40-59.

¹¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 2004, 154-155. Also Cyss Crocker (2004, 117 n. 22) entertains the possibility of a "Chloe faction" while noting that generally scholars have not paid attention to that option.

1:11 he probably does not mean to say that the household of Chloe has informed him but that some members of her household have informed him. Thus, it is more probable that the different wording reflects the differences in meaning. In addition, there is no reason to surmise that Paul would implicitly side with the “Chloe faction” when he explicitly condemns all division within the Corinthian community (1 Cor. 1:10-13). It has become clear that Chloe’s identity is impossible to solve. At the same time, many possible perspectives on Chloe have been introduced. At least it seems more likely that Chloe was a Christ-believer, the head of her households and, perhaps, a host of an early Christian gathering.

5.4.2. Phoebe

¹Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὗσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς, ²ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων, καὶ παραστήτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρῆσι πράγματι, καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ²so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (Rom. 16:1-2, NRSV)

There is one instance in the New Testament in which the word patron is explicitly used. In Rom. 16:1-2, Paul writes of Phoebe, who has been προστάτις, patron to many, including Paul himself. Traditionally however, this passage has been interpreted to mean that Phoebe has “helped” many because a woman “cannot have been” a patron of Paul and other Christians as well.¹¹¹ In light of the research of the word προστάτις there is not sufficient reason to assume that it would not mean patron.¹¹² Thus, another androcentric interpretation of what early Christian women could have been becomes apparent. According to Paul, then, Phoebe is a patron of him and many others. Possibly Phoebe has offered financial support for the Christian community in Cenchreae. If this is so, as a financial supporter of first-century Christ-believers, it is possible that her support has taken the form of providing her fellow-believers with a gathering place.

In return for her benefactions she could expect respect and loyalty from those she has supported. But how would respect and loyalty materialize in Phoebe’s case? One answer to this question can be read in Rom. 16:1, where Paul calls

¹¹¹ E.g. Käsemann 1980, 411.

¹¹² Horsley 1987, 241-244; Castelli 1995, 278-279; Marjanen 2005a, 500; McCabe 2009, 104-109.

Phoebe a deacon (διάκονος) of believers in Cenchreae. It is possible that she gained this title in return for her financial support of the believers in Cenchreae. Paul uses the masculine word “deacon” when he describes Phoebe. One simple reason for the masculine form is the fact that the feminine form, deaconess, came into being only in the late third century.¹¹³ Therefore, Phoebe has a title in a Christian community at a time when there are very few of them.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Paul probably exercises his reciprocal responsibilities towards Phoebe, his benefactor, when he writes the letter of recommendation on Phoebe’s behalf for the believers in Rome.

It has been suggested that Phoebe is a businesswoman who takes Paul’s letter to Rome because she is going there on business.¹¹⁵ If Phoebe is a businesswoman who supports herself with her work, but is able to travel and assist financially her fellow-believers, she does not belong either to the elite or to the lowest socioeconomic stratum.¹¹⁶ This portrayal is reminiscent of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40) and perhaps Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and may be indicative of the socioeconomic status of women hosts in general, as will be discussed in chapter 6. In Phoebe’s case, especially her explicit patronage and having a title of deacon may imply that her financial benefaction relates to hosting an early Christian gathering.

5.4.3. The “Elect Lady”

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς, οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντες οἱ ἐγνωκότες τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth. (2 John 1, NRSV)

εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν καὶ χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε·

Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching. (2 John 10, NRSV)

Another possible woman host of a Christian gathering, the “elect lady” (ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία), is presented as a recipient of 2 John together with her children. 2 John is one of three Johannine letters in the New Testament. All of them are possibly or

¹¹³ Whelan 1993, 68.

¹¹⁴ McCabe 2009, 99-103.

¹¹⁵ Marjanen 2005a, 501-503.

¹¹⁶ For socioeconomic strata, see my discussion on pp. 21-23. For women in various businesses, see my discussion on pp. 54-62.

probably written by the same author¹¹⁷ in the late first or early second century.¹¹⁸ 2 and 3 John are personal letters in form, written by the “elder” to the “elect lady” and Gaius, respectively. Despite the form, it is not certain whether they were personal letters in reality. For instance, Judith M. Lieu points out that the matter is complicated as some ancient letter-writers wrote to real recipients but nevertheless intended the letters to be published, whereas writings intended for groups of people could be written in the form of personal letters. Thus, although it is not certain, it is possible that both 2 and 3 John are personal letters.¹¹⁹

The genre of personal letters is not the only genre that the author uses. This is evidenced in 1 John, which may be best understood as an exhortatory writing albeit admittedly it is also a letter.¹²⁰ Thus, the author of the Johannine letters does not force all his writings into the genre of personal letters. Nevertheless, he uses it in 2 John in a manner similar to 3 John. It also seems that one reason for interpreting the “elect lady” as a metaphor derives from the assumption that it would be unlikely for women to have been hosts of Christian gatherings. With this kind of presupposition, it may understandably be difficult to imagine a woman leader of a Christian community.¹²¹ However, the preceding pages of this study have already demonstrated that there indeed were women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

The apparent purpose of 2 John is to warn the “elect lady” about the opponents of a ‘true’ Christian faith, who are not to be allowed to teach in her house. Despite the form of a personal letter, the “elect lady” has been typically interpreted to represent a metaphor for a Christian community. Attention has been paid to the changing singular and plural forms in the letter, which seem to suggest that the true recipient was not an individual woman and a community in her house.¹²² However, the changes between singular and plural can also be understood in the context of there being matters directed specifically to the “elect lady” in addition to those

¹¹⁷ Lieu (2008, 7-9, 245) makes the decision “to respect the chosen anonymity of the letters” (p. 9) after discussing the possibility of a common author. Marshall (1978, 31) is more certain about there being one author.

¹¹⁸ Some scholars suggest a date at the beginning of the second century (Rensberger 1997, 29-30), others prefer the late first century (Marshall 1978, 48), while still others settle for ca. 100 C.E. (Brown 1982, 5).

¹¹⁹ E.g. Lieu (2008, 4-5) notes 1 John differs from 2 and 3 John as there are no salutations at the beginning or the end, yet it might have still been a letter or perhaps a sermon. However, the matter cannot be solved and it has only minor relevance in relation to the “elect lady.”

¹²⁰ Rensberger 1997, 31.

¹²¹ Cf. e.g. p. 132 n. 125 below.

¹²² Singular forms in verses 4, 5 and 13, in contrast to plurals in v. 8, 10 and 12. Marshall 1978, 60 n. 5; Rensberger 1997, 148; Lieu 2008, 244.

directed to the whole Christian community. Another argument for the metaphorical interpretation for the “elect lady” is offered by the wording in the farewell greeting in verse 13: “The children of your elect sister send you their greetings,” which seems to presume a metaphorical interpretation of the recipient as well.¹²³ However, the metaphorical interpretation of the elect sister does not necessitate the metaphorical interpretation of the “elect lady.” After all, the writer of the letter, the elder, does not identify even himself with a personal name.¹²⁴

Some have criticized the interpretation of the woman as a real host of a Christian gathering, as in their opinion this would mean that the children were the host’s real children. Accordingly, it would have been peculiar to canonize a writing that addresses problems a real woman was having with her real children.¹²⁵ This argument, however, misses one crucial point. Namely, if the host is a real woman, it does not necessarily result in the children being her biological children. Instead, they could be her spiritual children or, more precisely in this context, members of the Christian community she hosts and as such, this community’s spiritual co-owners.¹²⁶ Some discuss the possibility of either Kyria or Elekta being a personal name, but come to the conclusion that considering the context it is improbable.¹²⁷ However, there is no need to assume that a real woman could not have been addressed as the “elect lady” in a metaphorical manner.¹²⁸

There are also those who propose that the “elect lady” might have been an actual woman who would have led a Christian community and possibly hosted it in her home.¹²⁹ Clement of Alexandria writes at the turn of the third century C.E.: “The second Epistle of John, which is written to Virgins, is very simple. It was written to a Babylonian lady, by name Electa, and indicates the election of the holy

¹²³ Marshall 1978, 60 n. 5; Lieu 2008, 244.

¹²⁴ Cf. also Lieu 2008, 1-2.

¹²⁵ Houlden 1994, 142: “Is the Johannine community, under the Elder, a multi-headed matriarchal society, and, what is more, so largely a female business? And does the body of 2J read like an item in a domestic correspondence, with particular attention given to feminine interests? Are we really in the presence of a Christian family whose junior members, so much under mother’s wing, are becoming divided between those who live by ‘the truth’ and those who do not?”

¹²⁶ Even in the NT, the “elect lady” would not be the only Christian woman to have spiritual children; the infamous Jezebel also has followers who are referred to as her children (Rev. 2:23). Cf. also the discussion about the widow of Epitropus on pp. 134-138. Thus Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 248-249. Lieu (2008, 244, 258-260) also suggests that “children” may represent believers, although she maintains that it is impossible to know whether the “elect lady” was a real woman and is inclined to interpret her as a metaphor.

¹²⁷ E.g. Lieu 2008, 240.

¹²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 248-249.

¹²⁹ Albartz (1952, 429), Kraemer (1994, 177), Edwards (2001, 26-29) and Trevett (2006, 222 n. 267) suggest this briefly without much argumentation.

Church.”¹³⁰ Clement’s interpretation of the name of the woman and of the letter being addressed to virgins, whom he possibly envisioned as constituting a Christian community at her home, may not be correct. However, it is important to note that an early Christian writer stated that the “elect lady” was an actual woman.

One argument for the interpretation of the “elect lady” being a host of a Christian congregation is the context of 2 John as one of the Johannine letters likely written by the same author.¹³¹ The letters also present other hosts and itinerant teachers. In 3 John, there are two probable hosts of early Christian gatherings, Gaius and Diotrephes, whose portrayal indicates that they accommodate itinerant teachers (3 John 6, 10). The letter implies that both Gaius and Diotrephes are prominent believers in the same region, but they do not agree on which itinerants to welcome. The letter has been written because a man named Diotrephes has rejected teachers who were proponents of the elder (3 John 10). The elder exhorts Gaius to welcome these itinerant preachers (3 John 6). It may be noted that the figure of Gaius has never been interpreted in a metaphorical manner. Thus, it is quite natural to surmise that as the author writes a personal letter to Gaius, another letter of a similar form, 2 John, would be a real personal letter as well.

If the “elect lady” was a real woman, her relationship with the elder and with itinerant teachers is illustrative. The elder writes to the “elect lady” advising her on the right and wrong itinerant teachers (2 John 7-11). The elder does not seem to be a member of the immediate Christian community of the “elect lady” as he expresses his wish to visit her community in the future (2 John 12). It is possible that the elder is an itinerant charismatic as well. At the moment of writing, he is staying with another community (2 John 13). Although it is not known whether he stays there permanently or is visiting them as well, his wish to visit a community to which he writes, and greetings from another community where he is staying, imply that his activity may be similar to that of Paul.¹³² Thus, the elder may be an itinerant charismatic whom the community of the “elect lady” honors as its supreme authority.¹³³ There are also other itinerants but no other local authorities are

¹³⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.4. Late second / early third century C.E.

¹³¹ Marshall 1978, 31.

¹³² Cf. e.g. Rom. 15:24, 16:21-23; 1 Cor. 16:5-7, 19; Phil. 2:24, 4:21-22.

¹³³ Lieu (2008, 239-240) suggests that the letter may reflect a situation where itinerants were dependent on the “accreditation” of recognized authorities.

mentioned. Therefore, if the “elect lady” is a real woman who hosts an early Christian gathering, she seems to be a local authority.

It may be wisest to conclude that there is no decisive evidence for either interpretation of the “elect lady”. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that by no means is it the better alternative to understand the “elect lady” as a metaphor for a Christian community. As is known, there were women who hosted early Christian gatherings, and the “elect lady” might have been one of them. If the “elect lady” is understood as a host of a Christian gathering, 2 John offers a glimpse of the authority that women hosts would exercise in relation to itinerants and other believers.

5.4.4. *The Widow of Epitropus and Tavia*

ἀσπάζομαι πάντας ἐξ ὀνόματος καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν τέκνων.

I greet everyone by name, including her who belongs to Epitropus together with the household belonging to her and the children. (Ign. *Pol.* 8:2)¹³⁴

ἀσπάζομαι τὸν οἶκον Ταυίας, ἣν εὐχομαι ἐδραῖσθαι πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ σαρκικῇ τε καὶ πνευματικῇ.

I greet the household of Tavia, whom I pray will be firm in faith and in a love that pertains to both flesh and spirit. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2, LCL)

Tavia and “she who belongs to Epitropus” appear in the early second century letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Both of them are mentioned in greetings typical of Ignatius. Of these two women, the reference to “her who belongs to Epitropus” is more ambiguous. Τὴν τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου is typically interpreted either as the wife of Epitropus, the widow of Epitropus, or a woman who belongs to a household that is headed by Epitropus. Ignatius uses a grammatical form that contains the feminine article in the accusative case, τὴν, referring to the woman in question, followed by the identification of the woman as τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου, Epitropus in the genitive case. Epitropus is not necessarily a personal name but may refer to an official, ἐπιτρόπος. If so, she who belongs to ἐπιτρόπος would probably be of relatively high

¹³⁴ My translation.

socioeconomic standing. However, there is no way of knowing whether Epitropus is a personal name or denotes an official.¹³⁵

The designation of the woman as τὴν τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου leaves the situation open to many interpretations. If Epitropus is alive, identifying a Christian household through his wife would not seem probable in light of ancient conventions concerning the position of head of the household. If he is alive and a believer himself, there would be no need to identify the Christian household through his wife and explicitly call it the household that belongs to her and her children, not to Epitropus. On the other hand, if Epitropus is alive but not a believer, it would seem highly improbable that his wife's – thus also his – household is Christian. Certainly, his wife might be a believer although he is not.¹³⁶ However, it would be exceptional if the head of the household had a different religion from the rest of the household.¹³⁷ At least it would convey a picture of a liberal head of a household.

Another alternative is that Epitropus is the woman's father. This would not necessarily mean that she could not have her own household as there were ways for a woman to be independent even when her father was alive and she was not married.¹³⁸ Namely, having a household indicates that she would have been married at some point even though she no longer was. This interpretation is parallel to representations of adult women heads of households as daughters of their fathers.¹³⁹ However, it is different from them as there is no direct designation "the daughter of". Likewise, if Epitropus is the head of the household of the woman in question, but they are not married and he is not her father, it would be unreasonable to assume that she and the household could be Christian while the head of the household is not.¹⁴⁰ Thus, I am inclined towards the interpretation of her being the widow of Epitropus, although it is also possible that she is Epitropus's daughter.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ For a discussion about possible interpretations for both the woman and ἐπιτρόπος, see Trevett 2006, 221-222. Cf. also Schoedel 1985, 280.

¹³⁶ Cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 7:13.

¹³⁷ *Contra* Osiek and MacDonald (2006, 215): "This must be the case of a Christian *materfamilias* with an unbelieving husband." Elsewhere, however, Osiek and MacDonald (2006, 156-157) seem to be open to other interpretations as well. Ehrman also translates this in LCL (2003) "the wife of Epitropus."

¹³⁸ See my discussion on pp. 50-54 about the independence of women.

¹³⁹ Women identified through their fathers in chapters 3 and 4 of the present study: Julia Felix, Ummidia Quadratilla, Sergia Paulina, Junia Theodora, Mamia.

¹⁴⁰ Hodge (2010, 2-4) discusses believing women married to unbelievers (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:12-16). The crucial point in the case of the widow of Epitropus is that according to Ignatius, the members of her household are also believers. This implies that there was no unbelieving husband.

¹⁴¹ See my discussion on pp. 47-50 for the social and economic implications of women's widowhood.

Consequently, I will refer to her as the widow of Epitropus for the remainder of this study, while at the same time acknowledging that her relationship to Epitropus is not decidedly settled.

According to the letter, the widow of Epitropus has children who, together with her, own the household. The text reads: τὴν τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου σὺν ὄλω τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν τέκνων. Translations often dismiss the genitive case of τῶν τέκνων and speak only of the household and children of the widow of Epitropus.¹⁴² However, this interpretation is incorrect as τῶν τέκνων is also in the genitive case. Thus, the children are to be understood as a group of people to whom the household belongs, in addition to the widow herself. To say that they were co-owners perhaps takes the interpretation a little too far, although the genitive case can also denote concrete ownership.

It is possible that the children are the widow's actual biological children to whom Ignatius wishes to pay attention for some reason. However, the metaphorical sense of children seems more likely. Familial metaphors were widely used in early Christianity.¹⁴³ Ignatius also refers to children metaphorically elsewhere. In *Phil.* 2:1, he writes about believers as “children of the light of truth,”¹⁴⁴ In addition, there is a parallel passage where Ignatius greets the households of brothers and mentions also their wives and children. The wording of this passage does not indicate in any way that the households are also these children's.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Ignatius is capable of describing the heads of households and their children in a way that is not ambiguous about to whom the household belongs. It is therefore significant that Ignatius writes about a household that also belongs to the children of the widow of Epitropus. Subsequently, it is possible that these children are metaphorical children of the widow, and believers in the community she hosts.

In contrast to Ignatius's greeting to the widow of Epitropus, the greeting of Tavia and her household is fairly straightforward in his letter to the Smyrnaeans. Ignatius does not connect Tavia to a man, unlike the widow of Epitropus. This is not contradictory if there simply was no man to whom she could have been naturally

¹⁴² E.g. ANF01: “I salute all by name, and in particular the wife of Epitropus, with all her house and children.” See also Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 156.

¹⁴³ E.g. 1 Cor. 4:14, 17; Gal. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Thess. 2:7. Also 2 John 1:1 and Rev. 2:23, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Cf. Meeks 1983, 86-88.

¹⁴⁴ In addition, in *Ign. Phil.* 5:1 and *Ign. Eph.* 10:3, “brothers” is used metaphorically.

¹⁴⁵ *Ign. Smyrn.* 13:1: Ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς οἴκους τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου σὺν γυναιξίν καὶ τέκνοις [...]

connected.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Tavia is a woman head of a household who is a believer alongside of the people who belong to her household. In addition to being women who apparently are heads of their households, Tavia and the widow of Epitropus both live in Smyrna, but are mentioned only in one of the two letters which Ignatius sends to Smyrna. Thus, it has been suggested that Tavia and the widow of Epitropus may be the same person.¹⁴⁷ However, only one name, Alce, is included in both of these letters (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2; Ign. *Pol.* 8:3). The rest of the people greeted are presented only in one of the letters. Thus, it is not necessary to interpret Tavia and the widow of Epitropus as the same person. It is possible that in the Smyrnaean Christian community there are two women householders whom Ignatius wishes to greet.

Four of Ignatius's letters known to us are written in Smyrna, which implies that Ignatius stayed there for some time.¹⁴⁸ Thus, he is perhaps better acquainted with Smyrnaean Christ-believers than with the recipients of his letters elsewhere. Only in his letters sent to Smyrna, the letters to the Smyrnaeans and to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, does Ignatius greet individual believers. In addition to Tavia and the widow of Epitropus, he mentions Alce in Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2 and Ign. *Pol.* 8:3, Daphnus and Eutecnus in Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:2, and Attalus in Ign. *Pol.* 8:2. In the letters to the Ephesians, the Magnesians, the Trallians, the Romans and the Philadelphians there are no greetings to individual believers.

In addition, Ign. *Smyrn.* and Ign. *Pol.* are the only Ignatian letters that contain greetings to households. Both Tavia and the widow of Epitropus together with their households are greeted in a manner that Ignatius does not use in relation to any other distinct households in these letters. In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, he mentions other households aside from Tavia's only once: "I greet the households of my brothers with their wives and children" (13:1). In Ign. *Pol.*, the only household mentioned is the one that belongs to the widow of Epitropus and her children.

One possible explanation for Ignatius's attention to Tavia and the widow of Epitropus is that they are hosts of Christian gatherings.¹⁴⁹ If that is the case, it could

¹⁴⁶ Cf. also Eisen 2000, 215 n. 50.

¹⁴⁷ Schoedel 1985, 280. Cf. Trevett 2006, 222.

¹⁴⁸ Ign. *Rom.* 10:1; Ign. *Trall.* 12:1; Ign. *Magn.* 15:1; Ign. *Eph.* 21:1.

¹⁴⁹ Trevett (2006, 222) also suggests that she who belongs to Epitropus might have hosted a Christian gathering. However, Trevett (2006, 218-221) does not consider the possibility of Tavia's hosting a Christian gathering in her discussion about Tavia. Osiek and MacDonald (2006, 214, 236) suggest

mean that one or both of these women also gave Ignatius a place to stay in Smyrna in a manner similar to hosts who accommodated itinerant teachers.¹⁵⁰ That would explain why Ignatius takes into account these individual households while he greets other households on a more general level or not at all. That could also explain why the household of Epitropus's widow also belongs to her children. They would be other believers, members of a Christian community that gathers in her home. It is worth noting that these two women hosts are not depicted as authorities in Ignatius's letters. The letters seem to reflect a more advanced state of a Christian community than, for instance, the authentic letters of Paul. Ignatius consistently emphasizes the authority of bishops, presbyters and deacons. Nothing should be done without the consent of a bishop, and thus, for instance, the Eucharist is to be received only under a bishop's authority (*Ign. Smyrn.* 8:1-9:1, 12:2; *Ign. Pol.* 4:1). It is also a bishop's duty to ensure that gatherings are held more often (*Ign. Pol.* 4:2). Smyrnaean believers are urged to pay attention to the bishop and be obedient to the bishops, the presbyters and the deacons (*Ign. Pol.* 6:1).

Ignatius probably does not perceive the hosts of gatherings to be officeholders¹⁵¹ of Christian communities.¹⁵² But conversely, at this time many officeholders were probably heads of households.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, it is possible that the activities of Tavia and the widow of Epitropus would be restricted to providing gathering spaces where perhaps only the members of their own households convene. Likewise, it is also possible that Tavia and the widow of Epitropus themselves are presbyters or deacons.

briefly that Tavia might have hosted a Christian gathering. Hofmann (2000, 200-201) suggests that both Tavia and she who belongs to Epitropus may have been hosts of Christian gatherings. However, he also dates the letters to the 170's and holds them to be pseudo-Ignatian.

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Gaius in Rom. 16:23, Lydia in Acts 16:14-15, Gaius and Diotrephes in 3 John.

¹⁵¹ "Officeholders" denotes simply the group of bishops, presbyters and deacons without implying a rigid structure or clearly defined functions in these communities.

¹⁵² Cf. e.g. the following references in which Ignatius emphasizes the authority of officeholders but does not indicate that all hosts of gatherings would be among them: *Ign. Magn.* 3.1-2, 6.1-2; *Ign. Trall.* 3.1; *Ign. Phil.* 7.1-2; *Ign. Smyrn.* 8:1-2.

¹⁵³ See my discussion on pp. 37-39.

5.5. Women Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings in the Pastoral Epistles¹⁵⁴

The Pastoral Epistles contain passages that convey the author's¹⁵⁵ disapproval of women's behavior (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:9-15; 2 Tim. 3:6-7) and aim to regulate it (e.g. 1 Tim. 5:3-16). Although the passages have been studied extensively, it has often been disregarded that some of them may relate to the activities of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. While the possibility of women hosts in the Pastoral Epistles has been referred to at times,¹⁵⁶ the topic has never to my knowledge been studied extensively. In what follows, three passages from the Pastoral Epistles are discussed as each of them relates to different aspects of the activities of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. The first passage connects women's wealth and the assumption of authority (1 Tim. 2:8-15). The second passage refers to women who have no husbands and should provide for other believers (1 Tim. 5:11-16). The third passage concerns teachers who are welcomed at women's homes (2 Tim. 3:1-7). I will not argue that all the women addressed in these passages are women hosts of Christian gatherings but intend to show that some of them could have been.

With the majority of scholars, I regard the Pastoral Epistles as deutero-Pauline writings that date from the late first or early second century C.E.¹⁵⁷ and are possibly located somewhere in Asia Minor.¹⁵⁸ The Pastoral Epistles utilize the

¹⁵⁴ A more extensive version of this chapter will appear as an article in A. Marjanen (ed.), *Gender, Social Roles and Occupations in Early Christian Texts* (forthcoming).

¹⁵⁵ While I write about the 'author' of the Pastoral Epistles, I do not argue that there necessarily was only one author of the Pastoral Epistles. Jens Herzer is one of the proponents of the multiple authors hypothesis. See his discussion (Herzer 2008, 546-555) about the history of scholarship on multiple authors in the Pastoral Epistles. Recently, Ehrman (2012, 194-217) has scrutinized the hypothesis of different authors concluding that one author wrote all three Pastoral Epistles. I find Ehrman's analysis plausible. However, Ehrman (2012, 367-369) also notes that each of the Pastoral Epistles may have been aimed at a different historical situation. Especially the backdrop of 2 Tim. seems to differ from that of 1 Tim. and Tit. Nevertheless, the possibility of multiple authors or historical situations does not affect my argument, as the letters are clearly interrelated.

¹⁵⁶ See Stählin (1974, 457) about the widows in 1 Tim. 5; Schüssler Fiorenza (1983, 290) and Padgett (1987, 23) about the women in 1 Tim. 2.

¹⁵⁷ See discussions about authorship in Maloney 1995, 362-365; Bassler 1996, 17-21; Marshall & Towner 2003, 52-79; Trebilco 2004, 197-205; Fiore 2007, 15-20. However, there are also scholars who advocate the authenticity of the letters; see Mounce 2000, xlvi-cxxix; Johnson 2001, 55-90. Ehrman (2012, 192-217) offers an extensive analysis on the pseudonymity of the Pastoral Epistles. His discussion leaves little reason to doubt the pseudonymity of the letters.

¹⁵⁸ In their textual world, the letters are sent to "Timothy" in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) and "Titus" in Crete (Tit. 1:5). A connection between the Pastoral Epistles and Ephesus has also been suggested on the basis of names that appear in the Pastorals and elsewhere in the New Testament in connection with Ephesus (Prisca and Aquila in 2 Tim. 4:19 / 1 Cor. 16:19; Erastus in 2 Tim. 4:20 / Acts 19:22; Trophimos in 2 Tim. 4:20 / Acts 21:29. For discussions about the location of the Pastoral Epistles, see Bassler (1996, 20, 24); Marshall & Towner (2003, 85); Trebilco 2004, 205-206.

rhetoric of Hellenistic philosophy¹⁵⁹ and aim to shape Christianity and Christ-believers to make them acceptable in Greco-Roman society.¹⁶⁰ Despite the pseudonymity and these aims, some scholars argue that situations and opponents targeted by the Pastorals could be at least partially real¹⁶¹ while others are more pessimistic about this prospect.¹⁶² In the following sections, nevertheless, I will suggest why these passages could have been aimed at women hosts and how women hosts might have perceived them.

5.5.1. *Wealthy Women Who Assume Authority*

⁹Ωσαύτως [καί] γυναίκας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν ἑαυτάς, μὴ ἐν πλέγμασιν καὶ χρυσίῳ ἢ μαργαρίταις ἢ ἱματισμῷ πολυτελεῖ, ¹⁰ἀλλ' ὁ πρέπει γυναίξιν ἐπαγγελλομένας θεοσέβειαν, δι' ἔργων ἀγαθῶν. ¹¹Γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μαθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· ¹²διδάσκειν δὲ γυναίκα οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω, οὐδὲ ἀθθεντεῖν ἀνδρός, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. ¹³Ἀδὰμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, εἶτα Εὐά· ¹⁴καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν· ¹⁵σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης·

⁹also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Tim. 2:9-15, NRSV)

This passage has been under extensive scrutiny in scholarship but very seldom has it been interpreted as a reference to women hosts.¹⁶³ The author begins his instruction concerning women's right behavior by urging them to behave modestly and not to adorn themselves. Accordingly, many scholars have suggested that the passage is related to the behavior of wealthy Christian women.¹⁶⁴ In addition, it has been proposed that because of their wealth, women assumed that they should have

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Malherbe 2010, 377 n. 3 for references.

¹⁶⁰ This is evidenced in the way the author exhorts Christ-believing slaves to obey their masters (1 Tim. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:9-10) and all believers to pray for earthly rulers and be obedient to them (1 Tim. 2:1-4; Tit. 3:1). In regard to women, this aim becomes evident when the author instructs them to get married, have children and in general behave in a manner that outsiders would also consider appropriate (1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4-6). Cf. MacDonald 1988, 167-170; Bassler 1996, 34; MacDonald 1996, 154-161; Bassler 2003, 131-134, 146; Thurston 2003, 162; Fiore 2007, 67.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Bassler 1996, 26; Marshall & Towner 2003, 41, 57-58; Trebilco 2004, 210-233.

¹⁶² E.g. Dibelius & Conzelmann (1984, 65-67) argue that the Pastoral Epistles are so filled with stereotypical language and generalizations that they reveal nothing about the real historical context of the letters. Cf. also Pietersen 2004, 14-23.

¹⁶³ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983 290; Padgett 1987, 23.

¹⁶⁴ E.g. Padgett 1987, 23; Bowman 1992, 197; Bassler 1996, 58.

authority in their Christian communities.¹⁶⁵ However, it has also been noted that the stereotypic language about women's adornment may indicate that verse 9 offers no evidence about the real circumstances of these women.¹⁶⁶

Verses 11-12 exhort women to learn silently and submissively, not to teach or have authority over men. It is not entirely clear which women are to submit and to whom as the words used for woman (γυνή) and man (άνήρ) also mean wife and husband. According to some scholars, the author means women's universal submission to men.¹⁶⁷ According to others, the passage means women's submission to men in the worship setting.¹⁶⁸ Still others suggest that the author means that wives must submit to their husbands¹⁶⁹ and some that only certain women had to submit because of their heretic opinions.¹⁷⁰

As the author begins the passage with the advice on the proper prayer for men (1 Tim. 2:8) and continues by prohibiting women from teaching men (1 Tim. 2:12), it is plausible to interpret this passage as dealing with women's submission to men specifically in the worship setting. It is improbable that the author's train of thought changes in the middle of the sentence from the worship setting to the relationships between wives and husbands. The author bases his prohibitions on the relationship between Adam and Eve (1 Tim. 2:13-14) and then offers a solution for women to compensate for their transgressions and gain salvation by bearing children (1 Tim. 2:15). However, he does not intend to make this a matter between spouses but rather gives universal grounds for prohibiting women from having authority in a worship setting.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Countryman 1980, 153-154; Padgett 1987, 21-30; Kidd 1990, 102-103.

¹⁶⁶ Verses 9-10 have Christian and non-Christian parallels, some of them referring to adornment in the worship setting (Cf. Batten 2009, 479 n. 72, 484-485), some of them guiding women's adornment in general (E.g. 1 Pet. 3:3. Cf. Bassler 1996, 57-58).

¹⁶⁷ Baugh 1994, 153-155.

¹⁶⁸ Bowman 1992, 197-199; Bassler 1996, 59-60; Köstenberger 1997, 142-143.

¹⁶⁹ Hugener 1992, 350-358. Winter (2003, 97-119) also sees this passage as an exhortation to wives. However, according to him, its purpose is not to address the relationship between a wife and a husband but "how the godly wife should respond to Christian instruction" (quotation on pp. 113-114).

¹⁷⁰ Padgett 1987, 24-25; Gruenler 1998, 236, 238.

¹⁷¹ See also Bassler 1996, 60-61.

It has often been suggested that the author opposes women as teachers when they teach a heresy¹⁷² that the author opposes.¹⁷³ However, although heresy and women are linked elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles,¹⁷⁴ the immediate context of this particular verse does not bring heresy to the fore but deals with the practice of worship. Thus, the author may well mean that women are not to be teachers in the worship setting regardless of the content of their teaching.

Verse 12 continues by prohibiting women from having authority over men. The verb used for women having authority, ἀθεντέω, has been interpreted in various ways. A comprehensive survey of the usages in antiquity has given the following main translations: to rule, to control or dominate, to act independently, to be primarily responsible, to commit a murder.¹⁷⁵ One common interpretation has been that the author wants to forbid women from having any kind of authority in the worship setting.¹⁷⁶ Some infer that the author forbids women from having authority in a domineering or autocratic manner.¹⁷⁷ Understanding the prohibition as a prohibition of domineering has also been connected with the earlier prohibition of teaching. Thus, the third interpretation suggests that women are not to teach in an authoritarian manner.¹⁷⁸

In light of the context of the prohibition, I am inclined towards the interpretation that the author wants to forbid women from having any kind of authority over men in the worship setting.¹⁷⁹ Although the interpretation of the author wanting to forbid women from teaching in an authoritarian manner is reasonable, the whole of the Pastoral Epistles and its depictions of women do not indicate that the author would approve of women teaching in any manner in the worship setting. Neither is the supposed difference between teaching and teaching in an authoritarian manner clear. Thus, presumably the author wants to forbid

¹⁷² “Heresy” would deserve quotation marks. Labeling “heresy” and “heretics” were used in early Christianity as “rhetorics of exclusion” (Royalty 2013, 20). Elsewhere in this work, when the words heresy and heretic are used, I have left out the quotation marks. However, it is not my intention to imply that the people and beliefs in question would have been “real” “heretics” or “heresies” but they were instead literary representations drafted by their opponents.

¹⁷³ Spencer 1974, 216, 219; Padgett 1987, 21; Gruenler 1998, 229; Marshall & Towner 2003, 458; Heidebrecht 2004, 178; Collins 2011, 160-161.

¹⁷⁴ 2 Tim. 3:6-7; perhaps 1 Tim. 5:13.

¹⁷⁵ Baldwin 1995a, 65-80; 1995b, 269-305; Marshall & Towner 2003, 456-460.

¹⁷⁶ Knight 1984, 143-157; Köstenberger 1995, 81-103.

¹⁷⁷ Osburn 1982, 1-12; Marshall & Towner 2003, 458. For an extensive bibliography and a brief summary on varying views, see Fitzmyer (2004, 586, n. 12).

¹⁷⁸ Marshall & Towner 2003, 459-460; Payne 2008, 246-247.

¹⁷⁹ He probably would never want women to use any kind of authority over men, but that is not the point of this passage.

women from both teaching and otherwise taking authoritative actions in the worship setting.

The author's argument continues with the ultimate reason for women's subordination: they must submit because Adam was formed first and Eve became a transgressor (1 Tim. 2:13-14). Women can be saved through childbearing and modesty (1 Tim. 2:15). It has been argued that the author means concretely that women's salvation is dependent on childbearing.¹⁸⁰ However, it is more typical to interpret this passage more moderately; the author means that women should not abstain from marriage and childbearing but fulfill their "natural" role.¹⁸¹ Also women who do not manage to bear children for some reason can be saved if they submit to their "natural" role.¹⁸²

The formulation of the demand of women remaining in their "natural" roles and behaving subserviently in 1 Tim. 2:9-15 echoes the early Christian household codes.¹⁸³ In contrast to household codes, however, 1 Tim. 2:9-15 deals with the proper behavior in a community of Christ-believers, not in a household.¹⁸⁴ Thus, while these exhortations tap into the rhetoric of household codes, they extend the usage beyond individual households to Christian communities.

Although the household code formulation is typically seen in 1 Tim. 2:8-15, it can also be perceived as extending to 1 Tim. 3:1-13, where the author writes about the qualifications of bishops and deacons.¹⁸⁵ As the author extends the formulation, the aim of the whole is clarified. He first explains that women are not proper authorities and teachers in Christian communities as justified by the creation story (1 Tim. 2:12-15), after which he proceeds to describe who are true authorities (1 Tim. 3:1-13). While doing this, the author implicitly keeps reminding his readers of traditional Greco-Roman ideals by modifying his instruction according to household codes. The usage of household codes in the description of proper conduct in Christian gatherings and the qualifications of officeholders¹⁸⁶ directs the reader

¹⁸⁰ Solevåg (2012) argues that based on an "*oikos* ideology," which includes the power of the paterfamilias and women's place as submissive childbearers, the author really means that women are saved by childbirth because it presumes that women are in their right place in an *oikos*.

¹⁸¹ The author's emphasis on women's "natural" roles is also seen in his exhortation to young widows to remarry in 1 Tim. 5:14.

¹⁸² Bassler 1996, 61; Marshall & Towner 2003, 470.

¹⁸³ For household codes, see my discussion on p. 120.

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that another instance of using the form of a household code in a congregational setting comes from another Pastoral Epistle: Tit. 2:1-10.

¹⁸⁵ Verner 1983, 91, 96-100; Maier 2002, 44.

¹⁸⁶ See p. 120 esp. n. 73-74 and p. 148 n. 203 of this study.

to perceive the community as a household. Immediately afterwards, the author states explicitly that true believers constitute the household of God (1 Tim. 3:14-15).¹⁸⁷ These ideal communities are headed by local prominent men who are also respectable heads of households and, by implication, often hosts of early Christian gatherings (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:1-13). Thus, the Christian communities headed by men who are described in 1 Tim. 3:1-13 are real households of God, not those where women aim to be authorities.

The next issue is that if the author has in mind any real women who are in a danger of behaving the way the author here forbids, who might these women have been. On one hand, this is an entirely imaginative enterprise. On the other, the starting point of this whole study is to find perspectives from which to approach women hosts. Thus, it is essential to note that providing financial support was one of those rare means that enabled women to gain authority over men because of the reciprocal patronage relationships, as discussed earlier. In the context of early Christian communities, the financial support that could cause women to assume that they had authority over men was providing Christians with a gathering space. In addition, those early Christian communities that consisted mainly of the members of that household regarded the hosts, probably irrespective of their gender, as the authority over them in everyday life.¹⁸⁸ It does not seem viable to suggest that in a worship setting things would have been different.

The author's way of formulating the characteristics of proper behavior along the lines of household codes is significant in relation to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. The "natural" role of being married and bearing children might have a connection to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. It is quite certain that women hosts were celibate. Had they not been, they would not have been heads of their households. Thus, they would not have remained in the "natural" role of women that entailed submission to a husband or another male relative. This imaginative enterprise is not meant as a "proof" that there were women hosts who behaved in ways the author of the Pastoral Epistles describes. Instead, it is meant as one example of where the mute might be pushing through the fabric of the text.¹⁸⁹ If women hosts were there, would they have identified themselves as those who

¹⁸⁷ Thus also Verner 1983, *passim*; Maloney 1995, 367.

¹⁸⁸ Campbell 2004, 117-118, 126. See pp. 37-39 of the present study.

¹⁸⁹ The phrase is adapted from Gold 1993, 84.

should be careful not to behave in ways these newly discovered letters of “Paul” now told them not to?

5.5.2. Women Who Support Widows

¹⁶εἴ τις πιστὴ ἔχει χήρας, ἐπαρκείτω αὐταῖς καὶ μὴ βαρείσθω ἡ ἐκκλησία, ἵνα ταῖς ὄντως χήραις ἐπαρκέσῃ.

¹⁶If any believing woman has widows [NRSV: relatives who are really widows], let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows. (1 Tim. 5:16)¹⁹⁰

While the whole passage about widows in 1 Tim. 5:3-16 has been under much scrutiny in scholarship,¹⁹¹ the believing women who are to take care of widows in verse 16 have typically received less attention. However, from the point of view of the women hosts of early Christian gatherings, these women are the most interesting ones in this passage.

The Greek text in verse 16 is very compact: “εἴ τις πιστὴ ἔχει χήρας.” Accordingly, it does not specifically address believing women whose relatives are widows, as NRSV translates it,¹⁹² but simply believing [women] who have widows. The overly interpretative translation (“whose relatives are widows”) is likely due to verses 1 Tim. 5:4 and 8, which address family members who are to take care of widows.¹⁹³ However, as both verses 4 and 16 deal with the support of widows, it does not seem plausible that the author would repeat his exhortation that family members are to provide for the widows who belong to their households.

Thus, verse 16 likely addresses early Christian women who have the means to provide for less fortunate women who are not necessarily related to them.¹⁹⁴ Although the author has first written about the support of widows in general, he subsequently singles out women as providers for widows whom they have. The circumstances where women could be described as “having” widows would be most easily explained so that these women had widows in their homes. The widows could or could not be their relatives. Thus, in this passage the author instructs certain women on how to use their property for the benefit of other Christ-believers.

¹⁹⁰ I have altered the NRSV translation at some points in accordance with NA²⁷.

¹⁹¹ E.g. Bassler 1984 & 2003; Thurston 2003; Collins 2011.

¹⁹² NIV’s translation is more faithful to the original text: If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care.

¹⁹³ Winter 1988, 90-94; Marshall & Towner 2003, 606

¹⁹⁴ Roloff 1988, 301; Bassler 1996, 96. Cf. also Marshall & Towner 2003, 606.

Judith Bassler suggests that these believing women are proponents of the author and the ethos he represents. Accordingly, it is the task of women believers to make sure that widows who are in danger of going astray remain in the control of male authorities, and do not wander about and speak what they should not (1 Tim. 5:5-15).¹⁹⁵ However, this passage may equally well be designated to regulate the behavior of those women who provide for widows. Perhaps the author wants to channel their activities and patronage along the lines that suit his agenda: these women are to take care of destitute widows in their homes. Not only would this course of action ease the financial burden of a Christian community, but it would also ensure that these women occupy their time with activities suitable for independent women of means.

As heads of households, women who have widows in their home would be potential hosts of early Christian gatherings which would make them also a potential threat to the ideology that the author represents. Supporting women in need would be an ideal activity of believing women heads of households, which would help them fit in the picture of the household of God despite not being married. And while there could be Christian gatherings at their homes, at least consisting of widows, they would submit to the authority of the author of the Pastorals and his protagonists.¹⁹⁶

5.5.3. *Women Who Have Teachers in their Households*

¹Τοῦτο δὲ γίνωσκε, ὅτι ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις ἐνστήσονται καιροὶ χαλεποὶ· ²ἔσονται γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι φιλάυτοι φιλάργυροι ἀλαζόνες ὑπερήφανοι βλάσφημοι, γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς, ἀχάριστοι ἀνόσιοι ³ἄστοργοι ἄσπονδοὶ διάβολοι ἀκρατεῖς ἀνήμεροὶ ἀφιλάγαθοι ⁴προδόται προπετεῖς τετυφωμένοι, φιλήδονοι μᾶλλον ἢ φιλόθεοι, ⁵ἔχοντες μόρφωσιν εὐσεβείας τὴν δὲ δύναμιν αὐτῆς ἡρνημένοι· καὶ τούτους ἀποτρέπου. ⁶Ἐκ τούτων γὰρ εἰσὶν οἱ ἐνδύνοντες εἰς τὰς οἰκίας καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντες γυναικάρια σεσωρευμένα ἁμαρτίαις, ἀγόμενα ἐπιθυμίαις ποικίλαις, ⁷πάντοτε μανθάνοντα καὶ μηδέποτε εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν δυνάμενα.

¹You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. ²For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them! ⁶For among them are those

¹⁹⁵ Bassler 1996, 96; 2003, 145.

¹⁹⁶ Kartzow (2009, 149) discusses the two types of possible all-female communities in the Pastoral Epistles and specifically in 1 Tim. 5: the first type consists of women who wander around saying what they should not, the second of younger and older women who stay at home while the older women teach the younger the virtues of womanhood (Cf. Tit. 2:3-5). Although Kartzow does not mention women who are to take care of widows (1 Tim. 5:16) in this instance, they would fit the picture of all-female communities.

who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires,⁷ who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim. 3:1-7, NRSV)

From the author's point of view, one form of women's potential misbehavior is bringing false teachers to their homes. The author aims his criticism at women, not their husbands. Elsewhere, however, the author maintains that a male head of a household ideally manages his household well, while a wife must submit to him.¹⁹⁷ It is possible that some of these women are married to unbelievers, and thus women are the ones who invite teachers to their households.¹⁹⁸ However, there is no reason to surmise that none of the women who could invite teachers to their homes would be heads of households, as women heads of households are well attested.¹⁹⁹

The nature of heresy that the author attacks has been under extensive examination.²⁰⁰ During the course of this research, it has become increasingly clear that no specific content for false teaching can be reconstructed.²⁰¹ False teachers also appear elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles. 2 Tim. 4:3-4 targets those who seek teachers who teach what they want to hear. It seems that wealthy Christians pay these teachers. The passage also connects false teaching and a refusal of marriage. In a similar vein, but without mentioning women, Tit. 1:10-11 presents teachers who teach for money and in doing so disturb whole households. Even when it is impossible to discern which teachers were false teachers and from whose perspective, it is quite certain that there were hosts of early Christian gatherings who could use their authority to decide who would teach and enjoy their hospitality at their homes.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ 1 Tim. 3:2-5; Tit. 1:6; Tit. 3:5. Although the first two passages relate to the characteristics of a bishop and an elder, they also convey a more general ideal of the proper position and authority of a male head in his household.

¹⁹⁸ See Hodge (2010, 1-25) for a discussion and ancient sources on wives and husbands having a different religion. See also pp. 135-136 of this study.

¹⁹⁹ See chapter 3 of this study.

²⁰⁰ The usual suspects have been "Jewish-Christian" (e.g. Marshall & Towner 2003, 44-47, 50-51), "Christian Gnostic" (e.g. Ehrman 2000, 355, 358) and "Jewish-Gnostic" (e.g. MacDonald 1988, 179) teaching. For the research history of the nature of false teaching, see Pietersen 2004, 5-14, 23-26. Marjanen (2005b, 5-9) discusses the possible Gnostic allusions of opponent's teaching, but maintains that in addition to the fact that the references to opponents are highly polemical, many practices that have been interpreted as "Gnostic" could be explained by various factors. Marjanen argues that probably the views of the "opponents" comprise various unacceptable attitudes and practices.

²⁰¹ Horrell 1997, 331.

²⁰² Cf. my discussion about the hosts and itinerants on pp. 34-39 and the "elect lady" on pp. 130-134. See also *Did.* 11-12 for another illustration of the matter, and Patterson's (1995, 324-326) discussion.

Not only false teachers accept salary for their teaching. The Pastoral Epistles depict two kinds of male authorities of Christian communities. There are those male authorities who are heads of their households (1 Tim. 3:2-5, 12-13; Tit. 1:6-9).²⁰³ Another group of authorities seems to be those elders (πρεσβύτεροι) who work as preachers and teachers. Christ-believers are exhorted to pay for their hard work (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Perhaps these elders do not have the means to host Christian gatherings, implying that not all authorities are particularly well off. Perhaps some of those men who work on a “salary” would be authorities in communities that gather at women’s homes. However, not all women accept these proponents of the author to lead their Christian communities. These women “are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:7). It is also crucial to note that Christian women householders who accepted Christian teachers into their households, even if they were heretics, were in effect hosts of early Christian gatherings.

5.5.4. Conclusions about Women Hosts and the Pastoral Epistles

The Pastoral Epistles present a phase where early Christian authority structures have evolved from what they were in Paul’s lifetime. Because of the roles women hosts and other prominent women had had in Pauline communities earlier,²⁰⁴ the author of the Pastorals has to argue persuasively why prominent women could no longer rule or teach men. The author uses several techniques to accomplish his goals. He writes explicitly that women are not to have authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). He demonstrates how and why women are saved through their roles as wives and mothers (1 Tim. 2:13-15). He gives an example of how women of means are to support believers (1 Tim. 5:16). He depicts silly women who listen to false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6-7). While the pseudonymity and stereotypical language of the Pastorals may indicate that the author’s portrayal of women is fictional as a whole, one still

²⁰³Bishops and deacons are exhorted not to be lovers or greedy of money (ἀφιλάργυρος, 1 Tim. 3:3; αἰσχροκερδής, 1 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 1:7). These qualifications have been interpreted as an additional proof of officeholders not being well off. However, this interpretation may downplay the author’s use of rhetoric and its connection to Greco-Roman ideals. Namely, in antiquity it was not considered worthy of honorable people to actively acquire wealth, which is what the author criticizes. This is also a stereotypical depiction of authorities in early Christian writings (see e.g. *Did.* 15:1-2 and 1 Pet. 5:2. Cf. also Draper 2011, 7). Thus, this rhetoric may strengthen the idea of certain bishops and deacons being prominent and well off.

²⁰⁴Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 4:2-3.

wonders whether there might have been real women who were the author's target. Even when this question cannot be answered, it is known that there were women hosts in some early Christian communities and that the author of the Pastorals aims at reducing women's authority. Although the author would not have had any particular women in mind when writing these stereotypical depictions about women and their activities, one can surmise how they would have been perceived by real women hosts – whoever they were – and believers in their communities.

In chapter 4, I introduced Van Abbema's theory of male authors, such as Juvenal, who feel threatened by women's power and who thus denigrate women in writing.²⁰⁵ This theory is readily applicable to the Pastoral Epistles. A comparison with Juvenal highlights the stereotypes that the author of the Pastorals utilizes. Like Juvenal, the author of the Pastoral Epistles slanders women who transgress the boundaries of traditionally suitable behavior. He seems to be motivated by the authority that women could exercise. He states explicitly that women are not to have authority over men, as it is not natural; Adam was formed first and Eve transgressed. The passages that are not as explicit (1 Tim. 5:3-16; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 2:3-5²⁰⁶) may be understood as "rhetorical masks" that are meant to hide the real reason for the author's anxiousness, namely the power of some women in the early Christian communities. Thus, it is especially interesting that by the time of the Pastoral Epistles, due to the early stage of development of authority structures, women hosts could have been among the early Christian women likely to have most authority.

5.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, texts about women hosts and possible women hosts of early Christian gatherings were discussed. Probably the earliest of these is 1 Corinthians, followed by Romans, Colossians, Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, the Ignatian letters, and 2 John. The exact dating of these is not as important as the finding that women hosts of early Christian gatherings are represented at least in the first century C.E. and perhaps also in the second century C.E.

²⁰⁵ Van Abbema 2008. See my discussion on p. 101.

²⁰⁶ Tit. 2:3-5 contains instructions for old women to teach younger women suitable behavior in their households. Note that the equivalent exhortations to men (Tit. 2:2,6) are much shorter and less specific.

Women hosts can be organized into different categories on the basis of the factuality of these women and texts. The only uncontested woman host is Prisca who, nevertheless, hosts Christian gathering together with Aquila. Women who are represented as women hosts but whose authenticity is uncertain include Nympha, Mary mother of John Mark, Lydia, and the “elect lady.” Real women who are not necessarily women hosts include Nympha, Phoebe, Tavia and the widow of Epitropus. Fictional women who are not necessarily women hosts include certain women in the Pastoral Epistles. I have compiled these women in Table 1, which simplifies especially matters of authenticity. For views about the authenticity of each woman, a longer discussion is presented in relevant sections of this chapter.

TABLE 1. Women hosts in the source texts.

	Authentic woman (more likely)	Uncertainty about authenticity
Representation as a woman host	Prisca	Nympha, Mary, Lydia, the “elect lady”
Representation as a woman who might be a host	Nympha, Phoebe, Tavia, the widow of Epitropus	women of the Pastoral Epistles

Although the references are few in number and some of them represent fictional women, women hosts appear often enough to argue that women hosts of early Christian gatherings were a real phenomenon. The fictional character of some sources and the relatively wide spread of references to women hosts in effect indicate that in the vast geographical area where Christianity spread during its first centuries, the number of women hosts was greater than the sources known to us recount. However, as the examination of texts about them has made clear, their function is typically to be representations of women, and their actual functions, if there is some legitimacy in this expression, are left in the shadows. If these texts represent the mute pushing through the fabric of texts, there is not much information about what the mute would like to say about their lives and themselves. Nevertheless, these themes and trajectories relating to women hosts will be discussed in chapter 6.

6. The Authority Roles of Women Hosts

6.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, early Christian texts about women hosts of Christian gatherings vary in their contents, forms and authenticity. They present both authentic and fictional women hosts. Some texts imply but do not explicate their existence. In this chapter, I will move beyond individual texts to address general trajectories relating to the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. These will be discussed in the light of the data gathered in chapters 2 to 5 in accordance with the study design introduced in chapter 1. First, I will discuss how the domestic setting and the position of hosts in general affected the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Secondly, I will examine how models provided by non-Christian women affected the perception of early Christian women hosts. This chapter concludes with textual samples of Christian women hosts and women who exercised authority after the first and second centuries C.E. They demonstrate that gathering at women's homes continued as well as authority exercised by women, albeit not in mainstream Christianity.

I will argue that in certain contexts, the social connections and financial support provided by women mattered more than their gender, resulting in authority roles of women. This was a sign of multiple sources of authority that meant that gender was but one factor which affected how someone's authority was perceived. In this way, women could cross ideal gender boundaries because of their relative wealth, which entailed significant economic benefits for their communities. In the case of women hosts of Christian gatherings, financial benefit meant providing believers with gathering places in their homes.

6.2. Women as Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings

In chapter 2, I examined the domestic setting of early Christian gatherings and the position of hosts in relation to other possible authorities and as providers of meals. This was done in order to construct a framework for the setting in which women hosts functioned.

Women hosts of early Christian gatherings belonged to the group of hosts of early Christian gatherings. Early Christian texts tell little about the actions of male hosts of early Christian gatherings. Texts nevertheless indicate that male hosts represented their communities,¹ offered hospitality to traveling teachers and to Christ-believers in general,² and exercised authority and controlled activities³ in their communities.

All of these functions are visible in one or more early Christian texts that represent women hosts or possible women hosts, compiled in Table 2 below. Phoebe represents the Cenchrean community (Rom. 16:1-2). Chloe and her people voice the worries of some Corinthian believers to Paul (1 Cor. 1:11). Mary and Lydia offer hospitality to preachers outside of their immediate Christian community (Acts 12:12, 16:14-15, 40). Also the “elect lady,” if she is a host, is in the position of welcoming itinerant teachers to her community (2 John 10) as are possible women hosts in 2 Tim. 3:1-7.

At least Mary, Lydia, Prisca and the women in 1 Tim. 5:16 are more or less directly presented as offering material support or showing hospitality to their own early Christian communities. Women hosts likely offered hospitality also in the form of common meals. Early Christian writings do not tell about common meals at women’s homes. However, Luke may consciously depict Lydia as not hosting a common meal, although in the middle of references to Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40) he portrays a scene where Paul and Silas dine at the jailer’s home after he and his household are converted (Acts 16:33-34). In this way, Luke might imply that women’s proper roles are those of non-intruding benefactors who facilitate men’s aspirations in proclaiming the gospel.⁴ Christian women are portrayed offering libations in third- and fourth-century paintings in Roman catacombs.⁵ As discussed, meals were one primary setting of Christian gatherings⁶ and non-Christian women invited people to their meals.⁷ These factors indicate that it is plausible to assume that women hosts also offered meals.

¹ Stephanas in 1 Cor. 16:17.

² E.g. Rom. 16:23, 3 John 6, 10. Philemon is also a believer in whose house Christ-believers convene (τῆ κατ’ οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ). Paul also calls Philemon his co-worker (συνεργός) (Philem. 1-2) and asks Philemon to “prepare a guest room” for him (ἐτοίμαζε μοι ξενίαν) as he hopes to be released soon from prison (Philem. 22).

³ Stephanas in 1 Cor. 16:15-16; Diotrephes in 3 John 9.

⁴ See my discussion on pp. 112-115.

⁵ Tulloch, 2006. See p. 33 of this study.

⁶ See my discussion on pp. 30-33.

⁷ See my discussion on pp. 82-85.

Signs of exercising authority may be seen in the depictions of women deciding for themselves which teachers to welcome (Acts 16:14-15; 2 Tim. 3:1-7). It is also possible that the women aimed at in 1 Tim. 2:9-15 have exercised authority. In addition, as the early Christian communities that gathered at homes consisted probably largely of the members of these households, the hosts probably exercised authority over these members in daily life as well.⁸ Nothing indicates that women heads of households would have been less influential than men heads of households.⁹ Accordingly, also in this regard, women hosts would have been authorities in their communities.

TABLE 2. Tasks of women hosts.

Tasks of women hosts	Women
representing one's community	Chloe, Phoebe
hospitality to itinerants	Lydia, the "elect lady," Tavia, the widow of Epitropus, women in 2 Tim. 3:1-7
hospitality to one's own community	Mary, Lydia, Prisca, women in 1 Tim. 5:16
exercising authority	Lydia, women in 1 Tim. 2:9-15 and 2 Tim. 3:1-7

As discussed in chapter 2, the matter of primary authorities in early Christianity is contested. According to some scholars, itinerant charismatics were primary authorities, while others emphasize the authority of local prominent believers, most notably the hosts of early Christian gatherings.¹⁰ Early Christian sources both explicate and imply controversies between hosts of Christian gatherings, other local authorities and itinerant teachers.¹¹ Thus, the questions on authority were contested to some extent. However, what really happened in early

⁸ Cf. Campbell 2004, 117-118, 126. See also Osiek 2002. See my discussion on pp. 43-46.

⁹ See my discussion on pp. 54-70.

¹⁰ See my discussion on pp. 34-39.

¹¹ E.g. Paul's Corinthian correspondence, Johannine letters, the Pastoral Epistles.

Christian communities remains elusive, as the texts do not portray situations in an objective manner but always include an author's interpretation of the events. Even when the authors reprimand local prominent believers, their actual effect might have been trivial.

As the examples from the Johannine and Pastoral Epistles and Paul's letters to the Corinthians demonstrate, local believers had the power to decide whom they would welcome and listen to.¹² They could even choose not to listen to any itinerant teacher. From this point of view, the local prominent believers had authority over itinerants. However, when a local community chose to listen to an itinerant, they gave him or her a mandate to teach also the prominent local believers. But if the local believers then decided that this itinerant was not the right teacher after all, they could discard him or her. It is evident that hosts of early Christian gatherings played a vital part in strengthening or weakening the position of itinerant charismatics in a very concrete manner, as they were the ones who either welcomed or rejected the itinerants.¹³ It is also evident that believers of the same region could disagree about which itinerant teacher they would welcome and conceive of as an authority.¹⁴

In addition, authority structures were not similar in all communities, which is evidenced, for instance, in Paul's struggles with the Corinthians and the Johannine "elder's" discord with some of "his" communities. If these prominent itinerants had been uncontested authorities, problems would not have arisen. As discussed in chapter 1, authority derives from various sources, including, for instance, social, personal and spiritual factors.¹⁵ Authority is also relative to its social setting. Accordingly, authority could fluctuate depending on the changes in the setting.

The diversity of relationships between women hosts, itinerants connected to them and other local authorities¹⁶ demonstrates that the authority of female or male hosts was not automatically always similar. Instead, it was largely dependent on contextual factors and on the characteristics of each host, although the primary sources do not allow for discerning what these might be. Hosts, other local

¹² See my discussion on pp. 127-128, 133-134, 146-148.

¹³ Cf. e.g. Lk. 10; 3 John; *Did.* 11-13.

¹⁴ 3 John.

¹⁵ See my discussion on pp. 12-14.

¹⁶ E.g. Luke's depiction of Mary and Lydia as silent benefactors of authorities and Paul's depiction of Prisca. See my discussion on pp. 112-115, 121-123.

authorities and itinerants could form various different authority networks in different cases. Determining authority was not achieved only between potential authorities but communities of believers could also affect the development of authority structures in each case. For instance, the authority of a host in a community that consisted largely of his or her own household was perhaps stronger than in a community that consisted of people outside the immediate household. The authority relationships seem to have fluctuated from situation to situation in accordance with the people involved.

These networks of authorities touch on one focal aspect of authority. Namely, it has to be acknowledged by those under the authority.¹⁷ For instance, 2 Cor. represents Corinthians who are reluctant to give Paul an authority position. 2 and 3 John may refer to local authorities whose authority is not unequivocally accepted by others, despite their social prominence. When assessing the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings, the possibly contested authority of hosts in relation to other possible authorities has to be taken into account. The socially and economically prominent believers were not necessarily the highest authorities in the eyes of all believers.

6.3. Women Hosts as Heads of Households

As discussed in chapter 3, a woman typically became the head of a household because of widowhood or divorce.¹⁸ In early Christian sources, women hosts are presented in such a way that it seems unlikely that they were married at the time. Remaining unmarried could be perceived as countercultural to some extent, as the contemporary ideals emphasized marrying and child-rearing as women's duties. This ideal also included remarrying after becoming widowed or divorced.¹⁹

Contrasting with the ideal of remarrying there was the earlier ideal of *univira*, a woman who married only once and did not remarry after becoming widowed.²⁰ There were conflicting views about women's marrying and remarrying in early Christianity as well. Paul, for instance, considers celibacy better than

¹⁷ Weber 1947, 327, 382; Weber 1978, 946; Tyler 2006, 376-384; Morselli & Passini 2011, 294-297. See my discussion on pp. 12-14.

¹⁸ See my discussion on pp. 46-50.

¹⁹ Pomeroy 1995, 166; Portefaix 2003, 154.

²⁰ Lightman & Zeisel 1977; Verner 1983, 63 n. 161; Bassler 2003, 127-128; Collins 2011, 158. See my discussion on pp. 49-50.

marriage.²¹ The author of the Pastorals, for his part, exhorts widows or otherwise unmarried women to remarry or marry.²²

Despite these contrasting opinions, the *univira* ideal was modified in early Christianity and in certain settings was given a social and religious justification. Tertullian, for instance, writes about Christian widows and divorcees who by remarrying would forsake the opportunity of an ideal celibate life.²³ Perhaps as a result, at least some early Christian women did not feel a strong social pressure to remarry.²⁴ It has been suggested that remaining unmarried offered early Christian women freedom and authority. These, in turn, were partial reasons for women to stay celibate.²⁵ Usually this interpretation has been applied to early Christian women who also behaved counterculturally in other ways, especially ascetics and martyrs.²⁶

It has been argued that the celibacy of women ascetics and martyrs resulted in perceiving them as masculine.²⁷ However, women hosts who became Christ-followers and stayed at their homes and continued their daily lives as before have not been researched from the viewpoint of the authority they might have gained through their celibacy. Women hosts had numerous characteristics in addition to celibacy which could be perceived as masculine. As heads of households with other members of household in subordinate positions in relation to them, they occupied a place that was considered ideally masculine. Property ownership in general was also deemed masculine.²⁸ In addition, not being married meant that a woman head of a household was not under a man's authority in her household. If there was a guardian, his authority was likely to be a mere formality, with no actual control over the decisions made by a woman under his guardianship.²⁹ Stereotypically, however,

²¹ See 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 25-26, 38-40. The ideal of being married only once was sometimes connected with the "order of widows." Cf. 1 Tim. 5:9, and perhaps also Ign. *Smyrn.* 13:1; Pol. *Phil.* 4:3.

²² E.g. 1 Tim. 5:14. Cf. Seim 2004, 197.

²³ Tertullian, *To His Wife* 2.1. For other early Christian sources, see Lightman & Zeisel 1977, 26-32.

²⁴ Lightman & Zeisel 1977, esp. 27. Seim 2004, 236-237.

²⁵ Castelli 1986, 61-88; Seim 1989, 125, 137 n. 2; Wire 2003, 82-97; Bassler 2003, 126-128; Van Abbema 2008, 163, 167; Kraemer 2011, 148-149.

²⁶ One of the most oft-cited examples is that of Thecla, a young woman who is to marry soon but after hearing Paul's proclamation abandons her old life and starts to follow him (Acts of Paul and Thecla).

²⁷ E.g. Braun 2002, 111-112; Lieu 2004, 203-207; Cobb 2008; Marjanen 2008, 133-136; 2009; Stefaniw 2010; Kraemer 2011, 117-152, esp. 148-149. Examples include Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 39; Palladius, *Lausiac History*, Intro. 5.

²⁸ Williams 2010, 145-151.

²⁹ See my discussion on pp. 50-54.

not being under anyone's authority was a characteristic of free men, and thus women heads of households, among them women hosts, could also occupy a masculine position in this regard.

Women who presented masculine characteristics could be ridiculed, as Juvenal's sixth satire infamously demonstrates. As discussed in chapter 4, Juvenal finds women's independence and authority to represent threateningly masculine characteristics, and this causes him to ridicule women.³⁰ In a similar vein, for some early Christians it might have been problematic that gatherings took place at women's homes, enabling women to have authority there where men should have been. Perhaps this resulted in attempts to restrain the activity of women hosts, seen for instance in the Pastoral Epistles, that is if they deal with women hosts.

However, women who behaved in an apparently masculine way could also be perceived as positive. This resulted in seeing them as capable of actions typically deemed suitable to men.³¹ Examples of this are presented in Plutarch's *Bravery of Women*, which I discussed in chapter 4. These stories present women who are given responsibility and respect because of their masculine virtues.³² Thus, it was not unheard of to discuss women in masculine terms if their behavior indicated masculinity. For instance, the wife of Pythes demonstrates moderation, good judgment, and wisdom, all typically masculine virtues. The story illustrates how on certain occasions, women could occupy positions typically conceived of as belonging to men because of these virtues.

This is analogous to women being heads of households in the absence of male heads of households. As there were no suitable men present to offer their homes as gathering places, it was not necessarily countercultural for a woman to take this role and subsequently employ masculine authority in a group gathering at her home. Accordingly, women could assume authority rightfully when there were no suitable males present. It is likely that women hosts' authority in the absence of suitable men was recognized as such. That is also evidenced in the earliest references to them when Prisca is mentioned before Aquila, Lydia invites Paul and Silas to her home, a Phoebe is called a deacon.

³⁰ See my discussion on p. 101.

³¹ See also Williams 2010, 152.

³² In a similar manner, Seneca represents his mother as possessing masculine virtues in *Ad Helviam* 16.2, 5. For additional examples, see Williams 2010, 145-146 and 366 n. 26.

Assessing women’s masculine characteristics does not mean that conceptions about gender and their boundaries would have lost their meaning. Neither does it connote gender equality or striving towards it. However, the texts presented above illustrate that women could be perceived as masculine. Perhaps early Christian women hosts were not an exception. Male gender was only one source of authority. Recalling the definition of authority used in this study, authority can be defined as “relative control over another’s valued outcomes,” which may relate to physical, economic or social aims. Authority may derive from the social, spiritual or personal characteristics of the potential authority figure.³³ Accordingly, although male gender was an important factor that affected perceived authority,³⁴ authority was negotiated within more trajectories than only gender. Women hosts offered their communities a sense of belonging, physical safety in worshipping activities by providing a space for them, and perhaps material wellbeing in the form of common meals. These correspond to the social, physical and economic outcomes which were in women hosts’ control (see Table 3). Women also had the social status of an authority figure as heads of households even though they were not men.

TABLE 3. Valued resources (outcomes)³⁵ controlled by women hosts resulting in their authority.

social	sense of belonging, community of believers
physical	space to use for gatherings
economic	common meals, perhaps other material support

³³ Fiske & Berdahl 2007, 680-683. See my discussion on pp. 12-14.

³⁴ Hemelrijk 2004, 7-14.

³⁵ As defined by Fiske & Berdahl (2007, 678-680) in their discussion about authority as the control of others’ valued resources. See my discussion on pp. 12-14.

6.4. Women Hosts as Benefactors

Benefactors were one group of women whose model might well have affected the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. With the exception of Phoebe, if she was a host, women hosts are not explicitly called patrons.³⁶ As the sociological conceptualization of patronage used in this study connotes the relationship between a patron and clients as defined by actions, not by titles,³⁷ the use of explicit patronage titles is not even expected. In the case of hosts of early Christian gatherings the factors defining patronage relationship were imbalanced resources and the way in which the patron used her resources to the benefit of those under her patronage, namely the Christian community.³⁸

In early Christian ideology, there may have been efforts towards renunciation of patronage. Ideal pictures of egalitarian Christ-believers are sketched in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37. However, in reality the financial support of wealthier believers was needed for the practical arrangements of gatherings. Women hosts possibly had first-hand experience about gatherings of associations and about being their benefactors. These women were familiar with the reciprocal patronage relationships of their society, examples of which were presented in chapter 3, and in all likelihood they thought it was natural to offer their homes as gathering space for early Christian groups.

All women benefactors presented in chapter 3 offer points of comparison to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. I will first focus on Roman “mothers”. As non-elite women of sufficient means who exercised patronage, mothers increase the understanding of the context of women hosts in numerous ways. Many of the mothers were actually members in their associations and subsequently could have authority in the everyday lives of their groups, contrary to elite patrons who could be patrons of groups they did not belong to and were socially distanced from. Mothers gained respect within their associations because of their activities and their benefactions to them.³⁹ It is likely that women hosts of early Christian gatherings

³⁶ See my discussion on pp. 129-130.

³⁷ Saller 1982, 1-7. See also my discussion on pp. 74-76.

³⁸ Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984, 48-49; Moxnes 1999, 248.

³⁹ Hemelrijk 2008. See my discussion on pp. 85-88.

were similarly honored benefactors and insiders within their groups of Christ-believers.

In this way, mothers also show that when looking for parallel phenomena for the patronage of early Christian women hosts, the most useful comparative material does not come from inscriptions that title women as *patronae* but from inscriptions that describe women's acts of patronage. This echoes Richard Saller's sociological definition of patronage, which describes patronage as a relationship, not on the basis of what terms were used to describe them.⁴⁰

Another point of comparison between mothers and women hosts is the fragmentary primary information that typically offers mere glimpses about mothers in inscriptions and women hosts of Christian gatherings in early Christian writings. However, examining sources as groups of representations of mothers and women hosts enables one to reconstruct the possible activities of both of these groups of women. In addition, references to mothers of associations and gatherings in women's homes in multiple sources probably indicate that neither of them was an extremely marginal phenomenon.

Roman mothers are only one example of familial terminology commonly used in voluntary associations where leaders and members could be called mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and children.⁴¹ Parental metaphors also occur in early Christian writings, where they typically mark relationships between spiritual authorities and their subjects.⁴² Among possible women hosts of early Christian gatherings are the widow of Epitropus and the "elect lady," who both have children (Ign. *Pol.* 8:2; 2 John 1). As I argued in chapter 5, it is possible that these "children" are not biological but spiritual offspring,⁴³ which also adds a reason to be interested in the parental terminology used about non-elite women benefactors.

The inscription that mentions Sosinike and Eunosta is also illustrative in regard to women hosts of early Christian gatherings.⁴⁴ As mentioned in chapter 4,

⁴⁰ Saller 1982, 1, 7.

⁴¹ Fantham et al. 1994, 366; Kloppenborg 1996a, 26; Harland 2003, 31-32; Aasgaard 2004, 107-112; Harland 2009, 65-96.

⁴² Examples of this are numerous. E.g. 1 Cor. 4:14-21: Paul as a father and the Corinthians and Timothy as his children. 1 Thess. 2:7-12: Paul as a parent of the Thessalonians. 1 John 2:12-14: the apparent combination of metaphorical and actual kinship relationships. 1 John 2:28, 3:7, 18, 5:21: recipients as the author's children. Other familial metaphors occur e.g. in 2 Cor. 6:13, Gal. 4:19, 2 John 1, 3 John 4, Rev. 2:20-23; Philem. 2, 2 John 13; 1 Cor. 8:12-13, Phil. 2:25; Rom. 16:13. See Yarbrough 1995, 126-141; Aasgaard 2004, 10-22, 118-305; Harland 2009, 63-64.

⁴³ See my discussion on pp. 131-132, 136.

⁴⁴ IG X.2.255.

the story itself is similar to Lydia's story in Acts 16, as they both contain a divine vision received by a man which results in a cult established at a woman's home.⁴⁵ In addition, the women in the inscription are presented as statists in a manner similar to Mary and Lydia in Acts. However, when read carefully, the inscription portrays Sosinike and Eunosta as essential agents in worship activities that take place in their homes. In all likelihood, the same applies to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. The stories where they appear focus on men who have visions and travel from place to place preaching the gospel and founding communities of believers. Although women appear in these stories only briefly, they may well be the central figures in actual worship. They are not outside benefactors but are vitally involved in the worshipping communities.

The Sosinike inscription and stories of Mary and Lydia in Acts aim at legitimizing the cult or affirming the right piety in their writers' present-day situation in telling about the cult's divine origins.⁴⁶ The representations of women in Luke-Acts are meant to offer paradigms for their readers about the proper behavior of well-off believers.⁴⁷ Likewise, the Sosinike inscription can be interpreted as offering a paradigm as it represents an epigraphic genre that demonstrates how an individual could benefit his or her community by mediating between a deity and the community.⁴⁸ In this light, women who host religious gatherings do not appear as countercultural, although expecting spiritual authority because of hosting gatherings could be.

Non-Christian women officeholders who probably gained their titles because of their financial benefactions⁴⁹ indicate that there was a powerful model for women hosts to provide material necessities to their Christian communities, while not perhaps expecting leadership positions on this account. However, Ross Shepard Kraemer has demonstrated how the whole notion of leadership roles in antiquity is too simplistic, as it does not take into account the complex webs of social hierarchies of which material benefactions were only a part.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See my discussion on pp. 77-80, 112.

⁴⁶ Strom 2000, 56; Weaver 2004, 281-284; Dodson 2006, 49-51.

⁴⁷ Cf. pp. 112-115 of this study.

⁴⁸ Edwards 1996, 93

⁴⁹ See my discussion on pp. 86-87, 95-96.

⁵⁰ Although Kraemer (2011, 237) discusses here Jewish officeholders, her theories are readily applicable to other women officeholders. See my discussion on pp. 95-96.

Women's patronage was attested throughout the Greco-Roman world, including the cities where women hosts lived.⁵¹ However, not everyone perhaps agreed with its implications for women's authority positions. One example is Nympha, who has been changed to masculine Nymphas in numerous manuscripts.⁵² Pericopes of Mary and Lydia may reflect some controversies over how wealthy women were to behave as Christians.⁵³ Perhaps Luke wants to convey to them a message of the importance of their contributions to believers' communities and at the same time remind them that they should not expect to have authority roles in their communities in exchange. Thus, Luke may aim at modifying the patronage relationships in early Christianity.

The author of the Pastoral Epistles is more explicit in his criticism. In general, applying reciprocal patronage relationships in the communities of Christ-believers seems to pose a problem for the author. While wealthy Christians should keep supporting other believers financially (1 Tim. 6:17-19), the author does not want them to assume authority because of their benefactions. Instead, they need to understand that financial support in itself offers no adequate grounds for authority like it would traditionally in the Greco-Roman context of patronage.⁵⁴ The negative views towards the host's authority perhaps affect the attitudes towards the authority of women hosts. According to the author, for authority positions, other qualifications matter more. Authorities should be respectable in every way and should manage their households well. The author presupposes that they are men (1 Tim. 3:2-5, 8-12). Possibly he thinks that it is not desirable that women host Christian gatherings, but if they do, they should at least submit themselves to the authority of male authorities. They are not suitable authorities – not least because of their gender.

Throughout the sources that present women as benefactors, they are presented in mostly the same terms as men in equivalent positions. It is also worth noting that men who host early Christian gatherings are given as little space as women hosts in their respective primary sources.⁵⁵ Thus, women are not necessarily

⁵¹ E.g. in Smyrna and Ephesus, cf. Bremen 1996, 37 n. 96, 87. See my discussion on pp. 90-93.

⁵² See my discussion on pp. 116-117.

⁵³ Quite clearly there were some controversies, at least a few decades later, as evidenced in the Pastoral Epistles. See also my discussion about the Pastoral Epistles in chapter 5.5.

⁵⁴ See Kidd (1990, 93-100, 139-140, 200) for a detailed argument. Cf. also Countryman 1980, 153-154; Trebilco 2004, 380-383.

⁵⁵ The same applies e.g. to fathers and mothers of associations.

given little attention because of their gender. Either the writers did not see the role of patrons as needing to be explicated as it was self-evident, or they did not want to explicate it because they did not want to emphasize the authority of benefactors. Either way, the results were perhaps more detrimental to women, as numerous ancient texts infamously offer women restricted roles in various areas of life. As sources about women in positions contrary to the expectations of these writings have been easy to neglect, this has contributed to the enduring silence about women's authority roles.

6.5. Women Hosts in Private and in Public

The concepts of public and private in the Greco-Roman world are closely related to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. The relationships between public and private spheres and women's place in them are manifold. Greek and Roman authors offer abundant examples about women belonging to the private sphere of homes and men belonging to the public realm. Although these writings represent the ideology of elite male authors in gendering space, for a long time their depictions were perceived as descriptions of reality.⁵⁶

The rhetoric of women's place in the private sphere of life is widely found. One of the most often cited ancient writings concerning the proper place of women and men is that of Philo:

Market-places and council-halls and law courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life.⁵⁷

Philo does not describe the details of women's "indoor life." Instead, he illustrates the ideology of women's and men's proper spheres of life. The same ideology is visible when women are praised for their traditionally feminine virtues even when they take part in the public sphere of life.⁵⁸ On the level of rhetoric, homes were

⁵⁶ The examples follow later in my discussion. See also my discussion on pp. 4-8. Cf. Schmitt Pantel (1992, 78-81) for an analysis of the division between private and public areas in ancient writings as ideology, not as a description of reality. See also MacDonald 1996, 30-41; Økland 2004, 58-62.

⁵⁷ Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.31 (169). Translation in Lieu 2004, 182.

⁵⁸ Torjesen 1995, 121-125 includes primary sources. See also Lieu 2004, 185.

where women belonged. On the level of actual practice, the matter was more complex.

A famous ancient writing referring to the seclusion of Greek women is written by Cornelius Nepos:

[M]any actions are seemly according to our code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would blush to take his wife to a dinner-party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms of her dwelling and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner-party unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called "the women's apartment," to which no man has access who is not near of kin.⁵⁹

It is evident that Roman writings of this kind aim at presenting the superiority of Roman customs in comparison to Greek ones in their portrayals of tyrannical Greek men and pitiable Greek women. However, the context of this excerpt as a typical piece of polemical Roman discourse against Greeks is often disregarded, resulting in taking it as a description of reality. In addition, Greek writings also present ideas about women's quarters and seclusion which present stereotypical notions about women's proper place.⁶⁰

The influence of these writings has affected the interpretation of Greco-Roman women's lives. Relying on Roman writers as a source of information, Wendy Cotter argues that Greek women were secluded in their homes in the first century C.E.⁶¹ According to Cotter, women in Pauline communities could take on authority roles as the cities where they lived were "Romanized" even though they were located in the Greek East.⁶² Others have also accepted the notion of women's seclusion in Greek houses on the basis of ancient authors. Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, for instance, do not question the descriptive value of ancient writings, while also presuming that the seclusion of women was more rigid in the upper socioeconomic strata whereas those less well off were not as affected by the ideals of the elite and did not even have the means to adhere to them.⁶³

⁵⁹ Cornelius Nepos, *On Great Generals*, pref. 6-7. (First century B.C.E.)

⁶⁰ Hyperides, *Fragments* 204; Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 9.5.

⁶¹ In her discussion, Cotter (1994, 359-360, 362) refers to Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 2.2-4; Cornelius Nepos, *On Great Generals*, pref. 6-7; Cicero, *Verrine Orations* 1.2.1.25.66. See also Osiek & Balch (1997, 6-7, 44), who take for granted that Vitruvius's account of Greek women's seclusion describes the reality of at least the upper-class population.

⁶² Cotter 1994, 355-358.

⁶³ Osiek & Balch 1997, 6, 9, 44.

Lesser attention has been paid to many Greek sources which present respectable women attending meals from the fifth century B.C.E. onwards.⁶⁴ Furthermore, a wide array of archaeological evidence demonstrates that it is questionable whether there were secluded women's quarters in various Greek areas even in the Hellenistic era, let alone in the Roman era.⁶⁵

Yet another utilization of the ancient authors' notion of public and private is provided by Jerome Neyrey, who also takes ancient literary depictions of them as objective accounts of reality. He discusses the dichotomy of private and public in antiquity, taking Acts 20:20 as his starting point.⁶⁶ Neyrey uses only literary depictions of public and private space⁶⁷ and concludes that "private" can mean two different things: either "associations of non-kinship related males (either in a house or elsewhere)" or "males in houses with their families."⁶⁸ Thus, he excludes women altogether from his discussion, implying that all spaces where early Christ-believers convened belonged to the male sphere.

In regard to women hosts of early Christian gatherings, Neyrey's study provides an example of excluding women from early Christian authority roles on the basis of ancient writings which are taken at face value. Although Neyrey uses only ancient literature that excludes women, not for instance archaeological remains, he implies that this was the context where Paul functioned in reality.⁶⁹ Examining the literary world and making it the real world of Christ-believers, Neyrey offers another example of scholarship that has resulted in disregarding the women hosts.

From a contrasting point of view, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Karen Jo Torjesen take the domestic sphere as the point of departure for their study of the authority roles of early Christian women.⁷⁰ Both of them connect women's influence and its decrease after the first century C.E. with early Christian gatherings

⁶⁴ Burton 1998; Standhartinger 2012, 90.

⁶⁵ For a review of the most recent research relating to archaeological remains of Greek houses, see Trümper 2012, 292-296. Cahill (2002, 148-153, 191-193) discusses the ideal Greek house of ancient (mostly Greek) writings and its contrast to actual archeological remains. Cf. also George 2004, 21-22. Similar archeological findings have been discovered in Roman houses. E.g. in Pompeian houses, the rooms that were once interpreted as women's quarters have proven to have been rooms converted with removable furniture to suit various needs. See Balch 2008, 8-11.

⁶⁶ Neyrey 2003, 69-70.

⁶⁷ Neyrey 2003, 75-78.

⁶⁸ Neyrey 2003, 70-71.

⁶⁹ Neyrey 2003, 101-102.

⁷⁰ See my discussion on pp. 2-5, 35-36.

at homes. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, in the earliest phase of Christianity, wealthy and prominent believers who were benefactors gained authority in the Christian communities in exchange for their benefactions in a manner similar to patrons of voluntary associations. She separates benefactors from “leaders” but provides no clarification about how she perceives the connection between these two groups. She argues that as women could be benefactors, they became authorities both in associations and in early Christian gatherings. When authority started to concentrate in male heads of households, women’s influence disappeared.⁷¹

Schüssler Fiorenza may well overplay the contrast between women’s possible positions in the associations and households. She connects non-literary evidence about women patrons of associations with an egalitarian ethos that, according to her, would have prevailed in associations. In contrast, she argues on the basis of early Christian texts that households were solely patriarchal organizations. On the level of ideals that might be true. However, she does not take into account the ample non-literary and literary evidence demonstrating that women heads of households existed and used the authority of the head of a household within the confines of ideally patriarchal households, as discussed in chapter 3.⁷²

In contrast, Karen Jo Torjesen and Virginia Burrus argue that because of the gatherings in the household setting, women could have authority in early Christian communities. Torjesen and Burrus discuss women heads of households,⁷³ married women as domestic authorities⁷⁴ and women hosts of early Christian gatherings. They conclude that women hosts of Christian gatherings had similar authority roles to those of their male counterparts in the early Christian communities that they hosted.⁷⁵ In general, women’s authority in early Christian communities was approved because they gathered at homes which belonged to the private sphere.⁷⁶ When specific church buildings started to emerge in the third century, it was no longer possible for women to have leadership in Christian communities.⁷⁷

Aside from seeing the privacy of households and the model of wives as focal factors in women hosts’ authority, I agree with many of Torjesen’s and Burrus’s

⁷¹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 286-288.

⁷² See pp. 54-70.

⁷³ Torjesen & Burrus 1995, 55-56.

⁷⁴ Torjesen & Burrus 1995, 65-76.

⁷⁵ Torjesen & Burrus 1995, 76.

⁷⁶ Torjesen 1995, 126.

⁷⁷ Torjesen 1994, 304-307; 1995, 155-172. Torjesen’s dating for these phenomena (see also Torjesen 1995, 127) is a little later than I would suggest.

conclusions. However, I do not think that women in general could have authority in these gatherings, as homes were private and “women’s sphere”. When there was a male head of household, women were under his authority. It is necessary to emphasize that the authority of women hosts did not derive much from the model of wives of male heads of households but from the model of male heads of households themselves. It was the position of women hosts as heads of their households and as benefactors of their early Christian communities that enabled them to have authority in the gatherings at their homes. It is probably true that women hosts of Christian gatherings eventually lost their authority positions because of the model of the head of the household, as Schüssler Fiorenza argues. However, at first they gained in authority because of that model. Thus, the authority of benefactors and heads of households affected the authority of women hosts.

6.6. Later Developments – Women Patrons of Christian Communities after the First Centuries

This study has focused on women hosts of early Christian gatherings in the first and second centuries C.E. However, not all Christians ceased to gather at women’s homes at the end of that era. Harry O. Maier has studied fourth- and fifth-century writings about groups unapproved by mainstream Christian authorities. These groups met in homes instead of church buildings as they had been banned from them.⁷⁸ Interestingly, quite a few women appear to offer their homes as places for non-mainstream Christians to teach and assemble. I will briefly present some of them as they illustrate how women’s homes were also used as gathering places in the centuries to come.

One of these women is Spanish Lucilla, who in the early fourth century welcomes the Donatists to gather at her home. Augustine holds her responsible for the spread of Donatism to Spain.⁷⁹ In the late fourth century, Jerome writes of a heretic⁸⁰ who seeks the company of “weak women” and visits “the cells of widows and virgins.”⁸¹ A heretic Priscillian is depicted as being supported by a wealthy widow, Euchrotia, who invites him and his supporters to stay at her estate when

⁷⁸ Maier 1995.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *C. litt. Petil.* 2.108.247; Optatus, *Against the Donatists* 1.16, 18, 19. See Maier 1995, 52; Edwards 1997, xviii, xx.

⁸⁰ Cf p. 142 n. 172 on using the word heretic.

⁸¹ Jerome, *Epist.* 50.1.3. Possibly the heretic in question was Pelagius. See Maier 1995, 53, 62 n. 25.

they are refused by a bishop.⁸² It should be noted that Jerome himself was no stranger to women's hospitality. His friend Paula, a wealthy widow, along with her daughters, provided for him and other ascetic Christians.⁸³

When Augustine and Jerome connect wealthy women with the spread of heresy, their rhetoric is even surprisingly similar to that found in the Pastoral Epistles. We hear of false teachers whom women welcome (2 Tim. 3:1-7) and a connection is made between widows and heresy (1 Tim. 5:13-15), along with more general references to women's weaknesses. There are a couple of possible explanations. All fourth- and fifth-century texts are male-authored representations of their opponents. It may be that the depictions of their finding a shelter at women's homes are completely fabricated to ridicule opponents, as connection to women was used as a means of attack from the first century on, when Christian authors wanted to label their opponents.⁸⁴ However, the pattern is consistent across various authors, various non-mainstream Christians and various locales. Accordingly, there may also be traces of a real pattern in which women continued to provide room for Christian teachers and gatherings in their homes. For instance, Jerome's way of writing about Paula may imply this.⁸⁵ Thus, although the references to women are not to be taken as authentic portrayals of them, at least it is probable that gatherings took place at women's homes. This is also supported by the evidence of first- and second-century women hosts.

The interpretation of the authority of women hosts had changed over time. Women still hosted Christian gatherings, but now these were not the only possible gatherings, as specific gathering places had developed. Instead, some women would offer shelter for those who were deemed as deviant from mainstream Christianity's perspective. The implication is that because the function of gathering at women's homes had changed, so too their authority gained a different meaning. Earlier women hosts had been an essential asset to communities of Christ-believers, now they were an essential asset to those outside mainstream communities.

⁸² Sulpitius Severus, *Chronica*, 2.48. Cf. Van Dam 1985, 100; Maier 1995, 58. In addition to examples presented here, Maier (1995) offers numerous other examples with references.

⁸³ E.g. Jerome, *Epist.* 108. Cf. Cooper 2013, 197-213.

⁸⁴ Lieu 1998, 12-22.

⁸⁵ There was a tendency to ridicule various religious groups (also within Christianity) on account of women's connection with them. One example is Celsus in Origen's *Against Celsus* 3.44. This does not seem to pose a problem when men (e.g. Jerome) write about their own women benefactors. Cf. Lieu 1998, 12-22.

John Chrysostom provides another late fourth-century perspective to the matter. Although he does not mention women hosts of early Christian gatherings, he deals with a phenomenon that has points of connection to them:

The divine law indeed has excluded women from the ministry, but they endeavor to thrust themselves into it. And since they can effect nothing of themselves, they do all through the agency of others. In this way they have become invested with so much power that they can appoint or eject priests at their will. (...) The blessed Paul did not suffer them even to speak with authority in the church. But I have heard someone say that they have obtained such a large privilege of free speech as even to rebuke the prelates of the churches and censure them more severely than masters do their own domestics.⁸⁶

Chrysostom's complaint is clear. Although women are excluded from the priesthood, some of them have in effect more power than priests, and are not shy about using it. Chrysostom does not mention the grounds on which women have gained this power, but it is clear that these women are prominent. It is somewhat ironic that Chrysostom himself enjoyed the beneficence of a wealthy widow, Olympias, who was ordained a deacon of the cathedral in Constantinople and had a monastery built in connection with it.⁸⁷

Even with its negative tone, Chrysostom's account still refers to women who are prohibited from holding offices, but whose informal power is greater than that of priests. This informal power enables women to speak in their Christian communities and voice their disagreement with priests. Although the domestic setting no longer prevailed in mainstream Christianity, these women were on the same continuum as the women in the Pastoral Epistles and women who accommodated heretics. Due to their prominence, they exercised authority even beyond the authority of male officeholders. This raised uproar among those authorities who found themselves at a disadvantage.

6.5. Women Hosts and their Authority: Conclusions

In this study, I set out to research women hosts of early Christian gatherings and decipher their authority roles. I utilized the theoretical frameworks of feminist social-historical and post-structural approaches when discerning various sources

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio*, 3.9.215-216.

⁸⁷ Cooper (2013, 146-161) discusses Olympias using excerpts from *Life of Olympias*. Olympias's title indicates the masculine form, deacon (διάκονος), although the feminine form, deaconess, had emerged in the late third century C.E. On this, see Whelan (1993, 68).

discussed in this study. The aim of this study was “to write women hosts into the narratives of Christian beginnings more fully than has been done before.”⁸⁸ The study analyzed factors that affected the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings. These factors were either characteristics of early Christian gatherings or contextual factors dealing with non-Christian women comparable to women hosts of early Christian gatherings.

The authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings was affected by models given by non-Christian women in comparable positions. Although women heads of households and financial benefactors were fewer in number in comparison to men, as heads of households and patrons they were typically viewed in a similar way to men in similar positions.⁸⁹ There is ample evidence about instances where women’s wealth and socioeconomic status would have enabled them to have authority in settings, where more commonly there would have been male authorities. These settings included voluntary associations and households, neither of which generally possessed an ideology of gender equality.⁹⁰ Women’s authority roles in them resulted from their being in control of the social, economic and physical resources needed by members of their communities. Women providing these resources could be seen as patrons in patronage relationships, which were intrinsically patriarchal in nature. Therefore, it is paradoxical that these same structures allowed women to have authority over men. Then women, in turn, reaffirmed these patriarchal structures by their own patronage, although according to these structures women should not have been there in the first place.

Women could have authority because of their benefactions and because they were heads of households. However, this was only sporadically presented in Greco-Roman writings. The ideals in both non-Christian and Christian culture shared the conception of women’s proper role. Women who were passive and displayed other feminine traits, thus submitting themselves to male authority, strengthened the hierarchical gender system in religious settings.⁹¹ For women of means, the ideal role was donating to good causes and at the same time keeping silent. Neither was women’s participation in decision-making and their authority desirable. In another vein, women’s perceived attempts at authority were ridiculed, for instance in

⁸⁸ The quotation is from p. 16 of this study.

⁸⁹ Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 219.

⁹⁰ See chapters 3 and 4.

⁹¹ Kraemer 2011, 263.

Juvenal's sixth satire dating from the early second century. According to Juvenal, women had forsaken their traditional roles as chaste and subordinate wives and mothers, and aimed at controlling men.

Despite the ideals and caricatures represented in ancient sources, women of a suitable social status would gain similar positions as men, for instance in associations and households. A suitable status most likely entailed being a widow, a divorcee or otherwise unmarried, and at least relatively wealthy but not necessarily part of the elite. When these women became Christ-believers, they naturally wanted to benefit their new community. Thus, in accordance to the models they were used to in their surrounding society, they became benefactors of their communities. In sum, the main factors that enabled the authority roles of women hosts of Christian gatherings were their wealth and the model of a head of a household and of patronage.

Paul's letters – the earliest depictions of women hosts – mention women hosts or possible women hosts as effortlessly as they mention other prominent women and men. Phoebe is Paul's benefactor and *διάκονος* of the Cenchrean believers (Rom. 16:1-2). Prisca is Paul's co-worker, who has risked her neck for the gospel just like men did (Rom. 16:3-5). Deutero-Pauline Colossians casually mentions Nympha as the only named host of a gathering (Col. 4:15). A few decades later, Luke depicts women hosts of early Christian gatherings as financial benefactors who do not assume active roles in their communities (Acts. 12:12; 16:14-15, 40). Approximately at the same time, or a little later, the author of the Pastoral Epistles attacks prominent women, some of whom were probably hosts of early Christian gatherings (1 Tim. 2:9-15; 5:16; 2 Tim. 3:1-7). Also at the same time, the author of Johannine letters masks a possible woman host by naming her the "elect lady" (2 John 1). If Tavia and the widow of Epitropus are women hosts, Ignatius does not say it directly, although the context of these references indicates it. Thus, the portrayals of women hosts seem to develop over time even when the variance caused by different authors is taken into account.

Early Christian texts about women hosts and ancient literary and non-literary representations of women demonstrate that women held prominent positions in their communities. However, due to the stereotypical nature of these representations and the scarcity of information they contain, it is not known what women actually did in these roles. The literary and non-literary depictions of

women were always moderated by the conception of what the author or the assignor depicted as suitable for women. Male authors could write about women in significant positions but at the same time maintain that women should stay in their proper places. They modified the presentation of these women in such a way that women's significance could easily remain unnoticed. In a similar manner, many women hosts discussed above are represented in early Christian texts that elsewhere speak about women's possible functions in a restricting manner.

Luke, the author of Colossians with his household code and the author of the Pastoral Epistles employ various strategies when exhorting Christ-believers to be obedient members of the society.⁹² To achieve this goal, they choose to utilize stereotypes that pertain to women's "natural" roles as subservient wives and mothers and to their roles as silent benefactors who do not assume authority on the basis of their benefactions. One telling example is the comparison between Paul's and Luke's portrayals of Prisca. As discussed in chapter 5, Paul presents Prisca in her own right as his co-worker who has risked her neck for the gospel, whereas Luke's Prisca is primarily Aquila's wife.⁹³ The direction in which Luke likely modifies the portrayal of women hosts becomes evident.

Also, the attitude towards these women in early Christian writings as well as later scholarly interpretations have been affected by ideals and representations of ancient women. In chapters 2 and 3, Andrew Clarke's tendency to focus on the ideal of the male *paterfamilias* was used as an example of eradicating the possibility of the authority of a woman head of household and, as an implicit result, the authority of women hosts of early Christian gatherings.⁹⁴ In chapter 5, James Houlden's interpretation of the "elect lady" in 2 John, which indicates that women could not have spiritual children, was discussed.⁹⁵ Finally in this chapter, Jerome Neyrey's manner of defining the private as a sphere where males associated with other males was discussed.⁹⁶ In addition, the exclusion of women hosts is visible in studies that altogether fail to mention these women, although they would be relevant to the topic.⁹⁷ These examples suffice to demonstrate that there has been a tendency

⁹² See my discussion on pp. 113-115, 120, 139-140, 143-144.

⁹³ See my discussion on pp. 121-123.

⁹⁴ See my discussion on pp. 37, 46.

⁹⁵ See pp. 131-132.

⁹⁶ See my discussion on p. 165.

⁹⁷ See e.g. my discussion on p. 108 of the studies about parallel prison-escape stories which fail to mention women's roles as another parallel feature.

to view ancient representations as depictions of reality resulting in the exclusion of perceiving women hosts of early Christian gatherings as authorities.

To discuss a more general trajectory of what happened to women hosts and their authority, I propose the following loose outline of the development that took place behind the portrayals of women hosts. In earliest Christianity, local authorities were those who had the means to enable meetings. This authority derived from their being in control of valued outcomes, namely space where believers could gather and the sense of belonging to an early Christian community. Their authority also derived from their position as heads of households, which meant that within that domestic setting they were the highest authority. These sources of authority overruled the restrictions that women's gender could pose for them in traditional ideology as presented by Greco-Roman authors and non-literary sources. In these circumstances, women hosts were essential in the formation of early Christian communities. The finding that women were needed to uphold family honor in the absence of suitable men⁹⁸ is readily applicable to women hosts of early Christian gatherings. Although family honor was not at stake in the case of early Christian communities, there were positions that were probably considered more suitable for men, for instance hosting early Christian gatherings. However, due to the lack of suitable men, some of these positions were occupied by women.

As long as women's actions could be interpreted within the traditional gender hierarchy, they were tolerated. However, as the Pastoral Epistles show, not all early Christian women and, as I argue, specifically women hosts of early Christian gatherings remained within the boundaries set by their gender. When approaching the end of the first century, discord about the roles of women hosts started to emerge. Apparently, women and men hosts of Christian gatherings began to be viewed as separate groups with separate prospects.

Regardless of the conception of authority structures in the earliest Christian communities, during the second century C.E. authority roles became associated with prominent locals, perhaps especially with the hosts of gatherings⁹⁹ The notion of a bishop derived largely from the model of the head of a household. In general, early bishops were also in reality at least relatively wealthy heads of households. This is

⁹⁸ Bremen 1983, 225-237; 1996, 44-45, 85, 96-113, 163-170, 259-261, 299-302. See my discussion on pp. 53, 92-93.

⁹⁹ Filson (1939, 111-112) was one of the first scholars who emphasized this. Cf. also Horrell 1997, 323-341; Lane 1998, 211-212, 233-234. See my discussion on pp. 34-39.

visible, for instance, in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which depicts early second-century bishops as hospitable householders who welcome other believers and those in need of their hospitality.¹⁰⁰ In the second century, many bishops were still wealthy householders and provided for themselves financially.¹⁰¹

The ideal about a householder as an authority figure continued, but it started to seem that this ideal applies to male hosts, not to women. It is probable that the continuous strengthening of the authority of local prominent believers instigated reactions against women in these positions, as seen for instance in the Pastoral Epistles. It started to seem clear in mainstream Christianity that women were no longer suitable authorities. The primary sources about women hosts also point in that direction, although their different genres and objectives need to be taken into account. Although women were still viewed as proper benefactors, demands appeared for them not to assume authority merely on account of their benefactions. This is evident in the Pastoral Epistles. If the letters of Ignatius refer to the women hosts of Christian gatherings, the position of these women was probably different from the position of women hosts in Paul's time and soon after that. Probably, the women hosts living in the second century submitted to male local leaders in a way that was not required in the 60's CE, as local male leaders were not as powerful then. Gradually, the authority and resources in early Christian communities came to be controlled by bishops.¹⁰²

In this development, not all hosts maintained their authority roles. As the number of believers grew and their overall social influence increased, it became possible and even desirable to exclude women from authority roles. The women who had hosted early Christian gatherings passed away over time. Houses and apartments in apartment buildings were gradually adapted into exclusive places of worship, probably from the late second century on. Sometimes these exclusive spaces of worship began to be remodeled from one apartment and concluded with an apartment building or several houses being united as one church building.¹⁰³ Once the Eucharist had developed into a symbolic meal, there was no longer a need for a space that enabled actual dining.¹⁰⁴ The transformation of the meal into a mere

¹⁰⁰ Herm. Sim. 9.27.2.

¹⁰¹ Stewart-Sykes 1999, 18-19.

¹⁰² Kyratas 2002, 548.

¹⁰³ White 1996a, 103-110. See my discussion on pp. 24-27.

¹⁰⁴ White 1996a, 119-120; Osiek & Balch 1997, 35; Osiek & MacDonald 2006, 161.

ritual and the increasing number of Christ-believers were connected to the emergence of separate meeting places for the gatherings.

The authority of women hosts had been based on their authority as heads of households and as patrons. It had a social and economic basis. As a result, when women's homes were no longer gathering places of Christians and there was no longer a social and economic basis for their authority, they ceased to maintain it. Finally, all hosts of Christian gatherings lost their influence as hosts because Christ-believers started to convene at specific buildings. For women this meant that the most potent means by which they had gained authority became unavailable to them in mainstream Christianity. Outside mainstream Christianity, women continued to provide believers with gathering spaces. What had once been a necessity in some early Christian communities, started to signify the deviance of certain communities.

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Soranus

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Sulpitius Severus

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Tertullian

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To His Wife. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 4. Edited and translated by P. Schaff & A. C. Coxe. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885.

Valerius Maximus

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Vitruvius

On Architecture, Volume I: Books 1–5. Translated by F. Granger. Loeb Classical Library 251. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931.

Xenophon

Oeconomicus. In *Xenophon IV*. Translated by E. C. Marchant, revised by J. Henderson. Loeb Classical Library 168. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

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AE

L'Année épigraphique. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1888-.

BGU

I–IV. *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen (Staatlichen) Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden*. Berlin, 1895–1912.

VII. *Papyri, Ostraka und Wachstafeln aus Philadelphia im Fayûm*. Edited by P. Viereck & F. Zucker. Berlin, 1926.

XI. *Urkunden römischer Zeit*. Edited by H. Maehler. Berlin, 1966–1968.

CIL

Corpus inscriptionum latinarum. Edited by T. Mommsen, A. Hübner et al. 1869–2006.

IG

Inscriptiones Graecae. Editio Minor. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924-.

IGBulg

Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae. Vol. IV: Inscriptiones in territorio Sercidensi et in vallibus Strymonis Nestique repertae. Edited by G. Mihailov. Sofia, 1966.

ISmyrna

Die Inschriften von Smyrna. Edited by G. Petzl. Bonn, 1982-1990.

P.Amh.

The Amherst Papyri II: Classical Fragments and Documents of the Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine Periods. Edited by B. P. Grenfell & A. S. Hunt. London, 1901.

P.Berl.Leihg.

I. *Berliner Leihgabe griechischer Papyri*. Edited by T. Kalén et al. Uppsala, 1932.

P.BruX.

I. *Papyri Bruxellenses Graecae*. Edited by G. Nachtergaeel. Brussels, 1974.

P.Coll. Youtie

Collectanea Papyrologica: Texts Published in Honor of H.C. Youtie. Edited by A. E. Hanson et al. Bonn, 1976.

P.Hamb.

I. *Griechische Papyrusurkunden der Hamburger Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek*. Edited by P. M. Meyer. Leipzig / Berlin, 1911–1924.

- P.Fay.
Fayum Towns and their Papyri. Edited by B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt & D. G. Hogarth. London, 1900.
- P.Fouad
Les Papyrus Fouad I. Edited by A. Bataille, O. Guéraud, P. Jouguet, N. Lewis, H. Marrou, J. Scherer & W.G. Waddell. Cairo, 1939.
- P.Mil.
I. *Papiri Milanesi*. Edited by A. Calderini. Milan, 1928.
- P.Mil.Vogl.
III, VI. *Papiri della Università degli Studi di Milano*. Milan, 1965, 1977.
- P.Oslo
II. *Papyri Osloenses*. Edited by S. Eitrem & L. Amundsen. Oslo, 1931.
- P.Oxy.
I–XLI. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. Edited by B. P. Grenfell et al. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898–1972.
- P.Še'elim
Nahal Še'elim Documents. Edited by A. Yardeni. Jerusalem, 1995.
- PSI
I–VI. *Papiri greci e latini*. Edited by G. Vitelli et al. Florence, 1912–1920.
- P.Stras.
IV. *Papyrus grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg*. Edited by J. Schwartz et al. Strasbourg, 1963.
- P.Tebt.
II. *The Tebtunis Papyri*. Edited by B. P. Grenfell & A. S. Hunt. London, 1907.
- P.Yadin
The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters I: Greek Papyri. Edited by N. Lewis. Jerusalem, 1989.
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- SB
I–XXII. *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*. Edited by F. Preisigke, F. Bilabel, E. Kiessling & H.–A. Rupprecht. Strassburg / Berlin / Leipzig / Wiesbaden, 1915–2001.
- SEG
I–XXV. *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*. Edited by J. E. Hondius & A. G. Woodhead. Leiden, 1923–1971.

SIG

Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum. Edited by Wilhelm Dittenberger. 4 vols. 3rd edition. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1915–1924.

SPP

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