

Hermogenes the Smith and Narrative Characterisation in *The Acts of Paul*: A Note on the Reception of 2 Timothy

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The figures of Demas and Hermogenes in the *Acts of Paul* are puzzling for their ambiguous relation with figures by the same name in 2 Timothy (and, for Demas, in Philemon and Colossians). The purpose of the present article is to question what personal biographical details present in the Thecla narrative contribute to larger issues of literary dependence, focusing in particular on the notice that Hermogenes is a ‘coppersmith’. Although several scholars explain this passing reference in terms of a confused literary dependence on previous Pauline traditions, it is rarely approached as a meaningful narrative feature. This personal detail, however, should be read for its contribution to the Thecla narrative in light of the wider early Christian view of ‘smiths’, running from the New Testament texts into the third century and later. When these elements are taken into account, the smith-notice is highlighted as characterising Hermogenes (and, by extension, Demas) negatively.

Keywords: Acts of Paul, 2 Timothy, smiths, reception history, early Christian interpretation

The figures of Demas and Hermogenes in the *Acts of Paul* are puzzling for their ambiguous relation to figures by the same name in 2 Timothy (and, for Demas, in Philemon and Colossians). Resolving that ambiguity is made more complex thanks to the fact that it is tied up with broader questions concerning the relationship between the *Acts of Paul*, Acts, the *corpus Paulinum* (especially the Pastoral Epistles) and the possibility of continuing oral traditions.¹ Rather than address the question of these literary relationships at a broad side, the purpose of this article is to question the contribution that personal details in

¹ See, *inter alios*, D. R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) and B. L. White, *Remembering Paul: Ancient and Modern Contests over the Image of the Apostle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) for differing accounts of continuing oral tradition and its impact on Pauline reception.

the Thecla narrative bring to those larger issues, focusing in particular on the notice that Hermogenes is a ‘coppersmith’ (ὁ χαλκεύς, *Acts Paul* 3.1). In other words, the present study – examining the limits of treating biographical narrative elements as pegs upon which to hang one’s construal of textual relationships – addresses an issue of methodological priority.

This smith-notice is curious for at least two reasons: it supplies a craft for only one of the two people mentioned, and it is not obviously developed in the later narrative. Although several scholars explain this passing reference in terms of a confused dependence on previous Pauline traditions – in the form of 2 Timothy, *Acts* and/or oral traditions – it is rarely approached as a *meaningful* narrative feature.² That is the approach of the present article, namely, that this personal detail should be read for its contribution to the Thecla narrative in light of the wider early Christian view of ‘smiths’, running from the New Testament texts into the third century and later. When these elements are taken into account, the smith-notice is highlighted as characterising Hermogenes negatively (along with Demas by association). This undermines appeals to the notice as a relevant datum for determining the literary relationship between the *Acts of Paul* and 2 Timothy. On the other hand, if one can argue on other grounds for knowledge of the latter in the former, the shift in Hermogenes’ characterisation from 2 Timothy to the *Acts of Paul* raises more interesting questions of how the author of the narrative viewed the ‘Pauline’ letter – whether as an authoritative text, as a simple source to be appropriated and/or changed at will, or something in between. As will become clear below, although the onomastic overlap cannot tell us anything about the fact or specific mode of literary reception in this case, it can reveal something of the attitude in which the reception was undertaken.

1. Scholarly Solutions for Onomastic Overlap

The underlying problem concerning the named figures in the *Acts of Paul* can be stated briefly. There are five characters in the Thecla narrative (*Acts Paul* 3–4), apart from Paul himself, who overlap with characters of the same name elsewhere in the Pauline tradition: Onesiphorus, Demas, Hermogenes, Alexander and Tryphaena.³ The first four of these appear notably in 2 Timothy. When one looks closely, however, the details of the characters in their various presentations do not neatly align. Onesiphorus appears to be located in

² The principal exception to this is Richard Bauckham; see below.

³ Onesiphorus: 2 Tim 1.15; 4.19; Demas: Phlm 24; Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.10; Hermogenes: 2 Tim 1.15; Alexander: 1 Tim 1.20; 2 Tim 4.14; Tryphaena: Rom 16.12. There is some evidence for a Queen Tryphaena in Pontus in the first century; still useful on this point is W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before AD 170* (London: Putnam, 1893) 382–9.

Ephesus in 2 Tim 1.15 (cf. 4.19), while the Onesiphorus of the *Acts of Paul* is met in Iconium (*Acts Paul* 3.1). Demas is mentioned positively as sending his greetings with Paul, Luke and others in Col 4.14 and Phlm 24 while the Demas of 2 Tim 4.10 has abandoned Paul for love of the world and is ‘full of hypocrisy’ and pretending love for Paul in *Acts Paul* 3.1. In 1 Tim 1.20, a certain Alexander has been put out of the community, ‘handed over to Satan’, by Paul, and the Alexander of 2 Tim 4.14 is specified as a bronze smith (ὁ χαλκεύς) and has evidently caused great harm.⁴ In the *Acts of Paul*, however, Alexander is a leader in Antioch, unaffiliated with the Christian community.⁵ Finally, Hermogenes is associated with a certain Phygelus in 2 Tim 1.15 and numbered among those who abandoned Paul in Asia, though no other moral or personal failings are specified, while in *Acts Paul* 3.1 he is specified as a coppersmith (ὁ χαλκεύς) and also associated with Demas, rather than Phygelus, as one ‘full of hypocrisy’.

Given the clear overlap, some relationship between the figures in each text appears difficult to avoid. But is the problem one of confusion, conflation, alternative traditions or something else? Dennis MacDonald has famously argued

4 All translations are my own.

5 The location of Antioch here is debated. Ramsay (*The Church*, 381) thought that the introduction of *συριάρχη* (or *σύρος*) was a later editorial mistake in the Greek manuscripts (dating from the tenth century) since it was not present in the Syriac tradition (from the sixth century). He is followed generally by MacDonald, *The Legend*, 40–2; P. W. Dunn, ‘The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century’ (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1996) 21–2; J. W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (WUNT 11/270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 137 and others. However, the publication of the Coptic Heidelberg manuscript, which reads *ουγγρ[oc]*, demonstrates at least equal antiquity for that reading. Moreover, if R. A. Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha: Acta Petri, Acta Pauli, Acta Petri et Pauli, Acta Pauli et Theclae, Acta Thaddaei* (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1972) ad loc. is correct that the Greek should read *συριάρχη* with manuscript C (presumably on the principle of *lectio difficilior potior*), then the story would be clearly set in Syrian Antioch, with the term signifying Alexander’s status rather than simply his place of origin. C. Büllsbach, ‘Das Verhältnis der Acta Pauli zur Apostelgeschichte des Lukas: Darstellung und Kritik der Forschungsgeschichte’, *Das Ende des Paulus: Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte* (ed. F. W. Horn; BZNW 106; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001) 215–37, at 218 tentatively favours this view, as do E. Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla-Paulusschülerin wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Theklaakten* (NAbh 53; Münster: Aschendorff, 2008) 319 and, more confidently, R. I. Pervo, *The Acts of Paul: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014) 151–2. On the other hand, Lipsius’ decision is subject to debate (note the objection in O. von Gebhardt, *Passio S. Theclae virginis: Die lateinischen Übersetzungen der Acta Pauli et Theclae nebst Fragmenten, Auszügen und Beilagen herausgegeben* (TUGAL 7; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902) xcvi and L. Vouaux, *Les actes de Paul et ses lettres apocryphes* (Les apocryphes du nouveau testament; Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1913) 195) and Paul’s next destination is in Myra (*Acts Paul* 4.15), which lies in relative proximity to Pisidian Antioch and Iconium (though Pervo notes the easy sea access from Syrian Antioch). I follow Lipsius here, though it does not greatly affect my argument.

for the common use of oral tradition so that the 'variations can be attributed to the vagaries of the storytelling process'.⁶ Hermogenes and Demas are, in this view, doubled characters common to orally transmitted folk tales.⁷ The presence of a different 'smith' in 2 Tim 4.14 and its transferral to Hermogenes is only indicative of different uses of generally circulating and fluid oral traditions. MacDonald's corollary argument is that an identification of Hermogenes as a 'smith' *after* the composition of the Pastorals would necessarily be mistaken. His broader analysis has been forcefully criticised by numerous scholars – for its selective reading of gender roles in the *Acts of Paul* and its difficulty in explaining the composition of the work from oral legends after the Pastoral Epistles had gained canonical status, among other things – although it remains difficult to discount the possibilities around oral tradition entirely.⁸ MacDonald acknowledges, however, that the Thecla narrative, as the literary work we have, *was* written after the Pastoral Epistles.⁹ What is not explained in his view, however, is why a 'mistaken' identification of Hermogenes as a smith would be kept in a work put into literary form after the Pastorals had gained widespread acceptance. As will become clear, once

6 MacDonald, *The Legend*, 65; cf. the general agreement of W. Rordorf, 'In welchem Verhältnis stehen die apokryphen Paulusakten zur kanonischen Apostelgeschichte und zu den Pastoralbriefen?', *Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 60. Geburtstag* (Paradosis 36; Freiburg-Neuchâtel: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1993) 462–5 and Barrier, *Acts of Paul*, 40–1.

7 See MacDonald, *The Legend*, 29.

8 For general critiques, see W. Schneemelcher, 'Acts of Paul', *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. II (ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge/Louisville, KY: James Clarke & Co Ltd./Westminster John Knox, 1992) 213–70, at 221–2; G. Häfner, 'Die Gegner in den Pastoralbriefen und die Paulusakten', *ZNW* 92 (2001) 64–77; E. Y. Ng, 'Acts of Paul and Thekla: Women's Stories and Precedent?', *JTS* 55 (2004) 1–29 and esp. Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla*, who surveys and critiques MacDonald and Rordorf's views on pp. 25–7 and whose entire argument undermines his approach. Dunn, 'The Acts of Paul', 21, 40, 49, 78, 94–5, A. Merz, *Die fiktive Selbstausslegung des Paulus: Intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe* (NTOA/SUNT 52; Göttingen/Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/Academic Press, 2004) 215–17 and Pervo, *Acts of Paul*, 89–90 engage on this narrower point. G. E. Snyder, *Acts of Paul: The Formation of a Pauline Corpus* (WUNT II/352; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 117 simply states, 'Whatever we do with MacDonald's theory, the similarities between the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* and 2 Timothy are worth noting.'

9 MacDonald, *The Legend*, 62–3, and see the comments in Schneemelcher, 'Acts of Paul', 221. Regarding the literary form of the Thecla narrative, Barrier, *Acts of Paul*, 1–21 and *passim* has attempted to establish firmly the view first proposed by E. von Dobschütz, 'Der Roman in der altchristlichen Literatur', *Deutsche Rundschau* 111 (1902) 87–106 that the *Acts of Paul* is best read as an ancient romance novel. In addition to Barrier's work, Dobschütz's suggestion has been followed by R. Söder, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhaftige Literatur der Antike* (Würzburger Studien zur Altertumswissenschaft 3; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932); J. N. Bremmer, 'Magic, Martyrdom and Women's Liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thekla', *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thekla* (ed. J. N. Bremmer; Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 36–59.

the smith-notice is situated in its early Christian and narrative contexts, no correlation between different ‘smiths’ need be sought nor does the ‘smith’ characterisation of Hermogenes after 2 Timothy necessarily fall under the category of ‘mistake’.

A different confusion model is adopted, often implicitly, by other scholars as part of a broader construal of the relation between the Pastorals and the *Acts of Paul*. Peter Dunn, for instance, argues that ‘2 Timothy seems to have provided the inspiration’ for Demas and Hermogenes, who are representatives of false teaching more generally, conflating the failures of each character in 2 Timothy along with broader patterns of false-teachers in the Pastorals.¹⁰ In a similar way, Elizabeth Esch-Wermeling argues that the ‘final’ form of the Thecla narrative is generally dependent on 2 Timothy for the characters and the pattern of Thecla’s actions in the Iconium episode.¹¹ More specifically, it is often noted that Demas, a positive figure in Philemon and Colossians, is treated negatively in 2 Timothy,¹² along with other opponents such as Hermogenes and Alexander the coppersmith. While this solution – confusion within direct literary dependence of the *Acts of Paul* on 2 Timothy – neatly accounts for similarities, MacDonald rightly notes that it has more difficulty accounting for the differences.¹³ The question ‘Why does the author of the *Acts of Paul* alter these characterisations and associations?’ remains open here.¹⁴ Most commonly, in opting for a soft ‘confusion’ solution, the differences are either subsumed generally under the deliberately hazy category of ‘inspiration’ or dismissed as products of a careless composer.¹⁵ On the other hand, in a rare narrative solution to the problems posed by Demas and Hermogenes, Richard Bauckham has argued for a much more deliberate act of conflation in which all of the opponents of Paul in 2 Timothy are collapsed into the figures of Demas and Hermogenes for ‘effective storytelling technique’ that was also evident in ancient Jewish exegesis of scripture.¹⁶

10 Dunn, ‘The Acts of Paul’, 21, 40, 94.

11 Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla*, 25–6, and see her full comparison of the ideology of the Pastorals and the Iconium episode on pp. 27–68. While her observations are incisive regarding these parallels, her larger redactional argument faces a number of difficulties; cf. B. A. Edsall, ‘(Not) Baptizing Thecla: Early Interpretive Efforts on 1 Cor 1:17’, *VC* 71 (2017) 235–60, at 242–6.

12 Cf. R. Bauckham, ‘The Acts of Paul as a Sequel to Acts’, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, vol. 1: *Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. B. W. Winter and A. D. Clarke; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1993) 105–52, at 117 and M. Betz, ‘Thekla und die jüngeren Witwen der Pastoralbriefe: Ein Beispiel für die Situationsgebundenheit paulinischer Tradition’, *Annali di Studi Religiosi* 6 (2005) 335–56, at 342 n. 25.

13 MacDonald, *The Legend*, 63.

14 Of course, early Christian writings are well known for alterations and expansions of various elements in their base texts. Later apocryphal narratives (whether Gospels or Acts), however, often tend to imaginatively fill perceived gaps in the authoritative text rather than simply shift characterisations without textual warrant; see further below.

15 The latter is the implied solution in Schneemelcher, ‘Acts of Paul’, 219–22.

16 Bauckham, ‘Acts of Paul’, 129–30; see further below.

The confusion/conflation solutions work on a general level – particularly with reference to Demas and Hermogenes as generally representative figures – though why the author used those two specifically is impossible to say for sure. One might argue that the selection was helped, intentionally or not, by the relative commonness of the names. According to the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, Hermogenes occurs 594 times and Demas 25 times.¹⁷ By comparison, Phygelus occurs only twice. Even if this were the case, however, it is harder to explain why Hermogenes alone is described as a coppersmith if both Demas and Hermogenes are cyphers for more general opposition.¹⁸ Indeed, ancient scribes evidently experienced some confusion about the referent of the coppersmith-notice and attempted to fix it in various ways.¹⁹

Bauckham's argument that the author of the *Acts of Paul* has deliberately conflated Alexander the coppersmith with Demas and Hermogenes appears to suggest that he has signalled this conflation by transferring the description 'coppersmith' to Hermogenes *as an individual*, despite the fact that Bauckham notes the closer link in 2 Timothy between Demas and Alexander.²⁰ His appeal to Jewish exegetical practices, while suggestive in general terms, provides no precedent that I am aware of for such a transfer. On Bauckham's analogy, it is more likely that the author would have *expanded* the information about Demas and Hermogenes on the basis of their description and suggestive silences about them in Paul's letters rather than the descriptions of other unrelated persons.

In support of a soft 'confusion' view, one might point further to other early Christian texts which introduce discrepancies when reworking on their (often authoritative) base narrative. Works such as the Pseudo-Clementine homilies, Infancy Gospels and several Apocryphal Acts all build on preceding narratives

17 Δημῶς may have been a shortened form of Δημήτριος (cf. BDF §125.1), which occurs 2,570 times. I am indebted to Stephen C. Carlson for this observation. The *Lexicon* is now online at www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/.

18 This singling out of Hermogenes also problematises MacDonald's appeal to the folklore 'law of twins', with his argument that 'Paul's two fellow travelers ... possess no individual qualities'; MacDonald, *The Legend*, 29.

19 Preserved by the Coptic P.Heidelberg (ⲉⲣⲙⲟⲅⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲡⲉⲗⲙⲉⲕⲗ; C. Schmidt, ed., *Acta Pauli: Übersetzung, Untersuchungen, und Koptischer Text* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905)) and the majority of the Greek witnesses, the notice is omitted in B and C (see the apparatus in Lipsius ad loc.). The majority of Latin families L^B and L^A render the text in line with the Greek, while L^C tends to change the singular to the plural (*Demas et Hermogenes aearii*) and L^{Ba} adds Alexander to the list of companions (*facti sunt ei comites Demas et Hermogenes et Alexander aearius*; von Gebhardt, *Passio S. Theclae*). The Syriac provides probably independent attestation for the plural solution (ܩܪܘܢܐ ܕܕܡܘܨ ܕܗܪܡܘܓܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܝܐ; W. Wright, ed., *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1: *The Syriac Texts* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871)).

20 Bauckham, 'Acts of Paul', 129. It should be noted, however, that Demas is not paired with anyone in 2 Tim 4.10. It is clearly stated that Demas left Paul for 'love of the present world' while Crescens and Titus are simply mentioned as being elsewhere.

and characters by filling in perceived narratological gaps or omissions that invite rumination on what happens ‘offstage’ – either between or after narrated events. They normally draw on a range of texts and traditions, at times with a harmonising impulse and at times selecting one account over another, thus producing a new narrative.²¹ The *Protevangelium of James*, for example, which is clearly drawing on the shorter birth traditions in Matthew and Luke, expands numerous elements of the story to produce a compelling hagiographical account of Mary’s and Jesus’ birth. New figures and plot points are added, from Mary’s birth and upbringing to the ill-considered examination of her postpartum virginity. Even certain geographical elements appear to shift – the birth in Bethlehem and laying of Jesus in the manger becomes a birth just outside Bethlehem in a cave. These additions and changes, however, are perhaps best read as efforts to interpret the base narratives, to clarify their significance and expand on perceived emphases, correlating exegetical insights and (potentially) circulating tradition.²² The impulses that give rise to these additions and differences are several – e.g. harmonisation, hagiographical exaggeration, the needs of the newly expanded narrative. Even so, there do not appear to be any instances where characteristics of omitted characters are transferred to those in the narrative. Rather, already named characters are given further imaginative expansion based on their profile in the Matthean and Lukan accounts. Other examples could be added.²³

21 In this way there is a certain similarity with contemporary ‘fan fiction’. Drawing an analogy with ‘popular reading’ more broadly, Henry Jenkins notes that ‘media fans take pleasure in making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts’ (H. Jenkins, ‘Textual Poachers’, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (ed. K. Hellekson and K. Busse; Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014) 26–43, at 33). Further, ‘[f]ans have chosen these media products from the total range of available texts precisely because they seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans’ pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests; there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans and therefore, some degree of affinity will exist between the meaning fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story’ (Jenkins, ‘Textual Poachers’, 30). However, it is worth noting that the similarities between fan fiction and ancient literature is necessarily loose given that ‘conflation of folk and fan cultures may blur important distinctions between them, not least of which is the relatively recent legal idea that stories can be owned’ (F. Coppa, ‘Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance’, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 218–37, at 219).

22 See the recent similar treatment of the *Protevangelium* in M. N. A. Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels* (Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017) 58–71. In his terminology, the *Protevangelium* is ‘epiphenomenal’ with respect to the underlying Gospel texts.

23 For example, the evident change in the women at the tomb between John 20 and *Ep. apost.* 9–11, which appears to be a harmonising expansion. In an effort to correlate the account of John with that of Mark and Matthew, and perhaps in continuity with the interest in the different ‘Marys’ involved in Jesus’ life and ministry (cf. *GPhil* 59.6–11), Mary Magdalene of John 20 is expanded to include two other Marys, his mother and the sister of Martha.

Similarly, the *Acts of Paul* can be seen to work exegetically in its portrayal of Paul and his ministry, expanding on perceived textual invitations and lacunae.²⁴ The Ephesus episode (*Acts Paul* 9), for instance, appears to develop from Paul's passing comments about fighting beasts in Ephesus in 1 Cor 15.32. Within the Thecla narrative, exegetical and harmonising tendencies are evident in the presentation of Paul's teaching: the discussion of sexual renunciation in 1 Cor 7 is combined with the form of and some material from the sermon on the mount in Matt 5 (see *Acts Paul* 3.6). It is not clear, however, whether characterisation functions as exegetical expansion or harmonisation in the same way. Certainly it does not do so for all characters. Thecla, for instance, is not an exegetical expansion of other figures in the Pauline tradition. In the case of Demas and Hermogenes, their minimal presence in letters attributed to Paul may well provide space for creative portrayal, but transferring an attribute from a specific and evidently omitted figure (Alexander) onto one of the named figures still remains unprecedented. In fact, such a solution to the smith-notice is also unnecessary once the narrative characterisation in the Thecla narrative is clarified.

2. Narrative Characterisation in *Acts of Paul* 3–4

If, then, appeals to common traditions, garbled literary dependence on 2 Timothy and Jewish exegetical practices do not account satisfactorily for Hermogenes' description, a third option must be explored. The question must be asked, what is the internal, literary function of Hermogenes being a 'copper-smith' and how might that relate to similar personal details in the text more broadly? Moreover, we must ask what that detail is likely to have communicated to a Christian audience in the late second century (and later). Indeed, these questions need to be asked before any attempt is made to draw on such characterisations for evidence of textual relationships.

Undoubtedly the most famous description in the Thecla narrative is the description of Paul supplied when Onesiphorus sees him on the road: 'a short man, with a bald head, bow-legged, sturdy, with meeting eyebrows and a moderately long nose – full of grace. Now he appeared as a man, and now he had the face of an angel' (*Acts Paul* 3.3). It hardly needs to be said that this description owes nothing to either the Pauline letters or to Acts for the physical details included. While it is just possible that some oral tradition regarding Paul's general appearance had survived, the specific details are in keeping with the enduring Greco-Roman interest in physiognomy and are not normally taken to provide anything of historical value. In the context of the Thecla narrative more broadly, the

²⁴ Alongside Bauckham, the exegetical impulse of various aspects of the Thecla narrative has been noted by Snyder, *Acts of Paul*, 137–45 and Edsall, '(Not) Baptizing Thecla'.

description does at least three things. First, it highlights the ‘spiritual’ sensitivity of Onesiphorus who was only working from a second-hand description when looking for Paul. On one hand he is able to recognise the physical features that (presumably) were described to him by Titus. On the other hand, his recognition of Paul’s simultaneous visage of man and angel builds on the fact that Onesiphorus, we were told earlier, ‘had not seen him in the flesh but only in the spirit’ (3.2). When Onesiphorus is later confronted by Demas and Hermogenes for his lack of welcome for them, he responds, ‘I did not see the fruit of righteousness in you’ (3.4), a further indication of his spiritual discernment which sees beyond the façade of Paul’s two (ostensibly) loving companions. Second, the physical details function as physiognomic markers that characterise Paul for the readers, perhaps as a great general or an ideal philosopher.²⁵ Third, the fact that Paul is angelic and ‘full of grace’ indicates that his merits go well beyond his physical appearance, however that is construed, which is later picked up as Thecla is enthralled by his teaching before ever laying eyes on him (3.7).²⁶

When we meet Thecla, we are told that she is ‘a virgin, the daughter of Theocleia’ and ‘engaged to a man, Thamyris’ (3.7). Each of these details forms a crucial part of the characterisation of Thecla. Identifying her as a virgin links her with Paul’s previous beatitudes (3.5–6) and places her in the same category as the virgins whom she sees visiting Paul. Furthermore, her virginity and her relations to Theocleia and Thamyris provide the necessary foundation for the narrative in Iconium. Theocleia and Thamyris are not described when they are introduced again in 3.8, though Theocleia is both named and identified as ‘her mother’ as she condemns Thecla to burn at the stake (3.20). This detail, which is already known to the reader, is nevertheless introduced for literary effect: to increase the *pathos* of the situation. After Thecla is delivered from her first trial in Iconium, she is discovered by one of Onesiphorus’ children as she wanders around looking for Paul: ‘When the child was going to buy food, he saw Thecla, his neighbour, and he was astounded ...’ (3.23). Although one could surmise from the description of Thecla at her window that she lived fairly near Onesiphorus, the reader is here told that she was his *neighbour*, which explains how it is that the child recognised her. If the boy had been outside the city during the execution-attempt, with his parents and Paul, and not privy to the trial itself, how else would he have recognised her? The narrator does not leave the reader with any questions on that point. Again the biographical detail fulfils a specific role within the narrative.

25 See the most recent discussion in Pervo, *Acts of Paul*, 91–5 (who opts for the physiognomy of an ‘itinerant teacher’, p. 94) and also the short summary in Barrier, *Acts of Paul*, 75.

26 Cf. M. Betz, ‘Die betörenden Worte des fremden Mannes: Zur Funktion der Paulusbeschreibung in den Theklaacten’, *NTS* 53 (2007) 130–45, at 135–7.

This pattern continues in the Antioch episode. Alexander is described as a 'Syriarch' and/or 'a leader among the Antiochenes' (4.1). The textual difficulties at this point need not detract from the fact that both descriptions provide the context for understanding the narrative that follows.²⁷ As Syriarch, Alexander wears a wreath that indicated his status and his responsibilities towards the imperial cult, among other things.²⁸ Thecla's removal of his crown thus produces shame for which he must seek retribution. His status indicates that he has the resources to have her condemned *ad bestias* and to finance the spectacle in the theatre.

Tryphaena, when first introduced, is identified as a wealthy woman whose daughter has died (4.2). As with the previous examples, these details serve a narrative purpose. Tryphaena's wealth, and perhaps royalty which also features later in the narrative, serve to explain how it is that she could harbour Thecla between her trial and execution: she had the resources and status to make good on Thecla's request to remain a virgin. Her dead daughter provides motive for her to rescue Thecla as well as explaining her immediate and deep attachment to the condemned foreign girl.

3. Hermogenes among Early Christian Smiths

From these examples, it is evident that the author of the Thecla narrative uses biographical details about the characters for literary purposes. Each detail either picks up on some already extant narrative thread – as in the case of reminding the audience that Thecla's *mother* was calling for her execution and the clarification that the boy and Thecla were neighbours – or lays the groundwork for later narrative developments. If this is the case for other such personal material, it stands to reason that it is also probably the case for Hermogenes, to whom I now return. At first blush, there appears to be a complete lack of interest in

27 See n. 5 above, and note that Lipsius' favoured MS C does not include the phrase Ἀντιοχέων πρῶτος. My point holds true for the majority of Greek and Latin witnesses (cf. von Gebhardt, *Passio S. Theclae*, xcvi–xcix) and the Coptic P.Heidelberg as well, which read 'Syrian' rather than 'Syriarch'. Being identified as a Syrian in the second-century Roman Empire could have indicated the location of the narrative (Syrian rather than Pisidian Antioch) or even conveyed tacit characterisation based on ethnic stereotypes, such as the frequent association of Syrians with slavery (as slaves and traders); cf. D. Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000) 235–6, whose comments are specifically concerned with *peregrini* in Rome.

28 Cf. MacDonald, *The Legend*, 41, whose comments pertain to Galatarchs but hold true for other regional leaders as well (see also Pervo, *Acts of Paul*, 149, 151–2). Note that although MacDonald sides with Vouaux against Lipsius in reading 'Syrian', he nevertheless argues that Alexander being a Syrian indicates that his status was bought by benefactions rather than being inherited, perhaps contributing to a social insecurity that is exacerbated by the events with Thecla.

Hermogenes' craft subsequent to the notice in 3.1. What is developed instead is the description following the coppersmith-notice: being full of hypocrisy and only feigning love for Paul. Such a characterisation, it turns out, is in keeping with the dubious status of smiths in early Christianity.

In the early church, those who formed images for a living were associated in the first place with idolatry. Inheriting a ubiquitously negative assessment of idols from Jewish scriptures and tradition, the early Christians were evidently unanimous in their rejection of idolatry. Anti-idolatry teaching featured as part of the earliest Christian instruction among Greeks and Romans, seen in the fact that Paul told his Corinthian converts that idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor 6.9); consequently they should 'flee idolatry' (10.14).²⁹ This rejection of idolatry is found throughout the Pauline letters and elsewhere within the emerging New Testament canon.³⁰ Moreover, one finds warnings against idolatry from the *Didache* at the beginning of the second century to Tertullian and beyond.³¹ Not content to leave a criticism of idol-production implicit in the condemnation of the product, some writers specifically criticised bronze and silver workers as those responsible for such manufacture. In the *Epistula ad Diognetum*, the author engages in anti-idol polemic, following a scriptural model.³²

Are not all these things made from perishable matter? Are they not forged (κεχαλκευμένα) by iron and fire? Does not the sculptor form one, the copper-smith another, the silversmith another and the potter another (ὁ ... λιθοξόος ὁ δὲ χαλκεὺς ὁ δὲ ἀργυροκόπος ὁ δὲ κεραμεύς)?³³

Even more forcefully, Tertullian states bluntly that images of worldly things are idols and that 'whatever idolatry is committed [viz. in the consecration of images] is necessarily imputed to every manufacturer of every idol'.³⁴ He goes on later in the same tractate to deplore the election of *artifices idolorum* to ecclesiastical office (*Idol.* 7.3). It is unclear whether those *artifices* who were being elected in fact made idols, since Tertullian's definition includes all images of the natural world, whether consecrated or not (4.1). In any case, his concern is matched by the later *Apostolic Tradition*, which maintained the early Christian

29 Concern for idolatry also appears in what may be the earliest reference to Christian preaching in 1 Thess 1.9–10.

30 Acts 15.20 and *passim*; 1 Pet 4.3; 1 John 5.1; Rev 2.14 and *passim*.

31 *Did.* 3.4–6; Tertullian, *De idololatria*, see further below.

32 Cf. Isa. 40.19–20; 44.9–17; Jer 10.3–5, 14; Hos 8.4; Hab. 2.18 etc.

33 *Diog.* 2.3.

34 *Idol.* 4.2: *quicquid idololatria committit, in artificem quemcumque et cuiuscumque idoli deputetur necesse est.*

anxiety around idols by restricting entry to the community.³⁵ In its discussion of the initial interview for admission to the catechumenate, one's vocation and social status was of great importance. If one were to be 'a fabricator of figures or a painter, let them be taught not to make idols. They shall cease or they shall be cast away.'³⁶

Closer to home for Pauline reception, Paul's message had run afoul of smiths at least twice in his recorded career, and both of these instances featured as part of his emerging scriptural portrait by the end of the second century. In Acts 19, Demetrius the silversmith instigated a riot when he felt that his profession was being endangered by Paul's ministry, and in 2 Tim 4.14 we are told that a certain Alexander, who was a smith, caused Paul great trouble.³⁷ Moreover, early readers may well have understood this Alexander as once having been part of the community (1 Tim 1.20). Tertullian's exclusion of smiths from authority positions in the church and the *Apostolic Tradition's* restriction of entry for smiths would thereby have some scriptural grounding here: a smith who infiltrated the Christian community and then caused Paul great distress. This suggestion should not be confused with Bauckham's argument, noted above, that the author of the *Acts of Paul* has conflated the Alexander of 2 Tim 4.14 specifically with Hermogenes. Rather, the point here is that the scriptural accounts of Paul's ministry contribute to the atmosphere of distrust towards smiths in the early centuries of Christianity.

Given that biographical information in the Thecla narrative consistently has a narrative function, the dubious status of smiths in the early church takes us some

35 The date of the *Apostolic Tradition* is difficult, but it is generally accepted that the material concerned with Christian initiation (*Trad. ap.* 15ff.) was present in the earliest version, even if the details cannot all be assigned confidently to that early stage. Proposed dates for the composition range from the late second to the early third centuries; see the summary of relevant issues and discussion in A. Ekenberg, 'Initiation in the *Apostolic Tradition*', *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, vol. II (ed. D. Hellholm, T. Vegge, Ø. Norderval and Ch. Hellholm; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 1011–50.

36 *Trad. ap.* 16.3 (W. Till and J. Leipoldt, eds., *Der koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* (TU 58; Berlin: Akademie, 1954) 41.3): εὐωπε οὐρεψταμιε τοῦατ πε η οζωγραφος πε μαρογῆ σβω ηαγ εἰτήτρεψταμιε ειδωλων η μαρογλο η μαρογνοχογ εβολ. Note that concern over involving painters and idol-makers in the church is continued in later church orders from the late third and late fourth centuries; see *Didasc.* 18.3 (against receiving donations from painters (ܩܘܨܬܐܝܢܐ ܩܘܨܬܐܝܢܐ) and idol makers (ܩܘܨܬܐܝܢܐ ܩܘܨܬܐܝܢܐ); A. Vööbus, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 401, 402, 407, 408; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979) 180–1). The *Apostolic Constitutions* picks up the prohibitions both from the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Tradition* 4.6 (no donations from εἰδωλοποιοί) and 8.4.32 (εἰδωλοποιὸς προσίων ἢ παυσάσθω ἢ ἀποβαλλέσθω; M. Metzger, ed., *Les constitutions apostoliques* (SC 320, 329, 336; Paris: Cerf, 1985–7)).

37 The possibility of a subtle, even subconscious, connection with the Demetrius of Acts 19 may be supported by the relation between the names Δημήτριος and Δημῶς; see n. 17 above.

way towards understanding the function of the coppersmith-notice. When the general anxiety around smiths is combined with multiple episodes in which Paul has run-ins with smiths during his own ministry, the narrative function of the notice becomes clear. This renders unnecessary theories of reception in which Hermogenes is either mistakenly or deliberately conflated with Alexander the coppersmith. It is, rather, better seen as sounding an ominous note at the beginning of their introduction: a (dubious) smith is involved, who is full of hypocrisy and only feigning love for Paul ... The audience now knows how that relationship will turn out! Much like a musical theme for a vaudeville villain, Hermogenes is thus introduced to the reader. In the words of the later reworking of this story by Pseudo-Basil, 'these two were not good men'.³⁸

4. Conclusion

From this perspective, the smith-notice along with the other biographical narrative details primarily serves an internal narratological function. The notice, therefore, should not be pressed into answering questions about the fact of the reception of 2 Timothy in the *Acts of Paul* or about its specific mode. Hermogenes as 'smith' does not clearly point towards previous oral traditions or a confusion or conflation of Hermogenes with Alexander the smith. This detail, like other such personal details in the Thecla narrative, characterises Hermogenes for the readers. In the present instance, the smith-notice draws on a widespread early Christian notion that being a smith was a questionable occupation, in need of strict supervision, regulation or exclusion. The presence of a smith other than Hermogenes in 2 Timothy, then, is no more or less significant than the broader dubious status and action of smiths in a range of other early Christian texts that bear witness to an evidently widespread concern in second- and third-century Christianity.

The methodological priority of understanding the biographical details in the *Acts of Paul* clarifies the use to which they may be put. If these details cannot establish the fact or mode of reception on their own, they could nevertheless illuminate the quality of the relationship between the *Acts of Paul* and 2 Timothy, after that relationship has been established on other grounds. That is to say, if the majority of scholars are correct in seeing 2 Timothy as one of the base texts for the *Acts of Paul*, then, like the *Protevangelium* or Pseudo-Clementines mentioned above, the author of the *Acts of Paul* feels no compunction about expanding on his source material, adding new characters and giving received figures new attributes. This does not necessarily mean that he viewed 2 Timothy as non-

³⁸ Pseudo-Basil, *De vita et miraculis sanctae Theclae* 1.5: τούτω δὲ ἤστην οὐκ ἀγαθῶ μὲν ἄνδρῃ ... Notably the author drops entirely any reference to the craft of Hermogenes or Demas.

authoritative but it points towards a certain freedom to update the source material with the cultural lexicon of second-century Christianity.³⁹ The smith-notice, then, helps to illuminate the *attitude* in which the reception of 2 Timothy took place in the *Acts of Paul* rather than the literary fact itself.

39 A similar point could be made with regard to the portrayal of Paul and Thecla after the pattern of a late second-century Christian teacher/initiate relationship; cf. Edsall, '(Not) Baptizing Thecla'.