

The Gospel of Peter and the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

Using Cognitive Science to Reconstruct Gospel Traditions

by

ISTVÁN CZACHESZ

This contribution compares the *Gospel of Peter* with gospel traditions in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. I will restrict my investigation to the second and early third century, when the earliest, so-called 'major' Apocryphal Acts were written. In those writings, both references to Jesus' passion as well as reports of the apostles' martyrdom will receive attention. In the final part of the article, proposals will be made about the formation of the common tradition, relying on models of memory and orality from cognitive science.

1. The Gospel of Peter and the Apocryphal Acts

a. The Gospel of the Acts of John

That the *Acts of John* 88-104 contains a short gospel has been acknowledged by various scholars, yet this apocryphal gospel did not receive much attention in the discussion of the gospel tradition.¹ The *Gospel of the Acts of John* begins with a prologue and the call of the disciples, reports various details from Jesus' ministry, particularly, the transfiguration (in two versions), a visit in the house of a Pharisee, and the multiplication of bread. A number of episodes are unique to this *Gospel*: John watches Jesus on several occasions, Jesus never blinks his eyes, leaves no footprints on the ground, and once he pulls John's beard. The

¹ There is no discussion, to my knowledge, of this passage as a gospel. Cf. K. Beyschlag, *Die verborgene Überlieferung von Christus*, München 1969, 97-116; E. Junod/J.-D. Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis 2*, Turnhout 1983, 595-600, writing about 'the use of gospel traditions'; P. Lalleman, *The Acts of John. A Two-Stage Initiation Into Johannine Gnosticism*, Leuven 1998, 42-46; I. Czachesz, *Apostolic Commission Narratives in the Canonical and Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, Diss. Groningen 2002, 96-110.

last supper is replaced by a ritual dance of Jesus and the disciples, and the Gospel concludes with a passion narrative. For the time being, we will focus on details of the text that can be directly related to the *Gospel of Peter*.²

In the passion of *Acts of John* 97-102, while the crowd thinks they are crucifying the Saviour, the *real* Jesus teaches John in a cave on the Mount of Olives. We first have to consider his words, 'John, to the multitude down below in Jerusalem I am being crucified, and pierced with lances and reeds, and gall and vinegar is given me to drink'.³ Both piercing with reeds (νύσσω, καλάμιος) and the mention of gall and vinegar together (χολή, ὄξος) are found in the *Acts of John* 101 and the *Gospel of Peter* (9 and 16, respectively) but none of the other gospels.⁴ Interestingly, the same combination occurs in one of the Nag Hammadi texts, *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*: 'Another, their father, was the one who drank the gall with the vinegar (ἵπικιωε ἢ πικρῖα) it was not I. They were hitting me with the reed (ἵπικια); another was the one who lifted up the cross on his shoulder, who was Simon.'⁵

In the following section, *Acts of John* 98-101, a cross of light appears to John, and the voice of the Lord talks to him from the cross.⁶ The motif evidently parallels the resurrection scene of the *Gospel of Peter* 41-42, where the question whether Christ had preached to the dead is answered by a voice from the cross. There is, however, no literal agreement (beyond σταυρός) between the two texts in this case.⁷

Later, the voice from the cross explains to John, 'Therefore I have suffered none of the things which they will say of me.' This is parallel to the remark of the *Gospel of Peter* 11: 'But he held his peace as (if) he felt no pain.' Again, there is no verbatim agreement between the two texts.⁸

² For the text of the Gospel of Peter, see T.J. Kraus/T. Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse. Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung*, GCS.NF 11; Neutestamentliche Apokryphen 1, Berlin-New York 2004.

³ Text in E. Junod/J.-D. Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis. Praefatio – Textus*, Turnhout, 1983. The translation of the major Apocryphal Acts, the Gospel of Peter, and some other Christian apocrypha has been adapted from J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M.R. James*, Oxford 1993.

⁴ Gospel of Peter 9 and 16; cf. Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 129-130. Piercing with reeds occurs in Sibylline Oracles 1.374 and 8.296; cf. L. Vaganay, *L'Évangile de Pierre*, Paris 1930, 228; M.G. Mara, *Évangile de Pierre. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*, Paris 1973, 103-104. 'Gall' and 'vinegar' occur in Psalm 68:22, Barnabas 7:3-5, and a number of later Christian texts; cf. Vaganay, *Évangile*, 246; Mara, *Évangile*, 129-132.

⁵ *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NHC VII,2) 56.6-10, text and translation G. Riley, in: B.A. Pearson (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, Leiden 1996, 165; cf. Junod/Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* 1, 595 n. 7.

⁶ Cf. J.-M. Prieur, *La croix vivante dans la littérature chrétienne du II^e siècle*, RHPPh 79, 1999, 435-444, esp. 435-437.

⁷ Another passage of the *Acts of John* contains an important parallel. The occurrence of ὑπακούω in the meaning of 'answer' in *Acts of John* 94 is an early evidence of the liturgical use of the word, supporting the reading ὑπακοή in *Gospel of Peter* 42; cf. Vaganay, *Évangile*, 302-303; Mara, *Évangile*, 190; Kraus/Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 43.

⁸ Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 131-132, writes about 'conceptual intertextuality', claiming that both texts were influenced by docetic Christology. His explanation will be criticised below.

According to the *Acts of John* 102, 'When [Jesus] had spoken to me these things and others which I know not how to say as he would have me, he was taken up (...).' The same verbal form, 'taken up' (ἀνελήφθη) is used here as in the *Gospel of Peter* 19: 'And having said this, he was taken up.' In the Synoptics we find at this place 'breathed his last, expired' (ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα, ἐξέπνευσεν), in John 'gave up his spirit' (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα).⁹

A motif of the resurrection scene in the *Gospel of Peter* 40, Christ's head reaching beyond the heavens (κεφαλὴν ... ὑπερβαίνουσιν τοὺς οὐρανοὺς), is found also in *Acts of John* 90. In the *Acts of John*, there is no resurrection (Christ is not actually crucified and ascends directly to heaven, as we have seen above). However, when John describes the appearance of Jesus in different shapes, he mentions that on one occasion, 'his feet were whiter than snow, so that the ground there was lit up by his feet, and his head reached to heaven (τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐρειδομένην)'.

The list of agreements between the two gospels against other gospel texts is impressive and needs explanation. The *Gospel of Peter* has traditionally been stamped as docetic; this view has been challenged by recent scholarship.¹⁰ Even if we admitted that both the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Acts of John* were influenced by docetism, this would hardly explain the range of agreements. Christ's head reaching to (or beyond) heaven as well as the verbatim agreements of 'pierce', 'reed', 'gall' and 'vinegar' are difficult to connect with docetic christology; also, whereas 'taken up' in the *Acts of John* reflects a docetic concept (Christ did not suffer), the *Gospel of Peter* follows the sequence of death, burial, and resurrection.

A further interesting agreement is found between the *Gospel of Peter* 59 and the *Acts of John* by Pseudo-Prochorus.¹¹ In both texts, the author writes in the first person plural about 'we the twelve'. Both the use of first person and the number of twelve deserve our attention. After Judas' betrayal and death, the synoptics refer to the apostles as 'the eleven'.¹² The expression 'we the twelve' also occurs in *Apocalypse of Peter* 5, and is implied by the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* (cf. also the Ethiopic text of *Epistula Apostolorum* 19).¹³

⁹ Matt 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30. The passive voice of ἀναλαμβάνω normally refers to the ascension (e.g., Mark 16:19; Acts 1:2).

¹⁰ For an overview, see R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. From Gethsemane to the Grave 2*, New York 1994, 1137-1138. See also M. Myllykoski's article in the present volume.

¹¹ T. Zahn, *Acta Joannis*, Erlangen 1880, 32. Cf. Vaganay, *Évangile*, 337.

¹² Matt 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:9,33; cf. Acts 1:26.

¹³ *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* (NHC VI,1) 1:9-13 and passim, cf. the title (12:20-22): 'The acts of Peter with the twelve apostles'. In 1 Cor 15:5 Paul mentions Christ's appearance 'to Kefas and then to the twelve'. In Acts 1:26, Codex Bezae has 'twelve' rather than 'eleven'.

b. The Acts of Peter

In the *Acts of Peter* there are only few direct references to Jesus' passion. As in the *Gospel of Peter* 1-2, in *Acts of Peter* 8 Herod is made responsible for Jesus' death: 'You (the devil) hardened the heart of Herod' (*Tu Herodis cor indurasti*). The motif also appears in the *Acts of Thomas* 32 (see below).¹⁴

The *Acts of Peter*, however, show significant parallels to the passion narrative in another way. That Peter's martyrdom imitates the passion of Christ is explicitly stated in the famous *quo vadis* episode: 'When he (Peter) went out of the gate he saw the Lord come into Rome. And when he saw him he said, "Lord, where are you going?" And the Lord said to him, "I go to Rome to be crucified"' (ch. 35).

Peter is arrested by four soldiers and taken before prefect Agrippa. Given the emphasis on Herod's responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion in the *Acts of Peter* (see above), it would not be surprising if this were an allusion to another 'Herod', namely king Agrippa I (10 BC-44 CE).¹⁵ In Acts 12, Agrippa I is called Herod and presented as a persecutor of Christianity. After executing James, the brother of John, he

proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

The use of the name Herod as well as the mention of Unleavened Bread in the Lukan account allude to Jesus' passion. The mentions of four soldiers in *Acts of Peter* 36 and four times four in Acts 12 suggest that the two accounts of Peter's arrest derive from a common tradition.¹⁶ This makes it even more plausible that the name Agrippa in the *Acts of Peter* is meant as an allusion to the Herods involved in the executions and imprisonments of Jesus and his disciples.

Only in the *Gospel of Peter* is Jesus actually *ordered* to be crucified, and this order comes from Herod (v. 2: τότε κελεύει Ἡρώδης).¹⁷ Agrippa's command to crucify Peter (ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν σταυρωθῆναι) parallels that passion narrative. Again, the explicit mention of Herod's responsibility in Jesus' death earlier in the *Acts of Peter* makes the link even more plausible.

The *Gospel of Peter* gives special attention to Joseph of Arimathea in contrast to the other gospels. Joseph is introduced as a 'friend of Pilate as well as of the Lord' (v. 2). Peter is buried by a prominent character of the *Acts of Peter*, senator Marcellus, who is rebuked by Nero for his charitable deeds with the Christians (ch. 8). Marcellus washes the body with costly cosmetics and buries

¹⁴ Cf. *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* 26, 'We will kill you as Herod killed your teacher called Jesus'; Vaganay, *Évangile*, 205; Mara, *Évangile*, 74-77.

¹⁵ Cf. I. Karasszon, Agrippa, King and Prefect, in: *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, ed. by J.N. Bremmer, Leuven 1998, 21-28.

¹⁶ Four soldiers execute Thomas (*Acts of Thomas* 164-168), but they are not mentioned at his arrest.

¹⁷ According to the other gospels Pilate handed him over (παρέδωκεν) to be crucified.

him in his own tomb. Two verbatim agreements draw our attention in this scene. The washing of the body is not mentioned in any other gospel, except for *Gospel of Peter* 24; the same verbal form, ἔλουσε(ν), occurs in the *Acts of Peter* 60. Only the *Gospel of Peter* uses the adjective ἴδιος to emphasise the tomb was Joseph's own one; again, the same word is used in the *Acts of Peter* in connection with Marcellus' tomb.

There are also details in the *Acts of Peter* which clearly parallel other gospel traditions than that of the *Gospel of Peter*. For example, Peter 'gave up his spirit (to the Lord)' (τὸ πνεῦμα τῷ κυρίῳ παρέδωκεν / ἀπέπνευσεν / *deposuit spiritum*), as Jesus did in the canonical gospels, and was not 'taken up' as Jesus in the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Gospel of the Acts of John* (see above).¹⁸

c. The Acts of Paul

Although Paul is beheaded with a sword rather than crucified, his martyrdom in the *Acts of Paul* parallels Jesus' passion narrative at several points.¹⁹ Paul was sentenced to death by the emperor Nero, who 'commanded (ἔκελευσεν) all the prisoners [i.e. Paul's fellow-Christians] to be burned with fire, but Paul to be beheaded according to the law of the Romans' (Martyrdom 3). Similarly as in the *Gospel of Peter*, a direct command of execution is given.

When Paul was beheaded, the *Acts of Paul* reports, 'milk splashed on the tunic of the soldier' (Martyrdom 5). After seeing this,

the soldier and all who stood near by were astonished at this sight and glorified God who had thus honoured Paul. And they went away and reported everything to Caesar. When he heard of it he was amazed and did not know what to say.

In the synoptic tradition, the signs accompanying Jesus' death make the centurion confess that Jesus was 'son of God' or 'a righteous man'.²⁰ There is no mention in the gospels, however, of the soldiers reporting this to Pilate or Herod. In the *Gospel of Peter*, in contrast, the confession of the centurion occurs after the resurrection (45-46):

When those who were of the centurion's company saw this they hurried by night to Pilate, leaving the sepulchre which they were guarding, and reported everything that they had seen, being greatly agitated (ἀγωνιῶντες) and saying, 'In truth he was (the) Son of God.' Pilate answered and said, 'I am clean from the blood of the Son of God; it was you who desired it.'

¹⁸ The usage is consistently retained in later versions of Peter's Martyrdom: *Martyrium Petri et Pauli* / *Passio sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli* 62 (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῷ κυρίῳ / *emissit spiritum*); *Acta Petri et Pauli* 83 (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα), both in R.A. Lipsius, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* 1, Leipzig 1891, 172-173, 216, respectively.

¹⁹ *Martyrium Pauli* (Greek) and *Passionis Pauli fragmentum* (Latin) in Lipsius, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* 1, 104-117; C. Schmidt, ΠΡΑΞΕΙΣ ΠΑΥΛΟΥ. *Acta Pauli*, Glückstadt-Hamburg 1936, 60-73 (Hamburg Papyrus); idem, *Acta Pauli*. Aus der Heidelberger Koptischen Papyrushandschrift Nr. 1, Leipzig 1905, 48*-50* (Coptic Heidelberg Papyrus).

²⁰ Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47.

The soldiers' report of Paul's death to Nero, although in a different vocabulary, parallels the soldiers' rushing to Pilate in the *Gospel of Peter*. When hearing the report of the miracle at Paul's execution, Nero is amazed and confused (θαυμάζοντος καὶ διαποροῦντος), but his amazement will soon turn into fear (ταραχθείς).²¹ Unlike John and Peter in their respective *Acts*, Paul is resurrected in the *Acts of Paul*. He predicts to Nero that he (Paul) would be raised from the dead and would appear to him (Nero) (ch. 4), and announces his resurrection again to two of Nero's soldiers (ch. 5). Before his death, he instructs two new converts, Longus and Cestus, to come to his tomb early in the morning following his death (ch. 5). Soon after Nero receives the report of the soldiers, Paul himself, resurrected, appears to him:

While many philosophers and the centurion were assembled with the emperor, Paul came about the ninth hour, and in the presence of all he said, 'Caesar, behold, here is Paul, the soldier of God; I am not dead but live in my God. But upon you, unhappy one, many evils and great punishments will come because you have unjustly shed the blood of the righteous not many days ago.' ... When Nero heard this he was very frightened and commanded that the prisoners be released.

The statement of Nero's guiltiness in 'unjustly shedding the blood of the righteous' parallels the self-defence of Pilate, 'I am clean from the blood of the Son of God', and his command to release the prisoners the command of Pilate to keep Jesus' resurrection in secret.

Paul also appears to the two converts whom he ordered to visit his tomb. When Longus and Cestus approach the tomb, they take sight of 'two men in prayer and Paul between them'. They explain to Paul's companions, Titus and Luke, that they came to the tomb on Paul's command, 'whom we have seen in prayer between you before a little while' (implying that Paul disappeared meanwhile). This passage shows agreements with *Gospel of Peter* 39, where two men 'support' (ὑπορθῶω) Christ as he ascends to heaven.

Again, motifs that typically resemble other traditions than that of the *Gospel of Peter* are also found in the text. For example, before his execution, Paul 'prayed at length' and 'conversed in Hebrew with the fathers'. In the Hamburg Papyrus, Paul also prays 'Father ... I commit my spirit, receive it!' Although the last sentence is not totally clear in the manuscript,²² the motif of praying in Hebrew is best associated with Jesus' cry 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?',²³ and his last words in Luke 23:46, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'²⁴

²¹ According to the later *Passio Sancti Pauli Apostoli* 18, when Pilate heard the news about Paul's execution, he was 'amazed and horrified' (miratus est horrifice). Lipsius, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* 1, 42.

²² Schmidt's conjecture: 'Father of my Lord Jesus Christ (?), in his (?) hands I commit my soul, and Lord Jesus, receive it!'

²³ Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46. *Gospel of Peter* 19 has 'My power, O power, you have forsaken me', without indicating that the words were spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic.

²⁴ Cf. Stephen's last words in Acts 7:59: 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'

d. The Acts of Andrew

Andrew in his Acts is crucified in Patras by Aegeates, proconsul of Achaea.²⁵ His conviction by the proconsul and his death on the cross can be readily compared to the passion of Jesus. According to *Acts of Andrew* 51, Aegeates

commanded that Andrew be scourged with seven whips. Then he sent him off to be crucified and commanded the executioners to leave his knees uncut, supposing that by so doing he would punish Andrew even more cruelly.

As in the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul*, the proconsul actually commanded that the apostle was executed. Even more interesting is, however, Aegeates' order that the executioners do not cut Andrew's knees. The author finds this point especially important, because he later reports,

they tied up only his feet and armpits, without nailing up his hands or feet *nor severing his knees because of what the proconsul had commanded them, for Aegeates intended to torment him* by being hung and being eaten by dogs if he were still alive at night.

This passage is a perfect parallel to *Gospel of Peter* 14, 'And they were angry with him and commanded that his legs should not be broken so that he might die in torment.' An intertextual link is even the more likely since the motif is not frequent in ancient literature.²⁶

The proconsul's brother, Stratocles, converted to Christianity. When he heard of Andrew's arrest, 'he arrived running and saw the executioners violently dragging off (βίβη σπρόμενον) the blessed one like a criminal' (ch. 52). That the soldiers were 'dragging' Jesus at his arrest is not mentioned in the canonical gospels, but receives much attention in *Gospel of Peter* 6. It also occurs in *Acts of Thomas* 106, where parallels with the *Gospel of Peter* are even more explicit (see below).

The personification of the cross in *Acts of Andrew* 54 is a motif that we have already seen in the *Acts of John* and the *Gospel of Peter* (see above). Andrew calls the cross 'pure, radiant, full of life and light',²⁷ which is very similar to the image of the cross of light in *Acts of John* 98-100. The personified cross does not speak in the *Acts of Andrew*, which makes the analogy with the *Gospel of Peter* less direct in this writing than in the *Acts of John*.²⁸

²⁵ Text in J.-M. Prieur, *Acta Andreae. Textus*, Turnhout 1989, 507-549. Cf. J.-M. Prieur, *Acta Andreae. Prefatio – Commentarius*, Turnhout 1989, 45-56.

²⁶ J.N. Bremmer, *Man, Magic, and Martyrdom in the Acts of Andrew*, in: idem (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*, Leuven 2000, 15-34, esp. 33-34. Cf. John 19:31-33.

²⁷ For the various versions of Andrew's address to the cross, see Prieur, *Acta Andreae. Textus*, 737-745.

²⁸ An even less direct parallel is found in *Acts of Peter* 37, where Peter personifies the 'name of the cross', cf. *Armenian Martyrdom of Andrew* 72-73 (Prieur, *Acta Andreae. Textus*, 741). In the *Gospel of the Savior* (UBE; Pap. Berolinensis 22220) Jesus addresses the cross (C.W. Hedrick/P.A. Mirecki, *Gospel of the Savior. A New Ancient Gospel*, Santa Rosa/Cal. 1999, 38-39, 52-63; and S. Emmel, *The Recently Published Gospel of the Savior* [„Unbekanntes Berliner Evangelium“]. *Righting the Order of Pages and Events*, HThR 95, 2002, 45-72). In the Ethiopic

Andrew's death is reported similarly as that of Paul (and Peter). In his last prayer he entreats Christ, 'But you yourself, O Christ, you whom I desired ... receive me, so that by my departure to you there may be a reunion of my many kindred, those who rest in your majesty.' When he said this, 'he handed over his spirit' (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα, ch. 63).

e. The Acts of Thomas

Among the few references to the gospel narrative, the serpent in the *Acts of Thomas* 32 underlines the role of the Jewish leaders, Herod and Caiaphas, in Jesus' death: 'I (the serpent) am he who kindled Herod (ὁ τὸν Ἡρώδη πυρώσας) and inflamed Caiaphas to the lying accusation before Pilate.' The passage is similar to *Acts of Peter* 8 (see above); given the assumed dependence of the *Acts of Thomas* on the *Acts of Peter*,²⁹ it might be drawn from the latter, rather than from the *Gospel of Peter*.

The martyrdom of Thomas in *Acts of Thomas* 105-170 is the longest among the major Acts.³⁰ Thomas is arrested at the house of Charisius, a near relative of king Misdaeus, whose wife Mygdonia became a follower of apostle. Misdaeus sent 'many soldiers' to Charisius' house (ch. 105), where Charisius

took a mantle from one of his servants, put it on the neck of the apostle and said, 'Drag him off (σύρατε) and take him away; I shall see whether God can save him from my hands.' And they dragged him off (σύραντες) and took him to King Misdaeus (ch. 106).

The first detail that catches our attention at Thomas' arrest is Charisius' command to 'drag him off'. We have seen that the motif does not occur in the canonical gospels, but both in *Acts of Andrew* 52 (see above) and in *Gospel of Peter* 6:

So they took the Lord and pushed him as they ran and said, 'Let us drag (σύρωμεν) the Son of God along now that we have got power over him.' And they put upon him a purple robe and set him on the judgement seat³¹

Not only do soldiers 'drag' the victims in both the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Acts of Thomas*, their torturers also claim they have them in their power, saying, 'I shall

Apocalypse of Peter 1, the cross is said to 'come before Jesus' face' at the Parousia. For other writings, cf. Vaganay, *Évangile*, 298-299; Mara, *Évangile*, 188-189; Prieur, *La croix vivante*.

²⁹ D.R. MacDonald, *Which Came First: Intertextual Relationships Between the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, Sem. 80, 1997, 11-41; A.F.J. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas. Introduction – Text – Commentary*, Leiden 2003, 26.

³⁰ Greek: *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* 2/2, Leipzig 1903, 217-287; Syriac: P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriacae* 3, Leipzig 1892, 107-175.

³¹ Justin, *1 apol.* 35:6 seems to report the same tradition: "And as the prophet spoke, they tormented (διασύροντες) him, and set him on the judgement-seat, and said, 'Judge us.'" Cf. 4 Macc 6:1; Acts 8:3 and 17:6; *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* 25-26; *Acts of Philip*, Martyrdom 14; Vaganay, *Évangile*, 223-224; Mara, *Évangile*, 89 n. 3. On the question whether Justin used the *Gospel of Peter*, see Kraus/Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 11-12, and the article of K. Greschat in the present volume.

see whether God can save him from my hands' and 'we have got power over him', respectively. Charisius' casting a mantle³² on Thomas' neck might parallel the purple robe put on Jesus; the latter episode, however, is not restricted to the *Gospel of Peter* among the gospels.

The rest of Thomas' martyrdom contains various agreements with other gospels and apostolic Acts, but no particular references to the *Gospel of Peter*. The four soldiers, already known to us from Acts 12 and *Acts of Peter* 36 (see above), are given theological importance at Thomas' execution (ch. 165). Thomas' appearance to his followers at his tomb includes parallels with different gospels; the apostle instructs Siphor and Vazan, 'Why do you sit here and keep watch over me? I am not here but I have gone up and received all that I was promised. But rise up and go down hence; for after a little time you also shall be gathered to me;' he also comforts Mygdonia and Tertia, 'Do not be deceived: Jesus the holy, the living one, shall quickly send help to you.'

2. The common tradition of the Gospel of Peter and the major Apocryphal Acts

In the first part of the chapter we have searched each of the major Apocryphal Acts for elements which are found in the *Gospel of Peter* but not in the canonical gospels. Before proceeding with the explanation of the textual evidence, it will be helpful to summarise our findings in a table, this time from the perspective of the *Gospel of Peter*. The words in italics in the table indicate verbatim agreement.³³ In the last column other important early Christian parallels are listed, including references to some later Apocryphal Acts.

GosPet	AJ	APet	APaul	AAndr	AThom	Other
Herod and judges do not wash hands		devil hardened Herod			serpent kindled Herod and Caiaphas	Andrew and Matthias
Herod's <i>command</i>		Agrippa's <i>command</i>	Nero's <i>command</i>	Aegeates' <i>command</i>	Charisius' <i>command</i>	
<i>dragging</i> Jesus, having power over him				<i>dragging</i> Andrew	<i>dragging</i> Thomas, see if he is rescued	Justin; Acts; Andrew and Matthias

³² In Origen, *Selecta in Ezechielem* 13:812.28, ἡμιφύριον explains περιβόλαιον, worn by the personified Jerusalem. In the Septuagint, περιβόλαιον is any clothing that covers the body; in 1 Cor 11:15 it means women's headcovers. Passages referred by Lampe, s.v., show that ἡμιφύριον was later worn by monks. In the Syriac, ma'phrâ is worn by women and priests, cf. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, s.v.; Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, 119, translates 'turban', cf. his commentary on p. 273.

³³ Verbatim agreement does not always extend to the grammatical form.

throwing robe on Jesus					throwing mantle on Thomas	
<i>pierce with reeds</i>	<i>pierce with reeds</i>					Sib. Or.; Sec. Treat. of Great Seth
no pain	no suffering					docetism?
<i>gall with vinegar</i>	<i>gall and vinegar</i>					Barn.; Sec. Treat. of Great Seth
bones not broken to prolong suffering				knees uncut to prolong suffering		
<i>taken up</i>	<i>taken up</i>					ascension
high-status Joseph <i>washes</i> the body; buries it in his <i>own</i> grave		high-status Marcellus <i>washes</i> the body; buries it in his <i>own</i> grave				
ascension between two men			appearance between two men			AscIlsa 15-17
<i>head reaching beyond heaven</i>	<i>head reaching to heaven</i>					
voice from the cross	voice from the cross	(personified cross)		personified cross		UBE; Rev. of Peter
soldiers agitated, confess, report			soldiers astonished, confess, report			
Pilate's confession; clean from <i>blood</i> ; <i>orders</i> guard			Nero's confusion; shedding righteous <i>blood</i> ; <i>orders</i> release of Christians			
we the Twelve						Ps.-Prochorus; Peter and the Twelve

A general look at the table reveals that the passages extend to the entire plot of the *Gospel of Peter* as well as involve all of the major Acts. The parallels include verbatim agreements as well as similar content expressed in different

words. Most verbatim parallels are found in the *Acts of John*, but all of the major Acts contain at least one verbatim or otherwise very strong agreement. The extent and strength of the agreements makes it unlikely that we have to do with an ensemble of coincidences. Consequently, some kind of intertextual relation has to be established between the *Gospel of Peter* and the Apocryphal Acts.

Technically speaking, we have four major options to establish an intertextual link between the *Gospel of Peter* and any of the Apocryphal Acts. (1) The author used a copy of the *Gospel of Peter*. Were the parallels sentence-long verbatim agreements, this option would be very plausible. This is, however, not the case. If the author had a written copy of the *Gospel of Peter*, he opted to use it freely. (2) The author did not have a copy of the *Gospel of Peter* at hand, but read or heard it earlier and relied on his memory. (3) The author had access to a document related to the *Gospel of Peter*, such as a source or a different version. (4) The author relied on oral tradition connected with the *Gospel of Peter*. This might have been an oral source, parallel tradition, or a result of 'secondary orality'.

These four solutions actually can be reduced to two major options. The third solution, that the author used a written document related to the *Gospel of Peter*, immediately raises the question of how the *Gospel of Peter* used that hypothetical document (or vice versa). Consequently, both the first and third solution mount to the problem of reconstructing the scribal manoeuvres that transform the readings of the extant *Gospel of Peter* into their parallels in the Apocryphal Acts (or vice versa). Also the second and fourth solutions are close relatives. Citing a text from memory is basically the first stage of secondary orality. That is, the second major option is to consider oral transmission and its possible effects on texts to explain the connection between the extant *Gospel of Peter* and its parallels in the Apocryphal Acts.

Before going into more detail, a comparison with the use of other early Christian literature in the Apocryphal Acts may provide us with a good starting point. Studies on the use of the New Testament and other early Christian texts in the Apocryphal Acts show that parallels with such literature are of a similar nature as parallels with the *Gospel of Peter*.³⁴ Most agreements extend to one to a few words, regard phrases and expressions, include ideas reformulated in different words, or are due to conceptual similarities. This includes references to the epistles of Paul, which undoubtedly were the earliest written documents of Christianity in broad circulation.³⁵ In general, it is extremely difficult to locate extended verbatim quotations (such as complete sentences) of literary texts in the Apocryphal Acts. This overall picture yields

³⁴ P. Herczeg, New Testament Parallels to the Apocryphal Acta Pauli documents, in: The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, ed. by J.N. Bremmer, Kampen 1996, 142-149; Lalleman, Acts of John, 71-75. 110-135.

³⁵ H. Gamble, Books and Readers in the Early Church. A History of Early Christian Texts, New Haven-London 1995, 95-101.

the preliminary conclusion that the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles came to existence in an oral context, including probably both primary and secondary orality. In the rest of my article I will outline a model which is capable of explaining the type of intertextuality found in the *Gospel of Peter* and the Apocryphal Acts, and which is potentially extensible to other texts of earliest Christianity.

3. Martyrdom texts in a cognitive perspective

The use of cognitive science in orality studies provides biblical scholars with hitherto unexploited resources for understanding early Christian tradition.³⁶ The model that I will briefly outline relies on two findings of cognitive science: (1) the use of narrative scripts in remembering events; and (2) the mechanism of serial recall in retrieving texts. There are a number of additional aspects of (oral) transmission that cannot be discussed here, such as the role of innate mental structures and rituals in the transmission of cultural information.³⁷

Let us first consider narrative scripts. Human perception and memory make use of various levels of filtering and schematisation. Inherited and culturally learned structures of the mind determine what kind of information we perceive and in which ways we deal with that information.³⁸ Events that we experience are stored in memory as narrative scripts.³⁹ Any particular experience is perceived using the relevant script in our memory as well as it modifies the exact form of that script. When we receive a sufficient amount of information that is related to a given script, the script is evoked (instantiated).⁴⁰ The interpretative power of scripts lies in that once a script is evoked it supplies information that is not immediately available in the actual situation.⁴¹ At the same time, reality is distorted by (or better: experienced in terms of) the expectations and limits imposed on it by our available scripts. We extend the original use of scripts inasmuch as we apply them not only to remembering real-life (autobiographical) events but other information as well.⁴²

³⁶ Cf. I. Czachesz, *Cognitive Science and the Gospels*, in: *Learned Antiquity. Scholarship and Society in the Near-East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, ed. by A.A. MacDonald et al., Leuven 2003, 25-36; idem, *Toward a Cognitive Psychology of Early Christian Tradition*, *Studies in Religion* 2006 [forthcoming]; R. Uro, *Explaining Radical Family Ethos. A Critique of Theories Concerning the Synoptic Antifamilial Traditions*, NTT 2006 [forthcoming].

³⁷ For those aspects, cf. Czachesz, *Toward a Cognitive Psychology*, and the literature discussed there.

³⁸ A representative study is S. Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, London 1997.

³⁹ Our starting point is R.C. Schank/R.P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding. An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*, Hillsdale/N.J. 1977.

⁴⁰ Schank/Abelson, *Scripts*, 46-50, describe very precise rules for the application of scripts.

⁴¹ Schank/Abelson, *Scripts*, 41.

⁴² See E. Minchin, *Homer and the Resources of Memory. Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey*, Oxford 2001, for an attempt to use script theory in Homeric studies.

In early Christian literature it is easy to identify a number of frequently used scripts, such as the 'martyrdom script', the 'gospel script', the 'healing script', or 'divine call'.⁴³ A script is evoked when typical motifs occur in the information to be processed, such as illness, resurrection, or epiphany. The blueprint of the story is immediately made up in the listener's mind using the known details, whereas unknown details are filled up with default values of the relevant script. The importance of thinking in scripts is that the occurrence of a typical motif makes other details predictable: once 'martyrdom script' is evoked, the listener will predict a particular story pattern, excluding, for example, the possibilities that the hero was assassinated, or was acquitted during the trial.

Stories of martyrdom were well-known in Hellenistic (Jewish) literatures. That tradition probably began with classical Athenian civilisation, which nurtured a degree of interest in individuality unparalleled in other ancient cultures. An important consequence of this interest was the appearance of biography as a literary convention, of which the first example is Plato's *Apology of Socrates*.⁴⁴ The courage of the individual was powerfully represented by Socrates' martyrdom. Socrates' example gave later a decisive impetus to Christian images of martyrdom.⁴⁵ In Jewish literature, biographies mainly followed idealised patterns rather than portraying individual personalities.⁴⁶ And the ideal, it seems, was peaceful death rather than martyrdom. Even the martyrdom of a suffering prophet like Jeremiah is missing in the earliest tradition. In the Hellenistic period the situation changed. Paradoxically, it was likely under the influence of the Greek ideal that the story of the Maccabees, the emblematic figures of Jewish national pride, was coloured by the martyrdom narratives of Eleazar and the mother with seven sons.⁴⁷ The martyrdom narratives preserved in the books of the Maccabees contributed an important element to the martyrdom script: it was coloured by an Oriental interest in gruesome details.⁴⁸

⁴³ Cf. Czachesz, *Cognitive Science*, 29-32; idem, *Apostolic Commission Narratives*, 213-248.

⁴⁴ A. Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie*, Göttingen 1970, 18. 19. 35. 36 and passim; P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity. A Quest for the Holy Man*, Berkeley 1983, 7.

⁴⁵ As various scholars suggested, Acts 17 probably alludes to Socrates (e.g., J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting*, London 1970, 160-171). Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 12, reports that Christians called Peregrinus, when he was in prison, 'the new Socrates'. For the second and third century Fathers, see K.W. Döring, *Exemplum Socratis*, Wiesbaden 1979, 143-161. For Eusebius' *Life of Origen* 6:3.7, see Cox, *Biography*, 87.

⁴⁶ K. Baltzer, *Die Biographie der Propheten*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1975.

⁴⁷ 2 Macc. 6-7; 4 Macc. 5-12. Explicit references to those passages are found in *Martyrdom of Marian and James* 13:1 and *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* 16:4. Cf. A. Hilhorst, *Fourth Maccabees in Christian Martyrdom Texts*, in: *Ultima Aetas. Time, Tense and Transience in the Ancient World*, ed. by C. Kroon/D. Den Hengst, Amsterdam 2000, 107-122.

⁴⁸ For the sources of torture in early Christian imagination, see I. Czachesz, *Torture in Hell and Reality*, in: *The Apocalypse of Paul*, ed. by J.N. Bremmer/I. Czachesz, Leuven 2006, [forthcoming].

At the time when Christianity was emerging, the ideal of martyrdom became increasingly valued in the Roman world. Beginning with the early principate, Stoic contempt of death was famous, and accounts of Stoic martyrs circulated.⁴⁹ A particularly remarkable group of martyrdom texts is preserved in the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum*, containing records of the processes of Alexandrian noblemen, written probably between the middle of the first and the end of the second century CE.⁵⁰ Christian martyrdom is characterised by a twofold emphasis: on the one hand, Socratic wisdom during the trial, including a testimony or farewell speech; on the other hand, a detailed description of ordeals and death.⁵¹

The earliest Christian martyr texts include various reports of Jesus' passion, the martyrdom of the apostles, particularly in the major Apocryphal Acts, and the acts of the martyrs. Most examples of this literature follow the standard *martyrdom script*: 1. arrest; 2. imprisonment and tortures; 3. reaction of the martyr's companions; 4. significant words of the martyr; 5. conviction; 6. way to the place of execution; 7. last words of the martyr; 8. death; 9. miraculous signs; 10. reaction of friends and enemies; 11. resurrection; 12. appearances.

Narrative scripts not only predict an expected sequence of episodes, they also determine a set of narrative functions. In case of the Christian martyrdom script, it comprises the hero, the judge (monarch, proconsul, or other high-standing official), soldiers, the hero's companions, crowds etc. Their expected behaviour, their relation with each other, and the possible changes in their relation and character (conversion, betrayal, confession) are also predicted by the script.⁵² Already from a limited number of cues it is not difficult to construct a whole martyrdom narrative, filling up most details according to the default values of the scripts: proconsuls are hostile but impressed by the signs, some enemies convert, soldiers are struck with awe, the hero will resurrect and appear to his enemies and followers. That most Christian passion narratives, Apocryphal Acts, and martyrdom stories are rather similar to each other is not a matter of literary influence, but due to the constraints that the martyrdom script imposes on cognition.

At the same time, the narratives under examination are very different from each other. Verbatim agreement beyond the length of a few words is the exception, even among the synoptic gospels. A traditional way of explaining

⁴⁹ H.A. Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs. Acta Alexandrinorum*, Oxford 1954, 239-242.

⁵⁰ Musurillo, *Acts*, 83-232.

⁵¹ Whereas the Socratic, stoic, and cynic martyr ideal probably inspired formative Christianity, a direct influence of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* on the earliest Christian martyrdom narratives is unlikely; cf. Musurillo, *Acts*, v. 244. 262; K. Berger, *Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament*, ANRW 2.25.2, 1984, 1031-1432, esp. 1250-1251.

⁵² A full analysis of the martyrdom script would require a description of the narrative plot as well as of the narrative functions. Plot and functions are two interconnected aspects of the script: on the one hand, the plot emerges from the interaction of the characters; on the other hand, the function of the characters can be understood by analysing the plot. For an analysis of the 'commission script', see Czachesz, *Apostolic Commission*, 242-248.

this phenomenon is to attribute sophisticated editorial work to the authors, who rephrased each sentence in their sources according to their own theological views. It is not our task at this time to evaluate the documentary approaches to the gospel tradition. As for the comparison of the *Gospel of Peter* and the Apocryphal Acts, we have already provided arguments that compel us to solve the problems within the framework of orality.

When people recall and perform (or write down) texts, they also use another technique to fill up the blueprint provided by scripts. This technique is effective, *mutatis mutandis*, with narratives as well as poetic, legal, or other texts. In a process called *serial recall*, speakers depart from genre-specific constraints and some initial phrase, which gives cues to produce the next word or phrase, proceeding in this way from word to word, phrase to phrase, to build up sentences, episodes, up to very extensive and complex texts.⁵³ It seems that professional performers and casual ones alike follow basically the same strategy.⁵⁴ Different cues, including sound patterns, rhythm, rhymes, as well as syntactic and semantic features, help the speaker choose the next word in the text. Although professionals may make use of mnemonic techniques, this is not essential for the mechanism to work.

The set of words and phrases that can be used in telling a Christian martyrdom narrative is delimited by tradition. For example, expressions meaning 'gave up his spirit' (ἐξέπνευσεν, ἀπέπνευσεν, ἀφήκεν ... / παρέδωκεν / ἀπέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα) are preferred to report the death of the martyr in the gospels, the Apocryphal Acts, and often the acts of the martyrs,⁵⁵ above other alternatives. When the speaker or writer arrives at this detail, he knows that a phrase with 'spirit' is appropriate, but the actual formulation (using one of the above-mentioned phrases) is a matter of individual choice and momentary inspiration. Sometimes other alternatives are chosen, such as 'taken up' in *Gospel of Peter* 19, or other expressions, for example, in many acts of the martyrs. In this paradigm, the actual form of the text is a result of a delicate interplay of convention and improvisation.

Some details in the script are optional, but when they occur, they are frequently expressed with the same word. An example is the 'dragging' of the martyr in *Gospel of Peter* 6 and some Apocryphal Acts. Optional details may themselves form a 'sub-script' (a shorter chain of stereotyped events), such as the burial of the martyr. The burial script is implemented in a similar way in *Gospel of Peter* 24 and *Acts of Peter* 60, including verbal agreements (washing, 'own' grave). Such multiple verbal agreements may refer to a particular

⁵³ D. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions. The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*, New York 1995, 175-176.

⁵⁴ For example, American students were found to use this technique when recalling the Preamble of the Constitution; Rubin, *Memory*, 182.

⁵⁵ E.g., *Martyrdom of St. Carpus* 47; *Martyrdom of Pionius* 21:9; *Martyrdom of St. Conon* 6:5. For comparing the Apocryphal Acts with the Acts of the Martyrs, see A. Hilhorst, *The Apocryphal Acts as Martyrdom Texts. The Case of the Acts of Andrew*, in: *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, ed. by J.N. Bremmer, Kampen 1995, 1-14.

'dialect' in oral tradition, in which the formulation of an episode consistently made use of different words than in other dialects. Dialects of the tradition may be explained by social, linguistic (Greek, Latin, Syriac), or geographic relations between the respective implementations of the martyrdom script. For example, if particular dialects sympathised with high-status, influential Christians (possibly because such persons played a positive role in the respective communities), the burial script may have also paid special attention to persons like Joseph and Marcellus.

At other times, similarities are conceptual rather than textual, such as in the case of the personified cross. Within that larger concept, however, various textual traditions can be identified: the *Gospel of the Savior*, the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Andrew* seem to follow a closely related textual pattern of the address to the cross. The models of narrative scripts and serial recall, used in this article, are not particularly strong at explaining the evolution of concepts.⁵⁶

For the time being, I do not attempt a whole-scale explanation of the textual agreements between the *Gospel of Peter* and the Apocryphal Acts. Through a few examples I illustrated how a cognitive model of oral transmission can account for various types of textual relations between those writings. In the final part of the article, I want to ask about the historical framework in which such interactions between the respective texts may have occurred.

4. Did the Gospel of Peter influence the Apocryphal Acts?

If the similarities between the Apocryphal Acts and the gospels are due to the rules of remembering and orality, from the historical point of view we have the following possibilities: either the gospels (or some of them) influenced the Apocryphal Acts through *secondary orality*,⁵⁷ or the gospels (at least some of them) were in an oral-formative period at the very time during which the Apocryphal Acts (or their relevant parts) were composed. A definite answer to this question bears various implications for the dating of the gospels and the Apocryphal Acts. In this article I obviously cannot undertake such a large-scale investigation.

According to the opinion of recent scholarship, the major Apocryphal Acts were composed between the middle of the second and the first quarter of the third century.⁵⁸ The *Acts of John* have recently been dated even earlier, to the second quarter of the second century.⁵⁹ Our first, very careful conclusion is that beginning from the first half of the second century the Apocryphal Acts used either oral tradition that later became incorporated in the *Gospel of Peter*, or the

⁵⁶ Cf. Czachesz, *Toward a Cognitive Psychology*.

⁵⁷ Concerning the problem of secondary orality see also A. Kirk's article in the present volume.

⁵⁸ For the respective dates, see J.N. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts. Date, Time, and Readership*, in: idem, *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*, Leuven 2001, 149-170.

⁵⁹ Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 268-270.

Gospel of Peter itself from secondary orality. The literary fixation of the gospels (including the *Gospel of Peter*), as well as of the Apocryphal Acts, did not put an end to the oral transmission of the material included in them. Therefore, the dividing line between 'primary' and 'secondary' orality is far from being clear-cut: a cross-fertilisation of written and oral texts likely characterised the composition of the Apocryphal Acts.

Traditions of the apostles' death pre-dated the final composition of the Apocryphal Acts.⁶⁰ A more progressive conclusion, therefore, may date the use of the respective gospel traditions by the martyrdom narratives of the apostles to the end of the first and the beginning of the second century.

The third, provocative, conclusion sounds like this. Given that tradition set the martyrdom of Jesus under Pontius Pilate and the death of Paul (and Peter) under Nero, but the first written gospels are not dated earlier than 70 CE, we cannot *a priori* exclude that the respective martyrdom narratives circulated simultaneously before their fixation in writing. In that case, traditions of the martyrdom of Jesus and the apostles could have influenced each other within the framework of oral transmission, as outlined in the previous section. In principle, even some Apocryphal Acts could have been written before some of the (canonical) gospels.⁶¹ In that case, the intertextual relations between the gospels and the apocryphal (and canonical) Acts must be approached in a radically different way than it has been done in earlier scholarship.

⁶⁰ The martyrdom of Peter and Paul is reported first in 1 Clement 5; cf. recently H. Löhr, *Zur Paulus-Notiz in 1 Clem 5,5-7*, in: *Das Ende des Paulus. Historische, theologische, und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte*, ed. by F.W. Horn, Berlin 2001, 197-213, esp. 212-213; U. Schnelle, *Paulus. Leben und Denken*, Berlin 2003, 425-431. Early martyrdom traditions include the Stephen story (Acts 6:8-8:1) and the death of James (brother of John, Acts 12:1-3).

⁶¹ Cf. A. Hilhorst, *Tertullian on the Acts of Paul*, in: *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul*, ed. by J.N. Bremmer, Kampen 1996, 150-163, esp. 162, for a possible early dating of the Acts of Paul.