

## Chapter 9

# A Gospel of the Twelve: the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the Johannine Tradition

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In the so-called *Epistula Apostolorum* (*EpAp*), eleven named apostles write to the churches of the whole world to pass on the teaching they received from the Lord during the interval between his resurrection and ascension. The apostles are writing (so they say) to protect their readers from the corrupt teaching of Simon and Cerinthus, who are ‘false apostles’ and ‘enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ.’<sup>1</sup> Yet there is little explicitly anti-heretical material to be found in this text.<sup>2</sup> In a long series of questions and answers, Jesus provides his disciples with all they need to know in order to fulfil his commission to preach the good news to the people of Israel and the world. He instructs them about his own return in glory after 120 years,<sup>3</sup> the resurrection of the flesh,<sup>4</sup> the judgment of the righteous and unrighteous, and the eternal rest or torment that will follow.<sup>5</sup> He narrates his own descent through the heavens to enter the womb of the Virgin Mary and become flesh, and his further descent into hell to announce salvation to the righteous dead.<sup>6</sup> He predicts the conversion of Saul or Paul, the former persecutor who will become a preacher to the Gentiles.<sup>7</sup> He warns against showing partiality to the rich,<sup>8</sup> and vindicates the divine

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<sup>1</sup> *EpAp* 1.2; 7.1-2. Ethiopic (Ge‘ez) and Coptic texts were published respectively by Louis Guerrier (with Sylvain Grébaud), *Le Testament en Galilée de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 9, Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1913 (repr. Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 141-236; Carl Schmidt (with Isaak Wajnberg), *Gespräche Jesu mit seinen Jüngern nach der Auferstehung*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1919 (repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 1\*-26\*. Translations here are my own. Verse divisions here are those of Julian V. Hills, *The Epistle of the Apostles*, Santa Rosa CA: Polebridge Press, 2009, except in the few cases where my own forthcoming translation uses a different enumeration (indicated with an asterisk). My translation will provide a single text with variants noted in a critical apparatus, in contrast to the use of separate and poorly co-ordinated columns for the Coptic and Ge‘ez texts.

<sup>2</sup> *EpAp* 29.1-4; 50.8-11. Nothing is said in these passages about the content of the false teaching.

<sup>3</sup> *EpAp* 16.1-17.2.

<sup>4</sup> *EpAp* 19.17-25.8.

<sup>5</sup> *EpAp* 26.1-6; 28.1-5.

<sup>6</sup> *EpAp* 13.1-14.8; 27.1-28.2..

<sup>7</sup> *EpAp* 31.1-33.9.

<sup>8</sup> *EpAp* 38.1-3; 46.1-47.7.

justice.<sup>9</sup> In communicating this teaching to their readers, the apostles indicate that their commission to preach the gospel includes the production of this co-authored text.<sup>10</sup>

*EpAp* probably dates from the first half of the second century. While its early date and its content make it potentially no less significant than the *Gospel of Peter* or the *Gospel of Thomas*, it has never enjoyed anything like the recognition and attention that these more accessible texts have received. Its importance will best be appreciated if it is brought into relation to other early gospel literature of the period c. 75-150 CE, prior to the formation of the canonical collection.

## 1. The *Epistula Apostolorum* as Gospel

If it is integral to the gospel genre to narrate the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then a text such as *EpAp* will be at best gospel-like in certain respects though not in others. Yet there is little justification for such a prescriptive account of the gospel genre. The only canonical gospel to lay claim to the term εὐαγγέλιον is Mark (Mk.1.1). Matthew and John prefer ‘book’ (Mt.1.1; Jn.20.30, cf. 21.25), and Luke selects διήγησις, ‘account’ (Lk.1.1).<sup>11</sup> In itself, εὐαγγέλιον does not entail a specific narrative content but the apostolic announcement of salvation in and through the person of Jesus. Only from a rigidly a priori perspective is it problematic for texts with greater emphasis on sayings or dialogue to describe themselves or be described by others as ‘gospel.’

If *EpAp* is to be integrated into the field of early Christian gospel literature, it must be shown to belong most fundamentally to the gospel genre, whatever its other generic features. The situation is complicated by its categorization as an ‘Apocryphal Epistle’, a ‘Dialogue of the Redeemer’, or a ‘Dialogue Gospel’ in standard collections of New Testament Apocrypha.

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<sup>9</sup> *EpAp* 39.1-40.5; 43.1-45.8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *EpAp* 1.3-4; 2.1; 8.1; 31.11.

<sup>11</sup> The later evangelists’ lack of interest in the term ‘gospel’ makes it hard to accept M. Hengel’s claim that the traditional gospel titles ‘were not secondary additions but part of the Gospels as originally circulated’ (*The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, Eng. tr. London: SCM, 2000, 50). Hengel believes that anonymous circulation ‘must necessarily have led to a diversity of titles’, and that ‘[t]here is no trace of such anonymity’ (54).

(i) *Classifying EpAp*

In the collection of New Testament apocrypha edited by Montague Rhodes James and published in 1924, *EpAp* was placed last in a group of apocryphal letters that included the pseudo-Pauline *Epistle to the Laodiceans* and the correspondence of Paul and Seneca.<sup>12</sup> This arrangement remains intact in Keith Elliott's revised and expanded version of James' work (1993).<sup>13</sup> An alternative category is proposed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Hennecke-Schneemelcher collection (1959), where *EpAp* is placed within a group of 'Dialogues of Jesus with his Disciples after his Resurrection', accompanied only by the 'Freer Logion' (a further expansion of the Longer Ending of Mark) and a reconstruction of the two severely damaged pages of a 'Strassburg Coptic Papyrus.'<sup>14</sup> In the 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1987),<sup>15</sup> however, *EpAp* is set within a larger collection of 'Dialogues of the Redeemer' that include the *Apocryphon of James*,<sup>16</sup> the *Dialogue of the Saviour*,<sup>17</sup> the *First and Second Apocalypse of James*,<sup>18</sup> and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.<sup>19</sup> To these, texts such as the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Judas* have been added in the 7<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter (2012).<sup>20</sup> The generic category now proposed is that of 'Dialogue Gospels' (*Dialogische Evangelien*),<sup>21</sup> and it is an important step forward to recognize that a text that presents itself as a letter, an apocalypse, or a dialogue may in reality be no less gospel-like than one that includes 'gospel' in its title. Yet the category of 'dialogue gospels' may also have the detrimental effect of suggesting that *EpAp*'s affinities are with other members of this limited body of texts to the exclusion of gospels in general. While its dialogical format is broadly similar, *EpAp* may have less in common with, say, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* or the *Gospel of Judas* than with the Gospels of *John* or

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<sup>12</sup> Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 (corrected, 1953), 476-503.

<sup>13</sup> J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 537-88.

<sup>14</sup> 'Wechselsgespräche Jesu mit seinen Jüngern nach seiner Auferstehung': E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung: I. Band, Evangelien*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1959<sup>3</sup>, 125-57.

<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen: I. Evangelien*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987<sup>5</sup>, corrected 1990<sup>6</sup>, 189-275; Eng. tr. ed. R. McL. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume I: Gospels and Related Writings*, Louisville and London: WJK Press; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991, 228-353.

<sup>16</sup> NHC I, 2.

<sup>17</sup> NHC III, 5.

<sup>18</sup> NHC V, 3-4

<sup>19</sup> NHC VIII, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter (ed.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung: I. Band: Evangelien und Verwandtes, Teilband 2*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, 1051-1238.

<sup>21</sup> *Antike christliche Apokryphen, I*, 1051.

*Matthew*. Any generic categorization within the extra-canonical field can serve to reinforce the iron curtain that separates the canonical gospels from their non-canonical counterparts.

In spite of its re-categorization as a dialogue gospel, the title *Epistula Apostolorum* inevitably continues to suggest that this text is something other than a gospel. It received this title from the editor of the incomplete Coptic version, Carl Schmidt,<sup>22</sup> when fragments of a Latin translation were identified, preserved in a palimpsest, which included the running header *Epistula* on the verso of the two relevant folios.<sup>23</sup> Schmidt probably assumed that the corresponding recto pages contained the completion of the title, though now illegible, and that *Apostolorum* was the most likely candidate. This title might seem to have been vindicated when an Ethiopic version came to light that included the opening section of the work, no longer extant in the Coptic manuscript. Here eleven named apostles address themselves to the universal church in epistolary format: ‘John and Thomas and Peter... to the churches of the East and the West, the North and the South.’<sup>24</sup> In the Ethiopic tradition, however, the work is regarded not as an epistle but as a testament, as a result of assimilation to a larger and later work, the *Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, to which it is often attached in Ethiopic manuscripts.<sup>25</sup> Although the title *Epistula Apostolorum* is a conjecture, this work most probably circulated as an epistle some centuries before it was redesignated as a testament. It is uncertain whether or not it bore a title such as Ἐπιστολὴ τῶν ἀποστόλων or Ἐπιστολὴ τῶν Δώδεκα in its original Greek form. Did its author intend his work to be read as an

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<sup>22</sup> Carl Schmidt, ‘Eine Epistola apostolorum in koptischer und lateinischer Überlieferung’, *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen.preussischen Akademie* (1908), 1047-56. No such title is suggested in Schmidt’s earlier announcement of this text (‘Eine bisher unbekannte altchristliche Schrift in koptischer Sprache’, *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen.preussischen Akademie* [1895], 707-11).

<sup>23</sup> Edmund Hauler, ‘Zu den neuen lateinischen Bruchstücken der Thomasapokalypse und eines apostolischen Sendschreibens im Codex Vind. Nr. 16’, *Wiener Studien* 30 (1908), 308-40; 312.

<sup>24</sup> *EpAp* 2.1-2. The Coptic pagination shows that this version too once contained chapters 1-6 of the *Epistula*. In Guerrier’s edition these are enumerated as chapters 12-17, as the Ethiopic manuscripts also include a section of eschatological prophecy (ch.1-11), derived from another source and with a post-resurrection Galilean setting. This accounts for Guerrier’s misleading title (*Le Testament en Galilée de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*). In contrast, the *Epistula* is set in the vicinity of Jesus’ tomb, i.e. in Jerusalem. The link between the Coptic and Ethiopic texts was made by M. R. James, ‘The Epistula Apostolorum in a New Text’, *JTS* 12 (1910-11), 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> The Ethiopic version of the *Testament* (without the *Epistula*) was edited by R. Beylot (*Testamentum Domini Ethiopien*, Louvain: Peeters, 1984). In Beylot’s ms. B (= Guerrier’s A), the identical title ‘Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ appears both at the beginning of the work (Beylot, 1) and at the end of the *Epistula* attached to it (Guerrier, 232). The Ethiopic work (without the *Epistula*) is better known in its Syriac form, discovered and edited by E. Rahmani (*Testamentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi nunc primum editur, latine reddidit et illustravit*, Mainz 1899; Eng. tr. J. Cooper and A. J. Maclean, *The Testament of Our Lord*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902).

epistle or as a gospel? Did our text enter the world as a gospel and become an epistle at a later stage, later still becoming a testament?

In his homily on the prologue of Luke's gospel, Origen reflects on the word 'attempted' (ἐπεχείρησαν) which the evangelist applies to his predecessors' efforts at gospel composition (Lk.1.1).<sup>26</sup> For Origen, Luke could never have spoken of Matthew, Mark, or John in such disparaging terms; the evangelist is clearly referring to inferior gospels written without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, some of which are still in circulation. One of these is the *Gospel according to Thomas* (τὸ κατὰ Θωμᾶν εὐαγγέλιον), which is most probably to be identified with the text attested by three Greek fragments from Oxyrhynchus and by the full Coptic translation preserved in Nag Hammadi Codex II.<sup>27</sup> Another is a *Gospel of the Twelve* (τῶν Δώδεκα εὐαγγέλιον), and here the identification is entirely uncertain. It is not impossible that a text known in its Latin version as an *epistula* and in Ge'ez as a testament should have circulated as a *Gospel of the Twelve* in its Greek and Coptic forms. Nor is it impossible that the *epistula* is Origen's εὐαγγέλιον τῶν Δώδεκα. The fact that *EpAp* names only eleven apostolic authors, not twelve, is not a problem: Thomas can be described as 'one of the Twelve' on Easter day, even after Judas' departure (Jn.20.24).<sup>28</sup> Yet other identifications of Origen's *Gospel of the Twelve* are perhaps equally likely, or more so.<sup>29</sup> The point here is that a gospel-like text attributed to the apostolic collective is entirely feasible within the field of early gospel literature. *Gospel of the Twelve* would have been an appropriate title for *EpAp*, since its primary affinities are with other gospels rather than with 'pseudo-apostolic letters'<sup>30</sup> or with a special subcategory of gospel literature isolated from the mainstream.

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<sup>26</sup> Origenes Werke, Neunter Band: Die Homilien zu Lukas in der Übersetzung des Hieronymus und die griechischen Reste der Homilien und des Lukas-Kommentars, ed. Max Rauer, GCS, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959, 3-5.

<sup>27</sup> On this see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Other gospels refer to 'the eleven' in an Easter context (Mt.28.16 [+ 'disciples']; Mk.16.14; Lk.24.9, 33; Cf. Acts 1.26, 2.14).

<sup>29</sup> According to Jerome, a text he knows as a Gospel according to the Hebrews, and which he believes to have been an original Hebrew Matthew, is known to its Nazarene users as a 'Gospel according to the Apostles' (*dial. c. Pelag.*, iii.2 [PL 23.597B-598A]). Origen's *Gospel of the Twelve* may have been the text known to Jerome, or the *Epistula*, or some unknown third text: it is impossible to say. On Jerome's Nazarene gospel see Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, VigChrSupp, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012, 102-19.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Bauckham, 'Pseudo-Apostolic Letters', *JBL* 107 (1988), 469-94; 483-84. Bauckham's claim that the *Epistula* is a letter in form applies only to *EpAp* 1-2, 7-8.

(ii) *Gospel and Epistle*

In *EpAp*, epistolary characteristics are largely confined to the opening paragraphs, where they occur in unconventional sequence. Like the Book of Revelation, the text opens by announcing a revelation of Jesus Christ:

What Jesus Christ revealed to his disciples and to all: because of Simon and Cerinthus, false apostles, so that no-one should associate with them, for in them is the deceit by which they kill people; so that you may be strong and not waver or be disturbed or depart from what you have heard, the message of the gospel. What we have heard and remembered and written for the whole world we entrust to you, our sons and daughters, in joy. In the name of God, ruler of all the world, and of Jesus Christ: Grace be multiplied to you.<sup>31</sup>

ዘ ከሠተ ፡ ለመ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡  
ለአርዳኢሁ ፡ ወ[ ]ለኩሉ ። ሢሞን ፡ ወቄሌንቶስ  
፡ ሐሳወያን ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ እንተ ፡  
በእንቲአሆመ፡ ከመ፡ አልቦ ፡ ዘተሳተፎመ፡  
እስመ፡ ቦመ፡ [ ] ሕብል ፡ በዘይቀትልዎመ፡  
ለሰብእ ። ከመ፡ ትኩኑ ፡ ስኑዓን ፡  
ወኢታንቀልቅሉ ፡ ወኢትትሀወኩ ፡ ወኢትፍልሱ ፡  
እምዛ ፡ ሰማኔክመ፡ ቃል ፡ ወንግል ። ዘከመ፡  
ሰማኔ ፡ ወዘከርነ ፡ ወጸሐፍነ ፡ ለኩሉ ፡  
ዓለም ፡ አማንፀናክመ፡ ወሉድነ ፡ ወአዋልዲነ  
፡ በፍሥካ ። በስመ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ አብ ፡  
አኃዜ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ወበኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡  
ሣህል ፡ ይብዛኅ ፡ ላዕሌክመ፡ ፡

Only at this point do the collective apostolic authors introduce themselves by name and identify their intended readers:

John and Thomas and Peter and Andrew and James and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Nathanael and Judas the Zealot and Cephas, to the churches of the East and the West, the North and the South. In proclaiming and declaring to

ዮሐንስ ፡ ወቶማስ ፡ ወጴትሮስ ፡ ወእንድርያስ  
፡ ወያዕቆብ ፡ ወፌልጶስ ፡ ወበርተሎሜዎስ ፡  
ወማቴዎስ ፡ ወናትናኤል ፡ ወይሁዳ ፡ ቀናዒ ፡  
ወኬፋ ፡ [ ]ለቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያናት ፡ ዘጸባሕ ፡  
ወለዓረብ ፡ ላዕሌ ፡ ደቡብ ፡ ወሰማኔ ። እንዘ

<sup>31</sup> *EpAp* 1.1-5. My translation of the Ge‘ez text omits doublets at ‘and to all’ (‘and <how Jesus Christ revealed the book to the company of the apostles, disciples of Jesus Christ> to all’) and at ‘in them <and among them>’. Ethiopic variants have been selected which omit ‘the book’ after ‘his disciples’ and ‘it was written’ after ‘false apostles’. For the textual evidence, see Guerrier, *Testament*, 188. Punctuation has been added to the Ge‘ez text.

you our Lord Jesus Christ, we write about : ንዜን ወክሙ፡ ወንነ ግረክሙ፡ ዘበእን ቲአሁ  
 how we both heard him and touched him : ለእግዚእነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : በከመ  
 after he was raised from the dead, and : ጸሕፍነ : ወሰማኛ ሆ፡ ወገ ሠሥኛ ሆ፡  
 how he revealed to us what is great and : እምድራረ : ተንሥኦ : እመታን : ወዘከመ፡  
 wonderful and true.<sup>32</sup> ከሠተ : ለነ : ዓቢየ : ወመድምመ : ወህልወ  
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This belated introduction of the senders and addressees recalls the Book of Revelation, where an epistolary opening – ‘John to the seven churches of Asia...’ (Rev.1.4) – again follows an introductory paragraph, without thereby transforming the entire text from an apocalypse into another Epistle of John. The case of *EpAp* is similar. Epistolary features are embedded within an apocalypse in one case, a gospel in the other.

The combination of first and second person discourse at the opening of *EpAp* recurs only once, in a further introductory section (chapters 7-8) which recapitulates the warnings of the first (chapter 1). While the apostles continue to speak in the first person plural, direct second person address to their readers – a key indicator of epistolary discourse – is entirely absent from the main body of this text (chapters 3-6, 9-51). This is true also of its conclusion, which lacks the conventional final greeting retained in Revelation 22.21. First person discourse does not in itself identify a text as an epistle. In other early gospel literature, first person discourse seems to have characterized the *Gospel of Peter*, at least intermittently, in both singular and plural forms: ‘I, Simon Peter’ (ἐγὼ δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος, 14.60; cf. 7.26); ‘We, the twelve disciples of the Lord’ (ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ δώδεκα μαθηταὶ τοῦ κυρίου, 14.59). Here Simon Peter extends his traditional role as spokesman for the Twelve into the sphere of authorship. The apostle is also a letter-writer, but here he is an evangelist.

In *EpAp*, Peter loses his position of primacy. To begin the list of apostolic authors with Peter would imply that he again speaks on behalf of the others. A change of sequence has the effect of putting the apostles on a more equal footing. Thus Papias lists seven apostles in the order Andrew-Peter-Philip-Thomas-James-John-Matthew,

<sup>32</sup> *EpAp* 2.1-3. The Ge‘ez text has an additional ‘we write’ directly following the apostles’ names. This is omitted here since it is foreign to Greek epistolary convention and was probably absent from the original Greek text. The translation also omits two prepositions (‘... to the West, to[wards] the North...’).

so as to emphasize the distinct traditions stemming from each of them.<sup>33</sup> If the order in *EpAp* 2.1 is compared to that of Matthew 10.2-4, the Matthean sequence Peter-Andrew-James is preserved but placed after John and Thomas (promoted from fourth and seventh place respectively). In the final part of the list, Nathanael replaces James the son of Alphaeus, so that the list now contains only one James. Nathanael would probably have been included in a Johannine list of the Twelve (cf. Jn.1.45-49; 21.2; 6.67, 70, 71; 20.24). ‘Judas the Zealot’ conflates Luke’s ‘Simon called the Zealot’ and ‘Judas son of James’ (Lk.6.15-16; cf. Acts 1.13), eliminating the name Simon here and in connection with Peter so as to avoid confusion with Simon the ‘false apostle’ (cf. *EpAp* 1.2; 7.1).<sup>34</sup> Like Nathanael, Judas (‘not Iscariot’) is also a member of the Johannine twelve (Jn.14.22). In the *Epistula* ‘Judas the Zealot’ takes over the epithet Luke assigns to Simon, and Simon himself is replaced by or identified as Cephas (cf. Jn.1.42, where another Simon [Peter] is given the name ‘Cephas’).<sup>35</sup> Thus the first eight names on the *Epistula*’s list deviate from Matthew only in the placement of John and Thomas, whereas the last three names – Nathanael, Judas, Cephas – are all Johannine. The reference to Cephas may imply that, in the author’s opinion, the Johannine evangelist has identified Cephas with the wrong Simon. Even in this epistolary address we remain within the sphere of the early Christian gospel.

While the *Epistula* might be classified as a gospel with epistolary elements, it is more important to ask *why* these epistolary elements are present within a written gospel. The answer is that the epistolary combination of first and second person discourse preserves the communicative character of the oral, preached gospel as personal address, in spite of the transfer into the distancing medium of writing. Of all literary genres, it is the letter that can approximate most closely to the face-to-face speech of one person to another – in this case, a speech that announces good news intended to benefit the hearer as it is received. Addressees of *EpAp* are recalled in it to

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<sup>33</sup> Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* iii.39.4.

<sup>34</sup> Luke’s ‘Judas son of James’ (Lk.6.17) is himself a replacement for the Markan and Matthean ‘Thaddaeus’ (Mk.3.18; Mt.10.3).

<sup>35</sup> Cephas and Peter were often differentiated during the patristic period, e.g. by Clement of Alexandria, who claims that Cephas was a member of the Seventy Disciples sent out by the Lukan Jesus to prepare his way as he journeyed towards Jerusalem (Lk.10.1; Clement, *Hypotyposes*, book 5, cited in Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* i.12.2). On the patristic evidence see Bart Ehrman, ‘Cephas and Peter’, *JBL* 109 (1990), 463-74; 463-66. My thanks to Sarah Parkhouse for helpful discussion of this point among many others relating to the *Epistula*.



what they once *heard*, ‘the word of the gospel.’<sup>36</sup> The epistolary paragraphs enhance the character of this text as gospel, rather than qualifying it.

(iii) *Gospel and Dialogue*

In *EpAp*, Jesus’ teaching is given in response to the disciples’ questions,<sup>37</sup> requests,<sup>38</sup> and observations.<sup>39</sup> The disciples are supposedly the collective authors of this text, but they are also central characters within it: for it is their stubbornly persistent questioning that elicits crucially important teaching from the risen Lord that might not otherwise have been forthcoming. While responses prompted by the disciples play a greater part in this text than in other early gospels, this feature is not in itself sufficient to constitute a new sub-genre, that of the ‘dialogue gospel’, supposedly taken over from ‘gnostic opponents’.<sup>40</sup> The interactions concerned – responses to the disciples’ questions, requests, and observations – are all common features of early gospels, as the following examples illustrate.

(1) Questions:

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| [H]is disciples came to him privately,<br>saying, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and<br>what will be the sign of your coming and<br>the end of the age?’ (Mt.24.3) | προσηλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν<br>λέγοντες, εἰπέ ἡμῖν πότε ταῦτα ἔσται, καὶ<br>τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ<br>συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. |
|--|--|

|                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| His disciples said, ‘When will you be | λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· πότε |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

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<sup>36</sup> *EpAp* 1.3.

<sup>37</sup> *EpAp* 15.8; 16.1; 17.1, 3, 5, 7; *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> *EpAp* 20.1b; 34.1-3; 37.1; 50.7.

<sup>39</sup> *EpAp* 19.12; 20.1a; 21.5; 23.1-2; 25.1, 5; 29.5; 32.3; 39.1, 3; 40.1; 41.2; 42.8; 45.1, 7.

<sup>40</sup> M. Hornschuh’s statement of this widespread view is typical: ‘Der Verfasser unseres Apokryphons hat sich die von den Gnostikern geschaffene Form zu eigen gemacht... So griff man zu den von den Gegnern geschmiedeten Waffen, indem man ebenfalls apokryphe Offenbarungsliteratur schuf, um sich zum Kampf gegen sie zu wappnen’ (Manfred Hornschuh, *Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum*, Patristische Texte und Studien 5, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965, 6-7). There are two major difficulties with this position. (1) It is not clear if any extant examples of ‘gnostic’ revelatory dialogues can be shown to predate the *Epistula*, let alone to have been known to its author. The assumption of a very early gnostic dialogue genre reflects the now-discredited hypothesis of a ‘pre-Christian Gnosticism.’ (2) In spite of references to Simon and Cerinthus (*EpAp* 1.2; 7.1), there is little evidence in the *Epistula* of a polemical agenda. The extensive discussion of the resurrection of the flesh (*EpAp* 11.1-12.2; 19.8-26.6) is not directed against those who reject this doctrine but is intended to reassure those who find belief in it difficult: ‘One who died and is buried, can he come back to life?’ (10.4). ‘Lord, is it possible for what is dissolved and destroyed to be saved?’ (24.2).

revealed to us, and when will we see you?' (*GTh* 37)

ἡμ(ε)ῖν ἐμφανῆς ἔσει, καὶ πότε σε ὀψόμεθα;

And we said to him, 'Lord, great indeed are the things you revealed to us before! But in what power or in what sort of likeness will you come?' (*EpAp* 16.1)

πα.χεν δε νεφ δε π.χαις νετακβαλλπογ  
γαρ nen ἡραρι ρεννας νε εια κῆνηγ ρῆ  
ογσαμ ἡεζ ἡμινε η ρῆ ογαϊσθςις ἡεζ ἡεζ

His disciples said to him, 'When will the kingdom come?' (*GTh* 113)

πε.χ.α.γ. να.γ. ἡ.σι. νε.φ.μα.θη.της. δε. τ.μη.τε.ρο.  
ε.σ.ῆ.νη.γ. ἡ.α.ω. ἡ.ρο.ο.γ.

And we said to him, 'Lord, after how many years will these things be?' (*EpAp* 17.1)

πα.χεν δε νεφ δε π.χαις ἡῆ.ν.σ.ε. κ.ε.ο.υ.η.ρ.  
ἡ.ρ.α.μ.π.ε. α. νεῖ. να.ρ.ω.π.ε.

(2) Requests:

And his disciples came to him saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' (*Mt.*13.36)

καὶ προσῆλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ  
λέγοντες, Διασάφησον ἡμῖν τὴν  
παραβολὴν τῶν ζιζανίων τοῦ ἀγροῦ.

The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like." (*GTh* 20)

πε.χ.ε. ἡ.μα.θη.της. ἡ.ῆ.σ.ι. δε. χ.ο.ο.ς. ε.ρ.ο.ν. δε.  
τ.μη.τε.ρο. ἡ.ῆ.π.η.γ.ε. ε.σ.τ.ῆ.τ.ω.ν. ε.ν.ι.μ.

And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' (*Lk.*17.5)

Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῷ κυρίῳ,  
Πρόσθεες ἡμῖν πίστιν.

And we said to him, 'Lord, teach us what will happen after this.' (*EpAp* 37.1)

ω.ν. ο.λ.ο. : ν.η.η. : λ.η.η.λ. : ρ.υ.ζ.η. :

λ γ ρ γ λ γ η : ρ ρ γ τ̄ : ρ η ω ρ :

(3) Observations:

His disciples said to him, ‘Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel, and they all spoke in you!’ (GTh 52)

πε.χα.γ να.φ ν̄σι νε.φ.μα.θη.της.δε  
χο.γ.τα.φ.τε.προ.φη.της.α.γ.ω.α.δε ρ̄μι.σ.ρα.η.λ̄  
α.γ.ω α.γ.ω.α.δε τη.ρο.γ ρ.ρᾱι ν̄ρη.τ.κ̄

His disciples said to him, ‘Look, now you are speaking clearly and no longer in a parable! Now we know that you know everything and have no need for anyone to ask you. By this we believe that you have come from God.’ (Jn.16.29-30)

λέ.γ.ου.σιν.οι.μα.θη.ται.α.υ.το.υ, ”Ι.δε.ν.υ.ν.έν.  
πα.ρ.ρη.σί.α.λα.λε.ί.ς, κα.ι.πα.ρο.ι.μί.αν  
ο.υ.δε.μί.αν.λέ.γ.εις. ν.υ.ν.ο.ϊ.δα.με.ν.ο.τι.ο.ϊ.δα.ς  
πά.ν.τα.κα.ι.ο.υ.χ.ρ.εί.αν.έ.χ.εις.ί.να.τί.ς.σε  
έ.ρω.τ.ᾶ: έν.το.υ.τ.ω.πι.σ.τε.ύ.ο.με.ν.ο.τι.ά.πο.  
θε.ο.υ.έ.ξ.ῆ.λ.θ.ε.ς.

And we said to him, ‘Lord, you are again speaking to us in parables!’ (EpAp 32.3)

ω.ν.ο.ε.λ.ο. : γ.η.τ̄ : λ.η.η.λ.η. : η.θ.ο.ι. : ο.σ.η.λ.ε. :  
τ̄.τ̄.γ.γ.λ.γ. :

And when he had said these things to us, we said to him, ‘Lord, in everything you have been merciful to us and you have saved us and you have revealed everything to us! Once again we wish to inquire of you, if you permit us.’ (EpAp 20.1)

ν̄.τα.ρε.φ.δε.νε.ϊ.δε. [νε.ν.πα.δε.ν.νε.]φ.δε  
πι.χα.ει.ς.ρ̄.ν̄.ρ.ω.β.νι.μ.α.κ.να.ε.νε.ν.α.ο.γ  
α.κ.το.γ.χα.ν.α.κο.γ.ω.ν.ρ.α.βα.λ.νε.ν.ν̄.ρ.ω.β.νι.μ  
ε.τι.α.ν.τ̄.ν̄.ο.γ.ω.ρ.ε.α.ω.ν̄.τ̄.κα.κ.ω.α.κα.α.νε

Together with *EpAp*, it is the *Gospel of Thomas* that makes the greatest use of this format, in which Jesus’ teaching is responsive to the disciples’ collective questions, requests, or observations.<sup>41</sup> In *Thomas* named individuals – Mary, Salome,

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *GTh* 6, 12, 18, 20, 24, 37, 43, 51, 53, 99, 113.

Peter – put questions or requests to Jesus on just three occasions.<sup>42</sup> This format also occurs in John 13-14, where the speakers are Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Judas,<sup>43</sup> and it is more extensively employed in texts such as the *Apocryphon of James*, where Peter and James are separated from the rest of the Twelve to engage in dialogue with the risen Lord,<sup>44</sup> and in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, where the privileged dialogue-partners are Judas, Matthew, and Mary.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, the disciples’ interventions in *EpAp* are invariably collective and anonymous. The author is concerned to present the apostolic testimony as a single unified entity, rather than differentiating the contributions of named and privileged individuals. In spite of the authorial names listed at the beginning, this text otherwise maintains the tradition of gospel anonymity evident especially in the earlier texts to which the names Mark and Matthew came to be attached, and maintained in the Marcionite gospel.<sup>46</sup>

The apostleship of the twelve is grounded in their relationship to the earthly Jesus; the discipleship of the twelve is the presupposition of their apostolic mission to all nations. Classifying *EpAp* too readily as a ‘post-resurrection dialogue’ risks overlooking both the important collection of traditional miracle stories, prominently located near the beginning of this text,<sup>47</sup> and the theme of preparation for mission highlighted in its second half:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Again we said to him, ‘Lord, how will they believe, when you are to go and leave us behind? For you say to us, “There comes a day and an hour when I shall ascend to my Father.”’ And he said to us, ‘Go and preach to the twelve tribes and preach also to the Gentiles and to the whole land of Israel from east to west</p> | <p>παλιν πι[αχεν νεφ] χε πχαιε νεε̄ νεε̄<br/> εγναε̄ρ̄πιε̄τ[εγε εκ]ναβωκ καανε̄ ν̄ε̄ωκ ·<br/> ν̄τρε̄ ε̄τκχ[ογ̄ ν̄μαε̄] νε̄ν χε̄ ογ̄ν̄ ογ̄ροογε̄<br/> νηγ̄ ν[ν̄ ογογνογ̄] ταβωκ ᾱρη̄ῑ φα<br/> παιε̄ωτ̄ παχ[εφ] δε̄ ν[ε̄ν] χε̄ βωκ<br/> ν̄τω̄τνε̄ τε̄τ̄ν̄τᾱω̄ε̄αῑω̄ ν̄τ̄ν̄τ̄ε̄νᾱγ̄ε̄<br/> ν̄φγ̄λη̄ ᾱογ̄ τε̄τ̄ν̄τᾱω̄ε̄αῑω̄ ν̄ν̄κε̄ρε̄θ̄ε̄νο̄ε̄<br/> ν̄ν̄ πκᾱε̄ τη̄ρ̄ ν̄π̄η̄λ̄ χ̄ν̄ ν̄[ν̄ε̄αν̄ε̄ᾱε̄] φα</p> |
|---|---|

<sup>42</sup> *GTh* 21, 61, 114.

<sup>43</sup> *Jn*.13.36, 37; 14.5, 8, 22.

<sup>44</sup> *ApJas* 2.33-39 (NHL I, 2).

<sup>45</sup> *DialSav* 6, 15, 21, 24, 31, 45, 47, 49, 51, 58, 73, (84), 90, (95), 99, 101, 103 (Judas); 11, 19, 27, 29, 56, 65, 67, 75, 92 (Matthew); 13, 25, 41, 53, 60, 62, 64, 69, 79, 83, 88, 93 (Mary). References to ‘his disciples’ (1, 9, 38, 39, 40, 54, 71) or ‘his disciples, the twelve’ (81) indicate that the named disciples are not separated from the others, as they are in the *Apocryphon of James*.

<sup>46</sup> This work, entitled simply *Εὐαγγέλιον*, is criticized for its anonymity by Tertullian, *adv. Marc.* iv.2.4.3.

<sup>47</sup> *EpAp* 4.1-6.1; cf. 8.1

and from south to north, and many will  
believe in the Son of God.<sup>48</sup>

ΝΣΑΝΖΩΤΠ ΔΟΥ Χ̅Ν̅ Ν̅ΠΣΑ[ΡΗΣ ΦΑ  
Π]ΣΑΜΖΙΤ · ΟΥ̅Ν̅ ΟΥ̅ΜΙΕΩΕ ΝΑΡ̅Π[ΣΤΕΥΕ  
ΑΠ]ΦΗΡΕ Ν̅ΠΠΝΟΥΤΕ

A focus on Jesus' miracles and the apostolic mission is more characteristic of the canonical texts than of the revelatory dialogues. Mission is entirely alien to a text such as the *Apocryphon of James*, which claims to have been written 'in Hebrew writing' to help ensure its secrecy.<sup>49</sup> The *Dialogue of the Saviour* is preoccupied with matters of cosmology and soteriology. Mission is more prominent in the *Gospel of Mary*, but only as an intractable problem. The Saviour sends the disciples to preach,<sup>50</sup> but this parting commission fills his disciples with despair,<sup>51</sup> and Mary's impressive intervention leads only to a rift among the male disciples which leaves a final question-mark hanging over their intended apostolic activity.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, *EpAp* has more in common with the canonical gospels' portrayal of the worldwide scope of the apostolic preaching.

Within a collection of 'New Testament apocrypha', it is reasonable to classify *EpAp* as a 'Dialogue Gospel' alongside the *Apocryphon of James*, the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, and the *Gospel of Mary*. In making accessible a large number of texts that have in common only their non-inclusion in the New Testament, such classifications are clearly necessary.<sup>53</sup> Comparisons with other gospels in primarily dialogue format are indeed worthwhile.<sup>54</sup> Problems only arise when it is assumed that this collection of

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<sup>48</sup> *EpAp* 29.7-30.1. The mission theme is continued in 30.2-33.9 (on the role of Paul), 41.1-42.9 (pastoral ministry), 46-50 (discipline).

<sup>49</sup> *ApJas* 1.15-16. In this text the epistolary opening is followed by an extended appeal for secrecy (1.8-28).

<sup>50</sup> *GMary* 8.20-9.4 (cf. Mt.28.19-20; Mk.16.15).

<sup>51</sup> *GMary* 9.6-12.

<sup>52</sup> In the Coptic *Gospel of Mary*, all of the apostles named in this text finally 'go forth and preach' (19.1-2). In the Greek P. Ryl. 463, only Levi does so. On this see Christopher Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts, Oxford: OUP, 2007, 132, 194-6.

<sup>53</sup> As Jens Schröter notes, collections of New Testament apocrypha tend to follow generic distinctions within the New Testament itself: Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Apocalypse (*Die apokryphen Evangelien und die Entstehung des Kanons*, in Jens Schröter and Jörg Frey (ed.), *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen*, WUNT 254, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, 31-60; 33-34).

<sup>54</sup> See Judith Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge*, TU 146, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000. Along with the Epistula, Hartenstein discusses the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Mary, the Letter of Peter to Philip, the First Apocalypse of James, and the Letter (or Apocryphon) of James (34-246). Given these texts have links with canonical post-resurrection narratives, which Hartenstein carefully analyzes in each case, the question is whether or not their dialogue-gospel

texts is the primary literary context within which *EpAp* is to be understood, and that its relation to other early gospels is a matter of little interest. An alternative approach would be to use the heading ‘early non-canonical gospel literature’, and to include within it texts that can plausibly be dated before *c.* 200 CE, a point by which the fourfold canonical collection had become widely recognized. The category of ‘early non-canonical gospel literature’ would include the gospels attributed to Thomas, Peter, Judas and Mary and the ‘unknown gospel’ attested by the Egerton fragments, but it would also include closely-related texts such as the *Protevangelium of James* and *EpAp*. The way would then be open to explore interconnections and differences within the entire field of early gospel literature, across the boundary that retrospectively separated the gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John from the others.<sup>55</sup>

## 2. The Gospel of the Twelve and the Gospel of John

All extant gospels interact with the work of their predecessors. This is true even of the Gospel of Mark, in which secondary additions to still earlier text-forms can be identified at numerous points. If *EpAp* shows a knowledge of earlier gospels, that does not make it inherently ‘apocryphal’. If it is ‘late’ or ‘secondary’ in relation to its predecessors, so too are they in relation to their own predecessors. The initial period of gospel production should be seen as a continuum brought to a close only by the stabilizing of the four gospel collection, and not by the composition of the so-called ‘fourth gospel’. Far from inhibiting gospel production, the composition of one gospel can stimulate the composition of another, with which it may coexist or compete

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‘Gattung’ (249) prioritizes their relation to one another over their relation to, say, John and Matthew – texts with which the *Epistula* directly engages.

<sup>55</sup> For a collection along these lines, see Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, Guildford: Lutterworth, 1983, which has the merit of including the *Epistula*. (Unfortunately it also includes the 5<sup>th</sup> century *Acts of Pilate* and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century *Secret Gospel of Mark* – on which see my article, ‘Beyond Suspicion: On the Authorship of the Mar Saba Letter and the Secret Gospel of Mark’, *JTS* n.s. 61 [2010], 128-70). The *Epistula* features neither in the introductions to non-canonical gospels by Hans-Josef Klauck or Paul Foster, nor in the major collection assembled by Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše. (Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003; Paul Foster, *The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP, 2009; Paul Foster [ed.], *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008; Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*, New York: OUP, 2011.)

depending in large part on decisions taken by users of these texts.<sup>56</sup> Users of both *EpAp* and the Gospel of John existed in Coptic-, Latin-, and Ge‘ez-speaking communities, and in each case the collective decision was to value *EpAp* highly enough for it to be translated and circulated but to withhold from it the normative status accorded to John. The question is whether the author of *EpAp* would have shared that assessment of his own work as subordinate to his predecessor’s.

(i) *Textual Authority, Authorial Freedom*

It is generally agreed that *EpAp* is familiar with the Gospel of John. On three occasions it is said that ‘the Word became flesh’ (Jn.1.14).<sup>57</sup> On the first of these occasions, it is also explained that ‘not by the desire of the flesh but by the will of God was he born’, echoing John 1.13 in a christological variant also attested in Latin sources.<sup>58</sup> The Johannine miracle of water into wine is summarized in language similar to John 2.1-2, although here Jesus attends the wedding with his brothers rather than his disciples.<sup>59</sup> As in John 11, the sisters Mary and Martha are present at the site of a resurrection – that of Jesus rather than Lazarus.<sup>60</sup> After Jesus has been raised, Thomas is invited to put his hand into the wound in Jesus’ side, although it is Peter rather than Thomas who is to examine the nail-marks in Jesus’ hands.<sup>61</sup> Johannine language abounds. Jesus states that ‘I am wholly in the Father, and the Father is in me.’<sup>62</sup> He gives his disciples a new commandment, that they ‘love one another and obey one another’.<sup>63</sup> He speaks of himself as shepherd and of his followers as sheep threatened by wolves if they remain outside the sheepfold.<sup>64</sup> He repeatedly speaks of his Father as ‘the one who sent me’.<sup>65</sup> After the disciples have pronounced a blessing

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<sup>56</sup> For extended treatment of this perspective on gospel origins, see my *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, 1-9, 286-407, 604-19; *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016, 1-20.

<sup>57</sup> *EpAp* 3.13\* (Hills, 3.10); 14.6; 39.16.

<sup>58</sup> *EpAp* 3.14\* (Hills, 3.11). The most important manuscript witness to the singular reading ‘who... was born’ rather than ‘who... were born’ is Codex Veronensis (5<sup>th</sup> century, second half; it<sup>b</sup>). Among patristic attestations, Tertullian’s strong defence of the singular against the plural is notable (*de carn. Chr.* 19). In the case of Irenaeus (*adv. haer.* iii.16.2, 19.2) it is less clear that he is actually citing John 1.13; like *EpAp* 3.14\*, he may rather be adapting its language to christological use.

<sup>59</sup> *EpAp* 5.1; cf. Jn.20.27.

<sup>60</sup> *EpAp* 9.2.

<sup>61</sup> *EpAp* 11.7.

<sup>62</sup> *EpAp* 17.4; cf. Jn.14.11.

<sup>63</sup> *EpAp* 18.5; cf. Jn.13.34.

<sup>64</sup> *EpAp* 44.1-3; cf. Jn.10.12..

<sup>65</sup> *EpAp* 13.3\* (Hills, 13.2); 17.3, 6; 19.5, 29\* (Hills, 19.19); 21.1, 3; 28.4; 36.6\* (Hills, 36.5); 43.7; 51.1. Cf. Jn.4.34; 5.24, 30; 6.38, 39; 7.16, 18, 28, 33; 9.4; 12.44, 45; 13.16, 20; 15.21; 16.5. ‘The

on themselves for what they have seen, Jesus corrects them: ‘Blessed rather are those who have not seen and yet believed, for such will be called sons of the kingdom...’<sup>66</sup>

Connections with the Gospel of John are many and various. Equally unmistakable are the divergences from John even within the points of contact. Johannine material is always adapted, never simply reproduced. The question is how the relationship between the two texts is to be understood, in the light of the divergences as well as the connections. When the author of *EpAp* has Jesus’ brothers attend the wedding at Cana rather than his disciples, is he asserting his own independence from John, or even correcting him?<sup>67</sup> Or does his use of John represent an acknowledgment of its proto-canonical authority, and are the divergences mere incidental details? The tendency is to assume that knowledge and use of John expresses the deference to Johannine normativity of a text with no aspirations towards a normative status of its own, its ‘apocryphal’ and non-canonical status written into it from the outset. Thus Charles Hill believes that, ‘[d]espite the apocryphal and pseudonymous nature of this document, it does not seek to supplant or supersede the Church’s accepted Gospels’, and that ‘the sheer number of allusions to the Fourth Gospel... reveal the author’s high regard for that Gospel’, which he uses ‘in a wholly positive way’.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, *EpAp* even seems to suggest ‘that the authoritative sources are fixed and now closed.’<sup>69</sup> Along the same lines, Darrell Hannah concludes that

the *Epistula*’s author made use of a gospel canon which functionally was identical to our own, and he did so perhaps four decades before Irenaeus explicitly defended the same four-gospel canon...<sup>70</sup>

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Father who sent me’, *EpAp* 39.6, cf. Jn.5.23, 37; 6.44; 8.16, 18, 26, 29; 12.49; 14.24. ‘My Father who sent me’, *EpAp* 26.2, 5.

<sup>66</sup> *EpAp* 29.5-6; cf. Jn.20.29.

<sup>67</sup> *EpAp* 5.1; cf. Jn.2.1-2, but n.b. v.12, where Jesus’ brothers are mentioned as though they had been present at the wedding.

<sup>68</sup> Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, Oxford: OUP, 2004, 368. Hill does however recognize a ‘quite basic problem: if he regards these written sources so highly, how can this author... take[ ] so many liberties with those treasured words and add[ ] so considerably to them?’ (371). The problem lies not with the author of the *Epistula* but in the assumption that his written sources already have canonical authority.

<sup>69</sup> Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 371. Contrast the assessment of Carl Schmidt: ‘Sehr charakteristisch ist die Freiheit in der Verwendung des evangelischen Stoffes. Irgendwelche Scheu vor dem geheiligten Buchstaben der Schriften kennt der Verfasser nicht’ (*Gespräche Jesu*, 373).

<sup>70</sup> Darrell D. Hannah, ‘The Four-Gospel “Canon” in the *Epistula Apostolorum*’, *JTS* 59 n.s. (2008), 598-633; 633.



Hill and Hannah argue for an early *terminus ad quem* for this text at c. 150 CE. Like earlier scholars, Hannah appeals to Jesus' announcement that his parousia will take place after 120 years;<sup>71</sup> Hill finds that an Asian setting in this period accounts for references to earthquakes, plague, and other disasters presaging the end.<sup>72</sup> If this is indeed an Asian text from the first half of the second century, as it may well be, then its origins may lie in the same general time-frame and location as the Gospel of John. The question of the relationship between the two texts would then be all the more important. Given the fact of 'dependence', does the later text defer to a virtual canonical status already assumed by the earlier one? Or does it go its own way, assimilating Johannine material to its own agenda without any awareness of its own secondary, 'apocryphal' status?

These questions have broader significance in the study of early Christian gospel literature. To show that one text 'knows', or 'uses', or 'is dependent on' another does not in itself tell us anything about the status of the earlier text from the perspective of the later. In one case a later text may present the earlier material essentially unchanged, thereby acknowledging its priority and authoritative status. In another case, material from the earlier text may be subjected to more or less free rewriting and emendation, as the new text lays claim to an authoritative status of its own. The earlier gospel text may be treated as normative, but it may also be regarded merely as a source.

Both possibilities may be illustrated from a text perhaps roughly contemporary with *EpAp*, the so-called *Protevangelium of James*, where Matthew's account of Jesus' birth and infancy remains largely intact even where it is expanded, while material from Luke is treated with much greater freedom.

The *Protevangelium* introduces the magi as follows:

And there was a great disturbance in                   καὶ θόρυβος ἐγένετο μέγας ἐν Βηθλὲμ  
Bethlehem of Judea, for there came magi

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<sup>71</sup> Hannah, 'Four-Gospel "Canon"', 628-31. According to *EpAp*<sup>cop</sup> 17.2, the parousia will occur after 120 years ('the hundredth part and the twentieth part' = 'the hundred-and-twentieth [year]': the translator has mistakenly assumed that the underlying Greek ordinals represent fractions). *EpAp*<sup>eth</sup> 17.2 speaks instead of the 'hundred-and-fiftieth year', perhaps in response to the non-occurrence of the parousia at an earlier expected date. A comprehensive case for an early dating of *EpAp* is presented by Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, 370-402.

<sup>72</sup> Charles E. Hill, 'The Epistula Apostolorum: An Asian Tract from the Time of Polycarp', *J ECS* 7 (1999), 1-53; 39-51. Cf. *EpAp* 34.10 (earthquakes: 'falling cities and people dying in their ruins'); 34.10-13, 36.3-10 (plague).

saying. ‘Where is the king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and we have come to worship him.’ And Herod hearing was troubled and sent servants to the magi; and he summoned the chief priests and questioned them in the praetorium saying to them, ‘How is it written about the Christ? Where is he to be born?’ They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written.’ And he dismissed them.<sup>73</sup>

τῆς Ἰουδαίας. Ἦλθωσαν γὰρ μάγοι λέγοντες· Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; Εἶδομεν γὰρ τὸν ἀστέρα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἦλθαμεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ. Καὶ ἀκούσας ὁ Ἡρώδης ἐταράχθη καὶ ἔπεμψεν ὑπηρέτας πρὸς τοὺς μάγους· καὶ μετεπέμψατο καὶ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ ἀνέκρινεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ αὐτοῦ λέγων αὐτοῖς· Πῶς γέγραπται περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ποῦ γεννᾶται; Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Ἐν Βηθλεὲμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας· οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται. Καὶ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτούς.

This is not exactly what Matthew wrote. The author assumes that the magi proceeded directly to Bethlehem, and that Herod must send out his servants to make contact with them. The question, ‘How is it written about the Christ?’ is added; the scriptural citation from Micah 5.2 is omitted (cf. Mt.2.4-6). Yet this remains essentially the Matthean story. Recognizing its proto-canonical authority, the author allows himself only limited freedom as he rewrites it in his own words.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, Lukan material is treated with much greater freedom. Thus Luke’s depiction of the child in the manger is transformed as the author connects it not to the night of Jesus’ birth but to the slaughter of the innocents:

And Mary, hearing that the infants were being killed, being afraid, took the child and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and

Καὶ ἀκούσασα ἡ Μαρία ὅτι τὰ βρέφη ἀναιρεῖται, φοβηθεῖσα ἔλαβεν τὸν παῖδα

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<sup>73</sup> P<sup>Jas</sup> 21.1-2. Text, E. Strycker, *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques: Recherches sur le Papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une Édition Critique du Texte Grec et une Traduction Annotée*, Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961. Strycker’s text is based on P. Bodmer V (dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century), and is reprinted with English translation in Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*, New York & Oxford: OUP, 2011, 40-71. Translations are my own.

<sup>74</sup> The *Protevangeliium* engages with the Matthean infancy account in P<sup>Jas</sup> 13.1-14.3 (an expanded account of Joseph’s discovery of Mary’s pregnancy; cf. Mt. 1.18-19); P<sup>Jas</sup> 14.2 // Mt.1.20-25 (Joseph’s dream and its outcome); P<sup>Jas</sup> 21.1-22.1 // Mt.2.1-12 (the visit of the magi); P<sup>Jas</sup> 22.1 // Mt.2.16 (the command to slaughter the innocents).

put him into a cattle manger.<sup>75</sup>

καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἔβαλεν ἐν  
φάτνῃ βοῶν.

The swaddling cloths and the manger are obviously Lukan (cf. Lk.2.7), but using them as a means of concealment is a product of the later author's imagination. The manger is presumably located in or near the cave in which Mary has given birth,<sup>76</sup> but there is no reference to Luke's explanation: '... because there was no room in the inn' (2.7).<sup>77</sup> In transferring the Lukan motifs from the birth to the Matthean context of the massacre of the innocents, the author again shows how Matthew's birth narrative exercises a much stronger hold over him than Luke's. Although it would be anachronistic to claim that for this author Matthew is already 'canonical' while Luke is 'non-canonical', he clearly ascribes proto-canonical authority to Matthew but treats his Lukan source with considerable freedom. It would be quite inadequate to state that the author of the *Protevangelium* 'knows' or 'uses' the Gospels of Matthew and Luke if one failed to add that he 'uses' them in fundamentally different ways.<sup>78</sup>

This, then, is the question to be put to *EpAp*'s treatment especially of the Gospel of John. Does the later text's use of John indicate deference to an authoritative

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<sup>75</sup> *PJas* 22.2, cf. Lk.2.7. Elsewhere the *Protevangelium* divides the Lukan annunciation story into two distinct episodes (*PJas* 11.1-18, cf. Lk.1.26-38); depicts Mary as visiting Elizabeth but forgetting how she became pregnant (*PJas* 12.2-3, cf. Lk.1.39-56); and restricts a census attributed to Augustus to the citizens of Bethlehem (*PJas* 17.1, cf. Lk.2.1). Un-Lukan contexts are created for the Lukan characters Zechariah (*PJas* 8.3; 10.2; 23.1-24.4 [but cf. Lk.11.51]) and Elizabeth (*PJas* 22.3).

<sup>76</sup> The view of Justin, *dial.* 78.5; Origen, *c. Cel.* i.51.

<sup>77</sup> The *Protevangelium* can hardly be said to provide here 'eine Begründung für das Motiv der Krippe aus dem Geburtsbericht des Lukas', as Alexander Toepel argues (*Das Protevangelium des Jakobus: Ein Beitrag zur neueren Diskussion um Herkunft, Auslegung und theologische Einordnung*, Frankfurter Theologische Studien 71, Münster: Aschendorff, 2014, 233).

<sup>78</sup> The relationship between the *Protevangelium*, Matthew, and Luke has been surprisingly neglected, no doubt due to the assumption that an 'apocryphal' retelling of the birth story is unsuitable for comparison with the canonical versions. Raymond Brown assigns the *Protevangelium* to a different genre, claiming that it is 'the oldest extant commentary on the canonical Gospel narratives' (*The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New York: Doubleday, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 707n). H.-J. Klauck too denies that it belongs to the gospel genre, which 'never placed its primary emphasis on the birth of Jesus': thus, '[s]trictly speaking, an "infancy gospel" is a contradiction in terms' (*Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, London and New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2003; 64, italics original). According to Paul Foster, 'the major difference is [the *Protevangelium*'s] tendency to expand known events, to add details and to modify existing stories' ('The *Protevangelium* of James', in *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, ed. P. Foster, London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008, 110-25; 110). In each case, a focus on difference at the expense of commonalities assumes that the canonical/apocryphal distinction is inherent to the texts themselves. As Dieter Lüthmann rightly argues: '«Kanonisch» ist freilich keine Eigenschaft, die den so bezeichneten Evangelien von sich aus zukommt; ... kanonische Evangelien sind also zu solchen erst geworden. Solange das aber nicht geschehen ist, kann es ebensowenig Evangelien geben, denen diese Qualität von vornherein abgeht, und "nicht kanonische" sind ebenso durch die Kanonisierung der anderen erst "apokryph" geworden' (*Die apokryphen gewordenen Evangelien: Studien zum Neuen Texten und Neuen Fragen*, Leiden: Brill, 2003; 2, italics original).

text on the way to canonical status, or does it involve free adaptation from earlier written traditions still regarded as fluid and malleable? *EpAp*'s version of the story of Easter morning may serve as a test-case.<sup>79</sup>

(ii) *Redeploying Johannine Women*

In *EpAp*, the Easter story is introduced by a summary of the events of Jesus' passion, the Ethiopic version of which is somewhat fuller than the Coptic. Substantive variants (as opposed to paraphrases, repetitions, and errors) are relatively rare in the Ethiopic version, and these ones may derive from an early Greek text-form. There is also a potentially significant variant within the Ethiopic manuscript tradition:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>The one we confess is the Lord who was crucified by Pontius Pilate and Archelaus between the two thieves, &lt;<sup>eth</sup> and with them {<sup>eth ms C</sup> he was reckoned, } they took him down from the wood of the cross&gt; and he was buried in a place called 'The Skull' [ΚΡΑΝΙΟΝ].<sup>80</sup></p> | <p>peï [ετῆρ]μῆτρε ἀχῶα δε πλάεις πε πεï<br/> εταγ[ρσταγ]ρογ ἡμαα ριτῆ ποντιος<br/> πειλατος ·[μῆ δ]ρχελαος ἡτμητε<br/> ἡπκαειρ ἡληστη[ε &lt; ωσῆ ἁρσῶ· ἡ·ἡ·φ :<br/> ἡ ωε ε·φ : ἡ ἡθ θ : σῆ φ δ : &gt; αογ<br/> α]γταμσῶ ρη ογτοπος εραρογμογτε α..</p> |
|---|---|

'Archelaus' is probably an attempt to identify the 'Herod' whose role in the passion tradition is attested in the Gospels of Luke and Peter.<sup>81</sup> The correct name, Antipas, occurs nowhere in the New Testament and would be familiar only to readers of Josephus; Archelaus, is attested in Matthew 2.22. The reading of *Eth ms C*, 'with them he was reckoned', corresponds to an early Markan variant first attested in

<sup>79</sup> For a thorough analysis of the *Epistula*'s resurrection narrative, see Hartenstein, *Zweite Lehre*, 108-19. Hartenstein rightly notes that this text differs from other Dialogue Gospels in providing a full Easter narrative, rather than merely presupposing the resurrection (99-100).

<sup>80</sup> *EpAp* 9.1. The Ethiopic refers to 'Archelaus the Judge'. In the translation above, a redundant repetition of 'he was crucified' in the Ethiopic has been omitted after 'the two thieves', following the Coptic, together within a further variant within the Ethiopic manuscript tradition ('was taken down from <the wood of> the cross'). The priority of the Ethiopic over the Coptic here is accepted by M. Hornschuh (*Studien*, 12), Julian V. Hills (*Tradition and Composition in the Epistula Apostolorum*, Harvard Theological Studies 57, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, 78-79) and Judith Hartenstein (*Zweite Lehre*, 113n), although without taking into account the important variants within the Ethiopic manuscripts, noted by Guerrier.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Lk.23.6-12; *GPet* 1.1-2.5.

Eusebius. Two thieves were crucified on Jesus' right and left (Mk.15.27), 'so that the scripture might be fulfilled that says, "And with the lawless was he reckoned [καὶ μετὰ ἀνόμων ἐλογίσθη]"' (Mk.15.28 H K Δ\* Ɔ).<sup>82</sup> The longer reading ('between two thieves, and with them he was reckoned, they took him down...') is arguably more appropriate to its context than the shorter reading ('between two thieves, and with them they took him down...'). There is no reason to suppose that the allusion to Isaiah 53.12 is drawn from the Markan variant; indeed, the Markan variant reflects an earlier interpretation of the Isaianic passage.<sup>83</sup>

The longer text continues by stating that 'they took him down from the cross, and he was buried in a place called "The Skull."' In John 19.41 similarly, Jesus' tomb is located 'in the place where he was crucified', although there it is also a garden. Nothing in the synoptics suggests that Joseph of Arimathea's rock-hewn tomb was located at the place of execution. Since *EpAp* does not mention Joseph, it may attest a tradition in which Jesus is removed from the cross and buried by his enemies rather than his friends.<sup>84</sup> By placing Jesus' tomb both at the execution ground and in Joseph's garden, John apparently conflates two traditions. In visiting the tomb on Easter morning, Mary Magdalene alone (John) or with her companions (*Epistula*) also revisit the site of the crucifixion.

In the later text, it is not quite clear who Mary Magdalene's companions are. According to the most widely-used English version of *EpAp* (translated not directly from Coptic and Ge'ez but from German), the three women who come to the tomb are identified as Sarah, Martha, and Mary Magdalene in the Ge'ez version, and as Mary, Martha's daughter, and Mary Magdalene in the Coptic.<sup>85</sup> The question is whether a common underlying text can be identified, and the first step is to show that current English and German translations of the Coptic are misleading in their reference to 'Martha's daughter'. The text speaks of 'Mary who is of Martha', that is, 'Mary kin to Martha'. This Mary is identified by way of an unspecified relationship to Martha,

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<sup>82</sup> Mark 15.28 is linked to Luke 23.37 in Eusebius' canon VIII, and is present throughout the Ethiopic manuscript tradition (see R. Zuurmond, *The Synoptic Gospels: General Introduction, Gospel of Mark, Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989, 2.284).

<sup>83</sup> Isaiah 53.12 is said to be fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, v.3.14, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Acts 13.29: ὡς δὲ ἐτέλεσαν πάντα τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένα, καθελόντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου ἔθηκον εἰς μνημεῖον. See Hornschuh, *Studien*, 12-13. The view that Acts 13.29 attributes Jesus' burial to his enemies is rejected by C. K. Barrett (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1.641-42), but accepted by Beverly Gaventa (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 199).

<sup>85</sup> Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1.254; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 561; cf. Marksches and Schröter, I, 2, 1068. The following note gives a fuller account of the translation issues.

presumably in order to differentiate her from Mary Magdalene – as in the case of Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Ἰακώβου in Mark 16.1. ‘Martha’s daughter’ is a pure invention.

Eliminating modern translation errors still leaves us with ancient ones to contend with. In *EpAp*<sup>Cop</sup> 9.2, ‘three women’ visit the tomb but only two of them are named: ‘Mary of Martha’ and ‘Mary Magdalene.’ As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Martha too present in this scene, and not just her sister. The risen Lord reveals himself, and sends first Martha (10.3) and then Mary (10.8) to invite the male disciples to meet him at the tomb – an invitation they reject, stubbornly refusing to believe that he is truly risen. So Martha herself must have visited the tomb along with Mary. Just as the modern invention of Martha’s daughter is without foundation, so too is the Coptic version’s ‘Mary of Martha’. The ancient translator or scribe may have been influenced by references to the two women in John 11. The pair are introduced as ‘Mary and Martha her sister’ (Jn.11.1), and Martha will later summon ‘Mary her sister’ to meet Jesus on his way to Lazarus’ tomb (11.28). Thus in the Coptic *Epistula* ‘Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene’ has been emended to ‘Mary [sister] of Martha and Mary Magdalene’, apparently reducing the group of three to a pair.<sup>86</sup>

The Ethiopic tradition has probably introduced ‘Sarah’ for the same reason as the Coptic has introduced ‘Mary of Martha’: to differentiate this individual more clearly from Mary Magdalene.<sup>87</sup> Our reconstructed text may therefore be set out as follows:

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<sup>86</sup> Schmidt correctly translated the reference to eumah[|amte =nc]hime maria tamar;a aou maria [tmagd]alyny as ‘<drei> Frauen: Maria, die zu Martha Gehörige, und Maria <Magd>alena’, that is, as a reference to two women – Mary kin to Martha, Mary Magdalene – rather than three (*Gespräche*, 39; Coptic text, 2\*). There is thus a contradiction between ‘three women’ and the fact that only two are named. (For the prefix mah- indicating a group rather than an ordinal – ‘the third woman’ – cf. nefma;ytyc eumahm=nt=cnoouc, ‘his disciples, the Twelve’ [*DialSav* 81]). maria tamar;a is thus a gloss, and the text should read maria aou mar;a..., Mary and Martha...’ (Schmidt, 38). Schmidt’s translation and emendation were accepted by Hugo Duensing in his 1925 translation (*Epistula Apostolorum nach dem Äthiopischen und Koptischen Texte Herausgegeben*, Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen, Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1925, 9n, reprinted without the valuable textual notes in Hennecke-Schneemelcher<sup>3</sup> [1959], 126-57). In Hennecke-Schneemelcher<sup>5</sup> (1987), C. Detlef G. Müller undertook a ‘careful revision’ of Duensing’s translation, but (1) mistook Duensing’s ‘Maria, die zu Martha Gehörige..’ as referring to two individuals, not one, so as to produce the requisite total of ‘three women’; (2) decided that the now-unnamed relative of Martha was her daughter. Thus the ‘drei Frauen’ are now ‘Maria, der Martha Tochter und Maria Magdalena’. As Schmidt and Duensing were aware, maria tamar;a can only refer to a single individual. Müller’s error is reproduced in the NT apocrypha editions of Wilson (1.254), Elliott (561), and Marksches-Schröter (I.2, 1068).

<sup>87</sup> Darrell Hannah’s suggestion that ‘Sarah’ represents a scribal misreading of ‘Salome’ has little to recommend it (‘Four-Gospel “Canon”’, 618-19). Ethiopic scribes do not seem to have had particular difficulties with the name Salome (Zuurmond, *Synoptic Gospels*, 2.289, 292: Mk.15.40, 16.1).

There came to that place three women, Mary<sup>Cop</sup> Sarah<sup>Eth</sup> and<sup>Eth</sup> of<sup>Cop</sup> Martha and Mary Magdalene.<sup>88</sup>

That this reading is correct is confirmed by the sequel, in which, after Martha and Mary have returned after their fruitless attempts to convince the male disciples, the Lord proposes ‘to Mary and her sisters’ that they all visit them together (10.3, 6; 11.1). It is striking that Mary Magdalene, the leading figure in the canonical accounts and in the *Gospel of Peter*, has no independent role here, her primacy usurped by Mary and Martha:

- Mt.28.1: Mary Magdalene, ‘the other Mary’  
Mk.16.1: Mary Magdalene, Mary of James  
Lk.24.10: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary of James, ‘the others with them’  
Jn.20.1: Mary Magdalene  
*GPet* 12.50-51: Mary Magdalene, her friends  
*EpAp* 9.2: Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene

What is remarkable in *EpAp* is the use of Johannine characters associated with the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn.11) to take on the leading roles in connection with the resurrection of Jesus. Johannine characters are here found in an un-Johannine context. The author presumably knows the story of the raising of Lazarus, but he takes from it only the figures of the two sisters and uses them to rewrite the Johannine account of the Easter morning events, in which the spotlight falls initially on Mary Magdalene alone.

In *EpAp* as in John, the Lord’s first appearance takes place at the tomb:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| There came to that place three women,   | αΥΒΩΚ ΑΠΜΑ ΕΤ̄Μ̄ΜΟ ΕΥΜΑΞ[ΞΑΜΤΕ         |
| Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene.     | ̄ΝΣ]ΞΙΜΕ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΑΜΑΡΘΑ ΔΟΥ ΜΑΡΙΑ       |
| They took ointment to pour over his     | [ΤΜΑΓΔ.]ΑΛΗΝΗ ΔΥΧΙ ΝΟΥΣΑΘΝΕ            |
| body, weeping and grieving over what    | ΑΥΘΟΥΩΥ [ΔΧ̄Ν Π]̄̄ΩΜΑ ΕΥΡΙΜΕ ΔΟΥ       |
| had happened. But when they reached the | ΕῩΡ̄ΛΥΠΕΙ ΔΧ̄Ν [ΠΕΤΑ.]ΥΞΩΠΕ ΤΑΡΟΥΞΝΑΝ |

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<sup>88</sup> *EpAp* 9.2.

tomb and looked inside they did not find the body. And as they were grieving and weeping the Lord appeared to them and said to them, ‘For whom do you weep? Weep no longer! I am the one you seek. But let one of you go to your brothers and say, “Come, the Teacher has risen from the dead!”’<sup>89</sup>

ΔΕ ΔΡΟΥΝ ΑΠΤΑ[ΦΟΣ] ΔΥΩΝΤ ΔΡΟΥΝ  
 ΝΠΟΥΘΝ ΠΩΜΑ · ΩΣ [ΕΥΡ]ΛΥΠΕΙ ΔΕ ΔΟΥ  
 ΕΥΡΙΜΕ Δ ΠΧΔΕΙΣ ΟΥΩΝΣ [ΝΕ]Υ ΑΒΑΛ  
 ΠΑΧΕΥ ΝΕΥ ΔΕ ΑΤΕΤΝΡΙΜΕ ΝΝΙΜ · [Μ]ΝΩΤ  
 ΣΕ ΔΡΙΜΕ ΔΝΑΚ ΠΕΤΕΤΝΩΙΝΕ ΝΩΩΥ ΑΛΛΑ  
 ΜΑΡΕ ΟΥΙΕ ΣΝΤΗΝΕ ΒΩΚ ΩΑ ΝΕΤΝΚΝΗΥ  
 ΣΧΟΟΣ ΔΕ ΔΜΗΕΙΝΕ Δ ΠΣΑΖ ΤΩΝΕ ΣΝ  
 Η[ΕΤΗ]ΔΥΤ

The ‘ointment’ or ‘perfume’ is another Johannine element transferred from the Mary and Martha traditions, along with the names themselves. Mary of Magdala is associated with ‘spices’ (ἀρώματα, Mk.16.1; Lk.24.1), Mary of Bethany with the ‘ointment’ with which she anointed the Lord’s feet, wiping them with her hair (Jn.11.2, 12.3: μύρον = *σαῶνε*). In *EpAp* it is the Johannine Mary of Bethany who leads her sister Martha and Mary Magdalene to the tomb, so she naturally brings her ointment rather than spices. In its Johannine context too, the ointment is associated with Jesus’ death. Responding to criticism of Mary’s action, Jesus demands that she be allowed to ‘keep it [the ointment] for the day of my burial’ (Jn.12.7). Mysteriously, the ointment poured over Jesus’ feet is also reserved for his corpse. It is this motif that *EpAp* here picks up, deriving it perhaps from a version of the Johannine story in which Jesus defers the anointing until his burial.<sup>90</sup>

### (iii) Resolving Johannine Anomalies

At point after point, *EpAp* appears to be engaging with themes in the Johannine Easter narrative. More specifically, it addresses Johannine *anomalies* – or what might be thought such. A narrative anomaly is an unexplained alteration to an existing

<sup>89</sup> *EpAp* 9.2-10.2. Main variants: (1) Coptic reads ‘they poured’, obviously a mistake; Ethiopic, ‘to pour’. (2) Ethiopic has added a reference to the stone: ‘When they reached the tomb and ~~looked inside~~ <found the stone where it had been rolled from the tomb and the door opened {other mss: they opened the door}> they did not find the body.’ (3) Ethiopic omits ‘For whom do you weep?’

<sup>90</sup> On John 12.7 Bultmann comments that ‘Maria soll den Rest der Salbe für die Bestattung aufbewahren. (Sie zerbricht das Gefäss nicht wie Mk 14,3...) Damit wäre aber ja gesaGT, dass Jesus jetzt schon mit der Salbe der Bestattung gesalbt ist bzw. dass die Intention dieser Salbung bei seiner Bestattung ihre Erfüllung findet’ (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968<sup>10</sup>, 315n). Bultmann’s gloss is only loosely related to the text itself, as he admits: ‘Die Formulierung bei Joh[annes] ist kaum verständlich’ (315n). The passage in the *Epistula* suggests a tradition in which Mary *did* keep her ointment for Jesus’ burial.



configuration of characters, circumstances, and settings, leaving a gap in the narrative that disorients the reader. This disorientation may be an intended and appropriate effect of the narrative, or it may be the result of an oversight or some other accident. In either case, the narrative line has become difficult to follow. Anomalies in the Johannine Easter story are absent in *EpAp*, either because the author has eliminated them or because he is working with pre-Johannine traditions in which they have not yet appeared.

(1) In *EpAp* Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene arrive at the tomb ‘weeping and grieving over what had happened.’ When they look inside and fail to find the body, the apparent desecration of the tomb redoubles their grief. As in John, the discovery of the empty tomb is initially wholly negative. Here too, Mary is found ‘standing outside the tomb, weeping’ (Jn.20.11). Asked by two seated angels within the tomb why she is weeping, she explains that ‘they have taken my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him’ (v.13). Her words are an almost exact repetition of what she had earlier said to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple – except that then she had spoken in the first person plural. ‘They have taken away the Lord from the tomb, and *we* do not know where they have put him’ (v.2). The plural has no basis in the Johannine text in its present form. Mary Magdalene’s companions at the cross – Jesus’ mother and her sister, Mary wife of Clopas (19.25-27) – have disappeared from the scene. The plural may be a vestige of an earlier text-form in which, as in other gospels, Mary is not alone as she visits the tomb. If so, that older text-form is echoed in *EpAp*, which has Mary Magdalene accompanied to the tomb by authentically Johannine women (Mary of Bethany and her sister Martha) rather than synoptic ones.

(2) In John 20, Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb and runs to inform Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. After their visit to the tomb has been narrated in circumstantial detail, Mary is found at the tomb again, as though she had never left it. Nothing is said about her return there.<sup>91</sup> If the second mention of her name is replaced by a pronoun, a seamless continuity emerges between the passages separated by the intrusive episode of the male disciples’ race to the tomb (20.2-10).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Although one would expect an indication of Mary’s return to the tomb, this is bypassed’ (Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 524). The reader ‘expects’ and is entitled to an explanation, and experiences its lack as anomalous.

<sup>92</sup> A Johannine version of a tradition also attested in Luke 24.12, 24. R. H. Fuller finds in vv.3-10 ‘an alternative version of the discovery... inserted into the first version, with verse 2 composed to join together the two versions by taking Mary’s lament to the angels and duplicating it for the disciples’ (*The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, London: SPCK, 1980<sup>2</sup>, 134; italics original). Thus, ‘Verse 11 resumes the pericope which had been interrupted at verse 2’ (136).

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came – early, while it was still dark – to the tomb, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. And Mary <she> was standing outside the tomb, weeping. And as she wept, she looked into the tomb... (Jn.20.1, 11)

Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρωτὶ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἠρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου... <Μαρία δὲ> εἰστήκει πρὸς τῷ μνημείῳ ἔξω κλαίουσα. ὡς οὖν ἔκλαιεν, παρέκυψεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον (John 20.1, 11)

The discovery of the empty tomb and the grief at the Lord's disappearance belong together. Although they are separated in the present form of the text by the episode of the race to the tomb, the connection is preserved in *EpAp*: 'When they reached the tomb and looked inside they did not find the body. And as they were grieving and weeping...' The connection is not to be ascribed to the synoptics, where there is no reference to grieving and weeping. Rather, it is proto-Johannine. The author of *EpAp* tells the Easter story in his own words and his own way, but he is nevertheless rooted in a Johannine tradition that extends back behind the present form of the Gospel of John.

(3) When the solitary Johannine Mary looks into the tomb, she sees and converses with angels, whose presence there has obvious synoptic antecedents. The angels put exactly the same question to Mary as Jesus will do, a few moments later: 'Woman, why are you weeping?' (Jn.20.13, 15). The encounter with angels occasions neither joy nor awe, and the conversation is abruptly terminated as Mary turns to see the far more significant figure behind her. Once Jesus appears the angels vanish, eclipsed by the risen Lord whom Mary will shortly recognize and acclaim. The angels have served their theological and literary purpose, which is to evoke the transcendent mystery that envelops Mary's meeting with the figure she mistakes for the gardener. Nevertheless, viewed prosaically, they are redundant. If the Lord himself may be encountered in the vicinity of his tomb, angels may be dispensed with. Such at least is the view of the author of *EpAp*:

And as they were grieving and weeping the Lord appeared to them and said to them, 'For whom do you weep? Weep no longer! I am the one you seek...'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *EpAp* 10.1. The Ethiopic here lacks, 'For whom do you weep?'

Nothing is said of the women’s reaction, for the priority is to send them, one by one, to try to convince the male disciples that the one they know as the Teacher and Saviour has risen from the dead.<sup>94</sup> This is an author who strives for clarity and economy and is unconcerned about theological depth or literary effect. What is at stake for him is the sheer actuality of Jesus’ resurrection, and anything that does not promote belief in that great fact is a distraction.

(4) In this concern for factuality, *EpAp* exposes a further anomaly or ambiguity within the Gospel of John itself. On the one hand, the Johannine Easter event is a disorienting mystery. The risen Lord manifests or absents himself at will. He is beyond the disciples’ or the reader’s grasp. Thus Mary is told: ‘Do not touch me’ (Jn.20.17). On the other hand, the narrative is concerned to establish Jesus’ resurrection as a surprising but undeniable fact. ‘Do not touch me’ is not repeated: Thomas is invited not only to touch but to carry out an intimate physical examination: ‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and stretch out your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving but believing’ (20.27). To this offer of absolute physical proof and certainty the author of *EpAp* responds with enthusiasm:

Then he said to us, ‘Why do you still doubt, you disbelieving ones? I am he who spoke to you about my flesh and my death and my resurrection. That you may know that it is I, Peter, put your fingers into the nail-marks of my hands; and you, Thomas, put your hands into the spear wounds in my side; and you, Andrew, look at my feet and see if they are in contact with the ground. For it is written in the prophet, “As for the manifestation of a demon, its foot is not in contact with the ground.”’ And we touched him, that we might know that he had truly risen in

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 ΠΕ ΠΕΪ ΕΤΑΖΧΟΟΣ ΝΗΤΝΕ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΑCΑΡΖ ΜΝ  
 ΠΑΜΟΥ ΜΝ ΠΑΤΩΝΕ ΧΕΚΑΔC ΑΤΕΤΝΑΜΜΕ  
 ΧΕ ΔΝΑΚ ΠΕ · ΠΕΤΡΕ ΤΩΚΕ ΝΝΕΚΨΒΕ  
 ΔΝΕΙΨΤ ΝΝΑCΙΧ ΔΟΥ ΝΤΑΚ ΖΟΥΟΥΚ ΘΩΜΑC  
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 ΧΕ CΕΤΩΜΕ ΕΝ ΑΠΚΑΖ ΨΧΗ ΓΑΡ ΖΝ  
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 [Π]Ν[ΖΟ ΕΝΡΕΖΟΜΟΛΟΓΕΙ ΝΝΝΑΒΕ ΧΕ

<sup>94</sup> *EpAp* 10.2-9.

flesh. And we fell on our faces, ἀνθρώποις ἡ[δ]ατῆς]εῖτε  
confessing our sins, because we had been  
unbelieving.<sup>95</sup>

In this version of the story, the Johannine proof of Jesus' fleshly resurrection is made still stronger. It involves three disciples, not just one, to ensure that, when convinced, they are properly representative of the apostolic body. Perhaps the author recalled the scriptural requirement that two or three witnesses must testify, and not just one, if an alleged occurrence is to be established (Dt.19.15). In *EpAp* all the male disciples have so far disbelieved (as in Mk.16.11-4), and not just Thomas (as in Jn.20.25). Initial scepticism serves rhetorically to help ensure that a proof is effective. Two of the tests of physicality are the same as in John 20: the manual examination of Jesus' wounded hands and his side. The third, directed at the feet, is new, and this is where the emphasis lies – reinforced by an invented scriptural citation.<sup>96</sup> Jesus cannot be a ghost because he has his feet firmly on the ground. Andrew's important task is to confirm that the sacred feet are substantial and load-bearing, rather than merely hovering over the ground in a ghostly manner. The tests completed, the disciples *know* that Jesus has truly risen in the flesh, and it is this knowledge that is the foundation for the *belief* they are to elicit in their hearers or readers. In *EpAp*, the ambiguities that coexist in John 20 with Thomas' physical examination are passed over. The Jesus of *EpAp* does not manifest himself within locked doors. He does not reappear after absenting himself for hours or days. Far from prohibiting touch, he invites it. He could never have been mistaken for a gardener.

*EpAp* is, seemingly, the earliest extant text to show a thorough acquaintance with the Gospel of John. Yet the author does not regard the earlier text as an infallible authority to which he must accommodate himself. On the contrary, it is his own text that lays claim to authority – the supreme authority of the risen Lord as communicated through the entire

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<sup>95</sup> *EpAp* 11.6-12.1. The translation follows the Coptic, except that at 12.1 the Ge'ez 'know that he had truly risen' has been substituted for Coptic 'know truly that he had risen.' (The many minor variants within the Ethiopic manuscripts here are inconsequential.) 'Truly risen' receives some support from fragments of a Latin translation preserved in a palimpsest, which, though barely legible, may here have read: 'Nos enim temptantes, quod vere in carne resurrexerat' (Edmund Hauler, 'Zu den neuen lateinischen Bruchstücken der Thomasapokalypse und eines apostolischen Sendschreiben im Codex Vind. Nr. 16', *Wiener Studien* 30 [1908], 308-40; 328).

<sup>96</sup> On this see Hills, *Tradition and Composition*, 85-93.

