

# The Lamb and the King: "Saying" 27 of the Gospel of Philip Reconsidered

by

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As it has been repeatedly noted, the *Gospel of Philip* has attracted relatively little scholarly attention, in comparison to the *Gospel of Thomas*, the preceding tractate in Codex II<sup>1</sup>. In part this neglect can be attributed to the fact that the relation of the *Gos. Phil.* to the synoptic sayings tradition is less immediately obvious than is the case for the *Gos. Thom.* But, though quite clearly one is not dealing with a collection of dominical sayings, and the initial division of the text into "logia", on the model of the *Gos. Thom.* was somewhat arbitrary and misleading<sup>2</sup>, the material in the *Gos. Phil.* does have an affinity with the synoptic tradition which deserves further investigation. As a small contribution to this necessary larger undertaking an attempt will be made in this paper to analyze one particular unit and its putative prehistory.

The passage in question is that conventionally designated as "saying" or "paragraph" 27. Though the conventional division separates it from 26, our unit may have a rather close connection to the end of § 26; both will therefore be quoted for the sake of convenience. After an account of the polymorphic appearance of Jesus, and an allusion to the Transfiguration, the text runs as follows:

[§ 26b] "He [i.e. Jesus!] said on that day in the thanksgiving: 'You, who united the perfect [one], the Light, with the Holy Spirit, unite also the angels with us, the images'. [§ 27] Do not despise the lamb, for without it it is impossible to see the king. No-one can come naked into the presence of the king."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Y. Janssens, "L'Évangile selon Philippe", *Le Muséon* 8 (1968) 79; R. Kasser, "Bibliothèque gnostique VIII. L'Évangile selon Philippe". *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 20 (1970) 12.

<sup>2</sup> H.-M. Schenke, who first divided the text into 127 *Sprüche* ("Das Evangelium nach Philippus. Ein Evangelium der Valentinianer aus dem Funde von Nag-Hamadi", *ThLZ* 84 (1959) 1-26), himself subsequently suggested that the division should not be called "sayings" but rather "paragraphs", to make clear the difference in literary genre between the two works ("Die Arbeit am Philippus-Evangelium", *ThLZ* 90 (1965) 325). The later convention will be followed henceforth in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Codex II, folio 58, lines 10-16 (ed. *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices ... Codex II* (Leiden 1974), p. 70 = ed. P. Labib, *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum*



The text as it stands is quite clear, with one exception: the phrase in § 27 translated above as “to see the king” is in the manuscript  $\epsilon\eta\gamma\epsilon\pi\rho\alpha^4$ , literally “to see the door”. Our translation implies the emendation to  $\epsilon\pi\rho\alpha^5$ . To be sure, several of the versions consulted do not utilize the emendation<sup>6</sup>. But it seems that the emendation is indeed called for; it provides the catchword linking § 27a and § 27b, and, as we shall see, it enables one to arrive at a feasible exegesis of the entire text<sup>7</sup>.

The interpretation of the opening admonition in § 27 — “Do not despise the lamb” — is not at all obvious. It has been proposed that the reference is to the Johannine designation of Jesus as the Lamb of God, in the sense of Heracleon’s exegesis of John 1:29 and his identification of the “lamb” as the physical body of the Savior<sup>8</sup>. This “Johannine” exegesis is of course one possible approach; but it does not connect § 27a readily with § 27b, which by itself is best taken as an allusion to the parable of the wedding feast in Matt 22:11-14<sup>9</sup>. To link the two parts of 27 the suggestion has been made that the passage should be read in a (Pauline) baptismal context and that the “nakedness” of § 27b is equivalent to not “putting on” the Christ-Lamb<sup>10</sup>. But this would necessitate that we read into the passage the baptismal ceremony as it is described much later (§ 101). The baptismal interpretation of the text is by no means assured<sup>11</sup>. In particular, the state

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at *Old Cairo*, volume I (Cairo 1956), plate no. 106, lines 10-16. Some translations do join § 26b and § 27 in one unit: Janssens, “L’Évangile selon Philippe”, 89 and W.W. Isenberg in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco 1977) 135.

<sup>4</sup> Folio 53, line 15.

<sup>5</sup> Following W.C. Till, *Das Evangelium nach Philippos* (Berlin 1963) 75.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. C.J. de Catarzano, “The Gospel according to Philip”, *JThSt* n.s. 13 (1962) 42; J.-E. Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Philippe* (Strassburg 1967) 61, taking the expression to refer to — on the basis of not necessarily pertinent Naassene texts — a “mystère de la porte” (*op. cit.*, 147). M. Erbetta specifically renders the expression as “la porta (del plèroma)” without adducing any supporting evidence (*Gli apocrifi del nuovo testamento*, vol. I/1. *Vangeli* (Casale 1975) 225. R. Kasser, in registering the manuscript reading, suggests, with much caution to be sure, a possible reference to the story of Ulysses and Polyphemus! (“Bibliothèque gnostique ...” 29, note 1).

<sup>7</sup> It should perhaps be noted that if  $\pi\rho\alpha$  is allowed to stand, the paronomasia  $\pi\rho\alpha/\pi\rho\rho\alpha$  then suggests that § 27a and § 27b were in fact brought together by the Coptic translator/editor; they may not have had a connection in the Greek *Vorlage*.

<sup>8</sup> So Janssens, “L’Évangile selon Philippe” 90, noting Heracleon’s description of the imperfect nature of the lamb ( $\tau\tilde{\omega}$  τὸν ἀμνὸν ἀτελῆ εἶναι ἐν τῷ τῶν προβάτων γένει), ed. Y. Janssens, “Héracléon, Commentaire sur l’Évangile selon Saint Jean”, *Le Muséon* 72 (1959) 108, lines 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> R. McL. Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* (New York and Evanston 1962) 93.

<sup>10</sup> E. Segelberg, “The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel according to Philip and its Sacramental System”, *Numen* 7 (1960) 193; accepted by Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Philippe* 147, and, with more caution, Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> H.-G. Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sakramente* (Bonn 1969) 140.



of nakedness in § 27b, rather than being a baptismal allusion, may with more probability simply refer back to the author's somewhat opaque discussion of the nature of the resurrection body<sup>12</sup>. In brief, no entirely satisfactory exegesis of the whole passage has yet been arrived at, in my view; in particular, no sustained effort has been made to explain § 27 in its immediate context, or as expressing themes of Valentinian theology and mythology which are so clearly discernible throughout the work.

The "eucharistic" formula of § 26b previously cited quite certainly should be interpreted as expressing a well-documented feature of Valentinian soteriology<sup>13</sup>: the union of Jesus and Sophia is regarded as the prototype of the eschatological union of the angels to the "images", that is to say the pneumatics<sup>14</sup>. The nuptial terminology in *Gos. Phil.* is quite unmistakable, and may well have much relevance for the elucidation of the still very problematic Valentinian sacrament of the marriage-chamber<sup>15</sup>. For our purposes it is enough to note that in a Marcosian invocation which has an affinity to this text the angels of the images are identified as the angels of the little children of Matthew 18:11; the angels are those who "always see the face of the Father"<sup>16</sup>. But this characterization is not peculiarly Marcosian; elsewhere, in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, "the little ones" are explicitly identified as the elect, whose angels behold the Face of the Father<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> See A. H. C. van Eijk, "The Gospel of Philip and Clement of Alexandria: Gnostic and Ecclesiastical Theology on the Resurrection and the Eucharist", *VigChr* 25 (1971) 94-120; K. Koschorke, "Die 'Namen' im Philippusevangelium", *ZNW* 64 (1973) 317-18; H.-M. Schenke, "Auferstehungsglaube und Gnosis", *ZNW* 59 (1968), 124-25.

<sup>13</sup> So already R. M. Grant, "Two Gnostic Gospels", *JBL* 79 (1960), 6; see also Ménard, *L'Evangile selon Philippe* 146, and Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* 92.

<sup>14</sup> One should note the interesting differences between Irenaeus' account and the *Excerpta*: see E. H. Pagels, "Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus", *HarvThRv* 67 (1974) 44-46.

<sup>15</sup> See J.-M. Sévrin, "Les noces spirituelles dans l'Evangile selon Philippe", *Le Muséon* 87 (1974) 152-57. Sévrin points out the awkwardness of putting the formula on the lips of Jesus (152); one could in fact argue that the eucharistic invocation is a later interpolation and that "He said on that day" originally was the prelude to our § 27. On this passage see also E. Segelberg, "Prayer among the Gnostics? The evidence of some Nag Hammadi Documents", in M. Krause (ed.) *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1977) 57-58.

<sup>16</sup> ὁ πάρεδρε θεοῦ καὶ μυστικῆς πρὸ αἰώνων Σιγῆς ἦν [lege δι' ἧς] τὰ Μεγέθη διὰ παντὸς βλέποντα τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Πατρὸς ... τὰς εἰκόνας τότε ἐνθῦμιον τῶν ἄνω ὡς ἐνῦπνιον ἔχουσα (Irenaeus, *adv. haereses* I 13,6, ed. W. Völker, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Gnosis* (Tübingen 1932) 137, line 32 - 138, line 5). The whole invocation and related *apolytroxis* formulae may well have been part of a wider Gnostic liturgical tradition rather than being of specifically Marcosian coinage; see E. H. Pagels, "A Valentinian Interpretation of Baptism and Eucharist — and its Critique of "Orthodox" Sacramental Theology and Practice", *HarvThRv* 65 (1972) 158-61.

<sup>17</sup> «τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς ὁρῶσιν οἱ ἄγγελοι τούτων τῶν μικρῶν» τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν, τῶν ἐσομένων ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ κληρονομίᾳ καὶ τελειότητι (23,4, ed. R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London 1934), 58, lines 264-66). See also 10,6 and 11



Now, the angels of § 26b are the angels of Matthew 18:11. Next, § 27b, an allusion to the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, can further be interpreted as a reference to the celebration of the union between the angels and the pneumatic seed in the Valentinian scheme<sup>18</sup>. Then should perhaps the wedding garments in fact be interpreted as the *souls* which are stripped off prior to entry into the bridal chamber<sup>19</sup>, rather than as the resurrection bodies? In view of all this, one is encouraged to try to understand § 27a also as an interpretation of Matthaean material<sup>20</sup>, in a Valentinian way, rather than as a sudden intrusion of a Johannine motif.

Now in Matt. 18:1ff Jesus points to the child (παιδίον), one of those whose angels always behold the face of the Father, as a model for the disciples. In Matthew (but not in Luke!) this episode is brought into close connection with the parable of the lost sheep and Matt. 18:14 makes a quite explicit identification of the lost sheep and "one of these little ones". In Matt. 18:10 ("See that you do not despise one of these little ones") the same verb (καταφρονεῖν) is used as in § 27a. Thus, to my mind, a possibility exists that § 27a — "Do not despise the lamb" — should be interpreted in the context of Matthew 18 as "Do not despise the lost sheep, one of these little ones". To be sure, one could bring up the objection that the Coptic text of § 27a has the word ⲕⲓⲉⲃ, "lamb" *stricte dictu*, standing normally for ἀρνίον or ἄμνός<sup>21</sup>, rather than ⲉϥϥⲟⲩⲓ, which renders πρόβατον in the Sahidic version of the NT<sup>22</sup>. But it has been shown that the *Gos. Phil.* is not directly influenced by the language of the Sahidic and Bohairic Bible translations and the composite image which we are arguing for — little one lost sheep — is well rendered by the word ⲕⲓⲉⲃ<sup>24</sup>.

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(ed. Casey 48, lines 123-24 and 128-31). The verbatim quotation of Matt 18:10 in *Excerpta* 11, 1 seems to be Clement's own rather than being taken from Theodotus; unfortunately the passage is corrupt (ed. Casey 48, 128 – 30).

<sup>18</sup> Specifically we may have a reference to τὸ δεῖπνον τῶν γάμων in the Ogdoad, wherein both psychics and pneumatics participate, and during the course of which their distinctions are equalized, ἀπισῶθη, in some unexplained way (*Excerpta*, 63, 2, ed. Casey, 82, lines 591-94).

<sup>19</sup> *Excerpta* 64 (ed. Casey 82, lines 594-98).

<sup>20</sup> One should note the clear evidence for the dependence of the *Gos. Phil.* on Matt; see R. McL. Wilson, "The New Testament in the Nag Hammadi Gospel of Philip", *NTS* 9 (1962-63), 291 and Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium*, 32-46.

<sup>21</sup> M. Wilmet, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique, II. Les mots autochtones* 3. ⲱ-ⲧ (CSCO, vol. 185, Louvain 1958) 1404. In one instance at least, however, in the Bohairic version of Ezek 45:15 the word does stand for πρόβατον (W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* [Oxford 1939] 652b).

<sup>22</sup> M. Wilmet, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique, II. Les mots autochtones*. 1. ⲁ-ⲛ (CSCO vol. 173, Louvain 1957) 107.

<sup>23</sup> Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> In effect I am arguing that the author here is thinking of the lost sheep as the smallest one, in contrast to *Gos. Thom.* Logion 107 which identifies the lost sheep as the biggest one



If the foregoing reasoning is accepted, then it is not too far-fetched to suppose that we have in § 27a a reference to the Valentinian myth of Sophia as the wandering sheep<sup>25</sup>; the pendant “for without it it is not possible to see the king” accordingly finds a natural explanation as the restoration of Sophia into the Pleroma<sup>26</sup>, which is the necessary prelude to the bridal union of the pneumatic seed with the angels of the Savior, who can see the Father<sup>27</sup>.

It is possible to penetrate behind this redaction, namely the Valentinian interpretation of Matthaean texts, if one further is willing to suppose that an Aramaic wording may underlie § 27. This is not to be rejected out of hand, since, though the immediate *Vorlage* of the Coptic text is Greek<sup>28</sup>, as it is well known, the *Gos. Phil.* refers to Syriac and Hebrew etymologies, and a redaction of the *Vorlage* in a bilingual Syrian milieu is a strong possibility<sup>29</sup>. Now, as it has been noted often in another context, the Aramaic טליא has the meaning of (1) servant/child (2) lamb<sup>30</sup>. If the Aramaic underlying § 27a was “do not despise the טליא”, one could argue that originally the saying had no reference to the lamb or the lost sheep, but rather such a reference was only introduced when טליא was rendered as “lamb”, and § 26 was joined to § 27 in the Valentinian Greek redaction. One could then go even further and postulate that the טליא was not intended

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of the flock! It should also be noted that sometimes ἀρνίον and πρόβατον are used synonymously (e.g. John 21:15-17).

<sup>25</sup> See K. Beyschlag, *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis* (Tübingen 1974) 128-35 for a conspectus of various gnostic interpretations of the story. Of particular importance of course is the occurrence of the parable of the lost sheep (according to the Matthean version!) in the *Gospel of Truth* (see J.-E. Ménard, *L'Evangile de Vérité* [Leiden 1972] 150-51).

<sup>26</sup> In this connection it should be noted that possibly *Gosp. Truth* 19, 26ff. (“little children ... those to whom applies: theirs is the Gnosis of the Father”) could also be interpreted in the context of Matt. 18 rather than Matt 11:25/Luke 10:21 (so K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth* (New York and Nashville 1960) 59; Ménard, *L'Evangile de Vérité* 93). That the entry into the kingdom (Matt 18:1) should be identified as the possession of gnosis would hardly be a surprise; the subsequent reference to their learning “about the forms of the face of the Father” (ΔΝΙΜΟΥΝΤΕ ΝΩΟ ΝΤΕ ΠΩΩΤ) also points in the direction of Matt 18.

<sup>27</sup> That this role should be played by Sophia here is in agreement with the information obtained from other portions of the *Gos. Phil.*; see G. Sfameni Gasparro, “Il personaggio di Sophia nel Vangelo secondo Filippo”, *VigChr* 31 (1977) 244-81, especially 269 and 280.

<sup>28</sup> Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium*, 31-32. K. Grobel's intriguing suggestion of a Syriac original for the Coptic text (JBL 83 [1964] 318) lacks cogency.

<sup>29</sup> J.-E. Ménard, “Le milieu syriaque de l'Evangile selon Thomas et de l'Evangile selon Philippe”, *Revue des sciences religieuses* 42 (1968) 261-66; E. Segelberg, “The Antiochene Background of the Gospel of Philip”, *BullSocArchCopte* 18 (1965-66) 205-223, but see also the same author's qualifying remarks in “The Antiochene Origin of the ‘Gospel of Philip’ II”, *BullSocArchCopte* 19 (1967-69) 208-210. See also Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium*, 68-69.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. J. Jeremias, article “ἀρνός” *TDNT* 1 (1964) 339. It should perhaps be noted that this ambiguity is attested in Jewish Aramaic but not in Syriac.



to be the παιδίον of Matt 18, but rather the servant of the parable of the wedding feast in Matt 22<sup>31</sup>. Then the whole of § 27 could be interpreted in the context of Matt 22: do not despise the servant who can bring you into the presence of the king, the lord of the marriage feast! Whether in this very hypothetical primitive form the saying was dependent on an (Aramaic?) Matthaean text or reflects a source of Matthew can of course be only a matter of speculation<sup>32</sup>.

The suggestions offered above of course are of unequal cogency and importance. It is hoped, however, that at least the usefulness of the analysis of the smaller units within this text, which quite clearly is the end result of a complex redactorial process, had been demonstrated<sup>33</sup>. The train of reasoning in the *Gos. Phil.* is quite difficult to follow at times; but detailed analysis of this sort could make plausible the view that at least there are connections within small groups of "sayings", and it modifies the initial impression of the work as a random collection of dicta. The study of these gnostic texts is still at a very rudimentary stage, and much patient detailed work is called for; we should perhaps take to heart the admonition of the child Jesus in the apocryphal Infancy Gospel — find out about *alpha* first, then I will teach you about *beta*!

<sup>31</sup> But admittedly in Matthew δοῦλος is used, not παῖς which would immediately be connected to לֵבִיָּה

<sup>32</sup> On the redactional history of this parable see A. Weiser, *Die Knechtsgleichnisse der synoptischen Evangelien* (München 1971) 58-71.

<sup>33</sup> R. Kasser's attempt to identify several distinct sources in the text is interesting but, it seems to me, somewhat premature; he attributes our § 27 (no. 86 in his division scheme) to a "Source A" which he characterizes as a "chaîne de douze brèves sentences de caractère très sobre, et formant peut-être un petit recueil à usage sacramental" ("Bibliothèque gnostique ..." 16).