In its first and second Acts, the $A\bar{T}\bar{h}$ contains a story about palace-building which can be summarized as follows¹: Gundaphorus, an Indian king, sends his merchant, Abbanes, to Jerusalem to engage a skilled architect. There he meets Jesus. Jesus sells him his slave, Thomas, who is an accomplished craftsman. Abbanes and Thomas embark for India (2-3). After a stop at Andrapolis (4-16), an episode which we will not address here, they arrive at the royal court, where Thomas is presented to the king. The king invites him to build him a palace, which he agrees to do. They discuss plans and visit the place where the work is to be carried out. Thomas takes a reed, measures the place and designs a draft; all this convinces the king of Thomas’ competence. Although he is somewhat surprised at Thomas’ determination to build in winter rather than in summer, he departs, leaving a considerable amount of money with Thomas to meet the building costs. Thomas, however, distributes the money among the poor; at the same time, he reports to the king that he is building the palace. Finally, the king, who has received alarming messages from his friends, wants to inspect the progress of the work personally, whereupon Thomas gives the startling answer, ‘Now you cannot see it, but you shall see it when you depart this life’. The king is furious. He casts Thomas into prison and considers by what death he will kill him. The king’s brother, Gad, is so shocked at what he regards as Thomas’ insult to the king that he grows ill and dies. Angels take his soul up into heaven (17-22). Then the text continues in this way:

¹ My starting-point is the Greek text edited by M. Bonnet.
Angels received the soul of Gad, the king's brother, and took it up into heaven, showing him the places and mansions there, asking him, 'In what place do you wish to dwell?' And when they came near the edifice of the apostle Thomas, which he had erected for the king, Gad, upon beholding it, said to the angels, 'I entreat you, my lords, let me dwell in one of these lower chambers.' But they said to him, 'In this building you cannot dwell.' And he said, 'Why not?' They answered, 'This palace is the one which that Christian has built for your brother.' But he said, 'I entreat you, my lords, allow me to go to my brother to buy this palace from him. For my brother does not know what it is like, and he will sell it to me.' (22; trans. J.K. Elliott)

Then the soul of Gad is permitted to return to his body. He asks his brother to sell his heavenly palace to him. At first, the king does not understand anything of what his brother says, but after Gad explains, the king decides to keep his palace and refers his brother to Thomas, who will build a still better palace for him (23-24). Needless to say, both Gad and Gundaphorus become Thomas' converts in the meantime.

This story must have made a lasting impression on its readers. It was retold by the Syrian poet Jacob of Sarug (ca. 451-521)² and much later by Vincent of Beauvais and Jacobus de Voragine³; it was also represented in medieval Latin and vernacular rewritings of the AT⁴ and mentioned in medieval Latin historiography and poetry⁵. We find Thomas represented in art as a carpenter, and the story has earned him the dignity of being the patron saint of architects, surveyors, bricklayers and stonemasons⁶. Scholarship, however, has been—

³ Speculum Historiale 9.62-5 (edition of 1624 = 1965) and Golden Legend 5.12-87 ed. Maggioni, respectively.
⁶ Cf. M. Lechner, 'Thomas. Apostel', in E. Kirschbaum and W. Braunfels (eds), Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie 8 (Rome etc., 1976) 468-75:
less generous and much remains to be done. In this paper, I will look for some of the motifs and ideas that shape the story, namely the protagonist as a manual worker, pious fraud, and heavenly palaces for individual persons. Alms-giving, which plays a role in virtually all of the material, will not be dealt with separately; it will be taken for granted that charity, of little importance in the Graeco-Roman world, is a major obligation in Early Judaism and Christianity. Once we know what is traditional in the story, we will be in a position to establish its measure of originality.

1. Manual work

Early Christianity has a positive appreciation of manual labour, which contrasts strongly with Graeco-Roman views. In Greece, the ideal is the free, well-to-do citizen who can spend his time working for the common good and his own interests, while the ordinary work is being done by immigrants (μακροθυμεστά) and slaves. In Rome, a similar mentality can be observed. The Christian attitude was destined to get the upper hand and to maintain itself in later centuries as well, especially in monasticism (ora et labora). Paul is important in this...
respect, stressing that he works for his living with his own hands\textsuperscript{10}. In the Gospels, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, are portrayed as fishermen (Mt 4.18-22 par). We even see Jesus as a carpenter (τέκτων) in Mark 6.3 or the son of a carpenter in Matthew 13.55\textsuperscript{11}, a feature which Simon the Magician uses to make Peter lose face with the Romans in the \textit{APt} 23. And the \textit{Protevangelium of James} offers a picture of Joseph working with an adze (9.1) and building houses (9.3; 13.1).

In the \textit{ATH} it is essential that Thomas is a τέκτων (2). Indeed, this quality is duly stressed. Thomas himself gives a survey of his skills twice (3, 17) and he is actively engaged in the preparation of the building plans (18). Interestingly, a connection is found between the carpentership of Joseph and Thomas, for when selling Thomas, Jesus draws up a bill of sale beginning with the words: 'I, Jesus, son of the carpenter Joseph, declare that I have sold my slave' etc. (2).

Our story bears a certain resemblance to the legend of saints Laums and Floms, which may be summarized as follows:

\textbf{Florus} and Laurus were twin-brothers, stonecutters, who had learnt their craft from the martyrs Proclus and Maximus. They settled in a city of Illyricum, where they worked for the governor of the province, Lycon. Licinius, the son of empress Eulpidia, writes him a letter, asking to send him skilled workers to build a magnificent temple. And so it happens. Licinius engages them, draws a plan for the temple and furnishes them with funds to execute it. The saints take the money and spend it on the poor; by day they work at the building, by night they give themselves to prayer. When the work is nearly finished, the chief priest of the temple becomes a believer in Christ, his son having been cured of blindness by the twin-brethren. After the building has been finished, Licinius fills the temple with idols, but the twins come by night with the poor they had supported and destroy them. The poor and later the twin-brothers suffer martyrdom\textsuperscript{12}.

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\textsuperscript{10} 1 Cor. 4.12, cf. 1 Thess. 2.9; 2 Thess. 3.8; Acts of the Apostles 18.3: 20.34.

\textsuperscript{11} P. Nagel, 'Joseph II (Zimmermann)', \textit{RAC} 18 (1998) 749-61; for the allegorical meaning cf. Bornkamm (n. 7) 19-21; Klijn (n. 7) 163-4.

\textsuperscript{12} Partly after J. Rendel Harris, \textit{The Dioscuri in the Christian Legends} (London, 1903) 5. For an edition of the text, see F. Halkin, 'Une Passion inédite des saints Florus et Laurus. \textit{BHG} 662z', \textit{Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik} 33 (1983) 37-44.
This story shares with the Thomas narrative the element of saints as craftsmen and builders commissioned by a pagan ruler, the building plan drawn, the diversion of construction funds to relieve the needs of the poor, and the conversion of a prominent heathen. However, it is something of an overstatement to call both accounts, as Günther Bornkamm does, 'most closely related', if only because with Florus and Laurus there is no matter of a palace in heaven.

2. Pious fraud

Although the preparations for the building of the palace seem to be in earnest, in the end we become aware that Thomas is misleading the king. When the moment of truth arrives, his promise turns out to be true in a very different way than his employer had imagined: The palace is a palace in heaven, and the money needed for its building serves to bestow alms to the poor and needy. This is an instance of pious fraud that we meet more often in hagiographical texts.

A well-known example of this motif is the story about St Lawrence, who held the office of deacon in Rome in the middle of the third century. This story is sung in a famous Ambrosian hymn, *Apostolorum supparem*, and is related in several other sources? The deacon had the task of collecting and distributing the alms; in Rome, this might create the impression of big business. During the persecution under Valerian, the deacon was asked by the prefect of Rome to deliver up the treasure of the Church, whereupon he assembled the poor among whom he had distributed the ecclesiastical possessions and presented them to the prefect, saying 'These are the treasure of the Church'.

Another instance occurs in Palladius' *Lausiac History*, ch. 6, where a monk, Macarius, in order to free a rich woman from her attachment to material things, promises to buy her precious stones. However, he uses her money to pay for the costs of a hospital. When

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13 Bornkamm (n. 7) 22 n. 1.
the woman wants to see the stones, he shows her the patients nursed by her money\textsuperscript{15}.

In pagan tradition, there is a more or less comparable anecdote about Alexander the Great. Ammianus Marcellinus transmits a dictum by the Emperor Julian according to which Alexander, 'when asked where his treasures were, gave the kindly answer, "in the hands of my friends."'\textsuperscript{16} Here, although the interrogator may have expected to be shown Alexander's treasure-house, Alexander does not present his friends; rather, he confines himself to giving a witty answer, almost as if citing a standard expression. Indeed, the statement had already currency as a proverb in Plautus and other writers\textsuperscript{17}. Furthermore, the element of charity is characteristically absent.

3. Heavenly palaces

a. As the abode of celestial beings

Heavenly palaces are a normal feature of Greek myth. Hephaestus built these on Mount Olympus and the gods dwell there in their bliss. On the highest peak is Zeus' palace, where the other gods assemble to make merry and to deliberate. Mulciber (Hephaestus) also built the palace of the Sun painted in Ovid's \textit{Metamorphoses} 2.1-30\textsuperscript{18}. Poseidon has his magnificent palace in the depths of the sea, at Aegae, where he is surrounded by his own marine gods. Hades' palace, on the other hand, is in no way attractive, although he and his wife Persephone do not seem to be bothered by this. There is no place for

\textsuperscript{15} For the passage in the \textit{ATH} and the \textit{Lausiac History}, cf. R. Reitzenstein, \textit{Hellenistische Wundererzählungen} (Leipzig, 1906 = Stuttgart, 1963) 77, and Bomkamm (n. 7) 22. To these examples G.J.M. Bartelink, \textit{Palladio, La Storia Lausiaca} (s.1., 1974) 316-17. adds the story about St Laurence.

\textsuperscript{16} Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.15.


mortals in these palaces, apart from those who have been carried off to heaven like Ganymedes or deified like Heracles. But even these do not join the heavenly company as a reward for a righteous life. The Isles of the Blest are reserved for them. However, Elysium is not heaven and no gods dwell there.

In the Old Testament, God 'has built his high dwelling place in the heavens' (Amos 9.6); there he 'has fixed his throne' (Ps. 103.19), residing as a king surrounded by his heavenly army of angels. This heavenly palace is no more intended for mortals than it is in Greek myth. As a rule, the abode of the dead is the underworld, Sheol, and there are only two men to have 'vanished and be taken by God' (Enoch: Gen. 5.24) or 'gone by a whirlwind into heaven' (Elijah: 2 Kings 2.11).

b. As accessible to human beings

In the deuterocanonical works Wisdom (3.1-9; 4.7; 5.15-16) and 2 Maccabees (7.36), we meet for the first time the idea of heaven as the place of the blessed deceased, which also appears in the New Testament and afterwards. A curious representation of this idea, which has come to light only recently, is the poem called The Vision of Dorotheus. Dorotheus reports a vision he had and whose scene is

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20 But cf. Seneca, Agam. 813-14, on Hercules: *his seno meruit labore / adlegi caelo / magnus Alcides*.

21 1 Kings 22.19; Daniel 7.10. Cf. also Ps. 29.9: Is. 6.1-4; Hab. 2.20; Mic. 1.2; in these passages the term *hēkāl* is used, which may denote either God's palace in heaven or the temple of Jerusalem. This idea occurs also in I Enoch 14.10-23, 71.5-10; the Qumran literature: 1QSa 4.25-6, and the New Testament: Mt 5.34: 23.22; Acts 7.49; Rev 4.2.


heaven, represented as an imperial palace. He is adopted into the ranks of the angels and gets the important function of gatekeeper. His functioning, however, is not always satisfactory and he is punished by being thrown in prison and whipped. In the end, he is again a gatekeeper of heaven. A heavy accent is put here on the military character of God's court. More importantly, the equation of the heavenly palace with the palace of the Roman emperor has been carried here to such an extent that the members of God's bodyguard are liable to misbehaviour and may be punished in heaven. This is a new element, and a much more radical divergence from the biblical picture than is the story of Thomas. As for the term used for 'palace', this is the old poetic word ταμέγαρα, not the Latinisms πρατώριον or παλάτιον used in the ATH 20 and 21, although the Vision of Dorotheus does not at all shrink from Latin words alongside Homerisms.

c. Heavenly palaces for individual persons

The idea of an abode for men in heaven developed in still another direction, namely that of personal accommodations in the heavenly world. In rabbinic as well as in patristic sources, this image will be used to express a gradation of heavenly bliss in accordance with each person's merit? Initially, however, we cannot with certainty establish a one-to-one relationship between dwellings and occupants; all we can say is that the plural is used to denote the dwellings, e.g. Joseph and Aseneth 12.12: 'For behold, all the funds of my father Pentephres are transient and obscure, but the houses (δόματα) of your inheritance, Lord, are incorruptible and eternal.' In some texts,
the word σκηνή, 'tent', is used for the dwelling. Clearly the word cannot here have the connotation of a portable and temporary dwelling of canvas or the like, because it often carries the epithet of 'eternal'. There are no unmistakable pre-Christian passages. Examples include: Luke 16.9: 'Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal tents'; AA, Martyrium Prius 13 (Andrew praying to Jesus): 'Receive me into your eternal tents'; 5 Esdras 2.11: 'I will give them eternal tents, which I had prepared for them'. Of Johannine origin is the use of the word povai as it appears in John 14.2: 'In my Father's house are many abodes', unless the Greek of Ethiopic J Enoch 39.4: 'There I saw other dwelling places of the holy ones and their resting places' had made earlier use of the word. Both designations are combined in the long recension of Testament of Abraham 20.14: 'Take therefore my friend Abraham to paradise; there are the tents (σκηναί) of my righteous and abodes (povai) of my holy ones Isaac and Jacob in his bosom.' These heavenly dwellings are provided with their negative counterparts in Slavonic 2 Enoch 61.2 (long recension): 'Many shelters have been prepared for people, good ones for the good, but bad ones for the bad, many, without number. Happy is he who enters into the blessed houses; for in the bad ones there is no rest, no returning.' This idea of individual dwellings for the sinners was already present in I Enoch 45.3: 'Their resting places will be without number.' A later occurrence appears in the Ethiopic version of The Preaching of Saint Andrew and Saint Philemon among the Kurds. In this text, Andreas raises a boy to life, who reports what he had seen in Gehenna after his death: forty builders with burning torches constructing a house from sulphur and bitumen in which his father will be burned after his death as a punishment for his sins. Upon hearing this, the father repents and is willing to distribute his possessions among the needy.

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, II (New York, 1985) 222. As far as possible, quotations from 'Old Testament Pseudepigrapha' in the present paper are from Charlesworth's collection.


28 Fischer (n. 25) 69-71; Lampe (n. 27) s.v. μονή lc.

Compared with this imagery, the picture in the *ATH* shows the innovation that the dwelling is not just a home but a magnificent residence, a palace. This is also the case in the sixth-century *Life of John the Almsgiver* by Leontius of Neapolis. Ch. 27 of that work narrates the story of a bishop, Troilus, who is cured of his avarice in a dream sent by God:

'I saw,' said he [Troilus], 'a house whose beauty and size no human art could imitate, with a gateway all of gold and above the gateway an inscription painted on wood which ran thus: "The eternal home (μονή) and resting-place of bishop Troilus." When I read this, I was overjoyed;' he continued, 'for I knew that the king had granted me the enjoyment of this house. But I had scarcely finished reading this inscription when behold, an imperial chamberlain appeared with others of the divine retinue, and as he drew near to the gateway of the radiant house he said to his servants: "Take down that inscription." and when they had taken it down he said again: "Change it and put up the one the King of the World has sent." So they took away the one and fixed up another while I was looking on, and on it was written: "The eternal home and resting-place of John, the Archbishop of Alexandria, bought for thirty pounds."' (trans. E. Dawes)

On John's suggestion, Troilus had given the thirty pounds to the poor, but he was so upset of the 'loss' of his money that John had returned it to him\(^30\).

A comparable version may be found in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* 9.41-71. Saint John convinces two young men to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. When, however, they see their former slaves in wealth while they themselves have but one cloak between them, they begin to have regrets. Then John turns some sticks and pebbles into gold and precious stones for them so that they can buy back their possessions. In the meantime, he raises to life another young man who has died recently and orders him to tell the other two men about his vision of their loss. The man did so, speaking at length about the glories of paradise and the pains of hell... He told them they had lost eternal palaces built of shining gems, filled with bankets, abounding in delights and lasting joys. He also spoke about the eight pains of hell. (trans. W.G. Ryan)

\(^30\) For additional material, see L. Rydén, *Bemerkungen zum Leben des heiligen Narren Symeon von Leontios von Neapolis* (Uppsala, 1970) 74f.
The men implore St John to obtain mercy for them. He orders them
to do penance and to pray that the sticks and stones may revert to
their former nature. Their prayer is answered and the two young men
receive 'the grace of all the virtues that had been theirs'.

If we may extend both our geographic and chronological bound-
aries, a further parallel might be drawn. It is a story told among the
Santals, a tribe of the Munda people in India and reads as follows:

Once upon a time there was a Raja, who had many water reservoirs and
tanks, and round the edges he planted trees. mangoes, pipals, palms and
banyans; and the banyan trees were bigger than any. Every day after
bathing the Raja used to walk about and look at his trees, and one
morning, as he did so, he saw a maiden go up to a banyan tree and
climb it, and the tree was then carried up to the sky, but when he went
in the evening he saw the tree in its place again; the same thing hap-
pened three or four days running. The Raja told no one, but one morn-
ing he climbed the banyan tree before the maiden appeared, and when
she came, he was carried up to the sky along with the tree. Then he saw
the maiden descend and go and dance with a crowd of Gupinis (Divine
milk maids) and the Raja also got down and joined in the dance.

He was so absorbed in the dance that he took no note of time; so
when at last he tore himself away, he found that the banyan tree had
disappeared. There was nothing to be done, but stay where he was; so
he began to wander about and he soon came to some men building a
palace as hard as they could. He asked them for whom the palace was
being built, and they named his own name. He asked why it was being
built for him, and they said that Thakur [the supreme Being] intended
to bring him there, because he was a good ruler, who did not oppress
his subjects and gave alms to the poor and to widows and orphans.

There was no difference between night and day up in the sky, but
when the Raja came back, he found that the banyan tree was there, and
he climbed up it and was carried back to earth by it. Then he went
home and told his people that he had been on a visit to a friend. After
that the Raja used to visit the banyan tree every day, and when he
found that it did not wither although it had been taken up by the roots,
he concluded that what he had seen was true and he began to prepare
for death. So he distributed all his wealth among his friends and among
the poor; and when his officers remonstrated he made them no answer.
A few days later he died, and was taken to the palace which he had
seen being built31.

This story was recorded only a century ago; we do not know its origin, and the plot is very different from the story of St Thomas. Nevertheless, there are interesting points in common: both stories take place in India; under certain conditions it is possible to return to earth after seeing the palace in heaven*; the heavenly palace is due to royal persons, who earn it by giving alms to the poor; the palace has not been prepared beforehand but is being erected particularly for individual persons.

4. Conclusion

In the preceding sections we dealt with parallels concerning some features of the story of the palace building in the ATh. In our material, alms-giving was so omnipresent that it needed no discussion; manual labour played a role in only one parallel story; some examples of pious fraud could be found in contexts rather different from that in the ATh; and the idea of abodes in heaven generated the representation of a palace in heaven for the personal use of those having spent their riches for the benefit of the needy. ATh makes use of all these traditional views and images but is, nevertheless, highly original in at least three ways. First of all, the palace is being built during the life of the future occupant from his charitable deeds, whereas in other texts the palace is ready beforehand and can be earned by supporting the poor, but lost by avarice. There are parallels here, but they appear much later: the story about the Raja and the passage from The Preaching of Saint Andrew and Saint Philemon (and there an infernal building was intended). Second, the future occupant of the palace does not build it himself by means of his charitable deeds, but it is built from his money without his knowledge. Apparently, the assumption is that the king, once converted, will approve of it. Last but not least, the palace-building is integrated into a conspiracy of pious

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32 Returning to earth is envisaged also in Luke 16.27-31.