

FLIPPED SCRIPTS IN HERMAS'S EROTIC DREAMS:
A READING OF THE SHEPHERD'S VIRGINS IN
LIGHT OF ROMAN ONEIRIC LITERATURE

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'The majority of people get their knowledge of God from dreams'—or so claims Tertullian in his *Treatise on the Soul*.¹ Tertullian's judgment serves as an apt introduction to the place of dreaming in late antiquity. Indeed, dreams occupied a special role in the late antique imagination. While our own post-Freud world often interprets dreams in order to gain psychological insight into the dreamer, the dream-world of the first few centuries CE functioned instead as the anticipated setting of divine-human encounters.² In Peter Brown's words, the ancient dream was 'the open frontier; [for] when a man was asleep and his bodily senses were stilled, the frontier lay wide open between himself and the gods.'³

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1. Tertullian, *An.* 47.2 (*ANF*, III, p. 226).

2. On the distinction between Freudian and ancient theories of dreams, see John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (The New Ancient World; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 26.

3. Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Carl Newell Jackson Lectures; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 65. Cf. also Robert Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 391. For a thorough survey of the literary and material evidence suggesting that the Romans acted on their dreams, see Juliette Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 177-226.

Tertullian's comment illustrates that the notion that divine speech often came mediated through dreams was by no means distinct to the 'pagan' population of the Greco-Roman world. Christ-followers of the first few centuries also expected to meet God in their dreams, and, by their own accounts, often did.⁴ One such person was the second-century Roman freedman known to us as Hermas. The narrative that bears his name, the Shepherd of Hermas, is a puzzling text to interpret. It has long been recognized that Hermas represents a melting pot of literary and cultural influences, perhaps more so than any of our other earliest Christian documents. Its apparent independence of the writings that would become the New Testament, very infrequent use of the Hebrew Bible and consistent veiled allusions to Greco-Roman concepts and tropes make it difficult to identify any one milieu out of which the Shepherd emerged.⁵ The cautious scholar must acknowledge that the Shepherd arose out of several literary contexts.

This paper examines an often-overlooked literary family to which the Shepherd belongs: Roman oneiric literature. Following the methodological suggestions of Patricia Cox Miller,⁶ I propose that the erotic visions which permeate the Shepherd are best interpreted in light of Roman fascinations with the meaning of dreams, especially sexual dreams. By placing the Shepherd in conversation with Artemidorus's dream-interpretation handbook, the *Onirocritica*, I argue that Hermas's provocatively erotic yet chaste visions are employed to craft a new kind of Roman dream, one that is distinctively Christian. My argument proceeds in essentially two parts. First, I situate the Shepherd in its context of Roman oneiric literature with a close reading of Artemidorus and his most famous interpreter, Michel Foucault. I establish that the average Roman male expected to have sexual dreams that portended

4. Cf. Mt. 1.20; 2.19, 22; Acts 16.8; 18.9; *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4.1-2.

5. See the lengthier discussion of the Shepherd's sources in Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 24-28.

6. Patricia Cox Miller, 'All the Words Were Frightening: Salvation by Dreams in the Shepherd of Hermas', *VC* 22 (1988), pp. 327-38, is the first study (to my knowledge) to suggest that 'dreaming' could be a fruitful interpretive key to the Shepherd. See also its expanded version in Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 131-47.

his success or failure in public life. Secondly, I demonstrate the ways in which Hermas's erotic dreams also correspond to his position in his community and argue that Hermas's submission to the women of whom he dreams represents a Christian reformulation of a familiar Roman *topos*.

Erotic Dreams and Masculinity in the Roman World

Artemidorus's *Onirocritica* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) was composed in the second century CE out of the conviction that the substance of one's dreams had a unique relationship to one's real life. 'A dream (ὄνειρος)', says Artemidorus, 'is a movement of the mind that takes many shapes, and signifies good or bad things that will happen in the future' (*Onir.* 1.2).⁷ For Artemidorus, there is a difference between the true dream (ὄνειρος) and the ἐνύπνιον. The latter merely churns up an individual's own thoughts as they sleep; the former bears a prophetic, if allegorical, correspondence to one's future (*Onir.* 1.1). Artemidorus's guidebook to dream interpretation is a catalogue of the possible meanings of those allegorical dreams, based on painstaking research and his own brand of investigative journalism. Of particular interest to this paper is Artemidorus's research on sexual dreams, a portion of his work that has been famously analyzed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*.⁸

Foucault undertook a close reading of the *Onirocritica* because of Artemidorus's relative obscurity, not because he considered Artemidorus to be one of the giants of ancient philosophy. Foucault believed that Artemidorus's modern readers could find in his work 'schemas of valuation that were generally accepted' in the ancient world.⁹ The *Onirocritica*, Foucault observed, centered around the plight of the ordinary individual. It represents a class of literature that is 'revelatory of the types of preoccupations characteristic of ordinary people'.¹⁰ Artemidorus's descriptions of dreams gave

7. Artemidorus Daldianus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (trans. Robert J. White; Torrance, CA: Original Books, 2nd edn, 1990).

8. Artemidorus is the subject of all of Part 1 of Foucault's analysis: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. III. *The Care of the Self* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 3-36.

9. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 3.

10. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 3.

Foucault a precious window into the thought life of individuals in the Roman world.¹¹

If we follow Foucault's suggestions, we can discern from Artemidorus that erotic dreams were of particular interest to the Roman *vir*. Artemidorus spends no less than four chapters expounding the various meanings of such dreams, a longer discussion than he gives about any other kind of vision. Foucault's crucial contribution to studies of Artemidorus was his observation that for the dream interpreter, the fundamental dynamic in erotic encounters is not one of pleasure, but one of power. Foucault claims that 'Artemidorus sees the sexual act as first and foremost a game of superiority and inferiority',¹² wherein the sexual penetrator asserts his dominance over the one he has 'possessed'. In this schema, to dream of situations in which one was sexually dominant usually boded well for the dreamer; it could be allegorically interpreted as portending the growth of one's business, one's success in civic life or some other kind of imminent blessing:

If a man dreams that he has sexual intercourse with his wife and that she yields willingly, submissively, and without reluctance to the union, it is good for all alike. For the wife represents either the craft or the occupation of the dreamer, from which he derives pleasure, or whatever he controls or governs, as he does his wife (*Onir.* 1.78).

Of great importance here at the outset of Artemidorus's discussion of erotic dreams is the intertwining, analogical relationship between a man's sexual success and his success in society. That the dreamer is male is assumed; the *Onirocritica* is 'a man's book that is addressed mainly to men in order to help them lead their lives as men'.¹³ In this phantasmal economy of masculinity, being dominated by one's social superior likewise signifies a future good, for 'it is usual to receive things from such people' (*Onir.* 1.78). To be dominated by a man of lower status, on the other hand, foretells impending social disaster and masculine failure. The same is true for a man's erotic relationships with women. The Roman man was expected to sexually

11. A similarly positive assessment of Artemidorus's value in reconstructing Greco-Roman social norms is offered by Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, p. 30.

12. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 30.

13. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 28. Occasionally a woman's dream is referenced, though usually only when 'the sex of the subject happens to change the meaning of the dream'. See Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 7.

dominate the women in his dreams, because, as Winkler puts it, ‘women are all social subordinates to men’ in Artemidorus’s world.¹⁴

Artemidorus’s *Onirocritica* illustrates the complex way that masculinity, sexuality and social status intersected in Roman dreams. His handbook for dream interpretation, intended for practical and daily use by ordinary men, offers contemporary readers a glimpse into the mind of a second-century Roman male.¹⁵ Such a man could not only expect to receive divine communication through his dreams, but he could also expect those dreams to place him in sexualized situations designed to test the mettle of his masculinity. If he prevailed over his inferiors in the sexual dream arena, his life would flourish. If he dreamed of sexual submission to those inferiors, ignominious failure loomed over his future. With this context in mind, we can now turn to the erotic dreams of the Roman freedman named Hermas.

Erotic Dreams and Masculinity in the Shepherd of Hermas

The former slave-turned-Roman-businessman whom we know as Hermas begins an account of his heavenly visions in a rather unique way: ‘Some-time later, I was going to Cumae ... and I fell asleep as I walked’ (Hermas, *Vis.* 1.1.3).¹⁶ Hermas’s sudden onset of drowsiness leads him into a bizarre dreamscape, wherein previous acquaintances are back from the dead to accuse him of illicit sexual desire, and an elderly woman exhorts him to better control his family and to ‘be a man’ (ἀνδρίζου; Hermas, *Vis.* 1.4.3). With

14. Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, p. 36.

15. Foucault’s theory regarding the ‘practical’ nature of Artemidorus’s work has been largely sustained in subsequent scholarship. Cf. Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming*, p. 190.

16. That Hermas’s visions should be taken as dreams has been cogently argued by Patricia Cox Miller (*Dreams in Late Antiquity*, p. 133). As she elsewhere notes, Artemidorus explicitly links ‘visions’ (ὄραμα) with dreams (ὄνειροι). See Patricia Cox Miller, ‘A Dubious Twilight: Reflections on Dreams in Patristic Literature’, *CH* (1986), pp. 153-64 (158); cf. *Onir.* 1.1-5. We might also add that the Shepherd’s relationship to ancient pastoral dream literature was noted by J. Rendel Harris, *Herms in Arcadia and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), pp. 1-20. Citations of Hermas, unless otherwise noted, are from Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Text and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 3rd edn, 2007), pp. 455-685.

this opening dream, Hermas initiates his readers into the inverted logic of his dream world: in *this* call to manliness, sexual desire is rebuked, and decrepit old women wield significant authority over Hermas and his social deportment.¹⁷

The reclamation of Hermas's masculinity is, as Andrew Crislip terms it, 'a source of acute anxiety in the Shepherd'.¹⁸ And, as the opening of the narrative suggests, this reclamation is inextricably bound up with Hermas's experience of sexuality. Indeed, Hermas's dreams often place him in situations that a Roman reader would have understood to be fraught with eroticism and sexual potential.¹⁹ Unlike the dreams of Artemidorus, however, Hermas's erotic dreams consistently require him to forgo the sexual control that was characteristic of the Roman male.

The Shepherd's subversion of Roman sexual norms begins in Hermas, *Vis.* 1, with Hermas's reacquaintance with his former mistress, Rhoda:

The man who brought me up sold me to a woman named Rhoda in Rome. Many years later I met her again and I began to love her as a sister. Some time later I saw her bathing in the Tiber River, and I gave her my hand and helped her out of the river. When I saw her beauty, I thought to myself and said, 'How happy I would be, if I had a wife of such beauty and character.' This is all I thought, and nothing more (Hermas, *Vis.* 1.1.1-2).

As Hilhorst correctly points out, scenes depicting a man discovering a beautiful woman bathing were commonplace in antiquity, and almost fraught with eroticism.²⁰ Though Hermas denies any explicit sexual desire

17. On Hermas's call to manliness, see Steven Young, 'Being a Man: The Pursuit of Manliness in the Shepherd of Hermas', *J ECS* 2 (1994), pp. 237-55; B. Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, and Aseneth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 19-53.

18. Andrew Crislip, 'The Shepherd of Hermas and Early Christian Emotional Formation', *StPatr* 83 (2017), pp. 231-50.

19. Convincingly argued by A. Hilhorst, 'Erotic Elements in *The Shepherd of Hermas*', in H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman (eds.), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel IX* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1988), pp. 193-204. Hilhorst's argument for Hermas's direct dependence on Roman pornography probably overstates the case. It is enough to say that the dreams Hermas encountered would trigger erotic resonances for a Roman audience.

20. Hilhorst, 'Erotic Elements', pp. 195-96.

in his admiration of Rhoda, the very same woman soon appears to rebuke him for the desire for evil that arose in his heart. The sexual nature of Hermas's desire is clear; she is 'his lust in dream-like reality'.²¹ Of further interest is a certain impact which Hermas's sin seems to have on his own masculinity. Debriefing the encounter a few lines later, Hermas's female revelator specifically draws attention to his failure to live up to the designation ὁ δίκαιος ἀνὴρ ('the righteous man') (Hermas, *Vis.* 1.1.8). As Carolyn Osiek observes, the term is gender-specific, and perhaps not what we might expect from the more general, paraenetic nature of the exhortation. Here we could compare similar gnomic statements from the *Mandates* section which employ the gender-neutral ἄνθρωπος ('person'). Hermas's status as a true man is compromised by his desire for Rhoda. What began as an erotically suggestive dream ends up becoming a lesson in true manliness; Hermas is acting more like a δίκαιος ἀνὴρ when he is listening to Rhoda than when he is sexually exploiting her. This is the first of many subversively erotic dreams that Hermas will encounter.

A similar subversion occurs in a dream where Hermas is commanded to discipline his wife and children. In an almost off-hand comment (Hermas, *Vis.* 2), the Lady Church informs Hermas that his wife, in addition to being chastised for her loose tongue, 'is about to become like a sister to [him]' (Hermas, *Vis.* 2.2.3). It is more than likely that this refers to an institution of sexual abstinence within Hermas's marriage, an oxymoron within the context of traditional Roman family values.²² We have already noted Artemidorus's warning that to dream of one's wife as an unsubmitive sexual partner was inauspicious (*Onir.* 1.78).²³ Yet this dream that prohibits Hermas from

21. Miller, 'Salvation by Dreams', p. 329.

22. So Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 54; Martin Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (HNT; Die Apostolischen Väter, 4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1923), pp. 444-45; Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 389. Whether or not this is to be taken as an early attestation of the later Christian practice of *syneisaktism* (as has been postulated), the warning fits well within the broader framework of Hermas's struggle to overcome his sexual desire. See Mark Grundeken, *Community Building in the Shepherd of Hermas: A Critical Study of Some Key Aspects* (Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements, 131; Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 101; see Osiek, *Shepherd Hermas*, pp. 55, 228 for possible connections to *syneisaktism*.

23. For the Romans, a husband's sexual control over his wife was paramount. Cf. also Plutarch, 'Advice to Bride and Groom', 18 in his *Moralia* (*Moralia*, II

intercourse with his wife also promises him control over his family (Hermas, *Vis.* 2.3.3-4), success as a Roman *paterfamilias*.²⁴

The complex relationship between Hermas's masculinity and his own sexuality is further developed in his interactions with the female church of his first four dreams. Originally revealed to him in Hermas, *Vis.* 1.2 as an old woman (*πρεσβύτερα*), the woman church becomes progressively younger, until she is no longer an old woman but a radiant virgin (*παρθένος*) dressed for a bridegroom (Hermas, *Vis.* 4.3.1). According to an angel, this entire series of visions is meant to correspond to Hermas's growth in manliness: like the woman who is becoming younger, Hermas is throwing off his effeminacy (*μαλακία*) and 'acting manly again' (*ἀνδρίζεται*; Hermas, *Vis.* 3.12.2-3).²⁵ It is this renewed manliness which prepares Hermas to encounter his revelator as an expectant bride, another dream suffused with erotic potential.

The sexual overtones of this dream sequence have been noted by Ulrike Auga, who argues that the highly suggestive image of a virgin awaiting her groom in Hermas, *Vis.* 4 is meant to sexually entice Hermas into salvation.²⁶ Although there is an element of sexual enticement, it is extinguished quickly, and Hermas is given no opportunity to satisfy it. Instead he must listen patiently as he receives still more instruction from the virgin bride. If he pays close attention, the beautiful woman will reveal to Hermas how he

[trans. Frank Cole Babbitt; LCL, 222; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956]).

24. On the connection between Hermas's family and his own masculinity, see Young, 'Being a Man', pp. 243-44; Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Knowing how to Preside Over His Own Household: Imperial Masculinity and Christian Asceticism in the Pastorals, *The Shepherd*, and Luke-Acts', in Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities* (SBLSS, 45; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), pp. 265-96 (277-84).

25. The Greek word *μαλακία*, 'softness', frequently denoted effeminacy in Greek writers of the Roman world. Cf. Plutarch, *Inim. util.* 88; Pollux, *Onom.* 1.158.1. See also D'Angelo, 'How to Preside', p. 280.

26. Ulrike Auga, 'Shepherd of Hermas: Being Enticed into Conversion in the Erotic Church of Sophia', in Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 970-82 (978).

might guide his religious community through impending persecution (Hermas, *Vis.* 4.2.5). The text makes it clear that this episode is an instance of revitalized masculinity for Hermas (Hermas, *Vis.* 3.12.3). That it culminates with an initially seductive, yet ultimately sexually anticlimactic dream furthers the observations we made above. Here, Hermas's erotic dream tests his masculinity not by asking him to dominate a woman, but by asking him to listen to her. Auga's question of whether or not Hermas will prove to be a fitting bridegroom for the virgin church in fact misses the point.²⁷ In this dream, Hermas's future success as a leader in his religious community is signified not by any gratification of his sexual desire, but by his self-controlled submission.

The interplay between Hermas's erotic dreams, his growth in masculinity and his future success culminates in the lengthy Hermas, *Sim.* 9, when Hermas is left to stay the night in the recently constructed tower with a group of virgins. The virgins are quick to assure Hermas that he is staying the night 'as a brother and not as a husband' (Hermas, *Sim.* 9.11.3), echoing earlier language about Hermas and his wife. Hermas is initially resistant to the idea of spending the night with the virgins, and even admits to being ashamed of it (Hermas, *Sim.* 9.11.4). Osiek succinctly diagnoses the nature of this shame: 'It is the appropriate male reaction to being in a situation involving women that [Hermas] cannot control.'²⁸ What follows is the most heightened example of Hermas's desexualized masculinity we have yet seen:

And the one who seemed to be their leader began to kiss me and embrace me, and the others, seeing her embrace me, began to kiss me themselves, and to lead me around the tower and play with me. And I seemed to have become younger, and I began to play with them myself; for some were dancing together as a chorus, and some were dancing, and others were singing. But I remained silent as I was walking around the tower with them, and was happy with them (Hermas, *Sim.* 9.11.4-5).

As both Hilhorst and Osiek rightly note, one need not look very far to see the erotic potential in this scene.²⁹ There are 'increasingly clear hints of

27. Auga, 'Enticed into Conversion', p. 978.

28. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 228.

29. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 228.

sexual pleasure'.³⁰ The night-time plaything of twelve radiant virgins, Hermas is fondled and led around the tower, while trying to overcome the natural shame such a situation would naturally induce for the Roman male. By all accounts, however, the virgins are true to their word, and the evening of lovemaking ends up being decidedly unsexual, though it is filled with kissing and embracing. Through his eventual enjoyment of this kind of nonsexual love, Hermas once again experiences a renewed vitality in his becoming younger (*νεώτερος*), calling the readers' minds once again to the imagery of an old man receiving renewed virility and thereby becoming more manly (Hermas, *Vis.* 3.12.2). Hermas's acquiescence to the women's erotic energy masculinizes him and also allegorizes his submission to virtue, his triumph as a Christian man (Hermas, *Sim.* 9.15).

The final chapter of the Shepherd (Hermas, *Sim.* 10.4) is bookended by two future-oriented words of encouragement from the angel of repentance.³¹ The first is a charge: 'Conduct yourself manfully in this ministry!'³² The second is a promise: the angel 'departed, taking the shepherd and the virgins with him, telling me, however, that he would soon send the shepherd and the virgins back to my house' (Hermas, *Sim.* 10.4.5). Hermas is further reminded that the shepherd's ethical instructions 'cannot be kept without these virgins' (Hermas, *Sim.* 10.3.1). Hermas is promised that his continued masculinity, coupled with the presence of the virgins in his dreams, will finally allow him to lead a happy life.³³

Time and again, Hermas's dreams present him with scenarios full of erotic potential: an injunction to subdue his wife; an ugly and aged revelator transforming into a virginal bride waiting just for him; spending the night alone with no less than twelve virgins who want to do nothing but kiss and caress him. Numerous studies have correctly drawn our attention to the suggestive sexual imagery which permeates the Shepherd. Yet as the text highlights, the Shepherd's vision of masculinity appears to leave Hermas no latitude in fulfilling the dreams's erotic potential. Dreams that emphasize

30. Hilhorst, 'Erotic Elements', p. 202. Cf. also Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, p. 47.

31. This character is inconsistently identified with the Shepherd throughout the text.

32. Regarding the lacuna in the Greek text here, Young suggests a fourth use of *ανδρίζομαι* for the Latin *viriliter*. Cf. Young, 'Being a Man', p. 252.

33. *Felix erit in vita sua*, Hermas, *Sim.* 10.4.1.

Hermas's renewed manliness are almost always accompanied by eroticized situations where he is not the active agent, but instead the attendant, listener or plaything of a powerful woman or women. Each time Hermas encounters an eroticized situation, his developing masculinity teaches him not to seek control of it. His journey towards masculinity is complete when he surrenders control to the virtuous women he envisions. As we have seen, these same erotic dreams that highlight Hermas's growth in masculinity also very clearly correspond to Hermas's future endeavors in the real world. His domestic success as a *paterfamilias*, his social effectiveness as a religious leader, his personal spiritual triumph as a Christian and the cumulative result of his 'happy life' are all signaled by dreams infused with sexual innuendo and suggestiveness.³⁴

Hermas's Roman-Christian Dreams

How might we begin to situate Hermas's dreams within the dreamscapes of second-century Rome? To begin with, many of the features of Hermas's dreams (demonstrating or proving one's masculinity, sexualized scenarios and the allegorized combination of the two) are standard elements in the Roman dreams we encountered in Artemidorus's *Onirocritica*.³⁵ If Michel Foucault is correct to take Artemidorus's descriptions as representative of the concerns of a typical Roman male, then Hermas's dreams appear to comport well with what that average Roman man would have expected from his dreams. But absent in Hermas's dreams—or perhaps we should say reversed in—is the extreme valorization of a man dreaming of his own sexual dominance. At every point in his ironically sexual dreams, Hermas functionally becomes the inferior, the one who is dominated, even by women. For Artemidorus, such dreams would signify nothing less than the death

34. On restrictions on sexual desire in the Shepherd more generally, see Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, pp. 19-53.

35. They are also out of place in early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, so much so that Hilhorst argues for Hermas's direct dependence on Roman erotic literature (cf. Hilhorst, 'Erotic Elements', p. 203). For the disjunctions in content between the Shepherd and other so-called apocalyptic literature, see Graydon F. Snyder, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary, 6; London: Thomas Nelson, 1968), pp. 8-10.

knell for Hermas's masculinity and for his success in his social world. But Hermas's erotic dreams provide a 'flipped script' of the typical Roman sex dream, wherein Hermas's success is portended by his submission to women.

The Shepherd manifests elements characteristic of Roman dreams. However, these elements have combined with the ethical matrix characteristic of the nascent Christian community in Rome, a matrix that downplays desire and dominance and valorizes humility and self-control.³⁶ The Shepherd offers a distinctively Christian reimagining of this kind of Roman dream.

Conclusion

The Shepherd's relationship to Roman oneiric literature and theory is something of a mixed bag, and helps contemporary readers better situate the social reality of the earliest Christians in Rome. On the one hand, the general features of an accepted schema for evaluating masculinity and predicting social success remains intact. Then again, these features have been so significantly reworked that they could be seen to subtly critique that same schema in service of the unique religious and ethical commitments of Hermas's community. This tension is not in need of resolution. Rather, it reminds the modern reader that, despite some of their own overt claims to the contrary, the earliest Roman Christians were not an entirely discrete subgroup within Roman life. They, like other Romans, lived their lives negotiating hegemonic gender expectations and social norms with their own religious beliefs. The Shepherd's simultaneous appropriation and subversion of Roman standards of dream interpretation might be early evidence of one such negotiation.

36. Cf. Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, p. 35.