

Acta Pilati  
English translation of the Coptic text

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The text known as the Gospel of Nicodemus consists of several parts and has survived in several languages. The first publication of the Greek and Latin versions was made in 1853 by Konstantin von Tischendorf published *Evangelia Apocrypha*, the text volume sequel to his essay *De Evangeliorum Apocryphorum Usu et Origine* (1851). Tischendorf identified four genera of apocryphal gospels, three of which are devoted to the various phases of Jesus' life, the fourth known as the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Coptic text translated below deals with the text to which Tischendorf in his 1853 publication gave the title *Evangelium Nicodemi sive Gesta Pilati A*.

The manuscript of the Coptic papyrus text is in the Turin Museum (with the museum numbers 129/17 and 129/18) and was published by Eugène Revillout, with a French translation, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 9 (1913) pp. 65-127 under the title *Acta Pilati*.

Revillout states that he first copied the text in 1872 when it was in the possession of Bernadino Peyron, into whose hands it had come with the rest of the papers of Amedeo Peyron. Revillout assumes that Peyron had borrowed the text from the Museum to make a Latin translation for Tischendorf. One senses a certain rivalry on the part of Revillout when he claims that his own translation, but for circumstances beyond his control, would have been published before that of Tischendorf.

The first translation of the Coptic to be made was that of Amedeo Peyron, who did not publish it under his own name but gave it Tischendorf for use in the second edition of *Evangelia Apocrypha* (1876), where it can be found in the footnotes to the Greek text on pp. 210-286. An English version was made by M.R. James from the Greek text,<sup>1</sup> which has the chapter divisions of Tischendorf

I am not competent to address the subject of who produced the Nicodemus texts, when, why and for whom or how the texts were transmitted. A study that I have been able to consult is that of Jörg Roder: <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wibilex/dasbibellexikon/lexikon/sachwort/anzeigen/details/evangelium-nach-nikodemus/ch/45d4f59199b282913df3f90b2c889cbe/#h0>. Another study that I have not been able to consult is that of J. D. Dubois and Z. Izydorczyk 'Nicodemus' Gospel before and beyond

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1 M.R. James *Apocryphal New Testament* (1924) pp. 94 ff.

the Medieval West' in Z. Izydorczyk (ed.) *The Gospel of Nicodemus* (1997) pp. 21-41.

The numbers in brackets throughout the translation are the page numbers of Revillout's publication, which begins on p. 65. Revillout uses the same chapter divisions as those of Tischendorf's Greek text. What follows is a list of these chapter divisions with the page numbers of Revillout's publication.

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## The secrets <sup>2</sup> of the records about the Saviour

The records about the Saviour made under Pontius Pilate the governor.

I, Aeneas, the *protector*,<sup>3</sup> was a Hebrew first<sup>4</sup> and among those who know the Law. I was touched by the grace of the Saviour with His great gift. I came to know Christ Jesus through the Holy Scriptures and made my way to Him to believe in Him that I might be worthy of holy baptism. I first searched for the notes made at that time concerning Our Lord (66) Jesus Christ, produced by the Jews under Pontius Pilate. When I found them, among writings that had been left in Hebrew, at the wish<sup>5</sup> of their Lord Jesus Christ, I therefore translated them into Greek during the reign of Theodosius in his 17th consulship<sup>6</sup> and the 5th of Valentinus and the 9th indiction, Everyone who reads this book and copies into another book, I beg you to pray for me, Aenias the least, and God to have mercy on me and forgive me my sins that I have committed against him. Peace be to all those who read this and to their whole household forever. Amen.

In the 9th year<sup>7</sup> of Tiberius Caesar king of the Romans and Herod king of Galilee in his 19th year of rule, that is the 25th of Paremhotep, in the consulship of Rufus and (67) Rubellio of the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad in the time of Josephus known as Caiphas the Jewish high priest.

All that happened after the crucifixion and all that things that happened to Our Lord Jesus Christ, Nicodemus the Jewish magistrate searched for these things that the high priests and the other Jews had done against the Saviour. Nicodemus wrote them all down in a memorandum in Hebrew as follows, and these are their names: Anna, Caiphas, Soumis, Dôthaeim, Gamaliel, Judas, Libis, Nephthalim, Alexander and Hierios and the other Jews, they went to Pilate, to accuse Our Lord Jesus: "We know that He is the son of Joseph the carpenter

2 Not in the Gk.

3 Gk Ananias, captain of the guard

4 I suggest that the Gk and Coptic have essentially the same information, but in a different phraseology: being 'a Hebrew first' and 'making one's way in faith' to Jesus both seem to indicate conversion that is contained in the Gk προσελθών, the verb that generates 'proselyte'

5 The square brackets in the text indicate a lacuna, but I do not know how big the lacuna is. As it stands in the text, the Coptic seems to require emendation: I am not sure, for example, how to understand ΜΠΟΥΙΧΟΕΙC. Peyron's translation: '*Hos lingua henraica scriptos inveni, volente domino nostro Jesu Christo*' which can hardly be said a fair rendering the lacunose text presented by Revillout, suggests that it was the will of Jesus that Nicodemus found all these texts, whereas the Gk. states that it was θεοῦ εὐδοκίᾳ that Nicodemus translated them

6 Gk.: 'year'.

7 One of several years specified in the various versions

and Mary is his mother and he says: 'I (68) am the Son of God and I am a king.' He defiles the Sabbath of the Law of our fathers, with the intention of overturning our Law." The Jews also said: "Our Law prohibits practising medicine on anyone on the Sabbath. But He Jesus, the lame the leprous, anyone who was sick or demonically possessed, the deaf and dumb, He healed them on the Sabbath through Beelzebub prince of demons." Pilate said: "But what are His bad deeds?" The Jews replied: "He has performed these things through Beelzebub prince of demons, and everything submitted to Him." Pilate said: "A demon has never been cast out by an unclean spirit. Demons are cast out in the name of God." <sup>8</sup>The Jews said to Pilate: "We beg you, great one, that he be brought before the tribunal and that you hear Him in public." (69) Pilate said to them: "Tell me, it is possible<sup>9</sup> for a governor to interrogate a king?" They replied: "We say that He is not a king."

Pilate called a *cursor* and said to him: "Bring me Jesus quietly." The *cursor* left. When he recognized Jesus, he greeted<sup>10</sup> Him and took off his headgear,<sup>11</sup> spread it out on his hands and laid it at the feet of Jesus, saying: "Lord, walk this way and come in, for the governor is calling you." When the Jews saw what the *cursor* had done, they cried out to Pilate: "Why have you not had Him brought in by a *praeco*,<sup>12</sup> but have honoured Him with a *cursor*?" (70) When the *cursor* saw Him,<sup>13</sup> he greeted Him. He removed his headgear, which he held on his hands and spread it out and placed it on the ground and said to him: "Walk on it." Pilate then called the *cursor* and said: "Why did you do that?" The *cursor* said: "On the day when I was sent to Jerusalem to Alexander,<sup>14</sup> I saw Him sitting on a throne, the children of the Hebrews crying out with branches in their hands and glorifying Him, some spreading their garments at his feet, saying: 'Save us, You who are on high. The one who comes in the name of the Lord is blessed.'" The Jews looked and cried out at the *cursor*: "The Hebrews are crying out in Hebrew. How do you know what this means in Greek?" (71) The *cursor* replied that he asked one of the Jews what it meant, and he explained it. Pilate then asked them what they were saying. They replied: "Hosanna". Pilate asked what it meant, and they said: "It means 'save us'." Pilate said: "If you are witnesses to the sounds made by your children,<sup>15</sup> what sin has the *cursor* committed?" They said nothing.

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8 Gk 'Asclepius'

9 Gk. 'how can I...!'

10 Coptic: **ⲟⲓⲛⲟⲩ**, which I have translated consistently as 'greet'. It often means 'worship'

11 Gk has two words: **καθάπλωμα** (something folded over) and **φακεώλιον** (face cloth)

12 There was clearly a functional distinction between *praeco* and *cursor*, but is intriguing that there seems also to have been a status distinction-

13 A gap in the text is indicated by a number of dots. I cannot suggest what might have been here.

14 Perhaps the one mentioned in Acts 4, 6

15 Read **ⲱⲏⲣⲉ** (as in the Gk. text), not **ⲱⲏⲙⲟ** 'foreigners'

The governor said to the *cursor*: "Go out and bring Jesus in as you please." The *cursor* went out and did as he had originally done and said to Jesus: "My Lord, come in. The governor is calling you." As Jesus entered, the images<sup>16</sup> of the standards turned by themselves and greeted Him. (72) When the Jews saw what the standards did, that the image worshipped Jesus, they cried out about those holding the standards that they had turned them. The governor said:<sup>17</sup> "You do not admire how the faces of the standards have turned by themselves and greeted Jesus,<sup>18</sup> but you cry out accusing the standard bearers of being the ones to turn the standards to greet Him." The Jews said to Pilate: "We know how the standard bearers turned the standards to greet Him." The governor called the standard bearers and said to them: "Is this what you did?" They said to Pilate: "We are gentiles<sup>19</sup> and we (73) are servants of the temples. How would we greet him? For as we were holding the standards they turned by themselves and greeted him." Pilate said to the synagogue leaders and the priests of the people: "You, choose men for yourselves from the people, who are powerful and strong. Let them hold the standards and we will see if the images do not turn by themselves and greet Him." The priests of the Jews took twelve strong men and made six of them hold one of the standards and the other six the other one before the tribunal of the governor. Pilate said to the *cursor*: "Take Jesus out and bring him as you wish." The *cursor* and Jesus left the *praetorium*. The governor called those with the first standard and said to them: "On the life of Caesar, (74) if the standards do not turn when Jesus enters and do not greet Him, I will remove your heads."

The governor then ordered Jesus to enter for the second time. The *cursor* did as he had done before. He summoned Jesus to walk over his headgear. Jesus entered and when He did so, the standards turned and greeted Him. When Pilate saw this, he was afraid and tried to stand up on the tribunal. While he was still thinking about this, his wife said to him: "Remove yourself from this just man. I suffered great pains last night in a dream because of Him." Pilate called all the Jews and said to them: "You know that my wife is god-loving (75) and is drawn to the side of the Jews with you." They replied: "Yes, we know." Pilate said: "My wife told me: 'Remove yourself from this just man, for I suffered great pain last night in a dream because of Him.'" The Jews then said to Pilate: "Did we not tell you that He was a magician? Look, He has sent a

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16 A common symbol was an eagle

17 The conjunction  $\chi\epsilon$  can be omitted in Coptic, but one would normally expect it to be here cf. W. Till *Koptische Grammatik* (1961) §355

18 The order in which the information is presented is slightly different in the Coptic and Gk. and this is treated by Tischendorf as a question 'Do you not wonder how the standards turned and greeted Jesus?' and the extremely (περισσῶς) strident accusations are presented earlier.

19 Coptic  $\zeta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\eta\eta\iota$ .

dream to your wife."

Pilate called Jesus and said to Him: "Why do they accuse you and you say nothing?" Jesus replied: "If authority had not been given to them, they would not be able to speak. Each one is master of his own words to say what is good and what is bad. They are responsible."<sup>20</sup> The Jewish priests said (76) to Jesus: "Responsible for what? First, we know that you are illegitimate.<sup>21</sup> Second, you were born in Bethlehem, and because of you many<sup>22</sup> small children were killed. Third, your father is Joseph and your mother Mary. You fled to Egypt, not having the confidence of the people."<sup>23</sup> Some of the bystanders, being upright among the Jews, said: "We do not say of Him that He was born in fornication. We know that Joseph married Mary and He was not born in fornication." Pilate said to the Jews who had claimed that He was illegitimate: "Your claim is not true, according to your co-religionists, who have just said that she was married to her husband." Annas said: "Pilate, all our people (77) cry out that He is illegitimate, and you do not believe us. These people are foreigners<sup>24</sup> and His disciples." Pilate then said: "What is a foreigner?" The Jews said: "Those who were born among the Greeks and have recently become Jews." Those who had said He was not illegitimate then spoke, that is, Rezar, Asterius, Anthony, Jacob, Ambiais, Sera, Samuel, Isaac, Phineas, Crispus, Agrippa, Amys and Judas, they replied in unison: "We are not Greeks but the children of Jews. We are speaking the truth. We were all at the betrothal<sup>25</sup> of Joseph and Mary." Pilate called the men who had said (78) that He was not illegitimate. He made them swear on the life of Caesar: "This is the truth that you have said about the legitimacy of his birth." The Jews said to Pilate: "We have a Law that prevents us from swearing at all, because it is a sin. Let them swear on the life of Caesar that what we have said is not true, and we will submit to death."

Pilate said to Annas and Caiphas: "Will you not speak the truth or respond to the charges made by these people?"<sup>26</sup> They said to Pilate: "These twelve men are not trustworthy who say that He is not illegitimate, while all of our people say that He is illegitimate and a magician. He

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20 Gk. 'they will see'. Coptic **ⲡⲟⲩⲉ**, which means 'be enough, be responsible' W.E. Crum *Coptic Dictionary* 309a. The same verb is used in Matth. 27, 24 when Pilate washes his hands at the trial of Jesus and transfers responsibility to the multitude. The Gk uses the 2nd person pl. 'you will see', as in the NT. Revillout translates: 'they know what they are doing'. cf. also p.82.

21 Lit. 'were born in fornication'.

22 Lit. 'this multitude'

23 Gk. 'They fled to Egypt, not . . .' The 3rd. pl. makes it easier to understand the second part of the phrase, which implies that the couple were ashamed of conceiving a child out of wedlock and lacked the *parrhesia* to face the people.

24 Gk. 'proselyte': the Hebrew **גֵּר** is in fact much closer to the Coptic **Ⲅⲏⲏⲟ**.

25 cf. *Coptic Dictionary* 688b.

26 Gk. 'Will you not answer this?'

says that He is a king and they do not believe us."

Pilate ordered the entire multitude to leave (79) except for the twelve who testified that He was not illegitimate. He ordered Jesus to be removed. Pilate said to them: "Why do they want to kill him?" They replied: "He is envied because He heals on the Sabbath." Pilate became angry and left the *praetorium* and said to them: "The sun is my witness that I cannot find a single charge against this man." The Jews then said: "We would not hand Him over to you if He were not a malefactor." Pilate replied: "Take Him for yourselves and judge Him according to your Law." (80) The Jews said to Pilate: "We are not allowed to try<sup>27</sup> people." Pilate said to the Jews: "So God has told you not to kill, but I (may kill Him)?" Pilate went into the *praetorium*, called Jesus to one side and said to him "Are you king of the Jews?" Jesus said: "Are you saying this on your own part or have others told you this about me?" Pilate said to Jesus: "Am I a Jew? Your people and the high priests are the ones who have handed you over to me." Jesus answered: "My kingdom is not in this world. If it were, my servants would have fought against my being handed over to the Jews. So, my kingdom is not in this world." Pilate said: "Are you not a king?" (81) Jesus replied to Pilate: "It is you who say that I was born for this work and that I came for this purpose so that everybody who is of the truth might hear my voice." Pilate said: "What is the truth?" Jesus replied: "Truth is from heaven." Pilate said: "Is there no truth on earth?" Jesus said: "Do you see how those who have truth are judged by those who have power on earth?"

Pilate then left Jesus inside the *praetorium* and went out to the people and said to them: "I cannot find a single charge against him." The Jews said: "This is what He said: 'It is possible for me to destroy this temple and rebuild it on the third day.'" Pilate said: "Which temple?" (82) The Jews said: "The one built by Solomon in 46 years, He said: 'I will destroy it and rebuild it on the third day.'" Pilate said to them: "I am clean of this man's blood. You are responsible." The Jews said: "His blood is upon us and our children." Pilate then called the priests and the Levites.<sup>28</sup> He said to them confidentially: "Do not do this. For you have no charge of sorcery or of defiling the Law." The Levites said to Pilate: "If anyone blasphemes against Caesar, does he deserve to die or not?" Pilate replies: "He deserves to die." The Jews said to Pilate: "If He blasphemed against Caesar, he would deserve to die. But He has blasphemed against God." The governor ordered the Jews (83) to remain outside the *praetorium*. He called Jesus and said: "What have you done to them?" Jesus replied: "Moses and the prophets were the first to

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27 Gk. 'kill'

28 The place of Levites in early Israelite society is mapped out in Num. 18, 21-25.

preach of my death and resurrection." The Jews paid attention and listened as He said this. They said to Pilate: "What more or what more serious about His blasphemy do you want to hear?" Pilate said to the Jews: "If this is blasphemy, take Him to your synagogue and judge Him according to your Law." The Jews said to Pilate: "Our Law says that if a man sins against a man, he deserves thirty-nine lashes. If he blasphemes against God, he is stoned." Pilate said: "Take Him and do as you please." The Jews said: "We want to crucify Him." (84)<sup>29</sup>

While Pilate was talking to the Jews, saying that Jesus did not deserve crucifixion, he looked down at those standing there and saw that a number of them were crying. Pilate said: "Not everyone in the multitude wants Him to die." The priests said to Pilate: "We have all come with the multitude that He may die." Pilate said to the Jews: "Why is He going to die?" The Jews said: "He said: 'I am the son of God. I am a king.'" One of the Jews, whose name was Nicodemus, stood before Pilate and said: "I request you, pious governor, order me to say a few words." (85) Pilate said: "Say them." Nicodemus replied: "I said to the priests and the Levites and the whole multitude of the Jews and their synagogue: 'What is your problem with this man? He has performed signs and wonders never performed before until now which no-one else can do. So leave Him and wish Him no harm. If the signs are divine, they will endure. If they are human, they will disappear. Moses, who was sent by God to Egypt, performed great signs. God told him to do them before Pharaohs. Iannes and Iambres<sup>30</sup> also performed the signs that Moses performed, except for some which they could not, even though the Egyptians regarded both as gods. But since the signs which they performed (86) were not divine, they perished together with those who believed in them. So, what is your problem with this man, who does not deserve to die.'" The Jews said to Nicodemus: "You were a disciple of His and this is why you are speaking on His behalf. [Is the governor also His disciple who speaks on His behalf? Was this why?] Casar appointed him to this rank?"<sup>31</sup> The Jews became very angry and ground their teeth against Nicodemus.

When Pilate saw them, he said to them: "Why are you grinding your teeth? For you have heard the truth." The Jews said to Nicodemus: "Will you take the part of Jesus?" Nicodemus replied: "Amen, I will take it as you have said." Another Jew made his way to (87) Pilate and said: "Will you allow me to say something?" The governor replied: "Say whatever you will."

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29 Gk: 'Pilate said: "He does not deserve to be crucified."' This statement is provided in the next section of the Coptic.

30 2 Tim. 3, 8 referring the duel between Moses and the Egyptian sorcerers in Ex. 7,11

31 The gap in the Coptic can be filled from the Greek text, which is translated in the square brackets.



He said: "I have spent 46 years<sup>32</sup> lying on a bed in great pain and tribulation. When Jesus came, there were many<sup>33</sup> afflicted by demons and people with various illnesses, who were healed by Him. Some young people took pity on me and picked me up as I was on my bed and took me to Him. When the Lord saw me, He had mercy on me and said to me: 'Companion, pick up your bed and go.' At that moment I was healed and picked up my bed and walked."

The Jews wanted Pilate to ask the man: "On which day did Jesus minister to you?" Pilate asked the one who had been cured: "Tell us in truth on which day He healed you?" He replied: "On the Sabbath". **(88)** The Jews said to Pilate: "Is not that we said, that He heals and expels demons on the Sabbath?" Another Jew came and said: "I have been blind from birth. I hear voices but do not see faces. When Jesus passed by, I called out in a loud voice: 'Have mercy on me, son of David, have mercy on me.' He put His hands on my eyes, and at that moment I saw." Another came forward and said: "I was a hunchback and He made me straight with the word of His mouth." Another came forward and said: "I was leprous and he made me clean."

A woman named Verônîkê,<sup>34</sup> standing at some distance, said: "I was losing blood and **(89)** and I touched the hem of his garment and the stream of my blood stopped." The Jews said: "We have a law that prevents a woman from bearing testimony or saying anything." Very many others, men and women, called out: "This man is a prophet or a God, Even the demons obey Him." Pilate said to those who said that even the demons obeyed Him: "Why do your teachers not obey Him?" They said to Pilate: "When Lazarus died, He raised him from the dead in his grave." The governor became afraid and said to the multitude of the Jews: "Why do you wish to spill innocent blood?" Again Pilate called Nicodemus and **(90)** the rest of the twelve who said that He had not been born out of wedlock. He said to them: "What shall I do? There is strife among the people." They said: "We do not know. They are responsible." He had the whole of the multitude brought before him and said to them: "As you know, it is your custom according to the holiday to choose one prisoner to release. I have one in prison, a thief and a murderer, Barabbas, and Jesus here, against whom I find no charge. Which one do you want me to release to you." In a loud voice they shouted: "Barabbas," He said: "What am I to do<sup>35</sup> with Jesus called the Christ?" The Jews said: "Crucify him." Some **(91)** of the Jews said: "You are the companion of Caesar" because He had said of Himself that He was a son of God and

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32 Gk. '38'

33 There is a verb missing in the Coptic: perhaps,  $\lambda\gamma\alpha\pi\bar{\epsilon} <\omega\omega\pi\epsilon> \epsilon\gamma\omicron$

34 The 'name' in Gk is Haemorrhousa cf. Mark 5, 25ff. It was a popular subject in early Christian iconography, cf. the painting in the 3rd cent. catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus at Rome.

35 The Coptic translator or perhaps a copyist has probably not understood what is meant here and has written  $\tau\alpha\lambda\omicron$  ('produce') instead of  $\tau\alpha\bar{\rho}\omicron\gamma$  ('what am I to do')

that He was a king. Pilate became angry and told the Jews: "Your nation is always in rebellion and if anyone tries to do you any good, you oppose him." The Jews replied: "Who is doing good?" Pilate said: "As I have heard, God brought you out of a harsh slavery in Egypt and the sea became dry land to make way for you and you ate manna and quail. He brought water from a rock for you that you might drink. He gave laws to you. And on top of all of this you make God angry. God wanted to destroy you, and Moses prayed on your behalf, and you did not die. And now you utter wickedness against me."<sup>36</sup>

(92) Pilate then stood up on the tribunal and sought to leave. The Jews cried out and said to Pilate: "We recognize the king and Caesar. But Jesus we do not recognize. For the Magi brought Him gifts from the east as king. When Herod heard from the Magi that a king had been born, he sought to kill Him." When His father Joseph learned of this, he took Him and His mother and fled to Egypt. When Herod heard this he killed the children of the Hebrews that had been born in Jerusalem." When Pilate heard from the Jews, he became afraid. He forced the entire multitude to be quiet<sup>37</sup> and said to them: "Is this the one Herod was looking for?" And they said: "Yes, it is."

Pilate took some water and washed his hands before everyone: "I am clean of this just blood. You are responsible." (93) The Jews cried out in reply: "His blood is on us and our children." Pilate then ordered the curtain of the tribunal on which he was sitting to be drawn. He pronounced the sentence as follows: "The sentence of Pilate against Jesus: It is your own people that charges you as king.<sup>38</sup> I therefore sentence . . . I order you to be beaten in accordance with the laws of the high emperors and thereafter to be crucified in the place where you were arrested with Demas and Kystas, the two robbers arrested with you." Jesus then left the *praetorium* with the two thieves.

When He reached the place, His clothes were removed and a cloth was wrapped around Him. crown of thorns was placed on His head in the same way as the two thieves. (94) Demas was hanged to the right of Him and Cestas to His left. Jesus said: "My Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." His garments were torn into two by the soldiers and Pilate looked down on them. The high priests and the magistrates sneered<sup>39</sup> at Him together with the

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36 Gk. 'and now you accuse me of hating the king.'

37 Revillout reads:  $\lambda\tau\rho\epsilon\pi\mu\eta\eta\theta\epsilon\ \tau\eta\rho\bar{\eta}\ [T\bar{\eta}\epsilon\varsigma]p\omega\gamma\ .\ .\ .$ , which I do not entirely understand. I suggest 'he caused the multitude'  $[\kappa\lambda]p\omega\gamma\ .\ .\ .$  'to be silent . . .'

38 This must be a condensed version of: 'charges you with claiming to be king'

39 Coptic  $\lambda\kappa\omega\lambda$  contraction of  $\omega\lambda\kappa\ \omega\lambda$  similar to the English 'turn up one's nose'.

people, saying: "He who has saved others, let Him save himself if He is the chosen Son of God." The soldiers laughed at Him as they made their way to Him with vinegar and gall, saying: "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

After the sentence Pilate ordered that the charge against Him be written as a title<sup>40</sup> in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, as the Jews had said: He, king of the Jews (95). One of the thieves, called Kestas, said to Him: "If you are Christ, save yourself." The other one, called Demas, replied angrily to this rebuke: "Are you not afraid of God, for we have the same judgement as He, but we justly in accordance with the wickedness that we have perpetrated. This man has done nothing wicked." When Demas stopped berating Kestas, he called out: "Remember me, Lord when You come from Your kingdom." Jesus said to him: "Amen, I say to you: 'Today you will be with me in Paradise.'" It was the sixth hour and there was darkness on the earth on that day until the ninth hour (96). The sun became dark. The veil of the temple from above to below broke in two parts. Jesus cried out aloud: "My Father, I give up my spirit to your hands." He gave up His spirit as He said this. The centurion saw what had happened and glorified God and said: "Truly, this man was just." And all who came to see what happened saw what happened. They beat their heart and turned away. The centurion told the governor what had happened. When the governor and his wife heard this, they grieved greatly. They did not eat or drink on that day because of their great grief.

Pilate once again sent for these Jews and said to them: "You have seen what has happened." (97) But they said nothing.<sup>41</sup> All those who knew him stood at a distance, The women who had followed him in Galilee saw these things. And there was a man called Joseph, a Levite good and just, who did not sit in the Sanhedrin with the counsels that the Jews made, from Arimathea, who was looking forward to the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He took it and wrapped it in clean linen. He put Him in His cut grave, in which no-one had ever been placed. When the Jews heard that Joseph had taken the body of Jesus, they sought him and the twelve who said that Jesus was not illegitimate (98) and Nicodemus and many others with the intention of killing them. They made their way to Pilate and revealed the miracles performed by Jesus. All those sought by the Jews hid. Nicodemus did not hide, for he was a Jewish magistrate. He said to them: "Why did you go the synagogue?" They said: "Since you share with Him, His portion will be with you in the life to come." Nicodemus said: "Amen, amen"

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40 John 19, 19ff.

41 Gk. 'It was a normal eclipse of the sun.'

Similarly Joseph too made his way to them and said: "Why are you angry with me ? I asked for the body of Jesus and put it in a new grave. I wrapped it in clean linen and rolled a stone before the entrance to the cave. You did nothing to help this just man (99). You do not regret having crucified Him and planted a lance in Him." The Jews became angry and seized Joseph and ordered him to be detained until the following day. They said to him: "Know that this is not the time for us to do anything to you, for it is the Sabbath. Know therefore that we will not allow you to be worthy of burial and we will give your body to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth." Joseph said to them: "This is a hard-necked thing to say. Nevertheless, I am not afraid. I have the living God, and God says: 'Throw judgement at me and I will repay,'<sup>42</sup> said the Lord. You now see that the one who is circumcised not in the flesh but in the heart took water before the sun, washed his hands and said: 'I am clean of this just man's blood whom you see.' And you replied to Pilate (100): 'His blood will be upon us and our children.' Now I am afraid that the anger of God will be visited on you and your children as you said." When the Jews heard this, they seized<sup>43</sup> Joseph and threw him into a dark place where there was no light or window. They put people there to guard him and sealed the door with a seal. On the following day the synagogue leaders and the priests and the Levites assembled early and deliberated about how to kill him. When the Sanhedrin sat, they ordered him to be brought with great contempt. When they opened the door, they did not find Joseph, and people were crying. They were amazed to find the door and window sealed by Caiphas. They did not lay their hands again on those who had spoken well for Jesus before Pilate. (101)

While everybody was still in the synagogue, wondering about Joseph that he had not been found, some of the guard came, whom the Jews had asked for to watch over Jesus' grave lest His disciples come and remove him surreptitiously. They told the high priests and the priests and the Levites about the movement of the earth that happened at the time of the vigil: "We saw an angel of the Lord come down from heaven and roll away the stone at the entrance of the cave. He sat on it, his garment as white as snow. In fear of him, we were mortified and heard the voice of the angel speaking with the women who were still at Jesus' grave and saying to them: 'Do not be afraid. I know who you are looking for. You are looking for Jesus, the one who was crucified.' He rose as He said: 'Come and see (102) the place where Jesus was laid and go and tell His disciples that He has arisen from the dead and that He will precede you to

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42 The allusion is to Deut. 32, 35. The Coptic is quite different from the Gk text, which follows the Hebrew (not the LXX): **νοϣε** means 'cast, throw'. Peyron translates 'committe mihi iudicium', which has been followed by Revillout.

43 The earlier seizure involves the word **αμαρτε**, this one **σωπε**

Galilee, where you will see Him. Look, we have told you what we have seen."

The Jews said: "Who are the women the angel spoke to ?" The guards said: "We do not know who they are." The Jews said: "What time was it ?" The guards said: "Midnight." The Jews said: "Why did you not seize the women ?" The guards said: "We were mortified with fear and we did not think we would see the light of day. How then were we supposed to detain them ?" The Jews said to the guards: "We do not believe you."**(103)** The guards said: "You have seen all these signs from that man. You do not believe Him. Will you believe us ? We have heard another extraordinary thing: the one who asked for His body, Joseph of Arimathea, you locked him in a dark place and shut the door on him and sealed it . Then you opened the door and did not find him. Give us Joseph and we will give you Jesus." The Jews said: "First give us Jesus and we will give you Joseph."The guards said: "Give us Joseph first and we will give you Jesus. The Jews said: "Joseph has returned to his city." The guards said: "As we have heard, Jesus is in Galilee. The angel who rolled away the stone at the mouth **(104)** of the grave said: "He will precede you to Galilee." When the Jews heard this, they were afraid that this would become public and people would believe in Jesus. They formed a plan together and bribed the soldiers to say: 'We were sleeping that night and His disciples came and took Him away secretly.' (And they told the soldiers): 'If the governor learns of this, we will make him believe and we will take the blame.' The soldiers took the money and did as they had been told. This story has circulated among the Jews to the present day.<sup>44</sup>

One of the priests called Phineas and Addas the teacher and Ogias the Levite came from Jerusalem and explained to the synagogue leaders and the people **(105)** of the Jews, saying: "We have seen Jesus and His eleven disciples sitting on the mount called Mambrêch<sup>45</sup> and saying to them: 'Go into the world and preach the entire creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be judged in the judgement. You, my disciples, will be afflicted with demons in my name and you will cast them out. You will speak another new language. You will take poisonous serpents in your hands and they will do nothing to you. You will be given deadly potions to kill them and nothing will be able to harm you. You will lay your hands on the sick and they will be healed. Everything that you ask in my name will happen to you.' We heard Jesus saying these things. Then He ascended to heaven in great unutterable glory" **(106)**. The Jews, the leaders of the synagogues, the priests and the

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44 Not in the Gk.

45 Gk. Mamilch. The name is otherwise unknown, but Tischendorf provides Biblical references in his note: 2Kg. 23, 13, among others

Levites said to them: "Glorify the God of Israel<sup>46</sup> and confess to Him that you have seen these things and heard them." <sup>47</sup>They said to them: "As the Lord God is living, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we have heard these things and we have seen Him being taken up to heaven." The Jews said to them: "If you have come here to preach to us, be silent. If you have come here to pray to God, pray about this nonsense that you have done before the people."<sup>48</sup> Phineas the priest, Addas the teacher and Ogias the Levite said before the high priests, priests and Levites: "If these words about the things we have heard and seen are sinful, then here we are - do what you want to us." (107).

The Jews took the Law and made them swear not to utter these words to anyone. They ate and drank and escorted them from the synagogue. They gave them money and three men to expel them from Galilee and they went in peace. The Jews made a plan together after the men had gone to Galilee. They fell into great mourning, saying: "What is this sign that has happened in Israel?" Annas and Caiphas said: "Why are you in such distress? . . .<sup>49</sup> they said that the angel of the Lord had come down from heaven and rolled away the stone from the entrance to the cave. Rather it was His disciples who paid the soldiers and took the body of Jesus away and it is they who said: 'Say that an angel of the Lord came down and (108) rolled away the stone from the entrance to the grave.' Do you not know that one cannot trust the uncircumcised in anything. They doubtless<sup>50</sup> received a lot of money from us and they did what we told them to do." While they were saying this, Nicodemus arose in the middle of the Sanhedrin and said: "These are fine words. Do you not know that the men who went to Galilee are God-fearing men who hate trade and greed, peaceful men, whose words to us were made with great oaths. 'We saw Jesus sitting on Manrêkh with His eleven disciples teaching them what you have heard and we saw Him ascending to heaven. Elisha also cried out and cast his (109) cloak on the Jordan. He crossed the river and came to Jericho, and the sons of the prophets came out to meet him. They said to him: *Elisha, where is your master Elijah?* He said: *He has been taken up to heaven.* They said to him: *Was he perhaps taken by a gust of wind and deposited on a hill? Let us go and take others with us to look for him.* They persuaded Elisha and he went with them. They looked for him for three days, but they did not find him. They then realized that he

<sup>46</sup> Presumably an expression to distinguish this divinity from the Christian one.

<sup>47</sup> Gk: '. . . if you heard and saw the things you have told us'.

<sup>48</sup> Gk: 'Have you come here to preach to us or pray to God, and what is this nonsense you have said before the whole people?'

<sup>49</sup> Coptic  $\text{ΝΑΦΠΙΣΤΕΥΕΕ ΑΝΟΝ ΝΗΜΑΤΟΙ ΝΤΑΥΧΟΟΣ}$ : as it stands I can make little sense. out of this. Revillout has managed to understand: 'Ils ne sont pas dignes d'être crus, ni les soldats . . .' The Gk is easier to follow: 'Why are you upset? Why are you weeping? Or do you not know that His disciples have given enough money to the guards of the grave . . .' However one reads this, it is fairly clear that the Greek and Coptic diverge in this whole passage.

<sup>50</sup>  $\text{ΑΜΕΛΕΙ}$

had been taken up to heaven. Now, you listen to me: send out to every hill in Israel to see if by chance Jesus was taken up by a gust of wind and deposited on a hill."

Everybody agreed to this. They sent out to every hill in Israel but did not find Jesus. But they found Joseph of Arimathea, but nobody dared to seize him. They sent (110) and informed the priests and the Levites that they had searched in all the hills but not found Jesus, only Joseph. When they heard about Joseph, they glorified the God of Israel. When they heard about Joseph, the synagogue leaders glorified the God of Israel and made a plan with all their people how to meet Joseph. They decided to take a papyrus sheet<sup>51</sup> and write to Joseph: "Peace to you and everyone with you. We have prayed for you to God that you may exert yourself to come to your fathers and sons, for we are all very sorry about what we have done to you. We opened the door but did not find you there. We know that what we did to you was wrong. God<sup>52</sup> cut off our plan against you, our universally revered father Joseph. Seven men have been chosen from the whole people of Israel, (111) who love Joseph and whom he loves." The synagogue leaders, the priests and the Levites said to them: "Pay attention to this: if Joseph accepts the letter from you and reads it, know that he will come to us. If he accepts the letter and does not read it, he will grieve greatly. If this happens, greet him and come back to us." He accompanied them outside.

The men, when they left them, went to Arimathea to Joseph. They saw him and greeted him and said to him: "Peace to you." He replied: "Peace to you and all the people of Israel." They gave him the letter. He took it and embraced and blessed it, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God who saved Israel from shedding innocent blood and blessed is the Lord who sent His angel and protected me under His wings." And he greeted them (112) and kissed them and set before them a table. They ate, drank and fell asleep with him. Early the following morning Joseph saddled up his donkey and went with them to Jerusalem. All the people came out to greet him, saying: "Peace to your coming." Joseph said to the people: "Peace to you." They greeted him, wondering at what they saw. Nicodemus received him and took him into his house. He provided a great reception for him. He thus<sup>53</sup> ordered Annas and Caiphas and the priests to come to his house. They went and rejoiced. They ate and drank with Joseph. Then each one went home and Joseph stayed with Nicodemus. Early the following day the high priests and the priests and the Levites came to the house of Nicodemus. Nicodemus came

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51 Gk 'tomos' means 'something cut', that is from a papyrus roll.

52 The Coptic should probably read:  $\alpha\pi\iota\nu\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$  . . .

53 The meaning is clear enough, but the Coptic as it stands is ungrammatical. Something like  $\alpha\phi\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\zeta\alpha\zeta\eta\epsilon$   $\epsilon\langle\tau\rho\epsilon\gamma\rangle\epsilon\iota\eta\epsilon$  is required. Gk 'called'.

(113) to meet them and greeted them. They said: "Peace to you and Joseph and your whole house and the whole house of Joseph." They went into his house. The whole Sanhedrin sat and so did Joseph, who sat between Annas and Caiphas. Nobody dared to say anything to him. Joseph said: "Why did you send for me?" They motioned to Nicodemus to speak to Joseph. Nicodemus said: "Our father Joseph, revered among all the people, you know that the revered teachers, priestss and Levites have been trying to hear from you." Joseph said: "Ask me anything you want." (114) Annas and Caiphas took the Law and made Joseph swear: "Glorify the God of Israel and confess to him. For Akhar was sworn and he did not swear a false oath. He told the truth. He did not conceal a single word. You too, conceal nothing from us, not even a single word." Joseph said: "I will conceal nothing from you." They said: "We were grieved that you asked for the body of Jesus and wrapped it up in a white shroud and put it in your new grave. So we watched over in a windowless house.<sup>54</sup> We sealed the entrance with seals and watchers who watched the house in which you were shut up. On the following day we opened the door and did not find you and were very grieved. Everybody has been dumbfounded<sup>55</sup> until now, so tell us what happened." (115) Joseph said: "On the sixth day at the tenth hour you shut me in and I spent the Sabbath locked in. In the middle of the night I stood to pray the house in which had locked me was taken, suspended on all four corners. I saw with my eyes a light like lightning. Afraid I fell to the ground. Someone<sup>56</sup> gave me a hand in the place where I had fallen. Water fell down on my head as far as my feet and a fragrant perfume pervaded my nostrils. The one who had brought me out wiped my face and greeted me. He said to me: 'Joseph, do not be afraid. Open your eyes and know who is speaking to you.' When I lifted my eyes, I looked and saw Jesus. I was afraid. I thought it was a vision. I uttered these commandments. He too said to me: 'You know that if a vision deceives someone (116) and follows him, it goes away and leaves him because of the commandments.' When I saw him saying these things, I said: 'Rabbi Elijah.' He said to me: 'I am not Elijah.' I said to him: 'Lord, who are you?' He said: 'I am Jesus, whose body you received from Pilate. You wrapped it in a shroud and put a towel on my face. You put me in the new grave, rolled a big stone in front of the entrance and sealed it.' I said to the one speaking to me: 'Tell me where I put you.' He took me and showed me the shroud and the towel that I had bound on His face, and I knew it was Jesus. He took me and brought me from the house where the doors were sealed. He made me lie on my bed and said to me: 'Peace to you.' He greeted me and said: 'Do not come out (117) your house for forty days. I am going to my brothers in Galilee.

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54 Gk text is slightly different in this passage

55 The word in both the Grk and Coptic is 'ecstasy', which means something like an out-of-body experience

56 Following the Gk



The synagogue leaders, the priests and the Levites, when they heard this, became like corpses. They fell to the ground and fasted until the 9th hour. Nicodemus and Joseph coaxed Annas and Caiphas and the priests and the Levites, saying: "Stand up and eat some bread and fortify your soul, for tomorrow is the Sabbath of the Lord." They stood up and prayed to God. They ate and drank and each one went home. On the following day, the Sabbath, the teachers and priests and the Levites sat, saying: "What is this anger that has visited us? Because<sup>57</sup> His father and mother, we know them." Levi the teacher said: "I know His parents to be God-fearing, who do not neglect prayer. And **(118)** they give the tithe three times a year. When Jesus was born, His parents brought Him to this place and donated and sacrificed to God. The great teacher<sup>58</sup> Simeon took Him in his arms and said to Him: "Dismiss your servant, Lord, in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation that He has prepared before all peoples to illuminate the Gentiles and a glory for your people of Israel." Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary: "I give you good news about the little one that He will become great and is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel. Your soul, a sword will pierce it so that many thoughts will be revealed." Annas and Caiphas said: "How did you hear this?" Levi the teacher said: "Do you not know that I was taught<sup>59</sup> the Law by Simeon?" **(119)** They said to him: "We the Sanhedrin of your fathers, we wish to understand." So they<sup>60</sup> sent for his father. His father came and said: "Why do you not believe my son Levi? The blessed and just Simeon himself was the one who taught him the Law." The Sanhedrin said: "What you say is true." The synagogue leaders and the priests and the Levites deliberated and said: "Let us send to Galilee for the three men who came again and told us about the teaching of Jesus and how He was taken up to heaven and told us about how He had been taken up to heaven." Everyone agreed, and they sent to bring the three men.<sup>61</sup> **(120)**

When they came, they said: "Let them say<sup>62</sup>: 'You Addas the rabbi and Phineas and Ogias, peace to you and all those with you. There has been a great inquiry in the Sanhedrin. People have been sent to you that you will come to this holy place of Israel.'" And the people went to Galilee. They found these people sitting and reading the Law. They greeted them in peace. They said to those who had come to them: "Peace to the whole people of Israel. Why have you

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57 Coptic: **ΖΟΤΕΙ ΜΕΝ**, which I take to be *ὅτι μὲν*, used in a causal sense. Revillout translates 'cependant', which I do not understand. Gk has no conjunction.

58 The story narrated in Lk, 2, 29ff.

59 The Coptic should probably read: **ΝΤΑΥΤΣΑΒΟΙ ΕΠΝΟΜΟΣ . . .**

60 Coptic seems to have the sing. pronoun

61 Gk. "They sent the three men who had come with them from Galilee

62 Gk. *εἶπατε*

come here ?" Those who had been sent said: "The Sanhedrin summons you to the holy city of Jerusalem." When the men heard that the Sanhedrin was asking after them, they prayed to God and sat down to eat with the men who had come to them. They ate and drank. They arose and went with them to Jerusalem in peace. (121) .

The Sanhedrin convened on the following day in the synagogue. They asked the men who had come: "Did you really see Jesus sitting on the hill of Mambrêkh and teaching His eleven disciples and did you see Him ascending to heaven ?" Annas said: "Take them away and separate them from each other to see if their stories agree with each other." They were separated, each in a place apart. They called Addas first and said: "Tell us if you saw Him ascending to heaven." Addas replied: "While He was still sitting on the hill and teaching His disciples, I saw a cloud of light that enveloped Him and His disciples. When Jesus arose, the cloud of light took Him to heaven, while His disciples lay face down on the ground praying." (122). They then called Phineas the priest and asked: "Did you see how He ascended to heaven ?" And he replied: "It was as he said." They then asked Ogias, who told the same story. The members of the Sanhedrin agreed with each other that the Law of Moses stated that anything that came from the mouths of two or three witnesses was true.

One of the teachers<sup>63</sup> said: "It is written that Enoch was transported and was not found because he had been transported." Hierios the teacher also said: "The death of Moses: he died before the Lord and his burial place is not known to this day." (123) Levi the rabbi said: "When Simeon saw Jesus, he said: 'This one is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel.'" Another one named Isaac said: "It is written in the Law: 'Behold I will send my angel before you that he may watch over you on all your ways, for my name is upon you.'"<sup>64</sup> Annas and Caiphas said: "You have quoted the scriptures of Law correctly, for nobody saw Enoch or Elijah die. But we have seen Jesus speaking with Pilate and being slapped on the mouth, being spat at, a crown of thorns placed on His head and beaten by the soldiers. Pilate sentenced Him and He was crucified in the Place of Skulls.(124) Demas and Kestas, both were hanged with Him. He was given vinegar and gall to drink. His was pierced with a spear by Longinus the soldier. Our revered father Joseph asked for His body. He rose from the dead, as He said and as the three teachers said: 'We saw Him ascending to heaven.' Levi the rabbi said, bearing witness to Simeon and the things he said: 'This one is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel and is a sign that will be opposed.'"

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63 Gk. Bouthem the teacher

64 Ex. 23, 20, but the wording is slightly different: Gk. '... because my name has been called on it (way)'.

The teachers said to the whole people of Israel: "If this one becomes a miracle before our eyes, then be aware, house of Jacob, that everyone hanged on a cross is cursed.<sup>65</sup> (125). The scripture tells us that the gods who did not create heaven and earth will die." The priests and the Levites spoke to each other: "His memory will endure until Soum and the one called Jôbel.<sup>66</sup> if this happens. You will know that His name will endure forever and that He will leave for Himself a new people." The synagogue leaders, the priests and the Levites announced to the whole people: "Cursed is the man who worships the works of human hands and cursed is the one who worship creation before the creator" and everyone responded: "Amen, amen" and began to chant: 'Blessed is the Lord who has given rest to the people of Israel in accordance with every word He said. And not a word has fallen from His goodness and every word He said through(126) Moses His servant and the things He said to us as He had said to our fathers. Do not abandon us, Lord. Do not keep us at a distance from You that we may humble our heart for You and walk in Your ways and keep Your commandment. Do not shame us. Keep us for You. Your judgements are before us and Your truths, in the matter of which You have bound us and our fathers. The Lord has established Himself as king over all the earth and on that day the Lord will establish Himself, His name of Lord Our King being One. He will save us and there is nobody like You, Lord. You are great and Your name is great.

Heal us, Lord and save us. For we are Your portion and Your heirs. The Lord will not abandon us His people because of His great name. The Lord has begun to make us a people for Him." After they had finished chanting, each one went home in peace. Amen.

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65 Deut. 21,23

66 Gk. '... until the sômmos called Jôbel (perhaps related to 'Jubilee')