THE EVANGELIST AND THE REVISERS:
Revision and Counter-Revision in Matthew 27 and 28*

Introduction

The story the Chief Priests and their coadjutors devised for the guards to spread about a theft of Jesus' body from the tomb by his Disciples is said by Matthew to be still widespread among Jews (28. 15). And in the second century AD Justin, in a strongly sectarian work,[1] claims that hand-picked Jewish emissaries from Jerusalem had propagated a similar story (*Dialogue with Trypho* 108. 2).[2] The present paper was first prompted by an apparent affinity between, on the one hand, Matthew's treatment of that story, and on the other, the revisions of traditional myths practised by Hecataeus of Miletus and others as early as the fifth and notably by Palaephatus in the fourth century BC. I begin by examining the Jewish version as reported by Justin and considering the kind of reception it might have had among the various conceivable parts of his audience (§ 1). I then discuss Matthew's own version *qua* revision, and

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[1] See T. Rajak, "Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*", in: *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Boston – Leiden 2002) 511–533. For another view of the character and intention of this work, see G. N. Stanton, "Aspects of Early Christian-Jewish Polemic and Apologetic", *NTS* 31 (1985) 377–392. For a recent, detailed analysis, see C. J. Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians. History and Polemic, 30–150 C. E.* (Minneapolis 1994) 126–146.

[2] The parallel with Matthew is noted by G. Lüdemann, with A. Özen, *What Really Happened to Jesus. A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, tr. J. Bowden (London 1995) 140 n. 44.

consider the reception that it might have had (§ 2). The insights yielded shed light in turn on the narrative art of this part of Matthew's work (§ 3). I conclude with an attempt to answer three questions arising from the discussion, concerning the role of any earlier tradition of a guard at Jesus' tomb in the genesis of Matthew's version, Justin's failure to refute the Jewish version, and Celsus' failure to press it into service.

§ 1. The Jewish Version

Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 108. 2:

> καὶ οὐ μόνον οὐ μετενοήσατε, μαθόντες αὐτὸν ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀλλ᾽, ὡς προεῖπον, ἄνδρας χειροτονήσαντες ἐκλεκτοὺς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐπέμψατε, κηρύσσοντας ὅτι **αἵρεσίς τις ἄθεος καὶ ἄνομος ἐγήγερται ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ τινος Γαλιλαίου πλάνου ὃν σταυρωσάντων ἡμῶν, οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κλέψαντες αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ μνήματος νυκτός, ὁπόθεν κατετέθη ἀφηλωθεὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, πλανῶσι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους λέγοντες ἐγηγέρθαι αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀνεληλυθέναι**.[3]
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> Yet you not only refused to repent after you learned that he had arisen from the dead, but, as I stated earlier [17.1], you chose certain men by vote and sent them throughout the whole civilized world, proclaiming that **"A godless and lawless[4] sect has been started by an itinerant deceiver,[5] one Jesus of Galilee, whom we nailed to the cross, but whose body was stolen at night by his disciples**

[3] Text according to M. Marcovich (ed.), *Justini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (Berlin 1997), with highlighting added.

[4] For the interpretation of both terms and their connection with Jesus as one who "leads astray", see Stanton (n. 1) 382–384.

[5] On the sense of πλάνος, see M. W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London – New York 2001) 75: the root combines the senses of *leading astray* (active) and *wandering* (intransitive). For the sense of 'lead astray', 'deceive', see the verb πλανῶσι later in the passage, while, for the relevance of the intransitive sense, we might compare *Acts* 19. 13: the High Priest Scevas has seven sons who attempt to use the name of Jesus in exorcisms. These men are among, or follow the practice of, τινες τῶν περιερχομένων Ἰουδαίων ἐξορκιστῶν, "certain of the Jewish itinerant exorcists". The term is also used of Jesus in Jewish anti-Christian polemic after 70 AD; see W. D. Davies, D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew.* III. *Commentary on Matthew XIX–XXVIII* (Edinburgh 1997) 654 *ad* Matthew 27. 64.

> **from the place where he had been laid after being unpinned from the cross; and they now try to deceive men by affirming, that he has arisen from the dead and has ascended into heaven"** (tr. Falls and Halton).[6]

The reality of such a controversy as early as Matthew's date of publication is generally accepted as, for example, in the commentaries of Davies and Allison and of U. Luz[7] and in Raymond E. Brown's study on *The Death of the Messiah*.[8] From an earlier statement in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (17. 1) it appears that those emissaries were "from Jerusalem" itself; and the sequence of events later in the paragraph (quoted in § 3 below *ad fin.*) would make that version earlier than the fall of the city in 70 AD.[9] The charge against the Disciples is part of a set of accusations in which G. N. Stanton sees "good reasons for supposing that Justin may here be drawing on Jewish allegations".[10] Justin offers no refutation of this charge against the Dis-

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[6] Translation from *St. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho.* Translated by Th. B. Falls. Revised and with a New Introduction by Th. P. Halton. Ed. by M. Slusser (Washington D. C. 2003), adapted; and with highlighting and quotation-marks added. In the above passage and in other relevant passages I have pointed up with bold type those passages of direct speech or, in some cases, indirect speech introduced by ὅτι or ὡς which seem to let us hear the actual words that gave rise, by accident or by the design of the character(s) speaking them, to a false version of events which then gained currency. For some other significant Greek terms I use underlining.

[7] Davies, Allison (n. 5) 670; Allison repeats that view, in his contribution on Matthew, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Ed. by J. Barton and J. Muddiman (Oxford 2001) 885; U. Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, tr. J. E. Crouch, ed. H. Koerster (Minneapolis 2005) 611 n. 20.

[8] R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narrative in the Four Gospels* II (New York etc. 1998) 1292 n. 16.

[9] The *caveat* of Rajak (n. 1) 514 should be noted: "[T]he shortage of external evidence makes it hard to judge how much trust should be put in Justin's accusations of *organised* [my italics] Jewish opposition to Christianity"; cf. *ibid.*, 525–526. Setzer (n. 1) 40 raises the possibility that Justin may simply be "dependent on the Matthean verses", but concedes (*op. cit.*, 140) that "the structures were in place for communication [with Jews of the Diaspora] about various matters, including the sect of the Christians, although Justin's claim has no direct corroboration". For a still more positive view, see G. N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge 2004) 154 and n. 9. Feelings ran high, to judge from the homicidal response of Greek-speaking Jews after a disputation with the newly-converted Paul, reported in *Acts* 9. 29–30.

[10] Stanton (n. 1) 379.

ciples.[11] However, I reserve a brief comment on Justin's approach till the end of this paper.

Writing at some point either a few years before 70 AD[12] or else between then and 100 AD,[13] Matthew would be by then addressing a wide audience already familiar with the Jewish version. On the other hand, what other versions might be known to any of that audience can only be guessed. After all, none of the canonical Gospels is thought to have been published less than thirty years after Jesus' execution. Indeed, writing perhaps around 80–85 BC,[14] say, fifty years after the crucifixion, Luke (1. 1) speaks of "many" (πολλοί) having composed narratives of the events covered by his Gospel and *Acts*. The doctrine of the resurrection is shown encountering resistance in the *Acts of the Apostles*. All four canonical Gospels differ in details of the resurrection, and it has been argued that not only Matthew but also Mark and John, as well as the *Gospel of St. Peter*, contain defences against counter-versions.[15] It is reasonable to suspect that in the years between Jesus' execution and the publication of Mark and Matthew a whole range of objections and alternative hypotheses will have been advanced against the resurrection story and attempts made to counter them in debate and in oral, and perhaps already written, presentations of the story. The *Gospel of Peter*, with its inclusion of fears of theft of Jesus' body being used as

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[11] As is noted by Stanton (n. 1) 379 and Setzer (n. 1) 140. On the tradition of a theft of the body by the Disciples, see Setzer (n. 1) 40–41, and nn. 36–41, Brown (n. 8) 1284–1313, and, on that and other hostile views, Stanton (n. 9) 148–161.

[12] E. E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Boston – Leiden 2002) 288–292, esp. 292: "between AD 60 and AD 66, probably in the beginning years of the 60s".

[13] *Oxford Bible Commentary* (n. 7) 845. This is the commonly received date; see Ellis (n. 12) 289; cf. G. N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford [2]2002) 77.

[14] See Stanton (n. 13) 95.

[15] H. von Campenhausen, "The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb", in: idem, *Tradition and Life in the Church. Essays and Lectures in Church History*, tr. A. V. Littledale (London 1968) 62–64. Campenhausen, 56–62, argues that in Mark Pilate's concern to ascertain that, after such an early apparent expiry, Jesus is really dead may be intended to obviate any thought that the resurrection could be put down to failure to detect signs of persisting life; and, 69–73, that the silence of the women coming from the tomb may originally have been intended by Mark to leave the Disciples uninformed of the empty tomb, so that they would have no connection with it and their own later encounters with Jesus would have independent validity.

a basis for claims of a resurrection by the Disciples and the posting of a guard at the tomb, serves as a reminder of the surprises that may yet lie in wait.[16] Although opinions differ on the date of the *Gospel of Peter*,[17] it has been argued that it contains traces of a view of Jesus' exit from his tomb earlier than that in the canonical Gospels.[18] Thus, in examining Matthew's account, in which the presence of a guard at the tomb is essential to his explanation of the rise of the Jewish version, I am confronted with the possibility that that element formed part of an earlier version or versions. It may be that Matthew was not the first to include that element.[19] However, none of the other three canonical Gospels includes a guard at the tomb, and John, which was probably published

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[16] For the Greek text see M. G. Mara (ed.), *Évangile de Pierre.* Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et Index (Paris 1973). There are English translations by Brown (n. 8) 1318–1321, and J. D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco 1996) 224–227.

[17] An early date is argued for by Crossan (n. 16) *passim*, but a date later than Matthew is argued for by e. g. Brown (n. 8) 1341–1348, and Stanton (n. 13) 130–132, who thinks the author was well acquainted with Matthew.

[18] On the basis of a number of texts including the accounts in *Matthew* and the *Gospel of Peter* N. Walter, "Eine vormatthäische Schilderung der Auferstehung Jesu", *NTS* 19 (1973) 415–429, hypothesises an original resurrection story which directly described the resurrection and in which the primary purpose of the inclusion of the guards was not defensive but to emphasise how independent of human action and indeed overwhelming were the forces that liberated Jesus from his tomb, when the earth shook and an angel rolled back the stone in the manner of door-opening miracles familiar from Hellenistic and Roman contexts and awoke him; see pp. 420–421. For door-opening miracles, Walter, 419 n. 2, refers to O. Weinreich, "Gebet und Wunder: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Religions- und Literaturgeschichte. II. Abhandlung", in: *Genethliakon W. Schmid* (Stuttgart 1929) 280–341 (repr. with the orginal pagination in square brackets in Weinreich's *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* [Stuttgart 1968]). Compare Luz (n. 7) 580–587 with the further references to miracles of that type. The existence of an early Christian version of the resurrection involving, for such a non-apologetic purpose, a guard at the tomb, is also accepted by Brown (n. 8). While accepting the possibility of such a tradition, Luz, 586, maintains that little more is known of what it amounted to other than that the Jewish leaders had asked for a guard.

[19] A similar problem arises in Pindar's *Olympian* 1, in which the love of Posidon for Pelops has a key role in revising away the myth of the hero's death and revival. The poet claims to speak in opposition to those before him (line 36), and yet there may be artistic evidence for earlier knowledge of a relationship between the hero and that god. See J. G. Howie, "The Revision of Myth in Pindar *Olympian* 1: The Death and Revival of Pelops (25–27; 36–66)", *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 4 (1984) 277–281.

circa 90 AD, appears to attempt to eliminate not only the Disciples but also any other mortal party as responsible for the body's disappearance (John 20. 5–7 and 13) and to allude to another version involving a gardener employed by Joseph of Arimathea (John 20. 15).[20] This last version is spelt out by Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis* around 200 AD[21] and paired with the allegation found in Matthew: the body was simply removed by the gardener from the garden, where the tomb was situated, for fear of sightseers trampling his lettuces.[22] Hence at a date later than the publication of Matthew advocates for and against the resurrection were in some cases, at any rate, arguing on the basis of a common assumption that there were no soldiers and that the tomb had been unguarded.

For many people of that time a rationalistic view of Jesus' resurrection would not be without persuasiveness. There was, to be sure, a widespread living belief in miraculous cures, comparable with those recorded for Jesus, and effected by gods, heroes and even rulers.[23] In the nature of things, however, revival after death is rare in either myth or history. Historical examples consist in the detection of signs of life in a patient given up for dead.[24] And, while Origen later claimed that there were many recorded cases of people returning from their tombs on the

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[20] On the date of John, see Stanton (n. 13) 120; and on his form of defence, see Campenhausen (n. 15) 65–69.

[21] According to P. Habermehl, "Tertullianus [2]", in: *Der Neue Pauly* 12/1 (2002) 173–178, Tertullian (160/170–212 or later BC) wrote his first work 197 BC, and *De Spectaculis* was another of his early works (col. 174).

[22] *De Spectaculis* 30: [ironic] *hic* [sc. Jesus] *est quem discentes subripuerunt, ut surrexisse dicatur, hortulanus detraxit, ne lactucae frequentia commeantium adlaederentur*. See Campenhausen (n. 15) 66–69, and Setzer (n. 1) 40 and 122. ("John 20:15 also hints that someone may be claiming that Jesus' body was removed from the tomb"). Interestingly, as Brown (n. 8) 1330 notes, the *Gospel of St Peter* also has the detail of the tomb being located in a garden, in this case a private one, actually called Joseph's Garden (6. 24). Moreover, that Gospel also speaks of a crowd of sightseers from Jerusalem and the surrounding district coming to the tomb the morning after the execution (9. 34).

[23] See W. Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity. A Sourcebook for the Study of New Testament Miracle Stories* (London – New York 1999) 11–47, H. Versnel, *Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysus, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* I (Leiden – Boston – Köln 1998) 191 n. 323.

[24] Asclepiades (first century BC, two cases; Celsus, *On Medicine* 2. 6. 16–18 and Apuleius *Florida* 19); Apollonius of Tyana (late first century BC; one case; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4. 45); see Cotter (n. 23) 45–46.

day of the funeral or the next day (*Against Celsus* 2.16), many people would explain such stories naturalistically along the same lines, as cases of failure to detect signs of life.[25] As for Empedocles' prowess as a healer, his claim to be able to bring a man back from death (Diog. Laert. 8. 59 = 31 B 111. 9 DK), and his feat in preserving a woman who had neither breath nor pulse for thirty days[26] and then sending the "dead" woman back alive (ἀποστείλας τὴν νεκρὰν ἄνθρωπον ζῶσαν, Diog. Laert. 8. 67), it is worth observing that the traditions that he disappeared after a sacrifice following that achievement or the unhoped-for cure of another woman put him on a par with Asclepius in myth. Greek myth and heroic poetry generally concentrate on the inevitability and irreversibility of death, even for the children of gods.[27] The rare myths involving revival, such as those of young Pelops[28] and of the crafty Sisyphus,[29] the latter punished perpetually after his second, and final, death,[30] fall within the earlier, more fabulous part of the *Spatium Mythicum*,[31] before the dramatic date of the *Iliad*; and, during that earlier period, Zeus's slaying of Asclepius, who had revived one or even several mortals from death, such as Hippolytus,[32] and subsequently Hercules' rescue of Alcestis, which is in breach of the bargain substituting her for her husband, have the aetiological significance of closing those two routes of escape.[33] One

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[25] In Iceland in the early 1970s the law required that for ten days before burial the deceased should lie under special conditions in a coffin with the lid unsecured.

[26] Diog. Laert. 8. 60, 61, and 67 (= Heraclides Ponticus frr.77 and 83 Wehrli); cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 2. 16 and H. Chadwick, *Origen. Contra Celsum*, Tr. with an Intr. and Notes (Cambridge 1980) 82 n. 2.

[27] Pind. *Nem*. 8. 44–45, Aesch. *Agam*. 1019–1021, Eur. *Alc*. 112–118. On the *Iliad* see J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 167.

[28] For the revival of Pelops, see Σ *Pind*. *O.* 1. 40 a, pp. 29–30 Dr.

[29] On Sisyphus, see Alcaeus fr. 38 a 5–10 LP, Pherecydes of Athens fr. 119 (Fowler = *FGrHist* 3 F 119), and D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1965) 300–303.

[30] For the earliest reference to Sisyphus' punishment in the Underworld, see *Od.* 11. 593–600.

[31] On the *Spatium Mythicum*, see W. von Leyden, "Spatium Historicum", *Durham University Journal* 13 (1952) 89–104. On Aristeas of Proconnesus in Herodotus' Book Four, see below § 3 *init*.

[32] On mortals said by various sources to have been revived by Asclepius, including Hippolytus, see Apollod. 3. 10. 3, and on Hippolytus in particular, see Sir J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus: The Library, with an English Translation* (London – New York 1921) II, 17–18 n. 4.

[33] On Asclepius, see Pind. *P.* 3, 1–62, Aesch. *Agam.* 1022–1024, Eur. *Alc.*122–129; and, on Alcestis, J. G. Howie. "The *Alcestis* of Euripides Considered as an

tradition of Empedocles' sudden disappearance around 460 BC,[34] recorded in the two following centuries, would reflect a similar view. Consolation requires exempla reflecting reality.[35] Among Greeks (and presumably Romans) Jesus' resurrection and a future general bodily resurrection of the dead, of which Jesus' was a sign, were viewed by many with flat disbelief, as Paul experienced in Athens (*Acts* 17. 32).

With Jews the position was somewhat different. Elijah and Elisha were believed to have had the power to raise people newly dead (*I Kings* 17. 17–24 and *II Kings* 4. 18–37), albeit in the distant past. As for the doctrine of a future general bodily resurrection of the dead, that was a matter of acrimonious sectarian dispute, as we see from the account of Paul's appearance before the Council in Jerusalem, where he exploits that division among his Jewish adversaries (*Acts* 23. 1–10). Indeed not all Christians accepted that future general bodily resurrection.[36]

Even belief in magic will have encouraged suspicion. The paucity of witnesses and the brevity of the risen Jesus' appearances in the Gospels (see later in this section) enabled the late second century opponent of Christianity, Celsus,[37] whose work survives only in the quotations in Origen's third-century counterblast, to suggest a magician's arts (Origen,

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Aetiological Myth", in: *Τιμητικός Τόμος για τον καθηγητή Αντόνιο Ρήγα* (Athens 2005) 100–119.

[34] Diog. Laert. 8. 68 (= Heracl. Pont. fr. 83 Wehrli) and 69 (= Hermippus fr. 27 Wehrli). The date of Empedocles' death is placed at around 460 BC by P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic. Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford 1995) 1, who discusses these traditions at pp. 135, 233–256, 272–283, and 289–292. For mythical events within the *Spatium Historicum*, see G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myth* (Harmondsworth 1974) 106–107 and 172–175.

[35] On the relationship between deaths in the *Iliad* and early funerary inscriptions, see J. G. Howie, "The *Iliad* as Exemplum", in: Ø. Andersen, M. W. Dickie (eds.), *Homer's World: Fiction, Tradition, and Reality* (Bergen 1995) 156–159. For the approach to domestic bereavement, see Eur. *Alc.* 416–419: "[Chorus:] Bear up! You're not the first, nor will you be the last, to lose a good wife. You have to understand that all mortals are bound to die".

[36] See Origen 3. 11 and, with Chadwick (n. 26), *I Corinthians* 15. 12. For Paul, as the Apostle proceeds to explain, that doctrine stood or fell by the truth or otherwise of the resurrection of Jesus. A. E. Harvey, *Companion to the New Testament* (Oxford – Cambridge 1970) 565 considers it "much more probable that the question was raised by members of the Corinthian congregation who came from a *Greek* background" [*my italics*]. Compare Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80. 4.

[37] On Celsus' background, see M. Frede, "Celsus' Attack on the Christians", in: M. T. Griffin, J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford 1989) 222–227.

Against Celsus 2. 55; γοητεία).[38] The fact that at that point Celsus is using a fictive Jew as his mouthpiece should mean that both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish public were open to that argument.[39]

In the face of all those objections the Jewish version of the resurrection would seem to cut the Gordian knot. The criticism and revision of myths from a rationalistic viewpoint had been familiar since the fifth century BC,[40] and the wider Hellenistic public now shared that knowledge. In his recent study of Heraclitus the Paradoxographer Jacob Stern, who dates that author at apparently "the late 1st or 2nd century AD",[41] states that, "through [the handbooks of the rhetoricians], we may suppose, the rationalistic method became a fundamental part of the educational system from the 1st century AD onward". Thus in the first century AD it was a staple part of rhetorical education.[42] Moreover, the Budé editor of Theon's *Progymnasmata*, who dates that work by preference towards the beginning of the imperial period,[43] in other words, say, the

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[38] On the term and the practices associated with it, see Dickie (n. 5) 202–250. For Origen's own definition, see *Against Celsus* 2. 51: "magic and sorcery, wrought by evil daemons who are enchanted by elaborate spells and obey men who are sorcerers" (μαγείαν καὶ γοητείαν, ἐνεργουμένην ὑπὸ πονηρῶν δαιμόνων, κατακλήσεσι περιέργοις θελγομένων καὶ ἀνθρώποις γόησιν ὑπακουόντων). However, the nature of Celsus' objection makes it clear that he is thinking not of anything supernatural here but of trickery. For that aspect of γοήτεια, see Dickie (n. 5) 76 and 238–240.

[39] For the considerable value of Celsus and his Jewish informant, whether fictive or not, as a witness of the views of Jewish opponents of Jesus and his followers, see Setzer (n. 1) 147–151 and Stanton (n. 9) 149–151. For Origen's own fullness and reliability as a witness of Celsus' views and the high quality of Celsus' own work, see Stanton, *op. cit.*, 149–153.

[40] Pindar's celebrated *Olympian* 1 contains an overt and elaborate revision of the myth of Pelops' sacrifice, dismemberment, and revival; see, e. g., Howie (n. 19), with examples from Hecataeus and others and secondary literature in general; see also J. G. Howie, "Thucydides and Pindar: The *Archaeology* and *Nemean* 7", *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* 10 (1998) 75–130, *passim*; and, for a foretaste of this approach in Hesiod and others, see J. G. Howie, "Apollo's Dealings with Chiron and Croesus: Ambiguity and Hymnic Predication in Hesiod's Theogony, Pindar's 9th Pythian, and Herodotus 1", in: P. Sandin, M. Wifstrand Schiebe (eds.), *Dais Philēsistephanos. Studies in Honour of Professor Staffan Fogelmark Presented on his 65th Birthday* (Uppsala 2004) 21–41.

[41] J. Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ ᾽Απίστων: *On Unbelievable Tales*", *TAPhA* 133 (2003) 51–97.

[42] *Ibid.*, 56.

[43] Aelius Théon, *Progymnasmata.* Texte ét. et trad. par M. Patillon et G. Bolognese (Paris 1997) xvi.

last quarter of the first century BC, observes that Theon's precepts on the subject show that such rhetorical instruction was capable of encouraging a critical spirit among students.[44] Matthew's Gospel itself falls well within the first two centuries AD, a period described by Stern as "in truth a time rich in rationalistic and allegoristic readings of myth".[45] Theon cites not only the fourth-century BC handbook of Palaephatus[46] but also examples from Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Ephorus (93. 5–96, Patillon, pp. 93–96, Spengel). Palaephatus offers an elaborate revision of the revival of Alcestis, with a prefatory remark worth quoting here:

> ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ μηδένα ἀποθανόντα δύνασθαί τινα ἀναβιῶναι ποιῆσαι.
>
> It seems to me, however, that no one can bring a person who has died back to life (Palaephatus 40, tr. J. Stern).

As for explanations for this Christian claim, several factors might well occur to an audience of that date familiar with Greco-Roman culture. One factor likely to have influenced the reception of the resurrection story is what might be termed *enlightened deception*. Greek readers had long been familiar with the concept of the establishment of a religious belief through a *pretended* death and revival, as is well illustrated by Herodotus' report of how Pontic Greeks accounted for their Thracian neighbours' beliefs concerning Zalmoxis (4. 95). It had been founded, they said, on such a deception practised on the Getae by a fellow-countryman who had been a slave of Pythagoras in Samos and, once liber-

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[44] Patillon (n. 43) 60 n. 295.

[45] Stern (n. 41) 53.

[46] On Palaephatus, see G. Grote, *A History of Greece* I (2nd ed., 1849, of the 10-volume edition [London 1888]) 371–374, W. Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (Stuttgart [2]1941; repr. Stuttgart 1975) 148–152, Palaephatus, Περὶ ἀπίστων: *On Unbelievable Tales*, Tr., Introd. and Comm. by J. Stern, with Teubner Greek Text (Wauconda, Ill. 1996) and K. Brodersen, "'Das ist aber eine Lüge!' – Zur rationalistischen Mythenkritik des Palaiphatos", in: R. von Haehling (ed.), *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum* (Darmstadt 2005) 44–57 and, for some rationalisations in Herodotus, see H. J. Rose, "Some Herodotean Rationalisms", *CQ* 34 (1940) 78–84. Stern, *op. cit.*, 2 argues that Palaephatus was alive in the 330's–340's BC; and Brodersen, *op. cit.*, 46–48, also places him within that century, in the milieu of Aristotle. Certainly the examples quoted by Theon 95 from the fourth-century BC Ephorus already have a strong resemblance to the approach in Palaephatus.

ated, had made his pile, and then returned to Thrace, where, as a man who had known Greeks and, above all, Pythagoras himself, he was struck by the Thracians' half-savage way of life. He therefore prepared a hall, where he banqueted the chief men and sought to persuade them that neither he nor they nor their children would die but would go where they would have eternal life and the enjoyment of all good things. During the time he feasted these people, he had also been making an underground chamber, on completion of which he disappeared for three years. He was sorely missed by the Thracians, who wept for him as dead; and, when he appeared in the fourth year, they believed his teachings.[47] The inclusion of Pythagoras surely hints at Zalmoxis' having imitated his master's own reputed imposture,[48] which is possibly alluded to in Sophocles' *Electra*, where Orestes justifies his own plan of a feigned death.[49] The story is recounted in the scholia to that passage (Σ *Soph. El.* 62):

> Pythagoras shut himself up in an underground chamber, and told his mother to put out a story that he had died. And thereafter he appeared [as if supernaturally, ἐπιφανείς],[50] and gave a wonderful account of rebirth and of the underworld, and regaled the living with stories about relatives he claimed to have met there; on which foundation he was able to win high repute as having before the Trojan War been Aethalides, the son of Hermes, and then Euphorbus, and then Hermotimus, and then Pythius the Delian, and, after all those, Pythagoras.[51]

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[47] Summary based on the translation of J. E. Powell: *Herodotus*, Tr. by J. E. Powell, I–II (Oxford 1949). Much the same story is told by Hellanicus *FGrHist* 4 F 73.

[48] For the motif of imitation in Herodotus, see Howie (n. 19) 292–293. Origen (3. 54) says that Pythagoras encouraged his slave Zalmoxis to pursue virtue.

[49] "Yes, often in the past I have known clever men dead in fiction but not dead; and then, when they return home, the honour they receive is all the greater."– Sophocles, *Electra* 62–64, tr. H. Lloyd-Jones (Sophocles. Ed. and Tr. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones I [Cambridge, Mass.– London 1994] 173).

[50] For ἐπιφανῆναι with this connotation, of Hdt. 1. 24. 7 (Arion), and, for this and other connotations of φαίνεσθαι and its compounds, see J. G. Howie, "The Aristeia of Brasidas: Thucydides' Presentation of Events at Pylos and Amphipolis", *PLLS* 12 (2005) 261 and nn. 163 and 164.

[51] Compare Hermippus' version in. Diog. Laert. 8. 41 (= Hermippus fr. 20 Wehrli). For the view that Hermippus was not simply imitating the story in Herodotus but relaying a separate tradition about Pythagoras, see W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, tr. E. L. Minar Jr. (Harvard 1972) 156–166, and F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles. Supplementband I: Hermippos der Kallimacheer* (Basel – Stuttgart 1974) 56–57 ad fr. 20.

This kind of story chimes in with a more general concept of the pretended direct divine authority of a lawgiver. Writing in the first century BC, Diodorus Siculus names an Egyptian king as the first to induce his people to accept a set of written laws by pretending that they had been given to him by a god; and then lists other figures who had done the like, including Moses and Zalmoxis, the latter being said in this version to have claimed the Goddess of the Common Hearth as his source (1. 94. 1–2). Diodorus also says that Orpheus (famed in myth for his descent into the underworld) actually brought his teachings about that place, with its imagined punishments and blessings, from Egypt (1. 96. 4–5).

Other motives would be likely to occur, including fraud, as we see from a particularly forceful, and perceptive, piece of writing by Celsus, commencing with a collection of parallels headed by Zalmoxis. This passage, which is put in the mouth of his Jewish authority, offers a whole range of objections and hypotheses which may be considered within the conceptual scope of at least some of Matthew's audience. Celsus begins by drawing on a number of figures of myth and the remote past who had evidently already been the subject of rationalisation to the effect that they had deliberately disappeared for a time and later shown themselves again, claiming to have returned from the underworld (2. 56).[52] The first two, Zalmoxis and Pythagoras could also be taken as practitioners of enlightened deception, as could Orpheus later in the list. In Rhampsinitus' case, at any rate, bravado or fraud is the most likely motive; and the three heroes, Protesilaus, Hercules, and Theseus, are lumped in along with him, thus incurring guilt by association (Celsus *apud* Origen *Against Celsus* 2. 55):

> How many others produce wonders like this to convince simple hearers whom they exploit by deceit? They say that Zamolxis, the

[52] In all but one case a rationalisation is still known or (in Rhampsinitus' case) can easily be guessed. The story of Orpheus told by Diodorus Siculus certainly involves pious fabrication, and Rhampsinitus could well have been thought simply to have lied. Theseus, too, might be imagined to have lied about the underworld and Hercules' rescue of him during a *katabasis* rather than tell the truth about an inglorious adventure and lengthy captivity in North-West Greece. On the other hand, how imposture could be involved on Protesilaus' part is unclear, nor does it fit the rationalisation known as early as the time of Euripides (Hygin. *Fab.* 104; cf. Eur. *Alc.* 348–354 and A. M. Dale [ed.], Euripides, *Alcestis* [Oxford 1954] *ad loc.*); and imposture on Hercules' part is ruled out in Hecataeus' rationalisation of Cerberus in *FGrHist* 1 F 27 and F 27 b (= frr. 27 a and 27 b Fowler), though not in the version involving Theseus and Pirithous.

> slave of Pythagoras, also did this among the Scythians, and Pythagoras himself in Italy, and Rhampsinitus in Egypt. The last-named played dice with Demeter in Hades and returned bearing a gift from her, a golden napkin.[53] Moreover, they say that Orpheus did this among the Odrysians,[54] and Protesilaus in Thessaly,[55] and Heracles at Taenarum and Theseus (tr. Chadwick).[56]

The terms and the tone with which these earlier parallels are introduced and the way in which two well-known examples of enlightened deception are quickly associated with a more dubious instance indicate a concern to eliminate that concept. What matters to Celsus (ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνο σκεπτέον), is whether someone could really die and rise again in a bodily resurrection. Are all the other examples just cited mere myths, he asks, while the Christians' story of the crucifixion, with attendant wonders like an earthquake and darkness by day, the resurrection, and the proof of the wounds on the risen Jesus, is a seemly and plausible ending for their own particular piece of tragic theatre? Celsus *apud* Origen 2. 55:

> Τίς τοῦτο εἶδε; Γυνὴ πάροιστρος, ὥς φατε, καὶ εἰ τις ἄλλος τῶν ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς γοητείας, ἤτοι κατὰ τινα διάθεσιν ὀνειρώξας κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ βούλησιν δόξῃ πεπλανημένῃ φαντασιωθείς, ὅπερ ἤδη μυρίοις συμβέβηκεν, ἢ, ὅπερ μᾶλλον, ἐκπλῆξαι τοὺς λοιποὺς τῇ

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[53] Herodotus 2. 122. This example of Celsus' acquaintance with Herodotus increases the likelihood that his ignoring of the enlightened motive ascribed, according to Herodotus, to Zalmoxis by the Pontic Greeks is deliberate.

[54] Chadwick (n. 26) *ad loc.* cites Apollod. *Library* 1. 3. 2 as a convenient source; and among the sources cited by Frazer *ad loc.* is Diodorus Siculus, who tells of an Egyptian claim that Orpheus brought his rites and fabulous story of the underworld (τὴν τῶν ἐν ᾅδου μυθοποιίαν), including punishments for the impious and the meadows for the pious and other widespread fabricated supernatural beliefs from Egypt.

[55] Chadwick (n. 26) *ad loc.* cites Apollod. *Library, Epitome* 3. 30–31. Frazer *ad loc.* reports as a rationalising version Hygin. *Fab.* 104, in which Laodamia fashions a wax image of Protesilaus and lavishes secret embraces on it till her father burns it and she casts herself into the flames, a version already reflected in Eur. *Alc.* 348–354. No imposture is actually involved.

[56] Apollod. *Library* 2. 5. 12. No imposture is involved in either Hecataeus' rationalisation of Cerberus as an enormous deadly serpent originally known only figuratively as the Hound of Hades (F 27 a and F 27 b = frr. 27 a and 27 b Fowler) or the Euhemeristic treatments of Hades and his household as a king and his family in Molossia (Plut. *Thes.* 31. 4 and 35. 1–2) or in Thesprotia (Paus. 1. 17. and 1. 18. 4), for which see Frazer *ad* Apollod. 2. 5. 12.

> τερατείᾳ ταύτῃ θελήσας καὶ διὰ τοῦ τοιούτου ψεύσματος ἀφορμὴν ἄλλοις ἀγύρταις παρασχεῖν.[57]
>
> Who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say, and perhaps some other party to the same sorcery, who either dreamt with a certain disposition [towards such a dream],[58] and through wishful thinking imagined [it] while his belief was [thus] deluded, as has happened to thousands of others before now, or rather wanted to astound all the others through this wondrous story and through such a falsehood provide a pretext for other mendicants (tr. Chadwick [adapted]).[59]

Celsus' attack on the witnesses brings in several factors. It is just hysteria in the case of the single female witness, he says, pointing to her known history.[60] As for any other person claiming to have seen the risen Jesus, two other factors are suggested. One is delusion in a dream brought on by the witnesses' frame of mind. The alternative, which Celsus prefers, is deliberate falsehood. Both categories of witness are put under a common introductory heading: ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς γοητείας. This is taken by both Chadwick and Borret in their translations as referring to victims of such deception, a rendering which is inconsistent with the second category. However, ἐκ can be understood as "of" or "from among" a number of persons.[61] If the preposi-

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[57] For an illuminating account of the background of this passage, see Dickie (n. 5) 22–250, esp. 219–243.

[58] I owe this departure from "in a certain state of mind" in Chadwick (n. 26) to Prof. Verlinsky; compare M. Borret (ed.), *Origène. Contre Celse. Tome I (Livres I et II)*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes (Paris 1967) 415: "par suite d'une certaine disposition".

[59] Chadwick (n. 26) 109.

[60] Celsus is referring to Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus outside the tomb in the garden in John 20. 11–18. Although neither Chadwick (n. 26) nor Borret (n. 58) offers any note on the matter, Celsus is clearly pointing to, and rationalising *en passant*, the statements in two of the Gospels that seven devils had issued or been cast out from her; see the brief text-references in M. Marcovich: Origenes, *Contra Celsum libri VIII*. Ed. M. Marcovich (Leiden – Boston – Köln 2001) *ad loc.* See Luke 8. 2 and Mark 16. 9. The former passage names her as one of the women who followed Jesus. The latter passage, situated in the longer ending of that Gospel, states that he first appeared to her, and then actually adds that seven devils had been cast out of her.

[61] See, with *LSJ s. v.* I. 4, Plat. *Gorg.* 525 E: ἐκ τῶν δυναμένων εἰσὶ καὶ οἱ σφόδρα πονηροὶ γιγνόμενοι ἄνθρωποι. Compare Plutarch, *Antony* 13, where a similar metonymy is involved: τάττουσιν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐνίους τῶν ἐκ τῆς συνωμοσίας, [Brutus and Cassius and their associates] *set several of those belonging to the conspiracy to look out for* [Antony].

tion is taken in this sense and γοητεία is taken by metonymy as denoting the persons engaged in that practice, both categories can be understood as persons belonging to the one group engaged in the same piece of γοητεία, that practice associated with both fraud and evil powers. In other words, this may be a way of referring to Jesus' closest associates, including a woman and the Disciples, and of imputing to them either a delusion born of their distress or else the conscious intention of making up a lie to astound the rest (τοὺς λοιπούς) [of the group] and to provide a story for other [like-minded] mendicants (ἄλλοις ἀγύρταις) to trade on,[62] presumably other persons going about propagating Christianity down to Celsus' own time.[63] Celsus apparently did not include the Jewish version of the theft of Jesus' body by his Disciples, although he knew Matthew's Gospel (*Against Celsus* 1. 34). Hence Origen, who has earlier accepted Matthew's account of its genesis,[64] was spared having to deal with that, and indeed feels free to speak as if no such stratagem were known or conceivable, and argues as if the only perpetrator in question would have had to be Jesus himself (2. 56).

Celsus' comments thus reveal a whole range of sceptical and hostile approaches to the resurrection, and his collection of parallels, all in such summary form, provides a clear demonstration of the relevance of Classical Greek myth and legend and myth-criticism and -revision to the reception of the Gospels in the second century AD.

Relevant to the reception of the resurrection story is also surely the picture that the Romans had of the end their very founder met, which combines self-interested deception practised by a powerful group of men with the enlightened deception then resorted to by one man.[65]

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[62] For the overlap or identity of the terms γόης and ἀγύρτης as here, see Dickie (n. 5) 245.

[63] Both hypotheses are remarkably modern. The first is worth comparing with that of Lüdemann (n. 2) 93–95. The state of mind involved is completely natural, as the phrase "as has happened to thousands of others before now" makes clear. The second is a sceptical but insightful picture of the dynamics of a religious group whose leader has been killed or executed.

[64] *Against Celsus* 1. 51; see Stanton (n. 9) 153 and n. 8 and R. E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan – Cambridge 2000) 132.

[65] On the end of Romulus, see W. Burkert, "Caesar und Romulus-Quirinus", *Historia* 11 (1962) 356–376; C. H. Talbert, "Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity", in: *ANRW* II, 16, 2 (1972) 1630–1631, and W. Cotter, "Greco-Roman Apotheosis Tradition and the Resurrection Appearances in Matthew", in: D. E. Aune (ed.), *The*

Livy (1. 15. 8–1. 16) says that Romulus, who was less loved by the Senators than by the army and people, disappeared in a cloud during a sudden storm that broke out while he was reviewing his troops. Senators standing beside his throne said he had been carried aloft. Although a few initial cries that he was now divine led to the general multitude praying to him as a god for his favour, some quietly suggested that he had been torn to pieces by the senators; and unease and suspicion persisted until the respected Julius Proculus conceived the plan of appearing before the Assembly and announcing that Romulus had descended from heaven and that, before going back up into the sky, he had commanded him to tell the Romans of their destined supremacy and the need to teach their children that Roman arms were invincible.[66] The people then took heart, and believed in Romulus' immortality. This story comes from a part of Livy's work (Books 1–5) completed between 27 and 25 BC.[67] As in the case of Zalmoxis, the motifs of disappearance and grief are prominent. Similarly, Plutarch's version in his *Life of Romulus* includes the key terms of *disappearance* (παραλόγως ἀφανισθέντος αὐτοῦ, ἠφανίσθη, 17. 3; ἄφνω μεταλλάξαντος, 17. 4; τὸν ἀφανισμόν, 17. 6), *vain search* (ζήτησις, 17. 7), and *grief* (πόθος, 17. 7). These motifs are typical of actual Greek myths of apotheosis and heroisation from Persephone's abduction in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (44 ff.) onwards.[68] The subsequent epiphany, and the translation preceding it, are reported by a man whose motives are clear. According to R. M. Ogilvie, the assassination version was known as early as 67 BC, and Julius Proculus' story had already been viewed by Fabius Pictor, who flourished in the late third century BC,[69] as a fraud encouraged at the time by the Senators.[70]

Gospel of Matthew in Current Study. Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson, S. J. (Grand Rapids, Michigan – Cambridge 2001) 133–138.

[66] Paraphrased from Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, tr. A. de Sélincourt (Harmondsworth 1960) 34–35.

[67] J. Briscoe, "Livy", *OCD*[3] 878. On Julius Proculus's story, see Burkert (n. 65) 362–365.

[68] For the type of myth containing disappearance followed by such a change of status, see Burkert (n. 65) 362 with n. 34 and 371 with n. 74. For further, overlapping, collections of examples, see Talbert (n. 65) 1629–1632 and Howie (n. 19) 294 and nn. 130–133.

[69] See J. Briscoe, "Fabius Pictor, Quintus", *OCD*[3] 583.

[70] R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy Books 1–5* (Oxford 1965) 84–85. Burkert (n. 65) 365–371 argues that what was understood as a rationalisation

The Jewish version reported by Justin does not offer an explanation for every detail of the resurrection story, even though in Justin it purports to account for it right up to Jesus' ascension; it simply accounts for an otherwise unexplained disappearance of a body. Whether those sent to propagate it went into further detail cannot now be known, though, if they did, their explanation of some of the details could be guessed at from the sort of arguments later used by Celsus, especially the paucity of witnesses and the fact that they were all associates of Jesus.[71] However, the version reported by Justin has the advantage of leaving an audience to speculate for themselves; and in that respect it is in line with Classical practice. A reviser sometimes offers only what would be the germ of a myth, and assumes that the rest of it is the result of a subsequent natural accretion of mythical details. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, Tiresias resorts to this approach in his pious, evidently religiously acceptable, revision of the traditional myth of the birth of Dionysus (286–298), and says that it had developed "in time", χρόνῳ (294).[72] This approach is also sometimes employed by Palaephatus, who concludes his rationalisation of the Sphinx by saying that "once that much happened the rest was made up in myth, τούτων γενομένων τὰ λοιπὰ ἐμυθεύθη (21).[73]

§ 2. Matthew's Counter-Revision

Thus the Jewish version reported by Justin is compatible with already established attitudes among Greeks and Romans, as well as among Jews; and the story of Jesus' resurrection was open to that hos-

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(murder and dismemberment by the Senators, each man taking away a body part) really goes back to the original myth and the original ritual it had been associated with; and that the sequence *disappearance-apotheosis* is secondary and based on a Greek type. For a similar appproach to some other rationalistic stories in Herodotus, notably Pisistratus' entry into Athens with Phye (1. 60), earlier discussed by Rose (n. 46), see J. Stern, "Demythologization in Herodotus: 5, 92. η", *Eranos* 87 (1989) 13–15.

[71] ἐνὶ μόνῳ γυναίῳ καὶ τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώταις (Celsus, *ap.* Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2. 70). The number of female witnesses stated is in accordance with John (20. 16–17) and the so-called "Longer Ending" of Mark (16. 9). The latter objection is already anticipated in *Acts* 10. 41 by Peter, who says that it was God who had pre-ordained that the witnesses should be from among those who had known Jesus in life. See further Campenhausen (n. 15) 65.

[72] Howie (n. 19) 296 and nn. 143 and 144.

[73] For a striking example of this minimalist approach, see Herodotus 1. 1–5.

tile construction. In combating it, however, Matthew himself reveals a mastery of revising techniques. At the same time, certain mythical and historical stories, including those already mentioned in that connection, may offer an insight into the thinking of the Jesus' adversaries as presented by Matthew, who in these aspects of his account also shows narrative art.

For Theon the mark of competent myth-criticism was to show how the original version had come about (Theon, *Progymnasmata* p. 95 Spengel):

> τὸ δὲ μὴ μόνον ἀνασκευάζειν τὰς τοιαύτας μυθολογίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅθεν παρερρύηκεν ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος ἀποφαίνειν, τελεωτέρας ἐστὶν ἕξεως ἢ κατὰ τοὺς πολλούς.
>
> If one goes beyond merely demolishing such mythical accounts and actually shows where such an account has drifted in from, that is the mark of more than common competence.

This is just what Matthew sets out to do after giving his own account of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28. 12–15):

> καὶ συναχθέντες μετὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων συμβούλιόν τε λαβόντες ἀργύρια ἱκανὰ ἔδωκαν τοῖς στρατιώταις λέγοντες, Εἴπατε ὅτι **Οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς ἐλθόντες ἔκλεψαν αὐτὸν ἡμῶν κοιμωμένων** καὶ ἐὰν ἀκουσθῇ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τοῦ ἡγεμόνος, ἡμεῖς πείσομεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀμερίμνους ποιήσομεν. οἱ δὲ λαβόντες τὰ ἀργύρια ἐποίησαν ὡς ἐδιδάχθησαν. Καὶ <u>διεφημίσθη</u> ὁ λόγος οὗτος παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας.
>
> And having assembled with the elders and taken counsel, the high priests gave considerable money to the soldiers, telling them, "Say, **'His disciples came at night and stole him while we were asleep'**". And if this is heard in front of the governor, we will intercede with him and see that you have no cause for anxiety; and this report <u>was noised abroad</u> among Jews down to the present day (tr. Powell [adapted]).

Matthew accounts for a rationalising version already current among Jews as originating from a lie devised for dissemination by Jesus' adversaries, which caught on among Jews and has persisted ever since. Among the revisions of Palaephatus and Heraclitus there is a type with two stages, a misapprehension contemporary with the true event and its subsequent dissemination. This type is traceable with some probability

to Hecataeus, and is certainly known to Pindar;[74] and it is clearly exemplified in Euripides and Herodotus, who, however, postulate not an initial misunderstanding but a deliberate lie contemporaneous with the actual event, with an identifiable liar and motive.

The resemblance in language and function is obvious in Matthew's statement of the second stage (Matthew 28. 15):

> καὶ διεφημίσθη ὁ λόγος οὗτος μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας.
>
> (*literally*) And this story was spread among Jews [and continues among them] to this very day.

We may compare, first of all, the conclusions of some revisions based on a hypothetical misapprehension. Thus Palaephatus accounts for the metamorphosis of Atalanta and Melanion, by saying that they had withdrawn to a cave for intercourse only to be eaten by a lion and its mate which had their lair there; so that when the members of the hunting party saw those two beasts coming out, they believed that these were the two lovers, now metamorphosed.[75] Palaephatus (40. 11–13) concludes:

> εἰσβάλλοντες οὖν εἰς τὴν πόλιν διεφήμιζον ὡς οἱ περὶ Ἀταλάντην εἰς λέοντας μετεβλήθησαν.
>
> They hastened back to town and spread the word that the two of them had been turned into lions (tr. Stern).

Similarly, when Heraclitus has explained Proteus' fabled ability to become fire or water as originally metaphors used by people at the time to describe this man's kindness towards the good and punitive attitude towards the wicked, he concludes (Heraclitus 29):

> Ὅθεν ταύτην τὴν φήμην[76] περὶ αὐτοῦ διέσπειραν.
>
> And so people disseminated this story about him (tr. Stern).

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[74] See Hecataeus frr. 29 a and b Fowler (= *FGrHist* F 29 a and F 29 b), Pindar *O.* 1. 47, and Howie (n. 19) 293–294 and nn. 125–129.

[75] The story of the removal of Jesus' body by a gardener reported by Tertullian (see above § 1 and n. 22) was clearly intended as a revision along these lines, with the women finding the tomb empty and imagining Jesus had risen.

[76] Φήμη and the derivatives of it in the other passages discussed in this connection seem particularly appropriate in view of the power and the persistence

A further resemblance in the second stage has been pointed out to me in correspondence by Professor Stern, for whom the last four words reveal themselves as "yet another example of Matthew's knowledge of the technique of rationalisation, the 'still now' (μέχρι νῦν / σήμερον) topos".[77]

A clear example of an outright lie being made to be the genesis of the myth is Euripides' way of accounting for the version of Neoptolemus' death as arising from a raid by him to plunder Delphi. In the *Andromache* Neoptolemus had on an earlier occasion come demanding compensation from Apollo for his father Achilles' death, and is now at Delphi with the pious intention of seeking the god's forgiveness.[78] Neoptolemus' rival Orestes spreads a story among the already suspicious Delphians that he has come with a view to raiding Delphi (Eur. *Andr.* 1090–1091):

> ᾽Αγαμέμνονος δὲ παῖς διαστείχων *πόλιν*
> εἰς οὓς ἑκάστῳ δυσμενεῖς ηὔδα λόγους.
>
> Moreover, the son of Agamemnon went all over the city,
> speaking into the ear of everyone hostile words.

Euripides' Messenger then lets us hear Orestes' own words (1092–1095), which spread through the city and precipitate action by the authorities (1096–1099, 1114 ff.). In examples from Herodotus and, later, Palaephatus a revising story concludes with a crystallisation of the lie or misapprehension that had early taken such good root. Thus at the

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attributed to this factor by Hesiod in *Works and Days* 760–764; see especially 763–764 a: φήμη δ᾽ οὔ τις πάμπαν ἀπόλλυται, ἥντινα πολλοὶ | λαοὶ φημίξουσι.

[77] For examples of this aetiological aspect in Heraclitus and its wider mythographic background beyond myth-revision, see Stern (n. 41) 70. Matthew has already used this *topos* in the form ἕως σήμερον at 27. 7, where he recounts how the Chief Priests used the money thrown back by the remorseful Judas: to purchase a piece of ground for the burial of strangers, which in consequence was called the Field of Blood. As J. E. Powell, *The Evolution of the Gospel. A New Translation of the First Gospel with Commentary and Introductory Essay* (New Haven – London 1994) 208 observes: "the only effect of the prolongation is to adduce an allegedly contemporary placename as if it were evidence of the event". Is this aetiology, in combination with the earlier etymology of Golgotha (27. 33), intended to prepare the ground for the note in 28. 15 as earlier instances of the author's special knowledge and reliability?

[78] W. Allan, *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy* (Oxford 2000) 262–263.

conclusion of Herodotus' account of how a story of Cyrus' being miraculously preserved came about when his parents were inspired by the name of their returned son's foster mother (Spako, Grecised as Cyno, *i. e.* a personal name based on the word for 'dog'), the form of indirect speech chosen lets us hear *in nuce* the sort of thing that would be said (Herodotus 1. 122. 3):

> Οἱ δὲ τοκέες παραλαβόντες τὸ οὔνομα τοῦτο, ἵνα θειοτέρως δοκέῃ τοῖσι Πέρσῃσι περιεῖναί σφι ὁ παῖς, κατέβαλον φάτιν ὡς **ἐκκείμενον Κῦρον κύων ἐξέθρεψε**. ἐνθεῦτεν μὲν ἡ φάτις αὕτη κεχώρηκε.
>
> His parents took over this name so that their son should be thought by the Persians to have survived in a more divine manner, and established a story that **when Cyrus was exposed he was reared by a dog**. And that is where this story has come from.

This sort of lay-out is familiar in Palaephatus, who, as Stern puts it, "frequently uses … misunderstood speeches or casual remarks *at the climax of his rationalizations*" (my italics).[79]

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[79] Stern (n. 46) 19, citing Palaephatus 3, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27, 33, and 40. The question remains whether there is any other evidence of familiarity with what we may term the Palaephatean approach within the New Testament. I am not yet sufficiently well read in that corpus to be able to answer that question. However, I have noticed similar language in Matthew and Mark where the author is concerned to show how a miracle came to be generally known in spite of Jesus' injunction to a beneficiary to keep quiet about it. Thus two blind men cured and so enjoined proceed to spread his fame throughout the region (Matthew 9. 31: οἱ δὲ ἐξελθόντες διεφήμισαν αὐτὸν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ γῇ ἐκείνῃ); and a leper cured and so enjoined proclaims Jesus' fame so assiduously that he could no longer go into a town openly (Mark 1. 45: ὁ δὲ ἐξελθὼν ἤρξατο κηρύσσειν πολλὰ καὶ διαφημίζειν τὸν λόγον κτλ.). In the only other instance of the verb διαφημίζειν in the New Testament it is used of the dissemination of the Jewish version at Matthew 28. 15. There is also a story in Mark of a miraculous cure of a man deaf and with a speech difficulty. The persons who brought him are enjoined to tell no one, but proceed to proclaim the Jesus' powers all the more loudly, and in their overwhelming amazement even enhance them in the telling, claiming that he does everything brilliantly and makes the deaf hear and those [wholly] incapable of speech speak. Great emphasis is laid on the excessiveness of these persons' talk, and the story climaxes with a brief piece of direct speech in a manner resembling some Palaephatean revisions: αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον περισσότερον ἐκήρυσσον. καὶ ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες, "Καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν, καὶ τοὺς κωφοὺς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ ἀλάλους λαλεῖν" (Mark 7. 37). Thus both Matthew and Mark are anxious to show Jesus as not advertising his powers, and are careful to account for

Thus in function, language, and position, the words which Matthew makes the Chief Priests and Elders instruct the guards to use in order to account for the disappearance of Jesus' body reflect established Greek practice in revision. These words are also comparable in function with the message which, according to Justin, the religious authorities in Jerusalem later instructed their emissaries to spread. Another similarity with Matthew is that Justin, too, presents the emissaries' message in direct speech.[80] The only difference *vis à vis* earlier examples lies in the nature of the version so accounted for. Matthew's revision, like Justin's own later contention, revises away a rationalisation of a supernatural event which Matthew himself, like Justin, wholeheartedly accepts. I shall return to that point after considering the imaginative insight and art Matthew reveals, creating a narrative full of intrigue, awe, emotion, and characterisation as well as a reviser's ingenuity. There is a Classical Greek analogy in Euripides' way of accounting for the version of Neoptolemus' visit to Delphi as a raid in the *Andromache*.

§ 3. Matthew's Narrative

Matthew's own account contains striking supernatural features. One of these has Greek precedent. Jesus' body vanishes from within the tomb while it is still sealed, so that when an angel rolls back the stone he is already gone. This disappearance from an enclosed space is comparable with the Greek examples of Aristeas of Proconnesus (Herodotus 4. 13–15; after a sudden death) and Cleomedes of Astypalaea, who was declared by Delphi to be the last hero (Pausanias 6. 9. 6–8). A similar end was later attributed to Apollonius of Tyana (Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 8. 29–31). Yet Matthew's narrative also exhibits a no less remarkable mastery of Greek forms of myth-revision, which goes beyond the degree already detected (§ 2

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the spread of word of his miracles as through the beneficiaries. It is perhaps also worth noting that exaggeration is an important concept in myth-revision from Hecataeus onwards; see Howie, "Thucydides and Pindar" (n. 40) 102–103 and 115–118.

[80] *Dialogue with Trypho* 108. 2; see § 1 *init.* These emissaries are made to speak in terms apparently avowing a collective responsibility for Jesus' death; compare Matthew 27. 25, where the crowd is made to freely acknowledge that Jesus' blood will be on them and their children.

above). I shall argue that, in addition to the Palaephatean conclusion of the episode, the pieces of direct speech within the Chief Priests' and Pharisees' appeal to Pilate also have a Palaephatean function. The Jewish view is given a good run for its money but as a reasoned *anticipatory* rationalisation, spelling out what the Chief Priests and Pharisees foresee as the way the Disciples may exploit the situation if they manage to spirit the body away after the ground has already been prepared by Jesus' own claim that he would rise again after three days. What is presented *here* as an anticipatory rationalisation is in keeping with the Jewish version as reported by Justin.The Jewish version, *as represented by Matthew*, however, only assumes its final form, when the news of the accomplishment of the resurrection prompts the Chief Priests, now assisted by the Elders, to modify their view by including the guards and pretending that they had slept on duty, and then broadcasting the finished product as a false but plausible rationalising explanation of a supernatural event, which, according to Matthew, had actually taken place.

The day after the execution and burial the Chief Priests and Pharisees approach Pilate. They are respectful ("Sir", Κύριε, they begin)[81] and reasoned, but also pressing. To them Jesus is an itinerant deceiver (πλάνος);[82] and they have just remembered that he had predicted he would rise again after three days (27. 63); they evidently assume that he had already arranged for a further piece of deception after his death. The information and the interpretation come from the Pharisees, who heard Jesus; and, in some other instances, the meaning of an earlier utterance only struck them later, at which point they will have reported it to the Chief Priests; and hence the loss of half a day – all dramatically convincing.[83] They waste no further time expounding Jesus' use of scripture, and instead recast the essence of his prediction in brief and simple terms. Again, this is dramatically appropriate, but it will also serve another purpose, of Matthew's, as we shall see. They accordingly

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[81] Powell (n. 77) 218 would go further: "The term κύριε, 'lord', 'sir', used to Pilate, is highly obsequious".

[82] On πλάνος, see n. 5 above.

[83] The Pharisees had asked Jesus for a sign and had for an answer his thinly veiled prediction in 12. 39–40. Hence their inclusion in the delegation; see Luz (n. 7) 586 n. 9. For such recollections and realisations, compare John 2. 17, John 12. 16, and *Acts* 11. 16. Compare Callimachus in the famous Heraclitus-epigram (*Epigram* 2. 2, ἐμνήσθην).

urge Pilate to give orders for the tomb to be secured up till the third day. They fear that the Disciples will steal the body and tell the people Jesus really has risen from the dead; which would be a final piece of deception worse than the first (27. 64). Their appeal is also vivid, with direct speech both for Jesus' own words:

> **"Μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἐγείρομαι"**. (27. 63)

and in a succinct statement of the Disciples' likely role:

> μήποτε ἐλθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κλέψωσιν αὐτὸν καὶ εἴπωσιν τῷ λαῷ, "᾽Ηγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν!" (27. 64)

Thus these dignitaries are shown already formulating the accusation which Justin reports as later propagated from Jerusalem; and like the Justin's Jewish emissaries we hear them say it in their own words. Indeed the way the Chief Priests and Elders quote Jesus and then put words into the Disciples' mouths, in both cases in direct speech, creates a complete rationalisation of the resurrection in a manner paralleled in Palaephatus, with the two stages in the development of the belief they anticipate will arise. The parallel is particularly apt: Palaephatus' rationalisation of the death and revival of Alcestis (Περὶ ᾽Απίστων 40 [condensed]):

> When Pelias' daughters [were tricked by Medea and] killed their father, his son Acastus pursued and caught them all, except Alcestis, who fled to Pherae and supplicated her cousin Admetus. When he refused to hand her over, Acastus besieged his city. Admetus was ambushed when making a sally at night; and, when Acastus threatened to kill him unless Alcestis surrendered herself, she complied. So people said, **"Alcestis was brave indeed; she voluntarily died for Admetus"**. However, as the myth says, that didn't happen. Hercules arrived at that point in quest of the horses of Diomedes. Admetus gave him hospitality, and bewailed Alcestis' fate. Whereupon Hercules attacked and destroyed Acastus' army, and handed her over to Admetus. So people said, **"Hercules chanced to come by, and rescued Alcestis from death"**.

Through the Chief Priests' and Pharisees' speech, with its anticipatory rationalisation of any subsequent claim of a resurrection and its characterisation of such a state of affairs as "a final deception surpassing all the others", all the miracles recorded in this Gospel are called

into question.[84] The Evangelist has raised the stakes in his defence of Jesus, which is made to stand or fall by his success in demolishing a rationalistic version of his resurection. In the course of the narrative he has already provided a genesis. Now he must convincingly recount Jesus' actual resurrection and, in parallel with it, the successful spread and persistence of such a rationalisation.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees are clearly seeking to sow the same fear of loss of face in Pilate as they feel themselves.[85] For the reader, their characterisation of Jesus as a deceiver and their talk of a first and a final deception shows them as viewing him even in death as their real adversary, capable of having left some instructions for this final stage of their conflict with him. Pilate, as the man in authority, dispenses with any formal address and is brief in his consent, with a statement, "You [may] have a guard",[86] and a command, "Go! Secure it as you know best!" (27. 65); all in asyndeton, suggesting a prompt decision and confidence in his authority.[87]

These dignitaries are evidently sincere in their disbelief in Jesus' status and powers. They view their own fears as prudent and politic.

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[84] Compare Brown (n. 8) 2, 1292: "This sarcastically implies that Jesus' whole career was false". On the importance of Jesus' miracles and other miracles, see John 14. 11: (Jesus to the Disciples) "Believe me [when I say] that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at any rate believe it on account of my deeds themselves (εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε)". Compare the reactions of the crowd in John 7. 31, where σημεῖα is the term used, and Justin, *Trypho* 11. 4. For Justin it was also the miracles performed by the Old Testament prophets that made them worthy of belief (*Trypho* 7. 3). In general, Versnel (n. 23) 191 observes that miracles and epiphanies adduced as proof of a god's greatness are among the most characteristic features of the Hellenistic and Roman periods; cf. Versnel 192 nn. 323 and 324, and 195 n. 350.

[85] For the spur of what one's adversaries would say, presented in direct speech, compare Hom. *Il.* 4. 176–182.

[86] This is how *The New English Bible* (1970) takes ἔχετε κουστωδίαν. Powell (n. 77) 50 translates, "You have custody", and comments (p. 218): "Pilate does not say, 'take some soldiers', for which ἔχετε would be inappropriate, but 'You are in charge', an impatient, offhand response". Whatever the sense of ἔχετε or the first occurrence of κουστωδία in this context (in the rest of the episode the word refers to the guards), given the Chief Priests' manner of addressing Pilate, Powell has caught the tone of Pilate's reply.

[87] Compare Festus' decisive pronouncement cutting short Paul's accusers in *Acts* 25. 12: Καίσαρα ἐπικέκλησαι· ἐπὶ Καίσαρα πορεύσῃ. The Chief Priests' and Pharisees' *démarche*, by contrast, marks the proposal it leads up to with a connective, 'therefore' (οὖν).

With dramatic appropriateness the Evangelist credits them with foreseeing only one stage of the Christian claim, namely, that Jesus awoke from the dead. They see that simple claim as dangerous enough, and do not suggest any further stage of imposture. At this point, however, there is a another possibility, to which Greek and Roman, as well Jewish, readers would be alive, and which they might have thought the chief Priests and Pharisees had in mind: that the theft, and consequent disappearance, of Jesus' body might cause him to be seen as belonging to that special category of person who disappears and, instead of being (or remaining) dead, is raised to a higher status. Greek literature provides several examples of persons disappearing and being raised to divine or heroic status. Examples include not only mythical figures such as Hercules and Oedipus, but also, within the *Spatium Historicum*,[88] Aristeas of Proconnesus, Cleomedes of Astypalaea; and, as late as the second century AD, similar claims were made for Apollonius of Tyana.[89] One of the versions of Empedocles' end belongs here. After an alfresco celebration of a great feat of healing (see § 1 above), he was the only member of the company not to be found the next morning (οὐχ ηὑρέθη μόνος), and one of them claimed to have heard a great voice in the night calling Empedocles' name[90] and seen light and lamplights. The company was shocked, and his friend Pausanias sent people to look for him, but (presumably as the search proved fruitless) Pausanias later told people not to take any further trouble, and said Empedocles had become a god (Diog. Laert. 8. 67–69 [= Heraclides Ponticus fr. 83 W and Hermippus fr. 27 W]). For Roman readers, the obvious parallel is Romulus, with his disappearance, reappearance, and ascension.[91]

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[88] In contradistinction to the *Spatium Mythicum*: see von Leyden (n. 31). On Greco-Roman apotheosis traditions in general, see Cotter (n. 65) *passim.*

[89] I owe this example to Professor Dickie.

[90] Wehrli ad Heraclides Ponticus fr. 83 W notes that the mysterious disappearance and the divine voice are also features of the myth of Oedipus, and compares Soph. *OC* 1586 ff. and 1624. On Sophocles' account, see P. E. Easterling, "The Death of Oedipus and What Happens Next", in: D. L. Cairns and V. Liapis (eds.), *Dionysalexandros: Essays on Aeschylus and his Fellow Tragedians in Honour of Alexander F. Garvie* (Swansea 2006) 133–150.

[91] In Romulus' and in certain other cases, including Empedocles', Talbert (n. 65) 1628–1631 identifies a whole mythical pattern, which, in its fullest form, includes divine origin, prophecy of divine status, disappearance, divine status, and subsequent confirmatory epiphany. This pattern came to be transferred to the biography of historical figures. Talbert (*op. cit.*) 1647–1651 further draws a parallel with the treatment of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.

There are also two examples in the Old Testament.[92] One is Enoch, who was pleasing to God and vanished, and whose translation was later claimed to be attributable to his faith :

> And Enoch lived a hundred and sixty-five years, and [then] begot Methuselah. After begetting Methuselah, Enoch pleased God well for two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch amounted to three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch pleased God well, and *was not to be found, because God had translated him* (καὶ εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνὼχ τῷ θεῷ καὶ οὐχ ηὑρίσκετο, ὅτι μετέθηκεν ὁ θεός, *Genesis* 5. 21–27, Septuagint version).

> Through faith Enoch was translated so that he might not see death; *and he was not to be found, because God had translated him*. For before his translation it is testified that he had pleased God well (πίστει Ἐνὼχ μετετέθη τοῦ μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον, καὶ οὐχ ηὑρίσκετο διότι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός· πρὸ γὰρ τῆς μεταθέσεως μεμαρτύρηται εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ, *Hebrews* 11. 5).

The other is Elijah. The story of Elijah's translation is elaborate. He is carried off by a whirlwind, after being separated from Elisha by a chariot of fire, and is seen no more (*II Kings* 2. 1 and 11); and his translation is witnessed by Elisha with great grief (2. 12). A search is carried out by fifty men for three days (15–18), but they fail to find him (οὐχ εὗρον αὐτόν, with which we may compare οὐχ ηὑρίσκετο, of Enoch); and, interestingly, grief, a search, and failure to find the vanished person feature in some Greek examples.[93]

Both these Old Testament figures are relevant. Elijah is a holy man and a prophet, who, like Jesus, is said to have raised the dead (*I Kings* 17. 17–24) and performed miracles (17. 12–16, 18. 22–39); while in Jesus' time Enoch, though so briefly noticed in *Genesis*, was also a prophet, to whom moral and visionary writings and lore about angels were attributed. Elijah, however, is the more pertinent parallel. Matthew says that Jesus was taken by some to be Elijah (16. 14), though Jesus himself and his disciples identified John the Baptist with Elijah (Matthew 17. 10–13). Matthew's own Gospel also associates Elijah with Jesus, describing a vision in which the transfigured Jesus converses

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[92] On asking if there were any Old Testament analogies I received these examples from Professor Richardson.

[93] See Howie (n. 19) 294 and nn.130, 132, and 133.

with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17. 1–9). Moreover, in Jesus' own day there were traditions that took Moses' end and unknown place of burial in Deuteronomy 34. 6 as meaning that he, too, had been translated.[94]

Such were the instances of disappearance associated with assumption into a divine or heroic category that might have occurred to the Chief Priests and Pharisees within Matthew's story and to his audience. As for the notion that Jesus himself might knowingly have been turning his own likely violent death to account through his prediction to the Scribes and Pharisees and the subsequent theft of his body by his Disciples after his execution, there were versions of Empedocles' end that might be expected to occur to Greek or Greek-educated people, and Arrian reports a comparable story about the death of Alexander the Great.

In addition to being a philosopher, Empedocles was a healer; he was said to have practised magic (γοητεύειν) and to have laid claim to such powers in his poetry;[95] he claimed to be able (in whatever sense) to teach someone else how "to bring the strength of a dead man up from Hades";[96] and he claimed to have become a god.[97] In the guise in which Empedocles is represented by the combination of such fragments and such traditions, he exhibits similarities to the πλάνος the Chief Priests and Pharisees saw in Jesus,[98] and there were versions of Empedocles' end according to which, either after the alfresco celebration of a brilliant cure (see above § 1)[99] or else when, after clearing an epidemic at Selinus by diverting two other rivers into the one supplying the city, he had come upon an outdoor celebration in a manner somehow suggestive of an epiphany (ἐπιφανῆναι), and the company had risen and solemnly hailed him as a god,[100] the famous disappearance had been effected by Empedocles himself by secretly leaping to his death into the crater of

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[94] On Enoch, see P. S. Alexander, "From Son of Adam to Second God: Transformations of the Biblical Enoch", in: M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 1998), who notes (p. 93) the parallelism in the disappearances of Enoch and Elijah. On Moses, see Talbert (n. 65) 1631–1632 and Cotter (n. 65) 146–149.

[95] Diog. Laert. 8. 59 and, quoted there, 31 B 111 DK. On Empedocles and magic, see Dickie (n. 5) 32–33 and Kingsley (n. 34) 217–227.

[96] 31 B 111. 9 DK *apud* Diog. Laert. 8. 59.

[97] 31 B 112 DK *apud* Diog. Laert. 8. 62 (Heraclides Ponticus fr. 77 W).

[98] On this term, see above n. 5.

[99] Hippobotus (3rd cent. BC) *apud* Diog. Laert. 8. 69.

[100] Diodorus of Ephesus, an otherwise unknown author according to Kingsley (n. 34) 273, *apud* Diog. Laert. 8. 70. Kingsley, 273 notes the force of ἐπιφανῆναι, for which see also above § 1 and n. 50 in connection with a trick by Pythagoras.

Mount Etna in order to secure belief in his divinity.[101] As in the scenario the High Priests fear in Jesus' case, Empedocles' intention in such traditions was that a religious belief should be inspired by the absence of any body. That was also Alexander's intention according to a story quoted, without reference to Jesus, by C. H. Talbert.[102] This story embodies the concept of a man being aware of his impending death and seeking to disappear in order to secure divine status posthumously. Writing probably within the first half of the second century AD, Arrian reports with disapproval how, according to an author not named (*Anabasis of Alexander* 7. 27, tr. Robson[103]):

> Alexander, perceiving that he could not survive, went to throw himself into the Euphrates, so that he might disappear from the world (ἀφανὴς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος) and leave behind the tradition more credible to posterity that his birth was of the gods and to the gods he passed; but Roxane his wife saw that he was going out, and when she prevented him he cried aloud that she then grudged him fame as having been truly born a god.

Whether or not those Jewish dignitaries themselves were to be thought of as knowing of Empedocles' reputed powers and mysterious end or the story Arrian reports about Alexander, some members of Matthew's audience might remember one or the other, more likely the former, and find the scene of the priestly *démarche* all the more convincing.

Thus all likely members of Matthew's intended audience would be able to see the thinking of the Chief Priests and Pharisees as dramatically appropriate. In particular, Jewish readers may well have seen them as concerned to eliminate any comparison specifically with the virtuous

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[101] The trick was subsequently exposed when the volcano threw up one of his bronze slippers, according to Hippobotus; see above n. 99. That view is taken up by the Christian Gregory of Nazianzus *Sermon* 4. 59; see J. Nimmo-Smith, *A Christian's Guide to Greek Culture: the Pseudo-Nonnus Commentaries on Sermons 4, 5, 39 and 43 by Gregory of Nazianzus,* Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool 2001) 2–3. On the ancient lore from Herodotus to Lucian connected with the story of Empedocles' self-immolation, see R. A. Pack, "The 'Volatilization' of Peregrinus Proteus", *AJP* 67 (1946) 334–345, which was brought to my attention by Prof. Dickie.

[102] Talbert (n. 65) 1633.

[103] *Arrian,* with an English Translation by E. Iliff Robson I (London – New York 1929) 295–297.

Enoch or, worse still, the great prophet Elijah. Up to this point these dignitaries' thoughts and actions could be viewed as prompted by genuine incredulity and, from their point of view, prudent forethought.

Once the tomb has been sealed and secured with the guard in place, the scene switches to the daybreak of the following day and the two women's visit to the tomb. There quickly follows an earth-tremor and the awesome descent of an angel clothed in white, who rolls away the stone and then seats himself on it. Three striking short similes,[104] a figure well rooted in Ancient Near Eastern as well as in Greek literature, as in the well-known Homeric similes, heighten the effect.[105] The angel's appearance is *like a flash of lightning*. His garment is white *like snow*. The guards *become like dead men*.[106] And like dead men they remain throughout the rest of the scene. Attention is focused on the words of the angel, who shows the women the empty tomb and tells them that Jesus has risen as he had foretold; they are to go and tell the disciples that he has risen (ἠγέρθη, 28. 6; *now* spoken in truth) and that he himself has gone ahead of the disciples to Galilee, where the disciples will see him. Off they rush full of *fear and joy* (μετὰ φόβου καὶ χαρᾶς μεγάλης);[107] and they are met somewhere on their road by Jesus himself, who greets them and gives them the same instructions.

It is only after these scenes, which also draw the readers themselves into those same successive emotions of fear and joy, that attention re-

[104] For a simile conveying a miraculous event, compare Matthew 17. 22 on Jesus' transfiguration: "And he was transfigured in front of Peter, Jacob, and his own brother John, and his face shone *like the sun* (ὡς ὁ ἥλιος), and his garments became white *like light* (ὡς τὸ φῶς).

[105] On the simile, especially the short simile, in Ancient Near Eastern Literature, see M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon. West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford 1997) 217–218. With the first of Matthew's short similes compare, from the Old Testament, *Daniel* 10. 61 (of a visionary figure): 'His face was as the appearance of lightning'; and with his second simile Daniel 7. 9 (of the Ancient of Days): 'whose garment was as white as snow'.

[106] The effect on the guards is comparable with the ways in which a deity strikes one who has offended him; see the examples collected by Versnel (n. 23) 201–202. These include Paul's blinding on the road to Damascus (*Acts* 8. 9 etc.).

[107] Mark speaks of a different blend: the (three) women flee from the tomb; εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις (16. 8), with fear predominating. They speak to no one; ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ (*ibid.)*. Compare the combination of pain and joy in Amphitryon's astonishment at the miracle of the infant Hercules' overcoming the snakes sent against him and his twin by Hera in Pindar's *Nemean One*: ἔστα δὲ θάμβει δυσφόρῳ τερπνῷ τε μιχθείς, 'he halted in blended astonishment, hard to bear and delightful' (55–56).

turns to the guards. And here the distribution of interest is significant. It is reported that certain of the guard (τινες τῆς κουστωδίας) told the priests *everything* (with the emphatic form ἅπαντα) *that had actually happened*. Remarkably, that scene is not recounted. How *would* those clerics have reacted in a real-life situation if they had been reliably told such a thing? In the Roman world the degradation of a condemned man's corpse was evidently often part of his punishment. On the other hand, the man's relatives naturally did not wish him to be further mangled after death by birds, dogs, or wild beasts. The guarding of a condemned man's corpse was therefore a very serious matter. For theft through a guard's remissness we may compare Petronius' story of the Widow of Ephesus, which assumes that such concerns were commonplace.[108] The relatives of the Christians martyred in Lyons in 177 AD were unable to effect a *theft by night*, and failed to win over the guards with pleas or bribes.[109] To judge from Petronius' story, failure to keep adequate watch on condemned men's corpses was a capital offence for the guards in Roman times.[110] The sort of reception the guards coming back from the tomb might be imagined to have had when they brought their news can be illustrated from Sophocles' *Antigone*. When a terrified guard reports the mysterious covering-over of Polynices' body, Creon, despite the Chorus's suggestion of the hand of the gods (278–279), immediately assumes that it must have been politically motivated and effected by bribery (280–296). Matthew's concern may well been that, if he had recounted that first meeting, it would have been natural to show the priests initially reacting to the guards' report with incredulity and the audience would have expected them to voice actual doubts and suspicions, which would most naturally have concerned such things as bribery and political motivation; and that, even if he had then shown the priests somehow being convinced, these same doubts might still have remained and indeed would have been all the more alive in the audience's minds once they had actually been articulated within the narrative.

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[108] Petr. 111–112. See S. Légasse, *The Trial of Jesus*, tr. J. Bowden (London 1997) 97 and n. 105.

[109] Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* 5. 1. 61: τὰ δὲ καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἐν μεγάλῳ καθειστήκει πένθει διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι τὰ σώματα κρύψαι τῇ γῇ· οὔτε γὰρ νὺξ συνεβάλλετο ἡμῖν πρὸς τοῦτο οὔτε ἀργύρια ἔπειθεν οὔτε λιτανεῖα ἐδυσώπει, παντὶ δὲ τρόπῳ παρετήρουν (*sc.* the guards), ὡς μέγα τι κερδανοῦντες εἰ μὴ τύχοιεν (*sc.* the martyrs) τάφης. See Légasse (n. 108) 97 and n. 107.

[110] Cf. Légasse (n. 108) 160.

Instead, the narrative moves forward to a subsequent meeting with the Elders, at which, nothing daunted, these dignitaries are shown planning the successful spread of a suitable story, by *bribing* the guards to say they had been *remiss*, in the sense of having fallen asleep, so that the disciples had been able to steal the body. Thus factors that would naturally come to mind in an immediate sceptical reaction to news of the miracle are at last invoked, but in the service of an attack on the sort of sceptical and rationalistic approach reported by Justin as propagated by emissaries from Jerusalem. At this point the priests are acting as if they actually believe the guards' report.[111] And indeed for Matthew's purpose they *have* to be presented as believing it. Otherwise their rationalising lie of a simple theft of the body would only gain in plausibility in the eyes of Matthew's readers. The story which the guards are clearly intended to tell people generally – hence the possibility that it may come to the Governor's ears – has to be presented as a lie devised in full awareness of the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

The role of the guards is unlikely to have been an original part of any pre-existing anti-Christian version. Permission had been granted for a proper burial (57–60; cf. Mark 42–47, Luke 50–53, John 38–42), so that the conditions in which guards were normally employed, namely, when the body was to be left as rotting carrion, do not apply. The posting of a guard would presuppose a fear that something remarkable might happen or appear to happen; and, if in those circumstances the executed man's body went missing, people (of those days) might just be as likely to believe that a resurrection had taken place as that guards on such a special watch had all fallen asleep. The particular quality of the Jewish version consists in the way it leaves an audience to fill in the details (see above § 1 *ad fin.*), and, when opposed to the accounts in the other three canonical Gospels, it is effective, as Justin's response shows. Matthew's inclusion of the guards enables him to emasculate the Jewish rationalising version by giving it vivid expression but casting it in the role of a premature speculation which, after the true event, provided the basis for a false version successfully circulated by Jesus' adversaries.

Thus Matthew presents the resurrection and the genesis of the Jewish version in a dramatic combination, with attention to character and emotion, and with figurative language pointing up the miracle. The rhetorical technique of accounting for and eliminating the undesirable version is irradiated by the emotion of the narrative in a manner analogous

[111] As is seen by Lüdemann (n. 2) 51: "So they knew of this". We may compare their reaction to the news of the raising of Lazarus in Mark (11. 45–53).

to Longinus' recommendations on rhetorical figures, according to which a figure should not be noticed as such and that that aim is best achieved through emotion and sublimity (*On the Sublime* 17). And within that setting the successive initiatives of the chief priests and Pharisees are convincing. Indeed Matthew's art lies at least as much in making the genesis of the Jewish version convincing as in giving conviction to the resurrection story itself. Even the detail that only *some* members of the guard went back to the priests and were instructed and paid leaves open the possibility that there were other independent eyewitnesses to the events outside the tomb in addition to the two women and that those other guards' own experience also came to be known. At the same time, these dignitaries are shown coming to a final stage in an obstinate rejection of Jesus' status and teachings. That they should seek to prevent an anticipated imposture is understandable. When they hear the truth from their own agents and seek to suppress it through a lie, they become culpable. And the more plausible that lie (or that rationalistic hypothesis), the more blameworthy they are made to be.

Conclusion

If, as some scholars are prepared to believe, there may already have been a version of the resurrection story which had a guard at Jesus' tomb,[112] it is likely that it was part of a Christian version and emphasised how Jesus' resurrection was not to be prevented by any obstacle. When Matthew uses the guard in his attack on the Jewish version as a means of creating liars and motivation for them, it might be supposed that that would be a less suspect ploy if the guard were already known from another version in circulation and not merely invented for that purpose.

A less speculative answer can be ventured on Justin's apparent failure to refute the Jewish version.[113] He chooses instead to present its invention and propagation as one stage in a continuing failure of the part of Jews to accept Jesus in spite of such clear signs,[114] including the fall of Jerusalem, for which, indeed, he is the first to make their rejection or killing of Jesus responsible.[115] That interpretation is already implicit in the Gospels, and it is later reiterated explicitly by

[112] See above § 1 and n. 18.
[113] See above § 1 and n. 11.
[114] *Dialogue with Trypho* 108.
[115] *Dialogue with Trypho* 108. 3; see Setzer (n. 1) 133.

Origen,[116] who shows Celsus as familiar with it as a common Christian contention.[117]

If, however, the "naturalistic" Jewish version is "the obvious solution", as Setzer understandably puts it,[118] why does Celsus not press it into service?[119] Origen knows that Celsus was familiar with Matthew's Gospel.[120] And here there may lurk a clue. Matthew's way of enveloping that simple and effective shaft of scepticism in a layer of ingenious and attractive narrative, may have had the effect of making the Jewish version harder for Celsus to use, since readers might have expected him to refute Matthew, whose Gospel appears to have achieved early popularity,[121] as a precondition of using the Jewish version. And that might indicate just how well Matthew's Palaephatean and dramatic skills have served his purpose as Evangelist.

J. G. Howie
University of Edinburgh

Рассказ Матфея о воскресении Христа и событиях, непосредственно следующих за этим, рассматривается в статье на фоне бытовавших в то время рационалистических интерпретаций мифов, которые могли склонить разные слои потенциальной аудитории евангелиста в пользу широко распространенной среди иудеев версии о похищении тела Христа (§ 1). Высказывается предположение о том, что Матфею были хорошо знакомы приемы подобной рационализации и он не только сумел изобразить рационалистическую версию о воскресении как намеренную клевету современников (§ 2), но и проявил еще большую виртуозность, представив дело так, что первоначальная версия иудеев была изобретена ими еще до воскресения, чтобы предотвратить эффект предполагаемого чуда (§ 3). Чтобы создать ощущение правдоподобности настоящего чуда, евангелист, кроме вызывающего благоговейный трепет стиля изложения, вводит в сюжет интригу и наделяет персонажей характерами и речевыми особенностями, подходящими для каждого из участников действия.

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[116] *Against Celsus*, e. g., 1. 47, 2. 13. 4. 32.
[117] *Against Celsus* 4. 22.
[118] Setzer (n. 1) 41.
[119] See above § 1 and n. 64.
[120] *Against Celsus* 1. 34.
[121] For the early popularity of John and Matthew, as evidenced by surviving papyri, see Stanton (n. 1) 203 and L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts. Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, Mich.– Cambridge 2006) 20–21 and 29–30. Compare Stanton, 204: "This is very much in keeping with the evidence we have of early quotations from, and allusions to, the gospels".