

1 | The Christian Savior

The purpose of part 1 is to provide the reader with a broader perspective on the variety of Christian portrayals of Jesus Christ that had appeared by the year 300 CE. It is to be expected that some of these selections will contain confusing and possibly even startling ideas regarding Jesus Christ. It is our hope that the reader will compare these documents with the more familiar New Testament Gospels, and thereby arrive at a more vivid impression of the vitality and diversity of the Christian movement during its first three hundred years.

Each selection has been provided with a brief introduction to indicate the generally accepted views regarding date of authorship and place of origin, as well as to explain our reason for including it in this collection.

The Coptic Gospel of Thomas

Introduction: When it was discovered near the town of Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt, this gospel caused a sensation. It was found, along with the Gospel of Philip and other writings in thirteen bound books, near the ruins of an ancient Coptic monastery and probably belonged to that monastery's library. Bits of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas had been known in Greek, but the extent and nature of the whole work were unexpected. Suddenly, the world had a book that called itself a gospel but is only a collection of sayings. It looked like no other gospel. It had no narratives, no miracles, and no passion story. For the story of the gospel's discovery, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/pagels.html>.

Attempts to show that this gospel was derived from the first three (Synoptic) Gospels are not convincing. There are sayings in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas that do not occur in the New Testament Gospels. Some of the sayings in the Coptic

Gospel of Thomas that are also found in Matthew or Luke appear to have been less influenced by later Christian alteration than the same sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. This is particularly true of certain parables. Could it be that (1) the Coptic Gospel of Thomas represents a tradition of Jesus' sayings that is independent of the New Testament Gospels, and (2) this gospel has some sayings that are older in form than their parallels in the Synoptic Gospels? Many scholars tend to answer yes to both questions.

These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down.

1. And he said, "He who finds the meaning of these words will not taste death."

2. Jesus said, "Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he shall be troubled, and when he is troubled, he will marvel, and he will rule over the All."

3. Jesus said, "If the ones who lead you say, 'There is the kingdom, in heaven,' then the birds of heaven shall go before you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish shall go before you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and outside you. If you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will know that you are sons of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are poverty."

4. Jesus said, "A man who is old in his days will not hesitate to ask a baby of seven days about the place of life and he will live. For many who are first shall [be] last, and they shall become a single one."

5. Jesus said, "Know what is in front of your face, and what is concealed from you will be revealed to you. For there is nothing concealed which will not be manifest."

6. His disciples asked him, "Do you want us to fast, and how shall we pray, and shall we give alms, and what food regulations shall we keep?" Jesus said, "Do not lie, and do not do what you hate, because all is revealed before heaven. For nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing is covered that shall remain without being revealed."

7. Jesus said, "Blessed is the lion which the man eats, and the lion thus becomes man; and cursed is the man whom the lion shall eat, when the lion thus becomes man."

8. And he said, "The man is like a wise fisherman who threw his net into the sea. He drew it up from the sea; it was full of small fish. The fisherman found among them a large, good fish. He threw all the small fish back into the sea; with no trouble he chose the large fish. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

9. Jesus said, "Behold, the sower went out; he filled his hand; he threw. Some fell on the road. The birds came; they gathered them up. Others fell on the rock and did not send roots into the earth and did not send ears up to heaven. Others fell among thorns. They choked the seed, and the worm ate [the seed]. And others fell on good earth, and it raised up good fruit to heaven. It bore sixty per measure and one hundred-twenty per measure."

10. Jesus said, "I have hurled fire on the world, and behold, I guard it until it burns."

11. Jesus said, "This heaven will pass away and your heaven above it will pass away, and the dead are not living and the living shall not die. In the days when you ate what is dead, you made it alive; when you come into the light, what will you do? On the day when you were one, you became two. But when you have become two, what will you do?"

12. The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you will go away from us; who will become ruler over us?" Jesus said, "Wherever you may be, you will go to James the righteous; heaven and earth came into being for him."

13. Jesus said to his disciples, "Make a comparison and tell me whom I am like." Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise man." Thomas said to him, "Master, my mouth will not be able to say what you are like." Jesus said, "I am not your master. Because you drank, you are drunk from the bubbling spring which I measured out." And he took him; he went aside. He spoke to him three words. When Thomas returned to his companions, they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the words which he said to me, you will pick up stones; you will throw them at me. And fire will come from the stones and consume you."

14. Jesus said to them, "If you fast, you will bring sin upon yourselves and, if you pray, you will be condemned and, if you give alms, you will do evil to



Fig. 1.1. *The Sower*, by Vincent van Gogh, ca. 1888. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. [Commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

your spirits. And if you enter any land and wander through the regions, if they receive you, whatever they set before you, eat it. Heal the sick among them. For that which goes into your mouth will not defile you, but that which comes out of your mouth is what will defile you.”

15. Jesus said, “When you see him who was not born of woman, throw yourself down on your faces [and] adore him; that one is your Father.”

16. Jesus said, “Men might think I have come to throw peace on the world, and they do not know that I have come to throw dissolution on the earth; fire, sword, war. For there shall he five in a house: three shall be against two and two against three, the father against the son and the son against the father, and they shall stand as solitary ones.”

17. Jesus said, “I will give you what no eye has seen and what no ear has heard and no hand has touched and what has not come into the heart of man.”

18. The disciples said to Jesus, “Tell us how our end will occur.” Jesus said, “Have you found the beginning that you search for the end? In the place of the beginning, there the end will be. Blessed is he who will stand at the beginning, and he will know the end, and he will not taste death.”

19. Jesus said, “Blessed is he who was before he came into being. If you become my disciples [and] you hear my words, these stones shall serve you. For you have five trees in paradise which are immobile in summer or winter and they do not shed their leaves. Whoever knows them shall not taste death.”

20. The disciples said to Jesus, “Tell us, what is the kingdom of heaven like?” He said to them, “It is like a mustard seed, smaller than all seeds. But when it falls on plowed ground, it puts forth a large shrub and becomes a shelter for the birds of heaven.”

21. Mary said to Jesus, “Whom are your disciples like?” He said, “They are like little children; they settle themselves in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they [the owners] say, ‘Give us our field.’ They undress before them and release it [the field] to them and give back their field to them. Because of this I say, if the owner of the house knows that the thief is coming, he will watch before he comes and will not let him break into his house of his kingdom and carry away his goods. But you watch especially for the world; gird your loins with great power lest the robbers find a way to come upon you, because the trouble you expect will happen. Let there be a man of understanding among you. When the fruit ripened, he came quickly, his sickle in his hand [and] he reaped it. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

22. Jesus saw babies being suckled. He said to his disciples, “These babies who are being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom.” They said to him, “We are children, shall we enter the kingdom?” Jesus said to them, “When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner and the upper as the lower, so that you will make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female [not] be female, when you make eyes in the place of an eye, and hand in place of a hand, and a foot in the place of a foot, [and] an image in the place of an image, then you shall enter [the kingdom].”

23. Jesus said, "I shall choose you, one from a thousand, and two from ten thousand, and they shall stand; they are a single one."
24. His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, for it is necessary for us to seek it." He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. There is light within a man of light and he [or it] lights the whole world. When he [or, it] does not shine, there is darkness."
25. Jesus said, "Love your brother as your soul; keep him as the apple of your eye."
26. Jesus said, "The chip that is in your brother's eye you see, but the log in your own eye you do not see. When you take the log out of your eye, then you will see to remove the chip from your brother's eye."
27. "If you do not fast [in respect to] the world, you will not find the kingdom; if you do not keep the Sabbath a Sabbath, you shall not see the Father."
28. Jesus said, "I stood in the midst of the world, and I appeared to them in the flesh. I found all of them drunk; I did not find any of them thirsting. And my soul was pained for the sons of men because they are blind in their hearts, and they do not see that they came empty into the world; they seek to go out of the world empty. However, they are drunk. When they have shaken off their wine, then they shall repent."
29. Jesus said, "If the flesh exists because of spirit, it is a miracle, but if spirit [exists] because of the body, it is a miracle of miracles. But I marvel at how this great wealth established itself in this poverty."
30. Jesus said, "Where there are three gods, they are gods; where there are two or one, I am with him."
31. Jesus said, "A prophet is not acceptable in his own village; a physician does not heal those who know him."
32. Jesus said, "A city being built and fortified upon a high mountain cannot fall, nor can it be hidden."
33. Jesus said, "What you will hear in your ear and in your [other] ear, preach from your housetops. For no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, nor does he put it in a hidden place, but he sets it on a lampstand so everyone who comes in and goes out will see its light."
34. Jesus said, "If a blind man leads a blind man, the two of them fall into a pit."
35. Jesus said, "It is impossible for one to enter the house of the strong man and rob it violently unless he bind his hands; then he can pillage his house."
36. Jesus said, "Do not be anxious from morning to evening and from evening to morning about what you will wear."
37. His disciples said, "On what day will you be revealed to us and on what day shall we see you?" Jesus said, "When you undress without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet as little children and tramp on them, then you shall see the Son of the Living [One], and you shall not fear."

38. Jesus said, "Many times you desired to hear these words which I say to you, and you have no one else from whom to hear them. There will be days when you will seek me, and you will not find me."

39. Jesus said, "The Pharisees and the scribes took the keys of knowledge; they hid them. They did not enter, and they did not allow those to enter who wanted to enter. But you be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves."

40. Jesus said, "A vine was planted without the Father and it has not strengthened; it will be pulled up by its roots [and] it will be destroyed."

41. Jesus said, "He who has something in his hand shall be given more; and he who does not have anything, even the little he has will be taken away from him."

42. Jesus said, "Be wanderers."

43. His disciples said to him, "Who are you that you say these things to us?" "By what I say to you, you do not know who I am, but you have become as the Jews. They love the tree, they hate its fruit; they love the fruit, they hate the tree."

44. Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes the Father, it will be forgiven him, and whoever blasphemes the Son, it will be forgiven him, but he who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either on earth or in heaven."

45. Jesus said, "One does not pick grapes from thorns, nor does one gather figs from thistles; they do not give fruit. F[or a go]od man brings forth good fr[om] his treasure; a b[ad] man brings forth evil from the evil treasure in his heart, and he speaks evil. For out of the abundance of his heart he brings forth evil."

46. Jesus said, "From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women no one is greater than John the Baptist, so that his eyes . . . [here the text is uncertain]. Yet I said that whoever among you shall become as a child shall know the kingdom, and he shall become higher than John."

47. Jesus said, "A man cannot mount two horses; he cannot stretch two bows. A servant cannot serve two masters; either he will honor the one and the other he will scorn . . . No man drinks old wine and right away wants to drink new wine; and one does not put new wine into old wineskins lest they tear; and one does not put old wine into new wineskins lest it spoil. One does not sew an old patch on a new garment, because there will be a tear."

48. Jesus said, "If two make peace between themselves in the same house, they shall say to the mountain, 'Move away,' and it will move."

49. Jesus said, "Blessed are the solitary and the chosen, because you will find the kingdom; because you come from it, you will again go there."

50. Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We come from the light, where the light came into being through itself. It stood . . . and reveals itself in their image.' If they say to you, '[Who] are you?' say to them, 'We are his sons and we are the chosen of the living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your Father who is in you?' say to them, 'It is movement and repose.'"

51. His disciples said to him, "When will be the repose of the dead, and when will the new world come?" He said to them, "What you look for has come, but you do not know it."

52. His disciples said to him, "Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel and all of them spoke in you." He said to them, "You have left out the Living One who is with you, and you have spoken about the dead."

53. His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision profitable or not?" He said to them, "If it were profitable, their father would beget them circumcized from their mother. But the true circumcision in the Spirit has found complete usefulness."

54. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

55. Jesus said, "He who does not hate his father and his mother cannot be my disciple, and [he who] does not hate his brothers and his sisters and [does not] carry his cross in my way will not be worthy of me."

56. Jesus said, "He who has known the world has found a corpse, and he who has found a corpse, the world is not worthy of him."

57. Jesus said, "The kingdom of the Father is like a man who had [good] seed. His enemy came by night, [and] he sowed a weed among the good seed. The man did not let them pull up the weed. He said to them, 'I fear lest you go to pull up the weed, and you pull up the wheat with it.' For on the day of the harvest the weeds will be apparent; they will pull them up and burn them."

58. Jesus said, "Blessed is the man who has suffered; he has found the Life."

59. Jesus said, "Look upon the Living One as long as you live, lest you die and seek to see him and you cannot see."

60. [They saw] a Samaritan carrying a lamb; he was going to Judea. He said to his disciples, "Why does he carry the lamb?" They said to him, "That he may kill it and eat it." He said to them, "As long as it is alive he will not eat it, but only when he has killed it and it has become a corpse." They said, "Otherwise he cannot do it." He said to them, "You yourselves seek a place for yourselves in repose, lest you become a corpse and be eaten."

61. Jesus said, "Two will be resting on a couch; the one will die, the one will live." Salome said, "Who are you, man? As if from the One you sat on my couch and you ate from my table." Jesus said to her, "I am he who is from him who is the same. The things from my Father have been given to me." [Salome said,] "I am your disciple." [Jesus said to her,] "Therefore, I say, if he is the same, he will be filled with light, but if he is divided, he will be filled with darkness."

62. Jesus said, "I tell my mysteries [to those who are worthy of my] mysteries. What your right [hand] will do, do not let your left [hand] know."

63. Jesus said, "There was a rich man who had many possessions. He said, 'I will use my goods so that I can sow and reap and plant and fill my warehouses with fruit so that I will not be in need of anything.' He truly believed this. And in that night he died. He who has ears, let him hear."

64. Jesus said, "A man had guests and, when he had prepared the banquet, he sent his servant to invite the guests. He went to the first; he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said, 'Money is owed me by some merchants. They will come to me in the evening; I will go and I will give them orders. Please excuse me from the dinner.' He went to another; he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said to him, 'I have bought a house and they have asked me [to come out] for a day [to close the deal]. I will not have time.' He went to another; he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said to him, 'My friend is going to marry, and I will prepare a dinner; I will not be able to come: Please excuse me from dinner.' He went to another; he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said to him, 'I have bought a farm, I go to collect the rent. I will not be able to come. Please excuse me from the dinner.' The servant returned; he said to his master, 'Those whom you invited asked to be excused from the dinner.' The master said to his servant, 'Go outside to the streets, bring those whom you find so that they may feast.' Buyers and merchants will not enter the places of my Father."

65. He said, "A good man had a vineyard. He rented it to some farmers so that they would work it, and he would receive its profits from them: He sent his servant so that the farmers would give him the profits of the vineyard. They seized his servant, beat him, and almost killed him. The servant went back; he told his master. His master said, 'Perhaps he did not know them.' He sent another servant. The farmers beat him also. Then the master sent his son. He said, 'Perhaps they will respect my son.' Those farmers seized him, and they killed him, because they knew he was the heir of the vineyard. He who has ears, let him hear."

66. Jesus said, "Show me the stone rejected by those who built. It is the cornerstone."

67. Jesus said, "He who believes [that] the All is wanting in anything lacks all himself."

68. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they hate you and persecute you, and they will find no place wherever you have been persecuted."

69a. Jesus said, "Blessed are those whom they have persecuted in their hearts; these are they who know the Father in truth."

69b. "Blessed are those who are hungry, so that the belly of him who hungers will be filled."

70. Jesus said, "If you beget what is in you, what you have will save you. If you do not have it in you, what you do not have in you will kill you."

71. Jesus said, "I shall destroy [this] house and no one will be able to build it [again]."

72. [A man] s[aid] to him, "Speak to my brothers, so that they will divide my father's possessions with me." He said to him, "O man, who made me a divider?" He turned to his disciples; he said to them, "I am not a divider, am I?"

73. Jesus said, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few; but beseech the Lord to send workers to the harvest."

74. He said, "Lord, there are many standing around the cistern, but no one [or, nothing] in the cistern."
75. Jesus said, "Many are standing at the door, but the solitary will enter the Bridal Chamber."
76. Jesus said, "The kingdom of the Father is like a merchant who had goods. Then he found a pearl. This was a prudent merchant. He gave up [i.e., sold] the goods, and he bought the single pearl for himself. You also must seek for the treasure which does not perish, which abides where no moth comes near to eat, nor worm destroys."
77. Jesus said, "I am the light which is above all of them; I am the All. The All came forth from me and the All reached me. Split wood, I am there; lift up the stone, and you will find me there."
78. Jesus said, "Why did you come to the desert? To see a reed shaken by the wind? To see a [man clo]thed in soft clothes? [Behold, your] kings and your great ones are dressed in soft [clothes] and they are not able to know the truth."
79. A woman in the crowd said to him, "Blessed are the womb which bore you and the breasts which fed you." He said to [her], "Blessed are those who have heard the Word of the Father [and] have kept it in truth. For there will be days when you will say: 'Blessed are the womb which has not conceived and the breasts that have not suckled.'"
80. Jesus said, "He who has known the world has found the body, but he who has found the body, the world is not worthy of him."
81. Jesus said, "He who has become rich, let him become king; and he who has power, let him renounce it."
82. Jesus said, "He who is near me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom."
83. Jesus said, "The images are manifest to man, and the light in them is hidden in the image of the light of the Father. He will reveal himself, and his image will be hidden by his light."
84. Jesus said, "When you see your likeness, you rejoice. But when you see your images which came into being before you, [which] do not die nor are manifest, how much you will bear!"
85. Jesus said, "Adam came into existence from a great power and a great wealth, and he was not worthy of you. For, if he had been worthy, he [would] not [have tasted] death."
86. Jesus said, "[The foxes have] h[oles] and the birds have [their] nests, but the Son of Man does not have any place to lay his head and to rest."
87. Jesus said, "The body is wretched which depends on a body, and the soul is wretched which depends on these two."
88. Jesus said, "The angels and the prophets shall come to you, and they shall give you that which is yours. You give them what is in your hands, [and] say to yourselves, 'On which day will they come and receive what is theirs?'"

89. Jesus said, "Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Do you not know that he who made the inside is also he who made the outside?"

90. Jesus said, "Come to me because my yoke is easy and my mastery is gentle, and you will find your repose."

91. They said to him, "Tell us who you are so that we can believe in you." He said to them, "You examine the face of the heavens and the earth, and [yet] you have not known him who is in front of your face, nor do you know how to examine this time."

92. Jesus said, "Search and you will find, but those things which you asked me in those days, I did not tell you then; now I want to speak them, and you do not ask about them."

93. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs, because they will throw it on the dung heap. Do not throw the pearls to the pigs, lest they make . . ." [text uncertain].

94. Jesus [said], "He who searches, will find . . . it will open to him."

95. Jesus [said], "If you have money, do not lend it at interest, but give [to those] from whom you will not receive it [back again]."

96. Jesus [said], "The kingdom of the Father is like a woman, she took a bit of leaven, hid it in dough, and made big loaves. He who has ears, let him hear."

97. Jesus said, "The kingdom of the [Father] is like a woman who was carrying a jar which was full of meal. While she was walking on a distant road, the handle of the jar broke; the meal spilled out behind her onto the road. She did not know; she was not aware of the accident. After she came to her house, she put the jar down, and found it empty."

98. Jesus said, "The kingdom of the Father is like a man who wanted to kill a powerful man. He drew the sword in his own house; he thrust it into the wall so that he would know if his hand would stick it through. Then he killed the powerful one."

99. The disciples said to him, "Your brothers and your mother are standing outside." He said to them, "Those here who do the will of my Father are my brothers and mother; they will enter the kingdom of my Father."

100. They showed Jesus a gold coin, and they said to him, "Caesar's men demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give Caesar's things to Caesar; give God's things to God; and what is mine give to me."

101. "He who does not hate his [father] and his mother in my way will not be able to be my [disciple], and he who does [not] love his father and his mother in my way, will not be able to be my [disciple], for my mother . . . , but [my] true [mother] gave me life."

102. Jesus said, "Woe to the Pharisees; they are like a dog lying in the oxen's food trough, for she does not eat nor let the oxen eat."

103. Jesus said, "Blessed is the man who knows in which part . . . the robbers will come, so that he will rise and gather his . . . and gird up his loins before they come in . . ."

104. They said [to him], “Come, let us pray today, and let us fast.” Jesus said, “Why? What sin have I committed, or by what have I been conquered? But after the bridegroom has left the Bridal Chamber, then let them fast and pray.”

105. Jesus said, “He who acknowledges the father and the mother will be called the son of a harlot.”

106. Jesus said, “When you make the two one, you shall be Sons of Man, and when you say, ‘Mountain, move away,’ it will move.”

107. Jesus said, “The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, which was the largest, wandered off. He left the ninety-nine; he searched for the one until he found it. After he tired himself, he said to the sheep, ‘I love you more than the ninety-nine.’”

108. Jesus said, “He who drinks from my mouth will be as I am, and I will be he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.”

109. Jesus said, “The kingdom is like a man who had a treasure [hidden] in his field, and he did not know it. And [after] he died, he left it to his son. His son did not know; he received the field, and he sold [it]. The one who bought it went plowing; and [he found] the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.”

110. Jesus said, “He who finds the world and becomes rich, let him reject the world.”

111. Jesus said, “The heavens and the earth will roll up in your presence, and he who lives by the Living One will not see death . . .” Because did not Jesus say, “He who finds himself, the world is not worthy of him”?

112. Jesus said, “Woe to the flesh which depends on the soul; woe to the soul which depends on the flesh.”

113. His disciples said to him, “On what day will the kingdom come?” [He said,] “It will not come by expectation. They will not say, ‘Look here,’ or, ‘Look there,’ but the kingdom of the Father is spread out on the earth and men do not see it.”

114. Simon Peter said to them, “Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of the Life.” Jesus said, “Look, I shall guide her so that I will make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit, being like you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The Gospel According to Thomas

The Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas

Introduction: The Acts of Thomas is one of five well-known extracanonical Acts. Each tells of the adventures of an apostle of the church: Andrew, Peter, John, Paul, and Judas Thomas. Didymos Judas Thomas, the hero of the Acts of Thomas, is not well known to Western Christianity. His real name is Judas (“Judah,” in Hebrew). Both Didymos and Thomas mean “twin.” Judas is the twin of Jesus. Whether this

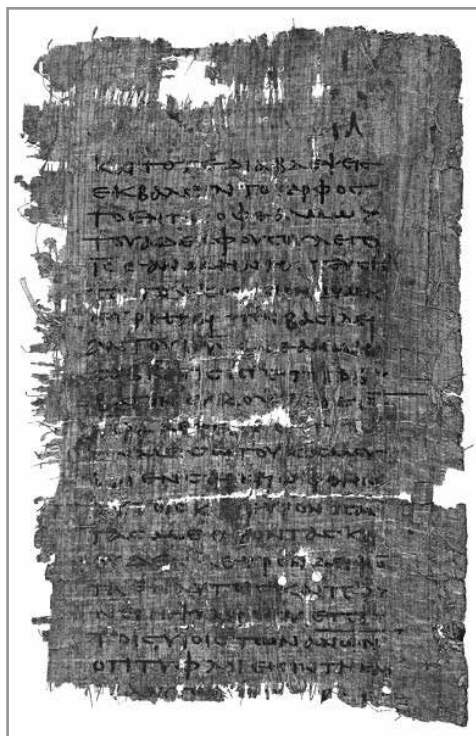


Fig. 1.2. *P. Oxy. 1, a Greek papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, dating from 130 to 250 C.E. including sayings 26 to 33 of the Gospel of Thomas. Bodleian Library. Commons.wikimedia.org.*

means biological or theological twin is not spelled out. His fame was widespread from Egypt to Syria and on to India, where there is an ancient community of Christians that claims Judas Thomas as its founder.

This account of Judas Thomas's adventures was most likely written in the first half of the third century. It makes use, however, of traditions that go back much earlier than that. The origin of the Acts of Thomas is considered by most historians to have been in eastern Syria, probably in the city of Edessa.

Thus the original language of the Acts of Thomas was Syriac, but the extant Syriac text has been "catholicized." That is, it has been altered to be more in line with the Western church's theology. The Greek versions of the Acts of Thomas thus appear to be translations of a better text than the one now preserved in Syriac manuscripts. There are some exceptions to this rule: the most important is "The Hymn of the Pearl" in chapters 108–113.

The Acts of Thomas is often labeled "gnostic." It fits this label to a great degree. The Acts of Thomas speaks of a mystical, saving knowledge that redeems the faithful

from this world. Its picture of Jesus is “docetic.” That is, the work rejects the concept that human salvation can take place as an historical event, brought about by a savior who is a fully human person. Thus salvation in the Acts of Thomas involves a sharp denial of the world and its created, physical processes.

Radical world rejection in this work is accompanied by extreme asceticism. Only those who are ascetics can know salvation. This theme is propelled in the Acts of Thomas by plays on the word *koinonia* and its cognates. This family of words means “community,” “marriage,” and “sexual intercourse.” The stories in the document are often built upon plays of meaning which are possible when the same word can refer to the church community (ascetic), a heavenly, transsexual marriage (see chapters 12-15), and the sexual union of male and female (often known as “filthy *koinonia*”).

Thomas’s activity is truly an extension of Jesus’ in this work. Didymos Judas Thomas is not only Jesus’ “twin,” the two figures even mingle together and become interchangeable at one point (see chapter 11). Such ideas as these may pose real problems for those familiar only with Western Christian writings, such as those canonized by the Western churches. For example, what basis in fact might there be for this tradition? Again, by what warrant did the third and fourth-century Western leadership reject this writing and this unique tradition regarding Jesus’ twin brother Judas?

Act One

[**Summary:** 1. The apostles are all gathered in Jerusalem: Simon Peter, Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, John his brother, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas the brother of James. They apportion the earth for their missionary activities, each to be an apostle to a separate region. Thomas “who is called Didymos” is assigned to India. He objects because “a weakness of the flesh” prohibits his travel, and, as a Hebrew he cannot preach the gospel to Indians. The Savior appears to him at night and assures Thomas, “My grace is with you.” Thomas says, “Send me to some other place you wish, for I am not going to the Indians.” 2. Jesus appears to an Indian merchant named Abban and, knowing that Abban has been sent to buy a carpenter slave,¹ sells Thomas to Abban. When Jesus leads Thomas to Abban, the merchant asks, “Is this your master?” Thomas says, “Yes, this is my Lord.” “I have bought you from him,” said Abban. And the apostle stands silent. 3. The next morning, Thomas goes off with Abban. They sail, with a favorable wind, and arrive at Andrapolis. 4. As they leave the ship, they hear the sound of a festival. It is the wedding of the King’s daughter. Abban and Thomas go to the wedding. 5. The apostle, to everyone’s astonishment, puts on a show of very bad manners by not eating or drinking anything at the banquet. At the guests’ questions about his abstinence, he says, “I have come here for something greater than food or drink.” The guests at the wedding anoint Thomas with oil. A flute girl, being a Hebrew, recognizes something divine in Thomas and stands near him. 6. One of the cup-bearers slaps Thomas. Thomas curses the cup-bearer, then sings the hymn:]

The maiden is the daughter of light,
the royal aura of kings rests and stands upon her,

looking upon her is delight,
 she is aglow with shining beauty.
 Her clothes are like spring flowers,
 from them is diffused a scent of sweet fragrance.
 The King is established in the crown of her head,
 he feeds those who are established under him with his ambrosia.
 Truth sits upon her head,
 she reveals joy by [the motion] of her feet.
 Her mouth is open, it is becoming to her [Syr.: with it she sings loud songs of
 praise];
 Thirty-two sing to her hymns of praise.
 Her tongue is like the curtain of the door,
 which is flung open to those who are entering.
 Her neck is like steps
 which the first artisan created.
 Her two hands make signs and trace secrets,
 proclaiming the dance of the blessed aeons,
 her fingers secretly reveal the gates of the city.
 Her bedchamber is light,
 waiting the fragrance of balsam and all sweet aromatics;
 giving out the sweet smell of myrrh and [fragrant] leaves.
 Inside are scattered myrtle and all sorts of sweet-smelling blossoms,
 the doorways are decorated with reeds.
 Her groomsmen surround her, their number is seven;
 she has chosen them.
 Her bridesmaids are seven;
 they dance before her.
 There are twelve in number who serve before her;
 they are her subjects.
 They gaze and look to the bridegroom,
 so that they may be enlightened by looking at him,
 and they shall be with him forever in that eternal joy,
 and they shall be at that marriage at which the princes gather,
 and linger over the banquet
 of which those who are eternal are worthy.
 They shall dress in royal clothes
 and shall be garbed in magnificent garments,
 and both shall be in joy and exultation,
 and they shall glorify the Father of the All,
 whose haughty light they received;
 they were enlightened by the vision of their Lord,
 they received his ambrosial food
 which has nothing lacking.
 and they drank from his wine
 which gives them neither thirst nor desire.
 They glorified and praised, with the Living Spirit,
 the Father of Truth and the Mother of Wisdom.

[**Summary:** 8. Only the flute girl understands the hymn because it is in Hebrew. She adores Thomas; she plays her flute for the guests but keeps looking over at Thomas. The cup-bearer, who slapped Thomas, goes to the well. There he is killed by a lion, and a black dog brings his right hand back to the feast (which fulfills Thomas's curse). 9. This amazes the guests. The King invites Thomas to pray for the bride. The apostle demurs, but is persuaded. 10. Thomas then is led to the Bridal Chamber and he prays over the couple.]

11. The King ordered the groomsmen to leave the Bridal Chamber. When all had gone and the doors were closed, the groom lifted the veil of the Bridal Chamber, so that he should bring the bride to himself. He saw the Lord Jesus, in the likeness of Judas Thomas the apostle, speaking to the bride. But Thomas had just blessed them and left them. The groom said: "Did you not leave in front of everyone? How did you get here?" The Lord said to him: "I am not Judas Thomas, I am his brother." And the Lord sat down on the bed and ordered them to sit on chairs, and he began to speak to them.

[**Summary:** 12. Jesus begins to preach a sermon to the young couple. He adjures them to refrain from "filthy sexual intercourse" so that they will not beget children who will only force the parents to become thieves in order to support their wants. Furthermore, says Jesus, most children are worthless or demon-possessed, or become lunatics or sick, and so on. Even if the children stay healthy, they will commit innumerable sins. "But if you obey and guard your souls pure to God, you will produce living children, whom hurts do not touch, and you will be carefree, living a life without grief and care . . . waiting to receive that marriage which is incorruptible and true, and you shall be

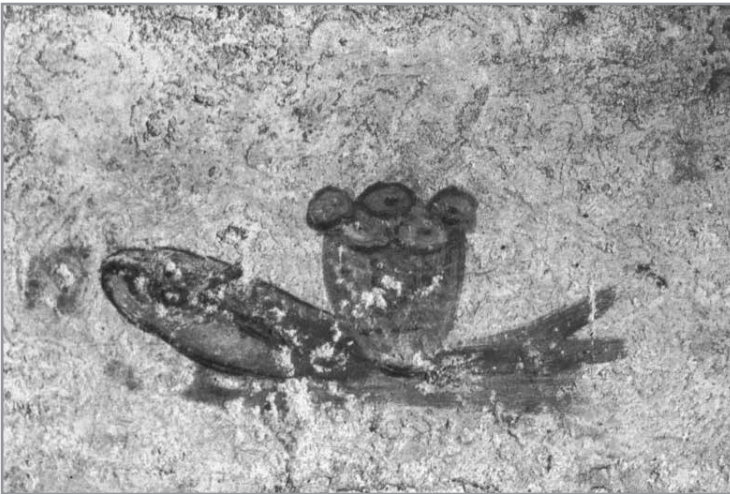


Fig. 1.3. Russian icon of the apostle Thomas, 18th century. While Thomas is better known in Western Christianity as "doubting Thomas" (cf. John 20:24-29), he is better known in the East as an evangelist. Kizhi monastery, Karelia, Russia. [Commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

its groomsmen entering that Bridal Chamber which is full of immortality and light.”² 13. At this, the couple refuses to have sex with each other, they give themselves instead to the Lord, and “abstain from filthy lust.” When the King comes in to them in the morning he is surprised to find the couple not shy with each other, but, as the Queen (who has also come in) says to her daughter, “Why are you sitting there that way, child? You are not ashamed but are acting as if you have lived with your husband for a long time!”³]

14. The bride answered, “Truly, father, I am much in love, and I pray to my Lord that the love which I have known this night will remain with me, and I seek for the husband whom I knew today. I am no longer veiled, because the mirror [or, veil] of shame has been removed from me. I am no longer ashamed or bashful, for the deed of shame and bashfulness has been taken far from me. And I am not frightened, because the fear did not remain with me. I am in joy and delight because the day of delight was not disturbed, and because have set aside this man and this marriage which passes away from before my eyes, for I am joined in another marriage. And [I rejoice] because I did not have intercourse with the temporary man whose end is regret and bitterness of soul, but I am yoked with the True Man.”

15. [The groom also makes a speech:] “I thank you, Lord, who was preached through the stranger and was found in us; who has put me far from corruption and sown life in me; who has delivered me from this chronic disease which is hard to cure and heal, and has placed me into eternity and wise health; who has shown yourself to me and has revealed to me everything about me which I am; who has redeemed me from the Fall and has led me to the better; who has redeemed me from temporary things and made me worthy of immortal and eternal things; who has humbled yourself to me and my insignificance, so that placing me beside greatness you should unite me with yourself; who did not hold back your own mercy from me who was perishing, but you showed me how to seek myself and to know who I was and who and how I am now, so that I should become again what I was;⁴ whom I did not know, but you yourself hunted me out; whom I did not comprehend, but you received me; whom I have experienced and now cannot recall; whose love ferments in me, and I am not able to speak as I ought, but what I am able to say about him is short and very little, and does not come close to his glory. He does not blame me as I am bold to speak to him and say what I do not know; I say this because of love for him.”

[**Summary:** 16. The King is very unhappy at this. He sends out orders to arrest Thomas. But Thomas has set sail, leaving the flute girl weeping because he did not take her along. When she hears what has taken place, she says, “Now I also have found repose here.”

Act Two

17. Thomas and Abban arrive in India and report to King Gundaphorus. The king asks Thomas if he will build a palace for him. Thomas says, “Yes . . . because for this I came to build and to work as a carpenter.” 18. The king and Thomas discuss plans for the palace. Thomas will build the palace during the winter, which is not the usual practice. Thomas draws master plans in the dust,

with a reed. 19. The money which the king gives Thomas to build the palace is distributed to the poor. The king asks if the palace is built. Thomas says it is, except for the roof. “. . . Let it be roofed,” says the king. 20. The king finally finds out how his money has been spent and that the palace has not been built. He calls Thomas for a reckoning. 21. The king asks if the palace is built. Thomas says it is. The king asks to see the palace and is told that he cannot see it in this life, “but when you leave this life you will see it.” Thereupon the king orders Thomas thrown into prison and contemplates how best to torture him to death. Meanwhile, the king’s brother, Gad, falls ill. Gad blames his illness on Thomas and asks that the apostle be swiftly killed. 22. Gad dies and, in heaven, sees the palace Thomas built for his brother. 23. Gad is released from heaven to tell his brother of the wonderful palace. He does so, 24, and the king sends for Thomas, asking him for instruction in the gospel. 25. The apostle prays joyfully. 26. Gad and Gundaphorus will not let him alone. They finally ask for “the seal”⁵ which will make them Christians. 27. The apostle “seals” them. They hear the Lord’s voice. The apostle takes oil and pours it on their heads and gives a prayer:]

Come, holy name of Christ which is above every name.
 Come, power of the Most High and perfect compassion.
 Come, highest gift.
 Come, compassionate Mother.
 Come, fellowship of the male.⁶
 Come, you [fem.] who reveal the concealed mysteries.
 Come, Mother of the seven houses in order that your repose may be in the eighth house.
 Come, Elder of the five members: understanding, thought, wisdom, Compassion, reasoning.
 Have union⁷ with these youths.
 Come, Holy Spirit, and cleanse their testicles,⁸
 and especially seal them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[**Summary:** When dawn comes they all celebrate a Eucharist (Lord’s Supper). 28. The apostle preaches an ascetic sermon, 29. he blesses all present, and he fasts. The Lord appears and sends Thomas “two miles down . . . the road.” He has a task for the apostle.

Act Three

30. The apostle finds the corpse of a beautiful boy beside the road and discerns evil at work. 31. A great serpent comes out of a hole and admits that he killed the boy. There was a beautiful woman with whom the serpent fell in love. The snake found the young man kissing her and having intercourse [*koinonia*] with her, and killed him. The apostle asks the snake to identify himself. 32. Among other evil deeds, the snake tempted Eve; he caused Cain to kill Abel; he is the Satan. 33. The apostle commands the snake “in the name of Jesus to . . . suck out your poison which you put into this man, and draw it out and receive it from him.” The snake is unwilling, but Thomas compels him to do it. The young man becomes healed; the snake swells up, explodes, and dies. 34. The young man expresses his freedom from Satan. 35. Thomas warns him not to

take his attraction to Jesus lightly. 36-37. A sermon, by Thomas, based upon the miracle.]

Act Four

39. While the apostle was yet standing in the road and talking with the crowd, a donkey's colt came up and stood in front of him. The colt opened his mouth and said: "Twin Brother [*didymos*] of Christ, apostle of the Most High and brother initiate of the hidden word of Christ, who received his secret sayings,⁹ coworker of the Son of God, who though free became a slave and was sold and led many into freedom; member of a great race which condemned the enemy and redeemed its own; who brings life to many in the country of the Indians—for you came to men who have gone astray, and through your manifestation and your divine words they are now turning toward the One who sent you, the God of truth—climb up and sit on me and rest until you enter the city."

[**Summary:** 40. The apostle asks the colt who he is. The colt says that he is a descendant of Baalam's donkey. Jesus rode one of the colt's ancestors into Jerusalem. Thomas is awed at this and refuses to ride. The colt persuades Thomas 41. and, after the ride up to the city, when Thomas dismounts, the colt falls dead. The crowd asks Thomas to raise the colt. Thomas says he could raise the colt "in the name of Jesus," but it is not useful and helpful to do so.

Act Five

42. The apostle is confronted by a "very lovely woman" who says that she has been tormented by "the Adversary" for five years. 43. She says that one day as she was coming from her bath a troubled man, weak with love for her, accosted her. He wanted to have sexual intercourse (*koinonia*) with her. She refused; she never had sexual intercourse even with her betrothed. She asked her maid if she had seen the youth; the maid replied that she had seen an old man. In the night, the demon youth raped her. This violation has been going on for five years. She asks Thomas to exorcise the demon. 44. Thomas, by means of a prayer incantation, calls the demon to him. 45. The demon appears and tries to put a counter-spell on Thomas, "What have we to do with you, apostle of the Most High?"¹⁰ 46. The demon is unsuccessful and leaves, weeping for love of the woman. He vanishes in smoke and fire. 47-48. Thomas raises a prayer of confession, thanks, and supplication.¹¹]

50. And he began to say, "Come, perfect compassion.

Come, fellowship of the male.

Come, she who understands the mysteries of the elect.

Come, she who has companionship in all the contests of the noble athlete [or, noble contender].¹²

Come, silence that reveals the great acts of the whole greatness

Come, she who reveals secret things, and makes the forbidden manifest.

Holy Dove, who begets twin young, Come, hidden Mother.

Come, she who is revealed in her deeds

and who presents joy and repose to those who are united with her.

Come and unite with us in this eucharist

which we celebrate in your name, and in the love feast [*agape*] to which we are gathered at your call.”¹³

Act Six.

[**Summary:** 51. There is a young man who had committed a sinful act. He comes and takes the Eucharist in his mouth; his hands wither so that he is unable to put them to his mouth. The witnesses to this event inform Thomas, and he asks the youth what crime he had committed. The youth replies, “A woman who lives outside the town loved me and I loved her. When I heard your sermon I came forward to receive the seal with the others. But you said, ‘Whoever shall unite [*koinonia*] in foul intercourse, especially in adultery, shall



Fig. 1.4. Bread and fish symbolize the Eucharist; Christian fresco from the catacomb of St. Callistus, Rome. Commons. [wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

not receive life from the God whom I preach.' Since I was very much in love, I asked her, trying to persuade her, that she would become my consort in chastity and pure conduct, which you spoke about. She refused. Because she would not agree, I took a sword and killed her, for I could not stand it if she committed adultery with another."

52. The apostle responds by condemning "insane sexual intercourse." He asks that a bowl of water be brought. He prays over the bowl and tells the young man to wash his hands; the youth does so and is healed. 53. The apostle and the young man go to the inn and find the beautiful girl lying there, dead. 54. Thomas said to the young man, "Go and hold her hand and say to her, 'I, by my hands, killed you with iron, and with my hands, by the faith in Jesus, raise you.'" The youth does so, and the woman is restored to life. 55-57. She tells the apostle that a man in black led her to hell and showed her horrible visions, terrible tortures happening to people who had sexual intercourse and bore children. 58. Thomas assures her of the forgiveness of her sin. 59. All the witnesses to this believe. 60-61. A prayer by Thomas.

Act Seven

62-64. A captain of a certain King Misdæus comes to Thomas and tells him that the captain's wife and daughter are possessed by demons who are sexually assaulting their women. 65. The captain is told he must believe in Jesus, and then his women will be healed. The captain confesses his faith and says, "Help my little faith."¹⁴ Thomas gathers the crowd around him. 66. A sermon about Jesus' constant care for his own is preached. 67. The apostle blesses all who are gathered there.

Act Eight

68. Thomas travels on with the captain and a wagon driver. 69. It is very hot and the animals pulling their wagon become tired. A herd of wild donkeys is nearby and Thomas tells the wagon driver that if he believes in Jesus he should go to the wild donkeys and ask for four of them to pull the wagon. 70. The captain does so, in spite of his fear. The donkeys obey him, all of them, not just four. Thomas rebukes them, asking again for only four. Again all the donkeys want to pull the wagon for the apostle. Thomas rebukes them, and finally the excess number of donkeys moves off. 71. They come to the city where the captain and the driver tell everyone of the miracle and a great crowd gathers.

72. The apostle prays 73. and commands one of the wild donkeys to go to the court of the King to summon all the demons there. 74. The donkey goes, accompanied by a great crowd. He summons the demons. 75. The captain's wife and daughter come forth. The apostle commands the demons to be exorcised "in the name of Jesus." The women fall down as if dead. The demons rebuke Thomas 76. and one asks to be set free. 77. The apostle banishes the demons. The women are still lying as if dead. 78. The wild donkey exhorts the apostle to heal the women and 79. the crowd to believe in Jesus. 80. The apostle replies in a prayer to Jesus, and then 81. restores the women. The wild donkeys go back to their grazing grounds. Thomas watches over them so that they are not harmed.

Act Nine

82. We are introduced to Mygdonia, wife of Charisius, a close relative of the King. She comes, from curiosity, to see this wonderworker, Thomas. Mygdonia arrives in a sedan chair, borne by her slaves, but the crowds are so great around Thomas that she must send for more servants to beat aside the throng so that she can see Thomas. Thereupon, the apostle rebukes them. 83. To bear their burdens they must refrain from adultery, murder, theft, and other vices, especially “from horrid intercourse and the couch of uncleanness.”¹⁵ 85-86. Thomas continues his speech, and exhortation to “holiness.” 87. The crowd is very excited over his sermon. Mygdonia throws herself at the apostle’s feet and begs that “I may become God’s dwelling place, and rejoice in the prayer and the hope and his faith, and that I too may receive the seal, and become a holy temple and he should dwell in me.” 88. The apostle adjures Mygdonia to give up her wealth, fame, pomp of adornment, and to renounce sex, “the fellowship of childbearing.” He bids her to “go in peace.” She is afraid she will not see Thomas again, but he assures her that Jesus will be with her. She goes home. 89. Charisius, her husband, comes to the dinner table and sees that his wife is not present. At his inquiry, the servants tell him that Mygdonia is ill in her bedchamber. He hurries to her and asks what is wrong. She says she is ill. 90. Charisius brings dinner to the room, but she still refuses to eat; he dines alone. She also refuses to sleep with him. 91. When Charisius wakes, he describes a strange dream to her. He says that he and his friend the King were at table and an eagle came and bore off two partridges to its nest. The eagle came back and took a dove and a pigeon. The King shot an arrow at the eagle, but it passed harmlessly through the bird. Mygdonia says, “Your dream is good, for you eat partridges daily, but the eagle has not tasted partridge till now.” 92. Charisius gets up, and accidentally puts his left sandal on his right foot. He takes this for another bad omen. 93. Mygdonia hurries to Thomas. 94. She confesses to the apostle that she has accepted Thomas’s words. Thomas delivers a sermon urging her to an ascetic life.

95. Charisius comes to breakfast and misses his wife. She has, he is told, gone to the “stranger” who is a doctor of souls. She returns and goes to bed alone. Again she will not come to dinner. 96. Charisius remonstrates with her, warning her that Thomas is a magician. 97. Mygdonia is silent; when Charisius leaves she prays for strength to overcome her husband’s “shamelessness.” 98. Her husband returns to her after dinner and wants to have sexual intercourse. She rejects him for “My Lord Jesus, who is with me and rests in me, is greater than you.” She runs, naked, away from him and goes to sleep with her nurse.

99. Charisius is very upset. He expresses his woe in a long speech in which he bemoans the loss of his wife. 100. Charisius continues his complaint. He has lived with his wife less than a year and an “evil eye” has snatched her away. Charisius vows vengeance upon Thomas. He asks King Misdaeus to give him “the stranger’s head.” He also wants satisfaction in the matter of Siphor, the captain, who brought Thomas to the city and who is sheltering the apostle. Charisius describes Thomas as one who “teaches a new teaching, saying this, that no one is able to live unless he gives away all his goods and becomes a renouncer like he

is; and he works fast to make many consorts [*koinonos*] for himself." 101. Day dawns and Charisius goes to King Misdaeus and reports what has happened. 102. Misdaeus promises action. He send messengers to Thomas (Mygdonia is again there, listening to the apostle's sermon) and they rebuke Thomas through the captain, Siphor. The apostle tells Siphor not to worry. 103. Thomas asks Mygdonia what caused this uproar. She tells him it is because she will not sleep with her husband. Thomas encourages her to continue her good works. 104. Meanwhile, the captain reports back to the king and tells him how Thomas has helped him by healing his wife and daughter.

The king sends men to bring Thomas to him, but the crowds frighten them and they return without Thomas. Charisius vows he will fetch Thomas himself.

He accosts Thomas, arrests him, and brings him to King Misdaeus. To the king's questions, the apostle stands mute. They give Thomas one hundred twenty eight lashes and lock him up. The King and Charisius consider, meanwhile, how they will kill him. 107. The apostle goes to prison rejoicing that he can suffer for his Lord. 108. Thomas, in prison, sings the famous Hymn of the Pearl.^{16]}

When I was a small child [lit. "a speechless infant"]
 in the realms of my father
 I reposed in wealth and among delicacies.
 My parents provisioned me
 and sent me from the East, our home;
 from the riches of the treasury
 they made up a load, both great and yet light,
 so that I was able to bear it alone.
 [Gold from Beth 'Ellaye and silver from great Gazak]
 and chalcedony stones from India [and opals from Kushan.]
 They girdled me with steel, [which crushes iron.
 And they took off me the splendid robe
 which in their love they had wrought for me,
 and the purple toga
 which was woven to the measure of my stature],
 and they made an agreement with me,
 engraving it in my heart, so I would not forget.
 They said to me, "If you go down into Egypt
 and carry off from there the one pearl
 [which is in the midst of the sea,
 in the abode of the loud-breathing serpent,
 you shall put on again your splendid robe
 and your toga, which lies over it],
 and with your brother you shall become
 herald [heir] in our kingdom."
 109. I left the East upon the difficult and
 dangerous way, with two couriers,
 for I was very inexperienced to do this.
 I went over the borders of Mesene,

the gathering place of the East's merchants;
 I came to the country of Babylon
 [and entered within the walls of Sarbug].
 When I came into Egypt, the couriers with me left me.
 I went immediately to the serpent
 and [nearby his abode I stayed,
 until he should slumber and sleep],
 so that I could take my pearl away from him.
 As I was alone, [I was a stranger
 to my hosts who were my companions].
 But there I saw one of my fellow countrymen
 from the East, a free man, a youth gracious and favored,
 a son of the mighty.
 He came and joined me,
 and I made him my bosom companion,
 my friend, to whom I communicated.
 I warned him to watch the Egyptians
 and their unclean companionship¹⁷
 But I put on clothes like theirs
 [that they might not suspect] that I had
 come from without to take the pearl,
 and the Egyptians would wake the serpent against me.
 But for some reason I do not know, they learned
 that I was not their countryman.
 They treated me with guile and I ate their food.
 I forgot that I was the son of a king,
 and I served their king,
 [and I forgot the pearl
 for which my parents had sent me].
 And from the heaviness of their food,
 I fell into a deep sleep.
 110. While I suffered all this,
 my parents were aware of it and suffered for me.
 A proclamation was announced in our kingdom
 that all should come to our gate.
 And then the kings of Parthia and those
 in office and the rulers of the East
 [made a resolve] concerning me [that I
 should not be left] in Egypt.
 [They wrote to me a letter,
 and every noble set his name to it.
 (When it arrived)
 I awoke and stood up from my sleep],
 I took it and I kissed it and read it.
 It had been written
 concerning what was engraved in my heart.
 I remembered immediately that I am
 the son of kings, and [my noble birth asserted itself].

I remembered the pearl for which I was sent into Egypt.
 I began to cast a spell on the fearful serpent.
 I subdued him by naming my father's name.
 [And the name of our next in rank,
 and of my mother, the Queen of the East.]
 And I snatched the pearl,
 and I turned to go to my father's house.
 I stripped off their dirty robe
 and left it in their country.
 I directed myself to the way
 to the light of my homeland, the East.
 [And my letter, my awakener,
 I found before me on the way.]
 It, by voice, had awakened me
 as I was sleeping, and it led me to the light.
 [Written on Chinese tissue with red ochre,
 gleaming before me with its aspect
 and with its voice and its guidance
 encouraging me to haste],
 "From your father, King of Kings,
 and your mother, the Queen of the East,
 and your brother [our other son]
 to our son in Egypt, peace.
 Arise and wake from sleep,
 and hear the words of [our letter],
 and remember you are a son of kings.
 Become sane again concerning your yoke of slavery!
 Remember your robe with the golden hem!
 Remember the pearl for which you were sent to Egypt!
 [Remember your splendid robe,
 and think of your glorious toga,
 that you may put them on and deck yourself therewith.]
 I did not remember my splendor [its dignity,
 for I had left it in my childhood in my father's house].
 Suddenly I saw my garment;
 it became like me as in a reflection,
 and I saw all myself upon it,
 and I knew, and I saw myself through it;
 because we were divided apart,
 and then, again, we were one form.
 It was not otherwise concerning the treasurers
 who brought me the garment;
 I saw them as two,
 but both a single form;
 there was one symbol of the king impressed on them both.
 They had treasure and riches in their hands,
 they gave me honor; and my splendid robe
 was decorated in gold and gleaming colors

[with gold and beryls,
 chalcedonies and opals,
 and sardonyxes of varied color.
 This also was made ready in its grandeur;
 and with stones of adamant
 were all its seams fastened].
 And the image of the King of Kings
 was all over it.
 And sapphire stones
 in its magnificence were sewn to it with harmony.
 And I saw that throughout it
 were moving the motions of knowledge. And it was ready to become speech.
 I heard its homily,
 [which it whispered at its descent]:
 "I am his, the most manly of all men,
 on account of whom [they reared me before my father].
 And I perceived myself his manhood.
 And all the kingly motions
 rested on me; its motions increasing."
 It hurried forward from the hands
 of [its bringers, that I might take it],
 and my desire quickened me to hasten to greet and receive it.
 Reaching out I [took it];
 I was decorated with [its[colors,
 and I put on my royal toga completely.
 I put it on and went
 into [the gate of greeting and homage].
 I bowed my head and worshiped
 the glory of the Father who had sent it to me,
 because I had done his commandments,
 and he also had done what he promised.
 I joined [at the gate of his satraps . . .
 with his great ones].
 He rejoiced over me and he received me
 with him in the kingdoms.
 All his subjects hymned with beautiful voices.
 He promised me that
 I indeed would go with him into the gate of kings,
 in order that with my gifts and my pearl
 we would appear before the King.¹⁸

[Summary: 114. We again join Charisius who goes home thinking that he has solved his problem. He finds Mygdonia in mourning. He rebukes her, reminding her of his conjugal rights. 115. Mygdonia does not listen. Charisius renews his attack. 116. He reminds Mygdonia of how much he loves her. 117. She replies, "The one whom I love is better than you and your wealth . . . Your beauty will vanish . . . Jesus alone abides eternally. Jesus himself will liberate me from the shameful things I did with you." Charisius offers to free Thomas

if his wife will love him again. 118. He falls asleep, and Mygdonia sneaks out to meet Thomas.

Act Ten

119. Thomas reassures Mygdonia that Jesus will not desert her. (Thomas has miraculously escaped from prison.) 120. Mygdonia asks for “the seal” of Jesus. They go and wake Mygdonia’s nurse and she fetches water and bread for a eucharist. 121. Oil is poured out and Mygdonia is baptized in a nearby spring. 122. Thomas returns to prison (again with a miracle). 123. Charisius goes in to his wife finds her praying and again begs her to return to him.]

124. Charisius continues, “Recall the day on which you first met me. Tell me straight, was I more beautiful to you then, or Jesus at this time?” And Mygdonia said, “That time demanded its things; this time requires its own. That time was of the beginning; this is of the end. That was the time of a passing life; this is the time of eternal life. That was the time of passing pleasure; this is of one that endures forever. That was the time of day and night; this is one of day without night. You have seen that marriage which passes away; but this marriage remains forever. That joining [*koinonia*] was of corruption; but this is of life eternal. Those wedding attendants were transitory men and women; but these now remain to the end. [Syr. That marriage was founded on earth, where there is a ceaseless pressure; but this on the fiery bridge, upon which grace is sprinkled.] That Bridal Chamber is taken down again; this remains forever. That bed is covered with blankets; but this with love and faith. You are a passing and decaying bridegroom, but Jesus is a true bridegroom, remaining immortal forever. That bridal gift was money and robes that grow old, but this is living words which never pass away.¹⁹

[**Summary:** 125. Charisius goes and tells the king all that happened. The king wants to kill Thomas, but Charisius wants to frighten the apostle so that Thomas will tell Mygdonia to return to her husband. Thomas is brought before the king. 126. They argue about what he is preaching and the effects it is having. 127. Misdaeus sets Thomas free and tells him to repair Charisius’s marriage. Thomas refuses. 128. Charisius pleads with the apostle to give Mygdonia back to him. Thomas again refuses. 129. They return to Charisius’s house where Mygdonia expresses her new happiness. 130. Thomas tests Mygdonia by telling her to go to Charisius. She passes the test by refusing. Charisius threatens to tie up his wife to keep her from Thomas. 131. Thomas leaves and goes to captain Siphor’s house.]

132. Thomas began to speak about baptism: “This baptism is forgiveness of sins. It begets anew a light which shines all around; it begets anew the new man, mixes spirit and man, makes new the soul. It resurrects the new man three times and is the fellow [*koinonos*] of the forgiveness of sins. Glory be to you, unspeakable one who is united [*koinonein*] with us in baptism! Glory be to you the invisible power in baptism. Glory be to you, renewal through whom those who are baptized are renewed, those who join with your state.” And when he said this, he poured oil on their heads and said, ‘Glory to you, love of compassion. Glory to you, name of the Christ. Glory to you, the power built in Christ.’

And he ordered a bowl to be brought, and he baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²⁰

When they were baptized and had put on their clothes, he placed bread on the table, blessed it, and said, “This is the bread of life; those who eat of it remain incorruptible. Bread which fills the hungry souls with its blessing, you are the one deemed worthy to receive a gift, so that you may be for us forgiveness of sins, and, so that those who eat you become immortal. We utter over you the name of the Mother, of the unutterable mystery of the hidden archons and powers. We utter your name, Jesus.” And he said, “Let the blessed power come, and let the bread be empowered, in order that all souls which partake may be saved from sins.” He broke it and gave it to Siphor, his wife, and his daughter.²¹

Act Eleven

[**Summary:** 134-138. In this act, Tertia, the wife of Misdaeus, the king, becomes a member of Thomas’s group. She, of course, begins to withhold her favors from her husband. Misdaeus says that Thomas has bewitched Tertia and in a rage has Thomas seized.

Act Twelve

139-149. Vazan, the son of Misdaeus, is converted.



Fig. 1.5. A man sets a (eucharistic) table while a woman offers prayer. Fresco from the catacomb of St. Callistus, Rome. [Commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).