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Apostolic commission narratives in the canonical and apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2002

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Czachesz, I. (2002). Apostolic commission narratives in the canonical and apocryphal Acts of the Apostles Groningen: s.n.

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7. The Acts of Peter and the Twelve

The *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* from Nag Hammadi differs from the apostolic Acts discussed in the previous chapters¹. Instead of reporting the teachings and miracles of an apostle, the narrative concentrates on the commission of the twelve apostles. The text resembles fairy tales and is filled with symbols². The narration changes back and forth between the first and third persons, the first person narrator being identified as Peter (1.30).

1. NHC VI, 1. I adapt the translation of Parrott and Wilson in Robinson (ed) *Nag Hammadi Library*, 289–94. Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 414 and Parrott, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 289, date the text to the second century. Molinari, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 235, suggests that it was written in the second half of the third century in Alexandria.

2. Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 414, compares it to Lucian’s *True Story*, which is, however, a literary composition of much larger scale (not to mention its overtly sarcastic tone). From Jewish and Christian literature, one may cite perhaps the *Book of Tobit* or the ‘Hymn of the Pearl’ in the *Acts of Thomas*. Whereas all of these parallels are imperfect, nevertheless, they point out something *Märchenhaftes* (fairy tale-like) in the story. Fairy tale is still the best name for these short narratives with a straightforward plot that is based on the motif of wandering, in the course of which the hero deals with angels, demons, monsters, speaking animals, some dangerous, others helpful, and prevails in the trials and difficulties. Molinari, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 83–92, suggests *narratio fabulosa*, quoting Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (late 4th or early 5th century AD). Macrobius defines ‘fabulous narrative’ as a fable that ‘rests on a solid foundation of truth’. He describes a subcategory of fabulous narrative, where the plot involves ‘a decent and dignified conception of holy truth, with respectable events and characters, presented beneath a modest veil of allegory’.

Journey to the Nine Gates

Let us summarise the contents of the book. Following some scattered words of the badly damaged beginning of the text³, we learn that the apostles were resolute to fulfil their ministry:

And in our hearts, we were united⁴. We agreed to fulfil the ministry to which the Lord appointed us. And we made a covenant with each other.

When the opportune moment (ΕΥΚΑΙΡΙΑ) comes from the Lord, they go down to the sea and find there a ship. The sailors are kind—as was ordained by the Lord—and they embark. After sailing a day and a night, a wind comes that takes them to a small city in the midst of the sea called Habitation (ΣΩΡΣ)⁵. A man comes out of the city, ‘beautiful in his form and stature’, whose appearance is described in detail, and who cries out in the city, ‘Pearls, pearls!’ Peter greets him, and he identifies himself as a fellow stranger. He cries again, ‘Pearls, pearls!’—but the rich men of the city do not even recognise him because of their disdain. The poor, however, ask him to show them the pearls. The merchant invites them to his city, where he will not only show them pearls, but will also give pearls to them free.

In a dialogue with Peter, the merchant identifies himself as Lithargoel, ‘the interpretation of which is, the light, gazelle-like stone’⁶.

3. The upper part of the first eight pages (out of the total twelve) is damaged, thus the beginning of the narrative is also unclear.

4. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 1.9–10. ΔΝΡ ΟΥΖΗΤ ΟΥΩΤ, ‘we were of the same mind’, cf. *1 Corinthians* 1.10, ἦτε δὲ [...] ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῖ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ; see also *Acts* 2.44.

5. The upper parts of all the pages (2–7) containing the episode in this city are damaged (see note 3 above), and ironically, the name of the city seems to have occurred precisely in those lost parts. Thus it actually appears nowhere in this account, only in a flashback at 10.3. Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 416, argues that ‘behind the catch-words of the city names [Habitation, Nine Gates], or round about them, there stand all kinds of elements which are not intended to yield any proper sense, and at any rate do not carry on the narrative at all’. These words, according to Schenke, belong to the names of the cities, giving complex names like ‘Be founded on endurance’.

6. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 5.16–9. ΠΩΝΕ ΠΔΑΖΣΕ ΕΤΑΔΙΩΟΥ, ‘a gazelle-like stone that is light’. Wilson and Parrott, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 214–5, suggest that the name ‘Lithargoel’ was composed *ad hoc* of λίθος (‘stone’),

Then he describes the road to his city: ‘No man is able to go on that road, except one who has forsaken everything that he has and has fasted daily from stage to stage’⁷. On the road, there are black dogs, which kill people for their bread; robbers, who kill them for their garments; wolves, which kill them for water; lions, which eat them for the meat in their possession; and bulls, which devour them for the vegetables that they carry. Finally he tells the name of the city: ‘Nine gates’⁸. The apostles forsake everything and set out to Lithargoel’s city. They do not take garments with them, nor water, meat, or vegetables. Thus, they evade the robbers, wolves, lions, and bulls. As they sit down in front of the gate and talk, Lithargoel appears as a physician: ‘An unguent box’⁹ was under his arm, and a young disciple was following him carrying a pouch full of medicine’ (8.16–9). The apostles do not recognise him, but he identifies himself first as Lithargoel and then as Jesus himself. He gives them the unguent box and the pouch, and commands them,

Go into the city from which you came, which is called Habitation. Continue in endurance as you teach all those who have believed in my name, because I have endured in hardships of the faith. I will give you your reward. To the poor of that city give what they need in order to

ἀργός (‘light’ or ‘quick’), and ⲗⲏⲥ (‘divine being’); ‘gazelle-like’ refers to the eyes of the gazelle. Krause, ‘Petrusakten’, 51, translates ‘Gott der Perle’. According to Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 419, the figure may have existed as a Jewish angel, ‘something like a Jewish Asclepius’ (cf. 8.14–9 of the text). Molinari, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 135 suggests ‘the shining stone of God’.

7. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 5.21–5. ‘Fasting daily from stage to stage’ (ⲡⲢⲢⲤⲈⲮⲈ ⲘⲘⲢⲢⲈ ⲪⲒⲚ ⲘⲚⲢⲢⲈ Ⲡⲗ ⲘⲚⲢⲢⲈ) may either designate a spiritual journey (of preparation), or an actual manner of travelling from monastery (μονή) to monastery.

8. Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 417, relates the subsequent words also to the name of the city, ‘In nine gates, let us praise him, mindful that the tenth is the chief gate’; cf. note 5 above. The gates probably represent subsequent heavens (idem, ‘Taten des Petrus’, 13).

9. The word appears as ⲢⲂⲠⲤⲚⲚ in 8.16, and as ⲢⲂⲠⲗⲚⲚ in 9.30. Krause, ‘Petrusakten’, 58, note 4, identified it with νάρθηξ. Note also the similarity to νάρδος, designating different sorts of ‘nard’, plants whose aromatic extracts were used in medicines, cf. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1160. The woman in the house of the leprous Simon, and Mary of Bethany both poured ointment of nard (μύρον νάρδου) on Jesus’ head or feet, respectively (*Mark* 14.3, *John* 12.3).

live until I give them what is better, which I told you that I will give you for nothing (10.1–13).

When Peter doubts how they could provide for the needs of the poor, Jesus answers that his name and the wisdom of God surpasses gold, silver and precious stones. He gives them the pouch (this is a repetition in the narrative, cf. above) and adds, ‘Heal all the sick of the city who believe in my name’¹⁰. Now Peter

signalled to the one who was beside him, who was John: ‘You talk this time’. John answered and said, ‘Lord, before you we are afraid to say many words. But it is you who asks us to practice this skill. We have not been taught to be physicians. How then will we know how to heal bodies as you have told us?’ (11.3–13)

Jesus answers,

[T]he physicians of this world heal what belongs to the world. The physicians of souls, however, heal the heart. Heal the bodies, therefore, so that through the real powers of healing for their bodies, without medicine of this world, they may believe in you, that you have power to heal the illnesses of the heart also [...]. (11.16–26)

Finally, Jesus warned the apostles against partiality to the rich in many churches, and ordered them not to dine in the houses of the rich, nor make friends with them, rather ‘judge them in uprightness’ (12.8–9); and he ‘departed from them in peace’ (12.18–9).

The Acts of Peter and the Twelve and Pachomian Monasticism¹¹

At the end of the text, the time of the apostles is suddenly blended with the present of the narrator. The contemporary reader may have had the feeling that he or she arrived from the past to the present, and also received a ready-made moral lesson as in an Aesopian tale: Jesus disapproves of the influence of the rich in the Church. This simple

10. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 10.34–11.1. Cf. *Acts* 3.6, where Peter says to the lame man, ‘I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk’ (NRSV).

11. In his recent monograph on the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, A.L. Molinari interprets the text against the background of the Decian persecution (250 AD). This section attempts a different interpretation. Cf. note 40 below.

conclusion, in fact, captures much of the complicated symbolism of this short narrative. It seems as if the author had been aware of the difficulties of the interpretation of his text, and unwilling to leave the deciphering to chance, he laid down different possibilities within the text itself. For a more advanced interpretation, we can also turn to the text itself. After their arrival at ‘Nine gates’, Peter relates,

We rested ourselves in front of the gate and we talked with each other about that which is not distraction of this world. Rather we continued in contemplation of the faith. As we discussed the robbers on the road, whom we evaded, behold Lithargoel, having changed, came out to us (8.6–15).

First of all, let us note the pun in the Coptic: the same expression (ⲭⲓ ⲓⲣⲁ), literally ‘take the face of’¹², is used both for ‘talk’ and ‘distraction’. In order to preserve the cohesion in English, one can translate ‘we talked about what is not the talk of this world’. Rather, they continued in contemplation of faith, or literally, they ‘remained in an exercise of faith’¹³. This implies that the previous journey was already an exercise of faith itself, which the apostles now continue. The actual topic of their contemplation is nothing else than the dangers of the road. We learn that they ‘discuss’ (ⲧⲁⲟⲩⲟ) the robbers, who, as we learned earlier, kill people for their costly garment. This is the first or second difficulty of the road¹⁴, a symbol that seems to subsume all the others. The costly garment of the world stands for possessions and bonds that prevent one from beginning the journey to the city. All the other dangers are connected to some sort of food (bread, water, meat, and vegetables), and the apostles’ travelling without them is most probably a reference to fasting. Let us remember that Lithargoel explicitly stated previously that fasting was a prerequisite to accomplish

12. The verb ⲭⲓ, meaning ‘take’, is widely used to create composite phrases in Coptic. The prepersonal form (*status pronominalis*) ⲓⲣⲁ can belong to two different nouns, ⲓⲟ (‘face’) and ⲓⲣⲟⲟⲩ (‘voice’), Layton, *Coptic Grammar*, 103. In 12.4–5, ⲭⲓ ⲓⲟ exactly corresponds to the Greek πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν in *Luke* 20.21 and *Galatians* 2.6, ‘to show deference to someone’.

13. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 8.10–11, ΝΕΝΗΜΗΝ ΠΕ ΕΥΜΕΛΕΤΗ ΠΤΕ ΠΙΝΑΖΤΕ.

14. In 5.28–31, Lithargoel also speaks about the dogs who kill people for their bread, but they are not mentioned during the actual journey in 7.26–8.3.

the journey to the city¹⁵. The travel narrative is evidently understood here as a spiritual exercise.

The apostles' 'talk' further expresses that contemplation takes place in a community. These details, when we put them together, suggest that the *Sitz im Leben* of the book is the life of a monastic community, rather than 'wandering asceticism'¹⁶ or other individualist form of monastic life. Pachomius, the father of coenobite monasticism, organised communities from the early 320s in Upper Egypt¹⁷. They had a uniform dress¹⁸. In contrast to other monastic liturgies that emerged in Egypt and in the West and put heavy emphasis on the singing of the Psalter, in the Pachomian community it was the reciting of Scriptures and reflecting on them that shaped daily life¹⁹. Such a meditation may be meant by the 'exercise of the faith' (perhaps better 'spiritual exercise') of Peter and the twelve. A number of themes mentioned in Pachomius' monastic *Rules*²⁰ are discussed in a similar manner by the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*. First, let us quote the rule describing how the newcomer should be admitted to the monastery:

Rules 49

When someone comes to the door of the monastery, wishing to renounce the world and be added to the number of the brothers, he shall not be free to enter. First, the father of the monastery shall be informed. He shall remain outside at the door a few days

and be taught the Lord's prayer and as

Acts of Peter and the Twelve 8.6–15

We rested ourselves in front of the gate

and we talked with each other about

15. Cf. note 7 above.

16. Schenke, 'The Acts of Peter and the Twelve', 414.

17. McGuckin, 'Pachomius', 985. The first monastery was formed gradually at the village Tabennesi; cf. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 61–2.

18. Pachomius, *Rules* 69 and 81, Jerome's Preface 4, cf. note 20 below. The dress of the monks had a symbolic interpretation from early times, cf. Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.14.

19. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 80–1.

20. The *Rules* in their fullest form are known to us from the Latin translation by Jerome, edited by Boon, *Pachomiana Latina* 11–74. The English translation is adapted from Veilleaux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol 2, 139–95. The *Rules* in their present form characterise Pachomian monasticism of the fourth century, rather than the views of the founder himself. Cf. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 48–53.

many psalms as he can learn. He shall tell his story carefully (*diligenter sui experimentum dabit*): has he done something wrong and, troubled by fear, suddenly run away? [...] Can he renounce his parents and spurn his own possessions? If they see that he is ready for everything, then he shall be taught of the rest of the monastic discipline.

Then they shall strip him of his secular clothes and garb him in the monastic habit. [the one who carries a costly garment of the world with him the robbers kill 5.31–6.1]

He shall be handed over to the porter so that at the time of prayer he may bring him before all the brothers. behold Lithargoel, having changed, came out to us.

The parallels are impressive. Peter and the twelve rest themselves before the gates as the newcomer at the entrance of the monastery²¹. Just as the novice learns the Lord's Prayer and Psalms, so the disciples engage in a spiritual exercise. In the same manner that the novice examines his past and the way he came to the monastery, so the disciples discuss the dangers of the road to the Nine Gates. While the novice examines if he can renounce the world, the disciples renounce the 'distraction of this world'. As the novice is stripped of his secular cloth, the disciples had to come to the gates without a costly garment. Finally, in the same manner that the novice is handed over to the porter, Lithargoel comes out to the gates to receive the disciples.

Further, the 'dangers of the road' that the disciples had to avoid, can be understood as the breach of different monastic rules:

Rules

As regards the small loaves given to the housemasters to be distributed to those who dedicate themselves to greater abstinence and do not want to eat in common with the others, they must see to it that they give them to no one as a favour, *not even to someone going away* (79). If the brothers who are sent

Acts of Peter and the Twelve

The one who carries bread with him on the road, the black dogs kill because of the bread (5.28–31).

21. Cf. *Acts of Philip* 13.4; *Acts of Barnabas* 16–20.

out on business or are staying far away eat outside the monastery, the weekly server who accompanies them shall give them food but without making cooked dishes,

and he shall himself distribute water as is done in the monastery. No one may get up to draw or drink water (64).

No one shall [...] carry jars full of water [...] until the housemaster says so (123).

No one shall take vegetables from the garden unless he is given them by the gardener (71). [Fish broth (*liquamen de piscibus*) is consumed only by the ill (43–6).]

The one who carries water with him, the wolves kill because of the water (6.1–3).

The one who is anxious about meat and green vegetables, the lions eat because of the meat. If he evades the lions, the bulls devour him because of the green vegetables (6.4–8).

It is notable that the warnings in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* are uttered by Lithargoel. The text views the monastic rules as given by Jesus in a different shape. This is consistent with the legend that an angel gave the *Rules* to Pachomius on a bronze tablet²². Obedience to the Pachomian rules was a matter of salvation: ‘Whoever transgresses any of these commands shall, for his negligence and his contempt, do penance publicly without any delay so that he may be able to possess the kingdom of heaven’²³. The city of Habitation could be readily understood by the Pachomian monks as the symbol of the monastery. In the *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, Saint Antony says: ‘Then the path of the apostles was revealed on earth. This is the word our able Apa Pachomius undertook. He became the refuge for everyone in danger from the one who has done evil from the beginning’²⁴.

Various features of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* can be interpreted against this background. First, it describes the novice’s arrival at the monastery, the renunciation of the world, and the life-saving power of the community rules. Second, Lithargoel’s giving precepts to the disciples is analogous to the angel’s bestowing the *Rules* to Pachomius. It is also possible that Pachomius himself became identified

22. Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 32.

23. *Rules* 144.

24. *Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 127, trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol 1, 23–295.

with Lithargoel²⁵. Thirdly, on the figurative level, the text describes a spiritual journey among different dangers and temptations. It reflects the exercises and development of the monk who meditates over the dangers of the world and the polymorphy of Jesus. The animals threatening him on the road are tempting demons. Wolves, lions, and bulls all occur in the vivid description of the temptation of Saint Antony (c. 251–356) in his biography by Athanasius (295–373)²⁶, and it is not unlikely that the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* took the motif from traditions about Antony. It is remarkable that from the list of animals mentioned by Lithargoel (5.28–6.8), one is missing in the disciples' account of the journey: 'the black dogs' do not appear in Antony's temptation either. This change can attest the gradual assimilation of the two traditions: Antony's legend was probably well-known in the monastic communities at the time of the final redaction of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*.

The final dialogue between Jesus and the disciples also fits into the framework of monastic life. It comprises three major themes: Jesus' sending the apostles to the poor (10.1–21), commission to heal them (10.22–11.26), and warning against the rich (11.26–12.16). When Jesus commands the apostles to serve the poor, Peter gives an answer that reflects the circumstances of monastic life: 'Lord, you have taught us to forsake the world and everything in it. We have renounced them for your sake. What we are concerned about [now] is the food for a single day. Where will we be able to find the needs that you ask us to provide for the poor?' (10.15–21) Jesus (giving them a pouch of medicine) answers, 'Heal the sick of the city who believe in my name' (10.33–4). When John protests, saying that they are not trained as physicians, Jesus responds:

Rightly have you spoken, John, for I know that the physicians of this world heal what belongs to the world. The physicians of the souls,

25. Pachomius had visions, and regarded himself as a salient figure of salvation history. Tradition made him the successor of prophets and apostles. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 57–63.

26. *Life of Antony* 9. The demons assumed the forms of *lions*, bears, leopards, *bulls*, serpents, asps, scorpions, and *wolves* (9.6). Pachomius himself is tempted by demons in the *Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 21, although not in the form of animals. On the questions of authorship and date of the *Life of Antony*, see Bartelink, 'Introduction', 27–35.

however, heal the heart. Heal the bodies first, therefore, so that through the real powers of healing for their bodies, without medicine of this world, they may believe in you, that you have power to heal the illnesses of the heart also. (11.14–26)

This passage can be understood again in the light of Pachomian tradition. It fits well into the programme of Pachomius, for whom the monastic community was an instrument of salvation²⁷. Within that context, we can understand the paradoxical ‘healing of the body without medicine of this world’. Ascetic life in the monastery transformed the body in order to achieve the salvation of the soul. Moreover, Pachomius himself is reported to have performed many miraculous healings²⁸. He also expounded his theory of healing to the brothers:

Do not think that bodily healings are healings; but the real healings are the spiritual healings of the soul. So, if today a man who was blinded in his mind through idolatry is led to the way of the Lord, to the point of seeing plainly and acknowledging the Creator, is that not healing and salvation for the soul and for the body before the Lord at once and forever? And if someone else is dumb from lying, not speaking the truth, but his eyes are opened for him and he walks in righteousness, again is that not healing?²⁹

We can see that the subsequent levels of bodily and spiritual healing were present in Pachomian tradition similarly as in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*. Besides, the *Rules* attests the medical provisions for the sick of the monastery³⁰, and Pachomius’ care for them is reported in his biographies³¹. Healing ‘the sick of the city who believe’ may reflect this other aspect of healing, the caring for the members of the monastic community.

In the last section of the closing dialogue Jesus exhorts the apostles to condemn the rich:

Do not dine in their houses, nor be friends with them, lest their partiality may influence you. For many in the churches have shown partiality to the rich, because they also are sinful, and they gave occasion for

27. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 58.

28. *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, 41, 43–5.

29. *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, 41

30. For example, *Rules* 40–6.

31. *Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 48.

others to do [likewise]. But judge them with uprightness, so that your ministry may be glorified, and that my name also, may be glorified in the churches. (12.1–13)

The ‘partiality of the rich’ that has to be avoided can be perfectly understood in the context of early hagiography,

[which] gives the impression that the only care dogging these monks in their alternative, monastic world was eluding the visitations, solicitations, and flatteries constantly thrust on them by pursuing admirers³².

However, the ideal picture drawn in these hagiographic texts has to be compared with contemporary social reality³³. Monasteries were competing for patronage, and a great number of failed monks went begging in the cities, many of whom actually gained entry into houses. The middle part of our passage actually reflects the practice of competition for patronage (12.4–8): ‘For many in the churches have shown partiality to the rich, because they also are sinful, and they gave occasion for others to do [likewise]’. Note that in the warning, ‘partiality’³⁴ is supposed to be exercised by the rich, whereas the explanation makes it plain that the churches are guilty of doing it. As in the hagiographic text, proud theory (there illustrated with the example of the famous ascetics) is contrasted with miserable practice. The conclusion of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* can be compared to the warning of Nilus of Ancyra (390–430) half a century later:

If we remain tranquil in our monasteries preserving in prayer and psalms, and if we do not press upon the people of the world, then God will rouse those very people [...] and compel them furnish our bodily needs gladly³⁵.

To the internal evidence of the text, we may add the widespread view that the Nag Hammadi codices themselves were manufactured and used in a Pachomian monastery³⁶. If one looks at the history of the

32. Caner, ‘Nilus of Ancyra’, 401.

33. Caner, ‘Nilus of Ancyra’, 403–4.

34. Coptic $\tau\rho\epsilon\mu\chi\iota$ $\rho\omicron$. Cf. Greek $\pi\rho\acute{o}\sigma\omega\pi\omicron\nu$ $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ and note 12 above.

35. Nilus of Ancyra, *Ascetic Discourse* 3.58, quoted by Caner, ‘Nilus of Ancyra’, 408.

36. Wisse, ‘Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt’, *passim*; Goehring, ‘New Frontiers’, 247–52; Pearson, ‘Nag Hammadi Codices’ 987; more cautiously Veilleux, ‘Monasticism’ 283.

community, one finds two possible periods when the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* could be written. The first of them comprises the years from the founding of the first monastery around 323³⁷ to Pachomius' death in 346. The second period extends from Pachomius' death to 367, when Athanasius' paschal letter certainly restricted the production and use of heterodox literature³⁸. If we assume that the figure of the Lithargoel in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* was seen as a symbol of Pachomius, a date after the latter's death is more likely. When Theodore assumed leadership of the community after an interim period of disturbances, Pachomius' figure was soon idealised to consolidate the institutional order of the monasteries³⁹.

Let us summarise the major points of this section. (1) The narrative of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* can be understood as an allegorical tale about the monks' renunciation of the world. (2) The text handles some typical administrative issues of cenobite monasticism in a similar way as the *Rules* of Pachomius. (3) The *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* addresses the sociological conflicts of monasticism that also influenced early hagiographic literature. (4) The central character of the book might have been inspired by the figure of Pachomius that was surrounded by legendary tradition soon after his death. (5) Finally, the use of the text in the Pachomian monasteries fits into the larger theory of the production and use of the Nag Hammadi Codices in that milieu. In conclusion, several features of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* make it plausible that the final redaction of the book took place in Upper Egypt in a Pachomian monastery between 347 and 367⁴⁰.

37. Veilleux, 'Monasticism', 273.

38. *Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 189. Veilleux, 'Monasticism', 290–1, warns that the purge of the monasteries from heretic books, an idea repeatedly echoed by scholarship, has not been proven.

39. Goehring, 'New Frontiers', 245–6; Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45–8, 178–83.

40. Molinari, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 233, proceeding from different premises, also suggests Egypt as the place of the final redaction. He also suggests (p. 76) that its genre is 'between a revelation dialogue and a church order'. However, he connects the text with the Decian persecutions, and therefore dates it to the second half of the third century. He suggests Alexandria, rather than Upper Egypt, as its place of origin. The two hypotheses perhaps can be combined (an earlier form of the text might have come into being under the circumstances that

Relation to the Other Apostolic Acts

If this is true, our document was written about the same time in Egypt as the *Acts of Philip* in Asia Minor⁴¹. The parallels between the two books⁴², which we are going to discuss shortly below, can be explained with the help of a third text, which perhaps was identical with one of the sources of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*⁴³. First, one may refer to the presence of animals in both narratives. Philip and his companions domesticate a leopard and a kid on the road, annihilate dragons, and charm snakes⁴⁴. Dragons and snakes represent the evil, whereas the leopard and the kid probably symbolise the latter days as foretold by the prophets⁴⁵. The animals of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* are demonic symbols, as we noticed above. Since animals play a role in many of the apostolic Acts⁴⁶, we should not attribute too much importance to this coincidence. Further parallels between the two texts include the identification of Jesus as a physician, the giving of medicines to the apostles and their commission to heal people⁴⁷.

As we have just seen, in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, Jesus appears as a physician in the figure of Lithargoel. In the *Acts of Philip*, all three motifs occur abundantly. In chapter 3, Philip prays, ‘Physician of our inner man, strengthen also me with your wisdom’⁴⁸.

Molinari assumes), but this would require a careful re-examination of the whole text from a redaction-critical perspective.

41. Cf. p. 136, note 1 above.

42. Cf. Molinari, ‘Petrine Traditions’, 21–3.

43. Molinari, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 52, identifies three sources, represented in the following sections: story of the pearl merchant (1.1–9.1); the resurrection appearance (9.1–29); and the author’s theology (9.30–12.19). For earlier theories see *ibidem*, 20–31.

44. *Acts of Philip* 8.16–21, 9.1–5, 13.1–3.

45. *Isaiah* 11.6–7. (According to verse 8, also the vipers will be harmless.) In the temptation of Antony, the leopard also occurs as a demonic symbol (cf. note 26 above).

46. Cf. recently Matthews, ‘Animals’.

47. In the New Testament, Jesus is called ‘physician’ only once (*Luke* 4.23). The motif appears as a topos with the apostolic fathers, and remains popular until Augustine. It probably relies on the image of Asclepius. Cf. Honecker, ‘Christus medicus’, 310–17. A command to heal people occurs in *Matthew* 10.1,8, and *Luke* 9.1

48. *Acts of Philip* 3.4.20 (A).

In chapter 4, he heals Charitine, the daughter of Nicoclides, friend of the king. The girl says to her father, ‘Behold, last night I heard news about a foreign physician, who preaches about *foreign medicines* that are in his store. He is the only one who can heal me’. When Nicoclides asks Philip if he is the doctor, he answers, ‘*Jesus is my physician, the healer of hidden and visible [illnesses]*’. Later he encourages Charitine, ‘Do not be afraid, girl, *the medicines of my physician* are going to heal you’. When the girl is healed, she confesses, ‘I worship the *physician who is in you*’⁴⁹.

The theme returns in the commission episode of chapter 8. Jesus himself encourages Philip, ‘I will put *medicines* on your wounds, and take them [and put them] on your hurts, and I will be your *good physician*’⁵⁰. When they meet the leopard that attacked the kid, Philip says to Bartholomew, ‘Let us go and see him *who was smitten and healed, and who healed the smiter*’⁵¹.

In chapter 13, Philip and his companions arrive at Opheorymos and establish themselves in an abandoned medical dispensary:

Entering into the village, the apostles found a dispensary in the vicinity, which was vacant and none of whose physicians was there. Philip said to Miriam: ‘Here our Saviour has preceded us and has prepared for us this spiritual dispensary. Let us occupy it and find rest, because we are exhausted from the exertion of the road’. To Bartholomew, he said: ‘Where is *the unguent box* (νόρθηξ) *that the Saviour gave to us* on that occasion when we were in Galilee? Let us set up practice in this dispensary and *attend to the sick* until we see what purpose the Saviour sets for us’⁵².

49. *Acts of Philip* 4.4–5 (V).

50. *Acts of Philip* 8.6.12–3 (G).

51. *Acts of Philip* 8.18 (V), ἴδωμεν τὸν πεπληγμένον ἰαθέντα καὶ θεραπεύοντα τὸν πλήξαντα (trans. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament* 516, adapted). This may contain a reference to Jesus, who was wounded (and killed), but God healed him and he became the healer of those who crucified him.

52. *Acts of Philip* 13.4, trans. Molinari, ‘Petrine Traditions’, 21 (my italics). Molinari, op.cit., 23, suggests that the *Acts of Philip* drew on the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 9.1–11.26.

In chapter 14, the blind Stachys says to his sons⁵³, ‘There are people sitting at the gate, and I heard that they said, “let us settle in this dispensary, and *heal every suffering and every illness*”’ (14.1.10–1). Stachys entreats Philip, ‘I beseech you, man of God, cure me from this suffering’. He relates his vision of a young man with three faces (child, woman, old man); the woman put a lamp to his eyes, and they were filled with light. He has seen the vision three times, and interprets it as a vision of God, ‘I believe that God is the one who revealed himself to me’ (14.4).

Although references to Jesus as a physician are widespread in Early Christianity, yet the medicines of Jesus and the apostles, healing as the task of the apostles, and especially the unguent box that Jesus gave them, are so close to the *Acts of Philip* that a literary connection between the two texts becomes likely. It seems that what Jesus commissions the apostles to at the end of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, they fulfil precisely in the *Acts of Philip*. Whereas the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* ends where the apostles are supposed to begin healing the people, in the *Acts of Philip* an explicit commission to heal is missing.

There is also a reminiscence of Johannine traditions at least at one point in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*. In the final encounter with Jesus (Lithargoel), Peter, who was afraid to ask him any more, urges John to speak for him. The critical words are ‘He signalled to the one who was beside him, who was John’ (11.3–4). The scene can be compared to the *Gospel of John*, where during the Last Supper

one of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’⁵⁴

The two texts are even closer to each other, if we revise the translation ‘beside him’ as ‘on his bosom’⁵⁵, ‘he’ referring to Jesus rather

53. Note the parallels between the whole Stachys episode and Tobit’s blindness and healing in the *Book of Tobit*.

54. *John* 13.23–5.

55. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 11.3–5. ΕΤΡΙΤΟΥΩΩ ΕΤΕ ΙΩΩΑΝΝΗC literally means ‘the one who was on his breast, who is John’. However, the idiom is not

than Peter. Apart from the question whether we interpret this clause as an echo of the *Gospel of John*⁵⁶, the text evidently suggests that John was in a confidential relation with Jesus and could ask him things that others could not. Mary or Mariamne plays the same role in the *Acts of Philip* and other texts. This is a special variation of the ‘helper’ function in the commission narratives, which we may label as the ‘confidential’. This function can be filled by different figures who have attributes in tradition that make them fitting for this role, as Mary Magdalene or John.

Another feature that connects the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* with the *Acts of John* (as well as with the *Acts of Thomas*) is the presence of polymorphy. Here polymorphy is presented as metamorphosis, the subsequent appearance of Jesus in various forms. The subsequent appearances are related to different stages of the disciples’ journey, and the disciples do not recognise Jesus until they arrive at their destination. The spiritual journey described in the text leads to a true vision of Jesus. From this perspective, the commission of Peter and the twelve is similar to the commission of John in the *Acts of John* 88–105 and 113. Both describe the ascent of the soul, in which encounters with the polymorphous Jesus play a central role.

Conclusions

Various references suggest that the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* was written in a Pachomian monastery between 347 and 367. Most of its symbolic motifs are rooted in that monastic milieu. In addition to that, one of its sources had contacts with the tradition of the *Acts of Philip*, and it also incorporated the motif of John as a mediator between Jesus and the disciples. Its plot is quite different from the story line of the other apostolic Acts. It is not biographical in the sense as the other apostolic Acts: it does not contain miracles, teachings, and legendary details from the life of an apostle. Instead, it contains one long commission narrative, describing a journey through the stages of contemplative ascetic life. It is not a biography, but rather a biographical

normally used in the literal sense, cf. Wilson and Parrott, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 227 note; Crum, *Dictionary*, 444b.

56. Cf. *Acts of John* 89.

program, an abstract model for imitation. In its present form, it does not seem an introduction to a longer text, but rather a self-contained allegorical tale about divine call to an ascetic and spiritual life.