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Joseph the Good and Delicate Man.

Masculinity in The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*

Abstract

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion von Männlichkeit im frühchristlichen Text *Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen*. Auf den ersten Blick scheint dieser Text, der den Fokus auf physische Kraft, sexuelles Verlangen und Selbstkontrolle legt, ein Bild von Männlichkeit, das sich über Herrschaft definiert, zu verstärken. Und doch legt die Art und Weise, in der die *Testamente* mit den genannten Themen umgehen und wie sich diese im Text manifestieren, nahe, dass hier alternative Formen von Männlichkeit konstruiert und dabei griechisch-römische Ideale dekonstruiert werden. Letztlich verkörpert Josef als der „gute Mann“ die Konstruktion des perfekten Männlichen, indem eine Vielzahl traditionell femininer Charakteristika mit dem männlichen Ideal verknüpft werden. Die *Testamente* konstruieren eine variantenreiche und nuancierte Form von Männlichkeit, die ihrer nuancierten Darstellung von sexuellem Verlangen und Weiblichkeit entsprechen. Sie bauen dabei auf der ihnen eigenen „übernatürlichen“ Anthropologie auf, in der der Mensch der Ort physischer und metaphysischer Interaktion ist und legen Zeugnis ab für eine Form früher christlicher Männlichkeitskonstruktion, die Männlichkeit internalisiert und spiritualisiert.

Peter-Ben Smit, writing the *Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation on Masculinity*, has challenged biblical scholars to ‘tease out and make visible what is uncommon, unexpected and unnoticed’ (Smit 2017, 67). In this article I will do just that in a second century writing the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. I will make some uncommon and unexpected aspects of masculinity visible among second century Christ-followers.

Most simply, ‘masculinity studies is the analysis of how masculinity is represented, constructed, or performed in specific cultural contexts’ (Haddox 2014). In a single cultural

context there is generally a dominant form of masculinity, which is called hegemonic masculinity, with which other forms of masculinity interact (Smit 2017, 10–11). ‘Thus “hegemonic masculinity” is one of multiple possible masculinities in a given context; at the same time, it is the model of masculinity preferred by a group or society’ (Smit 2017, 11). In the Hellenised world of the second century, the context should be Greco-Roman hegemonic masculinity. Mayordomo Marín (2006) gives a useful overview of this masculinity consisting of seven parts,¹ he explains: (1) ‘the human body was constructed as one single-sex body,’ the female body was seen as an inverted, inward-oriented – and thus less masculine – body; (2) ‘manliness was not a birthright, it was something that had to be won,’ men had to earn male honour, specifically in public performance; (3) masculinity was associated with being active rather than passive, men should be in control of situations; (4) virtues and manliness are closely related; (5) masculinity was defined ‘in terms of self-domination, measure and strength of will [...] the most active agent would be a man who controls himself with respect to anger and all other forms of passions, especially those associated with sexuality’; (6) boys needed to be brought up to be men; and (7) masculinity was closely connected to outdoors and the public arena.

Any reader of *The Testaments* will notice that some of these seven features are very prominent. Especially self-control (5)² and the importance of virtues (4)³ are widely seen as major themes in this work, and sexuality/fornication is a recurring theme throughout the twelve testaments. The emphasis on fornication and the associated portrayal of women has received extensive analysis in scholarship,⁴ but little research has been done on masculinity in *The Testaments*. While only Cason (2015) has written specifically on this topic, as part of a larger discussion of masculinity and disability in Hellenistic Judaism and as a text that was produced by men for men, masculinity is not unimportant to the text.

A short introduction to the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* should be given here: The work is a collection of twelve farewell discourses, each supposedly spoken by one of the sons of Jacob, mythical progenitors of the Israelite nation. The twelve testaments together are surely a single work, reaching their current form in a Christ-following context towards the end of the second century.⁵ In each testament a patriarch, being about to die, speaks his final words to his descendants. In each the patriarch reflects on his life, gives exhortation, and discusses the future of his tribe, Israel in general, or the world. The nature of *The Testaments* has led to much research on its eschatology⁶ and, more recently, ethics.⁷ *The Testaments*

contain discussions of gender and sexuality that have intrigued exegetes.⁸

Gender, sexuality, and the nature of women are notoriously complicated to interpret in *The Testaments*.⁹ Considering that these topics are then strongly interwoven with a complex and nuanced discussion of anthropology and ethics, interpretations of these topic vary wildly. A short example should demonstrate the usefulness of masculinity studies to interpreting the gender politics inherent to *The Testaments*. One part of the *Testament of Reuben* reads ‘women are more overcome by the spirit of fornication than men (ἄνθρωπος)’ (5.3). This has then easily been read as ‘woman has an inclining for adultery which is constitutional and stronger than any corresponding desire in the man’ (Hultgård 1995, 41), and subsequently quoted as ‘The *Testament* [sic] of the *Twelve Patriarchs* sees women as constitutionally unable to restrain themselves’ (Satlow 1996).¹⁰ Similar readings abound.¹¹ Such reductive analyses do not represent the nuance of *The Testaments*’ thought. In the context of the *Testament of Reuben*—where women are sexually innocent and men are fornicators, and women are introduced as opponents to men and manliness—such an interpretation makes little sense. Indeed, it gives an incorrect spin on the gender politics of *The Testaments*. A better reading would be that *The Testaments* is thoroughly grounded in the hegemonic masculinity of the day and sees every person is constantly involved in a battle to prove manliness in public performance. As such, as Rosen-Zvi argues, the passage rather presents ‘women’s constant temptation of man, not as an effort to fulfil their own sexual desire but as a cruel struggle for dominion. Their real goal is to [...] defeat men’ (Rosen-Zvi 2006, 86). In a monosexual society where ‘masculinity was not necessarily a fact determined by the body with which one was born’ and ‘needed to be proved constantly in the public arena through one’s appearance, behaviour and performance’ (Smit 2017, 52), women are simply asserting dominance. As should be apparent from this example, masculinity studies, building on the work of feminist scholars, will be a useful lens to better understand *The Testaments*. Additionally, as one of the longer texts of nascent Christianity, this work remains an important witness to second century thought and identity among Christ-followers.

In this article I will examine the construction of masculinity in *The Testaments*. As masculinity and anthropology are strongly linked, it is apt to summarise the anthropological world-view underpinning *The Testaments*.¹² Each person is involved in the struggle between good and evil. In this struggle all individuals need to align themselves with God and keep away from the opponent, Beliar. Beliar uses each person’s God-given nature against them, leading them to destruction. To do this the opponent uses spirits associated with vices and body parts.

Each person consists of a body and a mind, both of which are ethically neutral. The mind controls the body, and the spirits of the opponent attempt to blind a person's mind. A blinded mind cannot correctly distinguish right from wrong, leading a person to sin. Damnation is based, not so much on actions, but on the rational choices a person makes and the disposition of their mind. It is in this global understanding of humanity that gender is constructed. In this article I will examine various constructions of masculinity to show how *The Testaments* both conform to and deconstruct hegemonic Greco-Roman masculinity, constructing another masculinity. The *Testament of Judah* will serve as an example of conforming to and deconstructing hegemonic masculinity, whereas the *Testament of Simeon* and the portrayal of Joseph throughout *The Testaments* will demonstrate an alternative masculinity. Ultimately, I will argue that the work constructs a masculinity which, while having some concepts in common with the hegemonic masculinity presented above—specifically how self-control and virtue are presented—varies significantly from the cultural norm. *The Testaments* construct a subaltern or counterhegemonic masculinity that idealises compassion, pity and vulnerability. At the same time, the social struggle for dominance and control is removed from the human sphere and placed in the context of a supernatural struggle.

Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Testaments*: *The Testament of Judah*

The fourth testament, that of Judah is entitled 'about manliness, love of money and fornication.' Manliness (ἀνδρεία) appears to be a very good summary of the testament, though that word is not used in the testament itself. Judah's rather lengthy testament begins with a narrative of eight episodes where Judah recalls his mighty achievements in hunting and war and tells of his adventures with women. Before those episodes, Judah introduces himself: he was quick and eager in his youth and obeyed his father always (*Testament of Judah* 1.4). After Judah became a man (ἄνδρῳ), his father promises that he will be a king and prosper in all things (*Testament of Judah* 1.6).

In the eight episodes it becomes clear that Judah is a mighty warrior, greater than any other man. The narrative portrays Judah in such good light, that Philonenko suggested this might be a Jewish loan of the ancient myth of the twelve tasks of Hercules (Philonenko 1970, 62).¹³ Menn, examining the figure of Judah in Jewish writings, sees the same correspondence. She writes 'putting the difficult question of literary dependence aside, one may still imagine that in the Hellenistic world readers would have inevitably understood the figure of Judah in

the *Testament of Judah* as a parallel to Heracles' (Menn 1997, 179). Judah fought beasts – showing extraordinary strength and speed (*Testament of Judah* 2.1–7) – and many battles – defeating kings (e.g. *Testament of Judah* 3.1,7; 4.2), giant men (ἄνδρα γιγάντων, *Testament of Judah* 3.3), and thousands of men. (e.g. *Testament of Judah* 4.1–3). Though his opponents are often afraid, he and his father are not (*Testament of Judah* 3.8–10). Returning to Mayordomo Marín's overview of hegemonic masculinity it is clear that Judah remains the model of Greco-Roman manliness. He publicly dominates other men and even kings, he is active, and in control of his emotions. Menn, analysing these chapters in depth, concludes that he is 'a model of masculine virtue' (1997, 134).¹⁴ Yet, the question remains whether Judah's retelling is meant to be taken as an example to be followed or not.¹⁵ When Judah summarises what his children should learn from him, he says:

Do not follow your desires, nor in the considerations of your inclinations, nor in the arrogance of your heart. Do not boast of the strong deeds of your youth, because this too is evil in the eyes of the Lord. (*Testament of Judah* 13.2)¹⁶

He continues to explain that he boasted to Reuben that no women had ever tempted him, which he regrets soon enough (*Testament of Judah* 13.3). Loader sees this as possibly a deconstruction of the manly tales in the beginning of the testament, writes that this 'must call into question the first seven chapters of his testament, at least as something to be admired' (Loader 2011, 404).

Whatever the role of the six manly episodes, in the seventh and eighth the topic changes from war to women; in the seventh the fruits of Judah's marriage to a foreign woman are recounted (*Testament of Judah* 10.1–11.5) and in the eighth Judah's fornication with his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar is given (*Testament of Judah* 12.1–12).¹⁷ These two related episodes warrant a more in-depth discussion. In the first, Judah tells that he married a Canaanite woman named Bathshua (*Testament of Judah* 10.6; 13.3,7). He was invited to a king's feast, where he is given the chance to marry the princess (*Testament of Judah* 8.2). Judah, at first, plans to consult his father, but the king persists. He tempts Joseph with money (an immense dowry), feminine beauty (his daughter serves them wine, while dressed in gold and pearls), and wine (*Testament of Judah* 13.4–7). Judah explains how this affected him: 'the spirit of jealousy and of fornication raged inside me, until I had sex with Bathsua, the Canaanite' (*Testament of Judah* 13.3). In the very first chapter Judah associated his becoming

a man (ἄνθρωπος) with obedience to his father,¹⁸ yet here under the influence of various vices he loses control to the spirits of evil. He tells that the wine distorted his eyes and that pleasure blinded his heart; he loses control and disobeys his father. Thus, he goes against the very thing that he saw as a foundation for his manhood. Besides undermining this source of manhood, this is the first time that Judah loses a battle for dominance with another man. He has battled and killed several kings so far in his narrative, yet in this battle of wits, his opponent dominates him. Money, wine, and the female form undermine his manly power, and he is emasculated.

Beside his marriage, Judah also tells of the fruits of his union. Bathshua bore three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er marries Tamar but he – at his mother’s instigation – worries about Tamar’s nationality and refuses to consummate the marriage. He is struck dead on the third day. Judah immediately gives Onan to Tamar, who live in chastity together for a year. Only then does Judah threaten Onan, and Onan – again at his mother’s instigation – ejaculates on the ground. He dies also. Judah is ready to give Shelah to Tamar, but his wife refuses (*Testament of Judah* 8.3; 10.1–6). Using a ploy Judah fell for before, Bathshua pours out the wine and youthful passion blinds his mind.¹⁹ Following this, she finds a Canaanite wife for Shelah, Judah curses Bathshua and she dies on account of her sons’ evil (*Testament of Judah* 11.1–5). This narrative functions as a context to Judah’s next great downfall, his fornication with Tamar, yet also shows Judah in a different masculine light.

Judah is portrayed in a passive way in this narrative, and Bathshua becomes the main actor.²⁰ Judah attempts here and there to gain some control over the narrative, but keeps failing to Bathshua. The woman who entered the narrative as an object for the male gaze, wrests dominance (and thus masculinity) from Judah the great hero. While usually ‘the exercise of female subjectivity is deadly to masculinity’ (Glancy 1994, 43), the consequences for Judah in this narrative are surprisingly small (for the sons the consequences are significantly larger). Judah seems to lose his dominant position and control of his senses, but ultimately is vindicated: Bathshua dies. His dominance is restored, but only through the deadly intervention of the hypermasculine God.²¹ While his masculinity may be intact once more, in the next episode it again becomes clear how fragile masculinity is when women gain agency.

In the final episode, Judah tells his children that Tamar, now a widow, was sitting as a prostitute at the gate in bridal clothing. Judah, once again drunk, does not recognise her and her clothing makes her more attractive. He bargains for intercourse and offers his staff, belt

and crown (*Testament of Judah* 12.1–4).²² When she becomes pregnant, Judah follows the masculine script; he intends to assert his dominance by killing her – as he killed animals, giants, kings, and, possibly, his wife.²³ But she *privately* shames him by sending him the items he gave her and by the further proof of knowing his secret drunken mumblings. Judah attempts to downplay her agency by saying that it was all a trick (*Testament of Judah* 12.5–7), and his ultimate worry is his image. He worries about public shame when he claims that he ‘thought’ (νομίζω) no one knew of his fornication (*Testament of Judah* 12.10), though later he admits that he committed the sin ‘before the eyes of all’ (*Testament of Judah* 14.5). Whereas in the previous episode Judah’s masculinity, with a little help from God, remained unchallenged, here this is not that case. As Mayordomo Marín argues ‘being a man in antiquity was very closely linked to the role of being an active agent rather than passive [...] what qualified an individual as a *man* was his active control of the situation’ (2006, 7). Judah is by no means in control of this situation, he has been outmanoeuvred, outsmarted, and publicly dominated. He has, under the influence of wine and the spirit of fornication, lost all self-control. Here, at the culmination of his memories of his life, it has become clear that the great hero Judah is not the man he seemed to be.

Judah reflects on how dangerous the spirit of fornication is later in his exhortation. He explains that ‘the spirit of fornication has wine as a servant for the pleasure of the mind, and these two remove one’s power’ (*Testament of Judah* 14.2). Judah explains that he himself gave away, ‘my staff (i.e. the support of my tribe), my belt (i.e. my power) and my crown (i.e. the glory of my kingdom)’ (*Testament of Judah* 15.3). Judah has lost, through the workings of the spirit of fornication, all the items that signify his manly power. And this is true for all men: ‘The angel of God showed me that women rule over both king and beggar [...] From the king they take glory, from the manly they take power, and from the beggar the smallest thing supporting him in poverty’ (*Testament of Judah* 15.5). In a surprisingly universal statement, the masculine dominance of women over men is affirmed; empowered by their natural beauty and utilising other methods²⁴ they can step outside of their role as an object to dull a man’s wits, gain agency and dominate men.²⁵ As such they serve the spirits of deceit, causing a man to succumb the promptings of his supernatural enemies.

All in all, from the male point-of-view, a man walks a fine line of guarding his masculinity. Judah proves his manliness time and time again in battle, yet seems to argue later that this type of masculinity is not something to be proud of. Judah loses his dominance when he encounters two women. First with Bathshua, he loses control of his mind on account of

money, wine and her beauty and he loses his active agency becoming passive in the way his sons act regarding Tamar. Later with Tamar, after once again losing control of his mind due to wine and the female form, when it becomes clear that Tamar is in control of him, he loses face in the public arena. In all of this it is apparent that the major danger to Judah's masculinity is his loss of control of his mind, where he allows the spirits of the opponent to rise up and blind him. Ultimately, the true test of a man is not in physical battle, but in how he performs in the struggle between good and evil that takes place inside of him.

(De)constructing Greco-Roman Masculinity

Masculinity is constructed throughout *The Testaments*. For reasons of space I will examine the constructed masculinity of only one of the twelve patriarchs: Joseph. He is consistently portrayed throughout *The Testaments* as the ultimate good example of ethical perfection. Writing in 1981, before masculinity was on the radar,²⁶ Hollander argued that Joseph 'is not only a good example [...] above all he is a representative of the author's ideal of man' (Hollander 1981, 93). He outlines a definition of such a man: 'somebody who loves God and loves his neighbour' who has 'above all mercy and compassion, sympathy, forgiveness, sexual purity, steadfastness and endurance' (Hollander 1981, 93). Some of these virtues align with a more contemporary description of hegemonic Greco-Roman masculinity, but others stand out. Compassion (εὐσπλαγχία), and specifically mercy (ἔλεος), are not often associated with hegemonic masculinity,²⁷ and are evidence of the idealisation of a marginalised or counterhegemonic masculinity in *The Testaments*.²⁸

Joseph's masculinity is discussed throughout the twelve testaments, and the idea of Joseph as the ideal man is first introduced in the *Testament of Simeon*. In this testament, which focusses on Simeon's jealousy (ζήλος) and envy (φθόνος) of Joseph,²⁹ a dichotomy between the two brothers is presented. Simeon begins his testament with a general introduction about his character. Promising to tell his children 'what he has in his heart' (*Testament of Simeon* 2.1) he says:

2.3 I became very mighty, I was not afraid to act nor afraid of any deed. 4 For my heart was hard, my liver immovable, and my bowels compassionless. 5 Because also manliness in spirit and body was given to humans from the Most High. (*Testament of Simeon* 2:3–5)

Simeon presents himself as the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, both internally and externally. He is strong and never afraid; his heart, liver, and bowels are all emotionless. He fulfils the stoic ideal perfectly.³⁰ Simeon links his masculinity emphatically to the Lord, his spiritual and physical manliness comes from the Most High. Simeon presents himself as the epitome of masculinity, by showing his ‘resistance to weakness and to loss of control over the passions due to fear, anger, or pain.’ (Smit 2012, sec. 3)

Following his general introduction to himself, Simeon recounts his experiences with his brother Joseph. Introducing the topic of his testament, Simeon explains how he lost masculinity when he became jealous of Joseph:

2.6 I was jealous of Joseph for a while, because our father loved him. 7 I decided in my liver to kill him, because the spirit of jealousy, sent by the prince of deceit, blinded my mind. Thus I did not consider Joseph my brother, nor did I spare my father Jacob.
(*Testament of Simeon 2.6–7*)

Simeon’s previously immovable liver has now been turned by jealousy, and he resolves that he should kill Joseph. In making this decision, Simeon loses control over his rational capabilities. Fortunately for Joseph, the Lord intervenes. When Simeon is away, Judah sells Joseph into slavery (*Testament of Simeon 2.8–10*). Simeon is livid and this affects him fundamentally:

2.11 I grew angry with Judah, because he let Joseph go, while alive. And I remained angry for five months. 12 And the Lord enchained me, and he withheld from me the use of my hands. Because my right hand was semi-paralysed for seven days.
(*Testament of Simeon 2.11–12*)

The spirit of jealousy,³¹ having blinded Simeon’s mind, has further consequences to Simeon’s masculinity: his right hand becomes paralysed.³² Naturally any kind of ‘injury or disability undermined a man’s manliness’ (Wilson 2015, 51), but his right hand would be the symbol of his manly power,³³ making this disability additionally emasculating. Simeon has now presented his total emasculation due to the influences of the spirits of deceit: he was once powerful and his liver immovable, but the spirit of jealousy caused his reason to falter, his

envious liver to be stirred, and as a consequence the Lord has incapacitated him. At first glance, thus, it seems that Simeon presents a masculinity that easily falls within typical generic Greco-Roman masculinities, where men are ‘characterized as being dominant, active, and self-controlled’ (Wilson 2015, 40). One could argue that Simeon had all the characteristics of a hegemonic man, until the spirit of the opponent, i.e. a passion, rose up and took control of his mind. This seems to be what previous (short) studies in masculinity in *The Testaments* have claimed. Cason, for example, writes:

“the construction of gender in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* revolves around one’s ability to yield to virtues over passion [...] Chief among the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*’ rhetorical arguments, therefore, is that one must protect masculinity in order to preserve it. Protection takes place primarily through self-mastery over one’s passions.” (Cason 2015, 612–613)³⁴

Certainly, self-control is vital to *The Testaments*. Elsewhere, I have explored the anthropology of *The Testaments*, and have argued there is indeed a discourse of control (De Bruin 2015). Each person has been given rational abilities with which to make good choices. The forces of darkness lead a person towards bad choices, using ‘an individual’s desires, senses and nature against’ them (De Bruin 2015, 161). Additionally, the evil spirits can blind a person’s mind, causing them to no longer be able to distinguish between good and evil. This was specifically the case with Simeon, who no longer considered Joseph to be his brother (*Testament of Simeon* 2.7).³⁵ One could argue that this is a way of mythologizing the psychological processes,³⁶ but this does not seem to be how *The Testaments* view the world. Macky explains:

“The spirits were understood as non-human powers that are the manifestations of a world of spiritual evil that transcends man and his impulses and sins. The only appearance of this world of spiritual evil is in man’s passions and actions. Man’s natural capacities and impulses are the means by which the spirits invade him, but the excess of unintended passions and actions in man’s life is explained as due to something beyond himself that he is not able to control.” (Macky 1969, 216)

The control that is so vital to *The Testaments* is not so much over passions or emotions, but

over these non-human powers. Each person needs to keep their mind pure so that they can recognise the spirits and tell right from wrong. In other words, in the context of the fundamental thought of the work, the construction of masculinity is maybe not as simple as seems at first glance. Control is important, but appears to be different to the hegemonic discourse. I will now examine how the hegemonic image of masculinity is deconstructed: in the rest of the *Testament of Simeon*, and in the portrayal of the patriarch Joseph.

Seemingly emasculated, Simeon repents and his body is restored (*Testament of Simeon* 2.13). Moving from his memory of previous events to exhortation, he warns his children to keep clear of the spirit of envy (*Testament of Simeon* 3.1). After discussing the nature of envy, he explains the anthropological mechanics of repentance:

3.5 If someone takes refuge in the Lord, the evil spirit will flee from him and his mind will become lightened. 6 And from then on he sympathises with the object of envy, discovers love for him, and thus stops envying. (*Testament of Simeon* 3.5–6)

Taking this explanation of repentance and applying it to Simeon's re-masculation, it appears that as Simeon took refuge in the Lord, the spirit of envy fled, and Simeon had compassion with Joseph. In other words, it appears that Simeon recovered his manly strength through, ultimately, compassion for Joseph – exactly the opposite to his introduction to manliness. Simeon, with renewed strength, no longer has the hardened bowels (σπλάγχνα ἀσυμπαθῆ) of the compassionless (*Testament of Simeon* 2.4). And it is precisely compassion (εὐσπλαγχνος) that plays a large role in the rest of Simeon's advice to his children.

Following this example of regaining masculinity through a typically effeminate characteristic: compassion, Simeon continues to explain why Joseph was a better man than he was. He shares what Joseph's nature is. And with this biographical detail, Simeon introduces a major topic of *The Testaments* and a figure vital to understanding its construction of masculinity: Joseph, the good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός).³⁷ Simeon describes Joseph:

4.4 Joseph was a good man and, having the spirit of God in him, being compassionate and merciful, he did not bear a grudge against me. He even loved me, like the other brothers. (*Testament of Simeon* 4.4)

Simeon gives three characteristics of Joseph's 'goodness': (1) having God's spirit, (2) being

compassionate (εὐσπλαγχνος) and (3) being merciful (ἐλεήμων). In the context of Simeon's biography, these three are closely related to Simeon's emasculation. Simeon had no compassion nor mercy for Joseph, only after finding compassion did he recover; and the spirit in control of Simeon was not God's, but an evil spirit of the enemy. Joseph, thus, stands as a good example of masculinity in opposition to Simeon's poor example. Thus, in the *Testament of Simeon* we see a contrast between two types of masculinity. On the one hand there is Simeon's hegemonic Greco-Roman masculinity and on the other there is Joseph's compassionate, non-confrontational, almost effeminate masculinity. As such an alternative masculinity is being negotiated, one which devalues power, dominance, and the control of passions.

Constructing the Good Man

Having considered masculinity in the *Testament of Simeon*, and having seen that there are some hints of a deconstruction of hegemonic Greco-Roman masculinity, let me continue discussing Joseph. As we saw, the concept of Joseph being the ideal man was introduced in the *Testament of Simeon*, the second testament.³⁸ Throughout the following testaments this concept is fleshed out, and this discussion comes to a head – as we will see shortly – in the final testament. Along the way several passages stand out for our discussion of masculinity.

In the *Testament of Zebulon*, when Simeon and Gad intend to attack Joseph in anger, Joseph falls on his face and pleads with them. He asks them, weeping loudly (κλαίω), for mercy (ἐλεάω) for him and for his father (*Testament of Zebulon* 2.1–2, 5). Zebulon sees this and has pity (οἶκτος). He too begins to weep, and his liver and bowels become weak. Zebulon weeps so strongly that his heart hums, his joints go out of place, and he cannot stand. When Joseph sees Simeon and Gad coming, he hides behind Zebulon and begs (δέομαι, *Testament of Zebulon* 2.4–6). From this narrative it is clear that Zebulon, as Françoise Mirguet argues, 'is experiencing the physical symptoms of the terror affecting his brother Joseph, as if he himself were threatened' (Mirguet 2014, 852). Later it becomes clear that this strong empathetic compassion and pity is exactly what Zebulon argues as the ethical ideal (*Testament of Zebulon* 5.1–4; 9.7–9). Weeping is often seen as effeminate no matter the reason (Wilson 2015, 65–66),³⁹ but Joseph's weeping in fear of one's life is significantly emasculating. The same could easily be said for debilitating weeping from pity, another non-manly emotion.⁴⁰ Furthermore, both Joseph—the ideal man—and Zebulon—the patriarch

demonstrating good behaviour—are in no way in control in this narrative. They are not able to control their brothers and they are not able to control themselves, yet they are the ideals in this testament.⁴¹ All in all, the *Testament of Zebulon* presents Joseph, the ideal man, in a decidedly nonhegemonic light.⁴² Additionally, Zebulon’s exhortation, based on his life, further enforces compassionate over-emotional reactions to suffering.

Another time Joseph is presented in an effeminate way is in the *Testament of Gad*. Gad begins his testament recalling his own great and manly (ἀνδρεῖος) deeds as a shepherd. He would kill any beast that came near by grabbing it by the foot, whirling it round and sending it flying (*Testament of Gad* 1.2–3). Gad then introduces his brother: ‘Joseph shepherded with us for about thirty days, and being delicate he suffered (μαλακίζομαι) from the heat’ (*Testament of Gad* 1.4). Joseph must return to the home, the female domain (*Testament of Gad* 1.5). Gad creates a dichotomy between his manly shepherding and Joseph’s softness. This fits nicely into general practice where ‘charges of effeminacy were standard fare,’ and even includes one of the most common ‘pejorative terms to denote effeminacy: [...] μαλακός’ (Wilson 2015, 42). With Gad partaking in the culturally accepted performance of manliness, Joseph is painted in a very unmanly light. Once again, Joseph is in no way in control. Joseph’s masculinity, therefore, does not lie in his masculine deeds and masculine control but elsewhere.

The ultimate hegemonic token of masculinity, self-control (σωφροσύνη),⁴³ is the topic of the *Testament of Joseph*. Though in previous testaments he was not in control of his emotions or situations, in his testament he is very much in control of his sexuality. The subtitle of this text tells us that the testament will deal with σωφροσύνη, though as Hollander and De Jonge note ‘in *Testament of Joseph* it just one feature of Joseph’ (Hollander and De Jonge 1985, 364). With σωφροσύνη only occurring here, the translation is a topic of debate. Some authors choose to translate it as ‘self-control’⁴⁴ and others as ‘chastity.’⁴⁵ The debate lies in the fact that Joseph only talks of σωφροσύνη in relation to the attempts of Potiphar’s wife to seduce him. In the context of *The Testaments*’ ethics,⁴⁶ Joseph does not seem to show self-control in general, only self-control when it comes to the influence of the spirit of fornication. Thus, chastity might be a better choice. Whatever the English equivalent, Joseph is portrayed as a man who can withstand the spirit of fornication despite much temptation, he is clearly in control of his sexuality. As such, he does show this element of Greco-Roman hegemonic masculinity.

The *Testament of Benjamin* is the place where the portrayal of Joseph’s masculinity

comes to its culmination. In the metastructure of *The Testaments*, the last two testaments – those of Joseph and Benjamin – play a specific role: Joseph’s testament can be seen as the ‘climax and goal of the book’ (Thomas 2004, 185); Benjamin’s testament, following right after Joseph’s, has been called ‘a coda’ (Thomas 2004, 185). I have argued that these two testaments together ‘function to drive home the argument, and reemphasise important issues’ (De Bruin 2015, 46). The *Testament of Benjamin* ‘gives a résumé of the author’s ethical ideas’ and the central theme of the testament is the ‘good man’⁴⁷ (ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ) (Hollander and De Jonge 1985, 411–12). The *Testament of Benjamin* describes the good man in two places. The first comes just after Benjamin recounts the reuniting of Joseph and Jacob, and how Joseph’s captivity in Egypt came to a good end:

4.1 Have you seen, children, the end of a good man (ἀνὴρ)? Follow his compassion (εὐσπλαγγνία) with a good mind (διάνοια), so that you too may wear crowns of glory.
2 A good person sees all things correctly. He has mercy (ἐλεάω) for everyone, though they may be sinners, 3 though they may devise bad plans against him. In this way the one doing good overcomes the bad, being sheltered by the good. He loves the righteous like he loves his mind. (*Testament of Benjamin* 4.1–3)

This paragraph specifically addresses masculinity. Bringing together the thoughts of the previous eleven testaments, the ideal of a good man with a good mind is fleshed out. Compassion (the theme of Zebulon’s testament) returns as the major way of describing the good man. The importance of maintaining a good mind and remaining unblinded returns as well. Following this, a series of examples function to mediate performances of compassionate masculinity: a good man does not envy honour or wealth, applauds manliness, loves chastity, and is compassionate to subordinates (*Testament of Benjamin* 4.4–5). Some hegemonic masculine expectations, such as those of activity, dominance and control do not appear, but self-control – especially regarding sexuality – does. At the basis of the good man’s ethos, however, seems to be compassion for all and not a struggle for masculine dominance. Other men who through manliness, wealth, or honour enforce supremacy, are applauded and valued for those masculine qualities, not attacked as one might expect. Usually, as Mayordomo Marín argues, Greco-Roman society assumed that that ‘since the amount of masculinity is a limited good, aspirants to masculinity have to compete against each other’ (2006, 7). A good man, according to *The Testaments*, takes part in no such competition, but values the manliness

of his competitors.

In the portrayal of Joseph as the ideal man an alternative to the Greco-Roman hegemonic masculinity is constructed. In this masculinity power, dominance, and competition are downplayed, and compassion, mercy, and emotion are emphasised. Competition is not entirely absent, but the realm of the competition is moved from demonstrating masculine virtues such as power and dominance to demonstrating effeminate vices such as mercy and compassion. The key to this construction of masculinity remains the good mind which a good man should have. I will now draw some conclusions on the construction of masculinity in *The Testaments* and the good man's good mind.

Conclusion

Smit has argued that 'the masculinities that one encounters on the pages of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures are not just manifold but also frequently involved in negotiating subhegemonic and/or marginal kinds of masculinity' (Smit 2017, 67). Considering the way that *The Testaments* deconstructs hegemonic Greco-Roman masculinity, this could very well be what *The Testaments* are doing. Against a masculinity that is very much defined by physical prowess, dominance and control, this Christian text presents an alternative masculinity. Based on the ideal man: Joseph, *The Testaments* present a man who openly weeps and begs for mercy. A man who is compassionate and merciful to all. A man who does not strive for dominance or control of others, and who does not take part in the struggle for status and honour. A man who is not physically imposing or even manly, but who has a good mind, that is focussed on God.

As discussed above, *The Testaments* interweave the struggle between good and evil with anthropology, and they do the same thing with the masculinity. Borrowing dominance and self-control from the hegemonic masculinity it appears to interpret these virtues, not so much in the struggle between people, but in a struggle against the spirits of evil. As each person needs to follow the commands to love God and love one another, all the while keeping a good mind to enable good decisions, masculinity needs to be re-envisioned in this context. *The Testaments* argue that the person who keeps the commandments the best, that is the person with the best mind, is the manliest man.

Loving God and especially loving one's neighbour does not mesh well with acts of physical prowess, such as the manly Judah and Gad boasted of, or with merciless self-control,

such as Simeon demonstrated. A good man needs to be compassionate to all and should not attempt to gain control or dominate others. Thus, manly self-control required a person to dominate themselves and protect themselves from penetration, not by sexual partners, but by the spirits of the opponent.⁴⁸ While this appears to reflect common hegemonic masculinity, on closer examination this is not the case. Usually self-control is glorified as a way to prove masculinity in reference to other people, but in *The Testaments* the struggle is against supernatural beings. This means that dominance and control did not feature in interpersonal relations. The public demonstration of manliness then, was not in controlling emotions or demonstrating physical prowess, but in humble compassion and ethical choices.

The text is a witness to early Christians who idealise an alternative masculinity, where the struggle for dominance is not against other men, but against supernatural forces. Masculinity has been internalised and spiritualised and thus the ultimate test of a man is whether they can protect themselves from spiritual penetration.

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¹ See Mayordomo Marín (2006, 4–7). See also Smit’s analysis and praise for this overview (Smit 2017, 52–53). See similar overviews, which overlap significantly, in Stewart (2016, 91–96), Wilson (2015, 39–75), and Asikainen (2017, 161–64).

² In the terminology of *The Testaments* this could be equated with keeping a good mind, cf. De Bruin (2015, 152–54).

³ Indeed, many would argue that ethics is the foundation of the work. See, e.g. Kugler, who writes ‘by most accounts ethics are the *Testaments*’ central theme [...] the ancestors’ ethical teachings undeniably echo broadly defined popular Hellenistic, Christian and Jewish teaching on virtues’ (2001, 17).

⁴ See, for example, Opferkuch (2018, 27–87; 2017), De Bruin (2015, 139–49), Loader (2011), Rosen-Zvi (2006), Kirchhoff (1998), Menn (1997), Kugel (1995), Wassén (1994), and Eron (1991).

⁵ The dating and authorship of *The Testaments* has long been debated. In recent years, a majority of scholars seem to follow the Leiden school’s late second century date. Even if the work is of an earlier date, exorcising the Christian ‘additions’ would be impossible. See my analysis of the dating debate in recent years (De Bruin 2015, esp. 27–35). Recently Kurowski (2010) and Nicklas (2014, 108–12) have argued that *The Testaments* represent a theological ‘update’ to Judaism by Christ-followers. Recent proponents of a Jewish *Testaments* are DeSilva (2013) and Opferkuch (2018), who both argue for a pre-Christian *Testaments* more-or-less reconstructable from the current Christian form.

⁶ See, for example, Beasley-Murray (1947), Macky (1969), Hultgård (1977; 1981), De Jonge (1986), and Hollander (1995).

⁷ Examples include Kee (1978), Hollander (1981), Loader (2011), Konradt (2014), and Opferkuch (2018).

⁸ See recent works such as Opferkuch (2018, 27–87; 2017), Loader (2011), and Rosen-Zvi (2006).

⁹ Consider, as an example, Rosen-Zvi’s disagreements with Hollander and De Jonge, and Kugel: ‘Hollander and de Jonge thus give a wrong impression [...]. In the same manner, it is hard to accept Kugel’s reading of Bilhah’s innocence’ (2006, 73).

¹⁰ This then gets quoted as indicative of ‘the prevailing view of women’ (Cason 2015, 613).

¹¹ See e.g. Ulrichsen (1991, 293), Loader (2011, 435).

¹² This summary is based on De Bruin (2015, 97–162).

¹³ Philonenko’s understanding of *The Testaments* is now outdated, as is his analysis of the use

of this mythological trope, but these conclusions do demonstrate how Judah is portrayed as superhumanly manly.

¹⁴ Menn's complete summary of Judah's manliness is 'Judah's courage and physical dominance over animals and human enemies, his military leadership of his brothers, and his participation alongside his father in city-building mark him as a successful king and a model of masculine virtue' (1997, 134).

¹⁵ Menn notes ominous way the testament portrays this manliness, when they write 'interwoven into the account of his early life are foreshadowings of a precipitous change' (1997, 134–35). They see this change in how Judah fails when it comes to women.

¹⁶ All translations of *The Testaments* are mine. The Greek critical text can be found in De Jonge et. al (1978). English translations are available by De Jonge (1984), Hollander and De Jonge (1985), and Kee (1983).

¹⁷ In this discussion I will occasionally refer to other places in the *Testament of Judah* which reflect on these episodes.

¹⁸ Obedience to his father is so prominent in the *Testament of Judah* that Menn concludes 'Judah [...] equates the Lord's commandment with a patriarch's commandment' (Menn 1997, 117).

¹⁹ Contrary to my reading, Hollander and De Jonge see this as a flashback to his initial encounter with Bathshua, which led to his marriage (1985, 202). Loader seems to imply the same reading (2011, 401). Following this reading, the flashback functions to remind the children that Bathshua was wicked, and how he got into this situation.

²⁰ Cf. Menn, who writes that this passage 'present[s] the patriarch as a passive and anguished observer of his family's behavior' (1997, 144). See also their analysis of the roles of the male characters (Menn 1997, 144–49).

²¹ Cf. Moore's work on the hypermasculine deity (1996b; 1996a)

²² Unlike the biblical narrative, there is no indication that these are pledges against future payment, cf. Menn (1997, 154–55).

²³ Cf. Menn, who writes 'Judah's first impulse (apparently upon learning of her pregnancy) is to kill her, as he has killed those who have previously challenged his dominance, including his Canaanite wife' (1997, 155).

²⁴ Examples include wine (*Testament of Judah* 13.5—14.8), adornment and cosmetics (*Testament of Reuben* 5.1–5).

²⁵ Cf. Kugler, who writes 'the *Testaments*' treatment of women agrees with a common

Hellenistic conception of the feminine gender: she is often intent on gaining power over a man's wealth and power through wile and allure, and the same qualities trigger a man's self-destructive passions' (2001, 58–59).

²⁶ Cf. Smit who argues that Carrigan, Connell, and Lee's 'article "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity" (1985) is often seen as the starting point of contemporary masculinity studies' (2017, 7).

²⁷ See, for example, Asikainen who, analyzing masculinity in the Gospels, writes 'when instructing the disciples to show pity (ἔλεος), Matthew is advocating potentially unmasculine behavior' (2018, 105). Elsewhere she calls mercy/pity 'counterhegemonic' (2018, 85) and 'womanish' (2018, 178). See also Graver (2007, 56–58).

²⁸ This portrayal is possibly built on Joseph's canonical portrayal as very emotional, cf. Kirova's analysis of Joseph's masculinity (2017, 37–38)

²⁹ *Testament of Simeon* seems to use envy (φθόνος) and jealousy (ζήλος) as synonyms (De Bruin 2015, 125–26). See also Opferkuch's suggestion that *The Testaments* uses both due to the usage of these terms in the LXX (2018, 95–96)

³⁰ Cf. Cason, who writes 'as far as his interiority was concerned, it too resembled the masculine ideal' (2015, 614).

³¹ It is important to note that, contra Cason, it is jealousy that causes Simeon's hand to wither, *not* anger. Consider my discussion elsewhere, (De Bruin 2015, 126–28 esp. n. 97). Anger, while rightly pointed out by Cason as specifically 'unmanly' (Cason 2015, 615), is not given as the reason for Simeon's punishment and is not the subject of Simeon's exhortation—it is but one of many consequences of giving in to a spirits of deceit (cf. *Testament of Simeon* 2.13–14, 4.7–9).

³² This fits into a larger theme of the evil spirits being 'able to influence the body negatively' (De Bruin 2019, 136).

³³ Cf. Cason, who writes: 'as one whose masculinity was defined by his resiliency in "work" and "labor," the withering of Simeon's hand immobilizes the very instrument that facilitates his masculine identity' (2015, 615).

³⁴ Smit seems to take a similar stance (2012).

³⁵ See, De Bruin for a complete discussion of the anthropology of *The Testaments* as it relates to ethical choices (2015, 97–162). See also Konradt's recent contribution to this discussion (2014).

³⁶ Cf. Ulrichsen (1991, 227).

³⁷ See, Hollander (1981) for a complete (pre-masculinity studies) analysis of the role of Joseph in *The Testaments*.

³⁸ In the first Testament, that of Reuben, Joseph is already introduced as the good example (*Testament of Reuben* 4.8). Cf. Hollander (1981, 50–51).

³⁹ Cf. Kirova's analysis of weeping in the Torah and Deuteronomistic history, where male weeping is only appropriate as a way to react to God (2017).

⁴⁰ While pity can be associated with the 'manly tears' of, for example, a conquering general, the pity experienced by Zebulun does not meet the usual criterion of emotional distance between the subject and object. The pity (οἰκτος) that Zebulun experiences here, is more rightly seen as compassion—'the practice of suffering with, or sharing, a person's emotional state' (Matthews 2013, 386). Furthermore, in these cases, the tears shed 'are not so much about sorrow for those who are being crushed in violence. They are, rather, about the nobility of the conqueror—the magnanimity of the general—who does not succumb to the passions' (Matthews 2013, 384).

⁴¹ The patriarch in control, at first, is Reuben who convinces the brothers not to kill Joseph (*Testament of Zebulun* 2.7). Later, he too loses control (*Testament of Zebulun* 4.5–7), and rends his clothes. Reuben, while temporarily in control and seemingly on Joseph's side, acts from fear of (telling) his father, not compassion.

⁴² Mirguet similarly argues that *Testament of Zebulun* does not allow for the striving for dominance typical of hegemonic masculinity: 'The *Testament of Zebulun* resists any empowerment of the self over suffering others' (2014, 855).

⁴³ Cf. Weidemann who argues that 'the central value of self-control is increasingly recognized in recent discussions of ancient constructions of masculinity' (2017, 148).

⁴⁴ Cf. Kee (1983) and Wills (1995).

⁴⁵ See the translations of Hollander and De Jonge (1985) and De Jonge (1984). Kugler (2001) also prefers chastity.

⁴⁶ Kee understands the ethics (i.e. the 'law') of *The Testaments* to be stoic in nature (Kee 1978), possibly leading to his choice in translating σωφροσύνη as self-control. This suggestion does not seem to have gained much support in the academic debate, which has focussed more on whether the law refers to the Torah or to the double commandment (see De Bruin 2015, 56–63).

⁴⁷ Hollander and De Jonge have pointed out that this is a common phrase for Hellenistic authors to discuss the 'moral ideal of man,' but quickly note that the usage is 'thoroughly

Jewish or Christian and is in line with Jewish wisdom literature' (1985, 413).

⁴⁸ See Wilson for importance of penetration in Greco-Roman hegemonic masculinity (2015, 59–68).

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