

# Handbook for william

Family



English paper Handbook for William Dhouda, a Frankish mother, was separated from her son when he was still an adolescent. Her love and concern for the well-being of her son, William, led her to create a manual for him that described the proper ways in which a respected man would live his life. This manual, Handbook for William, is the only substantial text written by a woman that survived the Carolingian period. Although her writings are precious, offering a view of the intellectual and spiritual life during this period, her writing style has been censured, “ Modern authorities have criticized its lack of organization and of a clear plan”(Marchand, 4). Although her work has been labeled as having no direction, I disagree with this claim. Contrary to these assertions, her education and style demonstrate an organized and deliberate approach to the construction of her handbook. Dhouda is unique because she is an educated woman writer among the laity, she was not a cleric, rather a married woman which gave insight to that particular perspective. Dhouda was born in 804 CE into a prestigious Carolingian family. Her mother was the daughter of the Count of Aragon and her father was prince of Gascony. In 824 she was married to Bernhard of Septimania and gave birth to her first son, William, two years later. In 841 her second son was born, Bernhard, named after his father. However, she was not aware of her second son's name until two years after his birth because before he was baptized, along with William, he was taken from her. Dhouda's husband Bernard, Count of Septimania, had been hired by Louis the Pious to defend him against his greedy sons, Lothar, Louis the German, and Charles the Bald. When Louis the Pious died in 840 his three sons battled over their father's territories and Bernard desperately tried to secure his position amongst the Carolingian heirs. He accepted the authority of Charles

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the Bald, but was required to call on his son William to accompany him, as a hostage, against Bernhards betrayal of Charles. Dhoua's baby, Bernard, was stripped from her because Bernhard wanted one of his sons to be, safely, in his immediate presence. It was the separation from her sons that inspired Dhoua to begin writing a handbook that would instruct her sons, particularly William, on ones relationship with God and appropriate moral behavior according to God. Dhoua began writing her handbook in 841 and sent it to William in 843. Dhoua's unique writing style used to relay her teachings has been used as evidence for a lack of clarity and of a clear plan, however, her various writing styles and techniques do not complicate the handbook, but rather complete it. Her writing style effectively serves her purpose; to communicate to her son her advice and its urgency. Dhoua refers to the different writing styles used and states that they were intended as part of her plan, " From the beginning of this book to the end, both in form and content, in the meter of rhythm of the poetry as well as in the prose passages here-know that everything, through it all, in it all, is intended entirely for you, for the health and soul of your body"(Dhoua, 2). The first part of her text is a well- constructed introduction to the rest of the work. Firstly, she offers an etymology to the word manualis. Dhoua was very fond of etymologies, thus it was very fitting her knowledge on the subject would be included in the book. Dhoua used the etymology to provide further understanding of her objectives, " Manus , ' hand' as in manual means many things-sometimes the power of God, sometimes the might of the son, and sometimes even the son himself"(Dhoua, 1). This etymology sets the tone for the manual, describing that by manus meaning the power of God, it is apparent that he should provide the path and guidance for William. Also, to <https://assignbuster.com/handbook-for-william/>

have mention of etymologies, not only shows her intellect, but it also allows the reader to understand that this is an instructional text. It is not simply to be read, but studied and applied. She starts of her instructional manual by teaching the etymology of the word manual itself. This demonstrates a “clear plan” in preparing the text. Following the lesson on etymology Dhouda uses an acrostichon, a poem in which the first letters of each couplet form a word. The acrostic was, as stated by Carol Neel, translator of Handbook for William, “a fashionable form among Carolingian poets” further signifying her intellect. Her acrostichon not only demonstrates her fondness for unique writing style, but also demonstrate the subjective nature of the text. Her acrostichon spells, “Dhouda, to her beloved son William, greetings. Read!” This is blatantly claiming her plan for the piece. It is a manual written for the purpose of educating her beloved son, William, who has been taken from her. The acrostichon not only describes the purpose for the manual, but it simultaneously demonstrates the nature of the text that follows. She spells out her plan by stating in her poem that all the reader has to do to realize the meaning of the piece is read the acrostichon, “Reader if you wish to know the formula, scrutinize the first letters of the verses. Easily you will be able to find out the meaning of what I have written”(Dhouda, 5).

Subsequently she says that her verses are complete and now she can write the work, “undertaken for my son” (Dhouda, 6). She is demonstrating through her skillful knowledge on word play, the main theme of the books; that God is good and to be a good man one must follow him entirely. The subject of the poem is Dhouda asking help from God, begging for his help and guidance in writing for her son using a humility formula. For instance in the prologue she states, “things that are obvious to many people often

escape me, " this may appear as evidence that she is less knowledgeable, however, it proves otherwise (Dhouda, 5). The humility formula was commonly used by pious women to acknowledge that God has served them and assisted in their writing. Presenting the notion that God has assisted in her writing provides a spiritual uplift in the reader. To demonstrate the importance of God in one's life is the key message in the piece, so by using the humility formula she is indicating the goal of the manual. She also thanks God for his blessings, " I offer great thanks to you, the Creator. " The unique styles used by Dhouda do not make the handbook unclear, but rather verify her messages Dhouda then more clearly states the purpose for the books, taking what she has written in the poem and making the construction even more obvious. In this prologue she states to whom the manual is intended and its purpose, Having noticed that most women in the world are able to live with and enjoy their children, but seeing myself, Dhouda, living far away from you my dear son William, filled with anxiety because of this, and with the desire to be of aid to you, I am sending you this little manual, written by me, for your scrutiny and education, rejoicing in the fact that, though I am absent in body, this little book will recall to your mind, as you read it, the things you are required to do for my sake"(Dhouda, 2). She is deliberately setting up the stage for her text, which would demonstrate that she had a clear plan in the manner of how she would execute it and the subject matter. The last section of the extensive introduction, the preface, describes the historical context in which the handbook was written. This preface is crucial to understanding the meaning behind the text, it describes her family history, why her sons were taken from her and the absence of her husband. All of this information is crucial to understanding the significance of the text.

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If Dhoua was lacking order then she would not necessarily put in information that her son may know, however, she wanted the handbook to be well constructed and allow the historical context to set the tone for the piece. After organizing the introduction to allow the reader to know the reason for the text and what the handbook will entail, she starts the body of the manual. The body also explicitly demonstrates that she has direction in writing the piece. She is writing this piece for the purpose of instructing her son, she could have simply written a long passage with no direction, yet she chose to organize her message into eleven chapters. These books follow one another loosely, but are logically connected. The books are as follows, Book 1: loving God, Book 2: The mystery of the Trinity, Book 3: Social order and secular success, Book 4: Moral life, Book 5: God's chastisement of those he loves, Book 6: The Usefulness of the beatitudes, Book 7: The deaths of the body and the spirit, Book 8: How to pray and for whom, Book 9: Interpreting numbers, Book 10: Summary of the works major points and more on the author and Book 11: the usefulness of reciting psalms. All of the books are cohesive with the purpose of the text and are in an order that presents itself as meaningful. In books 1 and 2 she instructs her sons on the basics of religion and living a religious life. Then, in books 3 and 4, she advises on the proper ways to live a secular life. In books 5 through 9 she describes and demonstrates how certain practices, such as respecting priests and being kind to all, can aid in the development of a pure soul and can help eliminate secular evils. Dhoua demonstrates her intended cohesiveness by creating a summary of the messages and instructions presented in the previous books. Her message is clearly stated with ordered books all focused on the central idea that all right social behavior is modeled on worship of God. She

implored that her sons put God first and become learned in his way. Through her instruction she specifically addresses social order, how to worship God, and the connection between military and social responsibility. All of these themes are cohesive with her objective; thus demonstrating a concise plan. To clearly state her message, Dhouda's first chapter is labeled Loving God. This is Dhouda's primary message throughout the text and she states it clearly up front. Book 1 is devoted to God and worshipping him. She reminds her son that God is everywhere and that his life must be dedicated to finding God, whether it be through self-reflection or reading other texts. She encourages William to read other texts, yet makes it clear he should not cease reading the manual. Dhouda is often criticized for not quoting her references. Pierre Riche, who translated the handbook in 1975, examined that she "quoted loosely and often from memory." It is this style from which she receives some of her greatest and most common critique and alludes scholars to conclude that she is indirect and that her work is unclear. However, it is important to note that Dhouda is not writing a literary piece to be critiqued by scholars and intellectuals, rather a book of maternal advice for the son she has been deprived from. The point of her book is clear, which makes her a good, clear writer. Dhouda's work has also been labeled allusive, "Dhouda's style is so allusive and packed with quotations that it is difficult to find her sources" (Marchand, 4). The quotations and references she uses are all beneficial to supporting her arguments and teaching her son. Also, when she does have knowledge of the quotation, she does reference it, "As Solomon says, 'Give, Lord, because I have given. Take pity, because I have taken pity. Importantly, she does not claim work and quotes as her own, if she does not know the speaker she will say otherwise "as scripture says" or <https://assignbuster.com/handbook-for-william/>

“ as a wise writer stated”(Dhoua, 28, 34). Although, she cannot be completely accurate on the origins of her messages she admits they are not her own and gives as much credit as she is capable. Her mission is not to write for other intellectuals; rather her son and she will not disregard an important message because she cannot recall its source. Numerous times in the book she proudly asserts that she has borrowed from books that will be most useful to her sons learning. Her audience is her son William, she even states that she would have written a different manual if her were older, “ And if in twice as many years and half again, I were to see your image, I would write to you of more difficult things, and in more words”(Dhoua, 95). Her knowledge of texts demonstrates that she was an erudite lay woman. She quotes from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Psalms, 8th and 9th century academic writers, and commonly refers to scriptural records of David, the king of Israel, who she believes is the author of them all. She admits to borrowed advice, but the handbook is emphatically her own. Carolingian women had an essential role in moral and religious education and she is filling her role as an educator. Dhoua’s writing style has been criticized as, “ inept; her text is often rambling”(Dhoua, XXVI). The clarity of her prose would demonstrate otherwise. The main purpose for the handbook is to provide guidance for her son, William, and to aid him in finding salvation, “ So I send you this little work written down in my name, that you may read it for your education”(Dhoua, 2). She accomplishes this task by making it extremely clear what William should do and the path he should take. To explicitly demonstrate her instructions she commonly gives instruction, she supports the instruction either by quotes of intellectuals of the day or by scripture, and then she gives reason for that instruction. For <https://assignbuster.com/handbook-for-william/>



instance, on matters of social order and serving his lord, Charles the Bald, she describes why he should serve him, “ Serve him not only so that you please him in obvious ways, but also as one clearheaded in matters of body and soul. Be steadfast and completely loyal to him in all things”(Neel, 26). Here she educates her son on social order and responsibility and then she supports her direction by using an example from the bible, “ Think on that excellent servant of the patriarch Abraham. He traveled a great distance to bring back a wife for his masters son. Because of the confidence of him who gave him the command and the wise trustworthiness of him who followed it, the task was fulfilled”(Neel, 26). After referencing the bible Dhouda again supports her claim by giving reason for its importance, For we know that, as the scripture tells, all honor and authority are given by God. Therefore we should serve our lords faithfully, without ill will, without reluctance, and without sluggishness”(Neel, 26). Her explicit instructions and support demonstrate that she is not allusive and indirect, as she has been named. In this book she uses other examples from the histories of Kings to describe social order. Dhouda is aware of her obvious audience and creates the handbook to be a detailed description for them. She speaks to William, knowing his intellectual and educational capabilities and uses examples to secure her point. Furthermore, she describes reason for her instruction; she does not simply tell her son what to do, but tells him why. She clearly wants her son to learn from this manual, thus writes it clearly and concisely. Critics of Dhouda have called her writing “ allusive, ” “ lacking a clear plan, ” and “ hard to follow” it is evident in reading Handbook for William that this is not the case. All of her unique writing styles, such as using acrostichon and etymology, further the understanding of the manual. They do not show that <https://assignbuster.com/handbook-for-william/>

she is allusive, rather she is an educated lay woman who conveys her method through both “ form and content. ” The order of the books and the labeling of them also proves that she had direction when writing for her son. Dhouda preparatory matter sets the tone and the body content is strong with instruction, support for her claims, and reason on why William should follow her advice. Although she has quoted all of her sources this book was created for teaching her son, not citing her knowledge, and her sources proficiently serve that intent. Dhouda’s objective is clear throughout the text, she is writing for her son, which she eludes to repeatedly, “ William, to you now is my manual’s word addressed. ” Unfortunately, although the handbook was well constructed and the message was clear it did not translate into Williams life. The book’s intent failed when her husband, Bernhard, was killed and William was killed in attempt to avenge his father; not considering the wise advice of his mother.

Works Cited  
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