

## 6. The Acts of Philip

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The *Acts of Philip* is an extensive collection of loosely connected episodes<sup>1</sup>. However, it is possible to identify four cycles within the material: chapters 1–2, 3–7, 8–14, and chapter 15 with the martyrdom<sup>2</sup>. A part of the text is extant in two versions, a shorter and a longer one. This is the case with chapters 3 and 8, where the two commission narratives are found<sup>3</sup>. There is no commission narrative preceding the first act, which relates that Philip was coming from Galilee and raised the son of a widow. The first reference to commission occurs in chapter 3, where a loosely connected sequence of ‘acts’ begins (chs. 3–7).

### *Acts of Philip 3*

At the beginning of chapter 3, Philip meets Peter and the disciples ‘in a certain city’, and addresses them in the following way<sup>4</sup>:

1. The Greek *Acts of Philip* contains fifteen ‘acts’ plus the martyrdom text, of which acts 11–15 (whose existence was indicated by the title of a known recension) were found only in 1974 by F. Bovon and B. Bouvier, cf. Bovon, ‘Actes de Philippe’, 4434 and ‘Editing’, esp. 12–3. Chapter 10 is still missing, and some others (11, 14, 15) are fragmentary. Bovon, ‘Actes de Philippe’, 4467, dates the composition of the fifteen acts to the end of the fourth century. De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Philippi’, 469, situates the *Acts of Philip* ‘in encratite circles in Asia minor somewhere about the middle of the 4th century’. Amsler, *Actes de l’apôtre Philippe*, 80, calls it a ‘first hand document’ (except for the second ‘act’) of the Asian encratic milieu on the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. I relied on the Greek text in Bovon et al., *Acta Philippi*, vol 1.

2. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 21. Whereas the third and fourth cycles are clearly detectable units, the first two ‘cycles’ are rather haphazard.

3. For an overview of the textual witnesses see Amsler, *Actes de l’apôtre Philippe*, 88.

4. This chapter is preserved in two codices, the shorter version in the Greek Vatican Codex 824 (11th century, quoted as *V*), the longer in Codex Xenophontos 32 from Athos (14th century, quoted as *A*). We deal with the shorter text first.

I entreat you, who won the crown of Christ in the apostolic rank (ἐν τῇ ἀποστολικῇ τάξει), endow me with your power that I may go and preach, and take part in your glory in heaven. You showed your zeal according to your power. Pray, therefore, also for me now, that I may go and preach the gospel, and may be counted among those who realised the power that is in them<sup>5</sup>.

Peter and the disciples pray for Philip. Then ‘the blessed John’ speaks, and reminds Philip that ‘Andrew went to Achaia and Thrace, Thomas to India and the wicked flesh-eaters, and Matthew to the relentless cave dwellers, whose nature is savage, and the Lord is with them’. He encourages Philip not to wait, because Jesus will be also with him. They pray for him and send him out to preach (εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα).

In this narrative, Philip’s legitimacy comes from the apostles Peter and John. This falls in line with the accounts of the canonical *Acts* about Philip, one of the seven Hellenists<sup>6</sup>. *Acts* introduces Philip among the seven whom the Jerusalem church entrusted with the task of charity<sup>7</sup>. We learn that the apostles ‘prayed and laid their hands on them’. Later Philip preaches in Samaria<sup>8</sup>. When the apostles in Jerusalem hear that ‘Samaria had accepted the word of God’ they send out

5. *Acts of Philip* 3.1. Cf. *Letter of Peter to Philip* (NHC VIII, 2) 132.15–133.5: ‘Now I want you to know, our brother [that] we received orders from our Lord and the Savior of the whole world that [we] should come [together] to give instruction and preach in the salvation which was promised us by our Lord Jesus Christ. But as for you, you were separate from us, and you did not desire us to come together and to know how we should organize ourselves in order that we might tell the good news’. Trans. M.W. Meyer in Robinson (ed), *Nag Hammadi Library*, 434.

6. The *Acts of Philip* identifies the apostle of the Gospels (and the list of *Acts* 1.13) with the Hellenist of *Acts*. This is evident also in the long text of chapter 3. Although in the first part of the chapter Philip seems to be identical with the Hellenist of *Acts*, in 3.9.1–7 he speaks as a disciple who was with Jesus, witnessed his ascent to heaven, and received the Holy Spirit. Already Papias blended the two figures when he spoke of the daughters of the apostle Philip (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.9, cf. *Acts* 22.8–9). Theißen, *Religion*, 351, note 15, recently argued for the identification of the Philip of the *Gospel of John* and the Philip of the Lucan *Acts* (6.5, 8.5–40, and 21.8), on the basis that Luke was interested in separating the disciple Philip from the Hellenist.

7. *Acts* 6.1–6.

8. *Acts* 8, especially verses 4–8, 14–17. Cf. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 147–54.

Peter and John, who pray that the new converts may receive the Holy Spirit, because ‘they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus’. Then Peter and John lay their hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit. The important difference between the two narratives is that in the Lucan *Acts* Philip does not ask for the apostle’s support. In the same passage, however, Simon Magus beseeches Peter and John to give him the power to share the Holy Spirit by laying his hands on others, and this might have influenced the formulation of the episode in the *Acts of Philip*<sup>9</sup>.

The author of the longer text added further elements of divine commission to the episode. In the Codex Xenophontos (*A*) we first find additions to the story, and then a completely new version. Among the minor additions, one is especially interesting if we relate it to the passage in the Lucan *Acts*. When Philip addresses Peter and the disciples, he calls them συμπνεύμονες<sup>10</sup>, the ones who have the same Spirit. This is probably a reaction to *Acts* 8, where he is not capable of giving the Spirit to the new converts, and Peter and John have to help him. This is also understandable because he did not receive the Spirit in Jerusalem with the twelve<sup>11</sup>. Our text affirms that Philip is equal to them as a possessor of the Holy Spirit. According to the second version of the story, Philip reports his mission in Athens (ch. 2 of the *Acts of Philip*), and the disciples praise God. Then Philip asks John and Peter,

‘I beseech you, blessed John, and you, blessed Peter, pray for me, so that I too may accomplish my apostleship (τὴν ἀποστολήν μου) as the Lord entrusted to me’. When they were praying at length for him, a voice came from heaven and said, ‘Hurry, Philip! Behold, my angel is with you<sup>12</sup>, do not neglect your task’. The blessed Philip went out rejoicing in the same hour, because he was found worthy of such a

9. Cf. Simon’s words δότε καὶ μοι τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην with Philip’s words ἐνδυναμώσατε καὶ μέ.

10. We have to do with a hapax legomenon, and therefore the translation necessarily remains interpretative. Bovon et al., *Acta Philippi*, vol 1, 77, translate ‘mes compagnons par l’Esprit’. For the interpretation see Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 151.

11. *Acts* 2.1–4.

12. The archangel Michael helped Philip in 1.8 and 11, and will be with him in Martyrdom 31.

voice. He took three breads and five staters with himself, because he went for a long journey. Jesus was secretly walking with him and strengthened him, and opened the senses of his new man. The Spirit of the Lord filled him with answers, because earlier he did not have enough practice in speaking.

The divine epiphany that we find here is very similar to the visions in the commission narratives discussed in previous chapters<sup>13</sup>. Instead of legitimation through the apostles, this version of the episode speaks about legitimation from Jesus in a revelation. Yet, I hesitate to call it a commission story. First, Philip speaks about apostleship as something that he has already received earlier. Second, if we compare the episode with the structure of the commission stories, we find that it lacks most of the crucial elements (conflict, protest, description of the task), and is restricted to the motifs of reassurance and reference to the beginning of the hero's ministry.

The story can be interpreted as the manifestation of power conflicts between different Christian groups, who identified themselves with the individual apostles. If we try to situate it in our basic typology, we find that it is close to the institutional form of commission. It confirms the overall hierarchy of the Church by integrating the hero into that structure. Philip's authority is dependent first on Peter's and then on John's. The longer text tries to democratise this system by emphasising equality between the apostles, and linking Philip's legitimacy immediately to divine epiphany.

The long text further relates how Philip prays to Jesus on the road:

Filled with the Holy Spirit in grace, he longed for the sight of the glory and said, 'Lord Jesus, describe for me the words of that understanding. If the concord of your visitation is with me<sup>14</sup>, and if I am worthy of that understanding, as my brethren, reveal yourself to me. [...] You, who offered to us the good things from your father's good-

13. Voice from heaven: *Acts* 9, *Acts of John* 18, *Acts of Titus* 1, etc. Opening of senses: *Acts* 9.18, *Acts of John* 113. Rejoicing: *Acts of John* 18. The hero's incapability: p. 121 above. For the Spirit telling the answers, see *Matthew* 10.19.

14. The expression ἡ ὁμόνοια τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς is as difficult to translate as many others in this prayer. (Already remarked by Bovon et al., *Acta Philippi*, vol 1, 82, note 23.)

ness, Saviour of the weak, reveal yourself to me, the one who loves you'. (3.4.2–7, 12–14)

As an answer to his prayer, a tree appears in the desert, and an eagle on it. The apostle recognises that Jesus appeared to him in that form, and—speaking ‘by the Spirit’—he glorifies Jesus and the Father. Then Jesus promises the apostle again that he will guide, protect, and strengthen him. Speaking animals as helpers of the apostles are familiar figures in the apostolic Acts, and the *Acts of Philip* is especially fond of them: from chapter 8, a leopard and a kid will be Philip’s faithful travelling companions<sup>15</sup>. However, a theriomorphic representation of Jesus is rather surprising in an early Christian text. It was probably inspired by another apocryphal legend, the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*, the Christian edition of which can be dated to the first half of the second century<sup>16</sup>.

The *Acts of Philip* develops the tradition of polymorphy and metamorphosis of Christ in a radical way when it turns to the theriomorphic representation of Jesus. The eagle appears because Philip wishes to see Jesus—he had already heard his voice—as further evidence of his equal rank among the apostles. Jesus neither explicitly confirms Philip’s position as an apostle, nor does he give him a task or assign a missionary field to him<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, we can classify this narrative as a story of divine call, emphasising the theme of reassurance (a specific motif of commission), rather than a complete commission narrative, where the assignment of a task plays a major role.

### ***Acts of Philip 8***

In chapter 8 of the *Acts of Philip* another sequence of ‘acts’ begins (chs. 8–15). This takes Philip and his companions to the city of Ophorymos, interpreted as ‘the promenade of the serpents’ and occasion-

15. For example, a lion accompanies Paul in his Acts (cf. Adamik, ‘Baptized Lion’, with further literature), a dog assists Peter (*Acts of Peter* 9–12), and asses help Thomas (*Acts of Thomas* 68–81). Cf. Chapter 7, p. 167.

16. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, 172. For a detailed discussion of this parallel, see the Appendix to this chapter. Cf. *Iliad* 7.58–60, where Apollo appears in the form an eagle and sits on the oak of Zeus.

17. Cf. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 154–6.

ally also identified as Hierapolis of Phrygia in Asia Minor<sup>18</sup>, where Philip suffers martyrdom. The chapter begins with the division of the missionary fields<sup>19</sup>, where Philip receives ‘the country of the Greeks’. He finds this task difficult and begins to complain. His sister Mariamne<sup>20</sup> speaks to the Lord about him, who appoints her as his companion. This is also necessary because Philip is audacious, irascible and likely to inflict much punishment on the people<sup>21</sup>. Jesus sends also Bartholomew and John with them<sup>22</sup>. He also orders Mariamne to disguise herself as a man—to which the long text adds an explanation about Adam, Eve, and the serpent, disclosing also that their destination will be Opheorymos, ‘the promenade of serpents’.

Then Jesus said to Philip, ‘Why do you hesitate, Philip? Did you not hear my teaching: “Behold, I am sending you [plur.] out like sheep into the midst of wolves”? Do not fear, therefore, their savageness. I will be always with you [sing.], helping and assisting [you]. Behold, I

18. The name of the city appears as Ὀφεόρυμος, Ὀφιόρυμος, Ὀφιορύμη. Its identification with Hierapolis is secondary: it never appears in the text of chapters 8–15 except for the title of chapter 13 (the chapter is known only from *A*) and in one form of the martyrdom. Already Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol 2/2, 11–2 suggested that the narrative retains historical reminiscences to the cult of the serpent in Hierapolis. Recently Amsler, ‘The Apostle Philip’ and *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 305–10, argued that the viper, the leopard, and the kid all fit into the imagery of the Phrygian cult of Cybele. De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Philippi’, 469, also identifies the serpent with Cybele and the city with Hierapolis. Cf. Amsler, *Actes de l’apôtre Philippe*, 69–76 and *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 17–20. Bovon, ‘Les Actes de Philippe’, 4493–4 rejects the identification of the city with Hierapolis on philological grounds.

19. Only the beginning of the chapter is preserved in *A*. As a witness to the longer text of this chapter, we have the Athenian Codex 346 (15th century, quoted as *G*). For the division of the missionary fields, a frequent motif in the apostolic Acts, see pp. 219–224 below.

20. In *G* Mariamne ‘keeps record of the allotted lands’.

21. It is interesting to compare this with Jesus’ remark in the long text that ‘the character of women went into Philip, and the manly and brave character into you [Mariamne]’. The text echoes the classical Roman ideal: loosing one’s temper is a feminine trait of character and a man who acts out of anger is ridiculous; cf. Brown, *Body and Society*, 12.

22. According to the long text (*G*), Bartholomew is sent ‘to suffer with him’ (συμπάσχειν), and John is sent ‘so that he would encourage (παραθαρρύνῃ) them in the sufferings of martyrdom’. Cf. the classical example of Aaron, who was sent to serve as a mouth for Moses (*Exodus* 4.16).

send you [plur.] out as rays, I, the sun of righteousness. I am with you everywhere'<sup>23</sup>.

From this point on, the two extant witnesses considerably differ from each other. The text of *G* elaborates at length on the theme of commission. The metaphor of the rays evokes a meditation about the beneficent operation of the sun and the moon due to the providence of the Father<sup>24</sup>. For this reason, Jesus concludes that Philip and his companions have nothing to fear. Jesus will be with them in all dangers, and if people will persecute and abuse them, he will be there as 'a good physician' for them. If vipers threaten them, they only have to raise the cross, and the vipers will bow their heads<sup>25</sup>. But Philip is yet worried. He is afraid that if he goes to his allotted place, they will persecute him, because 'their nature is the serpent'. He will then avenge himself, and therefore transgress the commandment of Jesus not to take revenge<sup>26</sup>. In his answer<sup>27</sup>, Jesus tells about creation as the combination of contradictory elements: light and darkness, water and fire, good and bad. Then he tells the story of the Flood, pointing out that Noah brought also unclean animals to the ark. Peter remembered this when he asked Jesus, 'Do you want me to forgive my brother seven times, as Noah forgave?'<sup>28</sup> Then the discussion of providence in the creation continues with the lesson that 'you yourself should work for the salvation of the whole cosmos'. Now Philip and all who were with him, 'rejoiced in the teaching and precepts of the Lord'.

Here the two texts unanimously state that Philip, Bartholomew and Mariamne, 'holding the right hand of the Saviour' departed to the

23. *Acts of Philip* 8.5 (*V*). Cf. *Acts* 26.17–8, 'to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light'. 'Sun of righteousness' comes from *Malachi* 4.2 (3.20 LXX); the phrase was frequently applied to Jesus in the early Church, cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, 606, s.v. ἥλιος B4.

24. *Acts of Philip* 8.5.5–19, cf. *Psalms* 8.4, 19.2–7, etc.

25. *Acts of Philip* 8.6.1–8.7.6.

26. *Acts of Philip* 8.8; cf. *Matthew* 5.38–48.

27. *Acts of Philip* 8.10–4.

28. *Matthew* 18.21–22 and *Luke* 17.4. There Peter does not mention Noah. However, he has to eat unclean animals in *Acts* 10.9–16, which God 'has made clean'.

land of the ‘Ophians’<sup>29</sup>. This is the conclusion of the chapter in *G*. As for *V*, it relates a highly interesting story of a leopard that wanted to devour a kid, but instead both animals received a human voice from Philip, praised God, and followed the apostles.

The differences between the two versions are considerable at first sight, but there is a core that remains the same in both. If we set aside for a moment the episode of the leopard and the kid in *V* and the lesson of natural philosophy in *G*, the basic narrative tells about the division of the missionary fields, Philip’s protest, Mariamne’s intercession, and the appointing of Mariamne, Bartholomew (and John) as Philip’s companions.

The division of the missionary fields, which we encountered already in the *Acts of Thomas*, is a frequent motif of the apostolic Acts—although it is not found in the earliest ones. Where it occurs, it always stands at the beginning of the narrative. This confirms that chapter 8 forms the beginning of a cycle that ends with the martyrdom, and can be best titled as ‘The Acts of Philip in the city of the serpents’<sup>30</sup>. This episode talks about the commission of Philip quite differently from chapter 3. Philip has a stable position among the apostles, and his authority is not dependent to any extent on Peter, John, or others. The redactor who connected this sequence with the preceding ‘acts’ made no effort to harmonise the profiles of the protagonists<sup>31</sup>.

The next motif is also typical, belonging to the basic elements of commission. Similarly to Thomas, he is unhappy with the land allotted to him<sup>32</sup>. It is, however, difficult to talk about ‘protest’ in Philip’s case. He is reluctant, he murmurs, but does not protest. Although he is

29. *Acts of Philip* 8.15. Both texts are silent about John, who was also sent with them in 8.3.

30. De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Philippi’, 469, talks about the ‘Acta Philippi in Hierapolis’, cf. note 18 above.

31. For this reason, in the case of the *Acts of Philip* I refrain from interpreting the text and the different commission motifs within the framework of a single plot.

32. Cf. *Acts of Thomas* 1, Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, 100, lines 8–9 and 101, lines 1–2: ‘Send me wherever you want to send me: to India I do not go’. For that passage and the dynamics of commission–protest–reassurance, see pp. 120–125 above.

an apostle with full powers, he relies on the mediation of his sister Mariamne to settle his conflict with the sender. The helper figure in this commission narrative becomes more important than in any other text that we have examined<sup>33</sup>. In this passage, indeed, Mariamne is an alter ego of Philip, rather than simply his helper. She talks with Jesus on his behalf, and she has to go everywhere with him<sup>34</sup>. The long text explains that the female nature ‘went into Philip’, while the male character went into Mariamne (see above). Although Mariamne has to disguise herself—because Eve put on the skin of the serpent<sup>35</sup>—this affects only her outward appearance, and does not mean that she has become a man<sup>36</sup>. She appears as a female counterpart of Philip when they baptise the converts in the city of Opheorymos: ‘And Philip baptised the men and Mariamne the women’<sup>37</sup>. When he healed the blind Stachys, he first ‘put his finger into the mouth of Mariamne’, then ‘he smeared [his eyes]’. Clearly, Philip healed the blind man with Mariamne’s spittle<sup>38</sup>. They healed in cooperation. Or even better, the healing power of Philip came from Mariamne. The relation of Philip and Mariamne is a variation on the theme of twins and brothers, an esteemed motif in early Christian tradition. Mariamne could just as easily deserve the cognomen ‘twin’ as Thomas. When the text introduces Mariamne, it also mentions Martha who ‘serves’ and ‘works’, implicitly identifying them with the sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany<sup>39</sup>. In the Martyrdom text of the *Acts of Philip*, Mariamne and Nicanora,

33. For a discussion of the function of the ‘helper’, see pp. 240–242 below.

34. *Acts of Philip* 8.3.1.

35. *Acts of Philip* 8.4.16, τὸ ἀπόδυμα τοῦ ὄφεως [...] ἐνεδύσατο διὰ τῆς Εὔας. The expression ἀπόδυμα seems to be a *hapax legomenon*. In the context it must mean ‘slough’, the layer of skin that a snake leaves behind, cf. Bovon et al., *Acta Philippi*, vol 1, 246, note 16.

36. Cf. *Gospel of Thomas* 114, ‘Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her [Mary] in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling your males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven”’. Cf. Meyer, ‘Making Mary Male’.

37. *Acts of Philip* 14.9.1–2.

38. *Acts of Philip* 14.7. The text breaks off here. Bovon et al., *Actes de Philippe*, 328, note 33, suggest that the lacuna resulted from censorship. Cf. *Mark* 7.33, 8.23, *John* 9.6.

39. Cf. *Luke* 10.38–41 and *John* 11.1, 12.1–8.

the proconsul's wife, are also twins (*Acts of Philip*, Martyrdom 9)<sup>40</sup>. Mariamne also seems to replace Philip's four daughters as his female companions, as they nowhere appear in the *Acts of Philip*<sup>41</sup>. Unlike Thecla at Paul's side (in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*), or Peter's daughter, she is neither Philip's disciple nor subordinate to him in any way. Her emancipated—indeed, leading—position among the apostles is similar to the figure of Mary Magdalene in a group of texts related to the Gnostics and the Nag Hammadi Library. One of the most important instances is the *Gospel of Mary*.

### **The Acts of Philip and the Gospel of Mary**

The Gospel of Mary relates the gathering of the apostles after Jesus' ascent to heaven<sup>42</sup>. The extant part begins with a dialogue of Jesus and the disciples about nature and sin. The dialogue ends with words of commission: 'Go then and preach the gospel of the kingdom. Do not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed for you, and do not give a law like a lawgiver lest you be constrained by it'<sup>43</sup>. After saying this, Jesus departed from them. The disciples

40. Other famous siblings in early Christian tradition include Peter and Andrew, John and James, Mary and Martha (also Lazarus) of Bethany, Jesus and James (and Jude), Alexander and Rufus (*Mark* 15.21), Clement and his brothers (*Recognitions*), Jesus and Thomas (see pp. 133f above), Mary (Magdalene) and Salome (*Pistis Sophia* 132), and Maximilla and Iphidamia (*Acts of Andrew*).

41. De Santos Otero, 'Acta Philippi', 470. Cf. note 6 above.

42. Only a part of the text is extant. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 3525 (late 3rd century) and Papyrus Rylands 463 (early 3rd century) contain fragments in Greek. The main witness is Berlin Codex 8502, containing a Coptic translation from a Greek text that was somewhat different from the text in the two papyri. The *Gospel of Mary* probably existed (maybe in a different form) already in the second century. Cf. Pasquier, *Évangile selon Marie*, 4; Luttikhuisen, *Gnostische geschriften*, 38. The Coptic and Greek texts with an English translation are found in Wilson and MacRae, 'Gospel According to Mary'. In the Greek text, Mary is called Mariamme.

43. *Gospel of Mary* 8.21–9.4. An alternative reading is 'I have left no commandment but what I have commanded you, and I have given you no law, as the lawgiver did, lest you be bound by it'.

were grieved and wept greatly, saying, 'How shall we go to the gentiles and preach the gospel of the kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?'

Now Mary stands up and encourages them, 'Do not weep and do not be irresolute, for his grace will be entirely with you and will protect you'. Peter asks Mary to tell the words of the Saviour that only Mary heard, because the Saviour loved her 'more than the rest of women'. Mary recounts a revelation about the ascent of the soul past the cosmic powers. Andrew and Peter receive her report with reluctance, and Peter cannot believe that Jesus revealed this to a woman. But Levi rebukes him, 'Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Saviour made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us'. The end of the text states that 'they began to go forth [to] proclaim and to preach'.

The *Gospel of Mary* also shows some traits of the commission narratives, emphasising the role of the helper figure at the expense of other motifs. It contains few narrative elements and lacks the biographical interest that characterises the apostolic Acts. Its central figure is Mary. Although the text does not identify her with any of the women by this name in the New Testament, she is most probably Mary Magdalene<sup>44</sup>, who appears as an important witness to Jesus' passion and resurrection in the canonical gospels<sup>45</sup>, and in apocryphal writings<sup>46</sup>. She is a dialogue partner of Jesus and receives special revelations<sup>47</sup>. In the *Gospel of Philip* (late 3rd century<sup>48</sup>) Jesus calls

44. Cf. Pasquier, *Évangile selon Marie*, 6; Luttikhuisen, *Gnostische geschriften*, 41–4; Collins, 'Mary Magdalene', 580. Mary Magdalene played an important role in the Gnostic tradition, and often appeared as a rival of Peter: *Gospel of Thomas* 114, *Pistis Sophia* 36 and 72.

45. *Matthew* 27.56,61, 28.1, *Mark* 15.40,47, 16.1, *Luke* 24.10–1, and especially *John* 20.11–8. Cf. Koivunen, *The Woman*, 119–33.

46. *The Epistle of the Apostles (Epistula apostolorum)* 10; *Gospel of Peter* 12–4 (both from the 2nd century). For a comprehensive study of 'the myth of Mary Magdalene' see Koivunen, *The Woman*, 119–88.

47. In *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* 98 and 114 (1st century), the *Dialogue of the Saviour* (2nd century), and especially in *Pistis Sophia* (early 3rd century). The first two texts speak about Mariamme and Mariam, respectively, the third about Mariam or Maria Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene his ‘companion’<sup>49</sup>, whom ‘he loved more than all the disciples and used to kiss her on her [mouth]’<sup>50</sup>. It is noteworthy that the text tells about three women who were with Jesus, namely his mother, her sister, and Magdalene. Each are called Mary, but only Mary Magdalene has the title ‘companion’. The *Gospel of Mary* reports both claims of the *Gospel of Philip* about Mary. Peter says that Jesus loved Mary more than the rest of women<sup>51</sup>, but when Levi rebukes Peter he adds that Jesus also loved her more than the rest of the disciples<sup>52</sup>. We may conclude that the figure of Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* reflects the portrait of Mary Magdalene in the aforementioned texts. In these writings, Mary Magdalene takes the role of the ‘beloved disciple’ as John in the Johannine tradition. And similarly to John, her special position as the companion of Jesus enables her to receive revelations that the rest of the disciples do not.

The parallels with the *Acts of Philip* are evident. The ‘weeping’ of the disciples, the mediating position of Mary, the encouraging words to the disciples, and the disapproval of Peter’s irascible temperament, even the formulation of many parts echoes chapter 8 of the *Acts of Philip*. Also in the longs text of *Acts of Philip* 8, there is a teaching of Jesus about nature and salvation. The *Gospel of Mary* probably served as a source to Philip’s commission story in the *Acts*

48. Cf. Isenberg, ‘Introduction’, 134. Isenberg proposes that the original language of the book was Greek, but it was composed in Syria. The text is an ‘eccentrically arranged’ compilation of traditions related to different subjects, including seventeen sayings and a few deeds of Jesus. Cf. Isenberg, ‘Introduction’, 133 and ‘Gospel of Philip’, 139.

49. *Gospel of Philip* 59.9, ΤΕΔΚΟΙΝΩC.

50. *Gospel of Philip* 63.34–6. ‘Mouth’ is a feasible conjecture. According to the *Gospel of Philip* 59.2–6, ‘It is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another. We receive conception from the grace which is in one another’. Kiss must be understood in the sacramental context of the *Gospel of Philip*. Rites enable the body to enter the world of light after death. The word ‘loved’ is also a conjecture, but there is hardly any arguable alternative for it. Cf. Isenberg, ‘Gospel of Philip’, 140–1; Luttikhuisen, *Gnostische geschriften*, 69. For a recent analysis of the sacramental language of the book in the context of Jewish and Christian sexual symbolism, see DeConinck, ‘True Mysteries’, 245–58.

51. *Gospel of Mary* 10.2–4, ΠΑΡΑ ΠΚΕCΕCΕΠΕ ΝCΖΙΜΕ (ΝCΖΙΜΕ?). Cf. the words of Elizabeth to Mary in *Luke* 1.42, εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναῖξίν.

52. *Gospel of Mary* 18.14–5, ΔCΘΓΩC ΝCΖΟΓΟ ΕΡΟΝ.

of Philip 8. Whether this was a direct or indirect influence, this writing—together with the related tradition about Mary Magdalene—helps us to understand the role of Mariamne in that episode<sup>53</sup>. As a record keeper of the allotted lands (in the long text) and ‘elected among women’, she appears as the confidante of Jesus standing above the apostles. She intervenes on behalf of Philip and escorts the apostle to support him. In the *Acts of Philip*, however, Mariamne is also closely associated with Philip. Rather than competing with him as Mary does with Peter in the *Gospel of Mary*, being Philip’s sister and the one who completes his personality, she is depicted as the apostle’s companion. This is, indeed, the key to understanding her figure: her close relationship with Jesus as well as Philip enables her to play a role similar to that of the Johannine Paraclete<sup>54</sup>. Mariamne’s remarkable role in the healing of Stachys also gains deeper sense in light of the Gnostic tradition about Mary (Magdalene). Philip’s putting his finger into the mouth of Mary can be connected with Jesus’ kissing her. Bodily contact mediates divine power from Jesus to Mary, and then from Mary to Philip. Earlier we have seen a similar idea of intimacy in the *Acts of John*, where bodily contact served as a source of knowledge about the polymorphous Jesus.

## Conclusions

In the commission stories of his Acts, Philip is an ambivalent character. This is apparent already in his identity: he is an amalgam of Philip the disciple and Philip the Hellenist<sup>55</sup>. The *Acts of Philip* probably derived the figure of Mariamne from the *Gospel of Mary*; Mariamne completes and balances the character of Philip. The commission narratives contain references to the Jewish Scriptures. The *Acts of Philip* could have used the Lucan *Acts* in depicting the relation of Philip and the other apostles, and it drew on the *Acts of Thomas* in reporting the division of the world among the apostles. With the *Acts of Peter and*

53. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 312, states that Mariamne ‘is no one else than Mary Magdalene of the gospels’, with traits of the figures of Martha and Jesus’ mother.

54. *John* 14.16.

55. Cf. p. 137, note 6 above.

*the Twelve*, as we will see in the following chapter, it shares the motif of the apostles' commission to heal people.

Philip appears as a somewhat marginal figure in the company of the apostles, first seeking their confirmation and then rebelling against his allotted missionary field<sup>56</sup>. His commission story also contains mystical and speculative elements; it is enough to think about Jesus' appearance to Philip in the form of an eagle (see below) or his cosmological explanations to him. The group of the *Acts of Philip*, therefore, may have understood itself as an eccentric stream marginally related to an established institutional Church<sup>57</sup>.

### **Appendix: The Eagle in the *Acts of Philip* and the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou***

The *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*<sup>58</sup> is a Jewish legend with a Christian interpolation, dating from the first half of the second century AD<sup>59</sup>. In contrast to the narrative chapters of the canonical *Book of Jeremiah*, where rebels take the prophet to Egypt<sup>60</sup>, it relates how Jeremiah accompanied the people of Jerusalem to Babylon, and then led them home. In the meantime, his secretary Baruch remains in the devastated city and God's angel commands him to write a letter to the captives. At this point, an eagle appears to Baruch, sent by God to deliver

56. At the beginning of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (note 5 above) he is also depicted as a 'loner'.

57. For the relation of 'groups' and texts, see p. 260 below.

58. Also known as *2 Baruch*, *3 Baruch*, *4 Baruch*, 'The rest of the words of Baruch', or 'The rest of the words of Jeremiah'. Cf. Herzer, *Paralipomena Jeremiae*, 1. We quote the text after Kraft and Purinton, *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*. The major studies on the book are Delling, *Paralipomena Jeremiae*, Herzer, *op. cit.*, and Schaller, *Paralipomena Jeremiou*. Cf. Czachesz, 'Jeremiás', 49, 55–61. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol 2., 172 also reports this parallel (and the *Syrian Apocalypse of Baruch*, which is related in many points to the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*, cf. Schaller, *op. cit.*, 671 and note 75 below).

59. Herzer, *Paralipomena Jeremiae*, 177–92, dates the Jewish text between 125 and 132, the Christian ending a little after 136. Recently Schaller, *Paralipomena Jeremiou*, 678–81, suggested 118–132 AD for the Jewish text, but left open the question of the date of the Christian ending of the book.

60. *Jeremiah* 43.1–7.

the letter to Babylon<sup>61</sup>. Baruch addresses the bird: ‘You who are chosen from among all the birds of heaven, for this is clear from the gleam of your eyes: tell me, then, what are you doing here?’ Compare this with Philip’s words to the eagle on the tree: ‘O you graceful eagle, with your wings spread out, fly up and carry up my prayer [to heaven]. [...] For I can see that you are a chosen bird, and that your beauty is not of this place’<sup>62</sup>. The eagle arrives at Babylon and sits on a pole outside the city, reminding one of the eagle sitting on the tree in the desert in the *Acts of Philip*.

Then Jeremiah comes along, leading a group of Jews who bring a corpse to bury it outside the city. The eagle talks to Jeremiah: ‘I say to you, Jeremiah the chosen one of God, go and gather together the people and come here so that they may hear a letter which I have brought to you from Baruch and Abimelech’. Again, one can compare this with the manner in which the eagle addresses Philip: ‘Behold, I have blessed you because of your prayer, and in my glory, I condescended to you. I will strengthen you with my light among those who do not know me and I will become strong in you. Powerful times are coming. [...] I will not depart from you nor leave you alone. [...] Raise up, Philip, and go: behold, I am with you’<sup>63</sup>. The most surprising incident follows; Jeremiah gathers the people along with the women and children, and brings them to where the eagle sits. Then the eagle comes down to the corpse and revives it. The text adds: ‘Now this took place so that they might believe’. The people are astounded and exclaim,

Is not this the God who appeared to our fathers in the wilderness through Moses? And he made himself into the form of an eagle, and now he has appeared to us through this great eagle?<sup>64</sup>

The eagle then orders Jeremiah to read the letter to the people. The narrative of the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* expands the imagery to the same point as the *Acts of Philip*: the eagle becomes the actual representation of the deity. This becomes clear also in the words of Philip: ‘Now indeed, Lord Jesus Christ, you are the one who revealed your-

61. *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* 6.12, 7.1–21.

62. *Acts of Philip* 3.5.5–7, 9–11.

63. *Acts of Philip* 3.8–9.

64. *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* 7.20.

self in this form, as you are accustomed to appear to the saints. [...] Great is this form, the form in that I behold you'<sup>65</sup>.

The function of the eagle in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* is rather surprising. Whereas the eagle was a unanimously positive symbol in Greco-Roman culture<sup>66</sup>, it is very difficult to reconcile the appearance of Yahweh in the form of an eagle with Jewish tradition. The Torah categorised the eagle as an unclean animal<sup>67</sup>. In the Near East, the eagle was the symbol of Baal Shamem, 'the Lord of Heaven'<sup>68</sup>. The 'desolating sacrilege' (βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως) that the Seleucid King Antiochus IV erected in the temple in 168 BC<sup>69</sup>, probably contained the statues of eagles, representing this deity<sup>70</sup>. Josephus relates that Herod the Great placed the image of an eagle above the temple gate, which raised the anger of the people and was destroyed<sup>71</sup>. He also describes the eagles on the ensigns of Vespasian's army marching into Galilee<sup>72</sup>, as a symbol the Romans believed to secure their victory.

Whereas the image of the eagle is repeatedly attested as an offensive symbol for the Jews in Hellenistic times, in the Hebrew Bible the eagle often occurs as a positive symbol. Yahweh brought Israel 'on eagle's wings' out of Egypt, those who trust in God shall 'mount up

65. *Acts of Philip* 6.2–6. There are two possible interpretations of ὡσπερ εἴωθας ἐπιφαίνεσθαι τοῖς ἁγίοις. It can mean that Jesus appears to all the saints (and so he also appeared to Philip) or that he usually appears in the form of an eagle to them (and so he appeared also to Philip in this form).

66. Schneider and Stemplinger, 'Adler', 87–90; Hünemörder, 'Adler'.

67. *Leviticus* 11.13, *Deuteronomy* 14.12.

68. Klauser, 'Baal-Schamim', 1079. Baal Shamem is attested in Phoenicia from the ninth century BC, and in Hellenistic times his cult was widespread 'from Hatra to Carthage'.

69. *1 Maccabees* 1.54. *Daniel* 9.27 is a *vaticinatio ex eventu* that reports the same event.

70. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder*, 352–3. Schroer's interpretation relies on the text of *Daniel*, which she reads 'on the wings of the abomination there is the מִשְׁמֵם'. The *m<sup>e</sup>shomem* could be an astral symbol (cf. Baal Shamem). Zeus Olympios in *2 Maccabees* 6.2 is then a Graecised form of Baal Shamem. The earlier hypothesis was that the object described in *Daniel* and *1 Maccabees* was the altar of Zeus Olympius; cf. Koch, *Daniel*, 136–40 and Wenham, 'Abomination of Desolation', 28–9.

71. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.146–63; *Jewish War* 1.650–3.

72. *Jewish War* 2.123.

with wings like eagles', and the heavenly creatures in Ezekiel's court vision have the face of an eagle on one side<sup>73</sup>. Archaeological evidence shows that the image of an eagle as a decoration of synagogues was usual in late antiquity<sup>74</sup>. Finally, the eagle functions as the messenger of Yahweh in the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* 77.19–25. This text is parallel with the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*<sup>75</sup>, and praises the eagle that surpasses all the other birds. There is, however, no trace of the eagle working miracles or being identified with Yahweh. The difference between these two parallel texts shows excellently the limitations of Jewish symbolism of the eagle. We can conclude that although the eagle often represented the oppressors of Israel from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD, apart from this period the Jews used the eagle also as a positive symbol in literature and art. They refrained, nevertheless, from identifying it with their God, as other nations did<sup>76</sup>. The *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* seems to be the only exception.

Theriomorphic symbolism was not unknown to early Christian tradition. An obvious example is Jesus as a lamb in *Revelation* 5, where the participants of the heavenly liturgy praise him: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals', 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered', and 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever'. The eagles in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* and the *Acts of Philip* are praised in a similar manner. The symbolism of the lamb was widespread in early Christian literature, and specifically served to interpret Jesus' death<sup>77</sup>. Whereas the Fathers of the second century criticised

73. *Exodus* 19.4, *Isaiah* 40.31 (cf. *Psalms* 103.5), *Ezekiel* 1.10. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.8 used the latter passage to justify the number of the Gospels, and claimed that the eagle symbolises the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding later tradition, he identified the eagle with the *Gospel of Mark* (and not the *Gospel of John*).

74. Meyers, 'Giscala' 1029; 'Shema', Khirbet', 1198; 'Synagogue', 257; Hachlili, 'Diaspora Synagogues', 260; Turnheim, 'Eagle and Snake', passim.

75. One of the writings certainly used the other, but there is no consensus which was earlier. Cf. Herzer, *Paralipomena Jeremiae*, 72–7 (suggesting the primacy of the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*).

76. For the eagle as Zeus/Juppiter, see Pliny, *Natural History* 10.5.

77. *1 Corinthians* 5.7; cf. *John* 1.29,36; *Acts* 8.32; etc.

and ridiculed the role of the eagle in Greek mythology<sup>78</sup>, later the eagle appeared as a symbol of Christ. In the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena* 17–8<sup>79</sup> we read a vision that contains, among others, an eagle. The interpreter later says that the eagle stands for Christ. The vision in general imitates the eagle visions of *Ezekiel* 17, *4 Ezra* 11–2, or the *Acts of Thomas* 91. In other early Christian texts, eagles appear around the throne of God, at the gates of the Paradise, or escort the righteous ones to heaven<sup>80</sup>. Ambrose compares Jesus to an eagle whose nest is the Church<sup>81</sup>. In addition to these written sources, there is evidence of the eagle symbolising Christ in early Christian art<sup>82</sup>. However, whereas the symbolism of the eagle was inevitably popular in early Christian literature, I did not find a text, other than the *Acts of Philip*, where an eagle would talk and identify itself as Christ.

In the radical use of the eagle imagery, the *Acts of Philip* is as unique among the early Christian texts as the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* among the Jewish writings. It is important to note, however, that the latter text received its final form from Christians. Was the identification of the eagle as Yahweh the work of a Christian redactor? The wider popularity of the eagle image in Christianity than in Judaism would support the idea. The eagle resurrects a corpse, which also fits Christ's image as a physician. Whether it was a Jewish or a Christian redactor, who made that surprising identification in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*, he could find much inspiration in Greco-Roman

78. Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 10; Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.13.

79. Dated by M.R. James to the third century; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 524. Cf. Amsler, *Actes de l'apôtre Philippe*, 128, note 154 and *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 172.

80. Arabic *Preaching of Saint Matthias*, in Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts* 129; Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*, in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 570; *Apocalypse of Moses* 33. The second text is the Coptic version of the *Visio Pauli*, not identical with the *Apocalypse of Paul* in the Nag Hammadi Library (NHC V, 2). Add these examples to Amsler, *Actes de l'apôtre Philippe*, 128, note 154 and *Acta Philippi*, vol 2, 172–3

81. *Sermons* 46.2.

82. For example, the eagle sits on the cross and Christ's monogram on the sarcophagi (Schneider and Stemplinger, 'Adler', 92); an eagle of spread wings wearing a cross on its chest decorates one of the capitals in the fourth century cathedral of Elusa in the Negev (Negev, 'Elusa' 486). In the *Acts of Philip* 3.5 the eagle's wings were also ἐκτεταμένα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ σταυροῦ.

thought where the eagle was a representation of the supreme God, the guide of souls (*psychopompos*), and its parts bore healing powers<sup>83</sup>. The image of an eagle on the top of a pole (precisely as it appears in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*) was part of the triumphal wear of the consuls and the Caesars. A Jewish redactor may have adapted this symbol polemically, as a Christian redactor could refer in the same manner to the eagle as the symbol of the emperor's cult. The symbolism of the eagle in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* can be probably explained with the Jewish wars and/or the Christians' confrontation with the emperor's cult. It fits perfectly in the *Acts of Philip* for a different reason: the eagle was known as the natural and mythological enemy of the snake<sup>84</sup>, the most important demonic symbol in the *Acts of Philip*<sup>85</sup>.

The two writings in question are unique in early Christian literature with regard to the radical theriomorphic representation of Yahweh or Christ as an eagle. If one of the two texts borrowed from the other, it was the *Acts of Philip* that is two centuries younger than the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*. The latter text was widely read in the Eastern Church in late antiquity<sup>86</sup>, and it cannot be excluded that it served as the source of the startling epiphany in the *Acts of Philip*.

83. For ancient references to these and the following points, see Schneider and Stemplinger, 'Adler', 88–91.

84. Cf. p. 225 below.

85. *Acts of Philip* 8.4.6–10 (*G*), 13.1.11–2, etc.

86. Schaller, *Paralipomena Jeremiou*, 693, thinks 'an early and broad circulation' of the text 'very plausible'. The Ethiopian Church included it in the canon, and in other orthodox churches it found its firm place in the monastic lectionary. From antiquity, it survives in Greek, Ethiopic and Armenian; early medieval versions include Romanian and various Slavic languages; cf. *op.cit.*, 696–8.