10. Morphology

In the Introduction, I gave a preliminary form-critical description of commission with the help of its constant elements, whereas in the first two chapters I completed this with a number of literary critical observations. In this chapter, we turn our attention to both the dramatic relations between the characters and the dramaturgical function of the commission episode in the larger narrative context. The latter aspect also provides a criterion for the closer definition of commission stories. We have talked about ‘commission’ only in such stories where the hero enters into the service of the deity and receives a life-long task; that is, we anchored commission into a biographical framework. In the last two chapters of the book, we will systematise both aspects of apostolic commission stories: their inner organisations as well as their functioning in the larger literary and social frameworks.

First, we will elaborate on the inner dramatic structure of commission. I will use various commission passages discussed in the previous chapters to examine what I call the ‘sujet’ of commission. I distinguish the sujet from the narrative ‘plot’, the latter referring to the (hypothetical) sequence of the narrated events. At the examination of the sujet, I will draw on the narratological insights of three theorists. First, as already the title of this chapter suggests, I will rely on the narrative theory of V.J. Propp as explicated in his famous *Morphology of the Folktale*. It is important to note that I will use Propp’s methodology rather than his results. Propp’s morphology has too often been applied as a ready-made universal narrative scheme, which it is not intended to be. What we will borrow from Propp is the definition of the sujet as the complex of motifs. The sujet is not a static scheme, but rather a variable organisation of motifs, where newer motifs can integrate into an existing sujet, or different sujets may
form combinations with each other\textsuperscript{1}. As for the definition of motifs, for different reasons we do not stick to Propp’s ideas, who examined the ‘functions of the characters’, and thereby identified a limited number of constant elements\textsuperscript{2}. First, the genre of the apostolic Acts is different from that of the folktale. Second, we have to keep in mind that the commission stories, which we examine, are parts of larger narratives rather than being rounded-off tales themselves. Therefore, the sujets that we describe are also incomplete as compared, for example, to the sujet of a folktale. Third, the small size of the corpus does not enable us to completely break down motifs into elementary ‘functions’. Finally, we have a narratological reason not to slavishly follow Propp’s approach. The sole concentration on ‘actions’ is not completely justifiable. Persons and objects in a narrative function also in other ways, for example, by their symbolic content, or more generally, by all kinds of intertextual references.

Propp found that the thirty-one functions he identified in the Russian folktale fall into seven ‘spheres of activities’\textsuperscript{3}: those of the antagonist\textsuperscript{4}, the donor, the helper, the princess (sought-for person), the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero. Three of these spheres of action correspond to the basic roles in commission stories that we identified at the beginning of our study\textsuperscript{5}: sender (comparable to the donor as well as the dispatcher), hero (commissioned person), and helper.

\textsuperscript{1} Propp, \textit{Morphology}, 12, trans. L. Scott, adapted. Propp himself elaborates on A.N. Veselovskij: ‘Veselovskij understands by sujet a complex of motifs. A motif can occur in different themes. “A series of motifs is a sujet (Серия мотивов—сюжет). Motifs develop into sujets”. “Sujets vary: new motifs intrude into sujets, or sujets combine with each other”’.

\textsuperscript{2} Propp, \textit{Morphology}, 21, trans. L. Scott, adapted. ‘Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action. […] Functions of characters serve as the invariable, constant elements of the tale, independently of by whom and how they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of the tale. The number of functions known to the folktale is limited’.

\textsuperscript{3} Propp, \textit{Morphology}, 79–80.

\textsuperscript{4} Drawing on the English translation, literary critics talk about ‘villain’, whereas Propp himself uses the word ‘antagonist’ (антагонист) or ‘saboteur’ (вредитель). He clearly applies a Marxist vocabulary, evoking the irreconcilable antagonism of social classes as well as the image of the saboteur who undermines the stability of the communist state and the proper functioning of planned economy.

\textsuperscript{5} See p. 22 above.
Later developments of Propp’s theory are also relevant for the understanding of the roles of the commission stories. Let us consider the actantial model of A.-J. Greimas. Greimas, analysing Propp’s theory of the folktale and Souriau’s theory of drama, came to the conclusion that the core of both narrative structures is the relation between the categories of subject and object, which can be expressed as ‘desire’ or ‘quest’⁶. There are two other pairs of ‘actants’ in Greimas’ model: sender and receiver (their relation is expressed as ‘communication’)⁷; helper and opponent⁸. Greimas immediately offers two applications of the model: ancient philosophy and Marxism. This is the philosopher’s story:

Thus, with great simplification, it could be said that for a learned philosopher of the classical age the relationship of desire would be specified, by a semic investment, as the desire of knowing, and the actants of his drama of knowledge would be distributed more or less in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>philosopher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiver</td>
<td>mankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent</td>
<td>matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper</td>
<td>mind⁹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not difficult to apply this model to the apostolic Acts. The apostle (subject) desires salvation (object), which is offered by God (sender) to mankind (receiver). This is hindered by Satan (opponent) and promoted by the Church (helper)¹⁰. The idea of commission (although not mentioned by that name) is structurally inherent to Greimas’ model. In the folktale, the father of the princess (sought-for person)

⁷. Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, 203–5. The original terminology is destinateur and destinataire, referring to the sender and addressee of a letter.
⁹. Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, 208. It is also interesting to note his Marxist ‘militant’ scenario, and compare it to the Marxist terminology of Propp himself (note 4 above): Subject: man; Object: classless society; Sender: history; Receiver: mankind; Opponent: bourgeois class; Helper: working class.
¹⁰. Cf. the application of the scheme to the *Gospel of John* by Stibbe, ‘Return to Sender’.
commissions the prince to find and rescue her. Similarly, God commissions the philosopher, history commissions the Marxist activist, and the economic system commissions the entrepreneur. Greimas’ interpretation of modern ideologies provides examples of how the idea of commission functions in post-enlightenment, European thought.

In the analysis of the plot of apostolic commission, I will not slavishly follow Greimas’ own application of the model to the theme of philosophy. The \textit{a priori} reduction of the commission stories to bipolar oppositions of six actants would unnecessarily confine our investigation. However, the narratological analyses of Propp and Greimas can serve as promising starting points for the interpretation of the sujet of apostolic commission stories.

A third approach to narrative structures has to be added at this point. R.C. Schank developed the model of ‘scripts’ for the purpose of Artificial Intelligence research. Scripts are intended to model episodic memory. It is not necessary to discuss the notion of episodic memory in much detail now. Let it suffice that this model describes the narrative organisation of information, as opposed to ‘semantic’ or ‘hierarchical’ memory, which explains the storing of purely lexical data. Episodic memory makes use of scripts: ‘Some episodes are reminiscent of others. As economy measure in the storage of episodes, when enough of them are alike they are remembered in terms of a standardized generalized episode which we will call a script.’ Schank’s scripts are in fact narrative sujets, as it were, of shorter ‘stories’ taken from everyday life. Schank described a script as a series of elementary actions. Their explanatory power lies largely in the fact that the occurrence of a motif belonging to a script evokes (‘triggers’) the rest of the script.

I will elaborate on this model in order to complete the dramatic model based on the works of Propp and Greimas. Commission, too, can be described as a ‘script’, and a number of other scripts can be

\begin{itemize}
\item[12.] Schank and Abelson, \textit{Scripts}, 17–9.
\item[13.] Schank and Abelson, \textit{Scripts}, 19.
\item[14.] Originally, Schank and Abelson, \textit{Scripts}, 11–7, used the notion of ‘primitive acts’ that represent ‘the meaning of sentences’.
\end{itemize}
identified in biblical literature; for example, the exodus script, the gospel script, or the martyrdom script. These scripts describe, instead of stories of everyday life, abstract narrative thought patterns that are implemented (actualised) in different literary contexts\textsuperscript{15}. The model of scripts will be adapted in the following way: I will collect an array of typical motifs, and then attempt to describe the rules according to which they can follow (evolve or trigger) each other. In this manner, we do not receive a static list of constant elements, but rather a dynamic array of motifs which combine in different ways as to yield variations of the commission script. I also propose a shorthand reference to motifs. In this system, the name of the motif is followed by three components between square brackets: subject, object, and indirect object.

\textit{motif} [subject, object, indirect object]

Let us now proceed with the analysis of the motifs of apostolic commission. How can one acquire a list of motifs? Propp’s motifs are formal abstractions from the more elementary ‘functions of the characters’. Since I do not examine the functions of the characters exhaustively (neither do I describe, as Schank, every sentence with the help of ‘primitive acts’), I have to take a different approach. I examine a number of narrative patterns within commission stories that may contain one or more motifs. Thus, a higher level of abstraction is involved in the process; namely, the selection of significant narrative patterns. Many narrative patterns have already been discussed at some length, as for example, commission–protest–reassurance, the defeat of the hero, or legitimating by the authorities\textsuperscript{16}. Now I will investigate others: villainy, \textit{sortes}, epiphany, vision, sickness and healing, and the role of helper figures.

\textsuperscript{15} A good example of the exodus script would be \textit{Deutoronomy} 26.5–9; of the gospel script \textit{1 Corinthians} 15.1–8; of the martyrdom script \textit{Acts} 6.8–8.1. Cf. my forthcoming article on ‘The Gospels and Cognitive Science’ in the first volume of \textit{Groningen Studies in Cultural Change}.

Villainy

Villainy is the element in Propp’s sujet by which ‘the actual movement of the tale is created’\(^\text{17}\). In the context of biblical narratives, it frequently occurs before the commission of a prophet, when either a foreign enemy attacks Israel or the people turn away from God. The prophet is then called to restore Israel to its original state\(^\text{18}\). In the apostolic commission stories, the motif occurs in the commission of Paul in all the three Lucan versions (\textit{Acts} 9, 22, 26), and in the \textit{Acts of Peter}. To the former we can add Paul’s autobiographical account in \textit{Galatians} 1.13–4.

Paul’s commission in \textit{Acts} (and \textit{Galatians} 1) provides an interesting example of villainy. Here Paul himself is first the antagonist and then the hero. The defeat of the antagonist and the commission of the hero are the same event. The hero’s task, of course, cannot be here to defeat the antagonist. The antagonist is defeated already during the commission story itself, on the Damascus road and the transient (liminal\(^\text{19}\)) period of Paul’s blindness and prayers. The description is \textit{persecute} [hero, addressee]. ‘Addressee’ is a standard actant of the commission stories, and denotes those to whom the commissioner sends the hero.

Villainy occurs in one of the apostolic Acts that we did not discuss earlier in detail\(^\text{20}\). In the \textit{Acts of Peter} 5 Jesus sends Peter to Rome because Simon Magus has appeared there and gained respect among the Christians. Chapter 4 relates Simon’s arrival at Rome, how he denounced Paul and the Christians as deceivers, and won over to himself everyone except a presbyter and two women. Simon’s activity does not directly harm the people of Rome, but rather it is an indirect attack on Jesus, as becomes clear from his words: ‘his power has perverted all those who believed in me’. The description of the motif is therefore: \textit{mislead} [antagonist, addressee].

\(^{17}\) Morphology, 30.
\(^{19}\) For liminality, see p. 235, note 95 below.
\(^{20}\) Cf. p. 24 above.
In both variations\textsuperscript{21}, villainy contains an element of conflict whereby it creates tension. The antagonist and the addressee in mislead and the hero in persecute get into a position that contradicts their functions. The addressee is not supposed to associate with the antagonist, and the hero is not supposed to persecute the addressee. The result is a complete exchange of the narrative roles. The antagonist assumes the role of the hero, but the hero acts as an antagonist. A structural displacement, as it were, occurs in the sujet. This tension naturally moves the plot forward and launches a sequence of motifs that restores the integrity of the narrative functions.

Sortes: ‘Apostolic Lottery’ and Sacred Books

Whereas the aforementioned two motifs use dramatic conflict to initiate the course of events, commission stories more frequently begin with some kind of \textit{deus ex machina}. The deity can launch the story in different ways, of which we can discern two categories in our texts: (1) in epiphanies the deity breaks directly upon human reality, whereas (2) different methods of divination serve as more indirect ways of governing the events. There is also a difference between these categories with regard to their function in the sujet. Epiphanies (discussed in the next section) may occur at various points of the narrative, often as a reaction to the already developed conflict. Divination, in turn, is a typical mode of creating conflict at the beginning.

Out of the different methods that ancient people utilised to learn the will of the deity, we have already dealt with the random opening of (sacred) books\textsuperscript{22}. It was used in Christian biographical literature from the fourth century onwards. Among the apostolic commission stories, we find it in the \textit{Acts of Titus}\textsuperscript{23}. In this narrative, the commission of the hero is tied up with his conversion. His task requires him to change first his basic set of beliefs.

\textsuperscript{21} For a list of motifs and their variations, see pp. 244f below. The name ‘motif’ will be used also for a given variation of a motif. Villainy is the only motif whose variations include different actions (persecute, mislead); otherwise, different subjects and objects will characterise variations.

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. pp. 204–211 above.

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. ibidem.
A typical beginning of the apostolic Acts is the division of the missionary fields. Among the texts that we discussed hitherto, this is found in the *Acts of Thomas* 1 and the *Acts of Philip* 8, but it also occurs in many other apostolic Acts. The motif has several variations. Sometimes Jesus himself assigns the missionary fields to the apostles (*Acts of Philip*\(^{24}\) and the Arabic *Preaching of Andrew*\(^{25}\)), but more often, the apostles divide the world among themselves. In the latter type we often read about the ‘casting of lots’\(^{26}\). In the *Preaching of Philip*, Jesus himself commands the disciples, ‘Now cast lots among each other, and divide the world into twelve parts’\(^{27}\). Subsequently the texts report that ‘the lot fell’ on a given apostle to go to a certain country\(^{28}\). This may occur with or without the explicit mentioning of the casting of lots. We also read about ‘allotted places’\(^{29}\). In some Johannine Acts, the episode is situated after Pentecost, and Peter exhorts


25. Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts*, 1. ‘And when the disciples went out into the world to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Lord appeared unto them, and spake unto them, saying thus: “Peace be unto you, O my brethren, and my beloved, heirs of the Kingdom. Know that I will never separate myself from you, I will strengthen you”. And He turned to Matthias and commanded him to go to the city of the Cannibals; and Andrew his brother was to pass to Lydda to preach in it, he and his disciple Philemon, the son of Philip; “for I have many people in it whom I have chosen”’.


the disciples to divide the world. In other cases, the episode occurs between Jesus’ resurrection and ascent to heaven, and Jesus exhorts the disciples.

Although we cannot decide with certainty when the motif of dividing the world by lottery emerged (see below), in early Christian literature its earliest extant witness is probably the Acts of Thomas. There it occurs in a rather simple form in both the Greek and the Syriac texts. There is no introductory exhortation, and no direct mention of the act of casting lots. We can discern that in the Arabic Preaching of Thomas the exhortation appears (Jesus orders the disciples to divide the world), but the rest of the episode is reported similarly to the Greek and Syriac Acts of Thomas. The casting of lots is not mentioned in the Acts of Philip either. There (in the Greek text) Jesus himself divides the world, and afterwards the text uses the expression ‘lot’, but not with the technical expression ‘fell’ (ἐλαχεῖν). Therefore, it seems that the ‘lot’ of the apostles was the primary idea, and it was only later that the actual ‘casting of lots’ appeared in the texts. This variation first occurs in texts about John and Andrew,

30. Pseudo-Prochorus (Zahn, Acta Joannis, 3–5); Arabic Travels of John (Smith Lewis, Mythological Acts, 37); Syriac History of John (Wright, Apocryphal Acts, vol 1, 5 and vol 2, 4; Arabic Story of John (Smith Lewis, op.cit., 157).

31. The scene often takes place on the Mount of Olives, as in Acts 1.12. In the Preaching of Philip Jesus commands the casting of lots (see note 27 above); in the Arabic Preaching of Thomas he commands the disciples, ‘Assemble and divide the world into twelve portions and let each one of you go to his portion’ (Smith Lewis, Mythological Acts, 80). The Martyrdom of Saint Mark paraphrases Matthew 28.18–20 (ibidem, 147). Cf. the Arabic Preaching of Simon and Preaching of Thaddeus (ibidem, 115 and 120, respectively).


33. Smith Lewis, Mythological Acts, 80.

34. In the Syriac Didascalia apostolorum (3rd century) the apostles divide the whole world into twelve parts, but they do not cast lots. Cf. Vööbus (ed), Didascalia, vol 2, 229 and idem (trans) Didascalia vol 2, 212; for the date see ibidem, vol 1, 23. Eusebius, Church History 3.1, writes that Thomas, Andrew, and John received (ἐλαχεῖν) Parthia, Scythia, and Asia, respectively. The verb λαξεῖν with accusative means simply ‘obtain as one’s portion’, without an explicit reference to the casting of lots; Liddell and Scott, Lexicon, 1022b (I). The tradition
namely, in *Pseudo-Prochorus* and the *Martyrium prius*, and in both instances it is coupled with Peter’s central position. In the later versions, it found its way by analogy into the stories of other apostles.

The casting of lots and Peter’s prominent role resemble the first two chapters of the canonical *Acts*, where we read about the election of Matthias as an apostle by casting lots, the gathering of the apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and Peter’s Pentecost address. Scholars have emphasised the influence of the beginning of *Acts* on the apocryphal division episodes. There are, however, also weak points of this theory. In *Acts* we do not read about the division of the missionary fields, and in the *Acts of Thomas*, where the motif occurs among the apostolic Acts for the first time, both the act of casting lots and the prominent role of Peter are missing. We want to point out other possible sources of this motif.

The division of the earth as well as the idea that these parts are inherited by ‘lot’ have close parallels in the division of Canaan in *Joshua* 13–21. The actual ‘casting of lots’ occurs in *Joshua* 18.10, but it was probably a secondary addition to the already existing geographical description of the land. A closely related idea is one’s favourable ‘lot’, ‘allotment’, and ‘inheritance’, which frequently occur in *Psalms*. The oracle of the lot is a well-known metaphor in the


36. Also described in *Numbers* 32.33–42 and *Deuteronomy* 3.12–17.


38. *Psalms* 16.6 (15.6 LXX), 78.55 (77.55), 135.12 (134.12), 136.22 (135.22). In *Psalms* one speaks of ֶלַתְיַד rather than ֶלַל, the latter being the proper term for
Dead Sea Scrolls\textsuperscript{39}. The occurrence of the motif, however, is not restricted to Jewish literature. In the \textit{Iliad} as well in Akkadian and Hittite mythology, the gods cast lots to distribute the regions of the world among each other\textsuperscript{40}. The division of land into \(\varkappa\lambda\iota\rho\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\) is reported several times in classical Greek literature\textsuperscript{41}. Finally, we have seen that the description of the territory of one’s mission (Zuständigkeitsbereich) was an essential part already in the Egyptian and Old Testament commission passages\textsuperscript{42}.

Consequently, the motif of the division of land and the talk about one’s ‘inheritance’ or ‘lot’ is much earlier than the lottery episode of \textit{Acts} 1.23–26. In \textit{Acts}, too we read about the ‘share’ (\(\varkappa\lambda\iota\eta\rho\omicron\omicron\varsigma\)) of the saints quite independently from the casting of lots\textsuperscript{43}. Its stereotyped occurrence in commission texts as well as the classical Greek usage of the motif are likely to have served as the sources of the division episodes in the \textit{Acts of Thomas} and the \textit{Acts of Philip}. As in the \textit{Book of Joshua}, the actual casting of lots was probably a secondary addition to the list of missionary fields. The lottery episode in \textit{Acts} 1.23–6 provided an excellent analogy, which influenced the description of the division of lands in the \textit{Martyrium Andreae prius}, the \textit{Acts of Andrew and Matthias}, \textit{Pseudo-Prochorus}, and the later versions of the apostolic \textit{Acts}. In this phase, other elements in \textit{Acts} 1–2, such as the exhortation by Jesus or Peter and the location of the scene on the Mount of Olives, were also added to the description of the episode.

In the \textit{Acts of Thomas} 1 and \textit{Acts of Philip} 8, as in most Hebrew and Greek parallels, the central issue is the ‘inheritance’ or ‘share’ of the hero rather than the actual technique of allotting the lands. The division of lands is attributed either to Jesus (\textit{Acts of Philip}) or to the community of the apostles (\textit{Acts of Thomas}). In both texts, as in many
parallels, the hero immediately protests against the allotted task. We have analysed this narrative pattern at the discussion of the commission of Thomas. This means that the division episode is also a source of conflict in the sujet, similarly to the variations of villainy previously discussed. The nature of the conflict is similar as in that case, namely, the actants are out of place in the actantial structure. The hero does not want to play the role of a hero. It seems that one basic aspect of commission stories is the negotiation of the narrative functions; that is, the deciding of the question who will play which role.

**Epiphanies on the Road and on the Sea**

Divine epiphany, the appearance of a deity to a human, is such a widespread phenomenon of pre-modern Western culture, that we can hardly undertake even a partial discussion of it\[^{44}\]. As far as the narrative function of epiphany is concerned, either it launches the story, or it occurs as a reaction of the deity to a conflict situation that is already present in the sujet. We will deal with two aspects of epiphany in our texts: (1) the place and time of the epiphany, and (2) the shape in which the deity appears.

Let us first see in which forms the sender appears in our commission stories. On the Damascus road, Paul sees a flashing light; in the *Acts of John*, Jesus appears in different human shapes (boy, handsome man, bearded man, young lad, giant, short man), and as a voice above the cross of light; Philip in his Acts sees him in the form of an eagle; in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* he assumes the figure of a physician; John Mark in the *Acts of Barnabas* sees a man clothed in white raiment. In other cases, we read only that ‘Jesus appeared’ to the hero, without a closer identification of the form (i.e., in Paul’s temple vision and in the Acts of Thomas). Finally, in the *Acts of Titus* the hero only

\[^{44}\] Graf, ‘Epiphanie’, defines it as ‘the appearance of a deity, as manifested in a spontaneous vision, in an actual ritual event (ecstasy), or in a narrative’. Since the Homeric hymns, epiphany has fixed parts: the superhuman size of the deity, the accompanying light and divine fragrance; and human reaction of fear, which the deity tries to dissolve. This narrative scheme, Graf claims, persisted throughout ancient literature, including the New Testament. For an examination of Paul’s Damascus vision in the framework of ancient epiphanies, see Brenk, ‘Greek Epiphanies’. 
hears heavenly voices but sees no figures. This is an astonishing diversity, which suggests that no canonised form of Jesus’ epiphanies existed in Early Christianity. The ‘polymorphous Jesus’ is not a theoretical speculation of particular texts, but rather an empirical reality of early Christian literature. In some cases, the texts pick out and combine traditional Jewish and Christian motifs: light, cross, angelic figures, shining robe. Most forms of epiphany correspond to Greco-Roman patterns. At certain times, one even suspects an interpretatio Christiana of other cults: such are the figures of the eagle or the physician Lithargoel.

In addition to detecting the cultural and mythological roots of the various forms of epiphany, one also cannot overlook their symbolic values within the narrative plots themselves. The fight of the eagle and the snake, the latter representing false belief in the Acts of Philip, was emblematic in antiquity. The motif was popular in art, and later (from about the 4th century BC) it became the visual symbol

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47. Cf. Versnel, ‘Epiphanies’. On p. 53, he concludes that when an ancient man saw a god, ‘sometimes he saw a god, sometimes a human shape, sometimes a phantom, sometimes an animal form, sometimes he had an hallucination of light or a vision of bliss and sometimes he did not see anything at all but was none the less aware of the divine presence’.

48. This could happen in the form of transferring the attributes of deities to Christ (Herzog ‘Asklepios’, 798b; Detschew, ‘Apollon’, 530a; cf. the art of the Roman catacombs). Another possibility was the reinterpretation of gods as demons that revealed destructive powers; cf. Trombley, Hellenic Religion, vol 1, 99–108, at 107.

49. For the eagle, see pp. 149ff and below. For Lithargoel as Asclepius, see Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 419; Molinari, Acts of Peter and the Twelve, 139.

50. Acts of Philip 8.4.6–10 (G), 13.1.11–2, etc.

51. Ancient passages include Iliad 22.200–29; Aeschylus, Libation Bearers 247–9; Sophocles, Antigone 111–24; Aristoteles, Historia animalium 609a (9.1); Aelian, De natura animalium 17.37; Pliny, Natural History 10.17; further Schneider and Stemplinger, ‘Adler’, 87 and 89.
of the future that was revealed to the seer. This symbolism is further elaborated in the *Acts of Philip* when Jesus assumes the role of a physician. This is, in Greek religion, the function of Asclepius, wearing the form of a snake. Thus, the victorious deity takes over the functions of the defeated one. In the representation of the sujet, we have only limited tools to describe these metaphorical connections. They contain references to myths (that is, other sujets) and ideas outside the text, and therefore belong to the intertextual aspects, which were discussed in connection with the individual passages.

Let us turn our attention to the place of the epiphanies in the commission stories of the apostolic Acts. Jesus appears to Paul on the road before Damascus and in the Jerusalem temple; to John on the road near Miletus and on the sea (of Galilee?); to Philip on a road in the desert; and to Peter and the twelve twice at city-gates. In some cases the place of the epiphany is not indicated. The Saviour appears to Thomas at night, John Mark sees a vision after his baptism, and of Titus’ visions we learn neither the place nor the time (only that the second one followed the first after nine years). First, we can see that the majority of epiphanies (of which the place is indicated) occur during a journey: on the road, at sea, or at the city-gates. We find similar scenes in the earlier literary tradition. The epiphanies of Thutmose IV and King Saul, as well as Epimenides’ long sleep, occur on the road. Dio Chrysostom receives his call to philosophy when he is banished. Sea voyage is also a recurrent theme of the commission stories. However, comparison with other literatures also demonstrates an important difference. Whereas in our early Christian texts

56. *Acts of Philip* 3.5.1–3 (ἐν τῇ ἐρημίᾳ); cf. 3.4.1 (ἀπείτο τῇ ὀδόν).
57. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 2.10, 8.4–15; cf. 6.27–34.
59. Thutmose IV: 29f; Saul: 34ff; Epimenides: 47f; Dio Chrysostom: 49f.
the sender immediately communicates with the hero on the road or at sea, in other religious contexts usually a third party is involved in the process. Communication between the sender and the hero is often connected to a sacred place and a religious institution. Thus, the Egyptian heroes appear in an audience hall, and the Greek ones consult an oracle\textsuperscript{61}. Among the apostolic commission stories, only one epiphany occurs in a cultic building, namely, Paul’s vision in the Jerusalem temple\textsuperscript{62}.

The commission stories of the apostolic Acts suggest that God was immediately available to the apostles at any place. This is an important aspect of the mobility of the Christian mission. Especially in the later Acts, however, divine presence is claimed to be bound to particular spots, including sanctuaries founded by the apostles\textsuperscript{63} and their burial places\textsuperscript{64}. The itinerant heroes of the Christian tradition become the originators of the settled forms of worship\textsuperscript{65}.

\textsuperscript{61} For example, pp. 11–14, 26–33, 49f, 207f. In Homer and later Greek and Roman epic, the gods often communicate directly with the heroes.

\textsuperscript{62} The Lucan Acts takes an intense interest in the Jerusalem temple. Nevertheless, only one version of Paul’s commission story refers to the temple.

\textsuperscript{63} Acts of Titus 9, Acts of Barnabas 17, 20, 22.

\textsuperscript{64} Acts of Titus 11; cf. Acts of Barnabas 25 (pp. 177–182 above).

\textsuperscript{65} The classical formulation of ‘wandering radicalism’ comes from G. Theißen, ‘Wanderradikalismus’. Recently in Religion, 328, he writes about ‘wandering charismatics’ (Wandercharismatiker) who urged people to follow Jesus, leave their houses and households, break with their family and parents, and live without work and possessions. In Jesusbewegung, 14, he also described the cooperation of the itinerants and the local churches (Ortsgemeinden) that gave them ‘social and material support’. Crossan, Christianity, presents a complex analysis of that cooperation. He finds that itinerants offered healing in exchange for food (330), and whereas itinerants criticised the householders (355–61), the local churches developed strategies to control the itinerants, as we read in the Didache (363–82). From many respects, the protagonists of the apostolic Acts are idealised itinerant charismatics, whose authority is beyond the control of the local churches. That the issue of itineracy did not diminish after the first century, is exemplified by the controversies of the ascetics in the fourth century, cf. pp. 158–167 above. For a sharp criticism of Theißen’s itineracy hypothesis, see recently Arnal, Village Scribes, 67–95.
Twofold, Threefold, and Double Vision

Dreams and visions are found throughout ancient literature, and play an important role in commission stories. In addition, we find in our texts different combinations of visions: twofold, threefold, and double visions. The question can be raised why we deal with visions under a separate heading once we have already discussed epiphany. Visions, whereas they often contain epiphanies, include also various other sorts of experiences that surpass the limits of everyday perception. For example, Paul, sitting in the house of Simon in Damascus, sees Ananias in a vision coming to him and healing him. At other times, the heroes hear heavenly voices instructing them, or see angels and other messengers. We speak of twofold and threefold vision when a person sees more than one vision subsequently and about double visions when two persons see visions about the same subject at the same time. During the discussion of individual passages, we have already talked about the visions that occurred in them. In this section, we will consider the specific complexes of visions that we have just introduced.

In two of the narratives relating Paul’s commission in Acts, we find a sequence of visions. In both versions, the second vision is implied by the first one: ‘Go to Damascus, there you will be told what to do’. Similarly, in the Acts of John, the hero is sent to Ephesus by a vision, and he receives a second revelation on the road. In chapters 88–9 there is a threefold sequence, although without strong causality.

66. We cannot formulate an exhaustive definition of vision at this place. Goodman, ‘Visions’, 282, defines it as ‘a religious experience that involves seeing, and frequently, the other senses as well. The quality of the experience suggests that the content of the perception is real, a direct, unmediated contact with a nonordinary aspect of reality that is external and independent of the perceiver’. Dreams, according to her, may also qualify as visionary experiences. From these she distinguishes hallucination, which is delusion and occurs with mentally ill persons. We use the term in a broad sense, and qualify visions only from a narrative perspective, rather than from biological, anthropological, or psychiatric points of views. For examples of ‘symbolic synesthesia’ in Christian and Greco-Roman visions, see Meyer, ‘Light and Voice’, 30–3; add Acts of Peter, visa mihi est vox humana de caelo dicens.


The brothers first glimpse Jesus on the sea, then see him helping them to carry the boat onto the shore, and finally observe him in two different shapes, as they want to follow him. In his autobiographical account (ch. 113), John relates several subsequent and intensifying visions of Jesus. The same applies to the rest of the gospel cycle in chapters 87–105. In the Acts of Thomas, Jesus appears to Thomas first at night, and later as his master (owner) on the marketplace. The Acts of Titus, again, provides an excellent case of twofold vision. The first vision urges Titus to stop reading Greek literature, whereas the second instructs him to open the Hebrew Scriptures.

These narratives describe commission as the result of multiple encounters with the sender, and suggest that commission is a complicated progress rather than an isolated event. Similar narrative structures occur in many other texts discussed earlier in the book. This justifies also our attempt to describe the sujet of commission as a coherent cluster of motifs within biographical narratives. Are there typical narrative functions that one can associate with the subsequent visions? We have already seen that earlier visions may serve as preparations for later ones. At a closer look we can identify a pattern in which the first vision serves to defeat and punish the hero, forcing him to abandon his previous way of life, whereas the second serves his healing and his beginning of service of the deity. Paul is defeated because he is a persecutor of the Church, John because he wants to get married, and Titus is warned because he seeks salvation in the Greek authors. Later Paul is healed, John is healed and presented with a higher vision, and Titus is directed to the Hebrew Scriptures. At other times, as with Thomas (and the prophet Jonah) subsequent visions appear within the scheme of commission–protest–reassurance, and serve to break down gradually the resistance of the hero. In this case,

69. Examples include Rekhmire, Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 10.10 and 11.6–7), Jonah, Zeno of Citium, and Dio Chrysostom, all discussed in Chapters 2 and 9 (pp. 204–211) above. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, Lives 6.20–1, Judges 6.11–7.14, 1 Samuel 3.2–15, Ezechiel 1–3. Finally, there is a similar structure in some fairy-tales, when the hero has to accomplish subsequent tasks, each implying the next one. This often assumes the form of backtracking: the hero cannot do the tasks, until he finds the solution of the last task.

70. In the autobiographical narrative of Acts of John 113.

71. For further examples, see pp. 120–125 above.
the enforcing of the divine will is coupled with consolation and promises. In general, one can say that two sorts of visions evoke the occurrence of a subsequent vision: (1) if the deity defeats the hero, because to this only a new intervention of the deity can provide a sufficient remedy; and (2) if a vision is followed by the hero’s protest, because the sender has to enforce divine will. It is important to notice that these narrative structures may also occur within a single visionary episode. This is probably the more primitive literary form, whereas the introduction of a series of visions is due to a more elaborated narrative technique. At the same time, it emphasises the antagonistic traits in the relation of the sender and the hero in the commission story.

Double visions constitute the other important pattern examined in this section. Double visions occur in various sorts of ancient texts. These are ‘parallel revelations that occur to two (groups of) persons, but serve one and the same goal’ \(^72\). The ‘goal’ of the double vision can be war, love, and healing, but also initiation and commission. Some of the healings also occur within a commission narrative. In Greco-Roman literature, we can mention first the well-known last book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, which relates the healing of Lucius (he regains his human shape) and his initiation to the cult of Isis \(^73\). Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1381 contains the healing of an Egyptian scribe, which, at a closer look, proves to be a commission narrative (see below).

As for the apostolic Acts, among Wikenhauser’s texts we find the *Acts of John*, the *Acts of Thomas*, the *Acts of Andrew*, and the *Acts of Barnabas*. In the *Acts of John* 18, as we have mentioned above, there is a twofold vision about John’s commission. Alternatively one may add to them Lycomedes’ vision about Cleopatra’s healing in the next chapter, and regard this complex as a double vision. In that case, the


\(^73\) To Wikenhauser’s three passages add a fourth one in 11.6.
narrative complex will focus on the healing rather than John’s com-
mision. The problem can be resolved if we assume that a vision
originally focusing on John’s commission received a double function
in the present form of the text. As for the *Acts of Thomas* 29–34, it
does not have to do with Thomas’ commission; thus we can exclude it
from our investigation. We will return to the *Acts of Barnabas* later.

An additional early Christian passage is found in Eusebius’ *Church
History* 6.11.1–2 about the ordination of Narcissus as bishop of Jeru-
salem.

Now let us examine the double visions that occur in our commis-
sion narratives in more detail. The double vision of Paul and Ananias
in *Acts* 9.10–6 provides an especially interesting occurrence of the
pattern, where double vision has a sophisticated narrative function as
well. Ananias’ vision stands in the centre of the whole commission
narrative of *Acts* 9. It is connected to the individual scenes of the epi-
sode by a series of narrative flashbacks and prolepses (see Diagram 1
below). First, it makes up an organic unit with Saul’s vision of
Ananias and the healing episode (thick arrows): Jesus reports Paul’s
vision to Ananias, which in turn contains a reference to the later event
of Paul’s healing. The healing episode itself contains a report of
Ananias’ vision, by which this inner chain of cross-references re-
turns to itself. There are also flashbacks and prolepses within this in-
nner circle to earlier and later events of the story (thin arrows). The
vision of Ananias contains an anticipation of Saul’s future role as Je-
sus’ ‘chosen instrument’, thereby to the reports of his activity in Da-
mascus and Jerusalem. It also contains a flashback to Paul’s earlier
role as a persecutor. The healing episode refers back to the vision on
the Damascus road. There are also other cross-references, as the dia-
gram shows (dotted arrows), between the events preceding and fol-
lowing the inner circle.

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74. Cf. p. 93 note 13. There is a similar case in the *Acts of Peter* 5, where first
Jesus sends Peter to Rome in a vision, later captain Theon is warned to esteem
Peter higher than the rest of the passengers, finally Theon converts, and Peter
baptises him. Although the two visions result in Theon’s baptism, it is not their
primary goal.

75. For the text see pp. 59f above.

76. *Acts* 9.17, ‘the Lord has sent me’.

77. *Acts* 9.17, ‘Jesus who appeared to you on your way here’.
Ananias’ vision evidently forms the centre of the whole chain of references that permeate the narrative texture of the episode. At a closer look, it appears that the structure of the episode applies an especially sophisticated variation of the double vision. This is achieved by inserting Saul’s second vision into Ananias’ one. In this inserted vision of Saul, Ananias himself appears as a character. Ananias is not only told what he would do later, but it is shown to him through the vision of Saul, the third party involved. Jesus’ narrative voice holds together the whole complex: he appears to Ananias, reports Saul’s second vision, and foretells his healing. Jesus thus functions in that frame as an omniscient narrator, able to report Saul’s thoughts. Saul can see the future about Ananias, and Jesus can see that Saul can see the future and appears to Ananias to tell this to him. So complex are the effects of this brilliant ‘vision in the vision’ composition! This is, indeed, an especially concentrated moment in the narrative, when the characters’ thoughts, lives, and futures are mirrored in each other’s minds, or even better, where people are made each other’s thoughts for a moment.

In the Acts of John 88–9, John and James can see Jesus in two different forms at the same time. Whereas this evidently qualifies as a case of polymorphy, it is difficult to decide whether it is a double vision. The first question is whether we talk about two visions, or only

78. That these cross-references contain a number of contradictions has been observed at the discussion of this passage earlier in this book, pp. 63ff.
one appearance before two persons. If we suppose there are two visions, another difficulty is related to the ‘common goal’. Although the call of the brothers as Jesus’ disciples undoubtedly sets a common purpose before them, this is not manifested in a particular encounter or common affair as in other double visions. What is missing here is the dynamics of bringing together different people (enemies, people unknown to each other, or belonging to different ranks) for a common goal. From the dramatic point of view, the polymorphic visions seen by John and James rather serve to give individual faces to the initially undistinguished couple of characters.

Jesus appears to another pair of siblings in the Acts of Philip: Philip and Mariamne. Mariamne here receives the task of accompanying and supporting Philip in his mission. The narrative does not explain how Jesus communicated with the siblings. First, ‘Mariamne speaks with the Saviour about Philip’. Then, without an explicit reference to the change of the addressee, Jesus begins to speak to the disciples in plural, but Philip is evidently one of the listeners. Finally, Jesus speaks only with Philip. Like Paul’s commission in Acts 9, the recipients of the visions are the commissioned hero and the helper figures. This is the case also in the Acts of Barnabas (chs. 3–4), where Barnabas (together with Paul and Silas) appears as John Mark’s helper at his commission. After his baptism, John Mark sees a vision at night promising him ‘knowledge of mysteries’, and at the same time, Barnabas has a vision in which John Mark’s role is mentioned. Here double vision serves as a confirmation of the hero’s call.

We can conclude that the combination of more than one vision in different forms was a well-known literary device in Early Christianity. Whereas twofold and threefold series of visions are found in the Jewish literary tradition as well as in Greco-Roman texts, the more

80. For the question, what their relation symbolises see pp. 100f, also the following chapter.
82. Acts of Philip 8.2, lines 8–9 (G) and 8.5–7 (G).
83. Acts of Philip 8.7, lines 1–2 (G).
84. Acts of Philip 8.8–14 (G).
85. According to Acts of Philip 8.3, Bartholomew and John are also sent with Philip and Mariamne.
sophisticated pattern of double vision was probably adapted from Hellenistic models.86

**Sickness and Healing**

Whereas usually it is the apostles who work miracles in these books, in certain instances the apostle himself is healed from sickness at his commission. In some cases, one can speak of sickness and healing only figuratively. When Thomas complains of ‘bodily weakness’87, this is a well-known excuse from the commission stories of the Jewish Scriptures88. Philip also finds his lot ‘rude’, and he ‘murmurs and weeps’, or, as Mariamne says, ‘he is in pain’.89 In these narratives, sickness and healing are figurative expressions of the hero’s protest and the sender’s breaking down his resistance. In other stories, the figurative use of healing refers to conversion. Titus is commanded to abandon the Greek philosophers ‘to save (or heal) his soul’ (τὴν ψυχὴν σου σώσω)90. This is implicit also in John Mark’s conversion and commission91. Earlier (τὸ πρῶτον), he was the servant of the high priest of Zeus, but now (νῦν δὲ), he receives the grace of the Spirit.

In certain commission narratives, the sender first afflicts the hero with sickness, and later heals him. Paul (Saul) was blinded when he was approaching Damascus with the plan to arrest the people ‘of the Way’. Jesus’ question during the epiphany, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ suggests that Paul’s blindness is divine punishment92. His heal-

86. A double dream occurs in Augustine, The City of God 18.18; for a modern version of the story see Lang et al., ‘Dreams’, 32.
88. Cf. pp. 120f.
90. Acts of Titus 1. Cf. ‘everlasting salvation’ promised in the quote from Isaiah that Titus reads when prompted by the second vision.
92. 2 Maccabees 3 and 4 Maccabees 4 are often quoted parallels; cf. Windisch, ‘Christusepiphanie’, 1–9. These texts relate the legend that Heliodorus or Apollonius went to Jerusalem at the command of King Seleucus to confiscate the treasures of the temple, but were stopped by a revelation. The former text writes about a fearful horseman, the latter about ‘angels on horseback with lightning flashing from their weapons’ (περιστράπτοτες τοῖς ὀπλοῖς, cf. Acts 9.3, 22.6).
ing from blindness was a complex process, which is suggested especially by *Acts* 9. In the *Acts of John* 113, the hero recalls that Jesus ‘prepared a bodily sickness’ for him and ‘mutilated him’93. Later we learn that John was blinded, from which he was also cured. It has been suggested that Paul’s sickness and healing describe an initiation rite94, which can be equally stated of the *Acts of John*. The state of blindness that both heroes undergo evidently forms a stage of liminality95. The experience of suffering, or death and resurrection, was essential in Greco-Roman mysteries as well as in the Christian tradition96. In connection with John’s blindness, one has to mention that initiation in tribal cultures is often a rite connected to marriage97. Notwithstanding those rituals, John’s initiation prepares him for living without marriage. Meals completed the initiations to the cults of Isis and Mithras98. The symbolism of darkness and light can be called omnipresent99. Blindness as the punishment of the gods and the subsequent miraculous healing are attested at multiple places100. The general occurrence of these motifs in *religionsgeschichtliche* parallels,

In the Greek tradition, lightning sometimes meant punishment, but at other times it made people holy; cf. Rohde, *Psyche*, vol 1, 320–2.

93. Cf. p. 110, note 78.


95. ‘Liminality’ comes from *limes* (threshold). Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94–113, built on the ideas of A. van Gennep, and suggested that during transformative rituals the initiate must strip away the old identity: the period in which the individual is naked of self, neither fully in one category nor in another, is the liminal state. Cf. Myerhoff et al., ‘Rites of Passage’, 382–3.


however, raises the question whether there are texts where the motif of commission is also significant.

Tradition holds that the lyric poet Stesichorus (7–6th century BC) in his *Helena* wrote unfavourably about the goddess, who consequently blinded him as a punishment. Stesichorus realised from whom the blow came, and wrote his *Palinodia* praising Helena, whereupon he was able to see again. In this story, the hero is struck with blindness because he hurt the deity (as did Paul), and is healed when he is willing to serve her. We can speak of commission only in a limited sense here since even though the hero steps into the service of the deity to accomplish a specific task, there is no reference to his life-long commitment to Helena.

The commission narrative of the Egyptian scribe Nechautis is preserved on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1381. It forms a preface to a historical account about Pharaoh Mencheres’ establishing the cult of Imouthes or Imhotep. Only the beginning of the historical account is extant. The events related in the preface take place in Memphis under the reign of Nectanebo (reigned until 341 BC), the last Pharaoh. The worship of Imhotep had decayed and his temple was largely deserted, when the king—undertaking the restoration of the worship—entrusted Nechautis, who was his ‘archidicastes’, with examining a roll. ‘Nechautis conducted his researches with much strenuousness, and brought the list to the king after spending only two days instead of thirty upon the inquiry’. From the subsequent lines, we learn that the king renewed the cult of Imhotep/Asclepius. Nechautis undertook the translation of the whole book, but he advanced slowly. The narrative shifts to the first person at this point, and remains so until the end.

103. 2nd century AD; published and translated by Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol 11, 221–34.
104. Menkaura is Mencheres, who built the third of the Gîza pyramids. The god is mentioned in the text also as Imouthes son of Ptah, or Asclepius son of Hephaestus.
105. Cf. pp. 31f above.
of the preface. For three years, the scribe has completely abandoned his work on the book. When suddenly both he and his mother are struck with serious illness, Nechautis petitions the god:

I quickly hastened to the helper of the human race, and he, being again disposed to pity, listened to me, and displayed still more effectively his peculiar clemency, which, as I am intending to recount his terrible powers, I will substantiate.

Imhotep/Asclepius appears to mother and son in a vision:

Suddenly she perceived—it was no dream or sleep, for her eyes were open immovably, though not seeing clearly, for a divine and terrifying vision came to her, easily preventing her from observing the god himself or his servants, whichever it was. In any case there was some one whose height was more than human, clothed in shining raiment and carrying in his left hand a book, who after merely regarding me [sic] two or three times from head to foot disappeared.

Nechautis sees the same vision at the same time, and both of them are healed. The scribe realises that the god wants him to finish the translation of the book:

After these pains in my side had ceased and the god had given me yet another assuaging cure, I proclaimed his benefits. But when we had again besought his favours by sacrifices to the best of our ability, he demanded through the priest who serves him in the ceremonies the fulfilment of the promise long ago announced to him, and we, although knowing ourselves to be debtors in neither sacrifices nor votive offering, nevertheless supplicated him again with them. But when he said repeatedly that he cared not for these but for what had been previously promised, I was at a loss and with difficulty, since I disparaged it, felt the divine obligation of the composition.

The scribe rounds off his prologue by referring to his accurate philological work and praising the deity. In Nechautis’ preface, similar to the previously examined stories, sickness and healing prepare the hero for the service of the deity. Although there is no explicit mention that sickness is divine punishment, Imhotep/Asclepius clearly uses it for his goals. The description of the epiphany is elaborated in much de-
tail, resembling the scene of Lucius’ initiation in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* 106.

Another healing story has been mentioned earlier in Chapter 2. In 258 or 257 BC, Zoilus of Aspendus wrote a petition to Apollonius, the finance minister of Ptolemy II, in which he related the following story 107. At an earlier time, he did service to Sarapis on behalf of Apollonius and the king. On several occasions, the deity ordered him in dreams (χρηματίζειν πλεονάζει έν τοίς ὑπνοις) to sail over to Apollonius and tell him that a temple of Sarapis must be built and a priest established in the Greek quarter of a city (the name of the city is lost), and sacrifices must be performed on behalf of the minister and the king (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). When Zoilus begged Sarapis to excuse him the god struck him with a grave illness (εἰς ἄρεωςτι αν με περιεβαλεν μεγάλην), whereupon Zoilus promised that he would continue the service (ὑπομενώ τὴν λειτουργίαν) and comply with his command. Meanwhile someone began to build a sanctuary in Cnidus, but the deity commanded him to stop. Zoilus travelled to Alexandria, but he hesitated (ὅξνεω) to mention the issue to Apollonius. Then he fell back into the illness for four months, so that he was not able to return to Apollonius.

Therefore, you are doing well, o Apollonius, if you follow the commands of the god so that Sarapis would show himself merciful to you, and make you much greater and more famous than the king, and also heal your body. Do not be afraid that the costs would mean a great expense for you. On the contrary, everything will be very advantageous to you, because I will jointly supervise all these works.

We do not know whether Zoilus’ petition was successful, and Apollonius provided the costs of the new sanctuary. The words that Zoilus uses to describe his relation to Sarapis, θεραπεύω (line 3) and λειτουργία (line 11), and the fact that he performs this service on behalf of the king and his minister, suggest that he was a priest of Sarapis (Osiris). He must have been in a leading position, since he was accountable to the finance minister (lines 15–8). In this letter, he uses a very similar literary pattern as Nechautis did a century earlier when

he prefaced the translation of the book about the cult of Imhotep/Asclepius. Sickness and healing are in both cases the irrefutable signs of the will of the deity. If the god wanted to have a book translated, or a new sanctuary built, he struck one of the high priests with grave illness. It seems that this was a powerful argument in the hands of religious leaders in order to prove that they were acting at the behest of the deity. The motif was certainly known in the 2nd century AD, since Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1381, containing the story of Nechautis, was copied at that time. If the *Acts of John* was revised in Alexandria at the beginning of the third century, the author could rely on this motif when describing John’s commission in chapter 113.

Did Apuleius, writing in the 2nd century, use the same pattern when he related the initiation of Lucius as a priest of Isis and Osiris? At the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius is transformed into the shape of an ass when his lover smears him with a magic ointment to make him younger. After a series of adventures that constitute the bulk of the book, Lucius invokes Isis who appears to him in an epiphany. The goddess promises him deliverance from his misery, but at the same time she declares that Lucius will be bound to her for life: ‘the rest of your life’s course is pledged to me until the very limit of your last breath’\(^\text{108}\). After his healing, Lucius is initiated as a priest of Isis, and later of Osiris. As in the previous example, the goddess uses the hero’s malady to render him to her service. The hero undergoes a complex process of initiation, which Nock compares to the entry into a Christian monastic community\(^\text{109}\). The motif of a lifelong commitment that was not explicit in the stories of Stesichorus, Nechautis, and Zoilus, is central to this narrative.

We have good reasons to believe that John’s blindness and healing in the *Acts of John* 113 are connected to the same tradition that appears in the above-mentioned texts, although it seems more difficult to argue this in the case of Paul. The *Acts of John* was probably influenced by the Egyptian cultic legends and emerging Neo-Platonism. Could Luke draw on the same traditions when writing chapter 9 of his

\(^{108}\) Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.6, *mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminos ultimi spiritus vadata*.

\(^{109}\) Nock, *Conversion*, 155.
Acts? If a legend of Paul’s conversion (Paulusnovelle)\textsuperscript{110} ever circulated, it might have come in contact with the above-mentioned traditions\textsuperscript{111}. A peculiarity of early Christian narratives is the explicit figurative meaning of the hero’s sickness. In the commission stories of Paul and John, healing from blindness leads to the true vision of God\textsuperscript{112}. Thus, sickness and healing not only attest to the power of the deity, but also symbolise the transformation of the senses that is necessary for the hero in order to fulfil his task. The achievement of early Christian literature was the integration of the motif of sickness and healing into its own biographical model of divine commission.

**Helper Figures**

Helpers appear in nearly all of the commission narratives, and they fulfil multiple roles. They often mediate between the sender and the hero. The helper can heal, comfort, and advise the hero, or integrate him into an institutional order.

In Paul’s commission, there are two helpers, Ananias and Barnabas, and also three groups of people fulfilling the same role, namely, the travellers on the Damascus road, the disciples of Damascus, and the disciples of Jerusalem\textsuperscript{113}. Ananias and Barnabas play different roles as helpers. The former mediates between Jesus and Paul, the latter between Paul and the leaders in Jerusalem. Both of them are members of the local communities, and their acts contribute to the institutional character of Christianity in these narratives. John, on the contrary, has only companions, but no real helpers. In the Acts of John 18, there is a group of disciples escorting him to Ephesus. In chapter 88 he is with his brother James, who is an ambivalent duplicate of his

\textsuperscript{110}. Cf. p. 65, note 15 above.

\textsuperscript{111}. The specific use of darkness and light in Acts 26 is a closely related problem, see pp. 77–86 above.

\textsuperscript{112}. For Paul’s healing, see especially Acts 26.18: ἐπιστρέψας ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν. Hamm, ‘Paul’s Blindness’, 71, concludes that here ‘Paul’s own experience of loss and recovery of physical vision is transmuted to a metaphor describing the end-time mission of Israel, Jesus, and Paul’.

\textsuperscript{113}. The travellers (as helpers) and Ananias appear in Acts 9 and 22, Barnabas and the disciples only in Acts 9.
rather than a helper. In the *Acts of Thomas*, the merchant Abbanes plays the role of a helper. His figure proves that the narrative function of the helper is to be understood from the sender’s point of view rather than from the hero’s one. The helper serves the interest of the sender, even against the hero’s will, if necessary. Abbanes is also a dialogue partner of Thomas, asking him about his craftsmanship. This is a crucial moment for the interpretation of Thomas’ commission, as well as of the whole book.\(^{114}\) In the *Acts of Philip* 8, the role of the helpers is to comfort and strengthen the hero. Jesus appoints Mariamne, Bartholomew, and John as companions (see above). There are also animals that accompany Philip: the leopard and the kid. The eagle is a special sort of a helper because in the end it turns out to be Jesus himself.\(^{115}\)

In the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, we find a number of helpers: the sailors (1.16–26), the people on the dock (2.1–6), the merchant (2.10–6.26), the old man (6.33–7.19), and the physician (8.14 to the end). The merchant and the physician are identified as Lithargoel, who (like the eagle in the *Acts of Philip*) is identified with Jesus in the end. All these figures help the disciples toward their destination, the city of Habitation. In this text, the journey of the disciples symbolises the process of commission itself. Thus, when people transport them or provide them with information about different places, they actually take part in commissioning them, as Ananias and Abbanes do in the stories of Paul and Thomas, respectively.

In *Acts of Barnabas*, John Mark has three helpers: Paul, Barnabas, and Silas, who baptise him after his conversion (ch. 2). In his commission, the greatest role is played by Barnabas, who is also directed in a vision to take John Mark as a companion with him (ch. 4). The debate of Barnabas and Paul in Antioch is a central theme of this narrative (chs. 6–10), and thus helpers represent the power conflicts within the institution.\(^{116}\) In the *Acts of Titus*, the governor of Crete (Titus’ uncle) sends the protagonist to Jerusalem (ch. 2). After listening to the teaching of Peter, he is ordained by the apostles (ch. 4). The helpers are embodying institutions in this narrative, even more

\(^{114}\) Cf. pp. 125–134 above.


\(^{116}\) See pp. 172, 177–182 above.
directly than in *Acts* 9. Titus is converted by two heavenly visions, but he is commissioned by the state and the Church, the former represented by the governor and the latter by the apostles\(^{117}\).

The different roles played by the helper figures in the commission stories can be grouped into the following categories: (1) assistant, playing a minor role as Paul’s travelling companions; (2) instructor, a teacher, conversation partner, or associate who helps the hero realise his call; (3) healer; and (4) authoriser, appointing the hero as member of a community or official of an institution. In the latter role, the helper represents the actant ‘authority’. At other times, as in the *Acts of Philip* and the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, the helper is ultimately identified with the sender. Helpers may appear in all kinds of commission narratives, but their role is especially crucial in stories belonging to the institutional type. The few examples where we find no helper figures in the texts, the *Acts of John* and Paul’s commission in *Acts* 26, show clear traces of the philosophical model, where the true knowledge of the sender is the main purpose of the commission\(^{118}\).

### The Sujet of Commission

The description of the sujet of the commission narratives consists of two parts. First, we will map out the relations between the actants (synchronic or actantial structure)\(^{119}\). Second, we will outline the sujet as a series of motifs (diachronic or episodic structure). The following diagram describes the relations of the actants of the commission narratives:

\(^{117}\) See pp. 202 and 211ff above.

\(^{118}\) Helpers with an instructive function might appear also in the philosophical call stories, as, for example, Chaerephon in Plato’s *Apology* or the bookseller in Zeno’s call. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.2. Cf. pp. 11–14 and p. 207 above, respectively.

\(^{119}\) This can be called also the semantic description of the sujet.
The diagram shows a hierarchical disposition, which is typical of the ideological structure of the commission narratives. This hierarchy is bipolar; most commission stories imply a dualistic world-view. On the top of the hierarchy, there are the sender and his opponent, the false sender. The presence of the false sender is not always explicit. According to *Acts* 22.18, Paul has to release ‘the people and the nations’ from ‘the power of Satan’ (τῇς ἐξουσίαις τοῦ Σατανᾶ). The heroes’ fight against the power of Satan is an important motif in the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Thomas* as well, but it is not mentioned in the respective commission stories. When Jesus commissions Philip in his *Acts*, he talks about the serpent, ‘the arch-enemy’, whom the inhabitants of the city Opheorymos worship. In the commission of John Mark (in the *Acts of Barnabas*), the false sender is Zeus, whom John Mark served as a temple-servant.

In the same narrative, one may identify Zeus’ high priest, Cyril-lus, as the false helper. The high priests of *Acts* 9 function rather as the false authority, an institution supporting the antagonist. It is remarkable that in this narrative the antagonist turns out to be the hero, and the false sender is in fact the true sender as represented by the false authority. As we have seen above, in *Acts* 22 the false sender is identified as Satan. This implies that Paul’s persecuting the disciples was Satan’s will, and the false authority (the high priests) represented

120. *Acts of John* 54, 63, 69, 70, 84 (θεοῦ ἐκθρός Σατανᾶς). Especially dualistic passages are found in chs. 98 and 114. In the *Acts of Thomas* see chs. 32 and 160.

Satan’s power. In the *Acts of Titus*, the Greek poets (or ‘philosophers’) are explicitly identified as false authorities, but not associated with a false sender.

In the earlier part of this chapter, we have seen the typical modes of interactions between the actants. The arrows in the diagram show that all communication is ultimately directed toward the addressee: healing, conversion, and baptism from the hero (this is the ‘TASK’, the actual object of all communication in the sujet), misleading and persecute from the false hero. The addressee is thus the central actant in the semantic structure of commission. But it becomes also immediately clear that the hero participates in the largest number of interactions. This is not unexpected, for he is the protagonist of the narrative. With few exceptions, communication occurs downwards. The actants on the bottom line seldom say anything to the actants above them, except that they protest against their fates. Occasionally the helpers approach the sender on behalf of the hero, as Mariamne does on behalf of Philip. The helper might also advocate the hero before the authority, as Barnabas does on behalf of Paul in *Acts* 9 and on behalf of John Mark in the *Acts of Barnabas*122.

The sujet of commission can be described in a diachronic scheme as well. This diachronic description is based on the actantial structure outlined above. The difference is that it is organised along the actions rather than the actants, and it is indexed by the actants instead of the actions123. First, we will prepare a list of the motifs, and then describe how they can combine into sujets.

I. **Villainy**
1. The hero persecutes the addressee.
2. The antagonist misleads the addressee.
3. The false authority misleads the hero.

II. **Sortes**
1. The hero receives his TASK by lot.
2. The hero receives his TASK from a book.

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123. Translated into the level of narrative analysis, this means: narrative plots emerge from the interaction of characters, whereas characters are built up from their actions.
III. Assignment
1. The sender assigns the TASK to the hero.
2. The sender assigns the helper to assist the hero.

IV. Defeat
1. The sender defeats the antagonist.
2. The hero defeats the antagonist.
3. The sender defeats the hero.

V. Conversion
1. The hero converts from the false sender to the true sender.
2. The addressee converts from the false sender to the true sender.

VI. Protest
1. The hero protests against the TASK.
2. The helper protests against the assignment.

VII. Advocacy
1. The helper advocates the hero before the sender.
2. The helper advocates the hero before the authority.

VIII. Exhortation
1. The sender exhorts the hero.
2. The sender exhorts the helper.
3. The helper exhorts the hero.
4. The hero exhorts the addressee.

IX. Healing
1. The sender heals the hero.
2. The helper heals the hero.
3. The hero heals the addressee.

X. Baptism
1. The helper baptises the hero.
2. The hero baptises the addressee.

XI. Authorisation
1. The authority authorises the hero.
2. The false authority authorises the antagonist.

Although the above list offers a comprehensive presentation of the motifs of the commission narratives, it does not yet provide us with a satisfactory diachronic description of the sujet. We still have to give the rules how these motifs can be connected to each other. A few remarks and refinements are also needed. Epiphany has been excluded
from the list, because it indicates only that communication occurs between a divine and a human being. The actual narrative motif behind epiphany is always one of defeat, healing, assignment, or exhortation. Further, the variations of the motifs often differ from each other only in the subject and/or the object: Defeat 1–3, Protest 1–2, Advocacy 1–2, Exhortation 1–4, Healing 1–3, Baptism 1–2, Authorisation 1–2. These variations can be indicated with the help of the denotation that I proposed at the beginning of the Chapter 124. For the sake of brevity, at this time I do not mark all three of subject, object and indirect object, but only as many of them as needed for the clear differentiation: defeat [sender, antagonist], protest [hero], etc. As for sortes, its two variations are irrelevant as far as the sujet is concerned.

Every motif in the sujet evokes other motifs. If we can define the possible connections between the motifs, then the possible variations of the sujet can be traced back from the list of motifs. For example, villainy [antagonist, addressee] implies defeat, namely [sender, antagonist] or [hero, antagonist]. If one opts for the hero as subject, this must be preceded by either sortes or assignment. But villainy [antagonist, addressee] can also imply exhortation [hero, addressee] and then conversion [addressee]. This leads us back to the necessity of sortes or assignment. Not only villainy, but also sortes and assignment can begin the sujet. Whereas villainy and sortes always come at the first position, assignment may occur only later (as a consequence of villainy, and a necessary antecedent of defeat). Villainy may be preceded by the authorisation of the antagonist by the false authority. The rest of the motifs never occur at the first place. These three (or four) motifs represent the theme of ‘conflict generation’ in the sujet.

Defeat [sender, hero] is always followed by one or more of assignment [sender, helper], conversion [hero], advocacy, exhortation, healing. The sujet of the commission story can never be tragic. The hero is always helped out of the trouble, and in case the helper her/himself is at loss, the sender intervenes. If the antagonist has to be defeated, that can be done either by the hero or directly by the sender. Further, protest is always preceded by sortes or assignment, and followed by the same motifs as defeat. These motifs, defeat, conversion, protest, advocacy, exhortation, and healing, together can be called the

124. See p. 217 above.
theme of ‘conflict handling’. They provide an immediate answer to the conflict caused by *villainy, sortes, or assignment.*

*Baptism* [helper, hero] and *authorisation* [authority, hero] define the hero’s relation to the existing institutional frameworks. Together, they can be called the theme of ‘normalisation’, the adapting of the conflict situation to existing norms. Finally, a number of motifs are repeated in two variations, first with the hero, then with the addressee as the object: *exhortation, healing,* and *baptism.* The two variations of *conversion* (with two different subjects) also belong to this group. These four motifs make up the theme of ‘recursion’. They apply the same pattern to the addressee that has already worked with the hero. This is an important aspect of commission stories, the hero serving as a model for the addressee.

It is not necessary to trace all possible combinations of the motifs at this place. The examples given illustrate how the theory works. More important is the identification of the four major themes (groups of motifs) within the sujet: sc. conflict generation, conflict handling, normalisation, and recursion. The sequence of the four themes shows how the sujet of the commission tries to answer a specific need that is formulated during ‘conflict generation’. The conflict of the commission narrative always represents the social, historical, cultural, and anthropological problem of *being called* as experienced and formulated by (the members of) the communities who transmitted, authored, and read the narratives. The sujet of commission does not provide an absolute conclusion or a satisfying solution of this conflict in the narrative. It launches a new course of events, rather than bringing the plot to equilibrium. As a reaction to the conflict generated, the commission story advances a pattern that will be repeated over again in the subsequent narrative. It answers the problem by prolonging rather than solving it.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter, we have analysed a variety of narrative patterns, motifs, and themes. With the help of the analysis of the significant pat-

125. This is a broad interpretation of the *Sitz im Leben* of commission, relying on the idea of intertextuality as proposed in the Introduction.
terns, we identified a set of motifs, which were organised into four major themes. The sujet of commission has been described with the help of an actantial and an episodic diagram.

It is notable, however, that these diagrams by no means give the essence of the analyses offered in the foregoing sections and chapters. The actantial diagram cannot replace a detailed analysis of the multifaceted relations between characters, objects and scenes, and the episodic description of the sujet does not eliminate the need for a detailed narrative analysis of the motifs. The plot cannot be reduced to the sujet and cannot be deduced from it because the symbolic and metaphoric contents of the story emerge from the cultural intertextures in which the narratives are told, edited, written, copied, and retold. Nevertheless, the sujet helps us to recognise some dramatic laws of narratives, which can then be studied in their actual literary appearances.