

SUSAN E. MYERS

Spirit Epicleses in the *Acts of Thomas*

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For Kari
and
In memory of David

Preface

The present volume is a somewhat reworked version of my Ph.D. dissertation, written under the direction of Harold W. Attridge. In it, I examine prayers in the *Acts of Thomas*, concentrating especially on those found in liturgical settings, in particular those prayers addressed to the feminine Spirit and found in chapters 27 and 50 of the work. The study sets the prayers in context – historical, literary, and liturgical – and attempts to understand their meaning, a task that a colleague once commented could be an examination that one could “really get into,” although the process of “getting out” would be more difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, there remain many areas in which this study could lead, but it is long past time to “get out.”

At the risk of failing to mention individuals who have contributed, in a variety of ways, to the progress of this work, I would like to mention some people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I am most grateful to the many scholars, past and present, from whom I have learned, whether through their writing or their teaching, so much about Christian origins and early development. Chief among the contemporary individuals in this category is my *Doktorvater*, Harry Attridge, whose erudition, in both depth and breadth, is inspiring. I am most grateful also to Mary Rose D’Angelo, who provided support and encouragement through some very trying times. Paul-Hubert Poirier and Yves Tissot kindly exchanged correspondence with me regarding manuscripts of the *Acts of Thomas*. To Dr. Henning Ziebritzki and the staff of Mohr Siebeck, I extend gratitude for their patience with me; I am also grateful to Professor Jörg Frey for accepting this work for inclusion in the second series of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*.

Finally, I thank my assistant, Marisa Plevak, for her work on the manuscript, as well as Jane Cagle-Kemp and April Miller for assisting with indexing.

I dedicate this volume to my daughter and my stillborn son, from whom I have learned much, and whose presence – and absence – have done much to delay academic progress. Yet I remain deeply grateful for both of them.

Susan E. Myers
St. Paul, Minnesota

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Abbreviations

1. General

B.C.E.	before the Common Era	ff.	and the following one(s)
ca.	circa	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
C.E.	Common Era	ms(s).	manuscript(s)
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	no(s).	number(s)
chap(s).	chapter(s)	n.s.	new series
diss.	dissertation	p(p).	page(s)
ed.	edited by; edition	pt(s).	part(s)
ed(s).	editor(s)	repr.	reprinted
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	rev.	revised (by)
esp.	especially	Rev. ed.	Revised edition
ET	English translation	St.	Saint
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others	trans.	Translated by;
		vol(s).	translator(s)
			volume(s)

2. Ancient Literature

1 Pet.	1 Peter
<i>Acts Pet.</i>	<i>Acts of Peter</i>
<i>Adim.</i>	<i>Contra Adimantum</i> (Augustine: <i>Against Adimantus</i>)
<i>Alleg. Interp.</i>	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> (Philo)
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> (Josephus)
<i>Ap. John</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i> (Nag Hammadi)
ApocActs	Apocryphal Acts
<i>Carm. Nis.</i>	<i>Carmina Nisibena</i> (Ephrem)
Col	Colossians
<i>Comm. Isa.</i>	<i>Commentariorum in Isaiam</i> (Jerome: <i>Commentary on Isaiah</i>)
<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De vita contemplativa</i> (Philo: <i>On the Contemplative Life</i>)
<i>Div. haer.</i>	<i>Diversarum haereseon liber</i> (Philaster of Brescia: <i>Catalog of various Heresies</i>)
<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Demonstrations</i> (Aphrahat)
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistula(e)</i> (Letter[s])
<i>Ep. ad Idac.</i>	
<i>et Cipon.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Idacium et Ciponium</i> (Turribius: <i>Letter to Idatius and Cesonius</i>)
Eph	Ephesians

Exod	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
Faust.	<i>Contra Faustum Manichaeum</i> (Augustine: <i>Against Faustus the Manichaeans</i>)
Fel.	<i>Contra Felicem</i> (Augustine: <i>Against Felix</i>)
Gal	Galatians
Gos. Thom.	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
GosTr	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
Gos. Truth	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
Haer.	<i>Refutatio omnium haeresium (Philosophoumena)</i> (Hippolytus: <i>Refutation of all Heresies</i>)
Haer.	<i>Adversus haereses</i> (Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i>)
HcHaer	<i>Hymni contra Haereses</i> (Ephrem: <i>Hymns against Heresies</i>)
Heb	Hebrews
Hist. eccl.	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> (Eusebius: <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>)
Hist. eccl.	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> (Sozomen: <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>)
HNat.	<i>Hymni de Nativitate</i> (Ephrem: <i>Hymns on the Nativity</i>)
Hom.	<i>Homiliae (Homilies)</i>
Hom. in Luc.	<i>Homiliae in Lucam</i> (Origen: <i>Homilies on Luke</i>)
Itin. Eger.	<i>Itinerarium Egeriae (Pilgrimage of Egeria)</i>
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lev	Leviticus
Matt	Matthew
m. Ber.	<i>Mishnah Berakhot</i>
Nat. Hist.	<i>Naturalis historia</i> (Pliny: <i>Natural history</i>)
Op.	<i>Opera et Dies</i> (Hesiod: <i>Works and Days</i>)
Pan.	<i>Panarion (Adversus haereses)</i> (Epiphanius: <i>Refutation of All Heresies</i>)
Praep. ev.	<i>Praeparatio evangelica</i> (Eusebius: <i>Preparation for the Gospel</i>)
Prov	Proverbs
Resp.	<i>Respublica</i> (Plato: <i>Republic</i>)
Rom	Romans
Serm. Dom.	<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i> (Augustine: <i>Sermon on the Mount</i>)
Strom.	<i>Stromata</i> (Clement of Alexandria: <i>Miscellanies</i>)
Thom. Cont.	<i>Book of Thomas the Contender</i>
Trad. ap.	<i>Traditio apostolica</i> (Attributed to Hippolytus: <i>The Apostolic Tradition</i>)
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Zost.	<i>Zostrianos</i>

3. Journals, Series, etc.

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BLC	<i>Book of the Laws of Countries</i> (Bardaisan)

<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>EECh</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Early Church</i>
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HSem	Horae semiticae
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NTA</i>	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i>
<i>NTA</i> ⁵	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> , 5 th edition
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae</i>
<i>OrChr</i>	<i>Oriens christianus</i>
OrChrAn	Orientalia christiana analecta
PG	Patrologia graeca [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca]
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri graecae magicae</i>
PL	Patrologia latina [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina]
<i>RE</i>	<i>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i>
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
SSS	Semitic Study Series
<i>STDJ</i>	<i>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</i>
StSin	Studia Sinaitica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>SVTQ</i>	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen

WUNT

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZNW

*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der
älteren Kirche*

Chapter 1

Introductory Concerns

1. Introduction

The *Acts of Thomas* is generally regarded as an early third-century work¹ probably composed in Syriac.² It is a valuable witness to a type of Christianity that is also reflected in other apocryphal acts and that apparently thrived in the region of Syria in the early centuries of Christianity. Founded on evangelization by itinerant preachers, this distinct Christian formulation professed to require celibacy of all Christians and in many ways remained closer to the Jewish roots of Christianity than did that Christianity which existed among the Gentiles to the west. The *Acts of Thomas* shares with the other apocryphal acts a high value given to ascetic practices, including celibacy, the placement

¹ Richard A. Lipsius dates the *Acts of Thomas* before the middle of the third century (*Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden* [2 vols. in 3; Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1883–1887], 1:4), an opinion with which G. Bornkamm (“The Acts of Thomas,” in *New Testament Apocrypha* [ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; English ed. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; London: Lutterworth; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965], 2:440) concurs; likewise, A. F. J. Klijn settles on a date in the early third century, provided that the relationship between the *Acts of Peter* (perhaps datable to about 175 C.E.) and the *Acts of Thomas* can be taken to suggest dependence of the *Acts of Thomas* on the *Acts of Peter* (*The Acts of Thomas: Introduction-Text-Commentary* [NovTSup 5; Leiden: Brill, 1962], 23); Gilles Quispel declares that the *Acts of Thomas* was written ca. 225 (*Makarius, das Thomasevangelium und das Lied von der Perle* [Leiden: Brill, 1967], 39). The question of dating the work is one that requires an examination of its dependence on other apocryphal acts, and thus raises the problem of relative dating. The *Acts of Thomas* is generally considered to be later than the *Acts of Paul, Peter, John, and Andrew* and probably dependent, directly or indirectly, on several of them. The exact relationship, as well as the precise dates of other apocryphal acts, is debated.

² The principal witnesses to the work are in Syriac and Greek; the surviving manuscripts in both languages bear marks of revision, a fact that has led to extensive debate on the original language. For a discussion of the debate and for the view that the Syriac takes precedence, although the surviving Greek is in many cases closer to the original than the extant Syriac, see Harold W. Attridge, “The Original Language of the Acts of Thomas,” in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins* (ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin; College Theology Society Resources in Religion 5; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 241–50.

of women in prominent roles, and many characteristics of the ancient novel,³ including travels, talking animals, and miraculous deeds. The work was popular in antiquity with gnostic and Manichaean Christians, as is attested by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 47.1) and Augustine (*Faust.* 22.79), while Manichaean redaction of the text is apparent in the addition of the poetic Hymn of the Pearl.⁴

An account of the mission of the apostle Judas Thomas in the lands of the east, the *Acts of Thomas* contains the well-known poems, the Hymn of the Bride (chaps. 6–7) and the much-discussed Hymn of the Pearl (chaps. 108–113). It also contains early evidence of Syrian liturgical traditions, including five initiation accounts. The accounts differ from one another in the rite they describe, and the Syriac and Greek accounts of individual passages sometimes differ considerably. The fullest form of the initiation ritual seems to have consisted of an anointing with olive oil, either of the head alone or of the entire body (or perhaps both), followed by an immersion in water, and a celebration of the Eucharist using bread and water.⁵ The sacramental actions are accom-

³ On the ancient novel and its reproduction in Christian compositions, especially the various acts of apostles, both canonical and noncanonical, see the studies of Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 86–135, esp. 121–35; and “The Ancient Novel becomes Christian,” in *The Novel in the Ancient World* (ed. Gareth Schmeling; Rev. ed.; Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 685–711. Rosa Söder earlier had considered the relationship between the apocryphal acts and ancient novels in her *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932).

On the idea that religious literature, including Christian gospels, influenced the development of the ancient novel, see G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Sather Classical Lectures 58; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See also the interesting discussion of historical and novelistic characteristics in the apocryphal acts in Christine M. Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. chap. 1, as well as her earlier essay, “Stories without Texts and without Authors: The Problem of Fluidity in Ancient Novelistic Texts and Early Christian Literature,” in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins; SBLSymS 6; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 273–91.

Discussing the reception of the Apocryphal Acts in antiquity, Pervo concludes with a statement that touches on the question of genre, while avoiding a strict classification: “The ApocActs are extended prose narratives crafted by authors who have fashioned from varied sources and forms an integral whole. They are fictions about famous figures of the past, historical novels in short” (“The Ancient Novel becomes Christian,” 694).

⁴ See the study by Paul-Hubert Poirier, *L’Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas: Introduction, Text-Traduction, Commentaire* (Homo Religiosus 8; Louvain-la-Neuve: Poirier, 1981).

⁵ The avoidance of wine for the Eucharist is probably in keeping with the encratite tendencies of the document. On ascetic forms of Eucharist, see Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999). For a more extensive discussion of the various forms of initiation in the *Acts of Thomas*, see A. F. J. Klijn, “Baptism in the Acts of Thomas,” in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites* (ed. Jacob

panied by various prayers, including addresses to Jesus (or the “physician”; see chap. 156), a prayer to the oil (chap. 121) and an invocation over the oil (chap. 157), and two epicleses of the Spirit, found in chapters 27 and 50. It is these prayer passages found in ritual contexts, and especially the epicleses with their various epithets for the Spirit, that this study seeks to explicate.

The epicleses in chapters 27 (over the oil) and 50 (over the Eucharist) evidence a common structure and imagery, employing many of the same terms and phrases, thus demonstrating a close relationship with one another and probable composition by the same author. These prayers addressed to the Holy Spirit reflect themes, such as naming (chap. 27), which are here and elsewhere associated with Christ (see *Acts of Thomas* 132 and 163, and *Odes* 8 and 42). Much of the language of the epicleses, however, reflects an understanding of the Spirit best preserved in literature from Syriac-speaking Christianity, with affinities to that found in gnostic texts. The one addressed is always referred to in the feminine, specifically called “Mother” in the Greek of both chapters 27 and 50 (the Syriac, here and elsewhere, evidences some alteration apparently intended to render the text more palatable to an emerging orthodoxy), as also in the Greek of chapters 7 (the Hymn of the Bride), 39, and 133. The Spirit is that which reveals mysteries, and is “Mother of the seven houses” (Greek chap. 27);⁶ she is “perfect compassion” and “rest,” as well as “fellowship of the male,”⁷ and the “holy dove” (Greek chap. 50).

Vellian; The Syrian Church Series 6; Kottayam: C.M.S. Press, 1973), 57–62. On encratism in the apocryphal acts, see Yves Tissot, “Encratisme et actes apocryphes,” in *Les actes apocryphes des apôtres: Christianisme et monde païen* (ed. François Bovon et al.; Publications de la Faculté de Théologie de l’Université de Genève 4; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 109–19, and Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts* (Studies in Women and Religion 23; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1987).

⁶ Cf. Greek chap. 7 regarding seven groomsmen. The “seven houses” of this female figure, as well as her exalted state, recall similar imagery (“seven pillars”) applied in a different context to the figure of Wisdom in Prov 9:1.

⁷ On this final concept, and especially on the relationship between it and the understanding of “femininity” and “masculinity” in gnostic texts, see the discussion of Harold W. Attridge, “‘Masculine Fellowship’ in the *Acts of Thomas*,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 406–13. This concept is probably related to the notion of a bridal chamber, a heavenly union of the individual with a heavenly counterpart, thus restoring an original (often androgynous) state of harmony; this union can be proleptically entered into on earth. The imagery is found in chap. 124 of the *Acts of Thomas* and in the Hymn of the Bride (chaps. 6 and 7). The bridal chamber appears to be part of the Valentian sacramental system, either as a separate sacrament or as another name for one indicated elsewhere, if statements about it in the *Gospel of Philip* can be taken to refer to a particular ritual. Even if the bridal chamber does not appear as a liturgical ceremony, the concept of the Christian life as a marriage is well attested. It is found in the words of Mygdonia in *Acts of Thomas* 124; in later Syrian tradition, the “robe of glory” in which one is clothed at baptism is also a wedding robe, for “at baptism the soul is betrothed to the Son of God” (Jacob of Serugh, *Homily* 1). This is the wedding garment

2. Purpose of the Study and Method Employed

The goal of this study is to shed light on the colorful language employed in the epicleses of chapters 27 and 50 and to situate them in their proper historical and theological milieu. In order to do this, I begin by asking foundational questions regarding authorship, provenance, and date. My conclusions differ somewhat from those of previous scholars. Although the author is anonymous, and several persons contributed to the completed work, a close examination of the redactional activity in the *Acts of Thomas* reveals that the author of the unified second half of the work was also the compiler and redactor of the discrete tales in the first half. This author/redactor may have hailed from the city of Nisibis or its environs. Although the tales found in the first half of the *Acts of Thomas* may stem from early in the third century, the redaction of the completed work occurred later, perhaps in the middle of the century.

The epicleses of central interest to this essay are found in the only two initiatory settings that appear in the first half of the work. The first epiclesis, in chapter 27, occurs in the context of an initiation ceremony for King Gundaphar, who had previously opposed Thomas and threatened to kill him, and his brother Gad. In the context of an anointing, the apostle speaks the prayer over the oil. The epiclesis of chapter 50 is also set in the context of initiation; the prayer is spoken over the bread of an initiatory Eucharist. This second initiation involves several people, but the principal figure is a woman who had been harassed for five years by a demon until Thomas exorcised it. She requests and receives the “seal” (σφραγίς in Greek; in Syriac *rushma*, “sign”). Several adventures of the apostle intervene between the two scenes. The prayers themselves display a marked similarity with one another. I examine these texts in the light of the other prayers and liturgical texts in the *Acts of Thomas* as well as with regard to the work as a whole. The epicleses, like so many of the prayers in the *Acts of Thomas*, antedate the work and are likely to have been used in an earlier liturgical setting. They share images and vocabulary with other prayers in the *Acts of Thomas* that also give evidence of an earlier and independent origin.

Since the epicleses are employed in liturgical contexts in the work, and seem to have originated in the liturgy, I next analyze the presence of liturgical elements, especially regarding initiation, that appear in the *Acts of Thomas*. Although there is variety in the liturgical rites described (even in the five initiation accounts in the Greek text, but especially when Greek and Syriac are compared), the chief element in initiation throughout the work is the anoint-

which one wears for the eschatological banquet (Matt 22:12; see Sebastian Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* [ed. M. Schmidt; Eichstätter Beiträge 4; Regensburg: Pustet, 1982], 13); see also *Ode 42 of the Odes of Solomon*.

ing. An initiatory Eucharist is second in importance; its distinctive nature is the use of a cup of water rather than wine. Finally, baptism brings up the rear. Indeed, in the accounts of initiation surrounding the epicleses in the Greek version, baptism is entirely absent. At an early stage in the tradition, initiation in this region seems to have consisted of an anointing followed by a bread and water Eucharist.

In order to place the epicleses in their correct historical context, I examine prayers from various traditions and regions, attempting to isolate forms, terms, or images that agree with what is found in the prayers of chapters 27 and 50. With respect to form, the prayers evidence similarity to the adjurations of a deity found in popular (often called “magical”) prayers, and especially to the so-called Orphic Hymns. The terminology of the epicleses most often corresponds with that found in sources (sometimes called “heretical”) that were rejected by leaders of what later became the dominant churches. The study concludes with an exegesis of the prayers themselves. The epicleses represent the unique spirituality of the northern Mesopotamian region, a colorful, earthy Semitic spirituality unconcerned with philosophical precision and ignorant of such developments in the west. In some ways, it resembles that found in Valentinian gnostic texts.

Since my goal is to situate the prayers in their proper context, I employ primarily a tradition-historical approach to the material, comparing the epicleses with other known prayers from antiquity, in the hope of elucidating their meaning. The chapters treating of the *Acts of Thomas* as a whole and the prayers themselves in their literary context involve, of necessity, the use of some literary-critical categories as well as attentiveness to issues of textual transmission. Since the prayers appear in liturgical contexts, the study also employs findings from the history of Christian prayer and ritual.

3. Review of Literature

Use of the *Acts of Thomas* is attested in antiquity by several authors, but it is connected with individuals or groups maligned for their misguided doctrines or practices. Although Egeria, writing of her trip to Edessa in the late fourth century, indicates that Thomas is buried in Edessa and knows the legend of the correspondence between Jesus and King Abgar Uchama,⁸ she makes no mention of anything that could be construed as the *Acts of Thomas*. The earliest external attestations⁹ of the *Acts of Thomas* are by Epiphanius¹⁰ and

⁸ *Itin. Eger.* 19.1–19.

⁹ Origen, *apud* Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.1), knows the tradition that the various regions of the world were divided among the apostles and mentions by name the five whose acts survive; these five apocryphal acts would later come to be attributed to the same author, Leucius

Augustine;¹¹ both authors mention it in the context of polemical attacks against heretical movements. The *Acts of Thomas* was known even in the far western regions of the Roman Empire. The mid-fifth-century bishop of Spanish Asturica, Turribius, complained about its use among the Priscillianists.¹² The *Acts of Thomas* remains an anonymous work until it is attributed by the ninth-century Photius to Leucius Charinus (together with the *Acts of Peter, John, Andrew, and Paul*).¹³

Although the early references to it are critical of its use among heretical groups, the *Acts of Thomas* must have enjoyed a following in self-styled orthodox circles as well, perhaps especially on a popular level. Translations were made into Greek and from Greek into Latin¹⁴ and Ethiopic. From the Syriac were produced versions in Armenian and apparently Arabic. A Coptic rewritten story gave rise to another version in Arabic, as well as an Ethiopic translation and a later Greek translation.¹⁵ All of this textual activity, as well as the fact that the Syriac itself was redacted to bring it in line with a western understanding of orthodoxy, suggested to Günther Bornkamm¹⁶ that the *Acts of Thomas* enjoyed great favor in orthodox circles.

3.1. Editions

The first extended presentation of the text of the Acts of Thomas in Greek is the edition of Johann Karl Thilo, in 1823.¹⁷ Working from four Paris manu-

Charinus. Since Origen claims that the region of Parthia, not India, was given to Thomas, it is unlikely that he has in mind the text as we know it. It is not impossible, however, that he knew an earlier version of our work, perhaps comprising simple forms of the early tales in the *Acts of Thomas*.

The earliest mention of the collection of the apocryphal acts (and their association with the Manichaeans) comes from the pen of Philaster of Brescia, writing in the late fourth century. But, although he refers to the *Acts of Andrew, John, Peter, and Paul*, the person of Thomas is conspicuously absent.

¹⁰ *Pan.* 47.1 and 61.1.

¹¹ *Faust.* 22.79; *Adim.* 17; *Serm. Dom.* 1.20.65.

¹² PL 54.711–14. Turribius wrote to his neighboring bishops, but also sent materials complaining about the Priscillianists to Leo the Great. Leo responded by ordering that the apocryphal writings associated with the names of the apostles were to be burned, and any bishop who allowed them to be owned was to be considered a heretic.

¹³ In his *Bibliotheca* codex 114.

¹⁴ At least two separate Latin translations must have been produced. The extant Latin is essentially a rewritten work and does not correspond with that used by the Priscillianists. No claim could be made from it that the work teaches a “baptism” with oil.

¹⁵ See the discussion of the various versions in Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (1962), 4–13.

¹⁶ Bornkamm, “The Acts of Thomas,” 2:427.

¹⁷ *Acta S. Thomae Apostoli* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1823).

scripts,¹⁸ Thilo presents a critical edition, with extensive notes, of the first six acts of the work, with the absence of Act 4.¹⁹ Thilo's edition, which, indeed, spurred critical interest in the apocryphal acts in general, was most valuable for its analysis of the Acts of Thomas, providing extensive parallels, especially from Gnosticism (as gleaned from the heresiologists), to the motifs apparent in the work.

Thilo's edition was followed by that of Constantin Tischendorf in 1851.²⁰ Based on the four manuscripts edited by Thilo with the addition of one more Paris manuscript,²¹ Tischendorf's edition provides a few minor corrections to that of Thilo. The most significant contribution of Tischendorf is the inclusion of the martyrdom of Thomas, known to Thilo but absent from his edition.

Although earlier scholars laid the foundation, it was the work of Max Bonnet that brought the complete *Acts of Thomas* into the hands of scholars. Bonnet, together with Richard Lipsius, sought to complete and expand Tischendorf's edition of the apocryphal acts; the volume in which the *Acts of Thomas* appears was first published in 1903.²² Bonnet makes use of twenty-one Greek manuscripts and includes significant variants found in Acts 1 and 2 (an epitome), as well as in Act 9 and the Martyrdom (and brief passages elsewhere). The edition of Bonnet continues to serve as the standard edition of the Greek *Acts of Thomas*.

There exists no critical edition of the various Syriac witnesses to the text. Several individual manuscripts have, however, been edited. The first scholar to offer the *Acts of Judas Thomas* (as it is known in the Syriac) to the public was William Wright, who published an edition of several apocryphal acts

¹⁸ Thilo was aware, however, of others found in the "library of the king" that he was not able to include.

¹⁹ Act 4 is found in only three of the Greek manuscripts edited by Bonnet (for which, see note 22 below), i.e., the three most extensive mss., including the relatively complete P (missing only the Hymn of the Pearl) and the complete U. Bonnet follows Thilo's chapter numbering for the first three acts, but diverges in Acts 5 and 6 (due to the addition of the intervening three chapters that make up Act 4), providing Thilo's chapter references in parentheses.

²⁰ *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius et Mendelssohn, 1851). Tischendorf's edition, unlike that of Thilo, includes the martyrdom of Thomas.

²¹ This last manuscript, ms. E, might since have been lost. It parallels the mss. known to Thilo by containing Acts 1–3 and 5–6, but is absent from Bonnet's 1903 edition. Bonnet acknowledges that some previously edited mss. are not included, but provides no information regarding their identity or their fate. See further discussion of available mss. in notes 35 and 64 below.

²² Following a preliminary edition of nine mss. of the *Acts of Thomas* by Bonnet in 1883 (*Acta Thomae* [Supplementum Codicis Apocryphi 1; Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1883]). For the critical edition, see Max Bonnet, *Acta Philippi et Acta Thomae accedunt Acta Barnabae* (vol. 2.2 of *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*; ed. Richard Adelbert Lipsius and Max Bonnet; Leipzig: Teubner, 1903; reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959), 99–291. The two parts of the *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (in 3 vols.) were published 1883–1903.

from Syriac manuscripts, including the manuscript of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* found in the British Museum (now the British Library).²³ Because the London manuscript is the most complete of the extant Syriac manuscripts²⁴ and because of the convenience of Wright's edition and translation, it remains the standard edition of the Syriac version of the work.

In 1904, Agnes Smith Lewis published the text of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* found in the Sinai palimpsest from the Monastery of St. Catherine.²⁵ Although fragmentary, the manuscript is extremely valuable, being the oldest extant manuscript of the work in any language. In most cases, the Sinai palimpsest supports the text as found in the London manuscript, but in some key passages (generally fragmentary), there are tantalizing hints at the majority Greek reading.

The only other Syriac manuscript of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* to be edited to date is that from the Sachau collection in Berlin. Paul Bedjan produced an edition of it²⁶ in 1892, with an eye toward the edition of Wright. Although the shorter Berlin text is not a direct descendant of either the London or Sinai manuscripts and, therefore, potentially of interest, Bedjan's edition is less than helpful. Bedjan provides a heavily edited version of the Sachau manuscript, sometimes giving the reading of the London manuscript and including the Sachau reading only in the apparatus. Unfortunately, Bedjan does not indicate which manuscript he is following at any given point, making it a painstaking task to decipher the contents of Sachau.

Taeke Jansma attempted to incorporate the readings from these three manuscripts in his edition of 1952.²⁷ Jansma gives the text of the London manuscript, but notes the variants from Sinai and Sachau. Jansma's selection is brief (parts of the first, second, fourth, and eighth acts) and, for the most part, it provides the text found already in Wright.

English translations of the Syriac text, in addition to those found in Wright and Lewis, include an edition by A. F. J. Klijn,²⁸ which gives the translation

²³ William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1871; reprinted in one vol. Amsterdam: Philo, 1968), Syriac, 1:[181]–333; ET, 2:146–298.

²⁴ And constituting, in Wright's words (p. xiii), the "gem" of his collection.

²⁵ Agnes Smith Lewis, *Acta Mythologica Apostolorum* (HSem 3; London: Clay, 1904); ET as *The Mythological Acts of the Apostles* (HSem 4; London: Clay, 1904). Parts of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* from the Sinai palimpsest were already published by F. C. Burkitt in Agnes Smith Lewis, *Select Narratives of Holy Women* (2 vols.; StSin 9–10; London: Clay, 1900).

²⁶ *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum Syriace* 3 (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1892; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1968).

²⁷ Taeke Jansma, *A Selection from the Acts of Judas Thomas* (SSS n.s. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1952).

²⁸ See note 1 above for bibliographical information. A second, revised edition of Klijn was published by Brill in 2003 under the title, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and*

of Wright divided into chapters according to the Greek of Bonnet's edition, as well as extensive and valuable commentary. An early English translation of the five ancient apocryphal acts is that of Bernhard Pick,²⁹ while the German translations of Günther Bornkamm and of Han J. W. Drijvers are readily available in English re-translation.³⁰ The English edition of *The Apocryphal New Testament* by James³¹ and its revision by Elliott³² have provided English-speaking readers easy access to the *Acts of Thomas* and other Christian apocryphal literature.

Recently, Harold W. Attridge has translated both the Syriac and the Greek versions of the *Acts of Thomas* for a new English edition of the apocryphal acts forthcoming from Polebridge Press. Paul-Hubert Poirier and Yves Tissot are currently working on a critical edition of the work, making use of recent manuscript discoveries. They have also published a French translation of the Syriac.³³

3.2. Critical Scholarship

The first modern discussion of the *Acts of Thomas* can be found in a work of the seventeenth-century French biblical scholar, Richard Simon.³⁴ Simon quotes from a Greek manuscript in the "library of the king,"³⁵ saying it is

Commentary (NovTSup 108). Notable in the second edition is the placement of commentary (updated somewhat from the 1962 edition) on the same pages as the translated text as well as the correction of many printing errors. The introductory material in the second edition is less extensive and less helpful than that in the first edition. Unless otherwise specified, references to Klijn's commentary are to his 1962 edition.

²⁹ Bernhard Pick, *The Apocryphal acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew and Thomas* (Chicago: Open Court, 1909). A small portion of the *Acts of Thomas*, based on Tischendorf's edition, was earlier translated into English by Alexander Walker in *ANF* 8.

³⁰ Both are found in the collection of New Testament Apocrypha initiated by Edgar Hennecke and completed by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. German editions: G. Bornkamm, "Thomasakten," *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Wilhelm Scheemelcher (2 vols.; 3d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1959–1964), 2:297–372; Han J. W. Drijvers, "Thomasakten," *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Wilhelm Scheemelcher (2 vols.; 5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1987–1989), 2:289–367. English translations: G. Bornkamm, "The Acts of Thomas," in *NTA* (1963–1965), 2:425–531; Han J. W. Drijvers, "The Acts of Thomas," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. W. Schneemelcher; 2 vols.; English ed. R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: James Clark & Co.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1991–1992), 2:322–411.

³¹ M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924).

³² James K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

³³ "Actes de Thomas," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* 1 (ed. François Bovon and Pierre Geoltrain; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 1321–1470.

³⁴ *Nouvelles observations sur le texte et les versions du nouveau testament* (Paris: Boudot, 1695), 7–9.

³⁵ He identifies the manuscript as no. 1832. This number does not correspond with that of any manuscript included in the critical edition of Bonnet, nor does the text provided by Simon

clearly the same work that was used by the Manichaeans. Although Simon's longest quotation is from the introductory scene of the *Acts of Thomas*, he provides fairly extensive commentary, with short quotes, from the first initiatory scene and the prayer in chapter 27. The king and his brother Gad receive "la Confirmation"³⁶ and Eucharist, thus evidencing to Simon the spirit of the gnostics and Manichaeans. Perhaps because of this association, Simon considers the work to be the "prétendu Livre de saint Thomas."³⁷

Citing the closing line of the prayer in chapter 27, Simon indicates that the heretics to whom he attributes the work invoke the three persons of the Trinity, just as do Catholics. He provides as well the Greek of the opening lines of the prayer and the description of the anointing. His most interesting quotation from the prayer, however, is one that he provides only in translation; it is intriguing precisely because of what it does not say. The prayer skips from "come, merciful mother" to "come, you who reveal hidden mysteries," thus ignoring the line, "come, fellowship of the male." It is impossible to say if Simon's manuscript lacked this line, although it seems likely that he would have included it, and indeed commented on it, if it had in fact been part of the text as he found it. Unfortunately, Simon's treatment is so brief that it provides little information about his critical assessment of the text, except his association of it with heretics known to him from the early heresiologists.

represent that of any of the Paris manuscripts (or, for that matter, any other ms.) known to Bonnet.

Prior to the 1903 critical edition of Bonnet, Johann Karl Thilo, in his edition of the *Acts of Thomas* (*Acta S. Thomae Apostoli*, lxxii), comments that the Paris ms. 1176 (identified in Bonnet as D) is that known to Simon. I cannot see how this is possible. In the first quotation Simon provides, that of the introductory verses in Act 1, some of the peculiar readings of D (e.g., διειλάμεθα [Bonnet, p. 100, line 1] and ἔσται [Bonnet, p. 100, line 11]) can be found but, more significantly, in three places Simon's text disagrees with that of D. Simon's text is missing the πάντες of the first line of the work; D omits ἐκεῖ (Bonnet, p. 100, line 10) which Simon's text includes; and Simon's text omits the ἄλλαχού and has a different word order than that found in D for the final line of the first chapter. Thilo notes that there are several other manuscripts in the library of the king that he was not able to include in his edition, due to lack of time; perhaps he noted another ms. that agreed with that of Simon.

Yves Tissot, who together with Paul-Hubert Poirier is currently producing a new critical edition of the *Acts of Thomas*, did not include any new Paris mss. in the materials regarding the prayers in chapters 27 and 50 that he kindly forwarded to me. The manuscript known to Simon, therefore, seems to have been lost, destroyed, or perhaps moved to a different location and now identified by its current residence. From the few quotes that Simon provides, it is possible to determine that the ms. he knew represents the majority tradition in the sections quoted, but is not among those mss. edited by Bonnet.

³⁶ *Nouvelles observations*, 8. Thilo (*Acta S. Thomae Apostoli*, 164ff.), citing numerous instances in Greek authors of the use of σφραγίς for baptism, insists against Simon that the seal here includes the water rite.

³⁷ *Nouvelles observations*, 8.

In the eighteenth century, Johann Albert Fabricius responded to the censorship of non-canonical works by members of the reformed traditions, and the attempted rescue of patristic authors by Catholics, with a corresponding rejection of “frivolous” works, including the apocryphal acts.³⁸ Fabricius produced a collection of New Testament apocrypha³⁹ in order to make the materials available to a growing audience, thinking that their availability would lessen their attractiveness and prove the wisdom of the patristic authors. His near contemporary, Isaac de Beausobre, adopts the approach of an historian of religions and examines the texts free of theological concerns. In general, Beausobre distances himself from pejorative statements regarding practices and beliefs attested in the apocryphal materials and suspects that they represent ancient alternative practices.

Beausobre’s *Histoire de Manichée*⁴⁰ considers and dismisses the suggestion that the Manichaeans altered the books of the New Testament, and declares the same to be true regarding Manichaean use of various apocryphal acts. He demonstrates that Leucius, to whom the apocryphal acts were attributed, was not a Manichaean but preceded the Manichaeans by 150 years.⁴¹ Regarding the *Acts of Thomas* itself, Beausobre claims that the Greek and Latin manuscripts with which he was familiar must have been translated from Syriac;⁴² he discusses the claim of the fifth-century Turribius that the Manichaeans baptized in oil and finds the origin of the claim in the apostle’s prayer over the oil in chapter 27 of the *Acts of Thomas*, which ends in a three-fold initiatory formula.⁴³ The prayer itself, he claims, stems from the Marcosians.

³⁸ See the discussion of this period in Gérard Poupon, “Les Actes apocryphes des Apôtres de Lefèvre à Fabricius,” in *Les Actes apocryphes des Apôtres: Christianisme et monde païen* (ed. François Bovon et al.; Publications de la Faculté de Théologie de l’Université de Genève 4; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 25–47.

³⁹ Johann Albert Fabricius, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti Collectus, Castigatus, Testimoniisque, Censuris et Animadversionibus illustratus* (2 vols.; Hamburg: Schiller, 1703; enlarged with third vol., 1719). Vol. 3 bears the title *Codicis apocryphi Novi Testamenti* and was published by Schiller and Kisner.

⁴⁰ *Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Bernard, 1734–1739; repr. Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1970). Vol. 2 bears the title *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*.

⁴¹ Beausobre does not seem to question the claim that the apocryphal acts were written by Leucius Charinus, but recognizes that they must antedate the Manichaeans. Believing them to stem from a single author, he includes the *Acts of Thomas* in this assessment.

⁴² *Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, 1:405.

⁴³ Beausobre thinks that the prayer is misleading in this respect, and suspects that water baptism is to be understood in this passage. He criticizes Simon’s “ridicule” of the prayer. See his discussion in *Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, 1:414–21. Beausobre recognizes the superiority of the Greek version of this prayer and here claims that Leucius

Thilo, who produced the first Greek edition of the *Acts of Thomas*, discusses in detail the first two initiatory scenes in the work and the prayers associated with them. He addresses the issue raised by Turribius and decides that Turribius was wrong to find the *Acts of Thomas* supportive of baptism in oil. Thilo concludes that the appearance of an anointing with oil alone is misleading and decides that, in fact, the language of “sealing” must indicate a rite of water baptism.

Thilo addresses at length the language of the epicleses, and provides extensive parallels from other ancient sources, especially the accounts of Gnosticism as found in the heresiologists. He also finds evidence of parallels with Bardaisan and notes Manichaean links with motifs found in the prayers, making special use of Augustine in this regard. In general, Thilo considers the prayers to incorporate gnostic language, although he seems to stop short of declaring the epicleses to be themselves of gnostic origin.

Other scholars have been less cautious. In a lengthy journal article, Karl Macke⁴⁴ attempts to tackle the epicleses, concentrating especially on the first prayer (as well as the Hymn of the Pearl). After trying to restore the original meter of the prayer by comparing the Greek and Syriac versions, Macke argues that it has been composed from two separate prayers, one orthodox and one gnostic. The feminine figure addressed in the prayer is a saving and redeeming principle (an early gnostic understanding of Sophia), and is identified as the Spirit of holiness who descended on Jesus and is invoked throughout the prayer.

The earliest figure who most forcefully advances the idea of the gnostic character of the *Acts of Thomas* is Richard Adelbert Lipsius.⁴⁵ Lipsius begins by noting the parallels to the epicleses in “gnostic” literature (included in this category is the person of Bardaisan, as well as those works and authors deemed gnostic by ancient Christian heresiologists). He then extends his treatment to other prayers and speeches in the work. Following Thilo, Lipsius addresses the question of the sacramental actions found in the *Acts of Thomas* and notes parallels to known gnostic groups.

Wilhelm Bousset, in his massive study of gnostic motifs,⁴⁶ follows the lead of Lipsius and is unabashed in calling the *Acts of Thomas* gnostic. Against Lipsius, however, he does not believe that the first two initiation accounts of the *Acts of Thomas*, in which the prayers under consideration in this study oc-

must have written in Greek rather than in Syriac, and that the *Acts of Thomas* was translated into Syriac from Greek and then back again at a later date.

⁴⁴ Karl Macke, “Syrische Lieder gnostischen Ursprungs,” *TQ* 56 (1874): 1–70.

⁴⁵ Richard Adelbert Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*, 1:225–347.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907).