Late antique techniques of apocryphization

The case of the agony of Christ

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"Stories people want" – this is how Averil Cameron has once described the immense corpus of apocryphal dialogues, stories and narratives.[1] Her definition neatly captures one of the most important aspects of this literature: its popularity and wide-reaching pervasiveness. Apart from this apt description of only one of its many angles, the literary features of these texts have continued to puzzle scholars for centuries. Since the publication of the first scholarly collection of pseudo-biblical texts by Johann Albert Fabricius in 1703, theologians, biblical scholars, literary and art historians have constantly been struggling to find suitable definitions to describe what the term "apocryphal" means and in what exactly the "apocryphicity" of these texts may stand. Setting aside Fabricius' inherent theological understanding of the term "apocryphal" as "heretic" or "doctrinally suspicious", however, has led to a scholarly dead end: twentieth-century reinterpretations of "apocryphicity" are usually criticized either as too narrow and oversimplifying or as too broad and expansive.[2]

The traditional view by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, which is still one of the most widespread opinions about apocryphal texts, restricts the use of the term to the second- to fourth-century texts that were either rejected or simply left out from the biblical canon and "became apocryphal".[3] A different approach, outlined by Eric Junod and subsequent French scholarship, labels all "texts that preserve traditions concerning Biblical persons and events and represent different genres, epochs and provenance and are preserved in a great number of manuscripts and in different languages" as "apocryphal".[4] In contrast to Schneemelcher's restrictive approach, Junod expands the

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[1] Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 89.

[2] For the long and controversial history of the research on apocrypha, see Tóth, "Way Out of the Tunnel".

[3] Cf. his definition of the corpus in the introduction to the 1959 edition of Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 6: "writings which have not been received into the canon, but which by title and other statements lay claim to be in class with the writings of the canon, and which from the point of view of Form Criticism further develop and mould the kinds of style created and received in the New Testament, whilst foreign elements certainly intrude." For "apokryph gewordene" documents, see the study by Lührmann, *Die apokryph gewordenen Evangelien*.

[4] *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, p. XX: "ce sont des textes qui ont consigné des traditions mémoriales concernant des personnages ou des évenements bibliques, des figures du christianisme ou de la tradition juive,... écrits de genres variés, d'époques et de

notion of the apocrypha into such a large category that includes the second-century Gnostic gospels as well as Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* and becomes so wide that it is practically dysfunctional.

Recent scholarship is, therefore, more inclined to acknowledge that providing a scholarly definition, which can cover all aspects and layers of the immense body of the so-called "apocryphal literature", may not even be possible.[5] Later attempts to tackle the problem of apocyrpha "approach the question from a more practical point of view. Instead of experimenting with new general definitions, scholars tend to explore the intimate relationship between biblical scenes and their apocryphal reflections. Investigating in what ways apocryphal dialogues and narratives elaborate on biblical scenarios, they are trying to find suitable models to describe the process whereby specific authorial intentions are encoded in rewritten versions of biblical scenes, dialogues and narratives.

The crucial importance of this process for the study of apocryphal literature is best illustrated by a 2013 collection of essays on the apocryphal gospels.[6] Many of the authors in this volume directly or indirectly target the same problem: how best to describe the literary process that gives birth to apocryphal or pseudo-biblical dialogues and narratives. Many essays present new terms to achieve this, such as "rewriting" (p. 168), "extension and retelling" (*Weiterführung oder Neu-Erzählung* p. 165), "post-script" (*Nachschrift* p. 195), "beneficial tale" (*légendes profitable à l'âme* p. 270), "sub-canonicity" (p. 280), "historical encomium" (p. 270), "narrative theology" (p. 297), "midrashic" (*procédés typiques du midrach* p. 446) or "haggadic" (*christliche haggadische Freiheit* p. 195) compilation, "extension and enrichment" (*Weiterentwicklungen und Ausgestaltungen* p. 306), "erotapokritic teaching" (p. 335) or "re-elaboration and reformulation" (p. 637). This striking diversity of the terms to describe how and why new alternative biblical dialogues and scenes are created shows not only the central role that the understanding of this literary process is to play in studying the apocrypha, but also the elusive nature of its definitions.

In what follows, therefore, I will take a different approach to understand this phenomenon. Instead of experimenting with postmodern literary interpretations, I will examine pseudo-biblical dialogues from the perspective of Late Antique literature and exegesis. For a better understanding of how the authors themselves may have regarded their techniques of constructing pseudo-biblical dialogues and scenes, I will explore

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provenance diverses, conservés dans de nombreux manuscrits,... en toutes sortes de langues".

[5] Klijn, "Review", 305: "It appears impossible, to give a definition of these writings. They have come together as a result of an historical development". And later Thomasson, "Orthodoksi og heterodoksi", 49: "to give a historically useful and generically suitable definition of 'New testament Apocrypha' remains a hopeful quest for a Chimaera, sort of Tulip-Rose" or more recently by Schröter, "Die apokryphen Evangelien", 63: "den Begriff gattungsgeschichtlich und inhaltlich offen zu halten".

[6] Schröter, *Apocryphal Gospels*.

how dramatic and dialogic details appear in Greek, Latin and Coptic texts of the fifth–seventh centuries. I will collect theoretical and/or methodological clues that can help explain how pseudo-biblical dialogues are viewed and described in their own contexts and contrast this evidence to contemporary literary scholarship. As a systematic survey of this material is beyond the framework of the present essay, I will focus on one case study: I will examine the way in which the exegesis of one of the most debated and controversial biblical scenes, the agony of Christ in the garden, was developed from formal commentaries into pseudo-biblical dialogues.

The exegesis of Christ's agony

The exegetical puzzle of Christ's agony

Depicting the Savior's utmost human distress, the Agony scene of the synoptic gospels (Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:39–46) has always been in the centre of fierce theological debates. It was a laughing stock for pagan intellectuals who regarded it as a ridiculous representation of the God of the Christians who is unable to bear misfortunes with endurance.[7] But it must have puzzled Christians alike who, in fear that it was a heretical insertion to discredit Christ's divinity, deleted the scene of Christ's angelic consolation from a number of ancient copies of Luke's gospel (Lk 22:43).[8] Their fears were justified: Christ's agony in Gethsemane was frequently used as proof against Christ's divine nature not only by pagans, but also in many Christological controversies.[9] It was one of the core arguments of Arian,[10] Apollinarian[11] and

[7] See the objections by Celsus recorded in Origen's *Contra Celsum* (II. 24) and the fierce pamphlet by the Emperor Julian in his *Against the Galileans* (fragm. 95) where he writes "Jesus prays in such language as would be used by a pitiful wretch who cannot bear misfortune with serenity" (Masaracchia, *Giuliano Imperatore*, 186). Cf. Baarda,"The Emperor Julian".

[8] Epiphanius in his *Ancoratus* (32, 4) together with Hilary of Poitiers (PL 10, col. 375: *et in Graecis et in Latinis codicibus complurimis, vel de adveniente angelo, vel de sudore sanguinis nil scriptum reperiri*) and Jerome (PL 23, col. 552) speaks about truncated exemplars of Luke's gospel from which this detail has been excised.

[9] For an overview of the early exegesis of the scene, see Steiner, *La tentation de Jésus*.

[10] Cf. the quotation of the Arians' objection in Athanasius of Alexandria, *III. Discourse Against Arians*, §26 (PG 26, col. 377): "How can He be the natural and true Power of the Father, who near upon the season of the passion says 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me…'"

[11] Cf. Anastasius of Sinai: Uthemann, *Anastasii Sinaitae Sermones*, 87.

Eunomian[12] ideas in the fourth century, and it played a crucial role in the monothelite debates of the seventh century, too.[13]

In order to face these severe theological challenges embedded in the Gethsemane scene, patristic exegesis was to provide a clear-cut explanation of how Christ, having a divine nature consubstantial with the Father, could experience such a deep human anguish and how this all would relate to his divinity.

Origen was one of the first exegetes who tackled this problem and provided an elaborate exegesis of the passage when, responding to Celsus' attack against the gospels, he writes as follows:

> Now in this instance he [Christ] is speaking in his humanity both of the weakness of the human flesh and the willingness of the spirit. He refers to the weakness in the words "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me", and to the willingness of the spirit in "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt".[14]

Here, he argues, therefore, that the two parts of Christ's prayer ("let this chalice pass from me" and "may your will be done" (Mt 26:39)) refer to his twofold nature. "The element of weakness expressed in the first part belongs to his human flesh", while the words of obedience are those of the Spirit indwelling him. This interpretation, to take Christ's agony as a proof of his dual nature, permeates the entire patristic exegesis of the scene. The agony of Christ, together with his angelic consolation and sweat of blood, is usually interpreted as evidence of the reality of Christ's human nature that he took on with all its weaknesses, including pain, sorrow and terror.

Special explications – the chalice

Apart from this standard "dualistic" interpretation, however, there exist a number of peculiar explanations of this scene which play an important role in the afterlife and dialogization of the exegesis of Christ's agony. Such an alternative, but presumably also very early exegetical tradition is recorded also in Origen's *Contra Celsum*. Soon after presenting the traditional interpretation of Christ's Gethsemane prayer, he records another tradition:

> I am aware that there is also an explanation of the passage to this effect: the Saviour saw what disasters would befall the people and Jerusalem to avenge the acts which the Jews had dared to commit against him, and it was simply

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[12] Cf. Basil, *Against Eunomius*, PG 29, col. 697.

[13] Cf. John of Damascus, *On the Two Wills in Christ* § 38 and 41, PG 95, col. 180.

[14] Origen, *Contra Celsum* II, 25: "Καὶ ἐνθάδε τοίνυν διαγράφει ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης σαρκὸς ἀσθενὲς καὶ τὸ τοῦ πνεύματος πρόθυμον, τὸ μὲν ἀσθενὲς ἐν τῷ 'Πάτερ, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι, παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο', τὸ δὲ πρόθυμον τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ 'Πλὴν οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω, ἀλλ' ὡς σύ'" (Borret, *Contre Celse*, 352). English translation by Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, 89.

> because of his love to them, and because he did not want the people to suffer what they were to suffer, that he said: “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”.[15]

According, to this “other explanation”, then, the real meaning of Christ’s prayer in the garden was not his fear or human terror, but rather his compassion towards the Jews, as he did not want to be killed by his Chosen People, but by someone else in order to save Israel from the upcoming punishment for his crucifixion.

The devil

Another, probably equally early, explication of this scene was that Christ’s agony in the garden was nothing but a carefully prepared bait. It was designed to deceive the devil and make him believe that Christ was just an ordinary human being whom he could easily ensnare and destroy. In this exegesis, therefore, the scandalizing scene of the agony was a trap to ensure Satan would readily go on plotting Christ’s salvific death and thereby prepare his own destruction and the salvation of the world. This interpretation of Christ’s agony as a cunning trick to beguile the devil was probably also an early tradition: it is already mentioned by Origen in the third and Athanasius in the fourth century as a tradition they reject.[16] At the end of the fifth century, however, it turns up in full positive light in Pseudo-Didymus, who gives its full presentation in his *De Trinitate* as follows.

> The following special interpretation of the prayer “let this cup pass from me” is also very probable. As the Saviour knew that the devil trembles and escapes, if he declares himself God, but approaches him, if he speaks humanly, he puts up the dread of death, so that the devil, thinking him to be only a man and not God, attacks him and prepares his crucifixion.[17]

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[15] Origen, *Contra Celsum* II, 25: “Οἶδα δέ τινα καὶ τοιαύτην εἰς τὸν τόπον διήγησιν, ὅτι ὁρῶν ὁ σωτὴρ οἷα ὁ λαὸς καὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ πείσεται ἐπὶ τῇ ἐκδικήσει τῶν κατ’αὐτοῦ τετολμημένων ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων, οὐ δι’ ἄλλο τι ἢ διὰ τὸ πρὸς ἐκείνους φιλάνθρωπον θέλων μὴ παθεῖν τὸν λαὸν ἃ ἔμελλε πάσχειν φησὶ τὸ ‘Πάτερ, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι, παρελθέτω ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο’” (Borret, *Contre Celse*, 354). English translation by Chadwick, *Origen*, 90.

[16] Cf. Origen, *Fragments on the Psalms* (Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, 86), and Athanasius of Alexandria, *Expositions on the Psalms* (PG 27, col. 309), who both dismiss it as an incorrect interpretation (“οὐκ ἐν ὑποκρίσει, οὐκ ἐπὶ τὸ δελεάσαι τὸν Σατανᾶν”). For a detailed discussion of the origin and theological importance of the idea of the devil’s deception, see Constas, “The Last Temptation of Satan”, who does not mention this exegesis of the Gethsemane prayer.

[17] Pseudo-Didymus, *On Trinity* III. (PG 39, col. 908): “Καὶ οὕτω δὲ νοῆσαι τὸ, «Παρελθέτω τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο,» οὐκ ἔξω ἀληθείας ἐστίν. Ἐπειδὴ ἑώρα τὸν διάβολον, φρίττοντα μὲν καὶ ἀποφεύγοντα, ἡνίκα ἑαυτὸν ὁ Σωτὴρ Θεὸν διὰ τῶν θαυμάτων ἐπεδείκνυεν· προσερχόμενον δὲ, ὅτε ἀνθρωπότητος ἴδια ἐφθέγγετο· τὴν παροῦσαν αὐτῷ δειλίαν θανάτου ὑπέφηνεν «ὁ δρασσόμενος τοὺς σοφοὺς ἐν τῇ πανουργίᾳ αὐτῶν,» ἵνα

The angel

Besides the "Judaic" and "diabolic" interpretation of Christ's agony, there exists a third special explanation of the scene that focuses on the angelic consolation of Christ recorded only in Luke's gospel (Lk 22:43). It was probably the late-fourth-century Epiphanius of Salamis who first discovered that the Greek verb *strengthen* (ἐνισχύειν) used in Luke's gospel for the angelic consolation is exactly the same as the one employed in the Septuagint (Deut. 32:44) to describe how the angels glorify God.[18] Using this observation, Epiphanius interpreted the verb ἐνισχύειν not as consolation but as "to give somebody the power that suits him"[19] or "to confess him through the acknowledgment of his strength".[20]

> Consequently, – writes Epiphanius – the angel came to Christ not to "strengthen" him, in the ordinary sense of the word, but – according to its biblical meaning – "to give him glory", because he did not need the strengthening of the angels. They strengthen him in the sense that they confess him through acknowledging to him his attribute of strength."[21]

καθὰ ἤδη πειρᾶσαι τολμήσας, τῆς τε ἐλπίδος ἐκτὸς, καὶ ἄτιμος, καὶ καταγέλαστος ὑπενόστησεν· οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἄνθρωπον ψιλὸν πάλιν νομίσας εἶναι, καὶ οὐ Θεὸν, ὡς οἶδεν φανέντα σαρκὶ, ὀξυδρομήσας προέλθῃ καὶ ὑποβάλῃ αὐτὸν σταυρωθῆναι." The work has recently been re-attributed and re-dated, either to Pseudo- Dionysius the Areopagite (Perczel,"The Pseudo-Didymian De Trinitate") or to the newly discovered sixth-century Cassian the Sabaite (Tzamalikos, *A Newly Discovered Greek Father*, 441–620).

[18] As Epiphanius writes: "Behold, we have found the application of the passage by Moses when he says: Let all the sons of God worship him (προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ), and all the angels of God prevail for him (ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ)". (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69, 62.1: Holl, *Epiphanius*, 210. English translation by Williams, *The Panarion*, 380).

[19] Epiphanius of Salamis, *Ancoratus* 38.5.: "ἐν τούτῳ δείκνυσι τὸ προσκυνεῖν καὶ ἐνισχύειν, τουτέστι διδόναι αὐτῷ τὸ ἴδιον τῆς ἰσχύος κράτος".

[20] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69. 62.1 (Williams, *The Panarion*, 381).

[21] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69. 62.1 "οὐχ ἵνα δῶσιν αὐτῷ ἰσχὺν οἱ ἄγγελοι· οὐ γὰρ ἐπεδέετο τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων ἐνισχύσεως· ἀλλ' ἐνισχύσωσιν αὐτῷ, τουτέστιν ἀποδόντες αὐτῷ τὸ ἴδιον τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ ὁμολογήσωσιν". (Holl, *Epiphanius*, vol. 3, 210). English translation by Williams, *Panarion*, 381.

This innovative explication of the angelic consolation has become very popular in later Greek exegesis. It turns up in a number of later exegetical works,[22] and became one of the most current interpretations of the scene in the East up to the Middle Ages.[23]

Communicating exegesis

The "normal" way

It was with this rich exegetical tradition of Christ's agony and prayer, the standard one about Christ's twofold nature and the three special explanations of the "Judaic", "diabolic" and "angelic" aspects of the scene that the church fathers used to rebut pagans and heretics. Choosing one or sometimes even more of the aforementioned interpretations, they put forward their opinions in an authoritative form by announcing their explications in their own voices, speaking as teachers, preachers or bishops. In a treatise by John Chrysostom, for example, he simply quotes Christ's prayer from the gospel and explains it in the ordinary explicatory manner, mentioning what the words of the scripture mean, express or represent.[24] The clearest example of this "instructive communication" technique is probably preserved in the fifth-century erotapokriseis preserved under the name of Justin the Martyr where the puzzling question of Christ's prayer is discussed in a clear-cut question-and-answer form.

> QUESTION: If every human being, due to the weakness of their nature, needs the support of prayer, why is Christ who, as the Lord having enough power to do anything he wants to, did not have any such weaknesses, said by the Scripture to have been praying? ANSWER: …In order to provide an evidence of his human nature, he obediently took on all the weakness of his nature, so it is for the same reason that he prayed…[25]

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[22] For example, in the work of the late-fourth-century Didymus of Alexandria (*On the Holy Trinity*, PG 39, col. 913), as well as in the work of his contemporary John Chrysostom (*On the Holy Trinity*, PG 48, col. 1092).

[23] Epiphanius' interpretation found its way into exegetical catenae (Cramer, *Catenae*, 159) from where it was widely known in the later Byzantine exegetical tradition too, such as the influential gospel commentary by Theophylactus, Archbishop of Ochrida from the late eleventh century (cf. PG 123, col. 1081).

[24] See his work *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* (PG 48, col. 766A): and 'When he says: Father, let this cup pass from me" and "Not as I will but as you will", he is showing (δείκνυσιν) nothing other than that he is clothed in flesh, and that the flesh fears death. For it is a mark of the flesh that it fears death, shrinks back from it and struggles against it. English translation by Paul Harkins, *John Chrysostom On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* (CUA Press, 1999), 207.

[25] Pseudo-Justin, *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos* Question 106:

The author, replying the question of the anonymous enquirer, presents his traditional "dualistic" explanation of Christ's agony in a very straightforward way. He speaks in his own authoritative voice as a bishop or teacher, the expositor of truth, who not only knows, but bravely expresses the right interpretation of the biblical passage.

A special way

In addition to this simple and common way of conveying biblical interpretation, however, there are some other, much more sophisticated, forms of communicating exegesis that are based on the exegetical technique of paraphrase. Paraphrasing the classics was probably one of the most widespread ways of textual interpretation in Late Antiquity. It was especially favoured in elementary and secondary education where teachers had to deal with students who were still struggling with the polished language of the classics. In order to help their students familiarize themselves with the ancient authors, Late Antique commentators were trying to break down complicated grammatical structures by rewriting and simplifying them in a way that still reflected the grammatical structure of the original. In their simplified versions, they maintained the grammatical subject and sometimes even the word order of the interpreted textual unit and replaced problematic words, verbs and nouns with one or even more simple and modern expressions. This updated and modernized form of the original text, the paraphrase itself, was then appended to the original text, right after the problematic text, preceded by a characteristic introductory phrase: "that is" *hoc est* (τουτέστι) or "so to say" ὡς εἰ ἔλεγεν (*ac si diceret*). These terms have two important characteristics: on the one hand, they ensure that the speaker/subject of the original and the "addition" remains the same, whereas by its standard conditional tense, on the other, it also refers to the hypothetical, that is to say "apocryphal", character of the following interpretation, which, although placed in the mouth of the original speaker, was probably not said by him but appended and attributed to him by the commentator.

There are many examples of the use of this paraphrastic exegetical technique from Late Antiquity, preserved mostly in scholia. In a scholion, added to the very beginning of the *First Olynthiac Speech* of Demosthenes, for example, a pronoun is explained in this paraphrastic way.

> The "you" in the sentence "You, men of Athens, would give a lot of money to know" has a special emphasis here, as if he had said "you, who were not

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"*Ἐρώτησις.* Εἰ πᾶσι μὲν ἀνθρώποις διὰ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τῆς φύσεως ἀναγκαία ἡ διὰ τῆς εὐχῆς ὑπάρχει βοήθεια, ταύτης δὲ οὐ προσέδει τῷ δεσπότῃ Χριστῷ, οἷα δεσπότῃ καὶ ἀρκοῦσαν πρὸς πάντα κεκτημένῳ τὴν δύναμιν διατί… ὑπὸ τῆς γραφῆς τὸν κύριον μανθάνομεν προσευχόμενον; *Ἀπόκρισις* … διὰ δὲ τὸ παρέχειν γνώρισμα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης αὐτοῦ φύσεως ἑκουσίως ὑπέμεινε τὰ τῆς φύσεως αὐτοῦ ἀσθενῆ, οὕτως καὶ τὸ εὔξασθαι διὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰτίαν". (Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Θεοδωρήτου*, 109.)

bought by the money of the Persians, nor by the big promises of the Lacedaemonians".[26]

The emphatic character of the pronoun "you" is explained here by inserting a fictitious addition to Demosthenes' text. The commentary, preceded by the characteristic introduction (ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν), retains the original subject of the sentence, that is Demosthenes himself, and sounds as if the interpretation derived from the speaker, Demosthenes himself. Added to the original text, the newly constructed paraphrastic explanation has apparently provided the author with a new "apocryphal" sentence he had never said before.

The same technique is employed in another scholion added to a passage of the other great Attic orator, Aeschines, whose words are explained in a note as follows:

> "They ordered them to pay the fine at the temple within a stated time" – this is as if he had said "not immediately, but providing them with a little respite, which was again a sign of their benevolence towards sinners".[27] Here, it is the phrase "stated time" (ἐν ῥητῷ χρόνῳ) whose explanation is inserted into the text in the paraphrastic way. Keeping the voice of the original speaker, this time Aeschines, the commentator ascribes him a new, "apocryphal" text, which is nothing else, but a simple paraphrase of a part of the original sentence added by the commentator and introduced by the standard phrase (ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν).

The speaker gains voice – the paraphrase

This widespread late antique exegetical technique, practised all over the schools of the Late Roman Empire, obviously reached Christian exegetes, too. They promptly appropriated and applied it to a number of scriptural passages, including Christ's agony. An illustrative example is preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum* where, right after presenting his special "Judaic" interpretation of the passage, he sums up this explanation of the passage in a paraphrase as follows:

> It [the phrase "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"] is as if he said (ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν): "Since as a consequence of my drinking this cup of punishment a whole nation will be deserted by thee, I pray that, if it be

[26] Scholion to Demosthenes' *First Olynthiac Speech*: "ὑμᾶς ἑλέσθαι νομίζω] ἔμφασιν ἔχει πολλὴν ἡ λέξις τὸ 'ὑμᾶς', ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν· ὑμᾶς οὓς οὐχ εἷλε πλοῦτος ὁ Περσικός, οὐ Λακεδαιμόνιοι μεγάλα ὑπισχνούμενοι". Dilts, *Scholia Demosthenica*, 16.

[27] Scholion on Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* §129 (Adams, *The Speeches of Aeschines*, 409), the scholion is edited by Schutz, *Aeschinis orat,* 338: "ἐν ῥητῷ χρόνῳ] ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν· οὐκ εὐθὺς, ἀλλὰ προθεσμίαν τινὰ αὐτοῖς δόντες, ὅπερ ἦν πάλιν φιλανθρώπως αὐτοῖς χρήσασθαι".

> possible, this cup may pass from me, that thy portion which has dared to attack me may not be utterly deserted by thee".[28]

Similarly to late antique commentators of the Classics, Origen inserts his commentary into the text by the characteristic introductory phrase of the paraphrase. Thereby he gives a new, "interpretative" voice to Christ who, just like Demosthenes or Aeschines in the scholia, starts to speak unwritten, extra-canonical words that actually reflect Origen's own views on the text.

The speaker starts to speak – ethopoeia

Sometimes commentators go beyond this simple paraphrastic technique and insert their paraphrases by changing the grammatical structure of the original text and include their interpretations in the form of a speech in first-person singular. In a scholion added to a speech of the second-century Greek rhetorician, Aelius Aristides, for example, the commentator added a whole little speech to a simple description. Mentioning the wanderings of Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis, to escape Hera's rage, Aristides describes how Leto wanted to take refuge on some islands that eventually refused to accept her. In order to illustrate Leto's despair in her exile, the commentary adds a short note to Aristides' descriptive text in the form of a little speech, in which Leto addresses the inhospitable islands.

> Leto was walking ever to the East from the tip of Attica boarding the islands and stopped at "Delus to give birth to Artemis and Athena there" – as if she had said "O, islands of misfortune, who became misfortuned and deprived of the birth of the gods", because he [Aelius Aristides] also argues that Delus, after accepting Leto to give birth to the gods, has stopped wandering in the sea.[29]

Leto's short address to the islands is not a simple interpretative addition accommodated to the original style and tone of its context, as the notes attached to the speeches of Demosthenes and Aeschines were, but a whole new literary creation. In order to explain in what state of mind Leto may have arrived in her final destination at Delus, the commentator has decided to change the original narrative tone in his paraphrase. He formulated his explanation in direct speech, which he ascribed to Leto, the otherwise mute character of the original text providing her with a new, "apocryphal" speech, an

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[28] Origen, *Contra Celsus*, II. 25: "'Πάτερ, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι, παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο'· ὡς εἰ ἔλεγεν· ἐπεὶ ἐκ τοῦ με πιεῖν τουτὶ τὸ τῆς κολάσεως ποτήριον ὅλον ἔθνος ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐγκαταλειφθήσεται, εὔχομαι, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι, παρελθεῖν 'ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο', ἵνα μὴ ἡ μερίς σου τολμήσασα κατ' ἐμοῦ πάντῃ ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐγκαταλειφθῇ" (Borret, *Contre Celse*, 354). English translation by Chadwick, *Origen*, 90.

[29] Scholion on Aelius Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* §13 (Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides*, 1986), 8. The scholion was published by Dindorff, *Aristides*, 120: "ἐπιβᾶσα τῶν νήσων] ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν, 'ὦ νῆσος ἀτυχὴς καὶ τόκον τῶν θεῶν ἀτυχήσασα', φησὶ δὲ τὴν Δῆλον πλανωμένην τέως ἀπὸ τοῦ τόκου Λητοῦς ῥιζωθεῖσαν στῆναι".

ethopoeia that was not part of the interpreted original.[30] The use of ethopoeia, a fictitious speech of a character, to describe the speakers' particular state of mind, motives and reasons in explaining a text, was a widespread interpretative method in Late Antiquity, applied by students,[31] teachers[32] and experienced orators alike.[33] An excellent example of such an exegetical ethopoeia is preserved in a third-century schoolbook where the famous speech of Chryses in Homer's Iliad is paraphrased and expanded into a long and highly emotional speech embedded into an exegetical paraphrase of that portion of the poem.[34]

This exegetical use of ethopoeia, together with the paraphrase, was part of late antique school curriculum through which it reached Christian intellectuals alike.[35]It may not come as a surprise, therefore, that it has been readily accommodated to the exegesis of Christ's agony, too. In order to elucidate his own interpretation of the angelic consolation of Christ as a doxology, Epiphanius of Salamis attributes a little ethopoeia to the angel of Gethsemane to describe what this curious glorification may have sounded like.

> In his overwhelming amazement, the angel addressed him with a doxology and bowed down before him saying: "Yours is the power, oh Lord, because you

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[30] For the ethopoeia, see Naschert, "Ethopoeia" and the detailed discussion of the ancient definitions by Ventrella, "L'etopea".

[31] As, e.g., in a papyrus from Oxyrrhynchus (Parsons, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 13) where *Iliad* I, 207–14 is paraphrased, presumably by a student.

[32] The most popular paraphrastic exercise in teaching – as indicated by school papyri – was the emotional retelling of the farewell of Hector and Andromache (*Iliad* VI, 387–410), see Körte, "Literarische Texte", 121. nr. 900–901.

[33] One of the most renowned experts of paraphrase in Late Antiquity was the latefourth-century orator Sopatros, who compiled a whole range of paraphrases of Homer and Demosthenes and published it under the title *Transcriptions* (*Metapoieseis*). Among the fragments of this work, there is an example of how to retell a Homeric episode in the form of an ethopoeia, see Glöckner, "Aus Sopatros", 510, lines 27–30.

[34] Cf. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Greek Inscription 3019, 1b, published by Parsons, "A School-Book" where Chryses' original words (Iliad I, 16–18: "may the gods… grant that you sack the city of Priam, and return safe to your homes") are paraphrased as "that you occupy Troy and destroy the Priamids and return to your homeland with all the spoils of your victory. I am ready to pray for this so that Apollo may approve it and, in return of my prayer, I only ask you to give me back my only-begotten daughter whom you captivated in the battle".

[35] For Christian appropriation of the ethopoeia, see Kecskeméti, "Exégèse Chrysostomienne"; Kecskeméti, "Doctrine et drame"; Kecskeméti, "Deux caractéristiques"; and Tóth, "Speaking Quotations".

> have power against death, against the netherworld, against the devil to destroy its sting and deprive him of his possession of humankind".[36]

The fictitious words of the angel in Epiphanius, introduced by a shortened version of the paraphrastic introduction, make it clear that the angel's "apocryphal" speech in *Ancoratus* is nothing but an illustration of Epiphanius' own exegesis of the word "strengthen" as "glorification". It is an "exegetical ethopoeia" to convey the correct explication that what the angel actually expressed with his visit was not his intention "to help" Christ but to praise his "utmost compassion".

Another example of the application of the ethopoeia for the interpretation of Christ's agony is preserved in a homily by the fourth-century Amphilochius of Iconium. Reacting on the heretic arguments of Arius, Eunomius and Apollinarius, who are explicitly quoted in his text,[37] Amphilochius introduces Christ himself to deliver a long exegetical ethopoeia against the heresiarchs to explicate his own agony to them and the congregation. In the course of this long speech, Christ interprets his own sorrow and suffering along the "diabolic" exegesis of the passage discussed above.

> It is not because of the fear of death that I say "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mt 26:38); it is not in dread of suffering that I ask: "Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me". Everything I do, I do so that death will not evade me. I tremble as a man would tremble, that killed as a man, I may act as God, I use humble words, so that when my body will be consumed by death, death will face the glowing embers of divinity and I annihilate it for ever.[38]

The dialogue appears

The importance of this homily, however, stands not only in Amphilochius' masterful use of the exegetical ethopoeia, but also in the fact that it shows seeds of an "apocryphal" dialogue. Christ's long speech against the heretics in Amphilochius is not just a simple interpretative ethopoeia; it is a reaction, an answer to the queries or rather requests of the homilist who raises the exact same questions as the interlocutor of Pseudo-Justin's erotapokriseis. Amphilochius, however, addresses his doubts not to a teacher or a bishop, as the enquirers of Pseudo-Justin do, but directs them to Christ

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[36] Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 37: "καὶ διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς θαυμασιότητος ἐν τῇ δοξολογίᾳ ὁ ἄγγελος ἔλεγε προσκυνῶν· σή ἐστιν ἡ ἰσχύς, δέσποτα· σὺ γὰρ ἴσχυσας κατὰ θανάτου καὶ κατὰ Ἅιδου καὶ κατὰ διαβόλου, συντρῖψαι τὸ κέντρον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκβαλεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος" and'. Holl, *Epiphanius,* vol. 1, 52.

[37] The heretics are named by the homily: "Now Eunomius rejoices and Arius is gladdened, having found this passage as a pretext for their blasphemy", Datema, *Amphilochii,* 140.

[38] Datema, *Amphilochii,* 145: and "Εἰπὲ οὖν, δέσποτα, τίνος ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ τὸ πάθος ἐλθὼν παραιτῇ τὸ παθεῖν, διὰ τί δὲ φοβῇ τὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀπειλήν, ὁ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς ἀποκτέννοντας τὸ σῶμα παρεγγυώμενος… Εἰ γὰρ ἐν σοὶ κεῖται τὸ παθεῖν καὶ τὸ μὴ παθεῖν, περιττῶς λέγεις τό· Εἰ δυνατὸν παρελθάτω".

himself. He turns to him overtly and asks him to be the "commentator of his own words".[39]

> Teach us, oh Lord, and tell us, if you came to suffer, why do you show reluctance towards suffering, why are you afraid of the intrigue of the Jews if you said we do not have to be afraid of those who murder the body. You have the power to suffer and also not to suffer, why do you say then "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me".[40]

It is in response to these queries that Christ, fulfilling Amphilochius' request, answers the homilist with the long "apocryphal" speech. Christ's speech in this homily is halfway towards an "apocryphal" dialogue. His words are evidently non-biblical, but the dialogue he is engaged in is a bit odd: he speaks out of the time and context of the original biblical scene of his agony and converses with the fourth-century homilist and his audience.

This special way of interpreting Christ's Gethsemane prayer in the form of a "half-apocryphal dialogue" must have been very popular in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries.[41] Amphilochius' long homily was soon rewritten into a much shorter and simpler sermon preserved under Chrysostom's name.[42] This text, as a proof of its wide popularity, is preserved in a very large number of manuscripts and was translated into almost every languages of the Christian East from Syriac, Georgian and Armenian to Ethiopian and Arabic.[43] But it was probably due to the use of the same technique and not the direct influence of this particular text that the "dialogization" of the exegetical ethopoeia of Christ's agony appeared in Western exegesis too. In one of the presumably original homilies of Augustine, we find a masterful application of the same exegetical method in Latin, which attests to a general and widespread use of this exegetical tool in patristic literature.[44]

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[39] Datema, *Amphilochii,* 141: "ἵνα αὐτὸς τῶν ἑαυτοῦ λόγων ἑρμηνεὺς γενόμενος ἐκείνων".

[40] Datema, *Amphilochii,* 142.

[41] It was quoted in the mid-fifth century by Theodoret of Cyrrhus in the Christological florilegium of his *Eranistes* (PG 83, cols. 301–04) and, as part of another florilegium, a quotation from it was translated also into Latin by Facundus of Hermione (PL 67, cols. 804).

[42] This is the Pseudo-Chrysostomian homily under CPG 4654 published in PG 61, cols. 751–56. On the homily and its relationship with Amphilochius' sermon, see Holl, *Amphilochius*, 89–91 and Datema, *Amphiloque d'Iconium*.

[43] For the various translations of the text, see CPG 4654.

[44] Augustine, *Sermo 375B* where Augustine engages in a dialogue with Christ in the very same way as Amphilochius, saying: "What is it that you are saying, my Lord? … Why do you say: 'Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me' (Mt 26:39)? He answered thus. 'Man, together with the body I took you upon myself. If I took you upon myself, have I not taken also your words on myself? When I say 'I have authority to lay down my

Apocryphal dialogue in the making

It was probably not independent of this cross-temporal "half-apocryphal" dialogue, bridging biblical past into the homilist's present, that the way for the complete dialogization of this scene was opened. The final step of this process, whereby a "half-apocryphal" dialogue develops into a "full apocryphal" scene, is when the other participant of the conversation who, in all the above-mentioned cases, stayed outside the biblical context of the scenario appears in the scene as a character of the narrative. This, in other words, would mean that the character, who gained voice in the paraphrase and started to speak in the exegetical ethopoeia, instead of talking to the author, the homilist, the audience or the congregation, is now having this conversation with another character of the original narrative context, so the exegetical dialogue is fully transposed and encoded into the interpreted text itself.

An interesting example of how this final step was taken by an exegete in the fifth/sixth century is preserved in the rewritten version of Amphilochius' homily attributed to John Chrysostom. In the new version of the homily, the exegetical ethopoeia, that is Christ's long speech borrowed from Amphilochius, with Christ explaining to the homilist that his sorrow is just a bait to deceive the devil, is suddenly answered by Satan himself. In order to illustrate the efficiency of Christ's deceiving speech, the redactor of Amphilochius' homily introduces the devil himself into the narrative, who, in the form of another exegetical ethopoeia, blindly swallows the bait prepared for him by Christ.

> So when Satan will hear the words "Father if it be possible let this cup pass me", he will rejoice and think to himself: "Behold, he is just a man! I have already devoured Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the patriarchs and prophets, so I will devour this one, too. Behold, he is just a man: he is in fear as a human being, so I can easily devour him, too".[45]

Amphilochius' "half-apocryphal" dialogue between Christ and himself, designed to convey the "diabolical" interpretation of Christ's Gethsemane prayer to his congregation, has now been transformed into a "full apocryphal" encounter between Christ and the Devil in the Garden of Gethsemane. The paraphrastic exegesis of Christ's agony, expanded into an exegetical ethopoeia attributed to Christ and then into a cross-temporal dialogue between Christ and the author, has now become a new "apocryphal scene" involving an encounter, a dialogue between Christ and the devil. This new detail,

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life, and I have authority to take it up again' (Jn 10:18), I speak as the Creator. When I say, however, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death' (Mt 26:38), I speak in your voice". (Morin, *Sancti Augustini Sermones*, 24–25.)

[45] PG 61, col. 764: "Ὅταν ἀκούσῃ, Πάτερ, εἰ δυνατὸν, τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο παρελθέτω, εὐφραίνεται· καὶ τί λέγει ἐν ἑαυτῷ;"Καὶ οὗτος ἄνθρωπός ἐστι. Κατέπιον τὸν Ἀβραὰμ, τὸν Ἰσαὰκ, τὸν Ἰακὼβ, τοὺς πατριάρχας καὶ τοὺς προφήτας· καταπίω καὶ τοῦτον. Ἰδοὺ γὰρ, ὡς ἄνθρωπος, δειλιᾷ· ἄνθρωπός ἐστι· καταπίω αὐτόν"".

which comes up in other sixth-century homilies too,[46] will have a wide-reaching impact on Western mystical literature that finally results in the inclusion of the devil in the Gethsemane scene of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of Christ.*[47]

The apocryphal dialogue

The most illustrative example of what the completed process of the dialogic exegesis may result in is preserved in the Coptic text of the Berlin Fragment of the so-called *Unbekanntes Evangelium*. These four paginated parchment bifolia from the late seventh century, preserved in the Papyrussammlung in Berlin, contain a curious narrative about the Passion of Christ, which was first edited in 1999.[48] Since then, there were two new witnesses identified that contain other recensions of the same text preserved in the Berlin fragments and there has been much discussion in scholarship as to the exact nature, origin and date of this narrative.[49] Pages 101–102 of the Berlin fragments preserve a very fragmentary but still rather intriguing version of Christ's agony and prayer in the garden, which – in the English translation by Alin Suciu – reads as follows:

> We the apostles saw our Savior traversing all the heavens, [while his] feet [were being fixed with us] on the [mountain], [his head] pierced [the seventh] heaven. [... 8 lines broken ...] [The] angels and archangels prostrated on [their faces], [the] cherubs [prostrated before his [...] the seraphs let down their [wings]... [the] Son [bowed] to [the feet of his Father] [... 6 lines broken ...] then why are you crying and grieving so that the entire angelic host [is disturbed]? He answered [thus]: [... 5 lines broken ...] I am greatly [grieved] [...] killed [...] by the [people of] Israel. O my [Father], if it is [possible], let this [cup] pass from me. Let them[...] through another [...[if they [....] Israel [... 7 lines broken ...] [so that] salvation may come to the entire world. [Then] again, the Son bowed to the feet [of] his Father, saying: '[O my Father], [... 4 lines broken ...] I [want] to die joyfulle and to shed my blood for the human

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[46] For example, in the homilies of the mysterious Pseudo-Eusebius of Alexandria, who introduces the devil as he is having a fierce debate with Hades and proudly states that "I am completely sure he is a just a man who fears death, because I heard him saying 'Sorrowful is my soul even unto death'" (Mt 26:38) Eusebius of Alexandria, *Homily on the Devil and Hades* (PG 86/1, col. 400).

[47] Through a yet unexplored channel, the tradition of Satan's presence at Christ's agony has reached the late-eighteenth-century meditations of the Catholic visionary, Anne-Catherine Emmerich. She recorded a curious encounter between Christ and the devil in her vision on the passion of Christ (Emmerich: *The Dolorous Passion*, 97; 110; 117), which served as a basis for Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of Christ* where this scene has been added to the story. Cf. McMahon, *Showtime for the Sheep?*, 65–66.

[48] Hedrick and Mirecki, *Gospel of the Savior*.

[49] These are the so-called Strasbourg Fragments and another Coptic manuscript from the seventh century, known as the Qasr el-Wizz Codex. See the detailed survey of the manuscripts and literature by Suciu, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon,* 12–25.

> race, but I cry only because of my beloved, these being [Abraham], Isaac [and] Jacob, for [they shall] stand [on the] day of judgement, [while] I shall sit on [my] throne to judge the world... O my [Father, if it possible, let this cup] pass from me'. [The rest is very fragmentary due to a damage of the papyrus.][50]

However fragmentary the text of the papyrus is, it seems evident, even from these fragments, that this dialogue between the Father and Christ is related to his agony and prayer in the garden. The characteristic words of his Gethsemane prayer, asking the Father to "let the cup pass" from him, are replied here, just like in the Pseudo-Chrysostomian homily analysed above, by the addressee, there Satan, here God the Father himself. It is even more important, however, that what Christ asks here from the Father in his expanded prayer sounds very similar to how Origen interpreted his words, that is as a request to be murdered by another nation, and not Israel.[51]

It is also evident that even the technique of adding or mixing this interpretation into the original biblical context is the same here as in Origen and in the other texts we have hitherto surveyed. In the Coptic text, the commentary is placed before and after the original biblical quotation by the usual paraphrastic technique, the only difference being that it is embedded there without the characteristic connection phrases. Otherwise, however, the whole dialogue seems to follow the general pattern outlined above. It starts with the first stage of giving voice to a character by the application of the same-subject paraphrase; then, it steps into the second stage where the simple paraphrase is expanded into a longer exegetical ethopoeia, thus reaching the third stage in which the exegetical enquiry ("why are you crying and grieving?") is also included into the narrative context as a question attributed to one of the characters of the narrative, that is God the Father.

The Coptic text, therefore, applies the same technique as the texts previously analysed, but it carries out the dialogization of the scene completely. It creates not only a pseudo-biblical dialogue, which we already saw in the Pseudo-Chrysostomian sermon, but also a whole new context for the dialogue. The newly invented discussion between God the Father and Christ in the Coptic text is framed by an apocryphal vision describing how Christ was lifted up to the heavenly throne-chamber of the Father, which, as the ultimate step of the literary procedure, is witnessed and recorded by the Apostles themselves.

The pseudo-biblical dialogue created by the Coptic author was apparently so successful and convincing that the Berlin fragments have long been considered as remnants of a

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[50] Suciu, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon*, 172–73.

[51] The similarity between the Berlin fragments and Origen's exegesis of Christ's prayer has already been recognized and discussed in scholarship; see Frey, "Leidenskampf und Himmelreise", and more recently, Clivaz, "L'Évangile du Sauveur". As these authors had interpreted this similarity to argue for an early, Jewish-Christian origin of the text, Alin Suciu expressed his doubts about this interpretation but not so much in terms of its similarity to Origen but rather as a sign of an early date of the text.

"new ancient gospel" named either as the "Gospel of the Savior"[52] or as the "Gospel of Peter"[53] or "of Andrew"[54] or "of All the Twelve".[55] It was only Alin Suciu's new edition and commentary of the text that, departing from the traditional gospel-oriented approach of biblical scholarship, placed the Berlin papyri in the context of the post- and anti-Chalcedonian polemics of the Egyptian miaphysites.[56] Suciu's new observations on the conceptual parallels and theological orientation of the text, together with the above examination of its literary and theoretical background, speak against the ancient apocryphal character of the document. The text, therefore, is probably neither more nor less than another, very representative example of a special exegetical technique that explained biblical scenes in the form of a pseudo-biblical dialogue.

It is this literary process, a gradual exegetical expansion of the biblical text, that lies at the heart of "apocryphicity", which scholars have been seeking to describe and model in a number of different ways.[57] Although it may look elusive to grasp what exactly is happening in the process that generates such an apocryphal dialogue, the above investigations attest that this literary process can be decoded. One can model it with the various techniques of Late Antique exegesis, such as exegetical paraphrase and ethopoeia. Detecting these interpretational strategies, which were all integral elements of Late Antique elementary and secondary education, in pseudo-biblical dialogues is important. Their presence, together with the fact that similar literary trends and strategies can be identified in other, "pagan" exegetical literature alike, will prove that encoding exegesis and theology in pseudo-biblical dialogues was a specific but well-known and widely practised Late Antique exegetical technique. A systematic exploration and study of this process may eventually help us for a better understanding of what exactly pseudo-biblical, "apocryphal" dialogues are and why and how they were created and viewed by Christians of the first millennium.

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[52] This is how it was first published by Hedrick and Mirecki, *Gospel of the Savior* in 1999, cf. note 48 above.

[53] Schenke, "Das sogenannte 'Unbekannte Berliner Evangelium'", 205–7.

[54] Plisch, "Zu einigen Einleitungsfragen", 83–84.

[55] Markschies, *Was wissen wir*, 71; 82.

[56] Cf. Suciu, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon*, 128–38.

[57] Schröter, *Apocryphal Gospels*.

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