

Reconsidering Aegeates' Characterization in the *Acts of Andrew*: Sympathy  
for a Rejected Lover?

The *Acts of Andrew* is one of the five major Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. Likely composed sometime between the mid-second and mid-third centuries CE, the AA focuses on the success of the apostle Andrew in converting the household members of the proconsul Aegeates to the Christian faith. As a result, Aegeates is alienated from his wife (Maximilla), who thenceforth refuses to have any physical relations with him.

The AA has been studied by scholars of religion (e.g. Bovon 1994) with a focus on theological issues, and by literary scholars (e.g. Schroeder 2000) in the ongoing comparative analysis between Christian and pagan novels. With the exception of Spittler (2013), however, no scholar has undertaken an independent analysis of the AA with the goal of highlighting its literary and narrative qualities. My paper bridges this gap by examining the characterization of Aegeates.

In my paper, I argue that Aegeates' characterization in the AA represents a complex and polyphonic construction. In my approach to characterization I follow De Temmerman (2018), paying close attention to both focalization and the reader's sympathy. For this latter issue, I adopt the recent cognitive approach to immersion, which refers to the reader's mental state of being absorbed in the narrative world, such that she may experience it as if it were the actual world (Ryan 2001). As recently argued by Allan (2018), narrative texts promote immersion if they display verisimilitude, internal focalization, and transparency. Through this immersion, it becomes possible for the reader to experience sympathy with the character.

In the first section of my paper, I discuss Aegeates' characterization and his three main portraits in the AA. First, I demonstrate how throughout the narrative Aegeates' characterization

is often negative: in the eyes of both the narrator and the Christian characters, he is a blasphemer (Αἰγεάτης βλασφημώτατος), a threat, a sexual predator, a ‘savage lion’ (λέοντος ἡγριωμένου), and someone akin to the serpent (4, 6, 13, 14, 16). In short, he is an enemy of the Christians (cf. Pesthy 2000). In addition, Aegeates is characterized as one who is beast-like and lacks control over his appetites (e.g. 13). Finally, Aegeates is characterized as a lover who remains oblivious to the true nature of his beloved’s conversion.

In the second section of my paper, I argue that within the narrative of AA these three portraits elicit a variety of reader-responses towards Aegeates. Aegeates the enemy elicits fear (e.g. 13) and hostility (e.g. 16). The appetitive and beastlike Aegeates elicits irony, which both reinforces the reader’s antagonistic stance towards him and simultaneously makes the text more enjoyable to read. Finally, Aegeates the ‘oblivious lover’ can elicit the reader’s sympathy, as we see in the immersive narration of Aegeates’ response to his wife after he attempts to embrace her and being rejected (14). This passage is focalized through Aegeates himself, and the verisimilitude of the scene is particularly striking (see the focus on concrete, physical objects – τὴν ἐνόδιον ἐσθῆτα – and multiple verbs of motion – ἀποδυσάμενος, κατακλιθεῖς). I argue that the immersive quality of this narrative potentially enables the audience to identify and feel empathy with this rejected lover.

In the conclusion, I consider this multiplicity of responses elicited by Aegeates’ characterization in light of past scholarly attempts to reconstruct the authorship and earliest audience(s) of the AA. While hostility towards the “pagan” Aegeates and his desire for love may make more sense as a reader-response elicited by this early Christian text, my reading of the AA – which argues for a sympathetic view of Aegeates – corroborates Bovon’s and Junod’s perception of the *Apocryphal Acts* as “too equivocal to have been created by militant [e.g.

Encratite] communities” (Bovon and Junod 1986, 164). In highlighting this complexity of reader-responses, my paper challenges the scholarly perception of a rigid dichotomy established in the *Apocryphal Acts* between “pagan” physical love and Christian chastity. As a result, my study will demonstrate how offering an individual literary analysis of a Christian text may introduce a new way of comparing such texts with their pagan counterparts.

### Bibliography

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