5. The Acts of Thomas

Whereas the *Acts of John* reports the apostle's commission in three separate passages, the *Acts of Thomas* contains one continuous commission story at the beginning of the narrative[1]. This interesting episode, which offers possibilities for various symbolic interpretations, has drawn the attention of scholars writing on the *Acts of Thomas*[2]. We begin with a brief summary of this episode.

The book begins with the description of the 'apostolic lottery', a motif that frequently occurs at the beginning of the apostolic Acts[3]. The apostles gather in Jerusalem and cast a lot in order to see to which part of the world the Lord sends each of them. Thomas' lot falls to India, but he refuses to depart and seeks excuses: his inability due to his bodily weakness and his ignorance of the language[4]. At

1. *Acts of Thomas* 1–3. My analysis is based on the Greek text edited by Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum* 2/2, 99–288. Occasionally I refer to the Syriac (editions by Wright, Bedjan, and Smith Lewis). I adapt the translation by Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 447–511. As for the date and provenience of the text, I proceed from the hypothesis that the work originated before 240 in a bilingual (Greek–Syriac) environment; cf. Klijn, 'Acts of Thomas', 4 and Bremmer, 'Apocryphal Acts', 153–4.

2. Bornkamm, *Mythos und Legende*, esp. 18–23; LaFargue, *Language and Gnosis*, esp. 58–76; Drijvers, 'Acts of Thomas', 326–7.

3. For a detailed discussion, see pp. 219–224 below.

4. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 100, lines 5–6, λέγων μὴ δύνασθαι μήτε χωρεῖν διὰ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός κτλ. Figuratively, χωρέω can mean 'to be capable of', cf. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 2015b. It occurs in this meaning in *Acts of John* 88 (line 4 in Junod and Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis*, vol 1, 191). Therefore, the two verbs are synonyms, forming a case of hendiadys: 'neither capable nor fitted because of bodily weakness'. LaFargue, *Language and Gnosis*, 67, argues that χωρεῖν is a (Gnostic) term for spiritual-mental advancement, attested in *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.27. Thomas' words imply that the body has to be overcome so that the spirit can advance. This is similar to John's sickness and healing in *Acts of John* 113. Cf. *John 21.25*; *Acts of John* 88; p. 103, note 58 above.

night the Saviour appears to him and encourages him, but Thomas answers: 'Send me wherever you want to send me: to India I do not go'. At this point, the Indian travelling agent Abbanes appears whom Gundaphorus entrusted to buy a builder (τέκτων) for him. Jesus sees him on the marketplace at noon[5] and sells Thomas, whom he shows to the merchant from a distance. They sign a contract, and only then, the Saviour brings Thomas to Abbanes. The merchant asks him, 'Is this your master (δεσπότης)?' Whereupon Thomas answers, 'Yes, he is my Lord (κύριος)'[6]. Abbanes says, 'I bought you from him', and Thomas remains silent[7].

The next morning Thomas embarks with Abbanes[8], carrying with himself his price, which he received from the Lord. Jesus takes leave of him with the words 'Let your price be with you together with my grace, wherever you may depart'[9]. A highly interesting dialogue between Abbanes and Thomas rounds off the scene. When Abbanes asks Thomas about his craftsmanship, the latter answers: 'Of wood [I can make] ploughs, yokes, scales, boats, oars for boats, masts, and disks, and of stone columns and temples, and royal palaces'. And Abbanes confirms, 'Such a craftsman we need'.

Protest and Reassurance

One can easily recognise the similarity between our text and the commission stories of the Jewish Scriptures. As in many of those narratives, the sequence commission–protest–reassurance creates the basic dynamics of the plot. In the Jewish Scriptures, the pattern is espe-

5. While Jesus previously appeared in vision at night (διὰ τῆς νυκτός), now he is on the marketplace at noon (τὸ μεσημβρινόν). For epiphanies at noon (probably meant to be more powerful than visions at night) see p. 73, note 48 above. Jesus' physical presence is found also in chapter 11.

6. For Jesus as δεσπότης see pp. 125–134, note 44.

7. The Greek ἡσυχάζεν also implies Thomas 'found rest', 'consented'.

8. His words, τὸ θέλημα τὸ σὸν γενέσθω, allude to *Matthew* 6.10 (the Lord's prayer), γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου. Cf. Bolyki, 'Human Nature', 95; *Acts of John* 18.

9. LaFargue, *Language and Gnosis*, 70, translates 'May your authority be with you'. Although τιμή in the passage may symbolically refer to the authority that Jesus assigned to Thomas at his commission, its primary meaning 'price' also fits the context perfectly, as we will see later.

cially significant in the commission stories of Moses, Gideon, Saul, and Jeremiah[10]. The *Acts of Thomas* represents this scheme more characteristically than any other apostolic commission stories do.

In the biblical parallels, the protesting heroes often mention 'smallness'[11], but this refers to little significance (or honour) rather than the lack of bodily or mental strength. Thomas also mentions weakness (ἀσθενεία), which occurs in the same sense in the Septuagint version of Gideon's commission[12]. Jeremiah is 'young'[13], which is also close to what Thomas means. Both Jeremiah and Moses mention their inability to speak. Jeremiah complains, 'behold, I do not know how to speak'[14]. Moses says, 'I am of heavy lips and heavy tongue'[15]. This is parallel with Thomas' objection that he does not know the language of the Indians.

The reassurance is also similar to the commission stories of the Jewish Scriptures. In a vision, Jesus promises Thomas 'Do not be afraid […] my grace is with you'[16]. 'Do not be afraid', a frequent expression of encouragement in biblical texts[17], occurs in the answer to Jeremiah's protest. It is immediately followed by 'because I am with you', as in the commissions of Moses and Gideon, being another usual form of encouragement in the biblical passages[18].

10. *Exodus* 3–4 (cf. 6.10–13), *Judges* 6.11–24, esp. verses 14–6, *1 Samuel* 9–11, esp. 9.20-2, *Jeremiah* 1.1–10, esp. verses 4–6. The pattern also occurs in other passages; cf. Habel, 'Form and Significance', 311–3; 315–6; 321–2; Richter, *Berufungsberichte*, 145–6.

11. In the Septuagint: μικρός (קָטוֹן, *1 Samuel* 9.21; צָעִיר, *Judges* 6.15), ἐλάχιστος (צָעִיר, *1 Samuel* 9.21).

12. *Judges* 6.15 (דַּל).

13. *Jeremiah* 1.6 (νεώτερος, נַעַר).

14. *Jeremiah* 1.6.

15. *Exodus* 4.11. The Septuagint interprets 'heavy lips' as 'stuttering'. In the version of *Exodus* 6.10–13, Moses is of 'uncircumcised lips' (ἄλογος in the Septuagint).

16. *Acts of Thomas* 1, Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum* 100, lines 9–10.

17. *Jeremiah* 1.8 (μὴ φοβηθῇς, אַל־תִּירָא). 'Do not fear' is widely attested, but is not especially frequent in the commission narratives (as, for example, Hubbard, 'Commissioning Stories', 105, suggests).

18. Also in *Jeremiah* 1.17,19, 26.28; cf. *Genesis* 26.24 (Abraham), 28.15 (Jacob), etc.; *Psalms* 73.23 (Septuagint 72.23); *Isaiah* 41.10; *Acts* 18.10. The usual Hebrew form is אָנֹכִי אִתְּךָ (or אָנֹכִי עִמְּךָ), the Greek is ἐγώ (εἰμι) μετὰ σοῦ. Again, the expression is frequent but not typical in the commission passages.

It is remarkable that Jesus does not answer Thomas' actual objections. In the biblical parallels, Yahweh promises Moses 'I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say'[19] and appoints Aaron as his spokesman[20]. Gideon is assured 'you shall cut Midian as one man'[21]. In the *Acts of Thomas* Jesus does not promise he will help Thomas with speaking or will strengthen him in his weakness. He does not even promise he will be with Thomas: it is rather his 'grace' that is with him[22]. Does this divergence signify a different relation between the sender and the hero than in the Old Testament commission stories? One might argue that in the Old Testament the hero usually functions as the 'mouth' or 'hand' of the sender, who puts the appropriate words on his lips, directs and strengthens his arms[23].

Whereas Thomas is left on his own with a more independent authority[24]. As the twin brother of Jesus he replaces him, as it were. Indeed, several passages of the *Acts of Thomas* emphasise that Thomas and Jesus are twins, and they look alike[25]. If we consider the whole story, however, we can see that Jesus' farewell from Thomas in the commission story does not mean that he is left on his own as his representative. Jesus' active presence and the idea that it is he who acts through Thomas are attested all over the text[26]. 'Replacement', indeed, occurs in the first act, but here Jesus acts instead of Thomas,

19. *Exodus* 4.12. In the Septuagint 'I will open your mouth and teach you what you shall say'.

20. *Exodus* 4.14.

21. *Judges* 6.16.

22. *Acts of Thomas* 1 and 3, Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 100, line 11 and p. 103, line 4.

23. See above; cf. *Numbers* 21.38; *Isaiah* 42.6; *Jeremiah* 1.6–10, 17–9; *Psalms* 32.8, 144.1.

24. Also Herczeg, 'Theios aner', 33–8, argues that the heroes of the Apocryphal Acts stand close to the ideal of the divine men, who are more on equal terms with the gods than the biblical heroes.

25. *Acts of Thomas* 11–2, 31, 45, 39, 54–7. Thomas' cognomen 'twin' is found in *John* 11.16, 20.24, 21.2 and in the prologue of the *Gospel of Thomas*. He appears as the twin brother of Jesus in the *Book of Thomas the Contender* and the *Acts of Thomas*. For the development of the motif, see Puech, 'Gnostische Evangelien', 206, Drijvers, 'Acts of Thomas', 324, and Poirier, 'Writings'. For the symbolic meaning of twins in the *Acts of Thomas* see Kuntzmann, *Symbolisme*, 173–182; Pesthy, 'Thomas', 69–72.

26. *Acts of Thomas* 27, 50, 65, 77, etc.; cf. 141.

rather than the latter representing the former[27]. In addition to the idea of 'twin', on which many interpretations of the book have concentrated, the relation of the sender and the hero is also defined in the commission narrative through the metaphors of 'slavery' and 'selling', which we will examine later in this chapter.

Another peculiar motif of the story, the repeated protest of the hero after the reassurance by the sender, is also not without its parallels in the Old Testament[28]. An excellent demonstration for the existence of such a story line in the Jewish Scriptures is the above-mentioned commission of Moses. In the narrative of *Exodus* 3–4, Moses protests not less than five times against his mission. He invents a different objection each time: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?'; 'And if they ask me, "What is his name?", what shall I say to them?'; 'They will not believe me and will not listen to my voice'; and 'I am not a man of words, neither I was yesterday or the day before, nor I am after you have spoken to your servant'[29]. For the fifth time, having run out of excuses, he says, 'Send [him] whom you will send'[30]. Either this can be a submission to the divine will or a desperate final attempt to escape: probably Yahweh will still send someone else.

The most famous disobedient prophet is Jonah, but the pattern of commission–protest–reassurance appears with substantial modifications in his case. When Yahweh sends him to Nineveh at the beginning of the story, Jonah—instead of protesting against the commission—simply tries to escape to Tarsus. His protest, or even better his complaint, appears only at the end of the story, and the ensuing dialogue forms a theological evaluation of the plot rather than a commis-

27. *Acts of Thomas* 11, 'And he [the bride-groom] saw the Lord Jesus bearing the appearance (τὴν ἀπεικασίαν) of Judas Thomas and conversing with the bride etc.'.

28. LaFargue, *Language and Gnosis*, 70, takes this motif as an interruption of the biblical narrative pattern.

29. *Exodus* 3.11,13; 4.1,10 (NRSV, adapted).

30. *Exodus* 4.13. The Hebrew phrase שְׁלַח־נָא בְּיַד־תִּשְׁלָח is difficult to translate. The prepositional structure בְּיַד marks an instrument rather then an object: 'Send by the hand of him etc.'. The Septuagint renders 'Choose someone else whom you will send'. 'Send someone else' (NRSV) seems to be an overinterpretation. Durham, *Exodus*, 48, translates 'send anybody you want to send', and gives 'send, please, by a hand you will send' as the literal translation.

sion episode that launches the events[31]. Since there is no protest, there is no place for a reassurance either, and Yahweh completes his will through the sea storm and the fish. This story pattern is closer to the second scene of Thomas's commission, where Jesus sells him without his knowledge[32]. We have two different models here: On the one hand, in the sequence of commission–protest–reassurance, the hero stands in a dialogue with the sender much as an equal partner. On the other hand, in the latter story pattern the hero is subordinate and defenceless. This motif is common to Jonah, Thomas, and another famous 'deceived' prophet, namely, Jeremiah. His words depict the defenceless position of the hero:

> O LORD, you enticed me, and I was enticed;
> you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.
> I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me[33].

Consequently, these commission narratives do not only tell how the divinity calls and sends the hero; there is also an element of violence involved. In this respect, these narratives are similar to the stories of 'god-fighters' (θεομάχοι), to which Paul's Damascus story in *Acts* is closely related[34]. In both narrative schemes, the hero finds himself in opposition with the deity, and the deity overcomes the hero. Yet, there are major dramaturgical differences between the two patterns. In the

31. *Jonah* 4.2.

32. That Thomas did not know he was sold seems to me evident for several reasons. First, he was not present when Jesus made the deal with Abbanes; Jesus showed him to Abbanes from a distance (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 101, line 11). Second, in his answer to Abbanes' question whether Jesus is his master (δεσπότης), Thomas uses Lord (κύριος), Jesus' usual title (*ibidem*, 102, lines 7–8, cf. below), rather than repeating Abbanes' word that directly expresses a master-slave relation. Third, Abbanes' words 'I bought you from him' (*ibidem*, lines 8–9) would be superfluous (in this otherwise economic narrative) if Thomas had known this fact before. Finally, Thomas' reaction also suggests he has just learned he is sold.

33. *Jeremiah* 20.7 (NRSV). The distress of the prophet is expressed with five different roots in a threefold parallelism: פתח (open), חזק (be strong), and יכל (prevail), שׂחק (laugh), and לעג (mock).

34. The most important texts are *Iliad* 22.445f; Euripides, *Bacchanals* 794–5; *2 Maccabees* 3.24–40; *4 Maccabees* 4.1–14. Cf. Windisch, 'Christusepiphanie'; Vögeli, 'Lukas und Euripides', 437f. Add *Iliad* 5.431–42 and Xenophon, *Ephesian tale* 1.1.4–1.2.1 (cf. p. 128 below).

'god-fighter' pattern the conflict between the divinity and the θεομάχος is generated by the hero's arrogance. Further, the story of the θεομάχος actually concludes by his spectacular defeat, and although sometimes he becomes an agent of the divinity in the end, this is not necessary for the solution of the plot[35]. On the other hand, in the *Acts of Thomas* and the other examples that we quoted above, commission itself causes the conflict and the action of the sender, and after his defeat the hero always becomes an agent of the sender.

To sum up the first section of this chapter, we have found analogies from the Jewish Scriptures to various aspects of commission in the *Acts of Thomas*: the sequence of protest and reassurance, the repeated objection of the hero, and the use of power by the divinity to force the hero to obedience. Expressed in psychological terms, the hero understands his call in this pattern as a destiny forced upon him by the sender. We will further refine these observations through analysing two highly symbolic motifs of Thomas' commission: the selling into slavery and his craftsmanship.

Slavery and Craftsmanship

Selling as a slave is frequent in the ancient novels[36] and occurs in other apostolic Acts as well[37]. 'The motifs of exposure, kidnapping and abduction by pirates are among the most maligned of literary plot devices, but ancient comedy and the novel would be unthinkable without them. They allow the characters and readers to get out and see the world […]; they provide the thrill of sudden changes of status […], and they register extraordinary recognitions and paradoxical encounters'[38]. Whereas the *Acts of Thomas* agrees with the novels inas-

35. *2 Maccabees* 3.24–40 and *4 Maccabees* 4.1–14 end with the spectacular defeat of Heliodorus and Apollonius, respectively; cf. p. 234, note 92 below.

36. Kerényi, *Romanliteratur*, 198–9, esp. notes 95–6; Söder, *Apostelgeschichten*, 148–50; Wills, 'Slavery in the Novel'; cf. Hermas, *Visions* 1.1.1.

37. *Psuedo-Prochorus*, in Zahn, *Acta Joannnis*, 14–29; *Acts of Bartholomew*, in Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts*, 72–5 (epitome in Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 49–50, 231–2; cf. De Santos Otero, 'Later Acts', 451–2); Gregory of Tours, *Epitome* 23 (of the Acts of Andrew). Cf. Söder, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, 148–50.

38. Fitzgerald, *Slavery*, 93

much as selling to slavery occurs at the beginning of the story and launches the plot, the use of the motif can be fully understood only if we examine it in a religious context.

Slavery (αἰχμαλωσία, δέσμιοι, δεσμά, δουλεία) as a religious concept presents itself in different forms in the cultural environment of the *Acts of Thomas*. That a deity owns his or her adherents as slaves appears in various forms in this context. According to the traditional Jewish view expressed in the book of *Leviticus*, Yahweh owns the members of Israel as slaves: 'For to me the sons of Israel are slaves. They are my slaves whom I brought out of Egypt, I the Lord your God'[39]. This traditional Israelite interpretation of one's belonging to Yahweh might have been the source of the frequent use of expressions as 'slave of Christ' in the language of Paul and the Pauline literature[40]. At least two alternatives have been suggested as the basis of the Pauline usage. One is the idea that a deity buys a slave to set him or her free (an idea attested by the inscriptions in the wall of the temple of Apollo at Delphi)[41], and the other one is the notion that the initiates of a mystery cult are (at least during the initiation period) the slaves of the deity[42].

Whatever the origin of the Christian usage of the master and slave metaphor may have been[43], the *Acts of Thomas* uses it in a different way than the above-mentioned religious systems. The basic difference is, namely, that Jesus does not buy Thomas, or owns him, but rather sells him to someone else. The traditional Christian usage appears in the story when Abbanes asks Thomas, 'Is this your master?' and Thomas answers, 'Yes, this is my Lord'. Thomas, however,

39. *Leviticus* 25.55, כִּי־לִי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים. The idea had roots in oriental culture, where concepts of ruler/subject and master/slave were closely interwoven; cf. Callender, 'Servants of God(s)'; Combes, *Slavery*, 43.

40. For example *Romans* 1.1, *Galatians* 1.10, *Colossians* 4.12, *Titus* 1.1 (also *James* 1.1, *2 Peter* 1.1, *Judas* 1.1). In *Galatians* 4.7, in contrast, Paul claims that the Christians are 'sons' rather than 'slaves' of God. For this paradox, see Combes, *Slavery*, 94.

41. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, 271–80. The idea is explicit in *1 Corinthians* 6.20, 'For you were bought with a price' (ἠγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς) and 7.23.

42. Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*, 192–215, at 192 and 196; Fitzgerald, *Slavery*, 111–2.

43. Recently cf. Combes, *Slavery*, 68–94.

does not repeat the merchant's word δεσπότης, but says κύριος, the more usual title of Jesus[44]. Although both words can refer to an actual slave-owner, the use of two different expressions, of which the second is the usual title of Jesus, indicates that there is an element of cheat in the situation. This 'cheating' consists of an unusual application of the slave metaphor in the text, and Thomas falls prey to this theological innovation[45]. The reinterpretation of the slave metaphor consists of two elements. Firstly, the social status of Christians did not change because they regarded themselves as 'slaves of Christ'. The *Acts of Thomas*, however, translates the sociological metaphor 'slave of Christ' into sociological reality. Secondly, the very purpose of being Christ's slave was not to be the slave of someone else[46]. In both respects, Jesus breaks the rules of the game, giving a radically new interpretation to the slavery metaphor.

In antiquity, selling free people into slavery was a usual practice. Poor parents often sold the children whom they could not nourish[47]. Free persons from the lower class sold themselves in the hope of a more secure existence[48]. Christians sold themselves into slavery in order to release someone else, or to give their price to the needy[49].

44. The word δεσπότης occasionally refers to Jesus in the New Testament (*2 Peter* 2.1 = *Jude* 1.4), but more frequently to God. It is sometimes used for Jesus in the apocryphal Acts (for example, *Acts of Philip* 117, *Acts of Titus* 2). In the *Acts of Thomas*, it is a name for the Father (30, 97, 104). It probably refers to Jesus in chapter 78 (Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 193, line 8). In the other recension (the main witness of which is the Parisian Greek Codex 1510, called 'P' by Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum* 2/2, xvi), Thomas applies it to Jesus when he tells King Misdaios that Jesus sold him (ch. 163, Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum* 275, vol 2/2, line 15 and 276, line 12).

45. Cf. note 32 above.

46. Both aspects are discussed in *1 Corinthians* 7.17–24. In verse 23 Paul warns, 'You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters'.

47. Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* 2.7; Suetonius, *Grammarians* 5; Pliny, *Letters*, 10.65 and 66; *Code of Theodosius* 3.3.3 and 5.10.1; cf. Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 118–9.

48. Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 15.23, 'Great numbers of men, we may suppose, who are freeborn sell themselves, so that they are slaves by contract, sometimes on no easy terms but the most severe imaginable' (trans. J.W. Cohoon in LCL). Cf. Bartchy, 'Slavery', 67.

49. *1 Clement* 55.2, cf. *1 Corinthians* 7.23.

Debtors were sold by their creditors[50]. Nevertheless, the most significant for our passage is the stealing of people and selling them into slavery, which had been a widespread practice in the Mediterranean basin for many centuries. Although within the Empire piracy had been eliminated and kidnapping had been reduced by the middle of the 1st century BC, the idea is assumed by the text of the New Testament when 'manstealers' (ἀνδραποδισταί) are included in a catalogue of sinners[51].

Similarly, the commission episode of the *Acts of Thomas* presents Jesus as a manstealer or kidnapper, who sells the free man Thomas as a slave. The subject is also frequent in the Greek novels, where the hero and the heroine are sold into slavery as part of the tribulations that the gods inflicted on them. In Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*, for example, this is clearly part of Eros' defeating the rebellious Habrocomes. The hero of Xenophon, overcome by Eros whom he has despised, falls in love with Anthia (1.4). Before their marriage, an oracle promises them sufferings and salvation (1.6). Habrocomes marries Anthia (1.8), and then both of them are kidnapped and sold as slaves (2.2). The changes in Habrocomes' status parallel the career of Thomas. When he fell in love with Anthia, 'Habrocomes pulled at his hair and tore his clothes; he lamented over his misfortunes and exclaimed: "What catastrophe has befallen me, Habrocomes, till now a man, despising Eros and slandering the god? I have been captured and conquered, and am forced to be the slave of a girl (παρθένῳ δουλεύειν)"'[52]. When he is kidnapped, however, his metaphorical slavery turns into slavery in the sociological sense.

There is an important difference, however, between the sort of slavery that appears in the novels and in the *Acts of Thomas*. In the novels, slavery is a cruel punishment or a trial of the gods, and consequently it means an inferior social status (the heroine is typically sold into a brothel[53]). The slavery of Thomas is different. It better resem-

50. For example, Plutarch, *Moralia* 429d–e; cf. Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 36–44.

51. *1 Timothy* 1.10, *Revelation* 18.13; cf Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 110–7.

52. Xenophon, *Ephesian Tale* 1.4.1, trans. G. Anderson in Reardon, *Ancient Novels*, 130.

53. Xenophon, *Ephesian Tale* 5.5ff; *Apollonius King of Tyre* 33ff. Roman authorities applied this to Christian martyrs, e.g., in the *Martrydom of Agape, Irene, Chione, and Companions* 6.2. Trophima suffers the same punishment in the *Acts*

bles those cases when people sold themselves to obtain special jobs[54]. Slavery in that case could have meant the way to obtain important administrative positions. Erastus mentioned in *Romans* 16.23 as the 'city treasurer' (οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως) of Corinth, was probably such a slave[55]. In fact, the new occupation of Thomas as the architect of king Gundaphorus was such a high position. It also fits the pattern that before his departure to India Thomas receives his price (τίμημα) from Jesus, who also says good-bye to him with the words, 'Let your price (τιμή) be with you […] wherever you may depart'. Before speculating over the abstract meaning of τιμή, we have to consider it as a synonym for 'price'[56]. It was namely usual that persons who sold themselves into slavery deposited their price. This might have formed the basis of one's personal funds and ensured that one could buy his freedom back[57].

The comparison with the contemporary Roman practice of slavery helps us toward a better understanding of the narrative function of the selling scene. First, the episode does not (primarily) depict Thomas as a 'servant of God' either in the sense of the Jewish tradition, the Pauline usage, or the mystery religions. Second, it refers to the historical fact of 'manstealing' when telling how Jesus deceived Thomas. Third, slavery is not meant here as a punishment or revenge as in the novels, and consequently it is not coupled with a humiliating social position. Thomas' function as an 'architect' of Gundaphorus is

of Andrew (Gregory of Tours, *Epitome* 23). Cf. Bremmer, 'Acts of Paul', 51; idem 'Acts of Andrew', 22–3.

54. Bartchy, 'Slavery', 67, writes: 'According to Roman law, such special slaves were usually held in provincial municipal slavery until about age 40, at which time as freedmen and Roman citizens they were given opportunities to pursue political careers'. Cf. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 12.5; Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 162.

55. Earlier Cadbury, 'Erastus', 51, argued that he had been a city-owned slave with very humble duties. Theißen, *Social Setting*, 75–83, identified him with an Erastus who (according to an inscription from the mid-first century AD) was aedile in Corinth. (At that time the city was a Roman colony and had Roman municipal organisation.) Cf. Gillman, 'Erastus'.

56. Both Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 18 and LaFargue, *Language*, 70 emphasise the symbolic meaning of the expression. Bornkamm, *ibidem*, claims, 'the wish that Thomas should always carry with himself his price is of course pointless'.

57. Bartchy, 'Slavery', 67.

not only an important office, but also a metaphor of his task as an apostle[58]. Finally, Jesus gives Thomas the possibility to buy back his freedom[59]. Therefore, his slavery retains an element of willingness, which also becomes important for the soteriological interpretation of the episode.

In the analysis of Thomas' selling into slavery, his function as a craftsman receives a crucial importance. This is emphasised already in the commission episode itself, when on Abbanes' inquiry Thomas enumerates the things he can fabricate: 'Of wood ploughs, yokes, scales, boats, oars for boats, masts, and disks, and from stone columns and temples, and royal palaces'. What shall we do with this seemingly haphazard list? It is possible to refer to the tradition that Jesus himself was a carpenter, and that this probably played a role in the shaping of Thomas' figure. We can find some of the above-mentioned objects in references to Jesus' original occupation, and many patristic texts attribute allegorical meanings to them[60]. Ordericus Vitalis in the twelfth century claimed that when Thomas mentioned 'sailing' he spoke 'mystically of the knowledge of his art'[61].

In our interpretation of the passage, however, we will first pay attention to the structure of the list itself. There are two text-critical problems to begin with. The word 'scales' (τρυτάνας) appears to be out of context and scholars have been inclined to accept the reading of the Syrian text, namely, 'pricks'[62]. This would result in a group of three, consisting of basic agricultural instruments, each playing an

58. Similarly to Peter and Andrew's occupation as fishermen in *Matthew* 4.18–9.

59. This reminds us of the ancient novels, where 'no one falls irrevocably into the orbit of slavery', which corresponds to the sociological fact that 'Roman law regarded freeborn status as inalienable' (Fitzgerald, *Slavery*, 93).

60. That Jesus was a carpenter appears in *Mark* 6.12. Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 20–1, quotes the relevant patristic passages.

61. Quoted in Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 21.

62. Nöldeke, in Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol 2/2, 423. However, the approach of Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 20, is questionable when he simply corrects the Greek to κέντρα, because we do not have this reading in any of the Greek manuscripts. Another possibility is offered by the textual variant τρυπάνη. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1830, define this as a 'thong for working a τρύπανον', if we are correct, a leather strip for driving a carpenter's borer.

important role in Jewish and Christian symbolism[63]. The second group consists of three objects related to sailing, but we can perhaps add a fourth element, especially if we accept the reading 'pulleys' (τροχίσκους)[64]. The final part contains three architectural objects. The three groups differ from each other considerably. While the first consists of simple agricultural tools, produced by a rural carpenter, the items in the last one require the highest architectural proficiency. The three groups not only appear in an ascending order of difficulty, but also the three elements of the last group. The most composite object, the palace, comes at the end of the whole list, and it anticipates the heavenly palace that Thomas will build for Gundaphorus.

In the narrative of Thomas and Gundaphorus (ch. 17), the whole list occurs repeatedly, but only three items appear otherwise in the book: the plough, the temple, and the palace, that is, the first and the last two elements in the list. 'Plough' occurs in a free quotation of *Luke* 6.19 in the martyrdom: 'I put my hands on the yoked plough and did not turn back lest the furrows do not go crooked'[65]. 'Temple' occurs frequently in Thomas' speeches and prayers, and it always means the body of Christians, which has to remain clean[66]. 'Palace', as we already mentioned, appears in the 'second act'[67]. When Thomas receives the task to build a palace for Gundaphorus, he gives all the money to the poor and thus builds a palace in heaven. The use of these concepts in the *Acts of Thomas* seems to suggest that Thomas's list marks a way of perfection, or a way of salvation: 'putting one's hand on the yoke' means the beginning of Christian life, 'temple' stands for ascetic life, and 'palace' for the heavenly dwelling which

63. Important passages include: plough in *1 Kings* 19.19 and *Luke* 9.62 (quoted in *Acts of Thomas* 147), yoke in *Jeremiah* 27 and *Matthew* 11.29–30, prick in *Acts* 26.14 and *1 Corinthians* 15.55–6.

64. A diminutive of τρόχος (wheel). Two codices (Bonnet's H and Z) read τροχιλέας (pulleys), and two (Bonnet's U and R) τροχιλίσκους (diminutive of the latter). The form τροχιλέας appears also in ch. 17 when Thomas repeats the list before king Gundaphorus.

65. *Acts of Thomas* 147 (Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, 255, lines 18–20).

66. The idea is found in chs. 86, 87, 94, 144, 156, and follows *1 Corinthians* 3.16–7, etc. In ch. 79 the Jerusalem temple is meant.

67. *Acts of Thomas* 17–29. (The whole book is traditionally divided into fourteen 'acts'.)

one earns with a pious life on earth[68]. It would be an overinterpretation to force all the objects in the list into this scheme. Nevertheless, it is clear that the ascending order of complexity that appears in the list corresponds to a progress in life that leads toward heaven[69]. In this way we can provide a simple and reasonable interpretation of the cryptic workshop inventory and, indeed, of the whole commission episode, without going into speculative details and remaining within the narrative world of the text.

The dialogue with King Gundaphorus at their first encounter is decisive for understanding Thomas' craftsmanship. After Thomas has enumerated the things he can make, Gundaphorus asks him, 'Can you build a palace for me?' Whereupon Thomas answers:

> Yes, I shall build it and finish it; for *because of this I have come*, to build and to do carpenter's work[70].

A comparison with the New Testament will show that this is a solemn statement about Thomas' mission. First, we can easily discern the relationship between this sentence and the so-called 'ich Worte' of Jesus[71]. We can immediately narrow down the circle to the sayings about Jesus' coming, the so-called 'ἦλθον-sayings'[72]. These sayings in the first person singular are statements about the purpose of Jesus' coming: 'I have come to call not the righteous but sinners'[73]. Another element of this sentence as well deserves our attention, namely, the proleptic position of διὰ τοῦτο ('to this end'). Alternating with εἰς τοῦτο, in New Testament Greek[74] this phrase typically appears in sen-

68. Hilhorst, 'Heavenly Palace', 64, finds that whereas earning the right to a heavenly dwelling through charity is attested before the *Acts of Thomas*, building it during one's lifetime is a new development in the literary tradition.

69. At this interpretation, we proceed from the final compositional unity of the text. For a synchronic analysis, we put aside the problem that the different styles of 'acts' 1–6 and 7–13 may indicate their independent transmission. Cf. Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 2–3; Drijvers, 'Acts of Thomas', 323.

70. *Acts of Thomas* 17, my italics. Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, 125, lines 8–9, διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ἦλθον, οἰκοδομῆσαι καὶ τεκτονεῦσαι.

71. Bultmann, *Synoptische Tradition*, 161–9.

72. Bultmann, *Synoptische Tradition*, 164–8.

73. *Mark* 2.17 (NRSV).

74. Such a use of διὰ τοῦτο and εἰς τοῦτο seems to be rare before the New Testament. In the Septuagint, διὰ τοῦτο normally introduces consequence

tences that declare one's purpose: 'For to this end also I wrote, that I know your worth'[75]. Among the sentences that apply this structure, we can find especially numerous statements related to people's commission[76]: 'However, to this end I received mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show the utmost patience'[77]. 'For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living'[78]. The most remarkable passage for our purpose is in the dialogue of Jesus and Pilate in John's passion narrative. On Pilate's question 'So you are a king?' Jesus answers:

> You say that I am a king. *For this I was born*, and *for this I came* into the world, to testify to the truth[79].

This statement uses the proleptic structure with εἰς τοῦτο twice in a typical 'ἦλθον-saying'. Moreover, Jesus pronounces this emphatic formula in his answer to Pilate, similarly to Thomas, who uses it before King Gundaphorus. Consequently, when Thomas begins his sentence with 'for *to this I came*', he is introducing an emphatic statement about his commission.

Into this framework of Thomas being the 'architect of salvation', we can integrate the remaining, equally important motifs of his commission narrative. Many elements suggest that his fate mirrors that of Jesus, which is anticipated already in the twin-metaphor[80]. Thomas is

(*Psalms* 1.5, 15.9 [16.9 LXX], etc.) and εἰς τοῦτο (which is less frequent) never has a proleptic position (cf. *Psalms* 75.8 [74.9 LXX], 144.13 [143.13 LXX], *3 Maccabees* 1.21). It seems that they do not have such a function elsewhere in the apostolic Acts either (cf. *Acts of John* 39, 97, 104).

75. *2 Corinthians* 2.9.

76. The phrase εἰς τοῦτο occurs altogether fourteen times in the New Testament, and in eleven cases it introduces a statement about the commission of Jesus or the Christians: *Mark* 1.35, *John* 18.37 (twice), *Acts* 26.16, *Romans* 14.9, *1 Thessalonians* 3.3, *1 Timothy* 4.10, *1 Peter* 2.21, 3.9, 4.6, *1 John* 3.7.

77. *1 Timothy* 1.16.

78. *Romans* 14.9 (NRSV).

79. *John* 18.37 (NRSV, my italics), ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

80. Kuntzmann, *Symbolisme*, 176, concludes 'there is no doubt that the author of the *Acts* [of Thomas] largely drew on the writings of the New Testament, particularly on the biographical fragments of Jesus, for the elaboration of the story of Thomas' missionary life. […] This leads to the result that the biography of Tho-

praised because his slavery brought salvation to others: 'Twin brother of Christ, apostle of the Most High and initiated into the hidden word of Christ, who receives his secret utterances, fellow worker of the Son of God, who being free has become a slave, and being sold has brought many to freedom'[81]. In another passage, Thomas suggests the parallel between Jesus and himself: 'I thank you, Lord, in every respect, that you died for a short time, that I may live in you for ever, and that you have sold me, to deliver many through me'[82]. But this quotation also marks the significant difference between the two careers, namely, that Jesus' death brought salvation to others, which is not true of the latter's death. Thomas' death is only a release from slavery for himself: 'I have become a slave; therefore today I do receive freedom'[83]. In sum, Thomas' slavery brings salvation to others because of his apostolic 'craftsmanship'—but his suffering and death themselves have no effect on others[84].

Conclusions

In the commission of Thomas in his Acts, we have identified three major themes: (1) the defeat of the resisting prophet, (2) reinterpretation of the slave motif as selling into slavery, and (3) craftsmanship as a metaphor of perfection and salvation. These themes are interrelated and built upon each other in such a way that each development offers a specific interpretation of the previous element. Thomas is not only defeated through his selling as a slave, but his defeat immediately re-

mas is an "imitation" of that of Jesus, which constitutes for our survey the primary approach to this document'.

81. *Acts of Thomas* 39. Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 19, discussed this passage, together with the following ones.

82. *Acts of Thomas* 19.

83. *Acts of Thomas* 167, trans. Drijvers. That is, Thomas' death means freedom to him.

84. This has to be added to the interpretation of Bornkamm, *Mythos*, 19: 'Thomas' selling into slavery is a widely attested motif in the novels and the legends, but for the *Acts of Thomas* it has more significance: the fate of the Saviour is repeated in it, who humiliated himself in order to set his people free'. But the distinction between Thomas and Christ remains clear in spite of their being twins. As Pesthy, 'Thomas', 72, puts it, 'Thomas himself never becomes the Saviour, and he never claims it to be, he is only the helper of the Saviour'; cf. ibidem, 67.

ceives a positive, soteriological interpretation. Thomas' spectacular defeat and Jesus' appearance as a manstealer are necessary steps toward establishing Thomas as an architect of King Gundaphorus[85]. He is commissioned as an architect in the same manner that Andrew and Peter are commissioned as fishermen in the Gospel narrative[86].

The commission of Thomas shares motifs with the classical Old Testament commission stories as well as with the Greek novels. Yet the impact of the former, together with allusions to the figure of Jesus in the New Testament and in the patristic tradition seems far more decisive in the narrative. The *Acts of Thomas* fits well into the category of the ideal biography, beginning with the commission of the hero and finishing with his death. The hero's death is, however, less important in the Old Testament ideal biographies than in the Gospels and in the early apocryphal Acts which always relate the hero's martyrdom. Thomas' commission itself presents craftsmanship and architecture as a biographical program.

85. In the Coptic *Acts of Bartholomew* (cf. p. 125, note 37 above), Bartholomew asks Peter to sell him to a merchant so that he may get into the merchant's vineyard and preach there. The vine, of course, receives a symbolic meaning in his preaching.

86. *Matthew* 4.18–9.