The Apocryphal Acts Of John
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VI. Polymorphy of Christ

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In several *Apocryphal Acts of Apostles* (AAA) polymorphous appearances of Christ are described.' This aspect is very important in the *Acts of John*, but it is also present in the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of Paul*, the *Acts of Andrew* and the *Acts of Thomas*. In this chapter I will deal with polymorphy in order to gain a better understanding of the christology of the *AJ* and so of the *AJ* as a whole. Moreover, the study of polymorphy can yield important facts concerning the relations between the AAA, especially those between the *AJ* and the *APet*. In their edition of the *AJ* Junod and Kaestli maintain that they see the *AJ* as the oldest precisely because of the way this text uses polymorphy.²

*Metamorphosis*

We will first give some examples of polymorphy, limiting oursel-

1 Mr.H. Garcia kindly sent me his study called *Polymorphie du Christ dans la tradition Johannique gnostique* (Memoire de D.E.A., Ecole pratique des hautes études, Paris, 1994), which has been very helpful in preparing this chapter. I also wish to thank Professors Jan Bremmer and Gerard Luttikhuizen for critically reading my text and Mr. P.W. Dunn for his help with the English language.

yes to the polymorphy of Christ:

* In the AJ, the devout woman Drusiana tells the Christian community: 'The Lord appeared to me in the tomb like John and as a youth' (87). This causes John to tell how he knew the Lord; his words are contained in AJ 88-93.

* Origen says: 'Although Jesus was one, he had several aspects; and to those who saw him he did not appear alike to all.' He then explains that the polymorphy was linked with the capacities of the persons who met Jesus. He also discovers a clue to the polymorphy of Jesus in the fact that Judas had to designate the Lord to his captors with a kiss.'

Polyrnorphy has long been a neglected aspect of early Christian thinking, and regarding the origins of and motifs behind this concept no consensus has yet been reached.' An important aim of the present chapter is a clarification of the definition of polymorphy. One of the few scholars to pay attention to it, Peter Weigandt, holds that polymorphy is not always part of a docetic system. It is almost limited to the AAA, while the AJ are unique in describing polymorphic appearances of the Lord before his resurrection. As reasons for the use of the motif Weigandt mentions love of miracles and emphasis on the divinity or supernatural

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3 Origen, Contra Celsum 2.64. I use the translation by H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1965). Cf. quotations from his commentaries on Mt and Lk in E. Hennecke (ed), Handbuch zu den Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen (Tübingen, 1904) 451.

4 A possible reason for this lack of attention is the absence of polemics amongst the Church Fathers, cf P. Weigandt, Der Doketismus im Urgluitestmentum und in der theologischen Entwicklung des zweiten Jahrhunderts (Unpublished dissertation Heidelberg, 1961) 54.


6 Weigandt, Doketismus, 40-57, has an excursus on polymorphy. Most Nag Hammadi texts were not yet accessible to him.
character of the person.’

Eric Junod has given the following definition: ‘Polymorphy is a deliberate appearance by somebody in several forms. The change of form is not hidden, but instead evident for the witness.’ He adds that beings as diverse as Jesus, Satan, Simon Magus, Attis and signs of the zodiac can appear polymorphous, and that polymorphy serves theological, anthropological and cosmological interests.’ We will use this definition because it enables us to distinguish polymorphy from metamorphosis. To put it more exactly, polymorphy is part of the wider concept of metamorphosis or shape shifting, which is the idea that a person or thing (usually a deity) can at any moment assume another form, stature or age. In the NT milieu at least two types of metamorphosis were current: in the Hellenistic world the idea of a god temporarily assuming human form, and in Judaism as well as in the mystery cults the idea of a human being transposed into supernatural forms. Polymorphy is a metamorphosis of such a kind that the person or deity can be seen differently by different people at the same time.

Several phenomena in early Christian texts have been too easily labelled as polymorphy, whereas we are concerned with cases of metamorphosis. Amongst these are appearances of the Lord in the

7 Weigandt, Doketismus, 48. The view of Erik Peterson, Fruhkirche, Judentum und Gnosis (Rome, Freiburg and Vienna, 1959) 183-208, that Tatian was the origin of the polymorphy of age because he equated Christ and Aion has already been rejected by Weigandt (Doketismus, 40-1), Junod (‘Polymorphie’, 42 n.3) and by G.G. Stroumsa, ‘Polymorphie divine et transformations d’un mythologème: l’Apocryphon de Jean et ses sources’, VigChr 35 (1981) 412-34 (= idem, Savoir et salut, Paris, 1992, 43-63), 412f.
8 Junod, ‘Polymorphie’, 39-40: ‘Or la polymorphie est une apparition délibérée de quelqu’un sous plusieurs formes; le changement de formes n’est pas dissimulé, il est au contraire rendu évident pour le témoin’ (39).
form of somebody else, but not in several forms at the same time." Three examples:

* In the AP the virgin Thecla is condemned to death. Just before her execution we are told that she 'saw the Lord sitting in the likeness of Paul and said, "As if I were not able to endure, Paul has come to look after me"' (21).

* In the ninth parable in the Shepherd of Hermas we meet 'a man so tall, that he overtopped the tower.' He is designated as 'the glorious man, the Lord of all'. Later on Hermas is told that 'The glorious man is the Son of God'.

* A special case of metamorphosis is the appearance of Christ to a woman in female form, as one of the Montanists claimed.

Polymorphy has also been confused with another phenomenon in early Christianity, the ideal of the puer senex. This topos concerns the spiritual virtues of human persons and says that real Christians should be free from the influence of their age. This

11 It is even doubtful if the first example given above (from AJ 87) falls within the definition! J.-M. van Cangh, 'Miracles évangéliques - miracles apocryphes', in F. Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), The Four Gospels 1992. Festschrift F. Neirynck 3 (Louvain, 1992) 2317-8, recognizes both forms as polymorphy: 'Le premier et le plus fréquent est celui de l’apparition du Christ ou de l’apôtre sous les traits d’un bébé enfant ou d’un jeune homme pour opérer une délivrance' and: 'Il faut distinguer ce type de polymorphie d’un autre type, ou le Christ prend différentes formes antithétiques, en même temps.'

12 Hermas, Sim, ix.vi.1; ix.vii.1; ix.xii.8, transl. K. Lake (Loeb).

13 Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion 49.1 tells about either Quintilla or Priscilla: "'Christ came to me dressed in a white robe", she said, "in the form of a woman", ...' (transl. F. Williams. Leiden, 1994).

14 For example, see the otherwise excellent book by C. Markschies, Valentinus Gnosticus? (Tubingen, 1992) 208-10.

15 C. Gnilka, Aetas spiritualis. Die Überwindung der natürlichen Altersstufen als Ideal frühchristlichen Lebens (Bonn, 1972) 45: 'Die wechselnden Erscheinungsformen eines unternaturlichen Wesens, bzw. das Ineinander von Jugend und Alter in der ausseren Erscheinung eines solchen Wesens, sind doch eben etwas recht anderes als die Aufhebung der altersbedingten Mängel durch das geistige Streben eines Menschen!'
The former, outward phenomenon is polymorphy; it is only the latter for which Gn̄ilka reserves the term *puer senex*. Junod 'Polymorphie', 46 does not refer to Gn̄ilka but supports the same thesis.

16 Stroumsa, 'Polymorphie', 415. This distinction is not suggested by the texts themselves. Would the hearers and readers of antiquity have felt any difference here? Stroumsa also fails to distinguish polymorphy from the *puer senex* ideal (419).


19 Cf Junod, 'Polymorphie', 40 n.2.

20 Ménard 368f: 'Il existe dès lors une polymorphie du Christ selon laquelle il se fait grand pour *les grands* et petit pour *les petits*.'
without using indications of size.\footnote{21} In fact, Origen never clearly indicates what exactly these changes in Christ's appearance amounted to.\footnote{22}

3. Philo is an exponent of the idea that God reveals himself according to the capacities of man. Thus He appears on purpose as God or as Lord, or as an anthropomorphic being.\footnote{23} It is more likely that Philo was the source of Origen's ideas than the Iranian religion, since Origen stands in the same Platonist tradition.

4. Ménard tacitly assumes that polymorphism is a gnostic motif.\footnote{24}

Specific forms of metamorphosis

Polymorphy can be distinguished from the wider concept of metamorphosis, in which a person (often but not always Christ) takes several forms consecutively but not at the same time, during his descent from heaven to the earth. Probably the earliest extant text to present us with this 'metamorphosis of descent' is the Ascension of Isaiah.\footnote{25} Christ descends through the heavens, in

\footnote{21} Origen, Contra Celsum 2.62-6; 2.21, 42; 4.14-9; 6.68-77.
\footnote{22} Ménard (369) is wrong in assuming that the Gospel of Thomas logion 13 hints at the polymorphy of Christ.
\footnote{23} Philo, Quod deus 53-68; De somniis I 232-7; cf. A.F. Segal, Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism (Leiden, 1977) 178.
\footnote{24} Ménard, 'Transfiguration', 371. K. Beyschlag, Die verborgene Überlieferung von Christus (Munich and Hamburg, 1969) 101 also sees polymorphy as typically gnostic motif. While Christ unites in himself all aspects of life, they are 'aufgehoben' in him. He even lifts the boundaries between 'I' and 'Thou'. His very being is an image of the redemption. This view is correct in so far as the motif recurs in later gnostic texts like the Gospel of Eve and Pistis Sophia, but it does not explain the origin of the motif.
\footnote{25} The date of the text is uncertain; we may think of the second century AD. See M.A. Knibb, in J.H. Charlesworth (ed), The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Garden City and London, 1985) 151, who notes that APet 24 seems to quote Ascensio Isaiae 11.13; C.D.G. Müller,
each heaven taking a form similar to the angels who live there in order not to be recognized. He thus conceals his divinity (10.8-10, 17-31). Irenaeus tells something similar about Simon Magus, adding that Simon apparently (δεδοκηκέναι) suffered in Judaea.26 The parallel with Ascensio Isaiae is remarkable. Note that the motif here plays a clearly docetic role.

In the Physiologus, stemming from Egypt in the Christian era, the same form of metamorphosis is found. The first chapter deals with the lion and says, with an eye on Christ: 'Between angels he has become an angel, between archangels an archangel, between thrones a throne, between powers a power, as long as he descended; and he came into the womb of the holy virgin Mary in order to save the human race that had gone astray, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us."'27

A very specific and apparently late form describes Christ's adaptation to hearers or spectators on earth. Here it is difficult to see if we have real polymorphy or merely metamorphosis. Christ takes the stature of the person he is meeting or he adapts himself to the faith and capacities of the other. We can call this functional metamorphosis, which we find in the gnostic Gospel of Philip (57.28 - 58.10) and with Origen. The latter never explicitly says that Christ was being seen differently at the same time, but he clearly implies it so that he can be classified with those having a polymorphous view of Christ.

Polymorphy in the AJ

Having distinguished between polymorphy and the broader concept

of metamorphosis, we can now analyze the motif of polymorphy in the AJ. This analysis must focus on cc.87-93, which contain the twelve 'testimonies' concerning Christ to which we already referred.\textsuperscript{28} The testimony of Drusiana in c.87 is not included in this counting but can be seen as a thematic introduction.\textsuperscript{29}

Not all of these twelve 'short stories', though, depict the Lord as polymorphous in the strict sense. Nr. 11 relates that he did not eat.\textsuperscript{30} Nrs. 5 and 10 are nearly the same and tell us what could be felt when he was touched. Nr. 5 states that the Lord's body was not always materially the same, a secret only revealed to John. Nr. 10 goes a step further by adding that John came to know that sometimes the Lord was not material at all. Though the change in corporeality is not described exactly, we get the impression that it happened under John's hands and so practically at the same time. Therefore we see it as a case of polymorphy.

Nr. 6 is rather close to the NT transfiguration stories: Christ is surrounded by supernatural light, a situation witnessed by the same three apostles as in the Gospels. Nr. 7 is also situated on a mountain.\textsuperscript{31} John secretly looks at Jesus from behind (cf. Ex 33:23).

\textsuperscript{28} The label 'testimonies' was introduced by Junod & Kaestli, \textit{AI}, 468, 474. For easy reference I give the chapter and line numbers in their edition and in Bonnet's:

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>88. 9-20</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>195.11-196.2</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>196.11-18</td>
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\textsuperscript{29} The number twelve seems just accidental. Neither the text nor Junod & Kaestli attach any significance to it.

\textsuperscript{30} Junod & Kaestli, \textit{AI}, 478 n.1, refer to Ignace, \textit{Marcion}, Valentinus and Clement of Alexandria as other authors who discussed whether or not Jesus had to eat.

when he is naked and sees that he is not human at all; and in an instance from very tall he becomes very small. Here, in the longest testimony by far, we have a combination of the motifs of nrs. 4 and 6. This is metamorphosis rather than polymorphy.

Nrs. 1-4, 6-9 and 12 have to do with the way Christ is seen. Of these nr. 3 tells that Christ never closed his eyes, and it thus suggests a supernatural quality in the traditional Greek way.\(^{32}\) Nr. 12 relates that Christ left no traces when he walked, or rather hovered, over the earth. These testimonies give a docetic view of Christ but not a polymorphous one. Thus only nrs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 speak of polymorphous appearances.

Nr. 1 narrates that at the very same moment different people saw Christ in different ages. Nr. 2 amounts to the same, only adding a difference in beard-growth. Nr. 4 differs from nrs. 1 and 2 in several ways, as it indicates that John saw Christ's stature varying greatly from time to time. In this testimony it is not his age that is important; there are no other disciples involved; and contrary to nrs. 1 and 2, this time Christ assumes forms that are physically impossible. This contradicts Schneider's view that John, seeing the older or bigger forms of the Lord, stands for the mature believers. Judged from that point of view, John's faith can only be called unstable.\(^{33}\) Alternatively, we will have to say that this short testimony comes from another source than nrs. 1 and 2; but so far no indications of that kind have been given.

A doubling of the Lord occurs in testimony nr. 9 and probably also in nr. 8 - but this brief testimony can be read in different ways. John claims to understand the situation thinking of 'his abundant grace and his unity within many faces (\(\text{πολυπρόσωπον ένότητα, ΑJ 91}\))'. Here especially the words \(\text{πολυπρόσωπον ένότητα} \) are important, as well as the fact that John is not surprised but understands. Because of the context the man talking to

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\(^{32}\) Junod & Kaestli, A.I, 477.

\(^{33}\) Pace Schneider, Mystety, 64: 'And, with James and John seeing progressively older manifestations of the Lord, the spirituality of both groups of Christians should be seen as maturing.' We will come back on Schneider's interpretation below.
the Lord is best seen as another double of the Lord.\textsuperscript{34} Note that in nr. 8 the one ‘hypostasis’ is recognized as the Lord, whereas in his counterpart the uninitiated disciples only see an ordinary man. In nr. 9 both 'hypostaseis' look identical, but this constitutes another variation.\textsuperscript{35} Weigandt sees the gnostic idea of pairs (συζυγία) in nrs. 8 and 9. The one of the pair is in heaven, the other appears on earth; the same idea returns in \textit{ATH} 108 and 110.\textsuperscript{36} If the correspondence is real, it remains to see if the \textit{AJ} influenced gnosticism or vice versa. Note that the \textit{AJ} never make John the twin of the Lord, as the \textit{ATH} do with Thomas!\textsuperscript{37}

Other parts of the \textit{AJ} also have their share in the motif - but not everything is polymorphy! In the narrative part of the text, Satan, not Christ, is called polymorphous (70), but we can only guess what this means in this context. The polymorphy of Satan is a strong argument against those who, like Garcia, want to make too much of Christ's polymorphy.\textsuperscript{38} Christ is praised as polymorphic in c.82, without any explanation of the meaning of this concept. The beautiful young man who appears at the tomb of Drusiana (73, 76) is probably Christ. This means that the text tells of an appearance of the Lord to several people, including John, although the unconverted Callimachus fails to recognise Christ. The appearance is not limited to John and thus does not specifically exalt the apostle. In the same episode, the description of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Pace Schneider, Mystery, 65, who says that John himself is meant.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Testimony nr.9 is overinterpreted by Beyschlag, \textit{Überlieferung}, 106 who explains the double as a kind of angel (Mt 18.10; Acts 12.13-5) and makes much of the fact that the episode happens during the night - which the text does not say.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Weigandt, \textit{Doketismus}, n. 222. He deals with \textit{AJ} 42-56, 82-6.
\item \textsuperscript{37} This argument refutes Schneider's view that in the \textit{AJ} John is a more or less divine person. Also note the fact that John is not 'in total control' of his body (Schneider, Mystery, 71), but suffers for thirty days (90.17-21)!
\item \textsuperscript{38} Garcia (see n.1), passim. Schneider, Mystery, 37 n.2 suggests that this motif was developed in a passage now lost. Note that in the \textit{AJ} the word πολύμορφος occurs only here and in c.82 (not in cc.87-93).
\end{itemize}
Christ as a voice could suggest transcendence. Yet this is not real polymorphy, but metamorphosis: Christ is seen in the same way by all those present.

In the supposed interpolation (94-102) we have real polymorphy without the occurrence of the word polymorphy. While Jesus is hanging on the cross, the Lord appears to John in a cave on the Mount of Olives (97). The cross of light which John sees is best interpreted as a manifestation of Christ himself (98). At that moment Christ is invisible above the cross with only his voice audible, which means that we have at least two and possibly four manifestations of Christ at the same moment.39

The cross of light, again, has many names: Word, Mind, Christ, Door, Way, Bread, Seed, Resurrection, Son, Father, Spirit, Life, Truth, Faith, Grace.41 This long list seems to be a forced effort to find polymorphy in the Gospel of John. The author of cc.94-102 knows this Gospel well and tries to replace its teaching by his own.

Paul Schneider has given a sophisticated analysis of the polymorphy of the AJ, which is however strongly influenced by later texts in which the motif occurs. He is convinced that it is significant that it is John who sees the Lord as old, and James who sees him as young. John is the nearly divine hero and James an ordinary believer. Schneider states that Christ adapts to the capacities of his public, an idea that we also meet in the Gospel of Philip and in Origen. He does not discuss the dates of the texts he uses, but it is methodologically incorrect to interpret the AJ from later texts. The influence was in the other direction, with the second century

39 To me AJ 98.3 remains obscure: 'and in it (the Cross) was one form (μορφή μοί) and the same likeness (τὰς όμοιως.)’ Garcia: ‘l’Apôtre et la communauté croyante constituent proprement la forme unique et ressemblante dans la croix, forme unique encore perfectible.’ See also Luttikhuizen, this volume, 135.
40 J.K. Elliott (ed), The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford, 1993) here adds 'Jesus' with the Vienna MS, but the older witness of the text, the Acts of the Council of Nicea in 787, does not have this.
41 AJ 98.7-12; in c.109 a comparable list of epithets is given for Christ himself.
108 PIETER J. LALLEMAN

AJ containing a primitive, rather rough form of polymorphy which influenced third century conceptions such as those of Origen, the Gospel of Philip (57.28 - 58-10; 61.21-35) and possibly the ApoJ (on which see below), not everything in these later texts already being present in the AJ.42

We add two observations. It is remarkable that the polymorphy of the AJ is not limited to one aspect but covers several aspects: stature, age, corporeality. Junod & Kaestli correctly observe that John never tells us how the Lord looked normally: he is never a real human being.43 Van Cangh describes (this type of) polymorphy as a negative theophany.44

The number three, which plays a leading role in early Christian thought and which we will come upon in the APet and the ApoJ, is conspicuously absent from the AJ. Each polymorphous appearance is centred around a duality.

We conclude that the motif of the polymorphy of the Lord is the leading idea behind cc.87-93, but that it is much less important in the other parts. The motif is hardly explained to the readers. The message is nevertheless clear: Christ was not human. Polymorphy functions as a means to illustrate a docetic christology. That we find the motif of polymorphy in the main part of the AJ as well as in the supposed interpolation is an indication that the interpolation is not so different from the main part as Junod & Kaestli think.

The other Apocryphal Acts

In the other Acts the metamorphoses are more numerous than the instances of polymorphy and so we will start with them. It is not

42 Schneider, Mystery, 57-66, 69. He contradicts, wrongly in my view, Junod & Kaestli, AI, 471f, 484 ('Ce thème [une vision adaptee a leur capacite] n’apparaît nulle part dans le discours de Jean').
43 'C’est qu’il n’y a pas d’aspect habituel puisque le Seigneur n’est pas un homme, mais le Dieu immuable', Junod & Kaestli, AI, 479.
44 Van Cangh, 'Miracles', 2318.
necessary to say much about the two types of appearances of the Lord which recur in all *AAA*: the appearance in the form of the apostle who stars in the respective acts (AA 46.12-13; *ATH* 11, 27, 151; *AP* 21; *APet* 22, 35) and the appearance as a beautiful young man (*AA* 32.6; *ATH* 154; *AP PHamb* 3.28f; *APet* 5). They serve to stress the miracles in these texts.

The AAM contains other metamorphoses as well: into a ship's captain (5, 17) and a little child (18, 33). Satan appears in the form of an old man (24). Jesus tells Andrew: 'I showed you that I can do anything and appear to each person in any form I wish' (18). Jesus' life on earth is not narrated.

In *ATH* a young man addresses Thomas thus: 'For thou art a man that has two forms, and wherever thou wilt, you are found...', after which he says that he saw another man standing beside Thomas - this must be Christ (34). Thomas says about Christ that the disciples saw his transfigured appearance, but not his heavenly form on the mountain (143). The theme of the twin is important in the theology of the text. Thomas is not Jesus himself in another form.

The word 'polymorphous' is found three times in the *ATH*. In c.48 it is used in praise of Jesus without an appended story, and in c.153 it is followed by an illumination of the prison room in which Thomas uses the word. Only in c.44 the word is linked with a polymorphous appearance, viz. of Satan to a woman and her maid, five years before: the woman at that time saw a young man, the maid an old man (43). Satan now appears again, but this time only the apostle and the woman can see him (44). This is a unique case of polymorphy: the Lord is visible and invisible at the same time.

There is no polymorphy in *AP* and AA, but important examples

occur in *APet* 20-21, where we read that everybody saw the Lord as his capacities permitted. After a description of the transfiguration which forms a separate episode, Peter continues with:

He ate and drank for our sakes, though himself without hunger or thirst, he bore and suffered reproaches for our sakes, he died and rose again because of us. (...) this (God) who is both great and little, beautiful and ugly, young and old, appearing in time and yet in eternity wholly invisible... Peter ends this sermon with a list of christological predicates like the lists we have in the *AJ*: 'the door, the light, the way, the bread,' (etc). A short time later a group of blind widows is healed by a great light and sees the Lord:

And they said, 'We saw an old man, who had such a presence as we cannot describe to you'; but others (said), 'We saw a growing lad'; and others said, 'We saw a boy who gently touched our eyes, and so our eyes were opened.'

Peter confidently interprets this as a polymorphous appearance of the Lord. We see that the *APet* is quite close to the *AJ* on the subject of polymorphy, as it is in the speculation about the


49 *Manducavit et vivit propter nos, ipse neque esuriens neque sitiens, batulavit et inproperia passus est propter nos, mortuus est et resurrexit nostri causa. (...) hunc magnum et minimum, formonsum et foedum, iuvenem et senem, tempore adparentem et in aeternum utique inbisiblem ...* (Lipsius 67.26 - 68.4).


51 *APet* 21 (Lipsius 69.9-13): quae dixerunt: *Quoniam seniorem vidimus, speciem habentem qualem tibi enarre non possimus; aliae autem: iuvenem adulescentem; alii autem dixerunt: Puerum vidimus tangentem oculos nostros subiliter: sic nobis aperti sunt oculi.*
cross.\textsuperscript{52} In both texts the motif is linked with the life of Christ on earth. But the \textit{APet} state that Christ adapted to the people he met, which motif is a later development that recurs in Origen and the \textit{Gospel of Philip}.

\textbf{The origin of polymorphy}

Polymorphy in the narrow sense is not found in texts that are older than the \textit{AJ} and the \textit{APet} (second century \textit{AD}). We will therefore look at older texts presenting metamorphoses, asking ourselves if they can inform us about influences on the concept of polymorphy. We will look respectively at Egypt, the Greek world, Judaism and the New Testament.

An Egyptian origin, more specifically in the cult of the sun, is suggested by Peter Weigandt, who holds that the motif entered Christianity through the \textit{APoJ}.\textsuperscript{53} According to him, in the later period of the Egyptian religion the sun god is seen as polymorphous as regards his age: he is young, middle-aged and old. The oldest testimony is dated in the reign of Darius II (424-402 BC). However, leading Egyptologists do not support the idea that the metamorphoses of the sun should be seen as a kind of polymorphy. According to Erik Hornung, numerous gods are called \textit{'many-faced', 'Lord of faces' etc. Polymorphism (as well as \textit{'polynomialism'}, i.e. having more than one name) is a fundamental characteristic of nearly all Egyptian deities, but the number of forms a god could adopt was limited and each god had his own identity.\textsuperscript{54} The examples Hornung gives have to do with concrete

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{APet} 37-39, \textit{AJ} 98-100. The \textit{APet} seems to know the \textit{AJ} in the full version, i.e. including cc.94-102. This is an argument for the priority of the \textit{AJ}.

\textsuperscript{53} Weigandt, \textit{Doketismus}, 49-51, who follows A. Jacoby, 'Altheidnisch-Aegyptisches im Christentum', \textit{Sfinx} 7 (1903) 107-17, esp. 110. For the \textit{APoJ} see Appendix.

\textsuperscript{54} E. Hornung, \textit{Der Eine und die Vielen. Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen} (Darmstadt, 1971) 114-7.
forms like animals, human forms and celestial bodies. I would prefer to avoid the word polymorphy and to say instead that the deities were capable of metamorphosis. Although metamorphosis of age is very important in the Egyptian conception of the sun, the sun is by definition not polymorphous in the strict sense of the word that we use. From pre-Christian Egypt there seem to be no examples of gods who show two different forms at the same time, who are sometimes material and sometimes not, or who have a double, as Jesus in the AJ.

Oxyrhynchus papyrus 1380 (early second century AD) contains an invocation of Isis. Among the many names and titles of the goddess are 'polymorphous' and 'of many names'. The text has syncretistic traits. Isis is connected, among many other things, with both the sun and the moon. It seems that here 'polymorphous' means no more than 'capable of many metamorphoses'.

In the Greek religion metamorphosis is very common. There are also many double and even more threefold deities. A common example from Hellenistic times is the goddess Hekate who has two identities, as a single and as a threefold person. A recent study of Hekate in the first centuries AD, however, says that 'she manifested herself not anthropomorphically or theomorph-

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55 The publications of Jan Assmann about the Egyptian sun-cult do not support Weigandt either, see e.g. J. Assmann, Liturgische Lieder an der Sonnengott. Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Hymnik I (Berlin, 1969) 333-49; idem, Re und Amon. Die Krise des polytheistischen Weltbilds im Ägypten der 18. - 20. Dynastie (Freiburg and Gottingen, 1983) 54-8.
56 As far as I know, the Egyptians never considered the fact that at a given moment, in other countries the sun is seen in a different position (= in their view a different form).
57 AJ89.9-10, 89.10-15; 93.1-4 and 92 resp.
ically but as a formless, speaking fire'.

There is no evidence of polymorphy in the Greek world.

In Judaism mystical groups often speculated about the body of
God. A tradition in which this speculation was laid down is the
Shi'ur Qomah (The Measure of the Body). Gershom Scholem
introduced the label gnostic to describe this strand of Judaism,
whereas Stroumsa speaks of a macrocosmic divine body, more or
less parallel to the Greek makranthropos. Scholem thought that
this tradition dated from the first century AD; his dating is still
defended today but rejected by others as much too early.
Charles Mopsik has recently shown that the main pillars under
Scholem's dating are unconvincing; at the same time he has launched
another argument to prove the antiquity of the Shi'ur Qomah.
Having found the Hebrew term הַקָּוֶה behind the words
מַעְטְרֹן הַלִּיְקָוק in Eph 4:13, he goes on to say that the whole
Deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians is dependent on a Jewish
system of exegesis, which in his eyes proves the very early exist-

60 S.I. Johnston, Hekate Soteira. A Study of Hekate's Roles in the
Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature (Atlanta, 1990) 126.
61 For the first translation of this text with some notes see P.W. van
der Horst, 'The Measurement of the Body. A Chapter in the History of
Ancient Jewish Mysticism', in his Essays on the Jewish World of Early
Christianity (Freiburg and Gottingen, 1990) 121-35. Note the Introducti-
on of the volume, 14-5, in which for the eighteenth-century (!) date of
the manuscript Van der Horst now follows P. Schafer, 'Shi'ur Qoma:
Rezensionen und Urtext', in his Hekhalot-Studien (Tiibingen, 1988) 75-
83.
62 G.G. Stroumsa, 'Form(s) of God: some notes on Metatron and
Christ', Harvard Theol. Rev. 76 (1983) 269-88, esp. 270 (= Savoir et
Salut, 65-84).
63 G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic
Tradition (New York, 1960) 36-42; idem, Von der mystischen Gestalt
M.S. Cohen, The Shi'ur Qomah (London and New York, 1983) 52, 58,
65; cf. Van der Horst, "Measurement", 125.
64 C. Mopsik, 'La datation de Chi'our Qomah d'apres un texte neotes-
tamentaire', RevSR 68 (1994) 131-44.
ence of *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations. Although it is not unlikely that in this case oral traditions are much older than the written texts, the evidence is hardly sufficient to see the speculation of *Shi'ur Qomah* as predating early Christian polymorphy.

In Jewish speculative thinking not only God was represented as having a giant body but so were, probably at an earlier period, angels, even the angel of the Lord.\(^{65}\) Indeed, Stroumsa follows Scholem in suggesting that the *Shi'ur Qomah* speaks about another heavenly being than God Himself.\(^{66}\) The idea of a giant Christ, a form of metamorphosis, is probably due to Jewish influence. For instance, the *Gospel of Peter* describes how two giant angels lead a still larger person out of the sepulchre on Easter morning. In *Ascensio Isaiae* 9.27-40 we find a comparable angelchristology.\(^{67}\)

Having said this, I do not believe that another suggested influence is real. The angel Metatron could be described as makranthropos, but also as both old and young\(^{68}\) and as a servant (γυ 3, πατζ).\(^{69}\)

On the other hand, Jewish speculations about Metatron are relatively late and thus more probably dependent on Christian traditions and texts such as Phil 2 and Col 1 rather than vice versa.\(^{70}\) But all this is not the origin of Christian polymorphy.

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66 Stroumsa, ‘Form(s)’, 277f; see also J.E. Fossum, 'Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism', *VigChr* 37 (1983) 260-87, 262.


68 Stroumsa also mentions a rabbinic exegesis combining Dan 7.9 and Song of Songs 5, thus saying that God is sometimes revealed as young, sometimes as old ('Polymorphie', 420-I), but these sources are later than the second century, cf. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 33-41.

69 Stroumsa, 'Polymorphie', 420-4 sees similarities with the *ApoJ*.

70 *Contra* Stroumsa, ‘Form(s)’, 281-4; idem, 'Polymorphie', 425-7.
If the motif of polymorphy did not originate in Egypt, Greece of Judaism, what about the NT? It has indeed recently been suggested that the origin of the motif of polymorphy in later Christian authors is to be found in the NT stories about the appearances of the risen Lord, which were later projected backwards to the pre-Easter period. Among these appearances, some scholars want to include the transfiguration on the mount or traditions behind it. But the majority of scholars think it unlikely that the story of the transfiguration in Mk 9 is a post-Easter story transferred back into the lifetime of Jesus. So if we say that the story of the transfiguration influenced the concept of polymorphy, we are talking about a story from the life of Jesus. During the transfiguration three witnesses see the Lord changed from 'merely' human into something supernatural, possibly less material. This story was used by the author of AJ 87-93. Nothing suggests that he was the first to read the story as a testimony of polymorphy, but lack of sources prevents us from going further.

Next to be investigated are the stories about the appearances after Easter (Jn 20, 21, Mk 16, Lk 24, Acts 9.3 par, 1 Cor 15). In none of these stories the Lord is seen in more than one way at the time. But there are several hints at a change of stature, most of all in Mk 16.12, which is, though not authentic, very old: 


72 In contrast with Schmithals and Robinson (ibidem), see J. Gnilka, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar II.1 (Markus) (Zürich, 1979) and Paulsen on 2 Peter.

73 K. Aland, 'Der Schluss des Markusevangeliums', in M. Sabbe (ed), L'évangile selon Marc. Tradition et rédaction (Gembloux, 1974) 435-70, esp. 449f, prefers a date early in the second century, for the text had influence on EpAp, Gospel of Peter, Justin and Hennas. Whether or not the section Mk 16:9-20 circulated independently or had already become part of Mk at that time is not important for our present purpose. Cf R. Pesch,
The motif of polymorphy may well have risen from a docetic reading of the words used here. After Easter, the Lord's appearance is always that of a human being but he is not always recognized as Jesus (Lk 24, Jn 20). He comes and goes whenever he wants, even through physical barriers, which might suggest a less 'solid' body. Mary's failure to recognize her beloved friend (she first thinks that she meets the gardener and later recognizes [?] Jesus) can have been read to imply that he was really different at that moment.

The ideas about the church as the body of Christ in the Epistle to the Ephesians have engaged many. Paul (!) may have inherited Hellenistic-Jewish (Philonean) thoughts and applied them to Christ as the Son of Man or simply the Man. The readers are confronted with a poly-interpretable text, which can lead to taking the words about the measure of the fullness of Christ in 4:13 quite literally. But such a reading leads to the speculations of Shi'ur Qomah rather than to the polymorphy of the AJ.

Conclusions

To sum up, it is possible to speak about metamorphosis of Jesus in the NT, but polymorphy in the strict sense is not present. Yet the narratives about the risen Lord could easily be developed into stories about polymorphous appearances before Easter. Did such development need some external stimulus, such as gnosticism or docetism? Or would a general lack of appreciation for life this side of death and for the Jewish setting of the gospels have been sufficient? It probably would.

Markusevangelium (Freiburg, 1977) ad loc.
74 These words occur in what amounts to a summary of the narrative of the two men walking to Emmaus in the evening of Easter Day (Lk 24).
The AJ are a unique text. They (or the related *APet*) are the first to present us with polymorphous appearances of Christ. Even the earthly Jesus - i.e. Christ before his death, resurrection and ascension - could appear in several forms at a time. Thus the motif of polymorphy serves a docetic position. Real polymorphy has not been found in other religions, but it recurs in later Christian texts, though hardly with reference to the earthly Jesus. That may explain the lack of polemical interest on the part of the Fathers. Preparations can possibly be seen in Egypt (metamorphosis of age) and in Judaism (metamorphosis of stature), but the NT alone (metamorphosis of substance) might be sufficient as a background.

Appendix: The ApoJ and the date of the AJ

Several facts suggest that the AJ are early. We have seen that the motif of polymorphy is still unreflected and that it probably influenced later texts such as *APet*, ApoJ, Trimorphic Protennoia, Gospel of Philip and Origen, where the motif was often 'softened' into post-resurrection metamorphosis. On the other hand, docetism in its pure form which denied the human aspect of Jesus altogether, was a very early phenomenon which can be dated to the days of the Fourth Gospel, Ignace and Marcion, that is to say no later than about 150 AD. After that moment it disappears from our sources. In the AJ the docetic viewpoint is first expressed by means of polymorphy, but it makes no use of the number three, which was so frequent in later centuries. The chapters 87-93 are a non-gnostic text, in contrast to cc.94-102; they date from the period before gnosticism got hold of most non-orthodox forms of Christianity. We cannot say that polymorphy is a sign of gnosticism, although gnostics used it.

Weigandt considers the ApoJ to be an Egyptian text which was brought to Asia at an early date where it influenced the AJ.

76 We will never know how many comparable texts were lost, since they were banned by Orthodoxy like the AJ.
77 Weigandt, *Doketismus*, 144-6, 153-5.
and other AAA, so that it served as a mediator text for the idea of polymorphy. Under influence of Weigandt, Junod & Kaestli have suggested that the AJ themselves are of Egyptian origin, but this theory is highly vulnerable. If Michel Tardieu is correct in dating the earliest version of the ApoJ to about 170 AD and Weigandt himself is correct in seeing docetism as belonging essentially to the second third of the second century, dependence of the AJ on the ApoJ is extremely unlikely, for the AJ are above all docetic. Concerning the place of origin of the ApoJ the scholarly community nowadays keeps silent.78

In the narrative introduction to the ApoJ 'John' tells that in a vision he saw a child, an elderly person and a young person appearing through one another.79 The Saviour tells John: 'It is I who am [the father]; it is I who am the mother; it is I who am the son'(2.12-14). This 'explanation' does not fit the vision very well.80 The order 'child - old person - youngster' is not the order in which the Egyptian sun-god appears. The Christian trinity rather than Egyptian religion has influenced the wording of the 'explanation'. But I want to go further. The ApoJ is probably dependent on the AJ and Phil 2, and the polymorphy of the AJ served as an example for the ApoJ. This dependence could also explain why John, of all disciples, gave his name to this apocryphon. The oldest form of the ApoJ was known to Irenaeus and thus predates his writings (± 180); consequently, the AJ must be older still.81

79 ApoJ (NHC 11.1) 2.1-8. The third form is elsewhere translated as servant, see F. Wisse, in The Nag Hammadi Library in English, ed. J.M. Robinson (Leiden and San Francisco, 1988); Stroumsa, 'Polymorphie', 414, 418. The Coptic has hal; in the Berlin codex 8502 the third form is absent.
80 As is noted by Junod, 'Polymorphie', 43, and Stroumsa, 'Polymorphie', 414, who sees the reference to the Trinity as an editorial gloss.
81 This agrees with the conclusion by Bremmer, Ch. 3, Appendix.