

HERMANN DETERING:
JESUS ON THE OTHER SHORE

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HERMANN DETERING

JESUS
ON THE
OTHER SHORE

THE GNOSTIC INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS
AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE
JOSHUA / JESUS CULT

TRANSLATED BY: STUART G. WAUGH

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DANKSAGUNG

Ich freue mich, dass meine Studie *Buddha, Josua, Jesus und der Weg zum anderen Ufer* gleich nach ihrem ersten Erscheinen auf meiner Webseite *radikalkritik.de* auf großes Interesse gestoßen ist. Das hat mich zu einer Veröffentlichung in Buchform ermutigt.

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Neukirchen, Mai 2018

1 GNOSTIC INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS

In the book of *Exodus* (c. 13:17-14:31) the exile of the people of Israel from Egypt is a central motif and occurs repeatedly in the Old Testament (Deu 26:5ff, Psa 114:1ff; Isa 43:16, etc). Old Testament exegetes speak of a “primal confession” with a meaning that is constitutive of Israel’s faith and self-understanding.¹ Within Israel, the Exodus was generally regarded as a purely historical fact. An allegorical interpretation was only developed outside Orthodox Judaism, in Alexandria, Egypt.² According to the interpretation from the first century AD Jewish religious philosopher Philo, Egypt is “a refuge of a luxuriant and undisciplined life,” and symbol of “physical passions”, from which God led his people to be transformed, walking on the “path on which there are no sensual pleasures.”³ The Jordan also is a symbol of the passions for Philo. He thus interprets Jacob’s words, “with my staff I have crossed this Jordan,” (Gen 32:10):

¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Vol. 1, 2 Vols.; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), 177ff.

² According to Lahe the allegorical interpretation of the Exodus is “only in the Alexandrian-Jewish script. “ Jaan Lahe, *Gnosis und Judentum: alttestamentliche und jüdische Motive in der gnostischen Literatur und das Ursprungsproblem der Gnosis* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies v. 75; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 329.

³ Post 155; cp. Post 62; Leg 2,84.87; 3:38.312; Sacr 4; Abr 103

“Jordan means descent; to the lower, earthly and ephemeral essence to which belong the vicious and passionate acts; the virtuous mind transcends this. For that would be a low opinion that he had crossed the river with a stick in his hand.”

However, Philo only generally emphasizes the contrast between sensual-material (= Egypt / Jordan) and spiritual-intelligible (= desert); the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea (as a symbol of the transition from one to the other sphere) is not further reflected upon by him.

But the case is quite different among the *Therapeutae*, who lived in the vicinity of Alexandria, on Lake Mariout, on whom Philo reported extensively in his work *De Vita Contemplativa*. The Therapeutae occupied themselves intensively with the passage through the Red Sea. They saw in it a mystery which they presented in performance, i.e., by choral singing and dance. In his work *De Vita Mosis*, Philo emphasizes the special importance of singing ⁴ and asserts that Moses “led the singing of praises to the Father and Creator” after the passage through the Red Sea, dividing the Israelites into two choruses of men and women, with his sister Miriam as head of the women’s choir. ⁵

What Philo says about the two-choir singing of the Therapeutae, in *De Vita Contemplativa*, sounds like the staged realization of this apocryphal tradition: “Mainly following this model,” says Philo, “the singing of the male and female Therapeutae in a two-part melody of alternating chants, wherein the treble of the women mixes with the bass of the men, thus creates a harmonious and truly musical harmony”. (88)

⁴ The basis seems to be from a non-biblical tradition here.

⁵ VitMos 2,247. From Ex 15:1-19 (Moses’ hymn) and Exo 20:21 (Miriam’s hymn).

In his report, Philo suggests that the Therapeutae clearly understood the passage of the Red Sea as God's judgment, denoting for the one, that is the Israelites, the "means of salvation," for the other, i.e., the pagan Egyptians, the "means of utter perdition."

Celia Deutsch speaks in this context of a "communal ritual" and remarks quite rightly: "In ritual time and space, they are the people at the Red Sea; in their performance of the text they become a kind of embodied allegory." ⁶ (We will go into more detail on the Therapeutae in the next section.)

We find another allegorical interpretation of the Exodus motif in the early Christian heretic *Simon Magus*. We are informed about his teaching, among other things, by the church father Hippolytus. Mind you, the origin of the book from which Hippolytus quotes is not clear. It bears the title of the "Great Announcement," and according to Hippolytus, Simon is said to have been the author. But researchers are divided as to whether it actually comes from Simon, or only later from a circle of his students and subsequently attributed to him. The writing draws an analogy between the Tree of Life and an embryo growing on the umbilical cord of a uterus. In Simon's allegorical interpretation, the book of Exodus becomes a symbol of "what was born, passing through the Red Sea, com[ing] into the desert - the Red Sea he calls the blood - and the water [must be] bitter." ⁷ Bitter is the water behind the Red Sea, and indeed

⁶ Celia Deutsch, "The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual, and Mystical Experience", in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Lit, 2006) 287-311, here 306.

⁷ Hippolytus Refutation of All Heresies 6:15 paraphrased slightly by Detering. Greek text: "Ἐδει γὰρ τὸ γεννηθῆν

this is the way of the laborious and bitter life-experiences, which we pass through.

Similar to Philo's *Therapeutae*, the author of the Great Announcement also uses the passage through the Red Sea as a metaphor of purification. Egypt and the Red Sea are symbols of the body, which must be crossed [on the way to the immaterial sphere]. But by the Logos, i.e., through Moses, the path of bitter life experience is sweetened.⁸

Further interpretations of the Exodus motif can be found from the *Naassenes* and the *Peratae*. These two Gnostic sects, together with the Sethians, belong to the *Ophites*, whose teachings are referred to by Hippolytus in the fifth book of his *Refutations*. The (Ophite) name itself derives from the Greek word (ὄφις) for serpent. The serpent plays a central role in the myth of all three cults.

The reference of the *Peratae* to the Exodus theme is already visible in their name. According to Hippolytus, they are said to have derived from the Greek word (Περατής). So the *Peratae* regarded themselves as "passing-through" according to their own self-conception.

At the heart of their "colorful shimmering wisdom" is the serpent, whose historical significance, according to Hippolytus, was read out by allegorical exegesis from the Old Testament.⁹ Like other Gnostics, the *Peratae* also judge the work of the serpent in the story of paradise – in contrast to

διοδεῦσαν θάλασσαν, ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν ἔρημον (ἐρυθρὰν δὲ λέγει, φασι, τὸ αἶμα,) καὶ γεύσασθαι πικρὸν ὕδωρ.

⁸ Vgl. Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche die Ekklesiologie der Väter* (Salzburg: Müller, 1964), 274–79. To the bitter water, see Philo Post 155f.

⁹ Wolfgang Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1910), 103.

the Orthodox Jewish exegesis – as positive. She is regarded as a bringer of knowledge (Gnosis), and also as a symbol of salvation and redemption, for by the sight of the bronze serpent of Moses, the Israelites bitten by the venomous serpents were healed. (Num 21:9)

The image of the *Caduceus* in the “history of salvation,” on a cosmic level, is that of the Gnostic *Uroboros*. The Peratae identified the snake with the logos. Seated between the unmoving Father and moving Matter, it is thus the intermediary between the two. On the one hand he turns to the Father to absorb his powers and pass them on to Matter (Ref 5.17); on the other hand he liberates the paternal forces that have imprinted themselves on Matter from their material shackles (fetters), to lead them to the Father so that “at the top of his head” (τὴν ἄκραν αὐτοῦ τὴν Κεφαλὴν) they are as it were “both rising and falling all mixed together” (μίσγονται δύσιν τε καὶ ἀνατολὴ ἀλλήλαις) (Ref 5.16).

The Creation is considered as a sphere of voidness and transience by the Peratae. Because everything comes under this law, there is only one way of salvation for the Peratae: A man must go through his downfall, to which he is inescapably delivered, even before his death.

We thus arrive at the mysteries of the Peratae, or rather their central mystery, the Baptism. For the downfall is associated with water; water and downfall being synonymous for the Peratae: “The downfall is the water. For by nothing has the world perished more quickly than by the water,” (Ἔστι δὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὸ ὕδωρ, οὐδὲ ἄλλω τινὶ ἐφθάρη τάχιον ὁ κόσμος ἢ ὕδατι) (Ref 5.16) – this is presumably an allusion to the story of the Flood.

The created world as running water and as a river is a concept already encountered with Heraclitus: everything flows, and no one steps twice into the same river. This

proximity to Heraclitus is emphasized by Hippolytus. For the Peratae also, the descent of the eternal ideas into the world of matter, equates the water, the “trickling waters of the Styx,” with their death.

Correspondingly, the story of the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea to the Peratae means:

“Departure from the body – they say, Egypt is the body – and crossing the Red Sea, that is the waters of the destruction, namely Kronos, and passing beyond the Red Sea, that means crossing over and rising, and coming into the desert, this means coming into being (γενέσεως), to where all the gods of perdition and the God of redemption are together.”

As can be seen, the allegorical interpretation of the Exodus, in the case of the Peratae corresponds, by and large, to the basic pattern Philo wants to make known about the Therapeutae.

Hippolytus tells of the Naassenes that they first referred to themselves as “Gnostics” and claimed to know “only the depths of knowledge”¹⁰ (Ref 5:6). The name, he explains, comes from the ritualistic worship of the snake by the Naassenes. Apparently, the Naassenes took advantage of the similarity of the Hebrew term Naḥaš (נָחָשׁ = snake) to the Greek *Naos* (= temple), for they said that “there is no consecration under heaven, where there is not a temple and the Naas therein,¹¹ from which the temple was given the name.” (Ref 5.9).

¹⁰ Amended here to conform to the Greek. Detering “die Tiefen der Weisheit” = the depths of wisdom, Hippolytus μόνοι τὰ βάθη γινώσκειν = the depths of knowledge (Gnosis).

¹¹ Hans Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Bd. 32, 5. Ed., Stuttgart: Kröner, 1985), 111.

The theology of the Naassenes is essentially an allegorical interpretation of Old Testament and Greek myths. From the so-called Naassene psalm and in the interpretation of the Exodus, Jesus, among others, is spoken of. The Naassene Psalm is an old hymn about the earthly torments of the soul and the coming of its savior Jesus, and as such it is a testimony to the presence of preexisting Christian concepts in the earliest Christian times. In gnostic exegesis of Exodus, the sea becomes the image of the earthly material world. It is compared with the "Jerusalem above" as "Mother of the Living". The other symbol for this is Egypt:

"But if you go back to Egypt, to the lower mixture, you will die like men.' (Psa 82:7) For all that is mortal is born below, but the immortal is born above. For the spiritual is born out of the water and the Spirit alone, not the flesh; but that (which is born) below, is the flesh, that is, he says, that it is written, 'What is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit' (John 3: 6). This is, according to them, the spiritual birth (πνευματική γένεσις)." (Ref 5.7)

Then the image of the sea, in the allegorical exegesis of the Naassenes, suddenly changes to the "Great Jordan":

"As it flowed downwards and prevented the children of Israel from departing the land of Egypt, — that is from the mixture in the deep, for Egypt is to them the body — Jesus pushed it back and made it flow upwards". (Ref 5.7)

Because of the name Ἰησοῦς one might think that the text relates to the Gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus. But the allusion to the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt is unmistakable. Moreover, the most important motifs of the baptism accounts are missing: John the Baptist, the dove, the heavenly voice; also the motif of hesitation at the Jordan is not from the New Testament baptism stories, but from the Old Testament book of Joshua:

“When the people set out from their tents to pass through the Jordan, and as the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant before the people and came to the Jordan and their feet dipped in at the water’s edge -the Jordan, however, was for the entire harvest time overflowing all its banks- the waters that were coming down from above stood there, rising up like a single wall very far away, near the city of Adam, which lies beside of Zar’ethan; but the water that ran down to the sea, the Salt Sea, that had completely stopped flowing. So the people went through across from Jericho” (Jos 3:14-17).

The name Joshua is rendered in Greek as Ἰησοῦς, and is translated as Jesus when “Jesus” denotes none other than the Old Testament successor of Moses, Joshua.

But the association with the New Testament baptism story, triggered by the name of Jesus, is by no means accidental. *Testimonium Veritatis*, another gnostic text from the Alexandrian milieu, presumably written in the 2nd century, can show that the motifs of passage and the baptism of Jesus sometimes merged seamlessly:

“The Son of Man, however, [comes] from immortality [as one who] is alien to defilement. He came [into the] world over [the river] Jordan and immediately the Jordan [drew] back. John [however] testified of the descent of Jesus. For he [alone] is the one who saw the [force] that came down over the river Jordan. For it is he [alone] who has seen [the power] that came down over the river Jordan. For he realized that the dominion of carnal procreation had come to an end. The Jordan river however, is the power of the body, i.e., the sensations of lust. The water of the Jordan is the desire of intercourse. The Jordan river, however, is the power of the body. But John is the archon of the womb.”¹²

¹² 30.5-31.1 – Hans-Martin Schenke, Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, und Hans-Gebhard Bethge, Hrsg., *Nag Hammadi Deutsch: Studienausgabe; NHC I-XIII, Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae 1 und 4, Codex Tchacos 3 und 4* (3rd Ed; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 483.

Also in the *Gospel of Truth*, the imperishable and sensory-material spheres (water of the Jordan) are juxtaposed with each other; again the water recedes with the appearance of Jesus/Joshua; the only scene to which the interpretation relates is not the passage of the Israelites through the Jordan, nor is Jesus here the Old Testament Joshua, but actually the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan is in view. The encratic tendency found in the Naassene text *Testimonium Veritatis* has clearly increased as well. By a slight, barely noticeable shift in details, the Old Testament scene has become a New Testament scene. Admittedly, not entirely: Unlike in the Gospels, it is not the Holy Spirit who comes down from heaven at baptism, but Jesus Himself!

The writings of the Nag Hammadi corpus offer a similar view of baptism. In his teaching on baptism, the author of [which text?] notes that, through this, i.e. (the first) baptism,

“we are led from [destruction] to [everlasting]ness - [which (?) is the Jordan, [...] this place is the [...] world (?). So we were led out of the world to the aeon - but the interpretation of that which is the Jordan, is the descent, which is the [rising], which is the coming out of the world, [towards] the aeon.”¹³

Unlike *Testimonium Veritatis*, the motif of the Jordan's receding waters is missing here. So, unlike there, a reference to the fording of the Jordan is not visible.

Another allegorical interpretation of the Exodus motif is found in the *Odes of Solomon*. This collection of early Christian songs also originated in the Alexandrian milieu and is probably from the first half of the 2nd century AD. In the

¹³ Schenke, Kaiser, und Bethge, *Nag Hammadi Deutsch: Studienausgabe; NHC I-XIII, Codex Berolinensis 1 und 4, Codex Tchacos 3 und 4*, 527.

39th Ode, the “power of the Lord” is likened to raging rivers “which carry headlong those who despise him” (1-4), while those who cross them in faith “go without fail” and without “worry”. In verse 8 it continues: “So put on the name of the Most High, and (he) knows him, and you will pass over without danger, for the rivers will be subject to you.” It further says:

“The Lord bridged them by his logos, and he (the Logos) walked and crossed them on foot. And his footsteps remained on the water and were not destroyed, but were like wood, which is truly fastened. And from here and there the waves rose, but the footsteps of our anointed Lord stand firm and are neither blurred, nor destroyed. And a path was laid for those who go after him, and for those who follow the course of his faith and worship his name. Hallelujah!”

In contrast to the texts quoted so far, the 39th Ode does not explicitly refer to the Red Sea, the Reed Sea or the Jordan. Instead, the Odist speaks only of “raging rivers,” which could indicate a reference to Isaiah 43:2. It also seems as if the water is an afterthought for the Odist, not as in the Exodus crossing miracle, but as transcending it.¹⁴

On the other hand, a structural similarity to the previously cited Gnostic interpretations of Exodus is obvious: here as well as the passage through the water is considered a judgement, i.e., on the one hand as salvation (of the believers), on the other hand as annihilation (of the unbelievers).

¹⁴ According to Bauer, verses 9, 10 and 11, 12 are “not exactly matched with each other.” In verse 11, the miracle, according to Ex 14:22, is that “the floods have been held back over and over” – Wilhelm Schneemelcher und Edgar Hennecke, Hrsg., *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (4. Aufl., durchges. Nachdr. der 3.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), 620 A.8.

Whether a relationship with the Old Testament Exodus motif exists here, as the majority of the exegetes from Julius Wellhausen and Harris Mingana to Walter Bauer assumed, is not entirely clear. But it all implies that this was the case; bear in mind, the author has dealt with his subject very freely. Michael Lattke seems to accept this as well; he speaks of “gnostic interpretation of the Israelite passage through the Red Sea,” but also of “jumbled images from the saving bridge and crossing the raging waters by the word or in faith.”¹⁵

Once again, we encounter the Gnostic allegorical interpretation of the Exodus motif among the *Mandaeans*. This baptismal sect, originating from the eastern outskirts of Syria-Palestine and presumably in close genetic relationship with early Christian gnostic groups,¹⁶ knows an interpretation of the Exodus motif that is very similar to those discussed above. Mark Lidzbarski, who has done outstanding work in translating the Mandaean texts, notes:

“Apart from the Alexandrian hermeneutics, the attempt to interpret the exodus from Egypt allegorically and eschatologically suffices. Egypt with its fleshpots, a picture of the corporeal and sensual existence, by extension the escape from this

¹⁵ Michael Lattke, “The Imagery of the Odes of Solomon”, in *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis* (Bd. 4; OBO 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 17–36, hier 26.

¹⁶ Radhakrishnan also found a close connection with the Indian spiritual world: “The Mandeans flourished in Maišan, which was the gate of entry for Indian trade and commerce with Mesopotamia. Indian tribes colonized Maišan, whose port had an Indian temple. Mandaean gnosis is full of Indian ideas” – S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford India paperbacks; Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 158, A. 3.

material world, to the pneumatic, the Red Sea being the sheath between the two worlds; therein the wicked find their end, only the pious cross it. These ideas also show their effect in the Mandaean literature.”¹⁷

Lidzbarski refers to the familiar Mandaean notions of the Sûf (Reed) Sea,¹⁸ which is also referred to as the “Sea of the End”. As the following passage from the Mandaean Book of John demonstrates, the passage through the sea (symbolized by the baptism in the waters of the “Jordan”) is considered by the Mandaeans to be the judgment of God; the water becomes the downfall for the wicked, but for the faithful serves as a bridge to the light. The Gnostic Redeemer cries:

“I am the treasure, the treasure of life. The wicked are blind and do not see. I call them to the light, but they bury themselves in the darkness. ‘O ye evil ones,’ I call to them, ‘who are sinking into darkness, right yourselves and do not fall into the depths.’ I call to them, but the wicked do not listen and sink into the big Sûf Sea. So the Jordan became the bridge for the Uthras; He became the bridge to the Uthras, whereas he cut down the wicked ones and threw them into the great Sûf Sea.”¹⁹

To the faithful is issued the request:

“Love and bear each other, like the eyes that watch over the feet.

¹⁷ Mark Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1915), 21. Vgl. 60, 90, 105, 203, 239. Mark Lidzbarski, Ed., *Ginzā: Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer* (Bd. 13; *Quellen der Religionsgeschichte*; Leipzig: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht and J. C. Hinrichs, 1925). 20, 60, 67, 123, 124, 180, 227, 229, 300, 323, 336, 347, 373, 385, 391, 477.

¹⁸ end (sof) ܫܘܦ < reed (sûf) ܫܘܦ

¹⁹ Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 203.

Love and bear each other, then you will cross the great Sûf Sea.”²⁰

And:

“For those who can not show wages and alms, there is no bridge across the rivers.

For those who can not show wages and alms, there is no passage for him on the sea.”²¹

Also in the Mandaean Book of John, the Redeemer addresses his “chosen ones” with the following words:

“Love the alms giving and love Sunday, so that a bridge over the sea will be laid for you (the soul). A bridge will be placed over the sea, on its shores stand a thousand times a thousand. A thousand times a thousand stand on its shore, but of a thousand only one is allowed across. One out of a thousand is allowed across, and two thousand two. They let the souls over, who are zealous and worthy of the place of light (Pleroma).”²²

In summary, it can be stated that: in the Gnostic interpretation of the Exodus motif, Egypt or the waters of the Red Sea/Jordan are usually standing as a symbol of the physical world; the passage through the Red Sea or through the Jordan is a symbol of the ascent of the soul from the perishable (transient) sphere to the immaterial sphere or into the “immortality”.

Apart from such fundamental similarities, however, the Gnostic texts do differ in detail. From these differences can

²⁰ Lidzbarski, *Ginzā: Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer*, 20.

²¹ Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, XXI, 102f.

²² Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 102f.

be read a historical development of the tradition in three different stages:

- Moses saves the people of Egypt, holding back the waters of the Red Sea (Therapeutae, possibly Peratae).
- Joshua / Jesus saves the people from Egypt and makes the Jordan flow back up (Naassene).
- Jesus comes over the Jordan into the world, the waters fall back. (*Testimonium Veritatis*).

One can very well see how the displacement and interchanging of individual motifs gradually transforms the image of the passage of the people of Israel through the Red Sea under Moses into the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. If you closely follow this development line, it doesn't require too much ingenuity to recognize that there is a genetic connection between the Jesus of the *Testimonium Veritatis* and the Old Testament Joshua/Jesus. A transition from one notion to another is already underway, where the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is attributed to Joshua/Jesus, but not, as would have been expected, to Moses.

Before we go into the further development of this motif in early Christianity, we should now ask about the historical religious background of the Gnostic interpretation of Exodus. The usual reference to (Middle) Platonism contributes little to the explanation of this passage, although there is a distant analogy in Plato's Dialog Cratylos, wherein Heraclitus' so-called "flow doctrine" (πάντα ῥεῖ) is quoted.²³

But apart from this – the fact that it concerns only a small section, neglecting the doctrine of ascension of the soul or

²³ "Heraclitus says that everything goes away and nothing stays and compares everything to a stream" (402a).

salvation, which is closely connected with this by the Gnostics – it is highly unlikely that these various Gnostic groups – Therapeutae, Simonians, Peratae, Naassenes, Mandaeans – could have, on the narrow basis of two Heraclitean mystery sayings,²⁴ developed their Exodus interpretation.²⁵

The following section will show that, especially with regard to the Exodus motif, it can prove very useful to follow Zacharias Thundy's proposal and to take a look at the neglected terrain of Indian and Buddhist traditions.

²⁴ Possibly only B 12 and B 49a.

²⁵ Hugo Rahner has compiled a collection of quotes from ancient Greco-Roman literature to prove that the "Sea of the World" is an old topos (1. "The Bitter Sea", 2. "The evil sea"). What is missing is evidence that the image was used – as by the Gnostics and Therapeutae – as a transcendence metaphor. The "other shore", which in Buddhism is usually equated with *Nibbana*, has no explicit significance within the framework of ancient imagery. It gets these associations only in the later patristic exegesis. - Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche die Ekklesiology der Väter*, 272ff. - Hugo Rahner, *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (Vol. 4152; Herder-Spektrum; Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1992), 291ff.

2 "TO THE OTHER SHORE" – BUDDHISM AND UPANISHADS

In his post-mortem book published under the title: "Der Weg zum anderen Ufer" ("The Path to the Other Shore") the French Benedictine monk Henry Le Saux gives an impressive presentation of the spirituality of the Upanishads.²⁶ The title of the book is by no means coincidental, as it programmatically summarizes the spiritual essence of the Indian literature he discusses. Even the introductory quotations from the Upanishads impressively demonstrate their closeness to the imagery we have come to know from the Gnostics and their interpretation of the Exodus motif:

"With the syllable OM as a boat,
he crosses the room of the heart
and gets to the other shore,
in the innermost room,
which revealed itself to him ...
and so he enters the dwelling of Brahman."²⁷
"... on the farthest shore of the hereafter."²⁸
"... thus the venerable Sanatkumâra showed him

²⁶ Henri Le Saux, *Der Weg zum anderen Ufer: die Spiritualität der Upanishaden* (Diederichs, 1980). The English version appears to be *The Further Shore: Three Essays on Sannyasa, The Upanishads--An Introduction, The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience* (1997) -- need to confirm this, sgw

²⁷ *Maitri Upanishad* 6, 23

²⁸ *Kâthaka Upanishad* 3, 1

the shore beyond the darkness.”²⁹
 “From non-being lead me to being,
 from the darkness lead me to the light,
 from death lead me to immortality.”³⁰

These quotes provided by Le Saux could be multiplied many times over:

In the *Praçna-Upanishad* the disciples say to their master: “You are our father, who leads us out from ignorance over to the other shore.”³¹ The *Kâthaka-Upanishad* speaks of the “shore without fear.”³² And in the *Arsheya-Upanishad* it is said, “This Brahman is the Atman without end, without age, without shore; not outside and not within, omniscient, luminous, without hunger and without thirst; he leads from ignorance to the other shore.”

Admittedly, citations from the Upanishads also show that the metaphor of the crossing is being used in a slightly different sense than by the Gnostics. While in the gnostic Exodus interpretation water and river primarily denoted transience, i.e., as a “stream of becoming,” the quoted passages of the Upanishads emphasize other aspects: *ignorance*, fear and darkness. Of course, all these aspects are closely related in content, but this connection is barely reflected in the Upanishads.

²⁹ *Chândogya-Upanishad* 7, 26, 2

³⁰ *Brihadâranjya* 1, 3, 28; zitiert nach: Saux, *Der Weg zum anderen Ufer*, 29.

³¹ *Prasna Upanishad* 6,8

³² Paul Deussen, *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda: Aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt und mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen versehen* (3rd Ed.; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1921), *Kâthaka-Upanishad* 3,2, 276.

On the other hand, we do encounter the image of the “stream of becoming” or “stream of existence” especially in Buddhism. The Buddhist texts explicitly speak of this: ³³

“Where greed is dragged down to existence,
Further in the stream of becoming,
Down into the realm of Death:
One hardly hears such doctrine.” ³⁴

This passage, in a nutshell, contains the essential ingredients of the Buddhist world-view: The greed and death (and transience) are symbolized in the image of the flowing stream, which is at the same time the stream of Saṃsāra. The wisdom of the Buddha overcomes the stream of existence and points to the other shore. Some texts refer to this as “knowledge that has gone to the other shore” ³⁵ (prañā-pâram-itâm). ³⁶ In the same way, the 24 teachers

³³ Neumann commented on the passage – apart from a reference to Schopenhauer – with a logical reference to Heraclitus’ Παντα ῾Ρει.

³⁴ Karl Eugen Neumann, Übers., *Die Reden Gotamo Budhos, aus der Sammlung der Bruchstücke Suttanipato des Pali-Kanons. Übers. von Karl Eugen Neumann* (2.; München: Piper, 1911), 246, cf. 237. In the translation of Nyanaponika: “Drawn in the lust of life, carried away by the stream of existence, [so] are advised into the realm of death; the doctrine is not easy for them.” Nyanaponika, “*Tiṭṭhaka, ‘three baskets’, the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism*”.

<http://www.palikanon.com/index.html>.

³⁵ I have amended Detering’s English here, prañā-pâram-itâm is better translated as *that transcendental knowledge which has gone over to the other shore* – sgw.

³⁶ Heinrich Zimmer, Joseph Campbell, and Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Routledge library editions: Buddhism [20 volumes] ; Vol. 20; London: Routledge, 2008), 39f, see 542ff.

and saints of the Jains were called “ford maker” or “ford crosser” (tirthankara).³⁷ We are reminded, and not by chance, of the above mentioned “passing through” of the Gnostic Peratae.

A fragment of the Buddhist Sutta-Nipāta poetry reports that, because of a misunderstanding of teaching, Buddha’s pupil Nanda believed even Buddhist “priests and ascetics” could not escape the “flood.” The Sublime One clarified such misunderstandings with these words:

“I do not say: all priests and ascetics
 Are ensnared in birth and age.
 But the seen, heard, or otherwise experienced,
 rules, vows, all abandoned,
 the many other things, all abandoned,
 seeing through desire, they are driven uncontrollably,
 As people who have escaped the flood, I say of them.”³⁸

Or in Neumann’s translation:

“Not all priests, I say, and ascetics,
 are sunk in birth and age:
 What is visible, audible, conceivable,
 even what is virtuous have passed away completely,
 So many things have come to naught,

delirious from their thirst they are permeated,
 the floods, I say, have escaped these.”³⁹

³⁷ Zimmer, Campbell, and Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 392. John A. Grimes, *A concise dictionary of Indian philosophy: Sanskrit terms defined in English* (New and rev. ed.; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 320.

³⁸ Nyanaponika, “Tipitaka, Dreikorn, the Palikanon of Theravada Buddhism”.

In the 22nd speech from the Middle Collection, the Buddha compares his teachings to a raft. ⁴⁰ A man is standing in front of an “enormous body of water.” Since there is neither ship nor bridge and as “this shore is full of danger and terror, (*while*) the other shore is safe, free from terror,” the man builds a raft with his own hands to cross the water. He reaches the other shore and is saved. Buddha asks his students if it makes sense for the man to keep the raft to which he owes his salvation, then to load it on his shoulders and leave taking it with him. The disciples answer no, and are confirmed by Buddha, (*saying,*) the man would do better to set the raft on the shore or lower it into the tide. As for the raft, it is also within the Buddha’s teaching, that while suitable for escape, it is not to be held onto.

Again, this parable uses already familiar metaphors: the “enormous body of water” stands for the world of Samsāra, for the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; the raft for Buddha’s teaching, (*to reach*) the other shore for salvation and Nirvana (Nibbāna). ⁴¹

³⁹ Neumann, *Die Reden Gotamo Budhos, aus der Sammlung der Bruchstücke Suttanipato des Pali-Kanons*. Übers. von Karl Eugen Neumann, 352.

⁴⁰ Karl E. Neumann, *Buddha, Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos: Aus der Mittleren Sammlung Majjhimanikayo des Pali-Kanons* (Edition Lempertz, 2006), 158f.

⁴¹ The parable resembles in an astonishing way a passage from Master Eckhart’s sermon: “We must love the things that bring us to God; that alone is love with the love of God. Do I want to go across the sea, and I would like to have a ship, if only because I wanted to cross the sea? and as soon as I get over the sea, I no longer need the ship “; Buddha’s teaching was

Closely related to the parable cited above is that of the cattle herder from the 34th speech (2).⁴² The foolish cattle shepherd drives his herd “without inspecting the shore on this side (*ohne Untersuchung des diesseitigen Ufers*), and without surveying the bank on the other side (*ohne Untersuchung des jenseitigen Ufers des Ganges*), crossing his flock at random in the river.”⁴³ The cattle perish miserably.

“So also, you monks, it is with those ascetics or priests who don’t understand this world and don’t understand that world, who don’t understand the realm of nature and don’t understand the realm of freedom, who don’t understand temporality and don’t understand eternity: whoever among those want to dare their swimming skills, will be in for endless disaster and suffering.”

The wise herdsman, however, drives his cattle through the ford only after carefully examining the outer condition plus (*using his*) knowledge of his herd, with the result that they reach the shore safely.

“So also, you monks, it is with those ascetics or priests who understand this world and understand that world, understand the realm of nature and understand the realm of freedom, understand the temporality, and understand eternity: whoever among you wish to dare their swimming skills, will be in for endless well-being and salvation.”

replaced by Eckhart’s love, which “brings us to God”; Eckhart, *Schriften und Predigten* (Ed. Herman Büttner and Johann V Cissarz; Leipzig; Jena: Diederichs, 1923), 613.

⁴² Neumann, *Buddha, Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos: Aus der Mittleren Sammlung Majjhimanikayo des Pali-Kanons*, 252–54.

⁴³ I placed the original German of the two phrases in parenthesis, as the English translation loses the beauty of symmetry of Neumann’s rendering that more accurately reflects the Buddhist texts.

In this case, the bulls are the same bulls as those Monks, who “laid down their burdens, achieved salvation, destroyed the fetters of existence,” the “redeemed in perfect wisdom,” who “cross through the stream of nature and ... safely reach the other shore.” The strong cows are like those “who, after destroying the five low-rending fetters, ascend to leave from there, never to return to that world ...” The bulls and heifers refer to those “who have destroyed the three shackles, the ones facilitating greed, hatred and madness, who only return once they are almost purified, coming to this world once again only to put an end to suffering”; the gentle calves are those who “arising from truth, are devoted to the teaching.”

The metaphor of the Buddha’s stream, as distinct from the Christian Gnostics quoted in the first section, is understood as a “stream of existence,” which requires of all those wanting to cross over the task of purification and cleansing from desires and passions. Buddhist monks are referred to by the Buddha as “ford-makers” and “ford crossers,” just like the *Tīrthāṅkara* for the Jains mentioned above.

At another point, the stream becomes the “stream of iniquity”:

“Wise ships in this sea of iniquity,
Steer strongly and boldly through the stream of return:
Do you know the beginning, substance, context of the world?
We will be heirs to the Lord, who guides us to the best.”⁴⁴

Another variation on the theme is the Buddhist parable of “the stream”⁴⁵ from the *Anguttar-Nikāya*:⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Karl Eugen Neumann, *Die Lieder der Mönche und Nonnen Gotamo Buddho's* (Berlin, E. Hofmann & co., 1899), 238.

“Four kinds of people, you monks, are to be found in the world. And what are these four? The man who allows himself to be driven by the stream; the man who fights against the stream; the man who is secure in the stream; the man who has crossed the stream and reached the otherworldly shore, the saint who stands on secure ground.”

The first class includes those who pay homage to evil deeds and desires, the second those who fight against them and for a holy life, the third are those who find themselves, after destroying their shackles, in a higher world, and the fourth, those who while “still in this life, its delusions, are redeemed in mind and wisdom, recognizing and realizing it themselves.” The translator Nyānatiloka explains what hardly needs explanation: “The stream is the symbol of the world with its desires and passions. The otherworldly shore is Nirvana (Nibbāna).”⁴⁷

Only with the help of the redeeming knowledge of the origin and provenance of desire and lust is it possible to overcome the stream:

“He who understood where it comes from,
He will reject it, you realize, Yakkho;

⁴⁵ I have translated *Strom* as ‘stream’ for consistency in this section, although ‘current’ applies in half the cases here - sgw

⁴⁶ Gautama Buddha, *Die Reden des Buddha aus dem „Angúttarānikaya“*; aus dem Pali zum ersten Male übers. und erläutert von Myanatiloka (Übers. d 1957 Nyanatiloka Mahathera; München O. Schloss, 1923), 7–9.

⁴⁷ Gautama Buddha, *Die Reden des Buddha aus dem „Angúttarānikaya“*; aus dem Pali zum ersten Male übers. und erläutert von Myanatiloka, 8, A1.

The flooded waters that are hard to cross, he crosses them,
Never before crossed, never to return."⁴⁸

In addition to cleansing and purification ("destroying the shackles of the sensuous world"), faith also plays a role in crossing the river. In the *Samyutta Nikāya* the Sublime One answers the question

"How does one cross over the flood?
How does one cross the rugged sea?
How does one overcome suffering?
How is one purified?"
"By faith one crosses over the flood,
By diligence, the rugged sea.
By energy one overcomes suffering,
By wisdom one is purified."⁴⁹

The Buddha's answer in Schrader's German translation:

„Der Glaube führt uns durch den Strom,
Der Ernst uns durch die Lebenssee;
Standhaftigkeit besiegt das Leiden,
Und Einsicht macht von Fehlern rein.“⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Neumann, *Die Reden Gotamo Budhos, aus der Sammlung der Bruchstücke Suttanipato des Pali-Kanons*. Übers. von Karl Eugen Neumann, 94. Siehe auch 306: "The swamp of desires is difficult to cross."

⁴⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*; Translated from the Pāli (The teachings of the Buddha; Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 315.

⁵⁰ Otto Schrader, *Die Fragen des Königs Menandros. Aus dem Pali zum ersten Male ins Deutsche übersetzt* (Berlin: Verlag von Paul Raatz, 1905), 28. Note, I left this untranslated from German - sgw

The translator and commentator Bhikkhu understands this “flood” as the “flood of ignorance.”⁵¹ But that is by no means clear. For the “rugged sea,” the “life” or the “stream of existence” with its desires and passions would certainly fit better.

It is easy to understand, as the “dangerous river/ rescuing shore” circle of ideas is another motif that emerged from the transformation from water. The ability to walk on water attributed to Buddha, was already in the oldest Buddhist literature, in texts from the pre-Christian era. It is not always clear, whether it is speaking about walking on the water or hovering over the water. In *Dighanikaya* ⁵² is reported how Buddha wanted to cross the Ganges on his last trip. While the others are looking for boats and a raft or make themselves a raft from vines, the Buddha vanished so fast, “like a strong man extends his bent arm or bends his outstretched arm, from the Ganges bank on this side, and appeared on the other side.” There he calls to those standing on the other shore to:

“Overcome the flood (of being).
Suggesting the way to quickly build a bridge over it:
And those quickly find the way to find him,
When others are struggling for a raft.” ⁵³

⁵¹ Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 486.

⁵² Rudolf Otto Franke, *Dighanikaya, das Buch der langen Texte des buddhistischen Kanons. In Auswahl übersetzt von Otto Franke* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 192f. D XVI,1,3, See the following: J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive, Zeitschrift für Religionsund Geistesgeschichte* 41/3 (1989) 193–214, here 209f.

⁵³ Franke, *Dighanikaya, das Buch der langen Texte des buddhistischen Kanons. In Auswahl übersetzt von Otto Franke*, 193. Vgl. Rudolf Seydel, *Buddha-Sage und Buddha-Lehre*, 1882, 247. Mau-

In Dahlke's translation:

"Those who cross the river's wide waters,
 building for themselves a bridge, avoiding marshes -
 with a raft, though, people bind themselves.
 The current (Strom) sweeps them away."

Narrated in the manner of an apophthegm, the episode alternates between historical anecdote and parable. There is some evidence that we are dealing only with an "idealized scene", that is, a historiographical parable. The question of how the Buddha crossed the Ganges doesn't seem to bother the author, who in any case doesn't give us any details.⁵⁴ The historical framework serves only as an illustration in the last verses, which are to show that it is finally possible for the wise to transcend the stream of existence on their own.

The Scottish Indologist Berriedale Keith aptly summarized the essence of such "water traversing" equations: "Faith is the root of correct knowledge; man does not think out the doctrines of the Buddha by the independent light of reason; he must hear them taught and explained. Faith is the means by which man may cross the depths of the river of existence to the safety of Nirvâṇa; the teaching of the Buddha saves him who has faith, but destroy the faithless ..."⁵⁵

rice O'C Walshe, Hrsg., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (The teachings of the Buddha; Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 238f.

⁵⁴ Derrett concludes that there has been no walking on water, rather that the miracle performed is "that of invisibility and reappearance"; Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive*, 209.

⁵⁵ A. Berriedale Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 1923, 34f.

While Keith stresses the importance of faith, which is illustrated by such parables, Duncan Derrett puts the emphasis on the *concept of discipleship*:⁵⁶

“The Teacher of Knowledge, who overcomes the cycle of birth – sickness – death – rebirth (*saṃsāra*), has himself crossed a river (even an ocean); and he teaches his students (i.e., *disciples*) to do the same. He is a pioneer for others. The Buddha has overcome and caused others to overcome.”

Faith and discipleship were, as we have seen, also themes of the Christian Exodus interpretations, which in this respect differ in no way from their Buddhist counterparts. Particularly striking is the similarity of the Buddhist texts to the above-cited 39th Ode of Solomon. Bauer has summed up their contents with the following words: “Torrential streams... divide this world and the hereafter ... Only the believing souls find the way over when they - secured by the name of the Most High - follow in the footsteps of the Lord, who has preceded them, leaving behind indelible traces (i.e., *footprints*). Whoever venerates Christ’s name and is united with him in faith, finds his way and safely reaches the other side.”⁵⁷

The theological imagery of the ode is so similar in its basic structure to the Buddhist parables that names become interchangeable: “Christ” could easily be replaced by “Buddha” without the slightest difference being noticeable in the historical religious background.⁵⁸ It has already been

⁵⁶ Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive*, 202.

⁵⁷ Schneemelcher and Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, 618.

⁵⁸ In fact, Gressmann had already claimed in 1912 that one should “consider the possibility that ‘the revealed one’ or ‘the chosen one’ was [originally] called by name (such as Mani or

pointed out that there are important Buddhist parallels to the footsteps of which the Odist speaks.

Apart from the quoted texts, the idea of Buddha walking on water can also be demonstrated on the basis of Buddhist relief representations. The best-known representation is on the eastern gate of the Stupa of Sanchi. It is described by W. Norman Brown as follows:

“It shows the waves, the three Kasyapas rowing out to save the Buddha, and the Buddha himself serene amid the floods. The Buddha is not there in a human figure; he is indicated by a smooth rectangular slab below the waves, which is his *cankrama* ‘magic promenade’; for at that period of Buddhist art in Central India he was never represented in sculpture except symbolically.”⁵⁹

The stupa depicting the Buddha walking on water illustrates a scene described in Mahavagga 1.20.16 and also some other texts.⁶⁰ It probably arose between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. Norman Brown assumes, with Marshall and Foucher, based on archaeological studies, a pre-Christian emergence of the relief representation and writes: “we have the testimony of archaeology, for that

Buddha)”; Hugo Gressmann, "Solomon's 23 Ode", in *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (from phil.-hist. class sessions of 21 July, 1921; Berlin: Publisher of the Academy of Sciences, 1921) 616–24, here 620, A. 1.

⁵⁹ W. Norman (William Norman) Brown, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water* (Chicago, London: The Open Court Pub. Co., 1928), 21. [Note, I see only two rowing, the Buddha seated serenely between - sgw]

⁶⁰ Brown, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, 20.

gateway was not later than the first century B. C.”⁶¹ However, according to the famous English orientalist J. Duncan M. Derrett, it dates “from the early first century, or even from the period around 50 AD.”⁶² In any case, whether 200 BC or 50 AD, it’s not possible to infer that the motif of walking on water came from the Gospels (which, according to conservative estimates, should have arisen only towards the end of the first century).

Undoubtedly, Derrett deserves the credit for having drawn attention to the interconnection between the two motifs of Exodus and Walking on Water. In his essay *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive* he shows how much the New Testament baptismal account is related linguistically and by motifs to the Old Testament Exodus narrative.

Although Derrett proceeds with great erudition, at the end of his investigation he comes to conclusions that are hard to comprehend. He maintains the view that “crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan, which occur in various forms in the Gospels... were known via Central Asia and in other ways in India.”⁶³ In a hypothetical scenario, Derrett reconstructs the way in which “the Gospels via Syria to Sogdiana” reached the borders of India and could have influenced Buddhist tradition there.

Given that some of the Buddhist texts cited by Derrett are apparently older than the corresponding Christian ones,

⁶¹ Brown, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, 20.

⁶² Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive*, 204.

⁶³ Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive*, 212.

and that Derrett himself dated the Sanchi sculpture to the early first century AD, it would be difficult to follow the scenario he developed. Also speaking against Derrett's thesis is that the spiritualization of the Exodus has been shown to have a long Indian tradition dating back to the Upanishads. From the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer: "The broad river of ignorance and passion is a dangerous torrent, yet the savior, the divine ferryman, can bring his devotees safely to the other shore. This is an image held in common by all Indian traditions."⁶⁴ An importing of Christian Exodus ideas, as Derrett obviously accepts, was not necessary in India.⁶⁵

What is decisive, however, is that the texts cited above all impressively demonstrate that the idea grew organically out of Indian, especially Buddhist, theology and spiritual worlds.

Derrett's execution is captivatingly erudite, but his attempt to derive the Indian Exodus conceptions from Christian premises is not convincing. The age and character of the tradition speak unequivocally for an Indian origin. This

⁶⁴ Zimmer, Campbell, und Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 392.

⁶⁵ Also in Indian narrative literature there seems to have been an Exodus legend: the 8th verse of Rig Veda T. 1 879 "is taken from a song in which (as is often the case) the passage over a river is described, with pursuing enemies an obstacle"; „Classics of Indian Philosophy“ (Directmedia Publ., 2006), 3218, Rig Veda, T. 2, p. 473. "Through the Viçvamitra and its tribe songs", the stream they have to pass through will be brought to a stand still"; "Classics of Indian Philosophy", 1770, Rig Veda T. 1, 532. Indra „made the Sindhu flow upward with his power“ Rainer Stuhmann, "Schiffahrt im Rigveda", *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 22/3 (2015) 29–90, here 81.

applies both to the spiritual interpretation of the Exodus and to the closely related motif of walking on water. The Indologist and theologian Klatt, after detailed analysis of the relevant texts, came to the conclusion that “although we cannot determine unequivocally the original Buddhist text, we may affirmatively state, based on the historical priority of the Buddhist tale, as for example in the pre-Christian Pauline canon, that the direction of the borrowing is from the Buddhist source into the Christian gospels.”⁶⁶

Incidentally, Zacharias P. Thundy, W. Norman Brown, Christian Lindtner and Michael Lockwood hold a judgment similar to Klatt’s.⁶⁷ Brown also noted towards the end of his study: “The miracle of walking on the water, as it appears in Indian and Christian texts, originated in India, where its roots are found in the Rigveda before 800 B. C.”⁶⁸

We cannot wrap up our section on the evolution of the “Exodus” / “crossing” motif in the religious imagination of India without pointing out developments in Mahayana Buddhism. The name of the perfect wisdom exalted there, the *prajñāpāramitā*, is composed of the words *prajna*: that is, wisdom, and *paramita*, which literally means “other shore”, but is usually translated as “transcendent / perfect.” The

⁶⁶ Norbert Klatt, *Jesu und Buddhas Wasserwandel = Walking on the water of Jesus and of the Buddha: a presentation of the case in English, with a critical discussion of the opinion of J. Duncan M. Derrett in German* (Göttingen: The Author, 1990), 30.

⁶⁷ Michael Lockwood, *Mythicisim: A Seven-Fold Revelation of the Buddhist 'branch' Grafted onto Jesse's "Lineage Tree" [Revised]*. (S.l.: Worldview Publications, 2014), 108–9.

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, 69.

most well known scripture of Mahayana Buddhism is the so-called *Heart Sutra*. It ends with the mantra: “*Gate gate Pāragate Pārasamgate Bodhi svāhā*”, which, according to Edward Conze, translates as: “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, oh what an awakening, all hail!” All this sounds like a formula. The original character of the image is almost lost in the expression. The “going over” is merely a paraphrase for “transcending.”

In summary, the concept of a “spiritual exodus” is undoubtedly a genuine product of the imagination of the Indian world. Its tradition can be traced from (Mahayana) Buddhism back to the early Vedic literature and the Upanishads, and developed within these without an equivalent in Jewish, Greek or Roman literature. This means that the most important parallels to the Gnostic interpretation of the Exodus are found almost exclusively in the Indian and Buddhist spiritual worlds. The Gnostics used Old Testament images and motifs, filling them in with spiritual content from Indian and Buddhist traditions.

The key question now is: where did the two lines meet, the Jewish tradition and Hebrew Bible on the one hand, the Buddhist or Indian spirituality on the other? At what point exactly do they overlap?

The answer is easier to find than it may seem at first glance. We are already acquainted with the point at which both lines converge. It is located in Alexandria, more precisely with Philo’s *Therapeutae* from Lake Mariout.

3 THERAPEUTAE, BUDDHISM AND GNOSIS

The Therapeutae community, described by Philo with great sympathy in his book *De Vita Contemplativa*, consisted of men and women who had discarded their civic obligations and inheritance, or had given away their possessions, to devote themselves to the contemplative life of solitude.

According to Philo's account, by his time the community was not restricted to the vicinity of Alexandria but was scattered throughout the world. The decision to join the community was final; neither family nor friends could induce a member to reverse their decision.

The houses for group living on Lake Mariout were of great simplicity and quite minimalist. They were set close together so that the inhabitants could mutually defend themselves from hostile attack. In the center of the settlement there was a small sanctuary where the residents came together on the seventh day of the week for a common service.

The daily routine of the Therapeutae revolved around prayer, readings from and interpretations of scripture. Inside each house was a room called a sanctuary or cloister. The residents withdrew into it during the day, devoting themselves entirely to the study of the scriptures, i.e. the law, prophets and psalms. Along with the scriptures they read were also some writings of the founders of their community from long before.

The Therapeutae used to pray twice a day, at daybreak and in the evening. Their contemplative way of life included spiritual songs and hymns, but also strict asceticism. Food and drink were limited to the essentials and consumed only after sunset. Their clothing consisted of a thick fur coat in winter, a short skirt or a linen garment in summer.

Their sanctuary had a double enclosure with one area for the men and another for the women. In these services, texts from their holy scriptures were interpreted by the elders and the most learned. Usually, after the scriptural interpretation, a simple meal was consumed, consisting of bread and salt made somewhat palatable with hyssop and then spring water to drink.

For the interpretation of the Scripture, the leader employed the allegorical method also used by Philo. According to the Therapeutae, scripture is comparable to a living being “which has the literal (words) forming as a body, but as a soul possesses invisible meaning hidden in those words” (*De Vita Contemplativa* 78).

The meal on the eve of the fiftieth day consisted only of bread and salt mixed with hyssop and water, recalling the consecrated bread and salt on the table in the sacred vestibule of the Jerusalem temple. In a lengthy digression, Philo highlights the contrast with the lavish Greek banquets and their debauchery. During the meal the Therapeutae were not served by slaves, as was customary at the time, but by their novices, as they rejected slavery on principle.

The meal was followed by the holy night celebration, in which the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, as already described in part 1, was depicted in the manner of a mystery play. The celebration did not end until the early morning. As the sun rose, the Therapeutae raised their

hands to the sky in prayer, then returned to their sanctuary.

Philo concludes with a few general remarks about the Therapeutae, who, as citizens of both heaven and the world, have been placed on the side of the Father and Creator of the Universe and called to live exclusively in contemplation of nature and the soul.

Philo's writings about the Therapeutae are attested first, and relatively late, with the church father Eusebius. In his *Church History* Eusebius comments on and cites passages in detail. It becomes clear why he is interested in Philo's Therapeutae: He considers them Christian monks! In his opinion, the term Therapeutae was chosen only because the name "Christian" was not yet universally known.⁶⁹ Eusebius tries to prove his opinion, based on comparisons of individual commentaries (from Philo) with passages from the New Testament. For example, he explains the voluntary renunciation of worldly goods by the Therapeutae with a scripture from Acts, which reports that followers of the early Christian community laid their possessions at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:34ff). The church father was no doubt aware that one could have a differing opinion about the identity of the Therapeutae. Nevertheless, he stated emphatically that Philo could not have thought of the Therapeutae as anyone other than the "the first to proclaim the Gospels" and "the original customs handed down by the apostles" (Hist 2.17.24).

Other Church fathers join Eusebius in this opinion, including Epiphanius, who also dedicates a detailed section to the Therapeutae in his work.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, Hist 2.17.4

That the Therapeutae are, in truth, early Christian monks, and that there were already monastic tendencies in the oldest church,⁷⁰ were undisputed for a long time. It was not until the 19th century that this view began to waver. Instead of Christians, they are now seen as Jewish ascetics foreign to Christianity, or – like F.C. Baur and Eduard Zeller – Jewish representatives of Neo-Pythagoreanism or Orpheus-Bacchic asceticism.⁷¹

Doubts about the Christian identity of the Therapeuts was linked to doubt about the Philonic origin of the writing. But the literary question was overshadowed by the polemical debate between Catholics and Protestants about the origins of Christian monasticism. While the Catholics believed they could prove from the Scriptures that it originated in the apostolic age, the Protestants, who rejected monasticism, endeavored to demonstrate that this could not have been the case.

One of the first to doubt the authenticity of the writings was the Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz. In his opinion the writing came not from Philo, but from an encratic Gnostic, perhaps even Montanist Christian, “who had a tendency to give a panegyric of ascetic monastic life and to confirm its antiquity by Philo’s authority.”⁷² Graetz justifies his thesis by, among other things, noting that while Josephus mentions the Essenes, he does not seem to know

⁷⁰ A. Hilgenfeld, “Philo und die Therapeuten”, *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 23 (1880) 423–40, here 426.

⁷¹ Hilgenfeld, “Philo und die Therapeuten”, 426.

⁷² Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart: Geschichte der Juden von dem Tode Juda Makabi’s bis zum Untergang des jüdischen Staates* (Leipzig: Leopold Schnauß, 1856), 519.

about the related Therapeutae. Also the hand of the forger betrays itself already at the beginning of the work, since Pseudo-Philo seeks to give the impression here that his piece about the Therapeutae was a continuation of his discussion of the Essenes. However, no such writing exists, as *Quod omnes probus liber* contains only a few marginal notes on the Essenes. Graetz concluded that the forger merely sought out any connecting point in order to legitimize his writing as Philonic.

The observations of the Jewish historian Graetz were eagerly taken up by many Protestant theologians. Paul Ernst Lucius argued similarly to Graetz. He saw in the Philonic writing about the Therapeutae a “tendentious work”, which presumes “an asceticism, which is well-formed and widespread in many countries, and conditions, such as existed only in Christianity of the third century”. As the “first link from a branch of literature of the old church, rich in such products,” this was an “apology written under the name of Philo in favor of Christian asceticism.”⁷³

Graetz and Lucius, with their theses, had a lasting influence on Protestant research. For the majority of the theologians the *inauthenticity* of the book *De Vita Contemplativa* has long been a settled issue. There was not another change of course until the English Orientalist Frederick C. Conybeare published his study of the Philonic book in 1895.⁷⁴ Conybeare examined and collated all the manuscripts of *De Vita Contemplativa* in order to meticulously compare the text word for word, sentence by sentence,

⁷³ P. E Lucius, *Die Therapeuten und ihre Stellung in der Geschichte der Askese: eine kritische Untersuchung der Schrift De vita contemplativa* (Strassburg, 1879), 198.

⁷⁴ F. C. (Frederick Cornwallis) Conybeare, *Philo about the Contemplative Life* (Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1895).

against the other works of Philo held to be genuine. He could not find any evidence of a forgery anywhere. Conybeare held the writing to be an early work by Philo. In view of the fact that Philo was born around 30 BC, this meant that the work had to be written in the first quarter of the 1st century. This was all the more remarkable because the claims made by Eusebius and the Church Fathers that the Therapeutae were Christian monks. The question of who the Therapeutae were, if they were not Christians, came up again.

Meanwhile, the book *De Vita Contemplativa* came to be recognized as genuine by both Catholics and Protestants; the debate might therefore be regarded as “decided.” All agreed “That today we see in the text a genuine Philo writing and in the ‘Therapeutae’ a Jewish ascetic group.”⁷⁵

However, there are now and again occasional attempts to qualify the value of the historical presentation by hypothesizing that Philo’s account should be understood as an attempt to erect a literary monument to the ideal of a contemplative living community. For Troels Engberg-Pedersen the description of the Therapeutae is merely “a Philosopher’s Dream”.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden: Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 95.

⁷⁶ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Philo’s ‘De Vita Contemplativa’ as a Philosopher’s Dream”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 30/1 (1999) 40–64. Roland Bergmeier, *The Qumran – Essene – Hypothesis: Die Handschriftenfunde bei Khirbet Qumran, ihr spezifischer Trägerkreis und die essenische Gemeinschaftsbewegung* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 144ff. Bousset even casually supposed that Philo possibly drew “without any actual background an ideal

Speaking against this, if we look at it from another standpoint, the text gives a specific location for the Therapeutae. If Philo's presentation of his Therapeutae had been merely a literary fiction, providing location information - verifiable at any time - would undoubtedly have been counter-productive.⁷⁷

The full title of the writing is found in almost all Greek manuscripts: "About observations of life or petitioner for refuge. The first book on ability" (ΠΕΡΙ ΒΙΟΥ ΘΕΩΡΗΤΙΚΟΥ Η ΙΚΕΤΩΝ, ΠΕΡΙ ΑΡΕΤΩΝ ΤΟ ΤΕΤΑΡΤΟΝ).⁷⁸ Philo himself explains the words *Therapeutai* or (female) *Therapeutrides* as derived from the two basic meanings of the word θεραπεύειν = to heal and to worship; as "healers," the Therapeutae are the representatives of a healing art "which is better than that used among the nations," insofar as it is holistic, including body and soul; as "worshippers" they would "worship the Being" (*De Vita Contemplativa* 2).

It is unclear how the title ΠΕΡΙ ... ΙΚΕΤΩΝ ("petitioner for refuge, or worshipper") came about.⁷⁹ In the opinion of translator Karl Bormann, the two interpretations in chapter 2 that Philo gives to the Θεραπευταὶ do not fit. On the other hand, the combination of the two terms is by no means

life of pious, monotheistic, allegorizing philosophers"; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903), 446.

⁷⁷ Deutsch, "The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual, and Mystical Experience", 288, A. 6.

⁷⁸ Deutsch, "The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual, and Mystical Experience", 290, A. 13. (note, the Greek actually translates "About observations of life, or the

⁷⁹ Philo and Leopold Cohn, *Die Werke in deutscher Übersetzung* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1962), 44, A. 1.

uncommon in Philo (e.g., *Det* 160, *Migr* 124, *Congr* 105, 309, *Virt* 185, *Omn Prob Lib* 39). In *SpecLeg* 1.42 Philo speaks of the proselytes, who are called “right worshipers, free of all delusional beliefs.”

In truth, “they have become Protectors and servants of the True Being” (ικέται τε καὶ θεραπευταί). Celia Deutsch points out that there is also a close connection to the Old Testament Levitical service: “The Levites are God’s supplicants (ικέτης αὐτοῦ), and their service to God symbolizes the ‘fountain of devout ... contemplation’ (θεωρίας δὲ τῆς τοῦ μόνου σοφοῦ ... πηγὴ τὸ θεραπευτικῶς, *Sacr.* 118-120 LCL).” It reflects not only the language of the ancient mysteries, but also the cultic language of the Septuagint and its interpretation, “designating the members of the Lake Mareot community as initiates and/or priests whose contemplation is a cultic act.”⁸⁰

But there could conceivably be a very different interpretation. We must take a closer look at the origin of the term *Therapeutae*, independent of the secondary interpretation Philo gives it. The American academic Zacharias P. Thundy had advanced, in his 1993 study *Buddha and Christ*, the hypothesis that the term *Therapeutae* could go back to the Sanskrit / Pali word *Theravada*. The Indian *v* and *ḍ* had been converted by phonetic shift into a Greek *pi* (π) and *tau* (τ). As an example of a similar transfer, Thundy mentions the Tamil word *karuva* (cinnamon), which was translated by the Greek physician Ktesias with *karpion*. For an example of the conversion of the *ḍ* into a Greek *tau* (τ),

⁸⁰ Deutsch, “The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual, and Mystical Experience”, 290.

Thundy points to Clement of Alexandria, who always called Buddha “Boutta.”⁸¹

According to Michael Lockwood, the term Therapeutae also can be explained without a phonic shift as a translation of a Buddhist term into Greek:

“The Buddha’s knowledge, then, was to be passed down generation after generation of monks, under the guidance of leading Elders, (‘mahâ-thêra-s’) who had attained a thorough knowledge of the doctrine. It is in this sense that the term ‘thêraputta’ came to be applied to Buddhist monks in a monastery under the leadership of a Mahâ-Thêra (‘Great Elder’). ‘Thêraputta’ (Pâli) is a compound of the two words: *thêra* = elder, and *putta* = son(s). The fem. of the Pâli word *thêra* (‘elder’) is *thêrî* from (Skt.) *sthavirî* or *sthavirâ*, and ‘daughter’, (Skt.) *putrî*. Emperor Aśōka’s medical missionary monks who arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century B.C.E., and their followers and converts were to be known by this name, which, to the Greeks, would sound like ‘therapeutai’. These monks’ skill in healing the sick, both physically and spiritually, would enhance a medical connotation of the Greek term, ‘therapeutai’, and its later English offshoots, ‘therapy’, ‘therapeutics’, etc.”⁸²

In other words, according to Lockwood, the Therapeutae are the “Sons of the Ancients” (*thêraputta*), as young Buddhist monks called themselves, who had traveled to the West as emissaries of King Aśōka. To the Greek ears this sounded like *therapeutai*.

⁸¹ Zacharias P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions* (BRILL, 1993), 245. Elmar R Gruber und Holger Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus: die buddhistischen Quellen des Christentums* (Frankfurt/M; Berlin: Ullstein, 1996), 249f.

⁸² Michael Lockwood, *Buddhism’s Relation to Christianity: A Miscellaneous Anthology with Occasional Comments by Michael Lockwood* (T.R. Publications, 2010), 14.

Thundy, like Lockwood, affirms the theory that Henry L. Mansel, in his book *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, had argued a century and a half earlier: "The Therapeutae or contemplative monks of Egypt appear to have sprung from an union of the Alexandrian Judaism with the precepts and modes of life of the Buddhist devotees."⁸³ The Therapeutae were Jewish Buddhists!

With the help of these explanations, the other title of Philo's writing might now help to shed light on the term "refuge seekers." Kersten/Gruber refer to the Sanskrit word *Bhikshu*, which refers to the Buddhist monk - literally translated as "beggar," someone who "begs" for alms.⁸⁴ However, another conceivable derivation would be "taking refuge in the Buddha, the Sublime One, or the Lord Gotamo," a phrase often used in Buddhist texts.⁸⁵ The Dharma, i.e. the doctrine that is law, statutes, and truth is, in the words of the dying Buddha, an "island of refuge."⁸⁶ *Buddha, dharma, saṅgha* according to Buddhist view, form

⁸³ Henry Longueville Mansel and Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries* (London: J. Murray, 1875), 31.

⁸⁴ Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 250.

⁸⁵ The formula "Taking refuge in the Sublime One (in teaching and discipleship)" only occurs about 23 times in speeches from the Middle Collection. The expression "Take refuge in the Lord Gotamo (in teaching and discipleship)" is found an equal number of times. (translators note: *Erhabenen* can be rendered as either 'Sublime One' or 'Blessed One' - sgw)

⁸⁶ Klaus-Josef Notz, *Lexicon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis. 1.200 Stichw* [Buddhism: Basic Concepts, Traditions, Practices. 1,200 Keywords] (Bd. 2; Herder, Freiburg, 1998), 1, 132.

the three “jewels” or “treasures” (Sanskrit: *triratna*, Pali: *tiratana*), to which Buddha’s disciples should take refuge.⁸⁷

So it should be quite obvious that the Jewish Buddhists in Alexandria, who sought and found refuge in the Dharma – in the Greek *ἰκέται* – were called “refuge seekers.”

What stands in the way of such hypotheses are partly restricted thought patterns and partly simple prejudices. These should not stop us. For 200 years reputable researchers from Isaac J. Schmidt, to Samuel Beal, Henry L. Mansel, Zacharias Thundy, Christian Lindtner, and Michael Lockwood, have impartially examined the wider context of a close interrelation between Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism and Buddhism, and made arguments for identifying the Therapeutae as Buddhist monks. There are in fact a number of striking parallels:

- *Male and Female Therapeutae* – Even in ancient Buddhism, there have been monks and nuns; *bhikṣuni*, (Sanskrit, Pali *bhikkhuni*) = beggar. The Buddhist nun, however, was always subordinate to the monk. The ordination succession in the order of Theravādāna nuns was broken only in the 12th century. Unlike the monks, who had to follow 220 regulations of the order,

⁸⁷ Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 2, 477. “Take refuge in the Buddha, take refuge in the law, and take refuge in the community (*Buddham saranam gacchami, dharmam saranam gacchami, sangham saranam gacchami*).” - Zacharias P. Thundy, *Trial and Death of Jesus: Buddhist Sources of Gospel Narratives* (Kindle Edition, 2014), Pos. 244.

there were significantly more rules for the nuns, more specifically 290 (or 355).⁸⁸

- *Poetic Songs (De Vita Contemplativa 80, 84)* – In Buddhist literature there are collections of songs of the nuns and monks (see *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* of the *Pālika-non*).
- *Separate of male and female Therapeutae (33)* – In the Buddhist religious community, the *saṅgha*, monks and nuns are strictly separated; the contact with the opposite sex is undesirable.⁸⁹
- *Prayer at sunrise and sunset* (“When they see the sun rise, they raise their hands to heaven and pray for a beautiful day, that is to say, knowledge of the truth and discernment of the Spirit,” 27) – The number of and occasions for prayers may vary in the Buddhist *saṅgha*, but prayers at sunrise and sunset are universally attested.
- “So ahead of time they leave their inheritances by their own free will. But those who have no loved ones leave their possessions to companions and friends.” – The way of life of the Buddhist monk is one of the poverty, liberated from the fetters of the world; achieving self-realization in homelessness (*pabbajjā*) and the renunciation of worldly possessions.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 1, 74; 2, 341.

⁸⁹ Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 1, 147.

⁹⁰ Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 1, 53.

- “The *common sanctuary* in which they each come together on the seventh day” (32) – The Buddhist monasteries, called *Vihara*, usually consist of a central hall and surrounding simple monk cells. Especially during the rainy season when walking was prohibited, the *Vihara* served as a permanent residence for nuns and monks.⁹¹ Generally, there is no seven-day rhythm in Buddhism. However, the *Uposatha* is considered a day of inner retreat and renewal of the Dhamma practice. It is celebrated every 5 to 7 days and corresponds to the Jewish Sabbath. Since the Therapeutae were of Jewish origin, it is reasonable to assume that they maintained the usual seven-week rhythm. Buddhism was very adaptable in this regard.
- The Therapeutae have *two robes*, one for the summer and one for the winter. Also Buddhist monks are instructed to confine themselves to a double robe, consisting of an upper and lower part
- “As for elders, they do not consider old age and gray-hair ... but those who, from the earliest years of life, devoted their youth and the blossom of men to the contemplative part of philosophy.” (67) “The saṅgha saw itself originally as an egalitarian community of equals, which only allowed precedence after the ordination age.”⁹²
- Philo describes the posture of the therapist listening to the lecture as follows: “... the hands are held up in the

⁹¹ Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 2, 504f.

⁹² Notz, *Lexikon des Buddhismus: Grundbegriffe, Traditionen, Praxis*. 1.200 Stichw, 2, 292f.

robe, the right between the chest and the chin, the left withdrawn at the waist" (30). The gesture described by Philo is also iconographically verified. The evidence does not come from Egypt, but from *Gandhara*, the ancient border area between present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is regarded as an important intersection of Greek and Buddhist culture. Among the archaeologically significant finds is a frieze with rows of Indian arches (*caitya*) and Persepolitan columns. Beneath one of the arches stands a Buddhist monk, "who", according to Julius Thomas Bergau, "holds his right hand under his robe in front of his chest and grasp[s] his robe with his left hand."⁹³ The depicted posture corresponds to Philo's description down to the hair. Other finds also depicted Buddha and monk figures in corresponding posture.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, little is known about the significance of this gesture.⁹⁵ What is certain is that it comes from the Buddhist culture and seems to have its roots here. That the iconographic evidence all comes from Gandhara is certainly not a coincidence. Holger Kersten had already attempted to show the case can be made that the city of Taxila in Gandhara as likely the place of origin of those living in

⁹³ Julius Thomas Bergau, "Buddha, Bodhisattva und fremde Götter - Zur Ikonographie in der polytheistischen Gandhāra-Kunst", in *Gandhāra: Buddhas griechisches Erbe?* (Asian religions and society series; Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) 39-49, here 42.

⁹⁴ Bergau, "Buddha, Bodhisattva and foreign gods - On the iconography in the polytheistic Gandhāra art", p. 46, Note 26.

⁹⁵ Holger Kersten in our correspondence expressed the appealing conjecture that the gesture was perhaps in fact an expression that everything worldly was alien to them.

Alexandria. We will see elsewhere that, in fact, a number of arguments support this hypothesis.⁹⁶



Image from Gandhara⁹⁷

- The Therapeutae were not served by slaves (ἀνδράποδα) at their sacred meals, but by their young novices, because they fundamentally rejected the ownership of slaves and regarded slavery as contrary to nature (70). Also in the Buddhist community, administrative tasks and other worldly business, such as table

⁹⁶ Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 253–62.

⁹⁷ Julius Thomas Bergau, „Buddha, Bodhisattva und fremde Götter - Zur Ikonographie in der polytheistischen Gandhāra-Kunst“, in *Gandhāra: Buddhas griechisches Erbe?* (Asian religions and society series; Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) 39–49, here 43, Image 9.

service, were performed by special people, comparable to the auditor with the Manicheans. According to Jonathan A. Silk, “Karmadâna seems to mean something like ‘transaction’”. In any case, the Karmadâna are considered “managing monks.”⁹⁸ Buddha demanded neither an abolition of slavery nor a dissolution of the Indian caste system; his focus was entirely on the inner “enslavement” of man by the world. Those who had overcome it, like the Thai monk Buddhadâsa, could be called a “slave of Buddha.”⁹⁹ The admission of slaves into the Buddhist community was rejected by Buddha. Hence there were as few slaves in the Buddhist monastic community as there were with the Therapeutae. Of course, the justification for rejecting slaves was different with the Therapeutae. For the Therapeutae, they seem to have been more aligned with the naturalistic views of the Stoics.

- Philo reports that the head of the community spoke very slowly in the interpretation of the holy scripture, because it was not about rhetorical splendor, but about making the substance understood and remembered by his audience. The abandonment of rhetorical splendor on the one hand, and the utmost effort for comprehensibility and thoroughness on the other, can also be regarded as a basic principle of Buddhist scriptures. The seemingly monotonous style, the gradual development

⁹⁸ Jonathan A. Silk, *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 128. Samuel Beal, *Abstract of Four Lectures On Buddhist Literature In China*, 1882, 164.

⁹⁹ Junius P. Rodriguez *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, (ABC-CLIO, 1997), 111. Compare that with this: δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ bei Paulus (Rom 1:1; Phi 1:1; Col 4:12).

of thought, with endless repetitions, in which every new thought is immediately deconstructed several times, demands much patience from the unaccustomed Western reader when perusing it. Yet Kersten/Gruber note that Philo fails to give any clue in his account as to the livelihood of the Therapeutae. They suspect Philo had “deliberately left (*it*) unmentioned because it seemed demeaning to him and did not quite fit with the idealized image he tried to create for the Therapeutae. Now the certainty is dawning: clearly the Therapeutae, like their Buddhist brothers in other parts of the world, were mendicants (Bhikshus and Bikshunis) and dependent on gifts of kindness.”¹⁰⁰

Back to the crucial question: were the Therapeutae Jews, or were they Christians or were they Buddhists? The answer must be they were something of everything. They were Jews insofar as they clung to the Jewish holidays and rituals, referring to the Old Testament as the foundation of their faith. But they were also Buddhists, insofar as they interpreted the Old Testament as essentially Buddhist. And finally, they were (proto-)Christians, insofar as with their interpretation of the Old Testament they laid the foundation for the later development of Christian doctrine.

This view helps us to solve the problems that arise when you choose only one of the three answers. Anyone who claims that the Therapeutae are only Alexandrian Jews must explain how ascetical practice and biblical exegesis can develop on a purely Jewish basis. To regard them merely as Buddhists is impossible because the Jewish elements in them (use of the Old Testament writings, observance of the Sabbath commandment, etc.) are obvious. Those who consider them Christians must ask themselves

¹⁰⁰ Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 248.

why they should have been found in Philo's time not only in Egypt, but throughout the world, and why they could (*already*) look back upon a long history. On the other hand, if they are regarded as proto-Christians in the sense that Judaism and Indian Buddhist traditions have come together to form a new synthesis, then all contradictions are "sublated" ("aufgehoben") in the best Hegelian sense.

In the course of researching the history, further possibilities have been considered for the identification of the Therapeutae, which can only be mentioned here. For example, the theologian Eduard Zeller wanted to establish Pythagorean influence on the Therapeutae. As, according to some academics, Pythagoreanism was only a western offshoot of Buddhism,¹⁰¹ it would of course be difficult to distinguish the two.

As many have noted, the Therapeutae have numerous points of contact with the Essenes.¹⁰² However, the Essenes, in the opinion of many researchers, are not a genuinely Jewish phenomenon, rather only a kind of Jewish-Buddhist hybrid. The comparison with the Essenes can therefore only explain which Buddhist influences were imparted. The vital religious roots are certainly not Jewish, but Buddhist/Indian.

An explanation of the Buddhist influence not just in Egypt/Alexandria but also in Syria and Samaria requires a

¹⁰¹ Leopold von Schroeder, *Pythagoras und die Inder; eine Untersuchung über Herkunft und Abstammung der pythagoreischen Lehren* (Leipzig O. Schulze, 1884). See also Clemens Alexandria (Stromata 1.15): "Pythagoras was a listener of the Galatians and Brahmins".

¹⁰² A. Hilgenfeld, "Der Essäismus und Jesus", *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie* 10 (1867).

digression on the most important connections and trade routes, in particular Taxila in Gandhara. Already Samuel Beal observed this intermixing “intercourse of Bactrian Greeks or Hellenists with Syria, and probably Samaria, where Alexander the Great had left a Macedonian colony.”¹⁰³ “Buddhism in India undoubtedly owed much to Greek art in Bactria; and the same workmen who were employed at Taxila, may have worked at Antioch.”¹⁰⁴ “It goes without saying that the cultural influence of Bactrian Buddhists on Egypt and Syria related not only to art but also to religion. In particular, the Mahâyâna Doctrine, which developed at this very time and place, and as will be shown elsewhere, exerted a strong influence on the genesis of Christian incarnational theology. “¹⁰⁵

Finally, a digression about King Ashoka and the Buddhist World Mission would be necessary.¹⁰⁶ This will be taken up later.

In order to describe the principle of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, which marks the exegesis of the Therapeutae, as well as his own, Philo compares the scriptures with a living being, “which as a body has the literal

¹⁰³ Samuel Beal, *Abstract of Four Lectures on Buddhist Literature in China*, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Beal, *Abstract of Four Lectures on Buddhist Literature in China*, 160. A detailed chapter about the trade relations is found in Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 253ff.

¹⁰⁵ “Most scholars are of opinion that the Mahâyâna doctrine originated in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era” - Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine In Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, see 43f.

¹⁰⁶ Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 93ff. - In addition, Lockwood, *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity*, 6f.

arrangements, but as soul has the invisible meaning hidden in the words." For the "body" the Therapeutae understand the Old Testament. But how is it possible to qualify what Philo calls "soul" with their (*Therapeutae*) interpretation of the Scriptures? It is generally believed that Philo projected Platonic content into his interpretation of Old Testament Scripture. And that may be true in many cases.¹⁰⁷ With regard to the Therapeutae, however, it should be noted that the spiritual motif of their exegesis was by no means Platonism: instead the life and thought of their community was apparently determined by Indian or Buddhist underpinnings. These have also, and above all else, shaped their exegesis of the Old Testament.

As a continuation and further development of the Alexandrian wisdom, Christian "Gnosis" of the second century was also affected by it. Gnostic exegesis is essentially the combination of Old Testament, Alexandrian wisdom and Indian/Buddhist spirituality.

Via the indirect way of Christian Gnosis, Indian Buddhist ideas finally reached the early Christian writings.¹⁰⁸ Apart

¹⁰⁷ However, Isaac Jacob Schmidt had already remarked in 1928 on Philo's writings: "You find many peculiarly Buddhist things with him." According to Schmidt, "Philo drew his views from Indian concepts" and combined them with Platonic concepts. For example, Schmidt mentions the angelic manifestations of the Old Testament, which Philo declares to be "a kind of illusion or hallucination"; Isaac Jacob Schmidt, *Über die Verwandtschaft der gnostisch-theosophischen Lehren mit den Religionssystemen des Orients, vorzüglich dem Buddhismus* (Leipzig: Cnobloch, 1828), 17. See also Gruber and Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus*, 251.

¹⁰⁸ Of course, this presupposes that the Gospels did not originate before the flowering of Gnosticism in the second century, but at the same time as it did. I can pass over this point here, as I

from some parallels between the New Testament and Buddhist texts, which have already drawn the attention of Indologists and religious scholars from Seydel to Klatt and Thundy, what was previously overlooked was the emergence of the Jesus cult, together with the notions of mission and meaning attached to it. The Christian Savior is essentially the result of Alexandrian exegesis of the Old Testament, influenced by Indian/Buddhist ideas. This idea will be explained in more detail in the next section.

have already attempted to show in many other points, following radical critiques of the New Testament, that New Testament literature is consistently trafficking around second-century writings; see Hermann Detering, *Falsche Zeugen: Außerchristliche Jesuszeugnisse auf dem Prüfstand* (1st edition; Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 2011).

4 JOSHUA, THE JORDAN AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

The Alexandrian or Gnostic exegesis of the Exodus motif was, as we have seen, determined from the beginning by the Indian-Buddhist motif of crossing fords. In the Jewish-Buddhist circles of Alexandria, they sought an Old Testament image for overcoming the stream of existence and found it in the Exodus story. The Therapeutae considered the figure of Moses as a “ford maker” or “ford crosser”. In their nightly mystery celebrations, they depicted how the people of Israel were led through the waters of the Red Sea to the Holy Land, that is, according to their exegesis, from the material world to the immaterial, spiritual world.

While the exegesis of the Therapeutae was essentially oriented around the text of the Book of Exodus, Moses, who is the central figure to the Exodus theme, was replaced by Joshua/Jesus among the Naassenes and other Christian Gnostics. Apparently the Naassenes had deliberately referred to the Book of Joshua, not Exodus, in their interpretation. In their eyes, Joshua had surpassed his predecessor in every way, for he succeeded where Moses had failed: he had led the Israelites through the Jordan into the Holy Land, which was considered the prefiguration and shadow of the future world.¹⁰⁹ While at the same time, Joshua also

¹⁰⁹ “Moses had not yet been allowed to lead God’s people to where it ultimately had to go; it was *leesoûs* who had turned out to be the true leader for this mission.” - Gerardus Johannes Petrus Josephus Bolland and Jozua, *De evangelische Jozua*:

assumed the role of liberator from Egypt, which in the Old Testament tradition was reserved exclusively for Moses.

At the end of this development, the interpretation of the Exodus had become the Gnostic-Christian baptismal mystery. In *Testimonium Veritatis*, Joshua/Jesus enters the world over the Jordan, the waters recede, and the end of the reign of the flesh over the Spirit is initiated.¹¹⁰ There is only a short distance from here to the New Testament representation of the baptism of Jesus

Jesus was originally only a symbolic figure for the Gnostics derived through allegorical exegesis, which had its roots in the Old Testament Joshua tradition. We can demonstrate this from numerous short text passages from early Christian times both within and outside the New Testament – places which, insofar as they refer to the (historicized) Jesus of the Gospels, must remain enigmatic.

Eene poging tot aanwijzing van den oorsprong des christendoms (Leiden: Adriani, 1907), 4. The “greater than Moses” motif is also found in the later Jewish tradition; J. Duncan M. Derrett points out: “Rabbi Pinhas b. Ya’ir (between 150-200 AD), a famous saint (Mishnah, Sot IX, 15), an ascetic and miracle worker, set out to buy back prisoners. In doing so, he asked a river to divide itself to allow them to cross (as if he were Elisha: 2 Kings 2:14; see Isaiah 11:15e; 51:10). The river refused. Pinhas replied: ‘I command that no water shall flow through you!’ And the river parted. The same thing happened on two other occasions; we are told. And he was judged to be greater than Moses.” Derrett, *Der Wasserwandel in christlicher und buddhistischer Perspektive*, 200.

¹¹⁰ Cf *Exc ex Theod* 4.76ff

4.1 *Jesus, Joshua son of Nun, Dositheus and the question of the
"right prophet"*

The discussion about the "true prophet" plays a significant role in late pre-Christian Jewish and early Christian literature. The central biblical passage, as if words of Moses, is Deuteronomy 18:15, 18:

"A prophet like me, the Lord, your God, will allow to arise from your brothers ¹¹¹; you shall listen to him in everything that he will say to you."

The interpretation of this text is controversial. 1st century Jewish and Christian interpreters pointed to the passage as an indication of the return of "one of the (ancient) prophets".¹¹² God had once given Moses to the Israelites in Egypt to free them from slavery, and they were eventually led into the Holy Land under the guidance of Joshua. So, too, God would, in the present, allow one of the ancient prophets to arise. The Egyptian plagues (Exo 7:14-10:29), the passage through the Red Sea (Exo 13:17-14:31), the Jordan crossing (Jos 3:1-4, 24), the 40-year journey through the desert, the delivery of the tablets on Mount Sinai, the miraculous feeding with quail and manna (Exo 15:22-18:27), the eventual conquest – all these events were not just relics of the past, but were promises for the present.

The return of Moses is always spoken of in rabbinic literature, where there is talk of his death and his burial in the desert. "Moses had to endure both, (from Midrashim on Moses) so that the Scripture (Deu 33:21), 'He came to the heads of the people (so the Midrashim)' could be fulfilled,

¹¹¹ קום = to wake up, to get up.

¹¹² Joachim Jeremias in ThW IV, 862

that is, that the desert [generation] will one day be raised for the sake of his merit and be able to move into the promised land under his leadership.”¹¹³

The connection of “Moses redivivus” and the expectation of the true prophet is also found in some Qumran texts, for example, 1 QS IX 9-11, where it says:

“And they shall not deviate from any counsel of the law, ... until the prophet and the messengers of Aaron and Israel come.”

Other references indicate that the expectation of the true prophet, also known as the “teacher of righteousness” or “teacher of truth”, was considered fulfilled. Frequently this prophet is placed in parallel with Moses and referred to as a teacher or legislator.¹¹⁴

Irrespective of the question whether the texts provide reliable evidence for a clear identification of the teacher with Moses,¹¹⁵ it can be seen that the Qumran community also saw in the desert period the ideal model of the messianic salvation. Like Moses, the head of their community had also called for a new exodus. Their renewed eschatological exodus was compared to the Israelites’ migration to the Promised Land. The community lived like the people of

¹¹³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), IV 861.ThW IV 861

¹¹⁴ See Schoeps: “The former, schismatic sect of the new covenant of Damascus, have awaited the ‘teacher of truth’ as Moses redivivus (Dam 1:11; 20:20)” – Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949), 91.

¹¹⁵ J. Jeremias, ThWNT II, Art. Elias 932.

Israel in “camps”, their members were “patterned” and divided into groups based on the model of ancient Israel.¹¹⁶

Especially in the Samaritan region, the image of Moses had developed from a simple prophet to a figure of almost divine authority and dignity. He was – similar to the later New Testament Jesus – lifted out of the human sphere and into the preexistent and presented as divine. He ascends to heaven, is cleansed there in the bath of the angels, and writes the heavenly book dictated to him by God.

For the office of the eschatological (true) ¹¹⁷ prophet, there was another popular candidate: the prophet Elijah. The Gospels know Elijah, above all, as a forerunner of the Messiah. ¹¹⁸ Reasoning that Elijah must be “resurrected” before the Messiah comes, the Gospels invoke a scripture from the prophet Malachi 3:1 and 23f:

“Behold, I send my messenger to make the way before me. Behold, I send you the prophet Elijah, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes ...”

¹¹⁶ The Byzantine church historian Socrates still knows a Moses redivivus as the leader of a Jewish messianic movement in Crete in the 5th century AD. “Here a man appeared as Moses redivivus, who, coming from heaven, wanted to repeat the procession through the sea to the holy land. – See Exo 14:15-31 – He found numerous believers, and on the decisive day they began the migration through the sea. Many Jews plunged into the sea from the Cretan cliffs, where they died miserably. But when they looked around for the false Moses, he was gone.”

¹¹⁷ Detering uses *wahren* rather than *recht* here, implying also the character of *protector* for the “true” prophet – swg.

¹¹⁸ Mat 11:10; Mar 1:2; Luk 7:27.

Thus preparing the way for the Messianic end times. Furthermore, the immediate proximity of the prophet Moses to the messiah seems to have rubbed off on the prophet, so that one could also make *him* the messiah.¹¹⁹

Besides Moses and Elijah, there are other Old Testament figures who were to be resurrected as true prophets of the end times, i.e., Enoch, Jeremiah, and David. Josephus reports that one Athronges, a shepherd, appeared as the new David.¹²⁰

The most important figure in our context is *Joshua ben Nun* ("son of Nun"). Although it is a well-known fact that the Hebrew name Joshua was translated in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, as Ἰησοῦς = Jesus, it must be reiterated in this context, due to the fundamental importance of this identification for the following remarks.

The belief that Joshua-Jesus is the True Prophet promised by Moses was especially evident in the Samaritan region. In his book *Garizim und Synagoge*, Hans Gerhard Kippenberg has accumulated rich material, which show that in the New Testament period the view that Joshua/Jesus was the

¹¹⁹ If one considered Elijah a descendant of the tribe of Gad, one also saw in him a messianic personality; if one thought of Elijah as a descendant of the tribe of Levi, one attributed to him high-priestly functions; viewing Elijah's origin as being from the tribe of Benjamin, one saw in him only a forerunner of the Messiah, having merely the function of peacemaker and pioneer. This last perception seems to have been the most common and is also reflected in the NT.

¹²⁰ Ant 17.278; Bell 2.60.

expected prophet was widespread among the Samaritans.
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This view was utilized by the Samaritans with polemical intent against the early Christian heretic Dositheus.¹²² Thus, a certain Eulogius (died circa 607 AD) reports that the Samaritans had fallen into two warring parties:

“Some believed that Joshua, the Son of Nun, [was the prophet spoken of by Moses], while others, however, would protest and proclaim as this prophet someone named Dosthes or Dositheus.”¹²³

There is an illuminating parallel to this passage in the Jewish Christian *Recognitions* (I, 54, 5). Here it tells of the expectation of the “true prophet” among the Samaritans:

“And yet they rightly expected a true prophet because of the promises of Moses but were hindered by the depravity of Dositheus from believing that the one they expected was Jesus.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ Hans G. Kippenberg, *Garizim und Synagoge: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur samaritanischen Religion der aramäischen Periode* (Bd. 30; Religious-historical experiments and preparatory work; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).

¹²² Stanley J. Isser, *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* (Vol. 17, 1st edition; Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity; Leiden: Brill, 1976).

¹²³ Text: Photius, *Bibliotheca* Cod. 230. MPG 103, 1084 D-1085 A.; see Kippenberg, *Garizim und Synagoge: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur samaritanischen Religion der aramäischen Periode*, 132.

¹²⁴ Text: B. Rehm, GCS 51. Berlin 1965, 39 Z. 17–19; Translation: Kippenberg, *Garizim und Synagoge: Traditionsgeschichtliche Un-*

It is clear that both passages manifestly deal with one and the same problem in late Judaism, the controversial issue of right/true prophets to the Samaritans and early Christianity. While in Eulogius, *Joshua ben Nun* and *Dositheus* face each other as contenders and competitors in regard to the position of the true prophet, they are also found in the section from the *Recognitions* on *Jesus* and *Dositheus*.

Now, the striking similarity of the two texts as well as the parallelism of the two pairs of opposites: *Joshua, the son of Nun* – *Dositheus*, *Jesus* – *Dositheus*, suggest that the *Jesus* of *Recognitions* is none other than *Jesus/Joshua ben Nun*.¹²⁵ Even if the author of *Recognitions* was not aware of this relationship, and even if, when he mentioned *Jesus*, he no longer thought of *Jesus* = *Joshua*, the quote can show us the root of the name of *Jesus*. The *Jesus* of the Jewish Christians, who were undoubtedly the truly oldest Christian tradition, was, historically speaking, none other than *Joshua ben Nun*. Here we encounter traces of the earliest Christian faith in *Jesus*, at the center of which was not “*Jesus of Nazareth*,” but the Old Testament figure of *Joshua ben Nun*.

4.2 ΙΧΘΥΣ - *The meaning of the fish symbol in early Christianity.*

The fish is one of the oldest and most widely used symbols of Christianity. Found on front doors, grave inscriptions,

tersuchungen zur samaritanischen Religion der aramäischen Periode, 117.

¹²⁵ Eulogius seems to represent the more difficult reading and thus the older tradition. It is highly unlikely that the addition “*Son of Nun*” is his own innovation.

coffins, jewelry, signet rings and amulets, in the 2nd century, it was not only a (secret) identification mark among Christians, but also served as a symbol of the defense against evil spirits. Evidence of the symbol can be found throughout the Roman Empire.

Fish symbolism is frequently connected with the Eucharist. Many early illustrations depict the fish, together with bread and wine, as part of the communion. Presumably this is a combination of the Eucharist and the feeding story (compare Mk 6:35-44). In some representations, the fish may even symbolize the Eucharistic Bread, the body of Christ (including Westlettner, from 1250 AD, Naumburg Cathedral).

The question of the origin of the fish symbol is often answered by referring to the Greek word ΙΧΘΥΣ = fish, as an acrostic ¹²⁶ abbreviating the Greek confessional sentence “Jesus Christ, God’s Son (is our) Savior”, thus:

I = I = Ἰησοῦς - Jesus

X = Ch = Χριστός - Christ

Θ = Th = θεοῦ - God

Υ = Y = υιοῦ - Son

Σ = S = σωτήρ - Savior

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the fish symbol *originated* from the acrostic reduction of the confession. Rather, it already seems to have existed among Christians before

¹²⁶ i.e. the single letters of the word, read one after the other, form the first letters of a new word.

being interpreted and related to Jesus as described above.¹²⁷

So the questions remain: what was the original meaning of the fish symbol? And by what genuine connection was it associated with the figure and name of Jesus?

Various answers have been given. Dölger showed that fish gods, sacred fish, and fish sacrifices were known in various non-Christian cults (especially in the east of the empire, in Syria).¹²⁸ The practice of sacred fish meals (*cena pura*) could have been known to Christians from synagogue Judaism.

But the simplest and most plausible answer was given by Robert Eisler. Unfortunately, his pertinent works have not received the attention they deserve. In his essay *Zum Ursprung der altchristlichen Fischer- und Fischsymbolik* (*On the Origin of Ancient Christian Fishermen- and Fish Symbolism*)¹²⁹ Eisler demonstrates that the solution of the riddle lies in the nickname of the Old Testament Joshua = ben Nun.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (3rd, completely new; Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 2, 968. Carl Andresen: "In any case, the equation F. = Christ would have already existed when the ichthys formula was invented."

¹²⁸ Franz Joseph Dölger, *ICHTHUS: das Fisch-Symbol in frühchristlicher Zeit; ICHTHUS als Kürzung der Namen Jesu IESOUS CHRISTOS THEOU UIOS SOTER* (Münster in Westf.: Publisher of the Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928).

¹²⁹ Robert Eisler, "On the Origin of the Ancient Christian Fishermen- and Fish Symbolism", *Archive for Religious Studies* united with the contributions to the Religious Studies Society in Stockholm 16 (1913) 300-306.

¹³⁰ Exo 33:11; Num 11:28; 13:8, 16; 14:6, 30, 38; 26:65; 27:18; 32:12, 28; 34:17; Deu 1:38; 31:23; 32:44; 34:9; Jos 1:1; 2:1, 23; 6:6; 14:1; 17:4; 19:49, 51; 21:1; 24:29; Rut 2:8; 1Ch 16:34; Sir 46:1.

The Hebrew *ben Nun* literally means “son of the fish, son of a fish”, but it can easily be translated simply as “fish” (just as *ben baqar* can be simply rendered as “cow”). Thus Jesus ΙΧΘΥΣ is Joshua = (ben) Nun.

Eisler does not go so far as to claim that the historical Jesus owes his origin to the Old Testament hero Joshua (ben Nun). In his opinion, the name merely received special coloring through the mythical father’s name, because it made Joshua “a doppelganger of the ‘plucked out of the water’ as well as flood water dividing hero Moses.” Eisler further quotes another rabbinic sentence: Eisler further quotes another rabbinic sentence: “Only one man called ben Nun (son of a fish), (could) lead the Jews through the river into the Promised Land.” Eisler concludes: “So the Joshua or Jesus of the end times must in turn be a ben Nun.”¹³¹

According to Eisler, the epithet of Joshua could be the reason that later speculations placed the birth of the future Messiah in the zodiac sign of the fish. Only against the background of the equation ben Nun = fish can one explain the statement “colored by Babylonian Oannes myths in the fourth book of Ezra, the Messiah will rise ‘from the heart of the sea’”.¹³²

In another article Eisler points to another place in the rabbinical literature, in which an otherwise scarcely known tradition is reproduced.¹³³ According to this, the sons of

¹³¹ Eisler, “On the Origin of the Ancient Christian Fishermen- and Fish Symbolism”, 304.

¹³² Eisler, “On the Origin of the Ancient Christian Fishermen- and Fish Symbolism”, 304.

¹³³ Robert Eisler, „Der Messias ‚ben Nun‘ im jüdischen Folklore“, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 17 (1914) 336–39.

Ephraim (Samaria) had made an attempt to flee even before the exodus from Egypt under Moses, "under the guidance of an Ephraimite noble named Nun (= fish)." This man is, obviously, supposed to be the father of Joshua, who is also called an Ephraimite. He was martyred by the Egyptians in his aborted attempt at escape. "The suffering Redeemer of the end times might also have directly become the reincarnation of that ancient martyr for the liberation of his people named 'ben Nun'".¹³⁴

One need not follow Eisler's speculations in everything. But it is crucial to know that the Christian fish symbolism was apparently prompted by the epithet of the Old Testament Joshua and was deeply rooted in the early Christian imagination.

4.3 "... who once made the sun stand still"

In the 5th Book of the so-called *Orcalula Sibyllina*, an apocryphal Judeo-Christian collection in 14 books, which arose between the 2nd century BC and the 3rd/4th century AD, the following promise is made:

"One, however, will be again from heaven, an outstanding man, whose hands spread out on the fertile wood of the best Hebrews, who once made the sun stand still, speaking with beautiful words and with pure lips."¹³⁵

For Joachim Jeremias, "it follows that... the expected Son of Man, who made the Sun stand still... is Joshua (Jos

¹³⁴ Eisler, "The Messiah, 'ben Nun' in Jewish folklore", 339.

¹³⁵ Sib 5. 256-259

10:12)."¹³⁶ In fact, it is obvious that the passage is an allusion to Joshua 10:12ff, which speaks of the battle of the Israelites at Gibeon and says of Joshua: ¹³⁷

“He spoke in the presence of Israel: Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley Ajalon! The sun stood still and the moon stopped. The sun stood still and the moon stopped until the people had avenged themselves on their enemies. Is not this written in the book of the righteous? So the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hurry to go down for almost a whole day.”

Apart from an allusion to the passage just mentioned in the Book of Joshua, the author of these passages still seems to allude to the episode of Joshua and Caleb in the Holy Land. Numbers 13:1-33 tells how the two Old Testament heroes, in their exploration of the Holy Land, cut a vine with a grapes at the Eschkol stream and placed “two on a pole, as well as pomegranates and figs” to carry back – one

¹³⁶ Kittel und Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, IV, 861, A. 110. It is true that Jeremias – like some other commentators – considered the possibility of a reference to Moses, since the sun standing still, at least in Tannaitic times, could also be referring to him (Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, (München: Beck, 1922), I, 13; II, 414); nonetheless, he prefers the first possibility: “The biblical text, in any case, makes it easier to think of Joshua.”

¹³⁷ According to Kurfess, who still refers to Exodus 17:12, that except for Joshua 10:12, Joshua and Moses must be meant. However, the text mentions only one person. In Exodus 17:12 Moses raises his hands, “until the sun went down.” The fact that he had caused the sun to come to a stand-still by raising his arms, is not the question – Alfons Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen* (1st edition; Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 310.

very popular motif frequently occurring in Christian art. Presumably, the “fertile wood” is just this vine wood, which, of course, was at the same time reinterpreted by the author of this passage from the *Oracula* and connected with the wood of the cross.¹³⁸

The passage from the *Oracula Sibyllina* can show

- that, on the basis of the early Christian tradition, again and again, individual telltale hints show that the figure of Jesus of Nazareth has its origin in the interpretation of the Old Testament hero Joshua ben Nun;
- that the early Christian Eucharistic feast is closely related to this interpretation. Among the first fruits brought by Joshua and Caleb from their exploration of the Holy Land was a grape vine branch. Thus, in the early Christian interpretation, the wine enjoyed at the communal meal is a prophetic reference to the imminent seizure of the Holy Land and of the eschatological blessings of salvation thus given – but also to Jesus/Joshua, who “revealed” to his people such things.

With this we have reached the next point, Jesus/Joshua and the *Didache*.

¹³⁸ To this Robert Eisler: “‘Who spread his hands on the fertile wood’ can only [refer to] the crucified; it interrupts the connection between 256 and 258 in a meaningless way, for where does it stand in Exodus 17:42 – [to which] the comments always refer – or anywhere in the OT that Joshua Moses had spread hands on some wood?” - Robert Eisler, “Zum Ursprung der altchristlichen Fischer- und Fischsymbolik”, *Archive for Religious Studies* united with the contributions to the Religious Studies Society in Stockholm 16 (1913) 300–306, here 306.

4.4 Jesus/Joshua as the Revealer of the Vine - the *Didache*

The *Didache* ("Apostolic doctrine") is a church order first discovered in 1873, which, in the opinion of most researchers, dates back to the beginning of the second century. Within it there is a detailed section with instructions on the Eucharistic celebration. It deviates considerably from the corresponding New Testament sacramental texts because it contains neither the Words of Institution nor details about performing the Eucharistic ritual. Otherwise, the text also – as likewise the *Didache* as a whole – has a primitive character. The bulk of the material was used in prayers, apparently drawing upon predefined traditions, signaling a Jewish origin and showing striking similarities with the contemporary Jewish feasts.¹³⁹ Apparently, Jewish originals were reworked to provide them with a thin Christian varnish. "The Christianization is achieved by quite economical means."¹⁴⁰

In the Eucharistic texts, the "Christian" element seems to be limited to mentioning the name of Jesus, which is found here alone throughout the *Didache*. Elsewhere, there is usually only a general mention of "the Lord", although it remains unclear in some places whether that means God or Jesus.

¹³⁹ Klaus Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums. Didache (Apostel-lehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Klemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 48. Paul Drews, "Investigations on the *Didache*", *ZNW* 5 (1904) 53 – 79, here 74. Drews Notes: "These formulas themselves reveal that they are nothing but Christianity in Jewish forms."

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Anton Fischer, Ed., *Die Apostolischen Väter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), 48.

At the Eucharistic meal, the following prayers of gratitude are to be spoken in succession:

9:2 First regarding the cup:

We thank you, our Father,
for the sacred vine of *David, your servant*,
(Δαυειδ τοῦ παιδός σου)
to whom you have introduced us (or: of which you have
made us know) through *Jesus/Joshua, your servant*.
(Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου)

...

9:3 regarding the bread:

We thank you, our Father,
for life and knowledge,
that you revealed to us through *Jesus/Joshua your servant*.
(Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου)

...

10:1 Thank you, Holy Father,
for your holy name,
that you let take in our hearts,
and for knowledge and faith and immortality,
that you revealed to us through *Jesus/Joshua your servant*.
(Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου)

In the cited passages, the Old Testament epithet “servant” (παῖς, Hebrew עֶבֶד) is striking for Jesus. It is relatively rare in the New Testament and early Christianity,¹⁴¹ but it does not occur in the sacrament records. A reference to the title of Isaiah’s servant of God (Mat 12:18), which is accepted by many scholars, is by no means obvious and in my view must be excluded due the fact that the sacrificial concept in the Eucharistic prayers of the *Didache* is completely absent.

But, as we shall see, it would be possible to make a meaningful reference to the “servant Joshua” (Jos 5: 14, 24:29,

¹⁴¹ Act 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30. From David: Act 4:25, also Luk 1:64.

Jdg 2:8). The identification of Jesus with the Old Testament Joshua, above all, tells us that Jesus is referred to in the thanksgiving for the Cup as the “revealer” of the holy vine (David). It is not mentioned in the New Testament that Jesus “revealed” or “made known” (ἐγνώρισας = “make known, let know”) the holy vine to his disciples. Here, too, the solution to the problem could be that, at the level of the tradition represented by the prayer, the Jesus of the Gospels was not thought of but rather the Joshua of the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint. For indeed, as we have already seen, Joshua expressly says that after having explored the Holy Land, he let the assembled community (together with Caleb) “see the fruits of the land” (Num 13:26).

If one recognizes that the Jesus in the Didache’s thanksgiving prayers originally meant none other than this Joshua, then also the theological sense of the eucharistic meal, as is assumed in the Didache, becomes clearer. In particular, the transitional form 10:6, with the verse:

“Let grace come and this world pass!”

initiates it and ends with the call *Μαράν ἀθά* = *the Lord comes*, pointing directly to the expectation of the coming Kingdom of God, in line with the character of the meal celebration. This also comes to light in the Blessing of bread in 10:4, where, after giving thanks for the life revealed by Jesus/Joshua, it talks – preceding the kingdom of God – of the eschatological gathering:

“How this broken bread was dispersed on the mountains
And brought together has become one,
so should be merged in your gathering (ἐκκλησία = church)
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. “

The idea of the gathering is taken up again in 10:5. The request for the gathering (= church) is quite appropriate there:

“As this broken bread was dispersed on the mountains
Bring them (= ἐκκλησία = gathering) together from the
Four winds, those sanctified,
into your kingdom that you have prepared for them.”

The memory of Joshua and Caleb, who gave their congregation, with fruits and grapevine, a taste of the future “beyond the Jordan”, fits in well with this eschatological framework. The community meal clearly reflects the Old Testament setting of pending departure. As with the Passover meal, the community is, so to speak, perched upon the very eve of departure. Just as the eating of bread becomes a reminder of the gathering up of the eschatological church, so also the drinking of wine becomes the anticipation of the divine promise.¹⁴²

In a study of the peculiarities of the Eucharistic celebration of the Didache, K. Wengst comes to the following conclusion: “The Eucharist in the Didache is nothing more than a slightly Christianized Jewish-Hellenistic meal celebrated by the congregation on Sundays. So there is something completely different to this than in the Pauline and Markan tradition of the Lord’s Supper. For this indeed constitutes a reference to the death of Jesus. *But that is not the*

¹⁴² Robert M. Price notes: “One must wonder if this original understanding has found its way, as a kind of fossil, in the “vow of abstinence” ascribed to Jesus at the Last Supper: “I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mar 14:25). Do we discern here the direct sequel to the promissory display by Joshua of the bounty of the Promised Land?”

*least thing that can be sensed in Didache's instructions on the Eucharist [emphasis is mine]."*¹⁴³

It is hard to imagine that the Passion tradition, if it already existed, should have been unknown to the *Didache's* writer or ignored by him. The only reasonable explanation for the fact that the prayers of the *Didache* are not found anywhere else, can only be that they did not exist at the time these prayers were formed. Obviously, the Passion tradition only arose at a relatively late date, secondary to the other Christian or Jesus traditions.

We have so far explicitly related the equation Jesus = Joshua ben Nun only to the prayers of *Didache*, which are pieces of tradition more ancient than the other parts of the text. However, whether a knowledge of the Synoptic Jesus in the latter can already be proven is also doubtful, even if a "gospel" is mentioned in various other places (e.g., 8:1, 11:3, 14:3). As a rule, the gospel referred to here (singular!) is identified with the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., what it suggests is that the *Didache's* writer quotes the Lord's Prayer in the Matthean and not in the Lukan form).

Speaking against the assumption that the *Didache's* writer knew a complete Gospel of Matthew is the fact that he quotes only *Jesus' words* – but betrays no knowledge whatsoever of the narrative and Passion traditions in the Gospels. What the author of the *Didache* termed "gospel" seems to have in any case distinguished itself from the form of the Gospel that we know from the Synoptics and John, for which not only the speeches but also the miracle stories and above all the Passion story form an essential and characteristic part.

¹⁴³ Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums. Didache (Apostellehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Klemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet*, 53.

The problem could be solved by assuming that the *Didache* writer had in mind a collection of Logia circulating under the name Matthew, which was a Matthaean recension of the saying source Q (Q mt). This extended Matthaean recension of Q could itself be the much-debated sayings Logia mentioned by Papias (90-150). The Bishop of Hierapolis claims Matthew had compiled the words [of Jesus] in the Hebrew *language* “but each man translated them as best could” (Eusebeius Hist 3.39). This sayings source contains, similar to the Gospel of Thomas, very likely a collection of words from early Christian prophets who spoke in the spirit of the Old Testament Joshua = Jesus.¹⁴⁴

Against the thesis that the figure of a “Jesus of Nazareth” was still completely unknown to the *Didache* writer, it could further be claimed that 11:8 of the “ways of life of the Lord” is a speech:

“But not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, rather only, if he has the way of life (τρόπους κυρίου) of the Lord. For by his way of life one recognizes the false prophets and prophets.”

The passage gives the impression that the model that Jesus gave by his “way of life” is in mind here. However, one will have to admit that such a theological model, if it existed, represented something unique within the *Didache*. If the *Didache* writer of 11:18 actually wanted the “way(s) of life of the Lord” to be the standard for behavior of Christian prophets, one would need to ask, why he does not say anything more about the exemplary behavior of Jesus. It is obvious that nowhere has he any interest in either the life or the way of life of Jesus, but only in his *words* alone.

¹⁴⁴ Did 10:7; 11:3, 7ff; 13:1, 3f, 6; 15:1f.

Thus, with *τρόπους κυρίου*, in the understanding of the *Didache's* writer, does not seem to mean "the way of life of the Lord" (*subjective genitive*) – which would also hardly allow the plural form – but that the characteristic *behaviors* of the Christian prophets *are determined by the Lord* (*objective genitive*) as stated in the words of Jesus. Just as one speaks of the "commandments of the Lord" or God, one should speak of the "behaviors of the Lord", i.e., behavioral decrees *from the Lord*. In this context, one can think of them as missionary instructions, which are subsequently attributed to a historical Jesus (e.g., Matthew 10:9-15).

Whether the "accursed" (τοῦ καταθέματος) may be related to the crucified Jesus, as some commentators say, with references to Galatians 3:13 ("Cursed is he who hangs on the cross") or 1 Corinthians 12:3 (cursing of Jesus), is highly doubtful. The context does not suggest this. Presumably, it is the "seducer of the world" or Antichrist who is in view.

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Overall, it can be shown that in fact no traces of a "historical Jesus" (of Nazareth) can be detected in the *Didache*. The community which the *Didache* writer addresses, while knowing of a Jesus/Joshua (present in the prophetic spirit and word), is aware a number of sayings coming from the prophetic mouth and these are attributed to him, some of which are already authoritative in character, and collected in the "Gospel". In addition, they gather already on "the Lord's Day" (14:12), on Sunday, to celebrate the "resurrection" of Jesus (in the prophetic Word during the fellowship

¹⁴⁵ Cf. also Wengst, who refers to *Didache* 16:4 and Matthew 24:24; Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums. Didache (Apostel-lehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Klemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet*, 91, A. 132.

meal) – but a Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, died and buried is still unknown to them.

In the Eucharistic ceremony, there is no commemoration of his death, but a shared remembrance of the Old Testament hero Jesus/Joshua, who was the first to enter the Promised Land and on his return revealed to Israel the “holy vine of David” and thus brought and brings the prophetic word of “life, knowledge, faith, and immortality” proclaimed in the community.

Like the Israelite community at that time, the Christian community of the *Didache* writer was suffused with an awareness of being close to possessing the promised “Holy Land”. The gathering (= church) of the eschatological Israel has already begun (9:4.5), apostles and teachers are on their way, the promise of the eschatological spirit is confirmed through the work of numerous prophets (11:7ff), the coming arrival (as *Joshua redivivus?*) of “the Lord on the clouds” (16:8), preceded by the appearance of pseudo-prophets and seducers (16: 3ff), is not far off. In the Eucharistic fellowship, the congregation experiences the anticipation of the coming kingdom of God and gives thanks for the promises which are revealed through Jesus/Joshua, enjoyed symbolically in bread and wine. The spirit of Joshua/Jesus present in the “spiritual food”, i.e., in the (prophetic) word, continues to be alive. The call, “Maranatha, may our Lord come” (10: 6), with which the Eucharistic prayers come to an end, seems to be the “communion part”, i.e., the reception of the spirit (of Joshua) within the Eucharistic community. That this is so, is shown not least by the fact that immediately following is a discussion of the *prophets*, who are allowed” to say thanks, as much as they want” (10:7).

The *Didache* is an early testament of the existence of a Hellenistic Jewish Christianity in which the tradition of the life

and death of Jesus of Nazareth was still quite unknown. These words of “Jesus”, did not come from the mouth of a historical Jesus, but from the mouths of the prophets in whom the spirit of Joshua was active.

4.5 Jesus/Joshua in the Epistle of Jude

The Epistle of Jude, written in the name of the Lord’s brother Judas, probably originated in the 2nd century as a pseudepigraphic encyclical letter. There are differing views over the identity of the opponents it combats. The most likely theory is that these were libertine Gnostics, possibly the Cainites mentioned by Irenaeus and other church fathers.¹⁴⁶ After briefly going into his opponents’ errors in the 4th verse, the author wants to show in the following verses, that they will not escape the judgment of God. Three examples from the Old Testament should prove that. In this context, we are only interested in the first one, i.e., verse 5:

“But I want to remind you, though you already know all this, that the Lord¹⁴⁷ [God; ¹⁴⁸ Jesus¹⁴⁹], One time he had helped the people out from Egypt once and for all, the other times killing those who did not believe.”

Some textual witnesses, including Clement of Alexandria and the Syriac manuscripts, instead of the reading “Lord” (with or without specific articles), offer the reading “God” (ὁ θεός). On the other hand, the most important textual

¹⁴⁶ *Adversus Haereses* 1.31.1 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 38.2.4

¹⁴⁷ κύριος & C*^{vid} Ephr ὁ κύριός Kpm sy^h

¹⁴⁸ ὁ θεός C² b pc sy^{bh} Cl

¹⁴⁹ Ἰησοῦς B A pc vg Or

witnesses, such as Codex Alexandrinus, Vaticanus and Origen, among others, read “Jesus”.

If one puts the weight of the witnesses in the balance and considers the old rule of textual criticism, that the more difficult reading deserves preference, then the decision for “Jesus” is not difficult. In fact, there are Bible translations, such as the New English Bible (NEB), which refer the passage to the Old Testament Joshua.¹⁵⁰

However, Peter Müller rightly notes: “The problem of v.5 (one can read [ὁ] κύριος or Ἰησοῦς) is burdened by the fact that the text-critical argument of *lectio difficilior* speaks for Ἰησοῦς, but this reading raises difficult interpretation questions in context.”¹⁵¹ Presumably, Müller thinks that in the Old Testament not Joshua, but Moses is considered the liberator from Egypt. However, this objection is only convincing at first glance. Upon closer observation, it can be seen that the figure of Joshua in the early Christian tradition was already very similar to that of Moses. As noted on page 15 above, we found in the passage from the quoted Naassene sermon, Joshua, like Moses, had assumed the role of liberator from Egypt. In the middle of the 2nd century, the apologist Justin, in the dialogue with the Jew Trypho, made the unchallenged claim: “For all of us, who are of all the peoples [i.e., all nations, Gentiles], do not expect Judah, rather Jesus, who also led your fathers out of Egypt” (Justin *Dial* 120.3).

¹⁵⁰ John Norman Davidson Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Reprint.; Black’s New Testament commentaries 17; London: Black, 1977), 5.

¹⁵¹ Peter Müller, „Der Judasbrief“, *Theologische Rundschau* N.F. 63 (1998) 267–89, hier 270f.

The assertion cannot be due to the reading of the Holy Scriptures; this exegesis apparently has its origin in the conviction of early Christians that Joshua exceeded Moses in all respects, so that everything said of Moses must also apply to Joshua.¹⁵²

We encounter the name of Jesus in the Epistle of Jude not only in this location, but also in verses 1, 4, 17, 21, 25, and usually in the compound κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. If it is true that the author thinks of the Old Testament Joshua/Jesus in verse 5, the question arises, why he does not differentiate this language from the “Lord Jesus Christ,” specifying “Joshua *ben Nun*”? According to the results of our previous investigation, the answer lies near: for the author of the Epistle of Jude, they are one and the same person. For him, the κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός is none other than Joshua, the one who is elevated to Christ, in competition with and surpassing the Jewish Moses.

4.6 *The transfiguration of Jesus according to Mark*

Within the framework of this investigation, it is not possible to discuss in detail all the different interpretations the transfiguration story (Mar 9:2-8, par) underwent in the course of time, e.g., “anticipated the Parousia narrative, as confirmation of Peter’s confession, as a misplaced Easter story, as an apocalyptic vision, as a Christian transformation of the Sinai story, as a Christian interpretation of the Tabernacle story, as messianic enthronement.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² Vulgate Num 14:22-37; 26:64-65; Deu 2:15-16; Psa 106:26; Heb 3:16-19; 4:1-2.

¹⁵³ Adrian Wypadlo, *Die Verklärung Jesu nach dem Markusevangelium: Studien zu einer christologischen Legitimationserzählung* (Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 3ff.

When I was a student, it was in vogue to see an early, i.e., backdated, Easter story in the earthly life of Jesus (misplaced resurrection account). Wellhausen had already suspected before “that it was originally an account of the appearance of the Crucified before the three disciples.”¹⁵⁴ He was followed by other exegetes, including among others Bousset, Bultmann,¹⁵⁵ and his pupil Walter Schmithals, who believed he could recognize the lost narrative in the ending of Mark.¹⁵⁶ Today, however, it is true that: “the rejection of the research line opened by Wellhausen is now commonplace in the most recent interpretations of Mark 9:2-8.”¹⁵⁷ The internal contradictions and difficulties are too great. Wellhausen’s equation of “resurrection” and “transfiguration” could never be convincingly substantiated.¹⁵⁸

In addition, E. Best, D. Lührmann, J. Roloff, and Klaus Berger also expressed their skepticism early on. The mention of the two Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah,

¹⁵⁴ Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1909), 71.

¹⁵⁵ “[T]hat this legend is an original resurrection story, has long been recognized” - Rudolf Bultmann und Gerd Theißen, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (10, Ed; Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 29 = N.F., 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 278f. Wypadlo speaks of an “exegetical consensus”.

¹⁵⁶ Walter Schmithals, “The conclusion of Mark, the transfiguration story and the sending out of the Twelve”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 69/4 (1972) 379–411.

¹⁵⁷ Wypadlo, *Die Verklärung Jesu nach dem Markusevangelium*, 3, A.11.

¹⁵⁸ Wypadlo, *Die Verklärung Jesu nach dem Markusevangelium*, 3–4, A.11.

plus the clear allusion to Deut. 18:15 in the heavenly voice, showed that the narrative was by no means about resurrection. The focus, rather, is on the question: Who is the true prophet of the end times promised by Moses: is it Moses himself, or Elijah – or Jesus? In the transfiguration story the question is decided in favor of Jesus. "It should not be a triad of three authorities, but Jesus – and not Moses or Elijah – is the beloved son, the church should listen to him alone."¹⁵⁹ To the followers of the theory of a "dislocated Easter story" Berger asks: "What have these two (Moses and Elijah) to look for in a resurrection story? We are still owed an answer to this question to this day."

Adrian Wypadlo also recognizes "the tendency of Jesus to outdo Moses and Elijah as well, by the emphasis on the exclusivity of his theological dignity. It is a subtle polemic against an incriminating misconception of a theological equivalence of Jesus with the aforementioned heavenly inhabitants."¹⁶⁰

The citations of Berger and Wypadlo demonstrate again that the story of the transfiguration has to do with the question of the right prophet (Deut. 18:15), already dealt

¹⁵⁹ Klaus Berger, *Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums: Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen u.a.: Francke, 1994), 639.

¹⁶⁰ Wypadlo, *Die Verklärung Jesu nach dem Markusevangelium*, 441. See also Hartmut Gese, "On the Meaning of Elijah for Biblical Theology", in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag* (Hrsg. Peter Stuhlmacher, Scott J. Hafemann, und Otfried Hofius; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), here 148, A. 56. The appearance "of Moses and Elijah after 1 Kings 19: 9, 11-13 [makes] the transfiguration story appear as a recoding of the Sinai revelation, where now God's highest revelation has become Jesus' word ('Listen to him!')." .

with in part 4.3. All three, i.e., Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are potential candidates for this position. The choice, however, falls only on one, on Jesus, and he is more than his two competitors, because he is God's "beloved son ... you shall listen!"

Our foray into the late-Jewish/Christian interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15 might also show that "Jesus", does not, as Berger, Wypadlo, and other exegetes take for granted, mean Jesus of Nazareth, but none other than the Old Testament figure of Joshua Nun. The Old Testament Joshua is the appropriate counterpart to the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah.

At the end of the passage, Simon is alone with Jesus. Thus: not Moses nor Elijah, but Joshua ben Nun is the promised true prophet. And Simon is his witness.¹⁶¹

It is quite possible that the transfiguration story is basically nothing more than a dressed-up narrative decision on the question of the true prophet, that was originally put forth as a vision for Simon. Theologically, it is an expression of the more liberal Josuanism (as expressed, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount), legitimizing and distinguishing the Jewish/Gnostic/Buddhist Jesus cult from the Jewish Moses cult.

¹⁶¹ I follow Bultmann/Schmithals. Bultmann thought it possible, "that the story was originally told by Peter alone, and that the two other disciples ... were subsequently added" - Bultmann and Theissen, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 279. Schmithals further noted that "the original ... the oldest apostle as in 1:16f, 29f, 56 is always [called] Simon" - Schmithals, "Mark's ending, the transfiguration story and the sending out of the Twelve", 388. It would be interesting to find out if there were any connections with tradition from Samaria's other Simon.

4.7 "Journey ahead to the other shore" ¹⁶²

The expression "to the other shore" (εἰς τὸ πέραν) occurs strikingly often in the Gospels, 4 times in Matthew, 5 in Mark, and 1 in Luke, for 11 in all. By comparison, the Old Testament contains only 9 instances of the term. Mark uses it in three prominent places, Calming the Storm (4:35ff), Walking on Water (6:45ff) and Multiplying of the Loaves (8:13ff).

The fact that the "other shore" is mentioned in the context of calming the storm and walking on water is not as obvious as it appears; after all, it would have been possible for the author to name the specific destination travelled to by the disciples instead of speaking generically of εἰς τὸ πέραν. The ambiguity of εἰς τὸ πέραν, well recognized by many commentators, seems intentional. It still points to the original sense of the stories, which were not about itineraries and geography, but a metaphor for the world beyond. We have seen already from the Buddhist stories discussed in section 2, how closely the water-walking motif is connected with the concept of the "other/otherworldly bank". It seems, from the early Christians in their allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, that the motif of the water-walking Buddha was transferred to the new "ford crosser" Joshua/Jesus. ¹⁶³ The obstinate repetition of εἰς τὸ πέραν evokes the original sense of the narratives, clearly still in memory. It is not out of the question that Joshua 1:14ff played a special role in exegesis:

¹⁶² The reference to the treated areas I owe to my American friend René Salm.

¹⁶³ Klatt, *Jesu und Buddhas Wasserwandel = Walking on the water of Jesus and of the Buddha*.

“Let your wives and children and your cattle remain in the land that Moses gave you, beyond the Jordan. But as many of the men are truculent, you shall move armed before your brothers and help them, until the Lord brings rest to your brethren as also to you, for they too will take the land that the Lord your God shall to give them. Then you shall return to your land, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, has given you possession of beyond the Jordan (εις τὸ πέραν), toward the rising sun.”

That the story of the multiplication of bread (8:13ff) also belongs in this context has become clear from the findings we made in connection with the *Didache*. Symbolically, the fruits of the Promised Land, i.e., beyond the Jordan, anticipated the communal meal, where the revelation of the “Vine of David”, as we saw, forms the sacramental background of their Joshua/Jesus cult for the community of the *Didache* writer.

Incidentally, the same connection can also be observed in the Gospel of John, though it should be noted that instead of εις τὸ πέραν the evangelist consistently uses the formulation πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης (Joh 6:1, 17, 22, 25). After Jesus performed his miracle of bread on the other shore of the lake (Gennasaret), where in his bread speech he presents himself as the heavenly bread and as the legitimate true (genuine) prophet and the προφήτης ὁ ἐρχόμενος, he returns to Capernaum. They want to make him king there, but he flees to a mountain. Meanwhile, his disciples once again make their way to the other shore; when a storm comes up, Jesus recognizes their distress and follows them onto the water. Zeilinger has adequately paraphrased the section:

“The sovereign Lord, who came down from ‘the mountain’ to the lake to take action, came prior to the human wish! It was the feeding at the ‘heavenly mountain’, that wherever he went, *it is here*, the other shore, where [they] want to bring

him themselves. It is that shore, where the son of a royal official was awakened to new 'life', living thanks for the 'second sign' of Jesus, and where Jesus wants to reveal to the disciples the bread of life that lasts forever."¹⁶⁴

Behind the tale lie the original elements of the oldest Christian cult mystery – the “ford crosser” Joshua, the eschatological meal on the “other shore” – can still be recognized.

4.8 *Typological Interpretation of the Church Fathers*

It is usually presumed that typological interpretations of the Old Testament were used by the early Church Fathers to justify the legitimacy of Jesus and his various sovereign titles. With these, they wanted to demonstrate that Jesus was indeed the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament in “shadow images”.

However, according to our previous investigation, the situation is somewhat different. We saw that the path in no way proceeded from the historical Jesus back to the Old Testament type, rather the converse, from the allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament to the “historical” Jesus.

What this method of early Christian scriptural exegesis might have looked like, is depicted by Peter in the so-called *Kerygma Petrou*:

“But we unfurled the books of the prophets which we had; some in parable, some in riddle, and some reliable and in clear words named Jesus the Christ, and also found his coming, his death, his crucifixion, and all other punishments which the Jews had done to him, his resurrection, and his

¹⁶⁴ Franz Zeilinger, *Die sieben Zeichenhandlungen Jesu im Johannes-evangelium* (Kohlhammer Verlag, 2011), 63.

admission to heaven *before the founding of Jerusalem* (πρὸ τοῦ ἱεροσόλυμα κτισθῆναι)..., how this was all written down, what he had to suffer and what will be after him. Since we now recognized that, we believed God through that which is written (as allusions) about him... For we realize that God has ordained it and we say nothing without the Scriptures."¹⁶⁵

Since the admission of Jesus "into the heavens before the foundation of Jerusalem" is spoken of literally, the passage cannot have originally related to Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, the author candidly confesses how the cornerstones of the "life" of Jesus/Joshua, "his coming, his death, his crucifixion, and all other punishments which the Jews had done to him, his resurrection and his acceptance into heaven before the founding of Jerusalem" had come to be: They were deduced from the Holy Scriptures!

Typologically, i.e., as a legitimacy card, the Old Testament seems to have been used only when the image of Jesus had become more and more historically solidified, i.e., the time, place and circumstances of his origin and his life have been established. When it had been forgotten that the Christian Savior had owed his origin, indeed his entire existence, solely to Christian exegesis of Old Testament passages, those passages were interpreted and regarded as prophetic allusions, i.e., *Typoi* (τύποι), which should point to him.

This is, for example, the case with the apologists Justin, who reasons as follows, why Jesus must be the prophet predicted by Moses:

¹⁶⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VI 15.128; Dobschütz Nr. IX und X; Schneemelcher und Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, II 63.

“Who led your fathers into the land? Finally realize that it was he who had received this epithet of Jesus (= Joshua) and was first called Auses. ¹⁶⁶ For if you can see this, you will also recognize that Jesus was the name of him who had spoken to Moses: ‘My name is in him.’” ¹⁶⁷

Tertullian also uses the typological method, ¹⁶⁸ of course, without being aware that, conversely, Jesus is only the historicized hypostasis of the supposedly “Symbolic” Joshua:

“In as much as Christ should introduce a future people, we are those who are born in the wilderness (*desert*) of the gentile (*pagan*) world, into the promised land which flows with milk and honey, i.e., in the possession of eternal life, which is the sweetest of all, and this should not be done by Moses, i.e., not by the cultivation of the law, but by Jesus, by the grace of the gospel, after going through the sharpness of the stone, that is Christ, for Christ is the stone with which we had been circumcised, - therefore the man who was held in readiness became the symbol of this mystery of faith, was also introduced as a symbol of the name of the Lord, and called Jesus.”

Likewise, Clement of Alexandria, who no longer knows that the supposed “shadow image” is in fact the archetype:¹⁶⁹

“‘A prophet like me’, he says [Moses], ‘God will make you stand up from your brethren’, by using (riddling ¹⁷⁰) Jesus

¹⁶⁶ Compare Num 13:16; note, LXX Αυση = Hoshea, Hebrew חֹשֶׁה.

¹⁶⁷ Justin Dialogue 75.2

¹⁶⁸ Tertullian Adversus Marcionem 3.16.4-5

¹⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.7.60.

¹⁷⁰ Greek αἰνιττόμενος implies a hidden meaning in addition to ‘to use’. So Clement is saying God used both as a “riddle”.

[Joshua] the son of Nun (Ναυη) with Jesus the Son of God; for a shadow image of the Lord ...”

This subtlety does not come through in the German *indem er mit* - sgw

4.9 *Miriam-Mary*

How did Mary become the mother of Jesus/Joshua? Because as Miriam, she was the sister of the “ford crosser” Moses. For the Therapeutae Miriam/Maria and Moses were the two central figures of their nocturnal mystery celebration, in which they staged the Exodus scene. Maria/Miriam was considered a female counterpart to the ford crosser Moses, thus assumed the role of the guide, leading souls “to the other shore “. When Moses was later replaced by Joshua, Miriam/Mary became the companion of Joshua. As such, like Joshua, she, too, was the result of the (Buddhist-influenced) Gnostic Christian exegesis of the Old Testament.

A further reminder to original identity of Mary as the sister of Moses can be found in the Koran. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is identified in the 19th surah with Miriam, the daughter of Amram (Arabic Imram) and sister of Aaron (Harun), i.e., with the sister of Moses. Most religious scholars see this as confused and conclude that Mohammed had no idea of the historical proceedings.¹⁷¹ They all are wrong, at least in this respect: Mohammed, who was in contact with heretical Christian baptist communities, was better informed than them.

¹⁷¹ Marco Frenschkowski, *Heilige Schriften der Weltreligionen und religiösen Bewegungen* (Marixverlag, 2007).

5 THE CHRISTIAN REDEEMER JESUS – A RESULT OF THE JEWISH-BUDDHIST EXEGESIS

On the basis of the gnostic interpretation of the Exodus motif and the question of its historical religious origin, we came across the central importance of the image of the “other shore” used as a transcendence metaphor, which plays a significant role in Indian/Buddhist spirituality.

The question of where the two lines converge, on the one hand Jewish tradition and Hebrew Scripture, and on the other hand Buddhist or Indian spirituality, led us to the Therapeutae, about whom Philo of Alexandria reports in his book *De Vita Contemplativa*.

Once the Buddhist origin of the Therapeutae was recognized as plausible, it could be shown that their central mystery is an interpretation of the Exodus motif based on underlying Buddhist sources. At the same time, this interpretation contains the germ of the Christian baptismal sacrament.

Early Christian Gnostics like the Peratae and Naassenes transferred to Moses' successor Joshua, what for the Therapeutae, being more deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition, was reserved to Moses. The old *Moses cult* was to be superseded by the new, Gnostic-Christian *Joshua cult*. Jesus/Joshua became the counterpart of Moses.

The Christian Redeemer Joshua/Jesus is nothing more than that – a result of the Jewish-Buddhist exegesis of the Old Testament! The “historical” Jesus, i.e., Jesus of Naza-

reth, was hypostatized from the image of the Old Testament Joshua during the 2nd century.¹⁷²

¹⁷² It goes far beyond the limited task of this essay to trace in detail the complicated literary and historical process that led from the “ford crosser” Joshua ben Nun to the “historical Jesus”. It is clear that the idea of passion and resurrection was still alien to the original Jesus/Joshua cult. Presumably it goes back to a combining with the myth of *the dying and resurrected mystery god* (Osiris, Attis, Adonis, etc.) spread throughout the Mediterranean. The myth was originally without temporal fixation. It only originated in the second century from this foundation in the Gospels. In them, Jesus is described as a historical person under Pontius Pilate. The author of the Gospel of Mark was certainly one of the first to portray the image of the Savior as a historical figure and to portray Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (Christ).

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