

# **A Commentary on the Shorter Text of the *Acts of Thecla* and its New Testament Parallels**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study of the shorter Greek text of the *Acts of Thecla* edited by Constantine Tischendorf in 1851. In 1891 R. A. Lipsius re-edited the Tischendorf text and dramatically changed the principles on which the text was chosen. This led him to support the longer text of the *Acts of Thecla*. The longer text of the *Acts of Thecla* was available to Tischendorf, though he decided against it. This thesis argues in detail that R. A. Lipsius has not followed the accepted scholarly methods for choosing a more original text and he has not demonstrated that he has convincing reasons for the choice of the longer text. Dennis MacDonald and others have posited an early oral tradition of the *Acts of Thecla*, without recommending the Tischendorf text as evidence of a written text earlier than that of Lipsius. This thesis recommends returning to the Tischendorf Greek text until a scholarly twenty first century version of the shorter text is available. As a written text, the Tischendorf edition reads earlier than the commonly accepted Lipsius text, perhaps by as much as almost one hundred years.

This thesis also offers a new translation of the *Acts of Thecla* and a commentary on the narrative exploring its theology. The theology of this text is an important witness to the early Christian faith; in particular it is an important witness to the theological understanding of salvation and pastoral care of women. The thesis argues that the return to the Tischendorf text presents the *Acts of Thecla* in a form theologically compatible with New Testament narrative and theology. Although the thesis does not argue for, or defend, the historicity of Thecla's story, it also does not argue against the possibility of an historical basis and oral tradition of St. Thecla. It leaves open historical possibilities compatible with the New Testament tradition of the missionary journeys of St. Paul. The thesis is a contribution to the recent scholarly movement toward a greater acceptance of the importance of Thecla in early Christianity.

## STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION

I record here my thanks to Dr. Mary Sheather, of the Signadou Campus of Australian Catholic University, who has been my supervisor in this research. It is rarer and rarer these days to find someone who reads Greek and Latin as well as Dr. Sheather. Her attention to detail and her patience are exceptional. Dr. Sheather has been a faithful companion and steadying influence during my time of research on this text. During this time, my mother, my father, and my mother-in-law died and I changed the Christian denomination in which I hold Holy Orders. It was not an easy time to complete a research project that is so dependent on ancient language facility and insight.

I also wish to thank my husband, Dr. John Quilter, lecturer in Philosophy at Australian Catholic University. His knowledge of the Greek language and the ancient world has made him an invaluable dialogue partner. The practical help in everyday life tasks which he provided made the completion of the thesis possible.

I have completed this work while in full time employment with first the Uniting Church of Australia and then the Anglican Church of Australia. I wish both communions continued joy in their service of the Gospel. I am grateful for the many prayers, good wishes and encouragement of my friends and colleagues. Especially, I pray for strength for those women who follow St. Thecla in their service as leaders in the Christian Churches and those who continue to appreciate the Jewish heritage to which emerging Christianity in general, and this ancient text in particular, are indebted. I thank my women colleagues for their stalwart example as this thesis, and others like it, continue to recover women's ancient heritage and mandate in ordained ministry.

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# A Commentary on the Shorter Text of the *Acts of Thecla* and its New Testament Parallels

## I. Introduction: The Main Aims and Context

This commentary presents a study of the shorter Greek text of the *Acts of Thecla* which for many years has been neglected. The longer text edited by R.A. Lipsius<sup>1</sup> has become the standard and most scholarly discussions of the *Acts of Thecla* today are based on it.<sup>2</sup> Regrettably a number of scholars who are putting forth positions that the *Acts of Thecla* should be taken more seriously in terms of its historical or theological content have not realised that the shorter text would be a great support to their positions. The shorter text was edited by Constantine Tischendorf.

This commentary cannot proceed under the ordinary model of New Testament commentaries because it is arguing for a text while at the same time translating and commenting on the narrative. The argument that the shorter (i.e. Tischendorf text) is the primary written text is the main thesis of this study. I also argue that the Tischendorf text is appropriately situated in a New Testament time frame; from the end of the first century to the first part of the second century. I do this by comparing the shorter text of the *Acts of Thecla* to its New Testament parallels, showing that the theology is comparable and that the *Acts of Thecla* does not copy the New Testament.

In this commentary it will be argued, case by case, that the Tischendorf text is the earlier written text. Overall, it is less polished, edited by fewer scribes and contains an earlier theology. The Lipsius text is the accepted text at this time, so it is not proper simply to assume that this is a mistake and work only with the Tischendorf text. The Lipsius text will be measured against the standard criterion for an early text as well as against Lipsius' own thesis that the abridged text removes heretical material. The standard criteria for determining which reading is more original, case by case, may include the following:

1. The "lectio difficilior": Texts were routinely corrected by scribes. Later texts show these corrections. Earlier texts contain spelling,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Adelbert Lipsius, ed. *Acta Petri, Acta Pauli, Acta Petri et Pauli, Acta Pauli et Theclae, Acta Thaddaei*, in the collection *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, revision and second edition of the work by Constantine Tischendorf, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 1990 originally published by Hermann Mendelssohn, Leipzig, 1891. This edition will be referred to as "Lipsius" and in footnotes cited without the author's first initial.

<sup>2</sup> Among these see the most recent by Jeremy Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2009. Barrier consults the Heidelberg Coptic text and Lipsius Greek text.

grammar and other errors. Awkward or ambivalent syntax is improved by case changes or other morphological changes to produce clearer meaning in sentences in later editions. Earlier texts contain the unimproved sentences.

2. A more advanced theology betrays a later edition. Early texts will, for example, retain Jewish or Roman religious characteristics.
3. Assimilating the text to other notable texts, especially New Testament texts, may show the hand of a later editor.
4. Explanations and elaborations show the work of later editors or scribes.
5. The use of proper nouns to prevent any ambiguity in sentences which were relying on pronouns or the verb to indicate a character in the narrative.
6. Vocabulary can indicate a later or earlier variant.

The Tischendorf text presents a less hagiographical image of Paul than the Lipsius text. The Tischendorf text shows no literary dependence on the New Testament. Where there is agreement with the New Testament it is plausible that there is a common oral tradition but there is no written copying of any kind evident. The Tischendorf text reads as if it is as much as a hundred years earlier than the Lipsius text. The Lipsius text is commonly dated in the second half of the second century. The Tischendorf text could be as early as the end of the first or early in the second century, more or less contemporary with the writing of the canonical Acts of the Apostles. These are the matters which will be argued by the careful textual examination in this thesis. My conclusions will quantify the instances supporting this dating of the Tischendorf text.

If this earlier dating and the acceptance of the Tischendorf text or one very like the Tischendorf text become the common standard, as further scholarship addresses the matters demonstrated in this commentary, then the *Acts of Thecla* will offer a clearer independent source for several matters of theology and historicity in the Pauline corpus and in the Acts of the Apostles. We are a long way from this sort of general acceptance but this thesis will add to the other scholarly works which are considering the early layers of the material in the *Acts of Thecla*.

The *Acts of Thecla* has a less developed hagiography than the Passion of Perpetua or of Polycarp. The Tischendorf edition of the *Acts of Thecla* is less incredible than the extended *Acts of Paul* where animals talk and are indeed baptised. The most fantastic scenes in the *Acts of Thecla* can easily be explained. It rains to put out the fire; this is not remarkable. The seals do not eat her. The lions are circus animals and they act as if



they are not hungry. If Queen Tryphaena is indeed a protector of Thecla, and if all of the women of the city are supporters of Thecla, the feeding of the circus lions would hardly be a difficult matter to manage. Finally, red hot irons burn the ties binding the bulls. These do not compare with Polycarp bleeding milk. The *Acts of Thecla* is less fantastic than the Martyrdom of Polycarp, which dates approximately 150-160CE.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that there is nothing remarkable in the tale of Thecla: it is a tale of great adventure, but at the same time it contains a great number of interesting elements which inspire and instruct. It is not my purpose to separate out legend from fact. I am interested when a historical possibility arises, but I do not pretend that my thesis is to prove anything historical. I am interested in the re-dating of the written text of the *Acts of Thecla* to the first half of the second century at least. I believe this will follow naturally when the Tischendorf text (or one very like it) is restored as the earliest known edition of this document preserved in history. Ancient documents are obviously historical documents. They give us invaluable insight into the ancient world. It is probable that the *Acts of Thecla* also gives us insight into the development of Christianity, the leadership of women in that development and the story of Paul the Apostle.

No author is named for the *Acts of Thecla*. This is also the case for the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament. An implied author and a hypothetical actual author could be ventured but this thesis will not do that. In order to describe an implied author, narrative method of the examination of texts would need to be employed at a detailed level. In order to determine whether an actual author is for example a woman or a man, gender theory would have to be employed at a detailed level. This kind of work will become increasingly possible at the level of the most original text when the shorter text is accepted as the earlier written text. The work of this thesis is to examine the comparison of the Tischendorf text (and its New Testament parallels) and the Lipsius text in order to determine that this earlier written text is available to us. Some work has been done already supporting the actual author's familiarity with the district of Pisidian Antioch as contrasted with Luke's lack of knowledge of the same district in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/martyrdompolycarp.html>. Accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter Pilhofer, "Luke's Knowledge of Pisidian Antioch", and Christine M. Thomas, "The *Acts of Paul* as a Source for the Life of Paul" in *Actes du 1<sup>er</sup> Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie*, Thomas Drew-Bear, Mehmet Taşlıalan and Christine M. Thomas, eds., Université Lumière-Lyon 2, Lyon, 2002, p. 87. Thomas has, "Closer analysis of the text suggests that for some of the regions of Paul's missionary work, the *Acts of Paul* may have had access to more and better traditions than do the canonical Acts of the Apostles."

The extended *Acts of Paul* has been found in manuscripts including the *Acts of Thecla* as a kind of second episode of a total of three episodes. These manuscripts show the more developed hagiography of the Lipsius text and should be seen as part of the developing “Thecla tradition”. The Tischendorf text of the *Acts of Thecla* does not show this developed hagiographical character which allows for the hypothesis that the *Acts of Paul* is a continuous work including the *Acts of Thecla*. Both the Heidelberg Coptic and the Hamburg Greek manuscripts of the extended *Acts of Paul* include the *Acts of Thecla* (in a form longer than the Tischendorf text). We know therefore that at least by the sixth century a longer text of the *Acts of Thecla* in its more developed form was included together with the extended *Acts of Paul*. In this thesis the Tischendorf text is examined as a likely earlier phase in this development at a time when the *Acts of Thecla* was circulated as an independent document (without the additions of the extended *Acts of Paul*) and even possibly as part of what will eventually be the canonical New Testament.

The commentary in this thesis on the Tischendorf text of the *Acts of Thecla* will compare it with New Testament parallels. It will not labour with comparisons with the *Acts of Paul* which scholars have argued is a late second-century or third-century text. This will not be done even though it is a matter of great interest whether there is copying of the later more developed versions of the *Acts of Paul* into the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Peter*, or copying from any other second-century or third-century texts into the later *Acts of Paul* as we have them in Lipsius’ volume *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*.<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of these matters, the readers of this study are referred to Dennis Ronald MacDonald<sup>6</sup> and Sheila McGinn<sup>7</sup> both of whom use the Lipsius text as the base known text of the *Acts of Thecla*. If this were a commentary on the Lipsius text it would be appropriate to compare it with second-century and third-century texts but that is not the purpose of this commentary.

This thesis compares the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts arguing that the Tischendorf text is most likely earlier. It also compares the Tischendorf text to the New Testament to show that it is theologically compatible while not copying the New Testament. These are processes to support the

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<sup>5</sup>Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*. Separate works in Greek and Latin concerning Paul are listed pp. 23-44, pp. 104-105, pp. 118-119, pp. 178-223 and finally the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* referred to in this commentary as the *Acts of Thecla*, pp. 235-272.

<sup>6</sup>Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1983, pp. 50-51.

<sup>7</sup>Sheila E. McGinn, “The Acts of Thecla”, in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., Crossroads, New York, 1994, pp. 802-806.

hypothesis that there is an earlier extant written text, witnessed to by the Tischendorf text of the *Acts of Thecla*. Before the Tischendorf text there is likely also to have been an oral tradition and perhaps even earlier written versions, or partial versions which have not come to light. This is the way we understand New Testament texts to develop and there is no reason to think that the *Acts of Thecla* should be different.<sup>8</sup>

The relationship of the *Acts of Thecla* and the Pastoral Epistles has been a subject of some scholarly research. However, this commentary will concern New Testament parallels in general since my main thesis is that the Tischendorf text is earlier than the Lipsius text and that it shows better what Christine Thomas would call the “base text” (see footnote 8 below). My thesis also argues that the Tischendorf text does not copy the developing New Testament and is theologically compatible with it.

The approach of this commentary is wide-ranging; comments are theological, literary and historical. It is not post-modern, deconstructionist or semiotic. I come to the text as a Christian believer, sensitive to women’s pastoral issues, and as a New Testament scholar generally. Political and social impact may be considered in comments but no over-riding gender theory is used to colour or control those comments. I declare an interest in the equality of women in today’s churches<sup>9</sup> but I do not attempt to read that interest back into history. It is enough to let history speak for itself.<sup>10</sup> History will witness to the

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<sup>8</sup>C. Thomas, “The *Acts of Paul* as a Source for the Life of Paul” in *Actes du 1<sup>er</sup> Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie*, T. Drew-Bear, M. Taşlıalan and C. Thomas, eds., p. 86. “In antiquity, it was more usual for popular narrative texts to exist in a relatively fluid form than as fixed, unchanging texts. Scribes tended to alter or improve these texts rather than merely to transmit them exactly as found. In effect, they retold the story each time they rewrote it, adding and subtracting entire episodes. The earliest written version of the Acts of Paul may thus be the latest in a series of written editions of this text; the date of the edition in this case would not indicate the date of the base text.”

<sup>9</sup>The story of Thecla is used by some Roman Catholic women to argue for the ordination of women. See for example Francine Cardman, “Sisters of Thecla: Knowledge, Power, and Change in the Church”, in *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women’s Strategies for Reform*, Colleen M. Griffith ed., Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 2009, pp. 46-54. There are those who now think of the *Acts of Thecla* as a rehabilitated text. It was at one time thought of as apocryphal but to a certain extent that is no longer the case in certain circles. Such rehabilitation may serve a feminist agenda. See in this regard Frances Young, “Towards a hermeneutic of second-century texts” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p.106.

<sup>10</sup>This is not to say that one should be unmindful of the complexity of the discussion of history and historicity and the difficulties of hypothesising pristine origins. The need to continue in our commitment to telling the story of Christian origins, as faithfully as we can, is the work of those who examine ancient Christian texts. I agree with Schüssler Fiorenza that we cannot abandon the project of reconstructive work for a number of reasons, including: “As long as history is written by the winners, the marginalized and subjugated cannot afford not to have a written history.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “‘What She Has Done Will Be Told . . .’: Reflections on Writing Feminist History”, in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, Holly E. Hearon ed., The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2004, p.12.

diversity of relationships in any time and place between various persons, male and female, old and young, etc., and always that witness will not equal the reality of any given time and place.

This having been said, my idea of history in the Acts of the Apostles is formed within the Dibelius-Haenchen-Conzelmann school of thought.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective the Acts of the Apostles is not seen as an author's eyewitness account because the author, Luke, does not know Paul, has not been a companion of Paul and writes perhaps thirty or forty years after Paul's journeys. The Acts of the Apostles includes legends as well as theology and tradition and in this it is comparable to the *Acts of Thecla*. Indeed, the *Acts of Thecla* contains a number of legendary motifs. Further, in the *Acts of Thecla* there are similarities to several fables of Aesop and the later renditions of them in works such as *Androcles and the Lion*. Thecla also shares iconographical characteristics with a number of goddesses known at the time and location of her story. However, in terms of developed legend and hagiography the Acts of the Apostles may well be more advanced than Tischendorf's text of the *Acts of Thecla*, as will be noted in this commentary.

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<sup>11</sup>P. Pilhofer, "Luke's Knowledge of Pisidian Antioch", in *Actes du 1<sup>er</sup> Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie*, p.78.

## II. Preliminary Matters

### A. The Endings of the *Acts of Thecla*

This designation of the “shorter” and “longer” texts is not to be confused with the matter of the short and long endings of the *Acts of Thecla*. The two (or three) endings are a separate matter. It is a matter that will only be treated briefly in this thesis since the subsequent endings contain later hagiographical material which is really more a part of the “cult of Thecla” tradition<sup>12</sup> than of the original apostolic tradition of Thecla. The position of this thesis is that the apostolic tradition at its most original is known to us in the Tischendorf text and that any future edition of the *Acts of Thecla* must take this text as its foundation. The later endings do not weigh substantially in the arguments for or against the historical value of Thecla as an early apostle, nor is much of the content therein relevant to the theological intersection with the New Testament.

### B. The Shorter Text edited by Tischendorf

By “the shorter text” is meant that Greek text with fewer words, edited by C. Tischendorf<sup>13</sup>. In this thesis it will be referred to as the Tischendorf text. Although the shorter text was used by R.A. Lipsius as part of the material for his edition, it was rejected for the more elaborate and developed longer Greek text. Lipsius reviews the work of Tischendorf and, rather than agreeing with his arguments in the original prolegomena, Lipsius mounts, in what he presents as a new edition of Tischendorf, the opposite of what Tischendorf so carefully supported. At this stage Tischendorf was dead and, remarkably, no one has vindicated him to this day.

There have been other manuscripts discovered<sup>14</sup> but none that has made a definitive difference<sup>15</sup> to the fundamental matter of assessing the

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<sup>12</sup> See Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Constantine Tischendorf, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, Avenarius et Mendelssohn, Leipzig, 1851. This work hereafter in this thesis is referred to as “Tischendorf”.

<sup>14</sup> The Coptic Bodmer papyrus is of note, <http://actapauli.wordpress.com/category/acts-of-paul-scholars/>. Accessed 21 January 2014.

<sup>15</sup> <http://actapauli.wordpress.com/2011/06/11/>. Accessed 30 March 2013. Author of the quote below is unknown; however, the online editors for this site include Andrew A. Fulford, Annette Merz, Jeremy W. Barrier, and Peter W. Dunn. “Does ΜΝΤΡΜΝΖΗΤ translate προαίρεσις in Acts of Paul IX, 13?” “Now that the Bodmer Coptic of the Acts of Paul has finally appeared in print (R. Kasser and P. Luisier, *Le Muséon* 117 [2004] 281-384), we can attempt to verify the multitude of ingenious readings that the German scholar Carl Schmidt made in his 1936 edition of the Greek Hamburg Papyrus. The Bodmer MS beautifully preserves an elegant handwriting. The Hamburg Papyrus, by contrast, is fragmentary and was copied by a non-professional scribe, making it impossible to be certain how many

differences between the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts.<sup>16</sup> The reasons Tischendorf's work was left to languish could possibly be related to the way that Lipsius' thesis implies the denial of the authority of women in the early church to preside at sacraments and his relegation of the apostolic role of Thecla to a later and more fanciful hagiography. The later date implies that Thecla is not authentically a part of the original Pauline or apostolic tradition. It is certainly timely that this matter is readdressed.

Lipsius makes clear in his prolegomena that he believes that the *Acts of Thecla* was abridged at a later date and this is seen in the manuscripts. The Tischendorf text, according to Lipsius' regular pattern of choices, must be seen as reflecting this abridgment. My thesis is that Lipsius is mistaken on this matter. That there were problems with the Lipsius text was recognised, not long after the completion of his edition, by W. M. Ramsay who wrote in a footnote in his volume, *The Church in the Roman Empire*:

Lipsius, in his recent critical edition, omits this Syriac passage, which is of cardinal importance. In several cases he shows a preference for the easiest, the least characteristic, and therefore the worst reading; e.g., he here prefers ἐρχομένους to διερχομένους.<sup>17</sup>

This example in the *Acts of Thecla* verse 3 is only one example which demonstrates the general problem. Although this recognition was recorded in 1893, the vindication of the Tischendorf text remains the work of our time. This thesis and other works which choose the Tischendorf text or a translation of Tischendorf are part of that vindication.

The reinstatement of the shorter Tischendorf text offers noteworthy possibilities in its comparison to the New Testament. Certain matters which might not seem worthwhile or relevant, in a comparison of the

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letters are missing from the numerous lacunae. Today, one has to marvel at Schmidt's incredible ability to ferret out a text from faded letters and in many cases to restore the text where there are only holes in the papyrus. Yet with the advent of the Coptic text, it is necessary to review each of Schmidt's suggestions, because with the Bodmer MS, we stand before a more certain and complete text."

<sup>16</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Barrier writes an interesting volume with particular attention given to the Coptic Heidelberg Papyrus along with the early but badly damaged papyri fragments promoted by Carl Schmidt. Ross R. Kraemer has written on the conversion of Artimilla as it is recorded in the Hamburg papyrus of the *Acts of Paul*: (Paul) "having baptized Artimilla, sends her back to her husband Hieronymus". See Ross R. Kraemer, "The Conversion of Women to Ascetic Forms of Christianity" in *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1980, pp. 298-307, p. 298. Neither Barrier's volume nor Kraemer's article however, addresses the more fundamental question of the long and short texts pertinent to this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1893, p. 31.

Lipsius text to its New Testament parallels, are enlivened and surprise the diligent observer with important results when the Tischendorf text is carefully read. These New Testament parallel discussions are very informative on the matters of Christology, spirituality and the role of women in the early church.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed the *Acts of Thecla* may be one of the most crucial apocryphal texts for the study of the Pauline corpus, the Acts of the Apostles and the history of Paul's apostolic career. It may also be one of the most supportive early texts for offering an example of women in leadership in apostolic times. Certainly, a new critical edition must take account of the matters raised in this commentary.

The commentary will present the Tischendorf text. The variants that appear in the Lipsius text appear in the footnotes. When a disagreement is significant between the two texts arguments will be offered as to why the Tischendorf text is the more original. These may include: remarks concerning grammar and syntax, noting earlier and later theological development, the matter of the more difficult reading (*lectio difficilior*), vocabulary development, and historical and archaeological details. This thesis does not purport to be a complete refutation of the established text, which will presumably continue to have its place as perhaps a third-century text. It simply presents the shorter, earlier text as a legitimate study on its own terms and as a more original text of the story of Thecla.

Where significant material appears in the Lipsius text, his theory, that the Tischendorf text is based on manuscripts shortened for theological reasons to hide heresy, will be tested. Most often there is little to argue in relationship to these occurrences. Most of the longer readings are explanations and corrections which would be expected of later scribal editors. Lipsius notes gaps in the Greek text in some manuscripts. These gaps are not specified and they are not obvious in the Tischendorf text. In fact in this research no deletions for theological or other grounds have been found. Readers of this thesis will soon recognise that there is a case

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<sup>18</sup> The understanding of the role of women develops through the history of the church. A strong leadership role for women, despite many campaigns for submission of women, has always survived in Christian thought and tradition one way or another. Mary Magdalen and Martha will be known as apostles and preachers according to legend in France in the Middle Ages. This will inspire women leaders. It is to be expected that new legends arose to testify to the thought that there are Christian women who are leaders. See Mary T. Malone, *Women and Christianity, vol. II: From 1000 to the Reformation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, p. 266. Malone writes, "After the resurrection, Mary Magdalen, Martha and Lazarus preached throughout the Holy Land, this story goes, until they aroused the anger of the Jews. All three were shoved out to sea in a rudderless boat, which eventually deposited them at Marseille. Here, their apostolic lives of preaching continued, and some artistic representations would indicate that Martha and Lazarus became bishops."

to be made for my hypothesis. This thesis wants only to make that point: there is a case to be made for the shorter, i.e. the Tischendorf, text. It is arguably an earlier written text of the *Acts of Thecla* than the Lipsius text. This thesis simply examines the beauty and interesting theology and history of the Tischendorf text, which in itself is a worthy research project. The recognition of the earlier written text is an important contribution for those scholars who are interested in the origins of the story of Thecla rather than in its later usage among various religious groups including Manicheans and Marcionites.



### III. Introduction to Textual Matters

#### A. The Nineteenth-century Editions of the Acts of Thecla

Although recently there has been some significant scholarship concerning the “Thecla tradition”, the text of the *Acts of Thecla* is in a state of scholarly neglect. Two fine Greek editions exist: that of Constantin von Tischendorf published in 1851 and that of Richard Adelbert Lipsius published forty years later in 1891. There is at this time no edition in the series *Corpus Christianorum Apocryphorum* by Brepols Press. According to Brepols Press there is not likely to be a new text for the *Acts of Thecla* in the near future in that series; however, P. Dunn has now been added to those who are responsible for the preparation of the *Acts of Paul*.<sup>19</sup>

The two nineteenth-century critical editions of the Greek text do not take into account all of the extant manuscript evidence. There is a further addition to the textual material of the *Acts of Thecla* which was pieced together from fragments and published by Carl Schmidt in Leipzig under the title *Acta Pauli* in 1904.<sup>20</sup> As this Coptic material was in very bad condition (only one entire sheet of the manuscript was recovered) this is what has to be thought of as a valiant yet preliminary attempt at making a consistent narrative of the 2000 fragments.<sup>21</sup> The fragmented manuscript includes not only the *Acts of Thecla* but also the extended *Acts of Paul*. The story of Thecla is only represented on tables 6 to 28 of a total of 80 tables. C. Schmidt discussed ancient opinions on orthodoxy and canonicity in his introduction. He noticed in particular the motive attributed to the author by Tertullian, that the Acts are written out of love of Paul, and he envisioned a turbulent time at the end of the second century where the author is desperate to rely on the authority of the apostle.

Schmidt went on to say that the Lipsius text is the best: “Die beste Ausgabe ist die von Lipsius, obwohl seine Ansicht über das Verhältnis der Hss. zueinander nicht den wirklichen Tatsachen entspricht.” He

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Bauckham seemed to think that there was a critical edition in that series soon to come when he stated, “The *Acts of Paul* as a Sequel to Acts”, in *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 106 footnote 4, “There is as yet no complete critical edition of the texts, though one is to appear (ed. W. Rordorf) in the *Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum*.”

<sup>20</sup> Carl Schmidt, *Acta Pauli*, Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1904.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.indianchristianity.com/html/chap4/chapter 4e.htm>. Accessed 1 April, 2013. George Menachery, book 4 page 5, gives an overview of the state of Thecla studies. Concerning the work of C. Schmidt he writes: “A better readjustment of certain passages may yet be obtained by further patient labour.”

thought this though he did not support all of the relationship choices in the Lipsius stemma.<sup>22</sup> On the basis of this Coptic manuscript dated in the sixth century, he held the hypothesis that the *Acts of Thecla* was not an independent narrative and that it could be understood only as a part of the extended *Acts of Paul*. This commentary challenges the work of Lipsius and necessarily also disagrees with these conclusions of Schmidt who is following the Lipsius idea that the *Acts of Thecla* is from the end of the second century.

As well there are Coptic, Armenian and Syriac texts of the *Acts of Thecla*. Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare thought that the Armenian which follows the Syriac represented a first-century document.<sup>23</sup> On the whole however, the Armenian text supported by Conybeare does not support the text or ideas of R. A. Lipsius. The Syriac is still the earliest manuscript that we have and is the subject of the work by Catherine Burris.<sup>24</sup>

There is also a significant problem in that the two texts (Tischendorf and Lipsius) are published on differing premises and give weight to two different families of the manuscript tradition as it was known then. It is essential to have a description of these two differing approaches, but first it is helpful for the purposes of this commentary, which will compare the New Testament texts to the *Acts of Thecla*, to summarise in very rudimentary terms a few of the fundamental matters of New Testament textual study.

This summary is included as a helpful comparison to the problem that the *Acts of Thecla* presents. A summary of these New Testament textual matters provides for those scholars of ancient texts who are not accustomed to New Testament study an example of the complexity and relevance of manuscript discussions in matters related to New Testament study. At the same time it provides to New Testament scholars and

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<sup>22</sup> C. Schmidt, *Acta Pauli*, p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, Swan Sonnenschein with Macmillan & Co. New York, 1896, pp.57-58. "It is enough to point out that the claim of Thekla, though a woman, to baptise, far from being minimised in the older Armenian text, is in it presented more strongly and pointedly than in the Greek. It is the same with regard to the teaching of virginity. It is therefore certain that this teaching was part of the original first century document, instead of being, as Ramsay is inclined to think, a Montanist addition of the second century."

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Burris, *The Reception of the Acts of Thecla in Syriac Christianity: Translation, Collection, and Reception*, a dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010. Burris uses for a key to interpretation the manuscript context of the Acts of Thecla in two sixth-century Syriac manuscripts. One collects the *Acts of Thecla* with the Books of Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith, the other collects the *Acts of Thecla* with the story of Daniel. Note the *Acts of Thecla* is not a part of the so called *Acts of Paul* in these manuscripts, that is as a kind of second chapter together with hagiographical stories of Paul converting the talking lion and the so called third letter to the Corinthians. The *Acts of Paul* is perhaps simply another collection context.

others the sort of comparison that sheds light on those relevant matters in deciding which of the nineteenth-century editions of the *Acts of Thecla* may be more original. A discussion of these matters for the *Acts of Thecla* is not yet available but perhaps one day it will be. In the meantime this thesis re-opens certain questions concerning the textual traditions of the *Acts of Thecla*, and its theology and comparison with the New Testament. This commentary as a whole may be taken into account as a conversation on the text of the *Acts of Thecla* which hopefully will develop in the future.<sup>25</sup> This commentary only opens the discussion again in our time.

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<sup>25</sup> It is hoped that significant benefit could be gained from further study. See for instance Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, p. 98. "On the level of story, the apocryphal Acts, together with the infancy gospels and the Protevangelium of James (the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus), constitute a world of discourse complementary to and filling the many gaps left blank in the Gospels."

## B. Summary of New Testament Textual Matters: A Helpful Comparison

We are aware in New Testament scholarship that Tischendorf had a preference for the Alexandrian text especially as it is represented in Codex Sinaiticus.<sup>26</sup> The Sinaiticus text is at times written about today as a manuscript witness to the Neutral text.<sup>27</sup> Tischendorf's preference for this text can hardly be surprising given that he himself discovered this codex at the monastery of Saint Catherine in 1844. He was also a great advocate of that codex and was significantly instrumental in its coming to be held in the British Library, London. The 2005 edition of Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman's *The Text of the New Testament* states that primacy of position in the list of New Testament manuscripts is customarily given to this codex<sup>28</sup> designated as  $\aleph$ . The other major codex, which is representative of this Alexandrian tradition, is Codex Vaticanus.

The Alexandrian (and Neutral) traditions are shorter in the Acts of the Apostles but in the Gospels, in Luke chapter 24 especially, the Alexandrian text is longer. In particular,  $\mathcal{P}75$  in the Alexandrian tradition, which can be dated to the second century, contains the longer readings in the Gospels. Where at one time the shorter readings in Acts (Alexandrian) and the shorter readings in the Gospels (Western) was the standard, since the recognition of the importance of  $\mathcal{P}75$  greater credence has been given to the longer text of Luke. This gives even greater recognition to the Alexandrian text, and is seen most clearly in the changes from the third to the fourth edition of the UBS text.<sup>29</sup> As a matter of scholarly dialogue however, this will remain an area of continual review.

On the whole, the Western text is longer than the Alexandrian text.<sup>30</sup> The increased length is due mainly to an increased number of verses in the

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<sup>26</sup> Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, translated by Erroll F. Rhodes, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987, revised ed. 1989, p.26: "Tischendorf relies too frequently on Codex Sinaiticus for establishing his text; since Weiss, Nestle's third source, shares with Westcott-Hort a tendency to rely on Codex Vaticanus, a relatively close relationship between Nestle and Westcott-Hort is the result (although 55 differences is by no means a negligible amount)."

<sup>27</sup> A name given by Westcott and Hort to the Alexandrian text witnessed to by both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964, fourth ed. 2005, p.62.

<sup>29</sup> For example the longer (Alexandrian) readings in Lk 24:36 and 40 have moved from a D to a B rating. The degree of uncertainty has shifted from "the committee had great difficulty in arriving at a decision" to "almost certain." These examples show a significant shift in the way the text is understood at these points.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Head, "Acts and the Problem of its Texts" in Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, eds., *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, vol. 1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993, p. 416.

Acts of the Apostles. The Western text is represented by Codex Bezae and other manuscripts and ancient witnesses. It contrasts in a number of important ways with the Alexandrian text.

The contrast in these two New Testament traditions is similar to a matter which affects the *Acts of Thecla*. For the *Acts of Thecla*, there are two strong textual traditions which are available to us, one shorter and one longer. In New Testament study, the struggle to identify a text which is more likely to be primary is not a simple matter. No one factor, such as length or theology or language development, or earliest manuscript, can suffice to make a general choice. Always a delicate and considered decision has to be made after a thorough inquiry. In New Testament study these textual questions have not been settled by the publication, dating or analysis of  $\mathcal{P}75$ , nor have they been settled by an analysis of the contents of the longer readings, neither the Western ones in the Acts of the Apostles nor the Alexandrian longer ones in the Gospels.<sup>31</sup> The scholarly dialogue continues accordingly.

For the *Acts of Thecla*, this commentary chooses to use the shorter Tischendorf text. The longer Lipsius text appears to be a later tradition and that hypothesis will be borne out in this research. The continuing conversation on this matter will most likely compare with the continuing conversation on New Testament texts. For the *Acts of Thecla*, it is also the case that no simple solution derived from language, theology, collection context or any other factor, will at any point end the conversation. This commentary wishes to reopen the conversation which has been in abeyance for some time. The passages which are looked at carefully here will serve as examples in the argument for re-opening the discussion on the text of the *Acts of Thecla*.

For the purposes of this commentary the Tischendorf numbering is maintained. The Tischendorf numbering divides long verses or short paragraphs. This commentary has added lettered divisions to the Tischendorf numbered sections for the sake of convenience. The Tischendorf sections are referred to as verses in this commentary which is the convention elsewhere as well.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Wade Martin, "Defending the 'Western Non-Interpolation': The Case for an Anti-separationist Tendenz in the Longer Alexandrian Readings", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 124 no. 2, 2005, pp. 269-294.

### C. The Text and Manuscripts of the *Acts of Thecla*

This commentary on the *Acts of Thecla* will treat variant readings individually. Not every variant warrants substantial discussion so some variants will simply be noted. We are indebted to the very detailed apparatus in the two nineteenth-century editions: Tischendorf 1851 and Lipsius 1891.

The *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* has accepted the longer readings of the *Acts of Thecla* by using the Lipsius text. It was published forty years later than the shorter Tischendorf text and is the most recent text available. Simply because it is more recent and has found its way into online Greek tools, it has been used a lot recently in publications that cite Apocrypha. A French translation is cited by Jan N. Bremmer but his use of it would indicate that it is also the Lipsius text.<sup>32</sup> J.K. Elliott also chooses the Lipsius text as the basis of his English translation in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Lipsius has a definite preference for the text of Grabe from 1698 and Vaticanus gr. 866 against the Parisian traditions most heavily relied upon by Tischendorf, codices Parisini gr. 520, gr. 1454 and gr. 1468. Lipsius' strongest preference however, is for the codex Vaticanus gr. 797 edited by August Mau. Lipsius argues in his prolegomena that the longer readings are original and that the shorter text represents an abridgement resulting from those who wished to remove heretical material.<sup>33</sup> He finds that the August Mau texts are most complete. In the Tischendorf text the shorter reading is seen as the primary. For Tischendorf the longer readings are considered expansions, explanations, corrections and additions of various kinds. There are also some manuscripts which became available to Lipsius which were not available to Tischendorf. These, however, do not govern the choice of text for Lipsius. His idea that heretical documents were adapted to later Catholic standards is his

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<sup>32</sup> In the edition of Leon Vouaux, *Les Actes de Paul et ses Lettres Apocryphes*, Librairie Letouzey, Paris, 1913. The references used in Bremmer's work are clearly to the Lipsius and not the Tischendorf text. See Jan Nicolaas Bremmer, ed. *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1996, pp. 36-59.

<sup>33</sup> Lipsius, pp. xcvi-xcvi, Lipsius argues that in order to eliminate heretical material the *Acts of Thecla* appear to be redacted into a shorter form "in brevior formam redacta esse videntur". In saying this, Lipsius is referring to the manuscript tradition, not to the Tischendorf text per se. However, when Lipsius chooses a text, he regularly chooses against the Greek texts on which the Tischendorf text relies. This results in Lipsius producing a text that is a longer alternative to the Tischendorf text. My research in this commentary will demonstrate that this is so. Lipsius never says that he is taking Tischendorf on as an academic opponent, but he produces a text that chooses the alternatives that Tischendorf shows in his apparatus are the ones to be rejected. It is this basic result that attracted criticism from other scholars of that time. This commentary demonstrates that those criticisms are still relevant and the matter of the earlier text has not been settled.

governing argument in choosing the longer text. Surprisingly, in fact the longer text does not show signs of heresy as I shall argue, but it is more fantastic than the shorter text and it does fit better with the more fabulous extended *Acts of Paul*. The shorter Tischendorf text is better suited to the two sixth-century Syriac collection contexts explored by Catherine Burris in her work on the *Book of Women* and the Book of Daniel.<sup>34</sup>

Extensive research has been done on the extended *Acts of Paul* with the inclusion of the longer text of the *Acts of Thecla* as a kind of second chapter. This work by Willy Rordorf and his research students, Jeremy Barrier and Peter Wallace Dunn, remains of interest to those who are focused on the use of the longer text of the *Acts of Thecla* in the second half of the second century and the first half of the third century. Peter Wallace Dunn in his work, *The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century*, works with the idea that the extended Acts of Paul is reasonably thought to be written around 150 AD.<sup>35</sup> There is however, a growing interest in the origins of the *Acts of Thecla*. It is to the scholarly dialogue on the origins of the *Acts of Thecla* that this commentary on the shorter text by Tischendorf belongs. The earlier written text as witnessed to by Tischendorf's shorter text with its preference for the Parisian manuscripts is a very important and neglected element in the understanding of the development of the story of Thecla and its origins.<sup>36</sup>

Reference to the *Acts of Thecla* is found in early collections of the New Testament. It is listed in the books of Christian Scripture preserved in Codex Claromontanus, a bilingual Greek-Latin manuscript of the sixth century containing the epistles of Paul. This list is thought by Gamble to date to the fourth century.<sup>37</sup> Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman write that the Western text, preserved in Codex Bezae and Codex Claromontanus, "must have been extremely early perhaps before the middle of the second century." Metzger and Ehrman continue, "Marcion, Tatian, Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Cyprian all made use to a greater or lesser extent of a Western form of text."<sup>38</sup> (This cannot serve as an argument that the *Acts of Thecla* is represented in the Western text. In fact there is no extant manuscript of Thecla from that period, but it is

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<sup>34</sup> See footnote 24 above.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Wallace Dunn, *The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century*, a dissertation submitted in candidature for the PhD degree at the University of Cambridge, Internet Version © Peter Wallace Dunn, PhD, September, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> My research in this study will show that this is the case notwithstanding the arguments against the Parisian manuscripts given by Lipsius. His argument is that they are more fantastic, but that is not borne out in detailed scrutiny.

<sup>37</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon, Its Making and Meaning*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985, pp. 53-54.

<sup>38</sup> B. Metzger and B. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, p.178.

possible that these ancient scholars had access to the *Acts of Thecla*, for they are working in that tradition where it was included.) The *Acts of Thecla* is valued as Christian scriptures by Origen and Hippolytus.<sup>39</sup> So we know that the *Acts of Thecla* did exist as a text in the period from which we have our best copies of the New Testament. Other ancient authors, including Eusebius, are more reserved, referring to the *Acts of Thecla* as disputed Christian writings.<sup>40</sup> Tertullian notoriously discredits what has been interpreted by some<sup>41</sup> to be the *Acts of Paul*. Tertullian does this right after he claims that the Gospel of John comes from a time immediately after Paul, something that almost no New Testament scholars think today. This mention of a New Testament claim is only one example of many ideas of Tertullian which are not acceptable today.

There was a period in ancient times when the *Acts of Thecla* was considered Christian scripture. This is seen most dramatically in the Diary of Egeria in which the *Acts of Thecla* is read in the thanksgiving at the Monastery of Saint Thecla where Holy Communion is received by Egeria before she recommences her travel.<sup>42</sup>

Today a few scholars hold that the *Acts of Thecla* is more appropriately thought of as ancient heretical writing<sup>43</sup> but for most modern and contemporary scholars the *Acts of Thecla* is thought of as orthodox, although perhaps not historical or not entirely historical. For those scholars who consider the possibility of an historical basis for the *Acts of Thecla* this examination of the (shorter or) Tischendorf text will weigh in their favour and offer them renewed possibilities.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> H. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, p. 50, 51.

<sup>40</sup> H. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Stevan L. Davies, "Women, Tertullian and the Acts of Paul" in *Semeia*, vol. 38, 1986, p. 139, "Although Tertullian's reference to Thecla in De baptismo (17, 5) has long been thought to refer to the APL, careful consideration indicates that Tertullian is speaking of quite a different document, probably a lost pseudepigraphal Pauline letter. Latin manuscripts of De baptismo vary in their wording of the crucial passage." Not all manuscripts read *Acta Pauli*; another reading is *Pauli scripta*, or "writings of Paul." These could be any writings attributed to Paul.

<sup>42</sup> John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, Ariel Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 122. See also *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, George E. Gingras, translator, Newman Press, New York, 1970, p. 88. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, p. xxiii, quotes from Egeria before his formal introduction and then on page 1 notes that "Egeria offers a number of details suggesting that the cult of Thekla was very popular indeed. There were 'a tremendous number of [monastic or pilgrimage] cells for men and women' around the church, a 'great wall' around the 'very beautiful martyrion,' and a deaconess Marthana, also a pilgrim to Jerusalem, who was 'the superior of some cells of apotactites or virgins.'"

<sup>43</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 29-46.

<sup>44</sup> Anne Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*, Herder, Freiburg, 1995, p.71-76. Jensen uses the Lipsius text but gives a perspective on the polemic against women in the historical suppression of the *Acts of Thecla*.



As said above, in the Tischendorf text of the *Acts of Thecla*, preference is given to codices Parisini gr. 520, gr. 1454 and gr. 1468. Tischendorf himself following J. C. Thilo collated these. Thilo was a Greek and Coptic scholar who edited a volume of Apocrypha in 1823.<sup>45</sup> These codices are dated as follows: gr. 520 to the eleventh century, gr. 1454 to the tenth century, and gr. 1468 to the eleventh century. Tischendorf relied heavily on gr. 1468 in particular, often comparing it to a Latin manuscript held at Oxford and referred to as Digbaei num. 39. Lipsius made very little use of Digbaei num. 39 and cautioned against it in no uncertain terms. Tischendorf also used the manuscript edited by Ernestus Grabe (the Baroccianus) and the fragment by Thomas Hearne (supplement to the Baroccianus). Lipsius, taking the opposite perspective to Tischendorf with regard to Parisinus gr. 1468, claimed that it is usually the worst representation of the original tradition. Lipsius seemed to believe that the *Acts of Thecla* is a heretical invention which was later shortened to make it more acceptable. He believed that the more original text was the longer one and that there was no authentically apostolic tradition. In Lipsius' view an apostolic text is a deception. Tischendorf has no such theory influencing his edition; he sought what appeared to be the earlier text without a theory of later abridgement. There is no speculation by Tischendorf concerning heresy or contrived attempts to make the text appear authentically apostolic. Tischendorf is straightforward; texts that appear to correct and elaborate are considered later additions. This thesis argues that upon close examination, Lipsius' view is untenable. The longer text appears not to be heretical but rather it is more orthodox, has more clarity and is on the whole a more advanced text.

There are several other important manuscripts of the *Acts of Thecla* in languages other than Greek. This commentary is on the Greek text, and the practical constraints of this work will not allow consideration of the Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic or Old Slavonic manuscripts or editions or translations. Still occasional mention of these manuscripts or translations may serve to whet the appetite of those scholars with the resources to complete further study and may occasionally throw some light on the project here. In particular the attention of Barrier<sup>46</sup> to the Coptic is of interest because his work is so recent.

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<sup>45</sup> See: <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol36/nagy.pdf>. Accessed April 2013. Ilona Nagy in the article: "The Roasted Cock Crows", in the journal *Folklore*, p. 39, cites this volume by J. C. Thilo entitled *Codex apocryphorum Novi Testamenti*. Vol. 1. F. C. G. Vogel, Leipzig, 1823.

<sup>46</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. xiv. The Heidelberg Papyrus is Coptic.

There are several reasons to readdress the way that the *Acts of Thecla* is regarded by scholars. There is the turning around of the Tischendorf text to its opposite by the theory of Lipsius. There is the matter of the esteem in which Thecla was held in the apostolic and early church period. This is seen in the Martyrdom of Eugenia (a third-century Egyptian women's tradition) which directly quotes from the *Acts of Thecla*. As has already been mentioned, the Diary of Egeria is an important support to the Thecla tradition. Most important are the recent theological theories that show that there was much work, writing and plotting for the suppression of women's traditions, especially of women in leadership in early Christianity.<sup>47</sup> In light of these and other factors, it is important to look very carefully at the possible reading of the *Acts of Thecla*, giving due consideration to theories other than that of Lipsius.

One of the important outcomes of this work will be to find that the arguments put forward weigh in favour of the position that the Tischendorf version of the text offers the better and earlier written text. This insight and the arguments toward this position are based on the application of the ordinary rules of working with New Testament texts as outlined by Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman,<sup>48</sup> as well as the fact that the Lipsius text does not hold true consistently to the principles set out in its introduction. That having been said, the more developed text promoted by Lipsius of the *Acts of Thecla* in its later context in the *Acts of Paul* still offers an interesting subject for study of late second-century or perhaps third-century Christian thought.

To give the strongest presentation of this insight, the Tischendorf text will be included as a paragraph at the beginning of each section of commentary. This will include the conventions of upper and lower case lettering as used by Tischendorf, and his punctuation. To alert the reader to a variant where the Lipsius text adds something, a set of empty angle brackets will be used and a footnote will give the words of the longer Lipsius text. Other variants, in spelling for example, will be indicated by footnotes. Following the Tischendorf Greek text with these indications concerning the Lipsius Greek text, a translation is provided. The translations of the *Acts of Thecla* are all original to this thesis. The English translation will only include all that is presented in the Tischendorf Greek text.

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<sup>47</sup> For an example of the ongoing discussion see Esther Yue L. Ng, "Acts of Paul and Thecla, Women's Stories and Precedent?", *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series, vol.55, Pt. 1 April 2004, pp. 1-29. See esp. pp.13-15.

<sup>48</sup> B. Metzger and B. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 251-271.

The commentary on the Tischendorf text and the comparison to the New Testament is the second important outcome of this thesis. This commentary will use the lettering system that both Tischendorf and Lipsius use to refer to the manuscripts listed below. The disagreement about Digbaei num. 39 represents the only variation of manuscript lettering between Tischendorf and Lipsius. This thesis will use ‘d’ to indicate Digbaei num. 39 as is done in the Lipsius edition, as it is more customary to use a lower case letter to indicate a manuscript that is not Greek.

A = Codex Paris. gr. 520 edited by Tischendorf and Thilo 11<sup>th</sup> century  
 B = Codex Paris. gr. 1454 edited by Tischendorf and Thilo 10<sup>th</sup> century  
 C = Codex Paris. gr. 1468 edited by Tischendorf and Thilo 11<sup>th</sup> century  
 E = Codex Vatican. gr. 797 edited by A. Mau 11<sup>th</sup> century  
 F = Codex Vatican. gr. 866 edited by A. Mau 11<sup>th</sup> century  
 G = Codex Baroccianus 180 Bodleian Library edited by Ernestus Grabe 12<sup>th</sup> century  
 H = Codex Oxon. gr. 77 Baroccianus supplement edited by Thomas Hearne 12<sup>th</sup> century  
 I = Codex Paris. gr. 1506 supplied to Lipsius by Gotthold Gundermann 12<sup>th</sup> century  
 K = Codex Paris. gr. 769 supplied by G. Gundermann 13<sup>th</sup> century  
 L = Codex Palat. Vatican. 68 supplied to Lipsius by A. Mau 13<sup>th</sup> century  
 M = Codex Vatican. 1190 supplied by A. Mau 14<sup>th</sup> century  
 d = Codex 39 (Digbaei num. 39) Oxford, Bodleian Library donated by Kenelm Digby - Latin.

Folio, volume and page numbers for the shorter manuscripts are found in the Prolegomena of the Tischendorf and Lipsius editions of Apocrypha in which are collected the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Tischendorf, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, 1851, pp. xxi-xxvi. Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, 1891, pp. xciv-cvi.

#### IV. A Discussion of How the *Acts of Thecla* (the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts) has been Received in the Scholarly Community

Most scholars have considered the *Acts of Thecla* to be an orthodox early Christian text.<sup>50</sup> It appears in most collections of New Testament Apocrypha, most often without the extended *Acts of Paul*.<sup>51</sup> Most of those from before 1890 are effusive in recommending it. I include one example here. William Hone<sup>52</sup> in 1820 writes:

Tertullian says that this piece was forged by a Presbyter of Asia, who being convicted, ‘confessed that he did it out of respect of Paul,’ and Pope Gelasius, in his Decree against apocryphal books, inserted it among them. Notwithstanding this, a large part of the history was credited and looked upon as genuine among the primitive Christians. Cyprian,<sup>53</sup> Eusebius, Epiphanius, Austin, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Severus Sulpitius, who all lived within the fourth century, mention Thecla, or refer to her history. Basil of Seleucia wrote her acta, sufferings, and victories, in verse; and Euagrius Scholasticus, an ecclesiastical historian, about 590, relates that “after the Emperor Zeno had abdicated his empire, and Basilik had taken possession of it, he had a vision of the holy and excellent martyr Thecla, who promised him the restoration of his empire, for which, when it was brought about, he erected and dedicated a most noble and sumptuous temple to this famous martyr Thecla, at Seleucia, a city of Isauria, and bestowed upon it very noble endowments, which (says the author) are preserved even till this day.” Hist. Eccl. Lib. 3 cap.8. –Cardinal

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<sup>50</sup> See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967, p.44 and Jules Lebreton, S.J. and Jacques Zeiller, *Heresy and Orthodoxy*, Collier Books, New York, p. 114.

Chadwick, Lebreton and Zeiller describe the *Acts of Thecla* as orthodox early Christian literature.

<sup>51</sup> Some of those collections of New Testament Apocrypha include the following: William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: Edited from Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum and Other Libraries with English Translations and Notes*, Philo Press, Amsterdam, 1968 reprinted from the London, 1871 edition. (Wright refers to Tischendorf and von Gutschmid and entitles this section, “The history of Saint Paul and Thecla” p.xiii, 117-145. The four Syriac manuscripts which are a source for Wright do not contain the extended *Acts of Paul*.) L. Vouaux, *Les Actes de Paul, et ses Lettres Apocryphes*, is another significant example. These quotations from the collection of Conybeare are repeated here because of their immediate pertinence. “It is enough to point out that the claim of Thekla, though a woman, to baptise, far from being minimised in the older Armenian text, is in it presented more strongly and pointedly than in the Greek.” “It is therefore certain that this teaching was part of the original first century document, instead of being, as Ramsay is inclined to think, a Montanist addition of the second century.” “Saint Eugenia calls it ‘a divine book about God’ (Acts, ch.iii.), and, ‘the holy book’ (ibidem). Saint Eugenius, a martyr of Trebizond under Diocletian, couples Thekla in his prayers with David and Daniel. In connection with the Armenian version it is interesting to note that in the Armenian convent of Edschmiadzin, in the province of Ararat, there is built into the wall of the conventual church an old Greek bas-relief of Paul and Thekla which must belong to the fifth century at latest.” F. Conybeare, *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 49; see also pp. 57-60.

<sup>52</sup> William Hone, ed., *Apocryphal New Testament*, Ludgate Hill, London, 1820. pp. 99-110.

<sup>53</sup> It is recognised that Cyprian is third century.

Batonius, Locrinus, Archbishop Wake, and others; and also the learned Grabe, who edited the Septuagint, and revived the Acts of Paul and Thecla, consider them as having been written in the Apostolic age; as containing nothing superstitious, or disagreeing from the opinions and belief of those times; and, in short, as a genuine and authentic history.

The *Acts of Thecla* has been known since antiquity and in the Orthodox churches<sup>54</sup> has always been an important document. Indeed according to Nancy A. Carter, the *Acts of Thecla* has been considered a Biblical text in some Syrian and Armenian churches.<sup>55</sup> There are those who would say that Thecla is the most important woman in early Christianity. She is the role model for Macrina, sister and teacher of Gregory, Peter, and Basil. She is the role model of Eugenia of Alexandria. Her monastery is visited by Egeria. She is known to the authors and theologians of the first 600 years of Christianity. She is a focus of prayer and pilgrimage for large numbers of Christians. Her cult develops very strongly for hundreds of years after her death, reaching even to the fifth century where the Emperor Zeno builds a basilica in her honour during the time of Pope Felix III. Other women saints and Christian leaders take her name and are important in the history of the church. Thecla is the one woman most commonly depicted with Saint Paul in antiquity.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Thecla is known as an historical character in the works of W.M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, 1893 and in several of his other works. She is known as historical in F.C. Conybeare, *Monuments of Early Christianity*.<sup>56</sup> Her story is cited as historical by Ellen Battelle Dietrick, in Elisabeth Cady Stanton's *The Women's Bible*, 1898.<sup>57</sup> A poem written about her by Gerard Manley Hopkins in 1864-1865 sees her as a real person and saint of Iconium.<sup>58</sup> She is remembered for her historical character in T. R. Glover's *Paul of Tarsus*, 1925.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Leonie Liveris, "Time to Speak: The Voice of Feminism in the Orthodox Church", in Maryanne Confoy, Dorothy A. Lee and Joan Nowotny, eds., *Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology*, Harper Collins Australia, North Blackburn, Victoria, 1995, p.201.

<sup>55</sup> <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/corinthians/theclabackground.stm> accessed 4 April 2013, Nancy A. Carter in "The Acts of Thecla: a Pauline Tradition linked to Women" writes, "The Syrian and Armenian churches included the *Acts of Thecla* in their early biblical canons." Cf. F. Conybeare, *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> F. Conybeare, ed., *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 49ff.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9880/pg9880.html>, accessed 6 April 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Jude V. Nixon, "St. Thecla, 'Monastic Transvestitism,' and Hopkins's Proto-Feminist Utterance", in *The Hopkins Quarterly*, Vol. 39, Issue 1/2, 2012, p.43.

<sup>59</sup> Terrot Reaveley Glover, *Paul of Tarsus*, George H. Doran Company, New York, 1925.

After Lipsius' text in 1891, a new way to understand the *Acts of Thecla* slowly develops and eventually becomes dominant. In the Lipsius collection of Apocrypha, the *Acts of Thecla*, as has been noted, is seen as a late second-century invention and Lipsius believes that manuscripts used to produce the shorter text are abridged by later scribes who have removed heretical material. This dissertation is written to show that his theory is implausible. The *Acts of Thecla* was taken seriously by most early Christian writers, and several recent Thecla scholars have described this legacy in the attempt to re-claim Thecla. There are many levels at which the re-claiming is beginning to take place: in theology, in iconography, in liturgy, and in hagiography. Among the best historical and literary treatments are those of Linda Ann Honey, Anne Jensen and E. Esch-Wermeling.<sup>60</sup>

Tertullian is the only one who puts forward the negative view accepted by Lipsius. Tertullian in *De Baptismo* says that a presbyter in Asia has written a "mythos" in honour of Paul which is being used to give authority to women to baptise. New Testament scholars today do not accept the positions of Tertullian on other matters pertaining to the New Testament, such as the Gospel of John being written immediately after the letters of Paul. Other theological positions put forth by Tertullian are not accepted in today's churches.<sup>61</sup> It is remarkable that Lipsius proposes accepting Tertullian on this matter against others like Gregory of Nyssa and Origen. This is the case especially when it is clear that Tertullian has an agenda, to stop women baptising.<sup>62</sup> From the perspective of Roman Catholic theology where baptism by water, the spirit and blood are all recognised and where the laity has always been empowered to baptise in special circumstances, this idea that women should "stop baptising" seems only a matter of trying to control women church leaders. It is the sort of thing that most women saints and women church leaders suffer, and in that sense is very familiar.

Peter Wallace Dunn has correctly identified that the popularity of the Thecla story at the beginning of the third century cannot be explained by

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<sup>60</sup>Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla-Paulusschülerin wider Willen?*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster, 2008. A. Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*. Linda Ann Honey, *Thekla: Text and Context with a First Translation of the Miracles*, PhD diss, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, 2011.

<sup>61</sup>Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1980, pp. 17-22.

<sup>62</sup>In the early church there must have been various customs concerning baptising. Even in the New Testament the matter of baptising is not without diversity. Women in Jewish tradition would have performed their own prayer washings and would have assisted others, especially the young and the old. Early Christian women deacons have a role in the baptism of women. See for example Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, pp. 61-63, 88-91, and on p. 120 he notes: "Concerning the liturgical role of the deaconess, the *Didascalia* mentioned only her assistance in the administration of baptism to women."

a fabricated story at the end of the second century. Dunn's hypothesis is that the extended *Acts of Paul* must date from the middle of the second century.<sup>63</sup> Dunn appears to have been influenced by Willy Rordorf and Carl Schmidt. Carl Schmidt's theory that the *Acts of Thecla* must be part of the extended *Acts of Paul* is based not only on the fragmentary Heidelberg Coptic and Hamburg Greek papyri<sup>64</sup> but also on the theory of Lipsius that Tertullian's comment is correct. Dunn, although trying to take account of the recent positions which re-claim the *Acts of Thecla*, clearly remains influenced by Tertullian, Lipsius, Rordorf and Schmidt. In using the Lipsius text and referring to the author as "the Presbyter", which echoes Tertullian, Dunn holds his place with Rordorf and Schmidt.

The Heidelberg papyrus is a translation from Greek to Coptic and only approximates those manuscripts in Syriac in terms of its antiquity. The numerous Old Slavonic and Latin manuscripts are also important but scholars recognise that the original is written in Greek. Working with the extant Greek texts must be a priority. The Hamburg papyrus though dated early (sixth century) is in very poor condition and cannot on its own verify that the *Acts of Thecla* was always a part of the extended *Acts of Paul*. Even more it cannot verify the Lipsius hypothesis or the Tertullian claim. The view of Christine Thomas is more sensible, that the earliest manuscript does not necessarily give access to the earliest text.<sup>65</sup> Hundreds of years can mean hundreds of corrections by scribes.

More significant in the work of establishing a text is discerning when the manuscript has grown and developed and when it has been carefully copied and preserved. Many things can motivate scribes to make changes but they do not try to create mistakes or make the text less specific and harder to understand. In light of such considerations, the guidelines for choosing an early text that are published by UBS in the Greek New Testament (fourth revised edition's introduction) are our best tools to discern the earliest written text. These were first articulated by

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<sup>63</sup> P. Dunn, *The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century*, pp. 8-11. On p. 11 Dunn writes, "Thus, a date near the middle of the second century is by no means unreasonable."

<sup>64</sup> Carl Schmidt, *Acti Pauli, Aus der Heidelberger Koptischen Papyrushandschrift Nr. 1*, Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1905, reprinted 1965. See the Introduction esp. p. VIII. Gustav Wahl, Wilhelm Schubart and Carl Schmidt, *Acta Pauli, nach dem Papyrus der Hamburger Staats- und Universitäts-Bibliothek*, J. J. Augustin, Glückstadt and Hamburg, 1936.

<sup>65</sup> C. Thomas, "The *Acts of Paul* as a Source for the Life of Paul", in *Actes du I<sup>er</sup> Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie*, p. 87. "The second-century version of the Acts of Paul that has come down to us is thus probably not the first version of the story, but a reworking of earlier editions of it. One must presuppose an unbroken stream of tellings and retellings, of writings and rewritings, that dates ultimately to the first century, to a time shortly after the life of Paul." And p. 86: "The earliest written version of the Acts of Paul may thus be the latest in a series of written editions of this text; the date of the edition in this case would not indicate the date of the base text."

Constantine Tischendorf,<sup>66</sup> yet it seems that contemporary scholarship has neglected them in the acceptance of the Lipsius text of the *Acts of Thecla*. I shall argue that when they are applied the Tischendorf text stands out as the earlier or more original text.

It is time that the scholarly community re-visited the shorter Tischendorf text of the *Acts of Thecla*. Controversy concerning the Parisian and Vatican Greek texts surfaced in the nineteenth century, but has never been fully investigated. It is likely that the Parisian manuscripts witness to an early second-century or late first-century written tradition, as is argued in this thesis, and that the Vatican manuscripts witness to a later edition. Since the only interactive internet versions available are of the Lipsius text (reproduced in *TLG* and *Perseus*) this serious omission is particularly challenged by this thesis. Only after the assessment concerning these Greek manuscripts is completed is it appropriate then to assess what the relationship of the *Acts of Thecla* might be to the extended *Acts of Paul*. The position of this thesis is that the arguments of Carl Schmidt are only convincing if Lipsius can be justified in his hypothesis. From the conclusions of this thesis that would seem to be implausible.

This thesis considers specific matters of comparison with the New Testament not because it wishes to support MacDonald (though his theories are weighty and interesting) but because it wishes to bring out that the New Testament is not known by the author of the *Acts of Thecla*. The comparison is a primary factor in the argument for a likely early dating of the *Acts of Thecla* for it suggests that the work is contemporary with the later works of the New Testament. This in itself is not something that can be definitively proven but as a working hypothesis it is a key factor not only in interpretation of the *Acts of Thecla* but also, in the long run, in the understanding of the New Testament. In due course it is to be hoped that further scholarly textual consideration will be given to this important early Christian story and that the manuscripts which “read earlier” will be given more attention.

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<sup>66</sup> <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/extras/tischendorf-sinaiticus.html> accessed 6 April, 2013. This internet site reproduces Tischendorf’s explanation of how and why a Greek text of the New Testament ought to be sought, summarised by Tischendorf himself in the work: Constantine Tischendorf, *When Were Our Gospels Written? An Argument by Constantine Tischendorf. With a Narrative of the Discovery of the Sinaitic Manuscript*, American Tract Society, New York, 1866.



Dennis MacDonald argues for an older oral tradition which contains an historical layer underlying the *Acts of Thecla*. Virginia Burrus<sup>67</sup> follows MacDonald with limitations because she is interested in folk tales of the second century. P.W. Dunn criticizes MacDonald's theory while John Behr seems to be influenced by it and similar thought in his entry in the *Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*.<sup>68</sup> MacDonald's view is that the *Acts of Thecla* as it is known in the Lipsius text is more developed. He also holds that later New Testament material which restricts women is a reaction to the strong widespread early knowledge of Thecla's story.

These socio-historical theories identifying the context of the New Testament in general and of the Pastoral Epistles in particular are an important underpinning for this thesis. Dunn's critique treats the MacDonald material as if it is not a part of the wide body of literature on this topic. This socio-historical advance in understanding the role of women in the context of the first and second centuries indeed has become a special area of expertise in New Testament scholarship and is best witnessed to by the work of Schüssler Fiorenza, Schottroff, Wehn, Wainwright, V. Burrus, Richter Reimer<sup>69</sup> and others with whom Dunn does not engage. Being informed by these scholars and others like them is an important part of all New Testament study these days and especially when treating a text like the *Acts of Thecla* where women are the main characters. While it is not the main aim of this thesis to engage in socio-historical and feminist critique, it is hoped that this thesis will give opportunities for further research in the understanding of women's social history in early Christianity.<sup>70</sup> The main interest in this thesis is the recovery of the earlier written text of the *Acts of Thecla* and the argument that the *Acts of Thecla* does not copy the New Testament and therefore could be contemporary with the later parts of it.

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<sup>67</sup>Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1987. On pp. 55, 57, 89 and elsewhere Burrus finds that the story of Thecla is different from the others she examines, yet she makes no argument for the story of Thecla having first-century oral roots.

<sup>68</sup>John Behr, "Social and Historical Setting", in the *Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp.63-64.

<sup>69</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A feminist Commentary*, vols. 1 and 2, Crossroads, New York, 1994. Claudia Janssen, Ute Ochtendung, Beate Wehn, eds., *Transgressors*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2002. Elaine M. Wainwright, *Women Healing/Healing Women: The Genderization of Healing in Early Christianity*, Equinox, London, 2006. Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, SCM Press, London, 1995. Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, translated by Linda M. Maloney, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995. V. Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*.

<sup>70</sup>A. Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*, pp.73-76. Jensen's contribution on authorship in her volume is an example of interest in these important areas of research.

Thecla has always been an example of courage and Christian witness. She never has really been an example of what Bart D. Ehrman calls *Lost Christianities*,<sup>71</sup> or what the journalist Rena Pederson writes in *The Lost Apostle*.<sup>72</sup> The *Acts of Thecla* is ordinarily included in collections of New Testament Apocrypha including, for example, the 1924 Oxford edition by Montague Rhodes James and the more recent Oxford volume by J.K. Elliott, 1993. The longer text, the Lipsius text, is thought by the large majority of scholars not to be heretical. Therefore the story of Thecla has always been a part of orthodox theology and it has not been forgotten or lost.

Works in which the *Acts of Thecla* are utilised or explored include those by scholars of high repute including Howard Clark Kee, Carol A. Newsom and others.<sup>73</sup> Many of these are recent volumes that focus elsewhere than on the *Acts of Thecla* while still taking the *Acts of Thecla* seriously.

The authors who have made a more substantial contribution are those who have taken a life-long interest in Apocrypha study. Three who stand out are Gilbert Dagron, Willy Rordorf and François Bovon.<sup>74</sup> These

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<sup>71</sup> B. Ehrman calls her story an example of *Lost Christianities* in his Oxford volume of that name noted previously.

<sup>72</sup> Rena Pederson writes in *The Lost Apostle*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Dibelius and Werner Georg Kümmel, *Paul*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1953. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary*, SPCK, London, 1992. Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Leifeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to The Present*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1987. John Wijngaards, *No Women in Holy Orders?*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2002. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996. Marla J. Selvidge, *Notorious Voices*, SCM Press, London, 1996. C. Janssen, U. Ochtendung, B. Wehn, eds., *Transgressors*. Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2006. Maud Burnett McNerney, *Eloquent Virgins, From Thecla to Joan of Arc*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003. Virginia Burrus, *"Begotten not Made"*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000. V. Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*. Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal imagery in Early Christianity*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 2012. Teresa Berger, *Gender and Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> François Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, Pickwick, Allison Park, Pennsylvania, 1995, p. 174. In this volume Bovon refers to the removal of heretical material by abridgement. He calls it a "slimming program" in order to maintain the stories in the Church without encratism and docetism. François Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003. François Bovon, "Canonical and Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles", in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2003, pp. 165-194. Willy Rordorf, *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 60. Geburtstag*, University Press Freiburg, Freiburg, Switzerland, 1993. Rordorf has many articles defending his position. Of note are the one on Tertullian and those on the *Acts of Paul* and the Pastoral Epistles. See Willy Rordorf, "Tertullien et les Actes de Paul", in *Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi*, pp. 475-484 and "Nachmals: Paulusakten und Pastoralbriefe", in *Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi*, pp. 466-474. Gilbert Dagron, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle*, Société des Bollandistes, Brussels, 1978.

noted scholars are retired and emeriti or deceased and their work on Apocrypha is a weighty contribution. Unfortunately for Thecla studies, their work has not been very helpful in understanding how very important the tradition of Thecla was and is in Christianity. Rather their work has drawn a boundary around the *Acts of Thecla* isolating it to some extent from the earliest layers of the history of early Christianity. These authors have accepted the Lipsius hypothesis that the longer text of the *Acts of Thecla* is the more original and that it was later abridged in several manuscripts in order to eliminate heretical elements. A curious matter has been that the *Acts of Thecla* until only recently has always been considered orthodox even when the longer text has been the standard scholarly edition. Rordorf and others have had an interest in the knowledge of the *Acts of Thecla* in various kinds of Christianity in the third century, including Manichean and Montanist expressions. This work may be valuable even if one rejects the Lipsius argument about an early tradition of the *Acts of Thecla*, such as this thesis will do.

It is to be noted that a distinction has to be made between the *Acts of Thecla* and the “Thecla Tradition”. The “Thecla Tradition” includes the many artefacts which are evidence of the monastic and pilgrimage traditions honouring Thecla. There are also important documents which are part of the more developed and later traditions concerning Thecla. Contemporary scholars who have made a substantial contribution to the study of the “Thecla tradition” include: Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla: A Tradition of Women’s Piety in Late Antiquity* and Linda Ann Honey, *Thekla: Text and Context with a First Translation of the Miracles* and Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study*.

Those contemporary volumes which have influenced the understanding of the *Acts of Thecla* include the following:

*The Legend and the Apostle* by Dennis Ronald MacDonald, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1983

Sheila E. McGinn in *Searching the Scriptures* ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Crossroad, New York, 1994

Anne Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*, Herder, Freiburg, 1995

*The Apocryphal Acts of Paul* ed. by Jan N. Bremmer, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1996

*An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha* by Fred Lapham, T&T Clark, London, 2003

*The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* by Hans-Josef Klauck, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2008

*Thekla-Paulusschülerin wider Willen?* by Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster, 2008  
*The Acts of Paul and Thecla* by Jeremy Barrier, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2009  
*Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* by Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, T&T Clark, New York, 2009  
*The Reception of the Acts of Thecla in Syriac Christianity* by Catherine Burris, Dissertation, University North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010.

All of these volumes use the Lipsius text of the *Acts of Thecla*. It is the scholarly standard. Various approaches are used by the authors of these works listed above: narrative, historical, feminist, and linguistic. There are also numerous scholarly articles which address the *Acts of Thecla* from various points of view. Those fundamental for this thesis include: Dennis Ronald MacDonald, “The Acts of Paul and the Acts of Peter: Which Came First?” and “The Acts of Paul and The Acts of John: Which came First?”, both in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*,<sup>75</sup> and also Stevan L. Davies, “Women, Tertullian and the Acts of Paul”, in *Semeia*,<sup>76</sup> because these articles are part of the wider body of literature which argues against what once seemed a water-tight position that the *Acts of Thecla* belonged to the late second century. This thesis adds to that body of literature which argues against the *Acts of Thecla* belonging to the late second century. When one returns to the Tischendorf text the views of early nineteenth-century writers like Hone become again plausible. Therefore it is necessary to also consider where the story of Thecla fits in the stories of Paul’s “life”, as they are reconstructed by reading his letters, the accounts given by Luke and the disputed Pauline letters. This is helpful even though the understanding in this thesis is that the Acts of the Apostles, like the disputed letters, is not a primary source for Paul’s history.

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<sup>75</sup>Dennis Ronald MacDonald, “The Acts of Paul and the Acts of Peter: Which Came First?”, in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, vol. 31, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1992, pp. 214-224 and “The Acts of Paul and The Acts of John: Which came First?”, in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, vol. 32, Scholars Press, Atlanta, pp. 506-510.

<sup>76</sup>S. Davies, “Women, Tertullian and the Acts of Paul”, pp. 139-149.

## V. Some Considerations Concerning the Voyages of Saint Paul

In this thesis it is important to consider a possible place in the missionary voyages of Paul where the *Acts of Thecla* could fit in. Since the Tischendorf text could be used to argue for an early date of the *Acts of Thecla* and since it is more tempting then to consider an historical basis for the *Acts of Thecla*, finding it a place in the reconstruction of the Pauline missionary journeys is appropriate. Even within a strongly narrative approach to the Acts of the Apostles, the position of the narrative or legend of Thecla<sup>77</sup> within the narrative of Paul as we know it in the New Testament is a matter of interest.

Previously in the work of Sheila E. McGinn attention has been given to the position of the *Acts of Thecla* among the other apocryphal works which refer to Paul. This is appropriate since she uses the Lipsius text, and is situating the *Acts of Thecla* in a late second-century context.<sup>78</sup> In this thesis by using the Tischendorf text it is argued that the relevant body of literature in which to situate the *Acts of Thecla* is the New Testament.

The major events narrated about Thecla refer to her youth. In terms of literature and development of the Christian tradition it is likely that the *Acts of Thecla* is written after Thecla's success as an apostle and after her old age and death. The *Acts of Thecla* then might have been written at about the same time as the Acts of the Apostles, toward the end of the first or beginning of the second century. The historical Thecla would have been an associate of Saint Paul.

In considering the story of Paul's journeys it is a matter not of thinking of when the Acts are written but of considering when the events that are described may have taken place relative to Paul's life, and the events that may have taken place in his canonical story. It is not possible to come to a definitive answer to the question as to where in the voyages of Paul to situate the events of the *Acts of Thecla*. A working hypothesis is however a help to the further exploration of the narrative and/or history of the *Acts of Thecla*. The same working hypothesis may at some future time also become a significant help to understanding Paul's narrative and history.

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<sup>77</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon*, pp. 17-26. MacDonald uses legend as his main approach to the *Acts of Thecla*. It is more likely that there is a mixture of history and legend in the *Acts of Thecla*. This may also be the case for the canonical Acts of the Apostles, especially in stories like that of Eutychus, Acts 20:9-10, the Pythian oracle Acts 16:16f., and the healing properties of handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched Paul's skin, Acts 19:11.

<sup>78</sup> S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, pp. 800-802.

After a brief discussion here, the activities of Paul and Thecla are hypothetically assigned for the purposes of this commentary to the third and least documented journey of Paul. This journey is dated to the years 52-56 CE in the Griffith-Jones volume, *The Gospel According to Paul*.<sup>79</sup>

Several points will be made at this point concerning attitudes to the reconstructions of Paul's career. These are also underpinnings for new possibilities presented by this commentary on the *Acts of Thecla*.

The first verse of the *Acts of Thecla* brings up a number of considerations concerning location and dating of the work. These need to be taken together with the information that we have in verses two and four. In verse two we know that Onesiphorus has not met Paul at this stage and is depending on a description from Titus. And in verse four as well as in verse one itself we know that Paul is accompanied by Demas and Hermogenes.

In verse one, the phrase: "After the flight from Antioch", sparks the imagination. We wonder if this flight is a reference to leaving the so-called Council of Jerusalem or to leaving on account of another matter. If we think first of the Pauline correspondence then we would consider that Paul leaves Syrian Antioch in haste after his disagreement with Peter, those who came from James, and Barnabas as recorded in Gal 2:11-14. We could imagine this passage in the Pauline letters as a reference point for the flight in this first verse of the *Acts of Thecla*.

The disagreement is, however, not specified in the *Acts of Thecla*. There is a flight in the *Acts of Thecla* but we are not told from what Paul is fleeing<sup>80</sup> and although Galatians 2 is perhaps the best known of all Paul's references to conflicts, it is certainly not the only one. So although this reference in Galatians is a likely place to anchor the first verse of the *Acts of Thecla*, it has to be admitted that it is not easy to defend this even as hypothetical.

If we look at the Acts of the Apostles the matter becomes much more complex. Traditionally Pauline scholars attempt to reconstruct the journeys of Paul using both his Epistles and the Lucan Acts. This historical reconstruction usually includes when and from which cities

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<sup>79</sup> Robin Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 2004, p. xi.

<sup>80</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 69. Barrier understands that Paul is coming up to Iconium so that he might begin teaching the word of God there. This is a very loose description and does not discuss the time lapse since Titus described Paul, or any disagreements. There is no real sense of fleeing from anything or anyone as Barrier understands it. This is not surprising given that the reference is so vague.

Paul writes his letters. The fact is, we do not know if we are meant to pick up the story of Thecla at Acts 13, 16 or 18. It is not clear where we are in terms of missionary journeys of Paul as we know them from the Acts of the Apostles, and this is the case even if we use the reference in Galatians 2 as an anchor. There is more than one scholarly reconstruction of the journeys of Paul and correspondingly the suggested links between the Pauline epistles and the Acts of the Apostles are different.

As part of the considerations here, there is also the relevant matter of how we evaluate information about Paul from his letters and from the Lucan tradition in Acts. The historical reconstruction of Paul's missionary journeys and from where in his journeys he stopped to write his letters remains a lively matter for scholarly debate. Various reconstructions in recent times by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, Robin Griffith-Jones<sup>81</sup> and others have encouraged a fresh consideration. The Lucan material about Paul in the Acts of the Apostles is given different weight at certain points by various scholars. For example, concerning whether Paul was known to the churches in Judea (Gal 1:21) before he writes Galatians, Donald Harman Akenson writes:

Saul's statement is the more convincing because it is not a response to the accusation in *Acts*, but a statement made twenty to thirty years before the *Acts of the Apostles* was written. Saul puts it forward as an autobiographical fact that fits in a letter to a local congregation. Fine: so in this instance, we accept Saul's words over those of the author-editor of *Acts*.<sup>82</sup>

Accepting that Paul leaves Syrian Antioch in haste after the disagreement (Gal 2:9-14) is not much help since we do not know where we are to continue Paul's story in the Acts of the Apostles. It is rather less help than might be expected in today's world of Pauline scholarship where most scholars combine the Lukan and Pauline sources to some extent. To complicate the matter further we might consider 2 Timothy 3:11. Verse one of the *Acts of Thecla* may refer not to Gal 2:9-14 but rather to 2 Timothy 3:11. There is no way to know if the suffering in Antioch according to 2 Timothy<sup>83</sup> is the same type of disagreement recorded in Gal 2 or another kind of suffering. Perhaps it is the suffering in the *Acts*

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<sup>81</sup> R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*. Griffith-Jones is using Murphy-O'Connor's work.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Harman Akenson, *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> As in a selection of other New Testament studies, Paul's second letter to Timothy is considered to be authentically Pauline. See for example the arguments in Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1995, p.130. "According to 1 Timothy 1:3, Timothy was also bishop of Ephesus, and he too possessed a cherished letter; in my view 2 Timothy." See also Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, Kentucky, 1996, pp. 164-166.

of *Thecla*, being imprisoned in Iconium, fleeing to Pisidian Antioch and living in a cave along the way and having the fateful encounter with Alexander. In the Acts of the Apostles, a reconstructive chronology and itinerary which gives priority to the Pauline letters is itself difficult if it is possible at all. Another matter that is relevant is which letters are Pauline. In any case, where the epistles and Acts seem to work together, the Pauline letters must be given priority.

Although one might hope otherwise, this phrase in the first verse of the *Acts of Thecla*, μετὰ τὴν φυγὴν τὴν ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας<sup>84</sup>, does not help us a great deal to situate the story of Thecla in the career of Paul. It does not even say if the Antioch here is Syrian Antioch or Pisidian Antioch. We could imagine the journey from Syrian Antioch to Iconium. It is northwest. The city was under Roman rule from the year 25 BCE.<sup>85</sup> Roads existed and travel, though not convenient, was feasible.

Verse one of the *Acts of Thecla*, if it does not pre-date the Acts of the Apostles, could refer to Paul's journey as recorded in Acts 13, 16 or 18. All three ought to be at least mentioned. Jan N. Bremmer imagines the flight to be after the incidents in Acts 14. In Acts 14:1 the visit to the synagogue in Iconium is recorded.<sup>86</sup> Paul has arrived in Iconium from Pisidian Antioch where resistance developed to him and Barnabas (Acts 13:50-52). Just following, in Acts 14: 3 one reads that they stayed on there for a considerable time. Some were convinced and others were not. Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, takes flight from Iconium (verse 6) not to it and further flees from Lystra to Derbe (verse 20). Could Thecla have been one of those who accepted the message as Paul delivered it in Iconium? The mention in Acts 14 of some being convinced and others not sounds like the story of Thecla. Certainly in her story some are convinced and others are not. The argument against anchoring the Acts of Thecla in Acts 14 includes the consideration that it will not allow time for Titus to make the acquaintance of Onesiphorus. Also Paul is met not on the road from Pisidia but on the road to Lystra. The idea that the

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<sup>84</sup> After the flight from Antioch.

<sup>85</sup> See Pliny, NH 5. 42.147, and Dio Cassius, *History*, 53. 26. 3, which reads: τοῦ δ' Ἀμύντου τελευτήσαντος οὐ τοῖς παισὶν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐπέτρεψεν, ἀλλ' ἐς τὴν ὑπήκοον ἐσήγαγε, καὶ οὕτω καὶ ἡ Γαλατία μετὰ τῆς Λυκαονίας Ῥωμαίων ἄρχοντα ἔσχε. "On the death of Amyntas he (this is Caesar Augustus) did not entrust his kingdom to the sons of the deceased, but made it part of the subject territory. Thus Galatia together with Lycaonia obtained a Roman governor." *Dio's Roman History* with English translation by Earnest Cary, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1925, p. 261.

<sup>86</sup> As J. Bremmer, "Magic, martyrdom and women's liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 37 would have it. Bremmer imagines the flight to be after the incidents in Acts 14. This has Paul accompanied by Barnabas and taking flight from Iconium (verse 6) not to it and further flight from Lystra to Derbe (verse 20).



description in Acts 14 is apt is countered by the admission that surely wherever Paul goes some will be convinced and others will not.

In previous expositions of the *Acts of Thecla*, some expositors assumed that Paul must have been travelling from Pisidian Antioch to Syrian Antioch because only in Syrian Antioch was there a large enough city to have an arena like the one in which Thecla baptises herself. So from Antioch to Antioch (since no mention has been made of going back or retracing the journey) for a number of previous scholars meant Pisidia to Syria. Today however, we know from recent archaeological findings in Pisidian Antioch that there was indeed not only an arena but one with the sort of entrance that makes sense of the actions of Tryphaena when she faints. There was also a hippodrome. There is everything needed to support the actions of the story if it is moving from Syria to Pisidia. This is relatively new information and makes our choice of hypothetical travel to Pisidian Antioch more plausible. This hypothesis agrees with that of Dennis R. MacDonald who has the party travelling in the same direction toward Pisidian Antioch. MacDonald's hypothesis and this one are based on different reasons but they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>87</sup> This only helps support this hypothesis. Still, left with the hard choice of which Pauline missionary journey this is, consideration of the other two possible places in Acts is helpful.

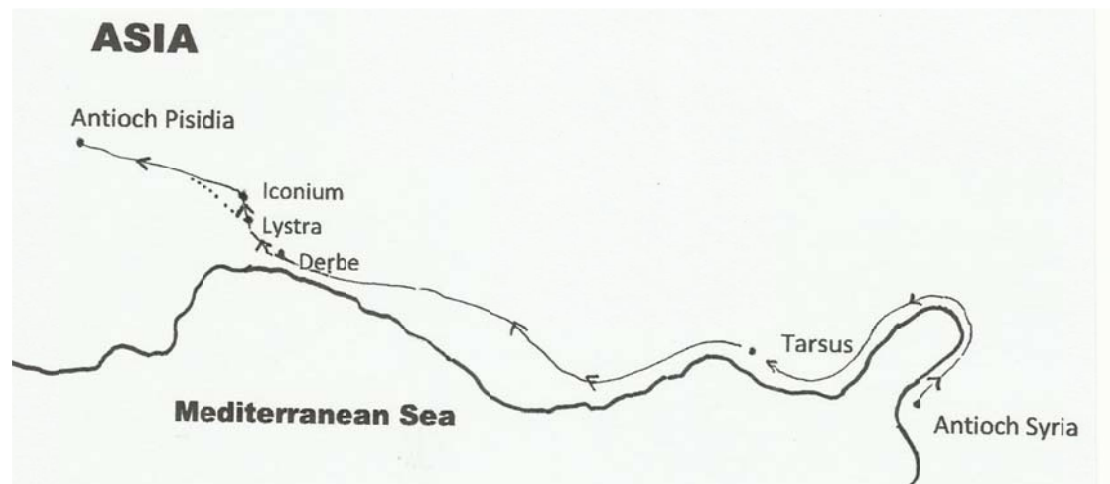
In Acts 16 the second journey of Paul is recorded. Paul has a disagreement with Barnabas concerning John Mark at Acts 15:37-40 just before the second journey. Paul comes to Derbe and Lystra at Acts 16:1 and at verse 4 he travels through the cities. Perhaps one of the cities he travels through is Iconium. He would be coming from Lystra which is the correct direction if this is the journey of the *Acts of Thecla*. Paul is travelling with Silas (Acts 15:40), and Timothy joins him (Acts 16:1). In the *Acts of Thecla* he is travelling with Demas and Hermogenes. In verses 4 and 5 of Acts 16 there is no mention of any difficulties. In fact in verse 6 they are forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. These differences suggest considering the option of the third journey being the most likely, especially if the Council of Jerusalem is dated 51CE, as it is by Murphy-O'Connor and Griffith-Jones.

The thing that weighs most against the theory of the third journey is that there is no description of Paul travelling overland through Lystra and Iconium in Acts 18. Many scholars have traditionally reconstructed the third journey with a major portion of it by sea or further north than

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<sup>87</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, p. 19. "Together they go to Antioch of Pisidia, where another frustrated would-be lover condemns Thecla before the governor."

Iconium and then not overland through Lycaonia. Nevertheless presented here is the third journey in both map and description from Robin Griffith-Jones, which has Paul travel from Syrian Antioch to Pisidian Antioch through Iconium. This hypothesis allows the story of the *Acts of Thecla* hypothetically to take place during the third journey. Paul then refers to it in 2 Timothy which he writes later when he finally reaches Rome.<sup>88</sup>



The map above shows the third journey according to Griffith-Jones.<sup>89</sup>

It is very important to remember that Paul's experiences in Iconium as reported in 2 Timothy 3:11-13 could be about his visits on any of the three reconstructed journeys. The hypothesis of this thesis is that the *Acts of Thecla* is about the third journey. A reference to Thecla cannot be proved at this time in academic research on Paul's career. Considering the various factors, however, the third journey seems most likely. Paul mentions persecutions, which he endured, and from which the Lord rescued him, and further he draws the inference that all those who would live a godly life in Christ Jesus will experience the like. Thecla will experience such suffering, but, it has to be admitted, so will many others.

Finally, there is the reference in 2 Timothy 3:6-7 about those who enter houses where silly women are ever learning but never come to truth. This too may perhaps have something to do with those who heard Paul preach in the garden of Onesiphorus' house as it is described in the *Acts of Thecla*. Soon after Paul's preaching the young men and women will turn

<sup>88</sup> As previously stated (note 83 above), along with a select minority of scholars this thesis accepts that Paul actually did write 2 Timothy. It would therefore be written very late in Paul's life.

<sup>89</sup> This map is to show direction of travel rather than an accurate representation of the land and coast. R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, p. xi. Griffith Jones has a similar map showing this.

against him in the case brought by Thamyras before the governor in Iconium (*Acts of Thecla*, verses 19 and 20).

At Antioch Paul disputes with Peter as recorded in Galatians 2:11-14. Paul, it seems, has lost the dispute and Peter has not only won but he has won over Barnabas. The community at Antioch has not accepted the understanding of Paul<sup>90</sup> concerning the relationship of the Jesus message and the Jewish law. In leaving Antioch Paul is confirming his commitment to evangelising and pastoring the Gentile communities, which are prepared to accept relative freedom from Jewish law and practice. The meeting in the home of Onesiphorus, it can be assumed, is typical of such a gathering.<sup>91</sup> The behaviour of Thecla is also confirmation of this direction of Paul's ministry and mission.<sup>92</sup> Thecla does not attempt to convert anyone to Judaism. At the home of Tryphaena she makes no provision to be given Jewish food. She is not described as completing Jewish daily practices or teaching these to others. These details provide reasonable support for the claim that the journey of Paul in the *Acts of Thecla* is at least the second but most likely the third journey.

Tackling the chronology of Paul's journeys is another challenge. Scholars for some time have dated the disagreement called the Council of Jerusalem at 49 CE, which would put it before the second journey.

In order to set a context for the discussion here and without going into unnecessary detail, I can simply say that I find the reconstruction of Ben Witherington to be less convincing than that of Murphy-O'Connor. Murphy-O'Connor's reconstruction is accepted and used by Robin Griffith-Jones. Witherington dates the disagreement with Barnabas at 49, Murphy-O'Connor dates it at April 52 at the earliest and Griffith-Jones has:

Late Autumn 51: Paul is in Jerusalem with Titus (whom he refuses to have circumcised; Gal. 2:1-2). The Jerusalem council takes place; its leading figures are James, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul

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<sup>90</sup>J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 158. Murphy-O'Connor writes, "Paul does not inform us who prevailed in his dispute with Peter at Antioch. His silence, however, tells its own story. Had he won, he could hardly have failed to mention it in Galatians." And further he writes, "The fact that Barnabas had aligned himself with the delegation from Jerusalem left Paul completely isolated. He no longer felt at home in Antioch." Murphy-O'Connor understands that the ensuing activity of Paul is recorded beginning with chapter 13 of the Acts of the Apostles. I agree with this chronological reconstruction of the mission of Paul, which contrasts with that of Witherington. Witherington dates this episode early, at 49 CE (Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1998, p. 318).

<sup>91</sup> No mention is made of the keeping of Jewish custom at the home of Onesiphorus.

<sup>92</sup> She becomes available to share the message of Paul with others who are not portrayed as Jewish in this text and who do not show any steps taken to conform to Jewish law.

(Miss. 15:5-29). Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch-in-Syria. Winter 51-52: Paul is in Antioch. Representatives of James arrive. A fierce dispute occurs, which is lost by Paul (Gal. 2:1-10). Paul leaves Antioch, never to return.<sup>93</sup>

This leaves a difficulty: that of Paul having been to Jerusalem in Acts 15:2 but saying in Galatians 1:22 that he has not been to Judea. The reference in Galatians 2:1 is a reference to Paul going to Jerusalem again after he has already had a significant mission to the Gentiles. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor recognises that verses 15:2 and 18:22 of the Acts of the Apostles are doublets. His explanation is complex:

In the light of Seneca's statement that his brother did not finish his term of office, it is impossible to place Gallio's encounter with Paul (Acts 18:12-17) in the latter part of the proconsular year AD 51-52. The encounter must have taken place between July, when Gallio arrived in Corinth, and September AD 51, the last date when he could have sailed to Rome.

This conclusion finds positive confirmation in Galatians 2:1, which places Paul in Jerusalem in AD 51. Luke gives the impression that Paul left Corinth for Jerusalem by ship shortly after his encounter with the proconsul (Acts 18:18-22). This cannot have been later than mid-September, because of the 'closed sea'. The run to the south-east was the best and fastest point of sailing for ships of the period. Paul could easily have been in Jerusalem by the autumn of AD 51, precisely as we have already deduced from Galatians 2:1.<sup>94</sup>

Griffith-Jones also has Paul travel from Syrian Antioch to Iconium on his way to Pisidian Antioch on his third missionary journey. This seems to be the best choice. On the third journey Paul travels from Jerusalem to Syria and from there overland through Lycaonia. The one thing that weighs most against this theory is that there is no description of Paul travelling overland through Lystra and Iconium in Acts 18. Many scholars have traditionally reconstructed the third journey with a major portion of it by sea and if overland to new communities north of

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<sup>93</sup> R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, 2004, p. x. Griffith-Jones uses the unusual abbreviation "Miss." to refer to the Acts of the Apostles throughout this volume.

<sup>94</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, pp. 21-22. See also pp. 7, "Earlier pedantic speculation as to whether or not these fourteen years included the three years of Galatians 1:18 has now given way to the commonsense recognition that the 'then. . . then. . . then' of Galatians 1:18, 21 and 2:1 mark the successive steps of a chronological series." Further p.8 has, "Paul's concern in Galatians 1 and 2 is to prove his independence of Jerusalem. Syria and Cilicia are mentioned only to prove that he left the Holy City, and fourteen years is manifestly the time he stayed away. This view is confirmed, not only by the 'again' prefixed to 'to Jerusalem', but by the mention of the churches of Judaea in Galatians 1:22, which is the proximate point of reference influencing Paul's formulation."

Lycaonia. Nevertheless in the view of Murphy-O'Connor and Robin Griffith-Jones the third journey is through Iconium on the way west.

The resulting hypothesis for this study is that the story of the *Acts of Thecla* takes place during this third journey. Paul on this hypothesis refers to his sufferings recorded in the *Acts of Thecla* in 2 Timothy which he writes later when he finally reaches Rome.<sup>95</sup> This thesis agrees with Murphy-O'Connor that 2 Timothy is authentically Pauline and written late in Paul's career from Rome. However, whether 2 Timothy is authentically Pauline or not, it may still refer to the events of the *Acts of Thecla* and this is still important to the relationship between the *Acts of Thecla* and the New Testament. This is a working hypothesis, and in the end is as good as if not better than any other in the absence of more documentary information. In one sense the lack of information given us by Luke is a real opportunity to fill out with the *Acts of Thecla* what otherwise is a journey with a noticeable lack of description. With this hypothesis in place it is possible to link up the *Acts of Thecla* with the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters to provide a possible basis for events in the third journey of Saint Paul.

The above having been said, I must reiterate that I believe that a healthy scepticism is best concerning any theory attempting to match the accounts of the Acts of the Apostles to the Pauline Epistles. Luke's purpose and his literary craft come across not as what we would ordinarily call "history". Paul's Epistles are disputed among scholars in terms of the authorship of whole letters and parts of letters. Conflations of letters may also affect any reconstruction of time lines and travel. While my work recognises the fact that any ancient document or story gives insight into history, I do not adhere, as some may, to the idea that reconstructions can give us historicity. Scholars do us a service who qualify their historical speculations and understandings in terms of the lack of evidence and the inadequacy of extant material. Attempts to understand what might have been are, nevertheless, not without merit for they help us read ancient texts meaningfully. In this commentary, the issues related to the social, cultural and geographical features encountered in the text are not meant to imply that the text is to be regarded as providing historicity. They are included in the commentary in order to illustrate the thesis that the Tischendorf text is primary and in order to show that the story gives some credible insight into the era and place where the story is set and/or where it may have been written down.

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<sup>95</sup>Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2005, pp. 432-433. Holladay has the second letter to Timothy written as a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. On page 425 Holladay says that 2 Timothy is treated as "Paul's farewell letter".

## Verse One

Πράξεις Παύλου καὶ Θέκλης

**1a** Ἀναβαίνοντος Παύλου εἰς Ἰκόνιον μετὰ τὴν φυγὴν τὴν ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας

**1b** ἐγενήθησαν συνοδεύοντες<sup>96</sup> αὐτῷ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης, < ><sup>97</sup> ὑποκρίσεως γέμοντες,

**1c** καὶ ἐξελιπάρουν τὸν Παῦλον ὡς ἀγαπῶντες αὐτόν.

**1d** ὁ δὲ Παῦλος ἀποβλέπων εἰς μόνην τὴν ἀγαθοσύνην τοῦ Χριστοῦ οὐδὲν φαῦλον ἐποίει αὐτούς<sup>98</sup>,

**1e** ἀλλ' ἔστεργεν αὐτοὺς σφόδρα,

**1f** ὥστε < ><sup>99</sup> τὰ λόγια κυρίου ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ<sup>100</sup> τῆς τε < ><sup>101</sup> γεννήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ ἡγαπημένου ἐγλύκαιεν αὐτούς,

**1g** καὶ τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πῶς ἀνεκαλύφθη<sup>102</sup> αὐτῷ, κατὰ ῥῆμα διηγείτο αὐτοῖς.

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<sup>96</sup> The Lipsius text reads: ἐγενήθησαν σύνοδοι αὐτῷ. The convention for this commentary is to include the Lipsius text in the footnote since the Tischendorf text is preferred and included in the body of the commentary.

<sup>97</sup> Here ὁ χαλκεὺς is found in the Lipsius text. Empty angle brackets indicate an additional word or words in the Lipsius text.

<sup>98</sup> Here the Lipsius text reads: αὐτοῖς. Lipsius has a preference for dative constructions which are grammatically more correct in almost all cases.

<sup>99</sup> The Lipsius text adds here the word πάντα.

<sup>100</sup> Instead of ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ the Lipsius text has καὶ τῆς διδασκαλίας.

<sup>101</sup> Instead of just τῆς τε γεννήσεως the Lipsius text has the very developed καὶ τῆς ἐρμηνείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς γεννήσεως which sounds like a later addition from a time when interpretation of the good news showed quite some variety. Lipsius himself uses square brackets to imply doubt.

<sup>102</sup> The Lipsius text has ἀπεκαλύφθη.

## Translation

### *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

- 1a** As Paul went up to Iconium after the flight from Antioch,
- 1b** Demas and Hermogenes, who were full of hypocrisy, came to be journeying with him
- 1c** and they were continually fawning<sup>103</sup> upon Paul as if they loved him.
- 1d** But Paul took notice only of the virtue of Christ and did them no harm.
- 1e** Rather he loved them very much,
- 1f** so that he persuaded them<sup>104</sup> with regard to the Lord's instruction in the teaching of both the birth and the resurrection of the beloved,
- 1g** and he explained<sup>105</sup> word for word<sup>106</sup> to them the great deeds of Christ as revealed to him.

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<sup>103</sup> Definition of the verb *λιπαρέω* from Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, revised by Henry Stuart Jones with Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, ninth edition, 1977 (henceforward referred to as *LSJ*), p. 1052 cum genitivo personae as in *S El.* 1378 (Sophocles *Electra* 1378, fawning upon). I have added the adverb continually in order to give the sense of the prefix.

<sup>104</sup> This is a matter of Paul's offering to them the goodness of the gospel, so that its sweetness might edify them. Rather than correcting or reprimanding them he is attempting to make opportunity for their improvement of character by teaching them about Jesus.

<sup>105</sup> I have translated literally but a more flowing English translation of this finite verb as a participle would result in "also explaining to them".

<sup>106</sup> See *κατὰ ῥῆμα* *LSJ*, p. 1569, "word for word" as in Aeschines, 2.122.

## Commentary and Notes

1a Ἀναβαίνοντος Παύλου εἰς Ἰκόνιον μετὰ τὴν φυγὴν τὴν ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας,

1a As Paul went up to Iconium after the flight from Antioch,

The Paul of this text is the Saint Paul of the New Testament tradition formerly known by his Hebrew name: Saul of Tarsus. He is mentioned by his Hebrew name in Acts 8:1, 9:1, 3, 11, 17, 22, 24. In Acts 13:9, he is referred to as Σαῦλος δέ, ὁ καὶ Παῦλος, “Saul, he is also known as Paul”. He is already known as Paul in his epistles; see 1 Cor 1:1, Rom 1:1 and so on.

Iconium literally means “small image”. It was where Konya<sup>107</sup> is today in Turkey, south on the Anatolian plateau. Paul visited Iconium probably on his first, second and third missionary journeys.<sup>108</sup> Thecla who is not yet introduced in this text, which is her story<sup>109</sup>, will come to be known in later texts and in iconography as Saint Thecla of Iconium.<sup>110</sup>

Paul’s travels were renowned and extensive. *The Acts of Thecla* open with a genitive absolute. Paul “went up”, that is he travelled north and inland from Syrian Antioch to Iconium, a city in Lycaonia. “Went up” indicates Paul’s journey inland from the coast. Ἀναβαίνω has the meaning “travel inland” as if the sea and coast are down, and travelling into the interior is travelling up. This is understandable as one often and especially at low tide begins a climb from the beaches to the lands away from the sea. Coastal roads also often offer vistas that are above the traveller. *LSJ* has: “of land-journeys, to go up from the coast into Central Asia, Hdt.5.100, X. An. 1.1.2”.<sup>111</sup> Herodotus’ *Histories* (fifth

<sup>107</sup> The name of the modern town is obviously a derivation from Iconium.

<sup>108</sup> R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, pp.vii-xiii. Griffith-Jones describes and maps the three journeys, suggesting that Paul visits Iconium on all three journeys.

<sup>109</sup> Although it is obvious that Paul is a minor character in the narrative and Thecla is the main character, many continue to refer to the text as *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, even when they are not thinking of the longer collections of apocryphal stories which include for example Paul’s death. In this commentary the more recent convention will be used, referring to this text as *The Acts of Thecla* because this more accurately describes the content. Ross Saunders for example states: “But the inclusion of a woman, Thecla, who had such a prominent role in this narrative, would be most unlikely, especially from such a legitimate source. Paul is a minor character in this novel.” Ross Saunders, *Outrageous Women Outrageous God: Women in the First Two Generations of Christianity*, E. J. Dwyer, Sydney, 1996, p. 167.

<sup>110</sup> For example see the fifth-century silver plaque discovered in 1957 in Isauria and now in Adana, Turkey <http://www.wardco.net/exhibition/heaven-on-earth-/from-allegory-to-icon-/plaque-with-saint-thecla>. Accessed on 21 January, 2014. For later named examples see ancient and modern images at <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=images+thecla+iconium>. Accessed on 21 January, 2014.

<sup>111</sup> *LSJ*, p. 98 entry for ἀναβαίνω the third definition, second column.



century BCE) and Xenophon's *Anabasis* (fourth century BCE) give examples of the use of the word.<sup>112</sup> The Xenophon reference in the *LSJ* is to Cyrus of Persia travelling to his father Darius (in the *Anabasis*) and the other reference is to the Ionians who had beached their ships marching inland to Sardis (in the *Histories* of Herodotus). This verb gives us an important clue that the reference is to Paul setting out from Syrian Antioch, for otherwise one could not be travelling "up" from Antioch to Iconium. From Pisidian Antioch one would travel completely inland and south to Iconium. Iconium is a smaller city and not a capital city. There is no sense in which the travel could be said to be "up" if from Antioch in Pisidia. From Syrian Antioch a traveller would follow for some time along coastal roads but would eventually have to turn inland to go up to Iconium. In Carleton L. Brownson's Loeb translation of *Anabasis* the explanation is given, "The verb ἀναβαίνειν, *lit.* "to go up," was used of any journey from the sea coast to the higher lands of the interior".<sup>113</sup>

There are also New Testament examples of ἀναβαίνω used to mean the action of going up from the shore of the lake to higher ground; see for example Mt. 14:22-23.

Καὶ εὐθέως ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πέραν, ἕως οὗ ἀπολύσῃ τοὺς ὄχλους. καὶ ἀπολύσας τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος κατ' ἰδίαν προσεύξασθαι. ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης μόνος ἦν ἐκεῖ.

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up (ἀνέβη) the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was alone there.

Here Jesus both goes up since he is coming from the shore and also because the narrative designates the land form as a mountain. There are other similar New Testament references (see also Mk 3:7, 13) where Jesus goes up from the sea to the mountain heights.

<sup>112</sup> The sentences from Herodotus and Xenophon are copied from the *TLG* and included in this footnote because this is an important part of the argument for Paul in the *Acts of Thecla* to be travelling up from the coast, thus in a westerly direction. There is not widespread certainty about which direction Paul is travelling in the *Acts of Thecla*. S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 805, for example, has: "a sojourn of Paul in Antioch (but which one?)". Herodotus from the *Histories* reads: Ἀπικόμενοι δὲ τῷ στόλῳ τούτῳ Ἴωνες ἐς Ἑφεσον πλοῖα μὲν κατέλιπον ἐν Κορησσῷ τῆς Ἑφεσίης, αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀνέβαινον χειρὶ πολλῇ, ποιεύμενοι Ἑφεσίους ἡγεμόνας τῆς ὁδοῦ. Xenophon reads: ἀναβαίνει οὖν ὁ Κῦρος λαβὼν Τισσαφέρνην ὡς φίλον, καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἔχων ὀπλίτας ἀνέβη τριακοσίους, ἄρχοντα δὲ αὐτῶν Ξενίαν Παρράσιον.

<sup>113</sup> *Xenophon in seven volumes III Anabasis Books I-VII*, with an English translation by Carleton L. Brownson, Loeb, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1922, p. vii., Footnote 1.

Recently the idea that Paul is travelling to Pisidian Antioch seems to be gaining more support. See the comments of Jeremy Barrier<sup>114</sup> following MacDonald,<sup>115</sup> and then also Klauck<sup>116</sup> following MacDonald.

In the phrase μετὰ τὴν φυγὴν τὴν ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας, we have μετὰ with the accusative here giving the meaning of time following, hence the translation “after”. The flight, one would assume by this construction, is complete and Paul and his companions are settling securely at Iconium. They remained there for an extended stay. The indication that this is the case comes from the context and the preposition, μετὰ; not from the verb, which is in its absolute construction as noted above.

The genitive absolute construction gives the geographical context for these early pieces of information. The present participle provides a lively feeling to the account and a sense of the immediate. I have translated the present participle as a simple past tense but more accurately it reads: “Paul going up to Iconium”.<sup>117</sup> The time indication of this journey is that it happened after the flight from Antioch; the genitive absolute does not indicate at all what time may have elapsed since Paul left Antioch. Often genitive absolutes are translated into English as adverbial clauses. This is done in the translation in this study and also in the Elliott translation,<sup>118</sup> but in fact no time reference exists in the Greek. The sense with a present participle in the genitive absolute is that the action happened as much as possible simultaneously with the action of the main verb. The main verb here is aorist used for simple narration. The temporal sense is that it was during the time that Paul travelled to Iconium that Demas and Hermogenes joined him. There is no indication where they may have joined him. They are mentioned no doubt because of their important role in betraying Paul to the authorities. There is no information about Silas and Timothy. This commentary takes the *Acts of Thecla* material at face value just as some scholars take the Lukan material at face value. These details are perhaps not historically verifiable any more than the details of the Acts of the Apostles.

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<sup>114</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 67.

<sup>115</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, p. 41.

<sup>116</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2008, p. 57.

<sup>117</sup> English struggles to give the exact sense of the genitive absolute in Greek since this construction does not exist in English. English does use a nominative absolute construction but not commonly in narrative. Genitive absolutes in Greek most often, as here, provide information needed for the story to progress.

<sup>118</sup> James Keith Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 364. “As Paul was going to Iconium after his flight from Antioch, his fellow-travellers were Demas and Hermogenes, the copper-smith, who were full of hypocrisy and flattered Paul as if they loved him.”

The frequent use of the preposition εἰς is a characteristic of Koine Greek in the New Testament and literature of the same time.<sup>119</sup> In classical Greek it would have been used for movement towards a place, but in the New Testament it is confused with ἐν and can be used to express location rather than movement. It could mean Paul went to Iconium or toward Iconium or into the city of Iconium. There is no further indication concerning the travel here. We assume that they are walking.

The use of the name Paul rather than Saul indicates two important things. Firstly it indicates that the persons to whom the *Acts of Thecla* was sent or by whom the *Acts of Thecla* was read knew Paul as the Paul of the epistles, rather than the man from Tarsus before he became renowned as a promoter of Jesus Christ and the Jesus reform in Judaism. Secondly the name Paul indicates that the change in Paul's own commitments is not the subject of this work.<sup>120</sup> He will not be the dynamic character of this work but rather he is a significant person in the story of Thecla. She is the dynamic character and the reader is directed to her development in the narrative. The story is about her, her faith, her baptism and her ministry. Later titles attached to the work that mention Paul do not ring true to modern readers who perceive that this is Thecla's story, and Paul (no matter how important in church history) is a secondary character in this work. This is the reason that the work is referred to by many from ancient times (see the Diary of Egeria)<sup>121</sup> as *The Acts of Thecla*.<sup>122</sup> The other perhaps more ancient title, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is, in terms of the substance of the narrative, misleading if not simply a misnomer.

1b ἐγενήθησαν συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης, < >  
ὑποκρίσεως γέμοντες,

1b Demas and Hermogenes, who were full of hypocrisy, came to be journeying with him

<sup>119</sup> The language develops a preference for prepositions rather than the use of case to express relationships: "the use of prepositions like ἐν, εἰς, ἐκ has been much more widely extended." See Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1961, item 203 on p. 110. See also on the same page item 205: Εἰς instead of ἐν in a local sense.

<sup>120</sup> Paul's change of commitments is described in Gal 1:15-17 and three times in the Acts of the Apostles at Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16 and 26:12-18.

<sup>121</sup> *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, p. 87.

<sup>122</sup> See for example Beate Wehn, "'I am a Handmaid of the Living God!': the Apostle Thecla and the Consequences of Transgression" in C. Janssen, U. Ochtendung, and B. Wehn (eds) *Transgressors*, p. 20.

The name ‘Demas’ appears in the New Testament three times. It is more helpful however, first to examine the occurrence of the name ‘Hermogenes’ in 2 Tim. 1:15, since the connections to the *Acts of Thecla* are more obvious and this examination gives us a context in which we can more easily see the relevance of the occurrences of the name, Demas. In 2 Timothy Hermogenes is also associated with the home of Onesiphorus in Asia as he is in the *Acts of Thecla*. In 2 Tim 1:15 Hermogenes is said to have turned away from Paul. The Greek reads:

15 Οἶδας τοῦτο, ὅτι ἀπεστράφησάν με πάντες οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, ὧν ἐστὶν Φύγελος καὶ Ἑρμογένης. 16 δῶν ἔλεος ὁ κύριος τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ, ὅτι πολλάκις με ἀνέψυξεν καὶ τὴν ἄλυσίν μου οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη, 17 ἀλλὰ γενόμενος ἐν Ῥώμῃ σπουδαίως ἐζήτησέν με καὶ εὗρεν 18 –δῶν αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος εὐρεῖν ἔλεος παρὰ κυρίου ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ – καὶ ὅσα ἐν Ἐφέσῳ διηκόνησεν, βέλτιον σὺ γινώσκεις.

15 You know that all in Asia turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because often he gave me hospitality and he was not ashamed of my chains. 17 Rather he searched earnestly for me when he was in Rome and found me. 18 The Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day. You know well to what extent he served in Ephesus.

This description is interesting because while it recognizes the work of Onesiphorus in Rome and Ephesus it also contains a blessing for his household members. One assumes from this passage that Onesiphorus’ house is not in Rome or Ephesus and this makes it possible that his home is indeed in Iconium, a city in Asia. This implies that the blessing (1:16) is personal and refers to individuals in the household of Onesiphorus. This blessing also indicates that Onesiphorus sheltered and refreshed Paul and searched for him in his Roman imprisonment.<sup>123</sup> The second blessing (1:18) is about Onesiphorus as an individual and certainly has an eschatological overtone (mercy from the Lord in that day). This can be an element in support of the authentic Pauline authorship. The position of authentic Pauline authorship is supported in Murphy-O’Connor’s volume.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>123</sup> J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 359. “The visitor in question was Onesiphorus, who ‘often refreshed me. He was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he diligently searched and found me’ (1:16-17). These simple words carry a weight of information, of which the most important is the place of the Apostle’s imprisonment. Paul’s delight at the courage of Onesiphorus is matched by his appreciation of the tenacity displayed by his visitor in the latter’s quest for him.”

<sup>124</sup> J. Murphy-O’Connor, p. 358.

In 2 Timothy Hermogenes' companion is Phygelus not Demas. Hermogenes is of disreputable character as he is in *The Acts of Thecla*. There is no reason to think that there is any copying of this information. There is no literary dependence, no comparison of vocabulary or syntax.<sup>125</sup> This supports a case for the two works having a common historical source rather than one being dependent on the other. We have, then, two independent sources telling us about Hermogenes.

This is reason to think that there may have been a real person Hermogenes associated with the home of Onesiphorus in Asia, as both the *Acts of Thecla* and 2 Timothy witness to this independently. It is likely that there was a common oral source which both 2 Timothy and the *Acts of Thecla* knew but which they have not copied from a literary text. Such an oral source, one would assume, was based on the actions and character of an historical person Hermogenes in his association with Paul.

Both 2 Timothy and the *Acts of Thecla* express the idea that Hermogenes is of bad character, but again the two witnesses may be independent, at least there is no exact copying of words. The association of Hermogenes and Onesiphorus in the *Acts of Thecla* is that Hermogenes and Demas have travelled with Paul to Asia to the home of Onesiphorus and that they are hypocrites. In 2 Timothy Hermogenes and Phygelus are mentioned in chapter 1, verse 15 as examples of those who have turned away from Paul in Asia while the household of Onesiphorus is the counter example, receiving Paul's blessing in the following verse 16. The link between the two independent traditions seems to be Paul himself or a Pauline tradition common to both documents.

The Latin manuscript d adjusts the *Acts of Thecla* to agree with 2 Timothy by adding the name Alexander. This supposes that at some stage the two works were considered by some early Latin translator to be describing the same person.

In 2 Timothy 4:14, Alexander is described as a copper-smith<sup>126</sup> with the same word, χαλκεύς, that we find here.<sup>127</sup> Neither the Tischendorf nor

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<sup>125</sup> The theory of Bauckham that the author of the *Acts of Thecla*, though she (or he) has a copy of 2 Timothy, corrects it or improves it, is implausible given the fact that there is no sign of literary dependence. MacDonald's theory that there is a common oral tradition is more plausible. R. Bauckham, "The *Acts of Paul* as a Sequel to *Acts*", in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, p. 129. D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, p. 129.

<sup>126</sup> English translations including New American, RSV, New English and NRSV have "copper-smith", NIV has "metalworker".

<sup>127</sup> Tischendorf's apparatus criticus tells us that the word χαλκεύς is found in G but also in A. The Latin text d reads: "Alexander aerarius" that is "copper-smith". Tischendorf omits the word χαλκεύς here. This is perhaps an indulgent omission when although the word is missing from B and C it is in A

the Lipsius texts includes the correction to “Alexander” in the *Acts of Thecla*. The correction does not appear in any Greek manuscripts. The later Latin inclusion is important since it witnesses to the belief that the characters of the *Acts of Thecla* were thought, at least by this Latin translator, to be New Testament characters.

The addition of the word χαλκεύς in the Lipsius text seems to be a matter of assimilating the *Acts of Thecla* text to the New Testament. The Lipsius text may be as much as 100 years later than the Tischendorf text and may be familiar with the traditions of the letters to Timothy. There is no actual copying of words, but there seems to be in the later Latin text a significant assimilation when the copper-smith becomes Alexander. This assimilation would explain why Tischendorf here chooses manuscripts B and C and avoids the manuscripts containing the word χαλκεύς.

Onesiphorus not only is a householder but also has the facility to travel, the wherewithal to offer comfort and the cultured ways of one who invites speakers to his home.<sup>128</sup> He cannot have been of a low social class. We imagine that Paul, a well-educated rabbi, and his companions are worthy guests in the household of Onesiphorus.

The name ‘Demas’ is a more complex New Testament reference in regard to its relationship with the *Acts of Thecla*. The name is also found in 2 Timothy. There it is in keeping with the tradition of the *Acts of Thecla*, where he is designated a hypocrite. Demas is referred to in negative terms in the New Testament only in this passage in 2 Timothy 4:9-15, which reads:

9 Σπούδασον ἔλθειν πρὸς με ταχέως· 10 Δημᾶς γάρ με ἐγκατέλιπεν ἀγαπήσας τὸν νῦν αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐπορεύθη εἰς Θεσσαλονίκην, Κρήσκης εἰς Γαλατίαν, Τίτος εἰς Δαλματίαν· 11 Λουκᾶς ἔστιν ὁ μόνος μετ’ ἐμοῦ. Μᾶρκον ἀναλαβὼν ἄγε μετὰ σεαυτοῦ, ἔστιν γάρ μοι εὐχρηστος εἰς διακονίαν. 12 Τυχικὸν δὲ ἀπέστειλα εἰς Ἔφεσον. 13 τὸν φαιλόνην ὃν ἀπέλιπον ἐν Τρωάδι παρὰ Κάρπῳ ἐρχόμενος φέρε, καὶ τὰ βιβλία, μάλιστα τὰς μεμβράνας. 14 Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ χαλκεύς πολλά

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and G and d. Though we cannot be certain, it is plausible that Tischendorf sees its inclusion as a later scribal correction to create more agreement with 2 Timothy. Further, in the Lipsius apparatus we see that the word χαλκεύς appears in the Greek manuscripts AEF GHIKLM. The matter of it being omitted in B and C is serious and future discussion will be likely to continue concerning its inclusion or exclusion.

<sup>128</sup>C. Osiek, M. MacDonald with J. Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place, House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, p. 163: “The entertainment could take a number of forms, and here an invited expert could be brought in, a philosopher or wisdom figure for the edification of attendees.”

μοι κακὰ ἐνεδείξατο· ἀποδώσει αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ· 15 ὃν καὶ σὺ φυλάσσου, λίαν γὰρ ἀντέστη τοῖς ἡμετέροις λόγοις.

9 Do your best to come to me soon, 10 for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. 12 I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. 14 Alexander the copper-smith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. 15 You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message. (NRSV)

Here Demas is said to have forsaken Paul because of his love of this age. It is further interesting in this passage that there is a smith mentioned in verse 14 but his name is Alexander not Hermogenes. They are the two in the passage who are specifically pointed out as disreputable. Demas is a lover of this age and Alexander has done Paul harm. One would wonder if the Demas and Alexander traditions had become conflated,<sup>129</sup> except that it is clearly Hermogenes who is the smith in the *Acts of Thecla*. Again there is no literary dependence that is obvious between the *Acts of Thecla* and 2 Timothy. An oral tradition which conveys information to the author of the *Acts of Thecla* is much more likely than a literary conflation of this kind. The name Demas appears two more times in the New Testament and they are both in the Pauline corpus. There is no reason to think that they are not references to the same person. However, the other two references do not agree with the *Acts of Thecla* and 2 Timothy that Demas is of bad character. In Philemon 23-25 we have these last three verses of the letter:

23 Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 24 Μᾶρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου. 25 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

23 Epaphras, my fellow captive greets you in Christ Jesus 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

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<sup>129</sup> R. Bauckham, "The *Acts of Paul* as a Sequel to Acts" in *The Book of Acts in its first Century Setting*, p. 129, offers a complex theory of conflation.

Here Demas is mentioned in a list of Paul's fellow workers who together with Paul send greetings to Philemon. There is no negative comment about him at all. This raises the questions, "which of these two letters is written first and did Demas remain a supporter of Paul for some time only eventually to abandon him?" The third reference is found in Colossians 4:14-15:

14 ἀσπάζεταιται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς.  
15 Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν.

14 Luke the beloved healer and Demas greet you. 15 Greet the community members (brothers) in Laodicea and Nympha and the church in her household.

It is noteworthy that these verses refer to Demas' association with another strong woman leader in the early tradition of the followers of Jesus. Among the leadership of the early followers are both Thecla the apostle and Nympha, the householder where the church gathers. Demas is known to both women leaders.

Here Demas is associated with Luke as he is in 2 Timothy but again there is nothing negative about him recorded. In this reference there are more issues than its dating in relation to 2 Timothy, as Colossians is one of the disputed Pauline letters. For that matter 2 Timothy is also a disputed Pauline letter. Scholars in general date 2 Timothy after Colossians and Philemon (which is not disputed). If Paul in fact wrote all three letters, then the circumstances suggested by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor best explain the development of thinking concerning Demas. Murphy-O'Connor has both Colossians and Philemon written from Ephesus in the summer of 53<sup>130</sup> and he has 2 Timothy written from Rome during Paul's second period of arrest shortly before his death in 67-68. This gives plenty of time for Paul to experience both Demas and Hermogenes turning away from his purposes. It also gives time for the description to develop from companions to hypocrites to individuals actually leaving Paul.

The activities of Paul in Iconium, according to the hypothesis accepted here, take place on the third missionary journey. After fleeing Antioch in

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<sup>130</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 184. The summary chart on page 184 shows Murphy-O'Connor's conclusions. For a fuller discussion of the argument see *ibid.*, pp. 175-179. The circumstances of the writing of 2 Timothy by Paul from Rome and his death following are described on pp. 368-371. Murphy-O'Connor believes Timothy to be in the churches of Galatia or the Lycus valley during the time that the letter was sent by Paul. See p. 365.



52 Paul travels by land to Ephesus.<sup>131</sup> The letters to Philemon and Colossians would be written perhaps from Ephesus in 53. These letters still give a positive description of Demas and Hermogenes. As the *Acts of Thecla* would not yet have been written, it is not surprising that the author of the *Acts of Thecla* knows both that Demas and Hermogenes were companions to Paul and that at this point in the story of Paul, they are beginning to show their true colours. Paul has not yet found great fault with Demas and Hermogenes. He will therefore write about them in positive terms. The author of the *Acts of Thecla*, however, knows the whole story (that eventually both of these companions will turn away from Paul) from the common oral source with 2 Timothy.

Their role in the *Acts of Thecla* is consistent with this progression from faithful companions to those who have left Paul's mission. It is only after they betray Paul to Thamyris that they become hypocrites: saying that they are friends of Paul while they give Thamyris reasons for Paul's arrest. If the *Acts of Thecla* represents the same historical tradition, then it should also be considered that Paul may not have known how Thamyris got all of his information until sometime after the events in Iconium.

It is also worth considering that while Demas is associated with Luke, the healer, he is in good standing in the Pauline tradition. It is when he loses the companionship of Luke that he becomes a lover of this age. In fact one could further say that it is in the company of a certain smith (Alexander in 2 Timothy and Hermogenes in the *Acts of Thecla*) that Demas loses his understanding of the purpose of the Pauline mission in the Jesus movement. In the *Acts of Thecla* in verse 4 Demas will be the one who voices the jealousy of himself and Hermogenes. This gives him a voice in the narrative and emphasizes his importance in the tradition.

Understanding the relationship of the *Acts of Thecla* to the New Testament Pauline tradition depends a great deal on the reconstruction of the journeys of Paul and the hypothesis of when Paul wrote letters, and where they were written. It also depends upon which letters are considered to be Pauline. Ben Witherington does not hypothesise an Ephesian captivity. He has Paul writing Philemon and Colossians from Rome and he leaves open the possibility of Paul writing the Pastorals, including 2 Timothy, during a later captivity in Rome before his execution.<sup>132</sup> This would also allow some time for Demas and Hermogenes to defect from their original loyalties but it would not allow for the record of their defection to be noticed during the time that Paul

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<sup>131</sup> R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, p. xi.

<sup>132</sup> B. Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, pp. 323, 326.

was on mission in Asia. Many other scholars as summarized by Raymond Brown<sup>133</sup> do not believe that the Pastorals or Colossians are authentically Pauline. In this case they are thought to be written after the death of Paul, and one would have to surmise that those who knew Demas and Hermogenes wanted to use Paul's authority to discredit them in 2 Timothy, whereas the traditions in Colossians and Philemon know no reason to discredit them. This could also be a result of the story of Thecla circulating in some circles and causing parts of the Pauline tradition to turn against Demas and Hermogenes.

There is a textual variant in the *Acts of Thecla* in this verse describing Demas and Hermogenes. The Tischendorf text reads: ἐγενήθησαν συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ while the Lipsius text reads: ἐγενήθησαν σύνοδοι αὐτῷ. The difference is that the Tischendorf has the present participle while the Lipsius has the noun.<sup>134</sup> Elliott translates the Lipsius, "his fellow-travellers were...". Elliott's translation shows a sense of distance between Paul and Demas and Hermogenes which deals with the difficulty of translating "fellows" or "partners".<sup>135</sup> The *Acts of Thecla* clearly designates Demas and Hermogenes as hypocrites so "fellow-travellers" fits best where "partners" or "fellows" does not fit the context as well.

The participle means "travelling with" from the verb συνοδεύω. It is a form of the verb found elsewhere in the New Testament, whereas the noun is not found in the New Testament. The Tischendorf text has the participle based on the manuscript A cited by Tischendorf and also by

<sup>133</sup> Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Doubleday, New York, 1997, pp. 600, 654, 673. Brown records that "about 60 percent of critical scholarship consider Colossians to be pseudonymous." p. 600. 1 Timothy, Brown says is "probably written by a disciple of Paul or a sympathetic commentator on the Pauline heritage several decades after the apostle's death." p.654. For 2 Timothy the entry is different, "probably written by a disciple of Paul or a sympathetic commentator on the Pauline heritage (either soon after Paul's death with historical memories, or decades later with largely fictional biographical content). Yet it has a better chance of being authentically Pauline than do the other Pastorals." p. 673.

<sup>134</sup> The Tischendorf reading is taken from manuscript A. The Lipsius reading is from BEHIK. The manuscript stemma of Lipsius has B as a precursor to A; it also has EKI as one family of texts. The decision to accept the Tischendorf text rather than the Lipsius is based on the grammatical discussion presented rather than on which manuscript is thought to be primary. However, it is to be remembered that manuscript families ELIK and FHGM are often carrying readings that include explanations and corrections. The main disagreement between the manuscripts then is A and B. Given Lipsius' theory that the text was abridged, there must be caution in accepting his theory that B is a precursor to A.

<sup>135</sup> See J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 65. Barrier, using the Lipsius text in the Greek and including the text on p. 65 with the noun σύνοδοι, translates with a participle in English as if he were using the Tischendorf text, but does not discuss the difference and avoids the question entirely. It is surprising that Barrier has not taken an interest in the more fundamental matter of whether Lipsius has evaluated the Tischendorf choice fairly or not, but these days when the Lipsius Greek text is readily available in electronic copy on *TLG* and *Perseus*, for example, the matter we are addressing may remain hidden. This is all the more reason why this present thesis is significant.

Lipsius in his notes. A is an eleventh-century text held in Paris and edited by Tischendorf and Thilo. Tischendorf also tells us in his apparatus that B reads σύνοδοι αὐτῷ and both C and G read αὐτῷ συνοδοιπόροι. Συνοδοιπόροι is a Patristic term meaning fellow-travellers and it comes to mean a fellow-martyr in the *Passion of Perpetua*.<sup>136</sup>

Lipsius has included in his text the word χαλκεύς that appears in manuscripts A and others. However, here he decides against the participle included only in A. Lipsius writes that A is the most complete of the three Parisian manuscripts used by Tischendorf. Lipsius relies for his text here on F. There is no indication how Lipsius would suggest understanding the noun σύνοδοι, but we might assume a translation which shows some distance between Paul and the other two since Lipsius see this text as quite late, in which case there would be time for these two characters to gain a bad reputation as enemies. At the same time a hagiography of Paul would be developing which assumes that he does things that are heroic and saintly such as loving his enemies. Paul never uses the term σύνοδος; neither does Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. It becomes a common term in the Patristic period meaning “fellow-travellers” as here and also “a meeting of persons”.<sup>137</sup>

The Lipsius text uses terminology which we know to be later and has the simpler syntax. In contrast, if the *Acts of Thecla* does not know the Pauline corpus including the second letter to Timothy, there is no reason to think that the noun would be used to mean people who have a special role, as those who appear in Paul’s letters have. The Tischendorf text offers the possibility of understanding that these two men are only travelling with Paul and have no special role. The Tischendorf text then is more likely to be the earlier, more original choice. This is one of many examples where the Lipsius text appears upon examination to be a later text.

The phrase then is composed of the aorist passive form of γίνομαι and the present participle active of συνοδεύω and finally the dative of the personal pronoun. The verb, γίνομαι, is the Koine equivalent of γίγνομαι. The development is occasioned by euphonic selection. The dative is used because συνοδεύω means to travel with (someone) and it takes the dative.

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<sup>136</sup>Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961, eleventh impression 1994, p. 1334. Hereafter this Lexicon will be referred to as “Lampe”.

<sup>137</sup>Lampe, pp. 1334-1335.

The words: ὑποκρίσεως γέμοντες, characterise Demas and Hermogenes as deceivers. Here the genitive singular is used with the nominative masculine plural present participle of γέμω, which means “being full”. They were “full of hypocrisy” is the correct meaning. There is no possible reference to their being actors in this context; rather there are a number of New Testament references which use ὑπόκρισις in this way. Matthew 23:27 has:

27 Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί, ὅτι παρομοιάζετε τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις, οἵτινες ἔξωθεν μὲν φαίνονται ὡραῖοι ἔσωθεν δὲ γέμουσιν ὀστέων νεκρῶν καὶ πάσης ἀκαθαρσίας.

27 “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whited sepulchres, that appear beautiful outside but are full of dead bones<sup>138</sup> and all uncleanness inside.”

The description here makes it clear that the word hypocrite means a pretender. This is also the case in the *Acts of Thecla*, although the context is not quite as explicit on the fact that Demas and Hermogenes are pretenders. The meaning may be more that they are not truly committed to Paul or to the Jesus movement and their flattery is false.

1c καὶ ἐξελιπάρουν τὸν Παῦλον ὥς ἀγαπῶντες αὐτόν.

1c and they were continually fawning upon Paul as if they loved him.

The nuance of this phrase is important to the meaning not only of this paragraph but also to the rising action in the plot against Paul. The word ἐξελιπάρουν is the imperfect of ἐξελιπαρέω. Ἐξελιπαρέω means “I entreat earnestly” or “I fawn upon”.<sup>139</sup> Elliot suggests “flattered”.<sup>140</sup> Flattery is part of what the verb could mean here. It could also mean that they asked him questions which are the sort that disciples would ask of a learned rabbi, and that they asked him to continue to lead them in the ways of Jesus and his resurrection, or that they asked Paul to take them along with him on his mission. There are many possibilities; all of them would in this context be rather flattering but the verb does not necessarily mean to pay compliments to Paul for his teaching or example. The attitude is what is being noted. They are sycophantic and looking for advantage through their servile courtesy. The comparative adverb ὥς is

<sup>138</sup> Most translations have “bones of the dead” cf. NRSV.

<sup>139</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1052.

<sup>140</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 364.

used here to mean “as if” with the present participle of the verb ἀγαπάω.<sup>141</sup> This translation is in keeping with their character in the narrative. The advantage that they seek here is not specified. The meaning is general and refers to a continual false attitude and deportment.

1d ὁ δὲ Παῦλος ἀποβλέπων εἰς μόνην τὴν ἀγαθοσύνην  
τοῦ Χριστοῦ οὐδὲν φαῦλον ἐποίει αὐτούς,

1d But Paul took notice only of the virtue of Christ and did them no harm.

This phrase means “but Paul took notice only of the virtue (that is the goodness) of Christ”. The δὲ is used here as the adversative conjunction showing general contrasts. The meaning of ἀποβλέπω is to look “off” from all others and at a single one, or to look with fixed and steady attention. The masculine participle is used in reference to Paul. The noun ἀγαθοσύνη is the cognate abstract noun of the adjective ἀγαθός. Here it is spelled with an omicron rather than with an omega. This should be seen as a simple spelling error occasioned by the lengthening of short vowels in the Koine period. It is the Koine word for goodness, generosity, kindness or virtue used in the Septuagint and in the Pauline corpus. The only New Testament references are Romans 15:14, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. In none of these cases is it used in reference to Christ. Some translators understand it in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 as the goodness of God.

11 εἰς ὃ καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα ὑμᾶς  
ἀξιώσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὃ θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώσῃ πᾶσαν  
εὐδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν δυνάμει,

The King James Version translates: “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power”. An alternative translation is supplied by the New Revised Standard Version: “To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith”. The problem is simple; it is not clear in this verse whether the εὐδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης, “the good pleasure of goodness” is “yours” or God’s.

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<sup>141</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 364, translates “as if they loved him”.

In the *Epistle of Barnabas* ἀγαθωσύνη means the purpose of the goodness of God the Father in chapter 2 verse 9.

9 Αἰσθάνεσθαι οὖν ὀφείλομεν, μὴ ὄντες ἀσύνητοι, τὴν γνώμην τῆς ἀγαθωσύνης τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, ὅτι ἡμῖν λέγει, θέλων ἡμᾶς μὴ ὁμοίως πλανωμένους ἐκείνοις ζητεῖν πῶς προσάγωμεν αὐτῷ.

9 We ought therefore to see, not being dull, the purpose of the goodness of our father, that he says to us, wanting us not to go astray as they did, “to seek how we may approach him”.

Whether this is God’s good purpose or the purpose of God’s goodness, it is a reference to God as is appropriate to Jewish thinking and not a reference to Jesus.

This matter is interesting because theologically the goodness of God and the goodness or virtue of Christ may be seen as a reference to the nature of divinity, or as a reference to the earthly actions of Jesus Christ. The *Acts of Thecla* may be referring to the kindness (i.e. virtue) of the historical Jesus as an example that Paul is following rather than to the divine nature of Christ as the one who is “good”. This is important to the dating of the *Acts of Thecla* in terms of the developing Christology since we have in the Synoptics (Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19; Mt 19:17) the saying of Jesus. Mark 10:18 reads:

18 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός.

18 But Jesus said to him, “why do you call me good? No one is good but one, God alone.”

There is no known tradition of remarking about the goodness of Christ in the New Testament. On the contrary, an ancient author who knew the Synoptics might well avoid calling Christ good because of this saying. The *Acts of Thecla* shows no knowledge of the Synoptic Gospels. The reference may be to the good deeds during the life of Jesus as Paul described them to the people of Asia. Paul himself would have had to be schooled in the healings, miracles and teachings of Jesus. Barnabas, Paul’s travelling companion, may also have spread the stories of the goodness and kindness of Jesus in this area. The translation here, “goodness”, is meant to refer more to the human deeds of Jesus than to equating him with God who is alone good.

Were knowledge of the Synoptics evident, it might be expected that Christ would be referred to as divine while still avoiding calling him good or referring specifically to the goodness of Christ, in deference to the Synoptic saying. In the *Acts of Thecla* there is no reason to understand either an advanced Christology or any familiarity with Synoptic tradition, as will be stated in the conclusions to this study.

The clause, οὐδὲν φαῦλον ἐποίει αὐτούς “and he did them no harm”, states negatively what has immediately preceded it. The adjective φαῦλος is employed in its substantive use. As an adjective it can mean, wicked, evil, vile, sorry. There is a variant in this phrase. Where the Lipsius text reads αὐτοῖς the Tischendorf reads αὐτούς. The dative is used less often as the language develops toward modern demotic Greek where the dative survives only in a “fossilized” form. The dative is eventually replaced by the genitive form and by a preposition with the accusative form.<sup>142</sup> The use of the dative here may be a false correctness. In any case there is evidence that ποιέω is used with double accusatives both early and late in the development of the language.

The principle that Lipsius has chosen is: that which could have caused doctrinal concerns for scholars after the third century is omitted, shortening the document as it became more developed through the years. But this has no relevance to variants such as this one. There is more manuscript evidence for the dative, but manuscripts A and d have the accusative and G omits the word altogether. The meaning of the verse is not affected by the study of this particular variant.

1e ἀλλ’ ἔστεργεν αὐτοὺς σφόδρα,

1e Rather he loved them very much,

These next words affirm the same thought.<sup>143</sup> Paul “took notice only of the goodness of Christ, did them no harm, but loved them greatly.” To do them no harm is to take notice of the goodness of Christ. Here the behaviour of Paul is following the example of Jesus Christ in his earthly life. The Gospel sayings tradition does not seem to be known by the author of the *Acts of Thecla*. The teaching, to love one’s enemies and to

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<sup>142</sup>Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, Rome, 1963, p. 19.

<sup>143</sup>The Tischendorf text reads as follows: ὥστε τὰ λόγια κυρίου ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ τῆς τε γεννήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ ἡγαπημένου ἐγλύκαινεν αὐτούς, καὶ τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πῶς ἀνεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ, κατὰ ῥῆμα διηγείτο αὐτοῖς. The Lipsius text reads: ὥστε πάντα τὰ λόγια κυρίου [καὶ τῆς διδασκαλίας καὶ τῆς ἐρμηνείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου] καὶ τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ ἡγαπημένου ἐγλύκαινεν αὐτούς, καὶ τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πῶς ἀπεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ, κατὰ ῥῆμα διηγείτο αὐτοῖς.

pray for those who hate you, which is represented in the New Testament in Matthew 5:44, is not mentioned in this context where it would be most appropriate. The verb ἔστεργεν is the imperfect of στέργω, which means to love or to have affection for someone. It is not a New Testament word for love but it is found in Sirach and Josephus.<sup>144</sup> The independence of the *Acts of Thecla* from the written New Testament weighs in favour of an early dating of the *Acts of Thecla*, more likely the beginning rather than the end of the second century. Some might even prefer a first century dating after the undisputed Pauline epistles.

lf ὥστε < > τὰ λόγια κυρίου ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ τῆς τε  
< > γεννήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ ἡγαπημένου  
ἐγλύκαινεν αὐτούς,

lf so that he persuaded them with regard to the Lord's instruction in the teaching of both the birth and the resurrection of the beloved,

At this point in the text we have the first instance of Lipsius supplying a longer text and Tischendorf supplying a significantly shorter text. Such instances will occur with regularity throughout the *Acts of Thecla*. It is important to ask at the occurrence of a longer text supplied by Lipsius if it would have occasioned doctrinal objections from scholars of the late second, third or fourth centuries as Christian thought and practice became more institutionalized and orthodox in the west. In this case the longer text translates, "so that all the words of the Lord and of the teaching and of the interpretation of the Gospel and of the birth and resurrection of the beloved." One fails to see what reason there could have been for a scribe to omit such a phrase.<sup>145</sup> On the contrary, the addition of it adds a sense of completeness and competence to Paul in the story. That Paul knew "all the words of the Lord" is an indication of developing hagiography, recognizing Paul as the great interpreter of the Jesus tradition and eventually as Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The use of εὐαγγέλιον is also an indication of this reading being a later one. In the Lipsius text the term means Gospel as a literary composition rather than as good news. This is clear because it can be interpreted in a discussion as part of a teaching session or it could be explained in a sermon. The longer Lipsius reading appears to be a later tradition, not an early unorthodox one which is in need of correction.

<sup>144</sup> Sirach 27:17 and Josephus' *Jewish Wars* 1: 596 and *Antiquities* 8: 249.

<sup>145</sup> It is completely orthodox. The Coptic added by Barrier "Christ was born of Mary the virgin and the seed of David" sounds credal compared with the early Apostles and Nicene Creeds. This certainly sounds later than the text chosen by Tischendorf.



In the shorter text as supplied by Tischendorf: “so that he persuaded them with regard to the Lord’s instruction<sup>146</sup> in the teaching of both the birth and the resurrection of the beloved”, there is no claim to completeness and no reference to interpreting the Gospel. In fact an ambiguity stands out concerning “the beloved” which is less obvious in the Lipsius text where all genitives are used instead of a dative first “ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ” and then the genitives. The beloved in the Tischendorf text could possibly be the believer in Jesus, in this context, foreshadowing Thecla. Those who do not marry but rather love Jesus are born again: they die and rise with Jesus.

The longer reading here with genitive cases throughout probably means, as Elliott has it: “of the Gospel concerning the birth and resurrection of the Beloved”<sup>147</sup>, who is Jesus. The most controversial doctrinal matter in the *Acts of Thecla* is the act of Thecla’s baptising herself. With the shorter reading there is the possibility that the words of Jesus are about the baptism of those who love him. Baptism would result in the figurative birth and resurrection of the individual. Baptism under the water is understood as the death and resurrection to a new birth of the baptised. In this narrative the baptised would certainly refer to Thecla. To begin in verse one by alluding to the baptism as instruction of the words of Jesus lays a strong claim on the legitimacy of the self-baptism of Thecla. Therefore the shorter reading is by far the more controversial doctrinally in the first several centuries. It is also the more difficult reading as there is an ambiguity, which is somewhat cleared up in the longer reading with the additions of “*all* the words of the Lord, and the interpretation *of the Gospel*”, even though the grammar of both texts is poor. For these reasons then the shorter Tischendorf reading again presents as the earlier.

1g καὶ τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πῶς ἀνεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ,  
κατὰ ῥῆμα διηγείτο αὐτοῖς.

1g and he explained word for word to them the great deeds of Christ as revealed to him.

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<sup>146</sup>I have chosen to translate “he persuaded them with regard to the Lord’s instruction”. A literal translation would be “he made sweet the word of the Lord for them”. In this context Paul is not oversimplifying for them, and he is not “battering them up”, he loves them and is telling them about Jesus to influence them in a positive way. I have therefore translated as above.

<sup>147</sup>J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 364. This is Elliott’s translation. He uses upper-case for “Beloved” and clearly means a reference to Jesus.

At this point there is one variant. Tischendorf has ἀνεκαλύφθη and Lipsius has the more expected ἀπεκαλύφθη a term more familiar in the New Testament.<sup>148</sup> In as much as there is a difference, the sense of ἀνακαλύπτω is “I reveal by pulling the cover up”, while the sense of ἀποκαλύπτω is “I reveal by pulling the cover off or away”. Lipsius has chosen the New Testament word, which suits his theory of dating and authorship. His view is that the *Acts of Thecla* was written after the New Testament period toward the end of the second century.

Looking back at the whole sentence one notices that the “sweetening” is in singular verbal form and so a translation can read that τὰ λόγια (the words), which are in neuter plural form and therefore take a singular verb, mean together with this verb and the pronoun: “the words sweeten them”. Another possible meaning is that “he sweetens them” and one understands that he, Paul, does that “by the words”. My preferred translation has the sense: Paul “sweetened them,” that is: “he persuaded them” or “he enticed them”.

There is a question concerning the revelation to Paul. The clause portrays Paul as a faithful repeater of the oral tradition. That is, Paul πῶς ἀνεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ, κατὰ ῥῆμα διηγείτο αὐτοῖς “explained word for word to them (the great deeds of Christ) as revealed to him”. The revelation is not Luke’s version of the conversion experience of Paul, which is what might be expected to occur to receivers of this text if they knew the Acts of the Apostles. There is no indication here that this author knows the Acts of the Apostles. The revelation is words about the great deeds of Christ as Paul received the revelation or disclosure of them. This fits better with the tradition of the Pauline epistles.<sup>149</sup> Paul is a teacher of these “words” of revelation.

There are a number of uncertainties in this verse especially as to how the clauses are meant to relate to each other. On the whole it has to be said that the sentence construction is unsophisticated. In the light of the paragraph as a whole, one has to ask what is likely to be a plausible meaning, bearing in mind that any position will remain speculative.

<sup>148</sup> In the New Testament both the verb ἀποκαλύπτω and the noun are used frequently, the verb 26 times in 10 different books and the noun 18 times in 9 different books, while ἀνακαλύπτω is used only twice in Colossians and the noun is not used in the New Testament.

<sup>149</sup> See for example: Galatians 1:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-11, 16. In these epistles the emphasis is on revelation for teaching or preaching. These passages from the epistles describe a revelation to Paul but without the phenomena (light, blindness, journey, being let down in a basket, etc.) of the Acts of the Apostles written later by Luke.

But Paul took notice only of the virtue of Christ and did them no harm. Rather he loved them very much, so that he persuaded them with regard to the Lord's instruction in the teaching of both the birth and the resurrection of the beloved, and he explained word for word to them the great deeds of Christ as revealed to him.

The sentence would be clearer if τοῦ ἡγαπημένου were omitted. There is an ambiguity concerning "the beloved" because it might apply to a believer, especially since it has just been stated that Paul loved Demas and Hermogenes. It might apply to all believers, but if the *Acts of Thecla* is written at the end of the first or beginning of the second century and an oral tradition of Thecla has circulated by then, τοῦ ἡγαπημένου could be a means of foreshadowing Thecla.<sup>150</sup> The translation that I have included above translates "the beloved" attempting to maintain this possibility. If a translator wished to commit to the translation that this can only refer to Jesus she might use the upper-case when translating "Beloved". I prefer to preserve the ambiguity.

It is important to remember in terms of the relevant theology that there is a tradition of Thecla being the first martyr (protomartyr).<sup>151</sup> Martyrdom portrays a saint as a representative of Christ in that their death is not only death for Christ but also death with Christ and death of Christ in the community of Christ's body. Baptism, with which Thecla is especially associated, is to die and rise with Christ. The narrative of Stephen's death in the Acts of the Apostles, which may well not have an historical basis,<sup>152</sup> uses much of the same vocabulary and many of the theological motifs of the death of Christ in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>153</sup> Clearly Stephen's death is portrayed as another instance of the death of Jesus. This is the

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<sup>150</sup> I would hold that this is the case, and notwithstanding that a reference to Thecla might be expected in a feminine form, since masculine forms are used for women in these kinds of religious references. See Romans 16:1, where δίακονος is used for Phoebe.

<sup>151</sup> This is a tradition which does not recognise the Acts of the Apostles presentation as prior to that of the *Acts of Thecla*. In the Acts of the Apostles Stephen is presented as the first martyr. The tradition of Thecla as the first martyr is preserved in the eastern churches. See images of her as the protomartyr at these websites: [http://www.stmarysbcc.org/bulletins/Sept20\\_Sunday\\_after\\_Cross.html](http://www.stmarysbcc.org/bulletins/Sept20_Sunday_after_Cross.html) [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Thekla\\_the\\_Protomartyr](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Thekla_the_Protomartyr). Accessed 21 January, 2014. Both ancient and modern images exist with this designation. See also this link below accessed 21 January, 2014: <http://www.conventofsaintelizabeth.org/bigpic.html?byzicons/print/images/st-thecla1.jpg>.

<sup>152</sup> "For this first part of Acts, the historian can see that Luke's creative scope was most ample, simply because he was unconstrained either by narrative precedent or wealth of information." Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992, pp. 4-5.

<sup>153</sup> R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 296. "The scene is truly significant, not only because Stephen is the first Christian martyr, but also because the death of Stephen in Acts matches so closely the death of Jesus in Luke. Both accounts speak of the Son of Man at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69; Acts 7:56); both have a prayer for the forgiveness of those who are effecting this execution (Luke 23: 34a; Acts 7:59); both have the dying figure commend his spirit heavenward (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59)."

understanding of taking the name “Christian” rather than for instance “disciple”, since Christians may be called to die the death Christ died. In the *Acts of Thecla* it is Thecla who by her public witness and public baptism represents Christ in his death and resurrection.

## Verse Two

**2a** Καί τις ἀνὴρ, ὀνόματι Ὀνησιφόρος, ἀκούσας τὸν Παῦλον παραγενόμενον εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

**2b** ἐξῆλθεν εἰς συνάντησιν αὐτῷ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτοῦ Σίλα καὶ Ζήνωνος καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ Λέκτρας,<sup>< ></sup><sup>154</sup> ἵνα αὐτὸν ὑποδέξηται·

**2c** διηγήσατο γὰρ αὐτῷ Τίτος ποταπὸς ἐστὶν τῇ εἰδέᾳ ὁ Παῦλος· οὐ γὰρ εἶδεν αὐτὸν σαρκὶ ἀλλὰ μόνον πνεύματι.

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<sup>154</sup> The Lipsius text reads: ἐξῆλθεν σὺν τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτοῦ Σιμμία καὶ Ζήνωνι καὶ τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ Λέκτρᾳ εἰς συνάντησιν Παύλου, ἵνα αὐτὸν ὑποδέξηται. Elliott's translation is: "he went out to meet him with his children Simmias and Zeno and his wife Lectra, in order that he might entertain him". Elliott does not repeat Paul's name here. See J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 364.

## Translation

**2a** And a certain man named Onesiphorus, hearing that Paul was approaching Iconium,

**2b** went out to meet him with his children, Silas and Zeno and his wife, Lectra, in order that he might receive him as a guest,

**2c** for Titus described to him in detail Paul's kind of appearance, for he (Onesiphorus) did not see him in the flesh but only in the spirit.

## Commentary and Notes

2a Καί τις ἀνὴρ, ὀνόματι Ὀνησιφόρος, ἀκούσας τὸν Παῦλον παραγενόμενον εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

2a And a certain man named Onesiphorus, hearing that Paul was approaching<sup>155</sup> Iconium,

The name Onesiphorus appears in the narrative for the first time. He is known in the New Testament, mentioned twice in 2 Timothy.

2 Tim 1:16 reads:

16 δῶη ἔλεος ὁ κύριος τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ, ὅτι πολλάκις με ἀνέψυξεν καὶ τὴν ἄλυσίν μου οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη,

The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because often he gave me hospitality and he was not ashamed of my chains.

2 Tim 4.19 reads:

19 Ἀσπασαι Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν καὶ τὸν Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον.  
20 Ἐραστός ἐμεινεν ἐν Κορίνθῳ, Τρόφιμον δὲ ἀπέλιπον ἐν Μιλήτῳ ἀσθενοῦντα.

Greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained in Corinth, but Trophimus being ill, I left him in Miletus.

This continues to strengthen the questions of relationships between 2 Timothy and the *Acts of Thecla*. Again there is no particular “copying” which indicates a reason<sup>156</sup> to think that the *Acts of Thecla* knows 2 Timothy or that 2 Timothy knows the *Acts of Thecla*. They are different but it is plausible that they have some common historical basis. It is not my purpose to defend a thesis on the nuances of relationship between the *Acts of Thecla* and 2 Timothy. The purpose here is to argue

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<sup>155</sup> The participle παραγενόμενον is used commonly and found in the New Testament, Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.9.2.35, Josephus *Vit.* 52.1 and 183.1, Herodotus *Hist. Frag.* 27b.4 and many other places.

<sup>156</sup> There is no literary dependency. The *Acts of Thecla* does not copy 2 Timothy. Some of the persons mentioned are the same but there is no adjustment in the early manuscript tradition of the *Acts of Thecla* to become consistent with 2 Timothy. Bauckham’s conflation theory requires a great deal of imagination compared to the simple possibility that there is a common oral tradition which comes to a written form with a number of discrepancies, as would be expected. The Bauckham theory does not show literary dependence in any ordinary sense of the word. Later Latin texts and editorial adjustments in later Greek texts will make the obvious adjustments, such as the one considered above concerning Alexander the copper-smith. R. Bauckham, “The *Acts of Paul* as a Sequel to Acts” in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, p. 129.

that the Tischendorf text offers an earlier text of the *Acts of Thecla* and any further discussion of the possible relationship of the *Acts of Thecla* to any other texts would be best carried out with reference to the Tischendorf text or one very similar to it.

2b ἐξῆλθεν εἰς συνάντησιν αὐτῷ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτοῦ  
Σίλα καὶ Ζήνωνος καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ Λέκτρας, < >  
ἵνα αὐτὸν ὑποδέξηται·

2b went out to meet him with his children, Silas and Zeno and his wife, Lectra, in order that he might receive him as a guest,

In 2 Timothy we see that Paul honours Onesiphorus with greetings and blessings. It is the household of Onesiphorus which is mentioned both times, indicating that Paul has had contact with the extended group of individuals who met at Onesiphorus' place. This would be not only Onesiphorus, his wife and children but also any who work for him or with him in common enterprises associated with his business and domestic economy. This agrees with the *Acts of Thecla*, where Paul<sup>157</sup> preaches to the group gathered in the household of Onesiphorus. At this initial meeting Paul is met to be welcomed by Onesiphorus<sup>158</sup> and his wife Lectra, and their two sons. It can be assumed that the children of Onesiphorus are young adults in the narrative; otherwise it would be odd to take them along to meet Paul.

The literary style of the Lipsius text reads more elegantly than this sentence in the Tischendorf text. The differences are in word-order and a difference in the prepositional phrases. The meaning of the sentences is essentially the same. The addition of the proper-name in the Lipsius text helps to clarify.

The Tischendorf is less elegant,<sup>159</sup> supplying the third person singular masculine dative pronoun, and using the obvious and common μετὰ meaning “with” does not offer clarity.<sup>160</sup> It could, if one did not know

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<sup>157</sup> Barrier concludes that the Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is the same Paul the Apostle known in the New Testament. See J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 69.

<sup>158</sup> Barrier notes that an Onesiphorus is also known in the *Acts of Peter and Andrew*. See J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 70.

<sup>159</sup> The use of repetition in such close proximate positions, the preposition εἰς and the prefix ἐξ- to the verb immediately before it, is thought to be less economical and in an historical context where writing materials are precious it is not thought to be more learned to repeat unnecessarily.

<sup>160</sup> See for grammatical comment M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, p. 27. “The number (or variety) of prepositions properly so called decreases: of the 19 prepositions of classical Greek, only seven survive in modern demotic Greek. In the NT the only ones completely extinct are ἀμφί and ὥς; but ἀνά and ἀντί are very restricted in use; as for the other prepositions, certain uses at any rate have either become rare or completely disappeared; for in general: the variety in the use of individual prepositions likewise



these characters, mean that the children and wife belong to Paul. The Lipsius and the Tischendorf use of εἰς συνάντησιν is unnecessary given the ensuing purpose clause. Εἰς preceding this accusative substantive<sup>161</sup> is known in Koine preferring the dative pronoun but also followed by genitive or accusative. This form of usage is attested in LXX Genesis 14:17. The Greek here is not a Semitism. That is it is not an attempt to mimic Hebrew syntax. The Hebrew language uses simple prefixed prepositions prolifically, as we might find if we had Hebrew here; therefore no unusual translation of the Greek, as if it were meant to sound Hebrew, is suggested. Koine Greek develops in the direction of less specificity and less accuracy. Scribal corrections can attempt to reinstate specificity.

It is clear that the Tischendorf text is not an improvement of the Lipsius text. Lipsius' word order and the addition of the proper-name are improvements. There is no doctrinal improvement to either text to avoid heresy. Neither text removes any theology that could be thought of as not acceptable.<sup>162</sup>

The Tischendorf text has the appearance of being the older one. The Lipsius text uses a more polished grammar correcting the Tischendorf text and offers more narrative clarity. Compare the above with this in the Lipsius text:

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decreases.” See also F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 118. “Σύν is limited in classical Attic to the meanings ‘including’ and ‘with the aid of’, while μετά means ‘with’. At the same time Ionic and accordingly Hellenistic (Mayser II 2, 398ff.) retain σύν in the sense of ‘with’ alongside μετά and so it appears in the NT also.” Further on p. 119 of the aforementioned grammar it is explained that σύν is frequent in the New Testament only in Luke and Paul. James Brooks, and Carlton Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1979, pp. 47-48, gives a good explanation of the proper use of σύν with the dative as the instrumental of association. This is precisely what is called for in the verse above and is arguably an improvement on the more common use of μετά.

<sup>161</sup> Συνάντησιν is the accusative singular of the noun, ἡ συνάντησις -εως, which is formed from the verb, συναντάω, meaning to meet with or encounter. The noun means a meeting or rendezvous. It is used in the LXX in 1 Kings 18:16; 2 Kings 5:26 and in Origen's commentary on the Gospel of John (TLG 13.29.177.4) concerning the Samaritan Woman's story compared to Rebecca at the well. Here the preposition εἰς is used with the substantive in its accusative case: καταβαίνει ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν καὶ πληροὶ τὴν ὑδρίαν, ἀναβάσῃ τε αὐτῇ ἐπιτρέχει εἰς συνάντησιν ὁ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ παῖς καὶ εἶπεν· Πότισόν με μικρὸν ὕδωρ ἐκ τῆς ὑδρίας σου. The last eight words Origen has taken from LXX (TLG Genesis 24:17): ἐπέδραμεν δὲ ὁ παῖς εἰς συνάντησιν αὐτῆς καὶ εἶπεν Πότισόν με μικρὸν ὕδωρ ἐκ τῆς ὑδρίας σου. Another LXX usage is an even closer comparison to the *Acts of Thecla* (TLG Genesis 14:17): Ἐξῆλθεν δὲ βασιλεὺς Σοδομων εἰς συνάντησιν αὐτῷ, μετὰ τὸ ἀναστρέψαι αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς κοπῆς τοῦ Χοδολλογομορ, καὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῶν μετ' αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τὴν Σαυη (τοῦτο ἦν τὸ πεδῖον βασιλέως). (in TLG no accents appear over Σοδομων and Χοδολλογομορ.)

<sup>162</sup> It is to be remembered here that Lipsius holds to such an argument: the earlier and more authoritative text according to Lipsius is the longer text which contains heretical information that is later removed from certain manuscripts. Lipsius, pp. xcvi-xcvii.

ἐξῆλθεν σὺν τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτοῦ Σιμμία καὶ Ζήγωνι καὶ τῇ  
γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ Λέκτρα εἰς συνάντησιν Παύλου, ἵνα αὐτὸν  
ὑποδέξεται·

Tischendorf used manuscripts C and d. Later Lipsius tells us that manuscript M agrees with Cd and Tischendorf. Lipsius chose his text here from manuscript G, which Tischendorf also had and chose not to include at this point in his edition.

Tischendorf has μετὰ with genitives and Lipsius' σὺν with datives. The Tischendorf text uses the pronoun and the Lipsius uses the proper-name, Παύλον, Paul.

This variant is important because an ordinary classical and higher literary Koine way to express accompanying someone is to use the dative and the preposition σὺν as we have it in the Lipsius text. The Tischendorf text is clumsy; one can work out what it means but it is not a clear construction in this context. The classical meaning of μετὰ with the genitive is “in the midst of”, “among” or “between”. It does not convey the specific meaning “to accompany someone”.<sup>163</sup>

Σὺν with the dative is the correction here. In classical usage σὺν with the dative can mean “including” and “in the company with” and “together with”. In the New Testament, σὺν used with the dative as it is here means “together with”. It is found in 1Cor 1:2; Mt 27:38; Mk 4:10; Lk 20:1; John 18:1; Acts 1:14; 2:14; 3:8 and there are many other NT examples. The more difficult text and therefore the one that appears to be earlier is the Tischendorf one.

Further, it might be argued that the second mention of the proper-name, Paul, is deferential, coming from a later time when Paul is considered even more important. Otherwise it could be argued that the proper-name is inserted to avoid confusion. This also makes the Lipsius text appear to be the later, more improved text.

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<sup>163</sup> We find the use of μετὰ with the genitive in the Ionian Greek of Herodotus. In Herodotus this construction is used rarely except to mean “with something”. In poetry, including Aristophanes, we do find μετὰ with the genitive to mean “with” or “together with” but with pronouns or common nouns not with proper names and not to mean “accompany someone”. In Thucydides 1.126 we have: Κλεομένης μετὰ Ἀθηναίων which is the joining of two subjects. This example in Thucydides uses μετὰ more as a conjunction than a prepositional phrase. Perhaps it means “among” in the sense of “Cleomenes among the Athenians” that is “Cleomenes and all the Athenians”. We have a Koine usage of μετὰ with the genitive in the Gospel of Matthew where it means “a crowd *with* swords and clubs”, but this is not an example of accompanying someone.

Another important variant here is the name of one of the sons of Onesiphorus and Lectra. The variant represents an adaptation of the Aramaic, Silas<sup>164</sup> to the Greek, Simmias.<sup>165</sup> Silas is the name found in the Tischendorf text. Simmias is found in the Lipsius text. Again the Greek adaptation of the Jewish name is more likely the later edition, as Christianity is more broadly accepted into the Greco-Roman world. In all New Testament texts which include name changes the changes progress from the Aramaic to the Greek; examples are Saul to Paul and Simon to Peter. No name change is recorded for Silas either here or in the New Testament and no significance is attached to moving to a Greek version of the Jewish name.

There is an important character, Silas, in the New Testament. He is a travelling companion of Paul. He is mentioned seventeen times between Acts 15:22 and 18:5. Often his name is linked with that of Paul but it is also linked to the name Judas. Silas and Judas are said to be prophets in Acts 15: 32. According to the narrative, given the result of the disagreement that Paul has with Barnabas in Acts 15:36-40, Paul decides to travel with Silas, and Barnabas decides to travel with John Mark. Judas is no longer mentioned. Above it is explained that this visit of Paul to Iconium is hypothetically part of a third missionary journey. In the *Acts of Thecla* Paul is not said to have a travelling companion, Silas, with him. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul travelled from Antioch with Silas through Syria and Cilicia until he came to Derbe and Lystra. Silas is associated with the second missionary journey to Asia<sup>166</sup> but he is not known as the son of Onesiphorus, nor is his origin in Iconium. Silas is said to be chosen to travel with Paul and Barnabas in Jerusalem by the apostles and elders with the whole church. He is Jewish, a leading man in the community in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-23). The sensible thing to think then is that the Silas of the Acts of the Apostles is not the Silas, son of Onesiphorus. This would be a simple matter if Silas were mentioned in the Pauline letters so that two sources could be used to support an historical underpinning. However, Silas is never mentioned in the New Testament outside this section of the Acts of the Apostles. It is intriguing that in the very section which describes a journey to Iconium a Jewish

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<sup>164</sup> John Lawrence McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1976, p. 815: "Silas (Gk silas, from Aramaic seila, "Saul"), a personal name; a leading member of the Church of Jerusalem and a prophet, who was sent with Judas as a delegate of the Church of Jerusalem to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to communicate the liberties granted the Gentile Christians by the council of Jerusalem (AA 15:22-35)."

<sup>165</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1599, under the entry Σιμμάκιον. The name is found in *Hephaestio the Grammarian in Hephaestionis Enchiridion cum commentariis veteribus*, 10.6. It is the name of a metre, named for one Simmias.

<sup>166</sup> R.Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, p. ix.

travelling companion of Paul is noted who has the same name as the Silas of Iconium. There is not more that can be said about this here.

The name Zeno is a Greek name referring to Zeus. There is an individual, Zenas, a lawyer in Titus 3:13, but it is uncertain that there is a relationship between the two characters. This is not only because the names are spelled differently, which need not be an insurmountable difficulty, but also because of the dubious Pauline authorship of Titus and the fact that there is no reference to the Zeno of the *Acts of Thecla* as a lawyer. Also there is no reference to the Zenas in the epistle as having a relationship with Onesiphorus. The Epistle to Titus is usually dated near the turn of the century because of its interest in church structures, which imply a significant development of the Jesus movement into an institutionalized organization.<sup>167</sup> This would be a similar time to the dating of the *Acts of Thecla* supported in this commentary. There is an intriguing connection between the two texts. It is that Onesiphorus is said in the *Acts of Thecla* to know of Paul's appearance because of a report from Titus. If indeed Zeno were the Zenas of the letter to Titus this would be a significant detail in the life of Paul, which would coincide with the history of the *Acts of Thecla*.

The name Lectra is also a Greek name. There is no Lectra mentioned in the New Testament or elsewhere in the *Acts of Thecla*.

2c διηγήσατο γὰρ αὐτῷ Τίτος ποταπός ἐστιν τῇ εἰδέῃ  
ὁ Παῦλος· οὐ γὰρ εἶδεν αὐτὸν σαρκὶ ἀλλὰ μόνον πνεύματι.

2c for Titus described to him in detail Paul's kind of appearance, for he (Onesiphorus) did not see him in the flesh but only in the spirit.

This final segment 2c is interesting for two main reasons. The first is the mention of Titus (and as stated above there is a possible connection with Onesiphorus' son, Zeno). The second is the matter of being "seen only in the spirit" which has strong New Testament Pauline parallels.

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<sup>167</sup> R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 640-641. "However, II Tim is not concerned with the same structural issues as Titus and I Tim; and so it is not inconceivable that II Tim was written first (perhaps by Paul) and that after his death an unknown writer composed Titus and I Tim, imitating the style of II Tim in order to deal with issues of church structure that had now become acute." Other scholars who support the idea that I Timothy and Titus are Pauline suppose a mission period of Paul with Titus in Crete after a first imprisonment in Rome. Brown lists Meinardus, Pherigo, and Quinn in his footnote 4 page 141, as scholars whose work supports the idea of a second career of Paul after imprisonment in Rome.

It is helpful in this early part of the commentary while working with the movements of Paul to show how the material in the *Acts of Thecla* can so easily coincide with the history of Paul, as it can be reconstructed by the information available in the New Testament.

Raymond Brown gives a clear summary of Titus' movements in this section of his *An Introduction to the New Testament* on the letter to Titus:

Although the letter does not depend for its meaning on a knowledge of Titus' career, in the NT Titus (never mentioned in Acts) is described as having been converted by Paul [note 3 Titus 1:4: "My true son in the faith."] and brought to the Jerusalem meeting in AD 49 (Gal 2:1-3) to demonstrate how genuine a Christian an uncircumcised Gentile could be. In the crisis between Paul and the church of Corinth, where Paul had been publicly embarrassed during his 'painful visit,' Titus carried the letter written 'with many tears' from Ephesus to Corinth. He was successful in effecting a diplomatic reconciliation, so that he brought to Paul in Macedonia good news from Corinth (ca. 56-57: II Cor 2:1; 7:6-16; pp. 541-43 above, #8-10). He was later sent to Corinth to gather the collection that Paul would bring to Jerusalem in 58 (II Cor 8:6, 16, 23; 12:17-18; #11).<sup>168</sup>

These were independent movements of Titus, yet continued contact with Paul made it possible that Titus has visited Iconium previous to Paul's third missionary journey which, hypothetically, included this visit as described in the *Acts of Thecla*. From Paul's letters we see that Titus has converted to Christianity and knows Paul across this period. Titus is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:10 saying that he has departed for Dalmatia. 2 Timothy describes circumstances later than Paul's second missionary journey; indeed the writing of 2 Timothy might have been during Paul's Roman captivity near the end of his life (67-68 CE). The mentions of Titus in Paul's early letters and Paul's late letters show that the relationship continued, for as Paul says Titus is "a true son in the faith" (Titus 1:4).

The idea of seeing someone in the spirit only and not in the flesh is not unknown to the New Testament. 1 Cor 5:3 is a strong parallel although not the exact same usage.

3 ἐγὼ μὲν γάρ, ἀπὸν τῷ σώματι παρὼν δὲ τῷ πνεύματι, ἤδη κέκρικα ὡς παρὼν τὸν οὕτως τοῦτο κατεργασάμενον

3 For I myself, being away in the body, but being present in the spirit, already judged as if I were present the one who did this thing.

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<sup>168</sup> R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 640.

There is a comparison in that Paul is not physically present, but knowing him is significant nonetheless; he has an effect on the communities that are a part of his network whether he is visiting or not. He seems to take an authoritative role and to have influence through his envoys, in the case of the events in the *Acts of Thecla*, through Titus. The knowing of Paul's appearance must be a response to a description by Titus. We can only surmise that the "knowing Paul according to the spirit" is a matter of the imagination having been given a range of relevant information. The physical appearance of persons is at times important to the telling especially of heroic or legendary tales. Ποταπός is an interrogative adjective, a later form of ποδαπός, which means "of what country?" In the New Testament, ποταπός is used to mean "of what manner, kind or sort?" Therefore, ποταπός ἐστὶν τῇ εἰδέᾳ ὁ Παῦλος, means literally "of what sort Paul is in appearance".

The fact that there is a description of Paul available to Onesiphorus is integral to the story and should therefore not be mistaken as an example of hagiography. In hagiographic descriptions there are attempts to preserve the memory of a saint and to enhance the remembrance of that person in a more than life-like fashion. These usually occur without reason in the narrative or as the reaction of a reputable character to a stunning appearance of the saint in some saintly activity in the narrative. The place in the narrative in which this description appears does not reflect on the saintly presence of Paul since he is not present at this point in the narrative, nor does it appear as extraneous to the narrative, but rather a description of him is necessary for the unfolding action to continue. The description of Paul in verse three will be discussed in detail.

## Verse Three

**3a** Καὶ ἐπορεύετο < ><sup>169</sup> τὴν < ><sup>170</sup> ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Λύστραν, καὶ εἰστήκει ἀπεκδεχόμενος αὐτόν, καὶ τοὺς διερχομένους<sup>171</sup> ἐπεθεώρει<sup>172</sup> κατὰ τὴν μήνυσιν Τίτου.

**3b** εἶδεν δὲ τὸν Παῦλον ἐρχόμενον, ἄνδρα μικρὸν τῇ<sup>173</sup> μεγέθει, ψιλὸν τῇ κεφαλῇ, ἀγκύλον ταῖς κνήμαις, εὐεκτικόν, σύνοφρον, μικρῶς ἐπίρινον,<sup>174</sup> χάριτος πλήρη.

**3c** ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἐφαίνετο ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀγγέλου πρόσωπον εἶχεν.

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<sup>169</sup> The Lipsius text adds κατὰ here and at note 169 adds βασιλικήν. The road from Pisidia to Lystra is a royal road. This has been a very important detail in the dating of the text in the nineteenth century. More recent studies of the *Acts of Thecla* like this thesis have the travel from Syria to Iconium. The Lipsius text reads: Καὶ ἐπορεύετο κατὰ τὴν βασιλικὴν ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Λύστραν. The Lipsius reading is found in EIKLd, and G is very similar. The Tischendorf text above is found in ABC, while manuscript F has: κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν.

<sup>170</sup> The Lipsius text adds βασιλικήν here. See note 168 above.

<sup>171</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is ἐρχομένους and is found in manuscripts ABEL. The Tischendorf word διερχομένους is found in manuscripts CGM and a third variant εἰσερχομένους is found in manuscripts F and I.

<sup>172</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is ἐθεώρει and is found in manuscripts ABFM. Tischendorf has chosen the variant from manuscript C. Three other variants are of interest: ἐθεώρουν is in manuscript G; ἐπετήρει in manuscripts EIL; ἐπετύρει is found in manuscript K; a variant in word order is found in M.

<sup>173</sup> In the Lipsius text the article τῇ appears here rather than τῇ; nothing in the apparatus explains this difference. The agreement with the neuter μέγεθος explains the gender change.

<sup>174</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is ἐπίρινον as found in B. The Tischendorf reading is found in A and E and there are a number of other variants and extrapolations some of which will be addressed in the commentary below.

## Translation

**3a** So he was going along the road, the one to Lystra, and he stood waiting for him and observing those passing by according to the disclosure of Titus.

**3b** He saw Paul coming, a man short of stature, with a bald head, crooked legs, a good body, one eyebrow and a slightly hooked nose, full of grace.

**3c** For sometimes he appeared as a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.



## Commentary and Notes

3a Καὶ ἐπορεύετο < > τὴν < > ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Λύστραν, καὶ εἰστήκει ἀπεκδεχόμενος αὐτόν, καὶ τοὺς διερχομένους ἐπεθεώρει κατὰ τὴν μήνυσιν Τίτου.

3a So he was going along the road, the one to Lystra, and he stood waiting for him and observing those passing by according to the disclosure of Titus.

This verse has a history of being very important in the dating and understanding of the *Acts of Thecla*. It mentions a road to Lystra from Iconium. In the Lipsius text it is referred to as a royal road and Onesiphorus is said to be following it; literally “he went according to the royal road to Lystra”. Καὶ ἐπορεύετο κατὰ τὴν βασιλικὴν ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Λύστραν. The Tischendorf text has only: Καὶ ἐπορεύετο τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Λύστραν, and is the more convincing, like many of the variants, in that it is the more difficult grammatically. A stylish shortening of the Lipsius text would have retained the preposition κατὰ even if there were reason to eliminate the adjective βασιλικήν.<sup>175</sup>

It is not difficult to account for the adjective being eliminated in a later text since there is a question about the existence of this road after the first century. The elimination would be a simple geographic correction for its own time, the author or scribe being unaware of the existence of the royal road in the time that the story is set. This could argue in favour of the Lipsius text as being the more ancient and the Tischendorf as the correction. However, both editors are working contrary to their usual methods. The Tischendorf text does list the variant in its apparatus stating that the reading, “the royal road”, is in manuscripts G and d.<sup>176</sup> Tischendorf often follows d but has not done so in this case. It can only be assumed that he does not follow d here because of the grammar. He chooses the more difficult reading grammatically. Lipsius does not in principle follow d but has included the adjective from EIKLdG. It is important here to note the overwhelming strength of the manuscript evidence for including the adjective.

Perhaps Tischendorf thought there was an even earlier and less specific text to which manuscript C witnessed. The idea then would be that later editors (perhaps near the end of the first century or at the beginning of the

<sup>175</sup> In fact the scribe of manuscript F has κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν.

<sup>176</sup> Tischendorf, p. 41. Tischendorf refers to the Latin Digby manuscript as D; this thesis has adopted the Lipsius designation for this same manuscript as d.

second) made the manuscript more specific and more believable by adding that the road was a royal road. Though the scribal addition makes the text more specific, there remains the fact that there are several “royal” roads in the area and this can complicate the matter considerably.

Ramsay thought that the road to Lystra was accessible during the first century and later was neither available nor known.<sup>177</sup> Ramsay understands it to be a road from Antioch of Pisidia to Lystra. It was primarily for military use while Lystra was an important colonial strategic position. He maintains that Iconium replaced Lystra as the city of importance in the area due to its commercial advances and political and military importance. Ramsay holds that after 74 CE the road to Lystra was no longer in use.<sup>178</sup> According to Ramsay, this is the via Regalis and he does not use the name via Sebaste but describes the road as commissioned by Augustus and built by Cornelius Aquila<sup>179</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Augustus’s tribunate, that is 6 BCE.<sup>180</sup> He describes both of the roads commissioned by Augustus in Pisidia: the one from Pisidian Antioch to the colony of Comana; and the one on which Onesiphorus and family on one conjecture would be waiting for Paul, the road from Pisidian Antioch to Lystra.

The information from Ramsay is used by Bremmer in his geographical discussion.<sup>181</sup> Bremmer however, believes that Paul followed the via Sebaste (a broad paved highway which is still visible) from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium, and relates this to Paul’s experiences as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 14. Bremmer believes that the author of the *Acts of Thecla* has picked up this idea of flight from Antioch from the canonical Acts and continued with his fiction.<sup>182</sup> He also sees that this is

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<sup>177</sup> W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 32. “The ‘royal road’ (βασιλικὴν ὁδὸν via Regalis ) that leads to Lystra is obviously the Roman road built by Augustus from Antioch to Lystra.”

<sup>178</sup> W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 35. “After A.D. 74 therefore the road from Antioch to Lystra ceased to be thought of as a highway, and must have disappeared from popular language.”

<sup>179</sup> W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>180</sup> Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, *The Roads that Led to Rome*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1967, p.134.

<sup>181</sup> J. Bremmer, “Magic, martyrdom and women’s liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla”, in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 37. Bremmer also cites Stephen Mitchell’s *Anatolia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 70, 76-78. Mitchell writes on p. 70, “The via Sebaste was clearly the major line of communication from the south coast to the interior; there can be little doubt that this was the route along which St Paul travelled from Perge to Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey.”

<sup>182</sup> It can be noted that in the many accounts of Paul’s meeting with opposition to his preaching in the Acts of the Apostles, even as he does in the *Acts of Thecla*, fleeing is not the recorded response. The overall impression is that opposition to his preaching is expected but still he wins many over and moves on courageously not in a hurry to save his life. The one exception is the story in Acts 14 cited by Bremmer. This raises the question: is there dependence of the *Acts of Thecla* on the canonical Acts 14: 6? Acts 14:6 uses the phrase, συνιδόντες κατέφυγον εἰς τὰς πόλεις τῆς Λυκαονίας Λύστραν

an important matter in the dating of the Thecla tradition. If she were an historical person who knew Paul then the road on which Paul travelled to Iconium would in fact have been, according to Ramsay, a royal road at the time. One notes that Ramsay is using manuscripts EIKLd and not the Tischendorf text which he otherwise supports. Lipsius who chooses from EIKLd does not think that Thecla is an historical person.

Ramsay's reconstruction would result in there being reason to think that Thecla should be thought of as an historical person who actually knew Paul, even though her story in the *Acts of Thecla* is probably told after her death and written down even later. Bremmer believes the *Acts of Thecla* is fiction.

The travel of Paul as recorded in the *Acts of Thecla* is from Antioch (unspecified) along the road to Iconium via Lystra and then on further to Antioch (unspecified) where Thecla having followed Paul will encounter the beasts in the theatre. Ramsay and Bremmer see Paul travelling in the *Acts of Thecla* from Pisidian Antioch to Syrian Antioch on the Orontes. This does not take seriously the description of the travel, "he went up", either travelling from the coast inland or going from a lower to a higher altitude. It also does not take seriously the designation of Alexander as a Syrian, for there would be no reason to say this if the setting were Syrian Antioch. Pisidian Antioch in the first and second centuries boasted a marvellous theatre and stadium. Pisidian Antioch is also the place where Tryphaena is more likely to be found as it was a part of the land she and her family governed. The difficulty is only in deciding from what Paul is fleeing as he leaves Syrian Antioch on his way to Iconium.<sup>183</sup> His conflict with Barnabas, Peter, James and company in Syrian Antioch is

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καὶ Δέρβην, see verses 5-7 below. There is no obvious literary dependence between the *Acts of Thecla* and the Acts of the Apostles on this point. The term for flight is different, the Acts of the Apostles using the prefixed verb which means to escape, and the *Acts of Thecla* using the noun. The assumed though arguably mistaken connection between the two Acta has caused confusion for a number of scholars, and continues to cause misconceptions of the *Acts of Thecla*. Acts 14: 5-7 ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁρμὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων σὺν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν αὐτῶν ὑβρίσαι καὶ λιθοβολῆσαι αὐτούς, συνιδόντες κατέφυγον εἰς τὰς πόλεις τῆς Λυκαονίας Λύστραν καὶ Δέρβην καὶ τὴν περίχωρον, κακεῖ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ἦσαν. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to molest them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country; and there they preached the gospel. (NRSV)

<sup>183</sup> In considering verse one, comment has been made concerning Paul's reason for this journey being the disagreements with Barnabas, Peter, James and the others in Syrian Antioch as recorded in Galatians 2:9-14. Mehmet Taşlıalan suggests also that Paul would be given hospitality by the Sergius Paullus family who are located in Pisidian Antioch. Mehmet Taşlıalan, *Pisidian Antioch*, Göltaş, Ankara, 1997, pp. 36-42. This conflict in Syrian Antioch is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles 15:39. So the flight is not from stoning crowds, for in Luke's narrative Paul often meets with opposition to his teaching even as he does in the *Acts of Thecla*. Rather he is fleeing from the very disturbing split in the leadership of the early Jesus movement. It was in this controversy that Paul found his new identity as an apostle.

described in Galatians chapter 2:1-10;<sup>184</sup> he leaves hurriedly from this conflict which must have been painful for him personally.<sup>185</sup>

The information that we have in this verse also includes the preposition ἐπί meaning “to” or “towards.” Paul would be travelling to Lystra from Pisidian Antioch only if he first passed the road to Iconium. It is not likely that the trip would be from Pisidian Antioch if indeed it was towards Iconium rather than towards Lystra, for it is not necessary to travel to Lystra to get from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium, whereas it is the natural route to travel from Syrian Antioch through Lystra to Iconium.

Therefore given all of the above: the term “royal” is likely a later addition; they are travelling “up”; Alexander is differentiated as a “Syrian”; Tryphaena is more likely to be in Asia; there are conflicts in Syria and one does not need to travel to Lystra to get to Iconium, it is likely that Paul’s travel is not from Pisidian Antioch. The better solution is Syria to Iconium and then Iconium to Pisidian Antioch.

The geographical solution “Syria to Iconium” has Paul travelling on the coastal road. Strabo<sup>186</sup> calls it the “way of the sea”; it extended from Alexandria through Palestine, to Tyre, on to Syrian Antioch and along the serrated outer edge of Anatolia to the Bosphorus.<sup>187</sup> The strong associations of Thecla with Pisidian Antioch, where her public baptism takes place, may well have influenced the later addition of the adjective “royal” to this verse as a kind of aggrandizement as well as possibly accurate historical memory. Indeed the road from Syrian Antioch via Tarsus and Derbe to Lystra is the overland route associated with Paul’s journeys. The road from Lystra to Iconium was part of the royal road built by Augustus, the via Sebaste, but Paul is travelling first on the coastal road and then north, going up, that is inland, and then along the via Sebaste.<sup>188</sup>

The next phrase, καὶ εἰστήκει ἀπεκδεχόμενος αὐτόν, “and he stood waiting for him”, adds to the drama. This has the liveliness of a tale

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<sup>184</sup> R. Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul*, pp. x-xi. “Winter 51-52: Paul is in Antioch. Representatives of James arrive. A fierce dispute occurs, which is lost by Paul (Gal. 2:1-10). Paul leaves Antioch, never to return.” Then Paul’s third journey is described: “Spring-Summer 52: Paul heads west overland to Ephesus, revisiting old foundations on way.”

<sup>185</sup> Map as reproduced in the introduction of this thesis shows travel from Syrian Antioch to Tarsus along the “way of the sea” further to Derbe and Lystra. From Lystra to Iconium travel is on the royal road, the via Sebaste.

<sup>186</sup> Strabo, *Geographica* book 14 chapter one, describes the seaboard ( ἡ παραλία ), also known as the “way of the sea” or coastal road.

<sup>187</sup> V. Von Hagen, p.106.

<sup>188</sup> The Latin *Augustus* is equivalent to the Greek *Sebastos*.

which is well known but it does not sound like fact. Standing to wait gives a certain sense of ceremonial dignity to the advent of the important person due to arrive, but it is impractical and unlikely after a considerable walk especially as there is still a walk home to make that same day. The story must have been known and the meeting is given a certain elevated character by both this standing and the description of Paul's face like that of an angel. The framing of the description of Paul has a tone reminiscent of ceremony.

The story continues: καὶ τοὺς διερχομένους ἐπεθεώρει κατὰ τὴν μήνυσιν Τίτου, “and observing those passing by according to the disclosure of Titus”.

This assumes that there are others travelling along the road. The Tischendorf and Lipsius texts differ here but the differences do not affect the meaning in any substantial way. They are surprising in that the Tischendorf text includes the two prefixes to the verbs in this phrase. Διά is prefixed to ἐρχομένους and ἐπὶ to ἐθεώρει. They do not change the meaning of the verse but are certainly more characteristic of Koine Greek than clear classical style. The removal of the prefixes which are not needed may be seen as an editorial tidying up by a later scribe, yet it is chosen in the Lipsius text. This is the editorial improvement noted by Ramsay earlier in footnote 17.

In this study the hypothesis is that this is Paul's third missionary journey. It is overland not by sea. This leaves time for Titus to have given a description of Paul to Onesiphorus before Paul's arrival this time.

3b εἶδεν δὲ τὸν Παῦλον ἐρχόμενον, ἄνδρα μικρὸν τῇ μεγέθει, ψιλὸν τῇ κεφαλῇ, ἀγκύλον ταῖς κνήμαις, εὐεκτικόν, σύνοφρον, μικρῶς ἐπίρινον<sup>189</sup>, χάριτος πλήρη·

3b He saw Paul coming, a man short of stature, with a bald head, crooked legs, a good body, one eyebrow and a slightly hooked nose, full of grace.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is ἐπίρινον. This is found in the dictionaries as the correct spelling. See for example Lampe, p. 530.

<sup>190</sup> There are two options for translation here, that Paul is “full of grace” or (with the adjective used substantively) that his nose is “full of grace”. L. Vouaux, *Les Actes de Paul et ses Lettres Apocryphes*, p. 151 has: “Et il vit venir Paul, homme petit de taille, à la tête chauve, aux jambes arquées, vigoureux, aux sourcils joints, au nez légèrement bombé, plein de grâce”. Vouaux has “full of grace” separated from the nose by a comma, so he is translating that it is Paul who is “full of grace”, but he has the comma after the adjective so that the other interpretation is still possible. The grammar fully supports both translations. I prefer the graceful nose because this makes better sense of the “short, long” nose. If it is gracefully curved, it is both short and long i.e. it is hooked. This list is primarily about physical

This is the best-known passage in the *Acts of Thecla*. It has attracted the most scholarly comment and has been the object of vigorous debate. The interest of course is in Paul. Scholars have debated whether or not this is an exact description of Paul. It seems to be known in the ancient world and certainly influences the iconography of Paul, especially in the East, where the *Acts of Thecla* retained ecclesiastical significance and a number of other important saints are named after her.

There have been a number of scholarly discussions about the description of Paul in the *Acts of Thecla*. Some scholars find that the description which follows is an idealized one<sup>191</sup> and probably has no reference to historical fact, and others take it to be an actual description of the man Paul.<sup>192</sup> The description has even been referred to as plain and unflattering.<sup>193</sup> Opinion then is divided about this description.

The Bollók argument, in the tradition of R.M. Grant and Malherbe<sup>194</sup>, sees it as being an idealized description. This does not take into account all of the elements of the description in detail; in particular baldness and shortness are not thought preferable to their opposites, and therefore it is just as well to accept it as actual not idealized. An obvious problem with the discussion concerning an idealized description is that there is always the possibility that Paul actually was “good-looking” in the context of the ancient world. In such a case it is not technically an idealized description but an actual description and Paul was simply handsome by ancient standards.<sup>195</sup>

There is no way to prove whether it is or is not the description of the real person Paul. There is also always the possibility that he actually had an

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characteristics not spiritual character which also weighs in favour of the graceful nose. Most scholars translate that it is Paul who is “full of grace”. In my translation, I intentionally translate to make this majority view possible.

<sup>191</sup> János Bollók, “The description of Paul in the Acta Pauli”, in J. Bremmer, (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 1-15.

<sup>192</sup> See the discussion in J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, pp.44-45.

<sup>193</sup> W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 31. “This plain and unflattering account of the Apostle’s personal appearance seems to embody a very early tradition.”

<sup>194</sup> As discussed by J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul, A Critical Life*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>195</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, translation cited by J. Murphy-O’Connor in *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 44 is now in the public domain accessed on 21 January 2014, on line at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137%3Abook%3D11%3Achapter%3D51>. Pliny includes an amazing variety of descriptions but indeed none would seem to be negative concerning Paul’s eyebrows or bald head or any other feature. As a matter of interest see Book XI, Chapter 51: “The eyebrows in man can be moved in agreement with it, either both together or alternately, and in them a portion of the mind is situated: with them we indicate assent and dissent, they are our chief means of displaying contempt; pride has its place of generation elsewhere, but here is its abode: it is born in the heart, but it rises to the eyebrows and hangs suspended there—having found no position in the body at once loftier and steeper where it could be sole occupant.”

appearance that was thought of as ideal in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Successful persons are often thought of as having favourable characteristics, and persons with favourable characteristics are often successful. We cannot tell which is the case here, if indeed this is an idealized description as Bollók contends. It is not the sort of idealized description that is fantastic and unlikely; for example he is not described as taller than all other ordinary men. Given that the description is needed in the narrative for the story to move forward, and this is not the way that idealized descriptions are ordinarily included, those who believe that this is not a real description of Paul should shoulder the burden of proof. The fact that this may be a pleasing description of a handsome man does not help those who are arguing that this is or is not a description of the real Paul. As there is no contest from the ancient world that this is not a real description we are bound to accept it as the best that we have without any other historical evidence or argument.

The translation “a slightly hooked nose” has become the standard translation of this element in the best known passage in *The Acts of Thecla*. The Latin of manuscript d is no doubt influential: “naso aquilino, plenus gratia dei”.<sup>196</sup> I have translated it this way as a nod to convention and to the iconography which frequently depicts Paul this way. The late nineteenth-century publication of William Reeves has, “a man coming (namely Paul), of a low stature, bald (or shaved) on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollow-eyed; had a crooked nose; full of grace”. This seems to be the text of Grabe.<sup>197</sup> The Lipsius text seems to have the spelling correction. The spelling “ἐπίρινος” seems to be a spelling error and is found by Tischendorf in manuscript A. Elliott translates the Lipsius text with “rather hook-nosed, full of grace”<sup>198</sup>.

3c ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἐφαίνετο ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀγγέλου  
 πρόσωπον εἶχεν.

3c For sometime he appeared as a man and sometimes he had the face  
 of an angel.

This is the verse in the *Acts of Thecla* that is most hagiographical concerning Paul. Yet, it hardly reads as a late second-century developed hagiography<sup>199</sup>. Very similar references are made concerning Peter in the

<sup>196</sup> Tischendorf, p. 41 note 3.

<sup>197</sup> Manuscript G as it is listed in apparatus of the Lipsius text, pp. C and 237.

<sup>198</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p.364.

<sup>199</sup> Douglas Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible, What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*, Harper-Collins, New York, 2012, p. 155. In this volume we

Acts of the Apostles in chapter 12 and concerning Stephen at his trial before the Council in Acts 6:15.

15 καὶ ἀτενίσαντες εἰς αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ καθεζόμενοι ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ εἶδον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὥσει πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου.

15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. (NRSV)

This is the same sort of description that we have in the *Acts of Thecla*. It does not necessarily mean that Stephen's spiritual being only was present, but rather that he appeared to be a spiritual person. In Acts 12:13-15 we read:

13 κρούσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν θύραν τοῦ πυλῶνος προσῆλθεν παιδίσκη ὑπακοῦσαι ὀνόματι Ῥόδη· 14 καὶ ἐπιγνοῦσα τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ Πέτρου ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς οὐκ ἤνοιξεν τὸν πυλῶνα, εἰσδραμοῦσα δὲ ἀπήγγειλεν ἑστάναι τὸν Πέτρον πρὸ τοῦ πυλῶνος. 15 οἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπαν, Μαίνῃ. ἡ δὲ διῆσχυρίζετο οὕτως ἔχειν. οἱ δὲ ἔλεγον, Ὁ ἄγγελός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ.

13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14 Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are mad." But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel!" (NRSV)

Here as in other advanced hagiographical texts in the Acts of the Apostles there are variant readings. The Western text at Acts 12:15 reads "perhaps it is his angel". The addition of *τυχόν* is a Bezan variant reading also at Lk 20:13 and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 Cor 16:6, so it is not included in the UBS text. The more difficult reading is without the word, "perhaps". This makes the Western text the less hagiographical however, and the codex Bezae reading the more hagiographical. The explorations of Istvan Czachesz are relevant<sup>200</sup>. There does seem to be development from the Western text to the text of codex Bezae. However, the *Acts of Thecla* text is closer to the Western text of Acts in this instance since it is only the appearance in the *Acts of*

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are reminded that "messengers" called "angels" and human beings look the same. "Yet the text also suggests that angels look like human beings."

<sup>200</sup> Istvan Czachesz, "The Acts of Paul and the Western Text of Luke's Acts: Paul between Canon and Apocrypha", in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp.107-125, explores the development of the traditions seeing the codex Bezae tradition as a development beyond the Western text.



*Thecla* that is in question, not that Paul is actually an angel. It is to be remembered that appearing sometimes as an angel, perhaps being an angel, being an angel are all descriptions that are thought to be only mildly miraculous, since it is a common idea that individuals all have an angel. This seems to amount to a spiritual form or presence which is rather ghost-like. There is not the strong dualism that will appear later in Gnostic literature.<sup>201</sup> Leaving the body, transforming gender, and astral travel are not present in the *Acts of Thecla*.

There is another interesting New Testament parallel in Mt. 18:10. In this saying the little ones have angels in heaven that see the face of the father in heaven. This seems to be happening always, including at the same time (διὰ παντός) as the little ones are in the house with Jesus and the disciples. So they have angels in heaven as well as being bodily on earth. Matthew 18:10 reads:

10 Ὁρᾶτε μὴ καταφρονήσητε ἑνὸς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων· λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς διὰ παντός βλέπουσι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς.

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (NRSV)

The mention that these little ones have angels in heaven does not seem to make them more saintly than any other little ones. It does not have a hagiographical meaning. In the *Acts of Thecla* the meaning of this part of the description is to set Paul apart as someone very special in this meeting, to mark him as benevolent, serene and attractive. There is no reason to think that it designates Paul as a saint in the sense of the yearly cults that develop in the late second and third centuries.<sup>202</sup> In fact the *Acts of Thecla* treats Paul as mistaken about Thecla. The assumption as one reads further is that he should have seen her dedication and holiness early on and recognized it, for it was certainly genuine. Thus, one does not find in the *Acts of Thecla* hagiography about Paul that fantastically exaggerates his good attributes and is blind to his shortcomings.

<sup>201</sup> J. Bollók, “The Description of Paul”, in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p.6. Bollók extrapolates well beyond the limits of the *Acts of Thecla* in assuming that the author’s “aim was to prove that only an angel (logos) lived in the body of the apostle together with the spirit, whereas evil – the demon – never found a home in it.” This is pure speculation. Logos language is not present in this work, nor these Gnostic complications of spirit, receptivity, demons and dispersing and descending celestial beings.

<sup>202</sup> Janos Bolyki, “Events After the Martyrdom: Missionary Transformation of an Apocalyptic Metaphor in Martyrium Pauli”, in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 92-106. Bolyki describes the transformation from missionary motif to martyr cult. See especially p. 99.

## Verse Four

**4a** Καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Παῦλος τὸν Ὀνησιφόρον ἐμειδίασεν,  
καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος Χαῖρε, ὑπηρέτα τοῦ εὐλογημένου  
θεοῦ· κακεῖνος εἶπεν Ἡ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου.

**4b** Δημᾶς δὲ καὶ Ἑρμογένης ἐζήλωσαν καὶ πλείονα τὴν  
ὑπόκρισιν ἐκίνησαν, ὥς εἰπεῖν < ><sup>203</sup> Δημᾶν Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν  
τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ,<sup>204</sup> ὅτι ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἡσπάσω οὕτως;

**4c** καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος Οὐχ ὁρῶ ἐν ὑμῖν καρπὸν  
δικαιοσύνης· εἰ δὲ ἔστε τινές, δεῦτε καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν οἶκόν  
μου καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε.

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<sup>203</sup> The Lipsius text adds the word τὸν here.

<sup>204</sup> The Lipsius text omits the word θεοῦ here. Θεοῦ is found in manuscripts ABFIKLM and not in manuscripts CEG.

## Translation

**4a** And Paul seeing Onesiphorus smiled and Onesiphorus said, “Greetings! Servant of the blessed God”. And he (Paul) said, “Grace be with you and with your household.”

**4b** Demas and Hermogenes were jealous and increased in hypocrisy so that Demas said, “Are we ourselves not of the Blessed God that you fail<sup>205</sup> to greet us in this manner?”

**4c** And Onesiphorus said, “I do not see in you fruit of righteousness, but whoever you are, you too come into my house and rest.”

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<sup>205</sup>Literally this would be translated “failed”. I have taken the liberty of translating the present “fail” to represent the immediacy of the direct speech.

## Commentary and Notes

4a Καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Παῦλος τὸν Ὀνησιφόρον ἐμειδίασεν,  
καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος Χαῖρε, ὑπηρέτα τοῦ εὐλογημένου  
θεοῦ· καὶ ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν Ἡ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου.

4a And Paul seeing Onesiphorus smiled and Onesiphorus said,  
“Greetings! Servant of the blessed God”. And he (Paul) said, “Grace be  
with you and with your household.”

The translation of the dialogue here depends on the correct understanding of καὶ ἐκεῖνος, (*and that one, that is the other one, here the first one*) which refers to Paul.<sup>206</sup> Ἐκεῖνος means “the former”. Some translations leave the subject ambiguous by using only the pronoun “he” in English, and making no other indication or note.<sup>207</sup>

The action moves to Paul as subject. Although the reader is expecting Onesiphorus to recognize Paul, the author has reversed this expectation. One may assume that Onesiphorus was caused to smile because of his awareness of Paul’s appearance. As readers we imagine that Onesiphorus sees Paul and smiles, initiating the encounter, but this is not in the text. The gap in the text is used to throw emphasis on Paul as the agent in the encounter. This would argue in favour of a high opinion of Paul by the author. The canonical Acts of the Apostles has a similar high opinion of Paul. When the two works are compared, however, it has to be admitted that the canonical Acts has a more developed estimation of Paul’s holy status, as he is able to raise Eutychus from the dead in Acts 20:7-12, and cures are accomplished even by handkerchiefs and aprons which have been in contact with his skin (Acts 19:11-20).<sup>208</sup> Nowhere in the *Acts of*

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<sup>206</sup>In the context this is best since Onesiphorus has a household and Paul and his travelling companions would not be referred to as a household. The nineteenth-century translation found in *The Apocryphal New Testament, being all the Gospels, Epistles, and Other Pieces Now Extant, attributed in the First Four Centuries to Jesus Christ, His Apostles, and Their Companions, and not included in the New Testament by Its Compilers*, William Reeves, ed., Reeves and Turner, London, 1860, p.100, has “And Onesiphorus said: Hail, thou servant of the blessed God. Paul replied, The grace of God be with thee and thy family.”

<sup>207</sup>The nineteenth-century translation edited by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol xvi., T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1873, translates the text of Tischendorf and has, “Onesiphorus said: Hail, O servant of the blessed God! And he said: Grace be with thee and thy house.” J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translates the Lipsius text and has: “Onesiphorus said, “Hail, O servant of the blessed God.” And he said, “Grace be with you and your house.” These give no indication of the attempt to understand καὶ ἐκεῖνος and perhaps they assume the meaning is obvious.

<sup>208</sup>There are textual variants involved in 19:12 as in Acts 5:15 where Peter’s shadow cures the sick. In 5: 15 there is a longer text of Acts in codex Bezae which adds that “they were being set free from every sickness, such as each of them had”. I. Czachesz, “The Acts of Paul and the western text of Luke’s Acts: Paul between canon and apocrypha”, in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*,

*Thecla* can anyone do such miraculous deeds. Paul takes the initiative here by smiling and inviting Onesiphorus' greeting. One has to assume that the meeting is somehow arranged by Titus, as there is no other reason for Paul to smile at Onesiphorus since he has not met him before this. In the reader's mind it would be necessary to imagine that Titus has given a description of Onesiphorus to Paul as well as vice-versa.

The greeting, Χαῖρε, is very ordinary. There is a common misunderstanding that the address, Χαῖρε, or "Hail", which I have translated "Greetings" and which can mean "Rejoice", is a particular form of greeting which shows deference. This misconception seems to be related to New Testament scholarship of the examination of the dialogue in Luke 1:28 where Mary is addressed by the angel Gabriel with this same word. Most recent scholarship however, is clear in avoiding the possible theological overloading while translating the phrase χαῖρε κεχαριτώμενη (hail, full of grace) with a certain formality.<sup>209</sup> It is used frequently as a greeting in meetings and has the sense, "well met", "I am glad to meet you", or "welcome". The fact that Onesiphorus and Paul have not seen each other before this meeting invites the thought that it is arranged by a third party. In this circumstance Χαῖρε could be said to have the meaning "pleased to meet you".

The narration continues with ὑπηρέτα τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ. This address is not known to the New Testament writings. The noun ὑπηρέτης is used, but infrequently, and most often in the Gospel of John in reference to the servants of Jewish officials.

This phrase in the *Acts of Thecla* compares very closely with Acts 16:17. It does not show literary dependence in the sense of copying.

17 αὕτη κατακολουθοῦσα τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἡμῖν ἔκραζεν λέγουσα, Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσίν, οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας.

17 Following behind Paul and us she cried out saying, "these men are slaves of the most high God, who announce to you a way of salvation".

The sense is similar in both Acts. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul is the slave (δοῦλος) of the most high God. In the *Acts of Thecla*, Paul is addressed as servant (ὑπηρέτα) of the blessed God. The vocative

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pp.107-125, explores the development of the traditions, seeing the codex Bezae tradition as a development beyond the Western text.

<sup>209</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1991, p. 37.

singular ὑπηρέτα for this first declension masculine noun gives a very clear designation of Paul as a faithful servant, attendant or officer of God. This term for servant is not the common δοῦλος “slave” which we know from the New Testament. This term ὑπηρέτης has the sense of one who rows a ship or serves on board ship, one who does military service or is the subordinate in a line of command. It is less extreme than δοῦλος and arguably shows an earlier tradition before Jesus’ divinity is understood in Christianity. The understanding that Jesus taught in proverbs using the term δοῦλος along with other preferences for this term and the late Pauline usage in the description “I Paul, slave of Jesus Christ” in the Epistle to the Romans results eventually in this popularity. Here ὁ ὑπηρέτης certainly has the sense of a believer in God. God here is the creator God of the Jewish tradition, not Jesus.

In the New Testament ὑπηρέτης it is not often used, but when it is, it most commonly refers to servants of Jewish officials or leaders such as in John 7:32, “the servants of the Pharisees and chief priests”. Another similar reference is Mark 14:54 where Peter sat in the palace of the high priest with the servants, warming himself. These overtones give the phrase in the *Acts of Thecla* a Jewish sense, which is totally consistent with the reference to God as Blessed. The Jewish character of this verse points to an early tradition.

“The Blessed God” is a term with Jewish overtones. The reference is to prayers of Blessing (Baraka) used ordinarily in Jewish daily and temple life. The *Acts of Thecla* does not portray the heroine of the tale as Jewish in the way, for example, that Judith is portrayed, carrying her sack of Jewish food. There are, however, many signs of Jewish background in the *Acts of Thecla*. These, being outside the Jewish homeland, are perhaps indications of early composition, connection to diaspora Jewish community or actual interface with the Jesus movement or with Saint Paul, the Jew. There is a different variety of terms with Jewish overtones in the *Acts of Thecla* from those in any other particular New Testament or inter-testamental book or writing. This shows a certain interesting independence, and at the same time the possibility of comparing the *Acts of Thecla* to New Testament and inter-testamental literature in a fruitful way exploring theology and historical context. The use of this term “the Blessed God” is characteristically Jewish. The Psalms offer comparisons.

An example is Psalm 102:1; in the Septuagint it reads:

1 Εὐλόγει, ἡ ψυχὴ μου, τὸν κύριον

1 Bless the Lord, my soul

Psalm 143:1 shows how the Blessing becomes a characteristic of the name of God.

1 Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεός μου ὁ διδάσκων τὰς χειράς μου. . .

1 Blessed is the Lord, my God, who teaches my hands. . .

In this psalm Εὐλογητὸς can be translated as predicate adjective “Blessed is the Lord, my God”. This is the ordinary convention when the adjective is anarthrous as here. However, “my God is the Blessed Lord” is also tolerable in this case. In both instances the action of blessing or assigning benefit to God has taken on a substantial sense. That is, God is the one who is qualified by being blessed, or God is the Blessed One and the Lord. In Psalm 102 the blessing is a verb in the imperative. Εὐλόγει is an action that is done for God, an act of worship. So it is clear that both the quality of being blessed and the process of blessing are known in the Septuagint. In the *Acts of Thecla* the participle is used to modify the word “God”, showing the transition from action to quality. Further in this verse of the *Acts of Thecla*, there is no avoidance of using the word “God” as one can find in the Gospel of Matthew. This is consistent with the Thecla story; at her baptism Thecla proclaims that she is the servant of the Living God.

We continue with the next phrase: κακεῖνος εἶπεν Ἡ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου, “and he (Paul) said, ‘Grace be with you and with your household.’ ”

There is an interesting connection here with the story of Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles. The household of Onesiphorus is mentioned in this greeting of grace by Paul who is described in verse three as sometimes having the face of an angel. In the Acts of the Apostles 10:1-3 we read:

1 Ἀνὴρ δέ τις ἐν Καισαρείᾳ ὀνόματι Κορνήλιος, ἑκατοντάρχης ἐκ σπείρης τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς, 2 εὐσεβὴς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς τῷ λαῷ καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός, 3 εἶδεν ἐν ὁράματι φανερώς ὥσεί περὶ ὥραν ἐνάτην τῆς ἡμέρας ἄγγελον

τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθόντα πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ εἰπόντα αὐτῷ, Κορνήλιε.

1 A certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of the cohort called Italian, 2 a pious one fearing God with his entire household, gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God every day. 3 About the ninth hour he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God approaching and saying to him, Cornelius.

The common elements are that Onesiphorus and his entire household are greeted with the grace of God just as Cornelius and his entire household are fearing God. Onesiphorus sees Paul, who sometimes has the face of an angel while Cornelius sees the angel in the vision. The angel calls out the name, Cornelius, recognizing him as the special recipient of this visitation, and Paul recognizes Onesiphorus although he does not call out his name. The Cornelius story is pivotal in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles in that it is crucial to the turning-point of emphasis from the Jesus movement in Jerusalem to the emphasis on the Jesus movement in Diaspora. It is an important story in the Acts of the Apostles but importantly Peter, not Paul, has a major role in the Cornelius story. Later Eastern traditions remember Paul's angelic appearance. For example in the discourse of Apa John (a Coptic manuscript) on repentance and continence, he is Paul, "this angel who belonged to the earth" and in the discourse of Mar John (a Syriac version) on virginity, repentance and admonition, he is Paul, "this earthly angel and heavenly man".<sup>210</sup> The discourse of Mar John also knows of Thecla.<sup>211</sup> It is possible that both discourses know the *Acts of Thecla* and have taken them seriously.

The devotional practices of a head of household, and consequently the entire household, being rewarded with divine visitation or holy travellers is interesting as an insight into the social circumstances of this historical period. Travel has its restrictions but by and large there is a freedom to travel<sup>212</sup> and travellers can bring blessings with them, as can angels. In the story of Cornelius the angel recommends that Cornelius send messengers to bring Peter to his house.

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<sup>210</sup> Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt: Edited from the Papyrus Codex Oriental 5001 in the British Museum*, Oxford University Press, London, 1910, pp. 147, 339.

<sup>211</sup> E. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, p. 147.

<sup>212</sup> Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994, p.147. "In the age of the Greek city-states we noted that there were some five basic motives for travel: people left home on business, either their own or the government's, for their health, to go on pilgrimage to an oracle or shrine, to be present at well-known festivals, and, in a very few cases, to see the world. The Romans, as we have just observed, added one more—the holiday—the annual departure from town for the shore or mountains and back."



As in many comparisons of the *Acts of Thecla* and the New Testament there is not an exact vocabulary link nor any literary dependency but the themes and actions are very closely comparable. It is important continually to establish that the *Acts of Thecla*, although presenting material similar to the New Testament material, does not copy New Testament writings. This supports the view that the *Acts of Thecla* contains early traditions, which are compatible with the New Testament accounts. Another way of saying this is that the *Acts of Thecla* and some New Testament writings could very likely have common oral sources or come from a similar time and place.

This greeting of grace—ἡ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου—is associated with the Pauline letters, although in Luke’s account Paul seldom has such words on his lips (perhaps Acts 13:43 and 18:27 offer some comparison). In the Pauline letters see, for example, 1 Cor 1:3; 16:23; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 4:23; 1 Thes 1:1; 5:28; 2 Thes 1:2; 3:18; 2 Tim 1:2; 4:22; Ti 1:4; 3:15; Philemon 3,25. Frequently the greeting is “grace and peace” while the farewell greeting is often “grace to all of you”. This is also a common epistolary greeting; it is the mention of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that makes it special to the early Jesus movement.

4b Δημᾶς δὲ καὶ Ἑρμογένης ἐζήλωσαν καὶ πλείονα τὴν ὑπόκρισιν ἐκίνησαν, ὥς εἰπεῖν τὸν Δημᾶν Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔσμεν τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ, ὅτι ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἡσπάσω οὕτως;

4b Now Demas and Hermogenes were jealous and increased in hypocrisy so that Demas said, “Are we ourselves not of the Blessed One that you fail to greet us in this manner?”

The correct translation of the dialogue depends on the understanding of the infinitive construction with the accusative.<sup>213</sup> The infinitive εἰπεῖν with the proper-name in the accusative is operating to express result. To explain this one might say that as a result of Demas and Hermogenes’ jealousy and their increasing in hypocrisy, Demas says the

<sup>213</sup> William Watson Goodwin, *A Greek Grammar*, Macmillan, London, 1978, p. 311. Discussion on the accusative and infinitive of result (paragraph 1456) has: “ὥς is sometimes used like ὥστε with the infinitive and the finite moods, but chiefly in Aeschylus, Sophocles, Herodotus, and Xenophon.” Koine sometimes uses lively vocabulary choices from poetry and Ionian Greek of an earlier period. That seems to be the case here.

following. One is expecting ὥστε rather than ὡς with this construction but in Koine the choice of ὡς is not uncommon.<sup>214</sup>

There is a variant in the phrase: Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμὲν τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ. The Lipsius text reads: Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμὲν τοῦ εὐλογημένου without the word θεοῦ. Θεοῦ is in manuscripts A and B. Manuscript C has the variant Χριστοῦ. Manuscript d, which Lipsius generally avoids, has the text as he has chosen it, and Lipsius cites one other Latin manuscript along with d as a witness to the reading he has chosen. So we can see that here Tischendorf is simply following the strength of the textual tradition in Greek (and as it is supported in Latin). In the Lipsius text the word θεοῦ does appear earlier in the verse, Χαῖρε, ὑπηρέτα τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ, resulting in a very similar translation. Both texts give a reading that again sounds very early and Jewish.

Demas and Hermogenes object to not being included as “Servants of the Blessed God”. In fact in the Acts of the Apostles 16:17, shown above, the address is in the plural and includes not only Paul but also Silas and Timothy. Here although Paul has two companions they are not included in the address.

4c καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος Οὐχ ὁρῶ ἐν ὑμῖν καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης· εἰ δὲ ἔστε τινές, δεῦτε καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε.

4c And Onesiphorus said, “I do not see in you fruit of righteousness, but whoever you are, you too come into my house and rest.

The defence of Onesiphorus is also interesting. In the Gospel of Matthew “good fruit” and “bad fruit”<sup>215</sup> and “righteousness” or “unrighteousness”<sup>216</sup> are used to express the value of attitudes, efforts or actions or the assessment of persons and their actions. See for example Matthew 3:8:

8 ποιήσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας.

8 Therefore bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.

<sup>214</sup> F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, paragraph 391.1, p. 197. See also J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 77. The argument of Jeremy Barrier for ὥστε as the original reading relies on a classical Greek grammar and the speculative reconstruction of the Coptic fragments, and does not persuade.

<sup>215</sup> A selection of references to illustrate the point includes: Mt 3:10; 7:16-20; 13:8; 21:19; 21:43.

<sup>216</sup> For righteousness and its cognates a sample includes: Mt 1:19; 5:45; 6:33; 21:32; 25:46.

In Paul's letters we do not find frequently this kind of use of καρπός "fruit" where it has a meaning concerning actions as personal achievements. In Paul's letter it is applied instead to very spiritual concepts such as the "fruit of the spirit" Gal 5:22, or Christ is the "first fruit (ἀπαρχή) of those who have fallen asleep" 1 Cor 15:20 (NRSV). The Gospel of Matthew stands out as the significant work in the New Testament which has this usage that we find in the *Acts of Thecla* and it is generally agreed by most scholars to be the most Jewish of the Gospels. The use of these terms here and in the Gospel of Matthew compares closely with the prophetic usage in the LXX. (See, for example, Isaiah 37:30-32 and Jeremiah 12: 1-3.) It is classic prophetic usage to compare the righteous or unrighteous behaviour, and achievements of the people to fruit. Interestingly Onesiphorus is portrayed in the story as a generous and righteous man himself, in that he offers hospitality to all of these visitors, even though this dialogue suggests, as a preview in the narrative, that Demas and Hermogenes are not righteous.

At this point the narration encodes a certain commentary on the characters rather than a straightforward reporting of action. The narrator knows of the jealousy of Demas and Hermogenes and is careful to let the reader know of their falsehood. However, the exchange between themselves and Onesiphorus may not have ever happened, as it is clearly a way of their showing their hand, anticipating their role in the narrative. It also allows for the increase in virtuous characterization of Onesiphorus and this is no doubt a very important effect of the reported conversation. It is not clear whether Onesiphorus' judgment that he does not perceive the fruit of righteousness in them is predicated on their asking the question that in itself shows a lack of virtue, or of some other knowledge or perception which was evident when he failed to address them. The failure to address the travelling companions of a dignitary in the ancient world is not uncommon or necessarily offensive.<sup>217</sup> This throws more emphasis on the jealousy of the companions and does not indict Onesiphorus at all.

It is important in the study of Pauline literature that Demas is attested to as a companion of Paul in three sources other than the *Acts of Thecla*. If indeed this is the same Demas in each of these works, the development of his character is seen across a period of time and the final Pauline work, 2 Timothy, sees him in a way compatible with the *Acts of Thecla*. It is also

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<sup>217</sup> This is because travelling companions may be helpers of varying status, including slaves, servants, helpers and employees or supporters of various kinds. The more important the dignitary the more likely this would obtain.

important that Demas is given the voice and leading role in communicating on behalf of himself and Hermogenes.

In the two previous Pauline letters, Colossians and Philemon, Demas had the secondary rank to Luke. Luke is described in Philemon as the esteemed healer (my translation, “beloved physician”, is a more common translation). In Philemon, then, Demas has the secondary or supporter role in relation to Luke. The question arises: “has his advance in rank in partnership made him ambitious?” If indeed the disciples went out two by two,<sup>218</sup> this advance in Demas’ position in the partnership is reported at the same time as his change of purpose. Being in love with the things of this age is a possible way of expressing ambitions to power and respect. The jealousy felt over the greeting also points the reader to a similar conclusion.

This reconstruction cannot be substantiated as historical fact as there is simply too little to go on to prove it to be the case. However, in the examination of the ancient text as a narrative and in comparing it to the Pauline letters, this is a message which is very close to the surface of the literal reading and which therefore should be noted. Another way of saying this is that, although we cannot prove this to be the case, the four ancient writings with which we are dealing suggest and do not preclude such an interpretation.

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<sup>218</sup> Mk 6:7: “He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”

## Verse Five

**5a** Καὶ εἰσελθόντος Παύλου εἰς τὸν τοῦ Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον ἐγένετο χαρὰ μεγάλη,

**5b** καὶ κλίσις γονάτων, καὶ κλάσις ἄρτου, καὶ λόγος θεοῦ περὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ ἀναστάσεως, λέγοντος τοῦ Παύλου

**5c** Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὁψονται.

**5d** μακάριοι οἱ ἀγνὴν τὴν σάρκα τηρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ναὸς θεοῦ γενήσονται.

**5e** μακάριοι οἱ ἐγκρατεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοῖς λαλήσει ὁ θεός.

**5f** μακάριοι οἱ ἀποταξάμενοι τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ < ><sup>219</sup> εὐθεῖς κληθήσονται.<sup>220</sup>

**5g** μακάριοι οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι<sup>221</sup> τὸν θεόν.

**5h** μακάριοι οἱ φόβον ἔχοντες θεοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ γενήσονται.

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<sup>219</sup> The Lipsius text reads εὐαρεστήσουσιν τῷ θεῷ. This reading is found in ABGd. The Tischendorf reading εὐθεῖς κληθήσονται is found in manuscripts CEFIKLM.

<sup>220</sup> These two words (εὐθεῖς κληθήσονται) are omitted from the Lipsius text.

<sup>221</sup> Only a final letter of this word is added in the Lipsius text, a ν, resulting in κληρονομήσουσιν.

## Translation

**5a** And when Paul entered Onesiphorus' home, there was great rejoicing,

**5b** and genuflection and breaking bread and the word of God about self-control and resurrection. Paul was saying,

**5c** "Blessed are the pure in heart because they will see God.

**5d** Blessed are those keeping the flesh pure because they will become God's temple.

**5e** Blessed are the self-controlled, because God will speak to them.

**5f** Blessed are those who renounced this world for they will be called upright.

**5g** Blessed are those who have wives as if they did not have them, because they will inherit God.

**5h** Blessed are those who fear God, because they will become messengers of God."

## Commentary and Notes

5a Καὶ εἰσελθόντος Παύλου εἰς τὸν τοῦ Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον ἐγένετο χαρὰ μεγάλη.

5a And when Paul entered Onesiphorus' home, there was great rejoicing,

The grammar and vocabulary of this phrase is unremarkable and there are no textual variants. Comment on this verse concerns some matters of information. The home of Onesiphorus is not simply a matter of a building. It is more accurate to think of an οἶκος as a community of persons involved in some enterprise and attached to an owner of that enterprise in a set of quarters much like a large villa. Although only Onesiphorus and his sons and wife have been mentioned until now, we can also imagine some servants at least are involved if the family is able to offer hospitality to three travellers. The description here of much joy is likely to be quantitative not only qualitative.

It is important to note that only Paul is mentioned here as entering. The rejoicing happens as Paul enters. Demas and Hermogenes are not mentioned so we are left to fill in the gap in the drama, including them as also having entered the household. What is implied but not said is: there is not rejoicing when they enter; the rejoicing is for Paul. This is consistent with the description of them above. It is notable that not all relationships in the early Jesus movement were harmonious and trusting. Even at the time of Paul there was serious dissension and disagreement among leaders in the movement. We are aware of this from Paul's own letters and the witness of the Acts of the Apostles.

This verse is the first in this *Acts of Thecla* that is very likely influenced by the canonical Gospels or by their oral sources. The discussion as to whether the influence is from the actual Gospels or from the oral sources is crucial to this study. This section of the *Acts of Thecla* shows a late understanding of the beatitudes. These beatitudes refer to very spiritualised rewards that come of practising the virtues recommended. These beatitudes are sometimes called the encratic beatitudes. This encratic character of the *Acts of Thecla* has led many in the past to date this work quite late, at the end of the second century. However, there is

more understanding now of the development of encratism in its first-century character.<sup>222</sup>

The visit of a travelling rabbi and his disciples would have been very exciting in the ancient world. Perhaps a feast would follow. Although the members of Onesiphorus' household do not know Paul, the benefits of his visit would still cause great rejoicing. This rejoicing, and the message of the encratic beatitudes, stand in contrast to each other. Only a spiritual interpretation can make sense of the joy of such limitations and the recognition of the freedom gained by what one does not have. The story has not unfolded enough for the members of Onesiphorus' household to know what Paul will preach, and the listener who knows the story, will be wondering if they will be disappointed. Thecla of course will be enthralled and delighted.

5b καὶ κλίσις γονάτων καὶ κλάσις ἄρτου καὶ λόγος θεοῦ  
περὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ ἀναστάσεως, λέγοντος τοῦ Παύλου

5b and genuflection and breaking bread and the word of God about self-control and resurrection. Paul was saying,

Besides rejoicing, there was genuflection<sup>223</sup> or kneeling, literally “bending the knee”. This is surprising as it is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Philippians, but is not frequently mentioned in the New Testament. There are sixteen references using the expressions equivalent to or similar to “bend the knee”; four of them occur in Acts, seven in the Synoptic Gospels, four in the Pauline letters and one in Hebrews. The Synoptic references are: Mk 1:40 the healing of a leper before Jesus (not all manuscripts have καὶ γονυπετῶν); Luke 5:8 the calling of the first disciples where Simon Peter kneels before Jesus and protests his sinfulness; Mk 10:17 the rich young man kneels before Jesus; Mt 17:14 the father of the boy with the demon kneels before Jesus; Lk 22: 41 Jesus kneels in Gethsemane and Mk 15:19 and Mt 27:29 the mocking by the

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<sup>222</sup> C. Osiek, M. MacDonald with J. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place, House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, pp. 27-28. “A key text to consider here is Paul's reference to the right of an apostle to be accompanied by ‘a sister as wife’ (adelphēn gynaika) in 1 Cor. 9:5.” “Moreover, it is important to note that none of the women singled out by name in Paul's letters is explicitly said to be married. Prisca (called Pricilla in Acts) is specifically identified as Aquila's wife only in Acts (see Acts 18:2, 18, 26), a fact that should be balanced against Luke's tendency to highlight the respectability of women associated with the new religious movement.”

<sup>223</sup> It is worth noting that this is not likely to be like the highly stylised liturgical genuflection known in churches today. Especially it is not the “quickly up and down” of the laity in the aisle before sitting that is familiar in Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic traditions. The genuflection in 5b is a mark of reverence and obeisance to God. It is a practice of devotion and prayer and can include pleading for favour from a representative of God. Normally it would include being on the knees for some time, perhaps some minutes (not seconds), and as in Gethsemane perhaps an extended time.



soldiers. What is common among these is that all the devout kneeling (and the ironic devotion in the mocking) is before Jesus except when Jesus himself kneels to pray in Gethsemane. Kneeling is not a particularly Jewish posture for prayer. It is very likely learned in Israel from foreign influences. It is not surprising that the Gospel of Matthew, which is the most Jewish of the Gospels, uses the expression the least among the Synoptics.

In the Acts of the Apostles the kneeling takes place at: Acts 7:60 Stephen prays before his martyrdom; Acts 9:40 Peter kneels to pray for Tabitha; 20:36 when Paul prays with the Ephesian elders; and 21:5 where Paul and the people of Tyre kneel to pray before he continues on his sea voyage.

These references from the Synoptics and Acts show the developing tradition of kneeling to pray that we know in the New Testament. In Luke-Acts we assume that praying is to the most high God of the Jews. Clearly no praying is ever done to Paul or Peter. Although Luke has Simon Peter kneeling before Jesus when he is called as a disciple, there is otherwise no kneeling to Jesus in prayer in Luke-Acts.

The Pauline references are even more enlightening as they show a genuine Pauline and post-resurrection tradition of prayer. Philippians 2:10 reads: ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πάν γόνυ κάμψῃ. This is translated in NRSV, “that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.” Immediately before this reference to the kneeling is a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The association of kneeling and resurrection is found in this hymn.

In summary what we can say about the New Testament tradition of kneeling is that it is never kneeling to disciples or apostles; it is always kneeling in prayer to the most high God of the Jews or to Jesus.

If the New Testament tradition is carried through here then the kneeling in this verse of Thecla is not kneeling to Saint Paul but to the most high God of the Jews or to Jesus. This directs us to the high probability that this breaking of bread is Eucharistic, especially when it is taken together with the reference to the word of God. It is worth noting that in the *Acts of Thecla* there is no copying of exact phrases concerning kneeling or “breaking bread” from the New Testament.

Before we leave the references to kneeling in the New Testament it is helpful to note that they do have a LXX background. The references in

Romans are quotations of the LXX concerning worship. In Rom 11:4 the reference is to worship of Baal and in Rom 14:11 the quotation of Isaiah 45:23 is the very one which the Philippians hymn quotes. Isaiah 45:22-23 reads in the NRSV: “Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.’ ” So we see that Paul knows this verse of Isaiah in Romans and has also used the hymn which quotes it in Philippians. Deutero-Isaiah shows Babylonian and Persian influence. This way of thinking that there should be kneeling to the most high God or to the risen Jesus is available then to the author of the *Acts of Thecla* as it was to the Synoptic authors and to Paul.

The mention of the “breaking bread” with the word of God is also significant. The obvious comparison is with the recognition of the Risen Christ in the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35. This Lukan story, though a clear model for interpretation of the scriptures with the breaking of bread, seems not to be known by the *Acts of Thecla*. Eventually the original synagogue service which included reading from Torah, teaching and blessings serves as model for the Eucharistic service of word and sacrament. The drinking of wine and eating of bread known as Kiddush is, according to Gregory Dix, the model in Judaism for the bread-breaking and blessing of wine at early Christian Eucharist.<sup>224</sup> This is a possible path of development for which there is not conclusive evidence but one which has been taken seriously since Dix’s seminal volume.

Perhaps Eucharist develops in several ways in different locations. In the *Acts of Thecla* the breaking of bread, the kneeling to pray and the sharing of the word of God about self-control and resurrection constitute an early Eucharist in the Thecla tradition.<sup>225</sup> The lack of mention of wine is significant in conjunction with the reference to self-control. Was this Eucharist without wine carried out as an ascetic practice? One cannot know; however, there is reference to the bread only in Eucharists, for example in the Acts of John and the Acts of Peter, as well as in Lk 24:13-35.

<sup>224</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dacre Press, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1945, pp. 88-89.

<sup>225</sup> J. Bremmer, “Magic, martyrdom and women’s liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla” in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 39: “ Apparently, the author of the ATHE was part of a congregation which took the Eucharist without wine, just like those of the Acts of John and the Acts of Peter. Would this allusion to the Eucharist have been understandable for pagan contemporaries? Probably it would.” Bremmer fails to note that the Emmaus Eucharist ( Lk 24:30-31) of the New Testament is also without wine.

There is a further reference to such a sacred meal, probably a second early Eucharist, in the *Acts of Thecla* at verse 25. This will be treated in detail in its place in this commentary, but here it is important to notice that the reference in verse 25 is to five loaves, herbs and water and to the solace that the group found in telling of the holy works of Christ. The reference to five loaves and to a boy is unmistakably Gospel tradition (cf. John 6:9 “there is a boy here who has five barley loaves” and also Mk 6:38; Mt 14:17; Lk 9:13). The bread sharing of verse 25 is joined together with the recounting of the Jesus story once again. It is prepared for by fasting and kneeling to pray. We can be distracted today by the presence of other food at these early Eucharists besides bread or bread and wine, but this comes from modern sensitivities, not ancient ones. In the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* the Eucharistic meal consists of fine white cheeses and it is clearly received with the “Amen” in a miraculous dream of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd.<sup>226</sup> When Perpetua awakes from the dream she can still taste the sweetness in her mouth. This miraculous sacrament prepares her for her passion and death.

The word of God is not a reference here to the divine *logos* but rather to the hearing of the good news and the interpretation of scripture as in the Lukan Emmaus story. There is no indication that the *logos* is a reference to Jesus; rather it is likely to be a reference to Torah, Prophets and Writings.

The idea of sharing of the word concerning self-control and resurrection is very important in the *Acts of Thecla*. Whether the encratism in Thecla necessitates a late dating is particularly important and crucial to this thesis. The meaning of self-control and the form of self-control advocated are consistent with the Pauline epistolary teachings on the subject. They are part of the word of God concerning resurrection as part of Eucharistic practice. It is noted that a further detailing of this word of God appears in the beatitudes that follow.

These beatitudes are not in any way attributed to Jesus but rather are noted to be the word of God concerning self-control and resurrection as preached by Paul. This leaves room for the modern reader to think of

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<sup>226</sup> *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, Chapter One, Paragraph 3. An English translation is found at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.asp> accessed 5.5.12. It reads: “and from the curd he had from the milk he gave me as it were a morsel; and I took it with joined hands and ate it up; and all that stood around said, Amen. And at the sound of that word I awoke, yet eating I know not what of sweet.”

Paul combining his own admonition and this first beatitude, which in Matthew is attributed to Jesus.

5c Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται

5c “Blessed are the pure in heart because they will see God.

This first beatitude is exactly the same as that in the Gospel of Matthew, Mt. 5:8. This is the only point at which the *Acts of Thecla* and the New Testament are exactly the same. This single verse segment is not an argument for the *Acts of Thecla* being a late tradition after the Gospels have become well circulated, since the beatitude is formulaic and could have been transmitted through oral tradition from a time before the writing of the Gospels. This is much like the “Our Father” in the Didache which cannot prove that the Didache is to be dated after the Gospels.<sup>227</sup>

This beatitude is in the *Acts of Thecla* the introduction of a theme of purity and self-control. The beatitudes of the *Acts of Thecla* far exceed either those of Matthew or Luke in their call for such holiness and freedom. Here the purity is not physical but a matter of the heart, that is of the purpose of a person. The reference to Thecla is to her conversion and baptism, where she gives her life to Christ. For her this is perfect freedom though others may look at her and think that she has given up many luxurious and sensual things. In matters of self-control the freedom of the person is always an important part of the situation, and with women in the ancient world there are special reasons why this is so.

5d μακάριοι οἱ ἀγνήν τὴν σάρκα τηρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ναὸς θεοῦ γενήσονται.

5d Blessed are those keeping the flesh pure because they will become God’s temple.

The purity of the flesh is a theme well known in the Pauline epistles. The theme appears in 2 Cor 6:6; 7:11; 11:2-3; Phil 4:8; 1Tim 5:22 and Ti 2:5. Purity is also a theme developing in the later years of the New Testament and is seen in James 3:17; 1Pet 3:2 and 1John 3:3.

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<sup>227</sup> See Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers, Greek Texts and English Translations*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999 updated edition from 1992, p. 247: “A remarkably wide range of dates, extending from before A.D. 50 to the third century or later, has been proposed for this document.”

There is quite a variety of meanings associated with the theme in the epistles of the New Testament. There is, for example, purity of mind (2 Cor 11:3) and purity in the world to come like Christ's purity (1 John 3:3). Both of these meanings have no physical reference. The specific meaning of fidelity in marriage is found concerning both men and women: men in 1 Tim 5:22 and women in 1 Pet 3:2. Other meanings include both virtue and dealing with hardship. Purity is listed in the catalogue of virtues in Phil 4:8 and in the peristatic catalogue in 2 Cor 6:6.

In the *Acts of Thecla* the kind of purity indicated is clearly the purity of the flesh. What is not clear is whether this is about fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness or both or more. The reference to God's temple does not preclude the possibility of interpreting this beatitude in terms of fidelity in marriage. Sacrifice for a good marriage was often made in ancient temples.<sup>228</sup> Temples would in fact be more likely to call to mind fertility than any form of celibacy. The interpretation that this beatitude includes fidelity in marriage would mean that this list of beatitudes is not excessively repetitive. The *Acts of Thecla* is not prone to repetition and so there is no reason to think that the beatitudes, even though formulaic, would be particularly repetitive.

Appropriate sexual behaviour is described by Musonius Rufus, a Roman Stoic philosopher who is thought to have been born around 30 CE and to have died before 102<sup>229</sup>. His writings are contemporaneous with Paul's writing and the New Testament. He writes in *Dissertationum a Lucio digestarum reliquiae* 12:1-22:

Μέρος μέντοι τρυφῆς οὐ μικρότατον κἂν τοῖς  
ἀφροδίσις ἐστίν, ὅτι ποικίλων δέονται παιδικῶν οἱ  
τρυφῶντες οὐ νομίμων μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ παρανόμων,  
οὐδὲ θηλειῶν μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρρένων, ἄλλοτε ἄλλους  
θηρῶντες ἐρωμένους, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐν ἐτοίμῳ οὖσιν οὐκ  
ἀρκούμενοι, τῶν δὲ σπανίων ἐφιέμενοι, συμπλοκὰς δ'  
ἀσχήμονας ζητοῦντες, ἅπερ ἅπαντα μεγάλα ἐγκλήματα  
ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν. χρὴ δὲ τοὺς μὴ τρυφῶντας ἢ μὴ κακοὺς  
μόνα μὲν ἀφροδίσια νομίζειν δίκαια τὰ ἐν γάμῳ καὶ ἐπὶ  
γενέσει παίδων συντελούμενα, ὅτι καὶ νόμιμά ἐστιν· τὰ  
δέ γε ἡδονὴν θηρώμενα ψιλὴν ἄδικα καὶ παράνομα, κἂν

<sup>228</sup> Just a single example from a myriad of possibilities is from the fiction *Callirhoe* by Chariton Book 1:1, where at the public feast of Aphrodite Callirhoe goes to do homage and meets her future husband, Chaereas. Chariton, *Callirhoe* (ed. and trans.) by George Goold, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1995.

<sup>229</sup> The *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Nicholas Geoffrey Lemprière Hammond and Howard Hayes Scullard (eds.), second ed., Clarendon, Oxford, 1970, p. 713 entry Musonius Rufus.

ἐν γάμῳ ἦ. συμπλοκαὶ δ' ἄλλαι αἱ μὲν κατὰ μοιχείαν  
παρανομώταται, καὶ μετριώτεραι τούτων οὐδὲν αἱ πρὸς  
ἄρρενας τοῖς ἄρρεσιν, ὅτι παρὰ φύσιν τὸ τόλμημα· ὅσαι δὲ  
μοιχείας ἐκτὸς συνουσίαι πρὸς θηλείας εἰσὶν ἐστερημέναι  
τοῦ γίνεσθαι κατὰ νόμον, καὶ αὖται πᾶσαι αἰσχυραί, αἱ  
γε πράττονται δι' ἀκολασίαν. ὥς μετὰ γε σωφροσύνης  
οὔτ' ἂν ἑταίρα πλησιάζειν ὑπομείνειέ τις, οὔτ' ἂν  
ἐλευθέρα γάμου χωρὶς οὔτε μὰ Δία θεραπαίνῃ τῇ αὐτοῦ.

Not the least significant part of the life of luxury and self-indulgence lies also in sexual excess; for example those who lead such a life crave a variety of loves not only lawful but unlawful ones as well, not women alone but also men; sometimes they pursue one love and sometimes another, and not being satisfied with those which are available, pursue those which are rare and inaccessible and invent shameful intimacies, all of which constitute a grave indictment of manhood. Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure-seeking, even in marriage. But of all sexual relations those involving adultery are most unlawful, and no more tolerable are those of men with men, because it is a monstrous thing and contrary to nature. But, furthermore, leaving out of consideration adultery all intercourse with women which is without lawful character is shameful and is practiced from lack of self-restraint (ἀκολασίαν). So no one with any self-control (σωφροσύνης) would think of having relations with a courtesan or a free woman apart from marriage, no, nor even with his own maid-servant.<sup>230</sup>

This passage shows how the language of self-control is generic to marriage in the first century of the common era. This kind of thought is also prevalent in Paul's teaching as we have it in his letters and so it is not surprising that it appears in this form on his lips in the *Acts of Thecla*.

It is true that a form of denial of the body will eventually become important to various second-century and third-century movements, where persons are encouraged to no longer be their own physical self. They will be encouraged to leave the body for astral travel and so forth, but here the self-control is for the purpose of freedom in a social and moral sense. It is related to the cultural expectations of the family in marriage,

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<sup>230</sup> Cora Elizabeth Lutz, *Musonius Rufus*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1947, pp. 84-87.

economics and reproduction. It has much in common with the ethical traditions of the Greek philosophers and becomes an important Stoic area of thought as well as an important Christian concept.

5e μακάριοι οἱ ἐγκρατεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοῖς λαλήσει ὁ θεός.

5e Blessed are the self-controlled, because God will speak to them.

This beatitude, “blessed are the self-controlled for God will speak to them”, gives us very little clarification concerning the kind of self-control intended. If taken with the other beatitudes it could mean self-control of the physical and sexual kind, before marriage, in marriage and for those who are not married for whatever reason. An extreme interpretation of these Acts concerning the ascetic, ἐγκρατεῖς, could be offered here including; abstaining from all sexual activity, eating only what is needed to stay alive, enjoying no luxury of life-style: no housing, no unnecessary clothing, no entertainment or social gathering.

Greco-Roman culture knows this sort of detachment from the things of the world among the Cynic philosophers. In Judaism it is evidenced in the Essene movement, in the John the Baptist cult and in the book of Judith. It is possible that this is what is meant here in this beatitude.

It is also possible that this reference is to that balance that is advised by Aristotle in the *Ethics*. Elsewhere in the *Acts of Thecla*, because Thecla seems to have no problem being given shelter by Queen Tryphaena, it is unlikely that she is eating only herbs and water and sleeping rough in Tryphaena’s quarters. She assures her mother that money is available from her. This is presumably from the resources given her by Tryphaena.

Then again perhaps in her itinerancy and certainly in the late additional ending where she enters the rock, the level of ascetic experience would be extreme. There is little comment on the details of life so that a judgment could be made. However, the strong thrust of this work is missionary rather than as a manual for ascetic practice. Even as we might glean such detailed prescription from something like the tradition of Anthony of Egypt, where years of solitude and poor diet so as to occasion illness are described, there is no reason to think that they apply or are advocated in the *Acts of Thecla*. In light of the absence of such details, the hypothesis of more ordinary circumstances is probably the more likely position.

If a sense of the judicious middle way is advocated, as in the Aristotelian tradition<sup>231</sup> which is available to the literate culture of this time, then this would reflect poorly on the actions of Alexander in verse 26, which are uncontrolled and offensive in the narrative. The sense of the judicious middle way, rather than the extreme practices of someone like Anthony in the desert, would fit better with the atmosphere and spirit of the Thecla story.

There are two beatitudes here which are clearly not about the physical: the first and the sixth. They are: “blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God” and “blessed are those who fear God, because they will become messengers of God”. Consistent with these beatitudes then it is possible that the self-control here may well be spiritual self-control, which is related to the ethical or judicious sort which strives for balance. Those who will be “messengers of God” may also be a reference to the mission thrust of this narrative. Spiritual strength, good common sense, and self-control are needed in mission.

That God should speak to those with this spiritual kind of self-control is plausible. Perhaps there are echoes of the prophetic voice of God here or the voice of God in the giving of the law. These Jewish notions of the voice of God would be consistent with the character of the Acts as a whole and it would offer a likely comparison to the idea in the sixth beatitude that those who fear God will be messengers of God.

That God would speak to good persons is also interesting in comparison with Paul’s teaching and the Acts of the Apostles. God speaks in Judaism through the prophets and in the Torah but also in theophanies and by messages from angels. Any of these kinds of speaking of God may be meant. Compare for example in Paul’s letters, 1 Cor 2:6-8 which has:

6 Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων· 7 ἀλλὰ λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ, τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, ἣν προώρισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν· 8 ἣν οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἔγνωκεν, εἰ γὰρ ἔγνωσαν, οὐκ ἂν τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης ἐσταύρωσαν.

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<sup>231</sup>See the *Eudemian Ethics*, 1223b.11-14, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on CD-ROM, University of California, 1999. ἡ γὰρ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετὴ, ἡ δ’ ἀρετὴ δικαιότερους ποιεῖ. ἐγκρατεύεται δ’ ὅταν πράττῃ παρὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν κατὰ τὸν λογισμόν. “For self-control is a virtue. And virtue makes more just (that is virtue makes one more just). One acts with self-control whenever one acts against desire according to deliberation.”



6 But we speak wisdom to those perfected, and wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who come to nothing, 7 but we speak the wisdom of God in mystery, which was hidden, which God decreed before this age for our glory; 8 none of the rulers of this age knew this, for if they knew, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.

This is a fine example of speaking of the glory and the mystery of God and not of this age, or of this world or of the cosmos of this age. Similarly in the *Acts of Thecla* being attuned to the spirit and not to the world is recommended.

5f μακάριοι οἱ ἀποταξάμενοι τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ,  
ὅτι αὐτοὶ < > εὐθεῖς κληθήσονται.

5f Blessed are those who renounced this world for they will be called upright.

Here we have a textual problem. The Lipsius text reads εὐαρεστήσουσιν τῷ θεῷ instead of εὐθεῖς κληθήσονται. Both texts though different are orthodox. The Lipsius theory of abridgement cannot be operable in this case because there is no reason to change from “they will be pleasing to God” to “they will be called upright”. There is no reason to think then that the Lipsius text is the more original. It is possible that the Lipsius text is an explanation of “upright”. For the Greek-speaking Jewish world the term εὐθεῖς “upright” will be familiar. It is found frequently in the Septuagint. A few examples will suffice to show this. At 1Sam 29:6, ὅτι εὐθὺς σὺ καὶ ἀγαθός is a description of David as upright and good. It is found in Proverbs 2: 21: “For the upright (εὐθεῖς) will abide in the land” and Psalm 33:1 “Praise befits the upright (εὐθέσι)” and Psalm 11:7 “uprightness (εὐθύτητα)”.<sup>232</sup>

It is possible that the Lipsius text is a later explanation for Christians who are not as familiar with the Jewish scriptural traditions as the earliest followers of the way of Jesus. If one were to ask the question: what is it to be “upright”? —a good answer might be: “it is to be pleasing to God”.

Renunciation is a Gospel virtue. Mark 8:34-36 has:

34 Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω

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<sup>232</sup> I have given examples of several forms of the root word to show the diverse usage. It is common in many forms in the Septuagint. The English translations of all of these segments are from the NRSV.

ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι.  
35 ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν·  
ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν [ἐμοῦ καὶ] τοῦ  
εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν. 36 τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἄνθρωπον κερδῆσαι  
τὸν κόσμον ὅλον καὶ ζημιωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ;

34 And when he had summoned the crowd with his disciples he said to them, “Whoever wants to come after me must renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 And whosoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but the one who shall lose his life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel, that one will save it. 36 For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world, and lose his soul?”

These sentiments resonate in the parallel passage in Matthew 16:24ff. Renunciation of the world is also early in the Christian tradition, being found in the parables and proverbs of the kingdom of God. This beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla* is entirely orthodox, yet it is not copied from the New Testament. This supports the argument that the *Acts of Thecla* could be from a time before the New Testament is completed. The *Acts of Thecla* could be written around the end of the first or beginning of the second century.

It bears emphasizing that to be called upright is a Septuagintal expression, not a New Testament one; see for example 1 Sam 29:6 where David is called upright εὐθύς. See also Psalms 32:11; 36:10 and Micah 7:2-4 and many other references. The Hebrew flavour of this beatitude may indicate that it is an old one. It could easily come from a time before the *Acts of Thecla* takes written form.

5g μακάριοι οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὸν θεόν.

5g Blessed are those who have wives as if they did not have them, because they will inherit God.

This beatitude has clear parallels in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 7:5 we have: “deprive not each other, unless by agreement for a time in order to have dedicated time for prayer”. Then in the same chapter in verses 7 to 9 we have Paul’s admonition for the unmarried to remain single as he is, but if that is not possible then to marry. Verse 29 of this chapter is the closest parallel; it reads:

29 ἵνα καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες ὦσιν

29 And in order that the ones having wives may be as though they did not have them.

This is a very close though not identical parallel. It certainly has the same meaning and but for the fact that it is enclosed in the ἵνα clause with the expected subjunctive, it is an exact parallel. This is an early letter of Paul's and is perfectly consistent with the story that this is what Thecla hears Paul preach in the house of Onesiphorus.

Not marrying, especially for women who were not interested in married life, often afforded a distinct advantage to them in this time and in these cultures.<sup>233</sup> The advantages may have included freedom to travel, freedom to follow their own interests, freedom not to risk having children, freedom from specific male control, and financial freedom.

We assume that Thecla takes the message to have relevance to her state, and she commences to discontinue her engagement, to the horror of her mother, for the sake of inheriting God. Matters of inheritance are certainly at stake here, and inheritance is a metaphor employed by Paul to explain salvation in Romans 8:17.

That those who live in this way, having wives as if they did not have them, should be rewarded by inheriting God is mysterious. There is no canonical reference to the inheriting of God. This could perhaps mean something like "the kingdom of heaven is theirs", that is, they are to inherit eternal life with God, but we have no clues to direct us in this way. The reference in verse 14<sup>234</sup> in this narrative to children being the result of resurrection shows how important inheritance was in this society. Children inherited not only material possessions but also a spiritual

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<sup>233</sup> Katherine Bain, "Socioeconomic Status in Early Christianity and Thecla's Rejection of Marriage" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2001, pp. 51-69. Bain examines the complexity of married and single women's social status. An example of this is pp. 65-66, "For Antiochis, the city name gives not only her place of residence but tells her reader that she claims a recognized political status there. The monuments present Eutychias and Antiochis with civic identity through their occupations and their access to financial resources. The portrayal differs from that of wives in that the single women are seen as members of a city rather than as members of a man's household. In the portrayals of these unmarried women, there is no place for the public/private binary that is often used in describing women's position in ancient society. Thus, it is possible to reconstruct historical understandings of single women that do not locate them in houses and do not see a woman's "public" activity as a transgression of boundaries. In this comparison of wealthy women, socioeconomic status varies with household position."

<sup>234</sup> 14d-14e καὶ ἡμεῖς σε διδάξομεν, ἣν λέγει οὗτος ἀνάστασιν γενέσθαι, ὅτι ἤδη γέγονεν ἐφ' οἷς ἔχομεν τέκνοις, καὶ ἀνιστάμεθα θεὸν ἐπεγνωκότες ἀληθῆ. "And we will teach you: that the resurrection of which he speaks is come to be, that it has already happened, in the case of children that we have, and we are risen having come to know God to be true."

obligation to remember their parents. The obligation of children to parents is an important theological theme in the *Acts of Thecla*.

5h μακάριοι οἱ φόβον ἔχοντες θεοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ γενήσονται.

5h Blessed are those who fear God, because they will become messengers of God.”

The fear of God is a Jewish virtue, attested to frequently in the scriptures. Becoming an angel or messenger of God is known in the Acts of the Apostles where Peter appears to be an angel. Here in the *Acts of Thecla* we also have the phenomenon of Paul appearing to be an angel. The possibility then exists that ἄγγελοι here means angels rather than messengers. This is not the preferred translation because both in the cases of Peter and Paul the appearance like an angel is not an actuality but only a semblance or indeed a mistake. In the references to Peter and Paul appearing to be like angels, something is being said of their character and effect on the community rather than about their being.

The function of angels is to bring messages; the older and more Jewish notion is that men of God bring messages from God. To be a God-fearing person is a prerequisite for being a messenger of God. As already stated, it is likely that this is to be taken along with the description of Paul. He appears as an angel, and here those who fear God become angels of God. What is being said in the narrative as a whole is that Paul is one who fears God, and that all those who fear God can be like Paul, God’s messengers.

Since the *Acts of Thecla* is primarily about missionary activity and the witness to faith in public baptism, the translation “messenger” suits the context better in that sense. It is also highly unlikely that, when the other beatitudes are so close to Paul’s teachings and the New Testament beatitudes, this one would advocate the third-century ideas of becoming pure spirits without bodies. The subsequent narrative confirms there is no sense at all that this is what Thecla wants to do after listening to this sermon. She wants to be a messenger of God.

Before moving on to verse 6 it is necessary to note that the Lipsius text contains four extra beatitudes here. They are:

A1 Μακάριοι οἱ τρέμοντες τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

A2 μακάριοι οἱ σοφίαν λαβόντες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,  
ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου κληθήσονται.

A3 μακάριοι οἱ σύνεσιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χωρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ  
ἐν φωτὶ γενήσονται.

A4 μακάριοι οἱ δι' ἀγάπην θεοῦ ἐξελθόντες τοῦ σχήματος τοῦ  
κοσμικοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀγγέλους κρινούσιν καὶ ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ  
πατρὸς εὐλογηθήσονται.

Elliott translates these:

A1 Blessed are those who respect the word of God, for they shall be  
comforted.

A2 Blessed are those who have received the wisdom of Jesus Christ, for  
they shall be called the sons of the Most High.

A3 Blessed are those who have come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, for  
they shall be in the light.

A4 Blessed are those who through love of God no longer conform to the  
world, for they shall judge angels, and shall be blessed at the right hand  
of the Father.<sup>235</sup>

They are not gnostic and do not contain heretical ideas. There is no  
reference to special or secret knowledge. Knowledge of Jesus Christ  
which allows one to walk in the light or know Jesus as the light is good  
Johannine theology cf John 1:1-14. Receiving the wisdom of Jesus Christ  
is also orthodox cf. 1 Cor 1:24. Judging angels appears in 1 Cor 6:3. The  
interest in the word of God is also reminiscent of Johannine theology cf.  
John 1:1-14. The love of God and not conforming to the world are again  
Johannine in character (see John 14:6, 23, 30-31).

These Beatitudes, which considering Lipsius' premise of later  
abridgement one might assume are removed because of their heretical  
character,<sup>236</sup> do not appear to be as difficult as for example 5g and 5h. 5g  
might be said to be a kind of denial of the body or an extreme encratism  
not unlike that in Gnostic thought. However, it is not heresy: on the  
contrary it agrees with Paul's letter to the Corinthians. 5h to become an  
"angel" could be thought of as Gnostic, if by "angel" is meant a  
disembodied spirit. "Ἄγγελος" does however, continue to mean  
messenger in the New Testament, for example in Lk 7:24; 9:52; and  
James 2:25. I have translated "messengers" but if one wanted to argue

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<sup>235</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 365

<sup>236</sup> Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, pp. xcvi and civ. On p. xcvi Lipsius comments that texts  
were purged of Gnostic material when accommodated later to Catholic use. He distinguishes on p. civ  
between texts AB and C stating that in C many things are changed, left out or cut short including  
beatitudes in this section. In his footnotes, p. 239, he lists those beatitudes omitted by C and  
Tischendorf.

for the excising of heretical material 5h might be a candidate for this; yet it is not left out of the short text or the long text of the *Acts of Thecla*. My argument is that the verses of the long text A1, A2, A3, and A4 are later additions. They may have been added as late as the third century or fourth century to conform to the theological ideas found in John's Gospel.

## Verse Six

**6a** <><sup>237</sup> μακάριοι οἱ τὸ βάπτισμα τηρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀναπαύσονται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν.

**6b** <><sup>238</sup> μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται ἡμέραν κρίσεως πικράν.

**6c** μακάρια τὰ σώματα τῶν παρθένων, ὅτι αὐτὰ εὐαρεστήσουσιν τῷ θεῷ καὶ οὐκ ἀπολέσουσιν τὸν μισθὸν τῆς ἀγνείας αὐτῶν.

**6d** ὅτι ὁ λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς<sup>239</sup> ἔργον αὐτοῖς γενήσεται σωτηρίας εἰς ἡμέραν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν ἔξουσιν εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος.

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<sup>237</sup>The Lipsius text has these additional beatitudes:

Μακάριοι οἱ τρέμοντες τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται. μακάριοι οἱ σοφίαν λαβόντες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου κληθήσονται.

They are not found in manuscripts CED. They are found in ABG with variations in KM and B.

<sup>238</sup>The Lipsius text also has these additional beatitudes:

μακάριοι οἱ σύνεσιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χωρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐν φωτὶ γενήσονται.

μακάριοι οἱ δι' ἀγάπην θεοῦ ἐξελθόντες τοῦ σχήματος τοῦ κοσμικοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀγγέλους κρινούσιν καὶ ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ πατρὸς εὐλογηθήσονται.

They are not found in Cd but are found in ABG with variations in K and M.

<sup>239</sup>τοῦ χριστοῦ is found in manuscript G and neither Tischendorf nor Lipsius chooses it.

## Translation

**6a** Blessed are they who secure baptism, for they will take rest with the father and the son.

**6b** Blessed are the merciful, for they will have mercy done them and they will not see the bitter day of judgment.

**6c** Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they will be acceptable to God and they will not lose the reward of their purity,<sup>240</sup>

**6d** because the word of the Father will be a work of salvation for them on the day of his Son, and they will have rest forever.”

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<sup>240</sup> This may be better translated: “Blessed are the bodies of the unmarried women, for they shall be acceptable to God and they shall not lose the reward of their holiness.” Wealthy women may not have been physically virgin, yet they may have remained unmarried in order to pursue a life of service and holiness using their means for charitable purposes. See 1 Tim 5:2-15 where it is clear that the author appears to instruct “younger women to marry” against the existing practice. These “widows” who are not widows are going from home to home doing good deeds. Presumably they are wealthy for they must have funds for this work and for their own needs. See Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1980, p.112, “Only in continence might a woman become spiritually equal to men, and only to the continent could come the full benefit of the Christian faith.” This conclusion of Davies is part of a larger picture where great variety actually existed concerning virginity and belief.



## Commentary and Notes

6a < > μακάριοι οἱ τὸ βάπτισμα τηρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀναπαύσονται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν.

6a Blessed are they who secure baptism, for they will take rest with the father and the son.

My translation of μακάριοι οἱ τὸ βάπτισμα τηρήσαντες takes its tempo from the ὅτι clause. To find rest, or take rest, with the father and son, is likely to be a reference to afterlife. It is striking that the Trinitarian formula is missing. Later Latin manuscripts complete it.<sup>241</sup> The incomplete formula is a sign of the early origin of this beatitude.<sup>242</sup> The theology of baptism includes the understanding of dying and rising with Christ. The sense is that one gives one's entire life to this, so that not even death is too much to ask. Thecla as the proto-martyr shows the way for many who will actually die for their faith.

Here to be baptised means that afterlife with God and Christ is merited. In later Christian documents the unity of the Trinity is a metaphor of the joy of eternal life. Believers, when they die, live in unity with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In their prayer life before death they understand the beauty of the unity of the Trinity and long for unity with God. In the *Acts of Thecla* the familiar formula for the Trinity is not yet present, just as it is not well known in the New Testament. The unity of Jesus and the Father serves the same purpose here in relationship to baptism. As Christ is united to God the Father in death, so may all who are baptised be with the Father and Son as they die and rest in peace.

Eternal life with God and Christ is a very important theme in the *Acts of Thecla*. Queen Tryphaena is very concerned with the circumstance of her daughter, Falconilla's death. Her hope is that Thecla can help her with this "unknowing" grief about her daughter.

Reference to baptism in this story is reference to martyrdom. Thecla baptises herself in the pool when her martyrdom is being carried out. The two actions of baptism and martyrdom are inseparable in the *Acts of Thecla*. To be baptised is to give witness to dying and rising with Christ.

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<sup>241</sup> Tischendorf notes that G adds τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.

<sup>242</sup> Perhaps it is also an indication of the early date of the *Acts of Thecla*.

Thecla is a survivor of martyrdom twice (two public attempts to kill her where she is given opportunity to witness publicly) and so is awarded the status of a martyr (a witness) though she does not die. That is: she is a witness, a public witness, who even in the face of death has given her testimony to Jesus Christ. Thecla's missionary journey and ministry will become the way that she lives out her baptism.

This beatitude can be compared to the understanding of baptism in Pauline tradition. Paul understands witness, including his own witness to the good news, as taking precedence over baptism. In 1 Corinthians 1:14-18 he writes about this evangelical witness and its relationship to baptism:

14 εὐχαριστῶ ὅτι οὐδένα ὑμῶν ἐβάπτισα εἰ μὴ Κρίσπον καὶ Γάϊον, 15 ἵνα μὴ τις εἴπῃ ὅτι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα ἐβαπτίσθητε. 16 ἐβάπτισα δὲ καὶ τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον· λοιπὸν οὐκ οἶδα εἰ τινα ἄλλον ἐβάπτισα. 17 οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλén με Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν ἀλλὰ εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 18 Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν.

14 I give thanks that I have baptised none of you, other than Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptised in my name. 16 I baptised also the household of Stephanas: otherwise I know no one else whom I baptised. 17 For Christ sent me not to baptise but to preach<sup>243</sup> the good news, not in wise words, in order that the cross of Christ should not be ineffective. 18 For the word of the cross is foolish to those perishing, but to us being saved it is the power of God.

Clearly it is the word of the effective cross that is central in this passage of Paul's letter. This is the substance of Paul's message. Baptism may well be the recognition of one's living the good news of the cross, but it is not in itself the good news; rather the good news is in Jesus Christ. It is this union with Christ, not saving one's life or being baptised, that is the good news. This is true in this beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla* too, for baptism is secured for the purpose of eternal unity with Christ and God. For Paul in his letter to the Philippians, the union with Christ extends beyond death. We need to remember here that the cross for Christ is death. In early Christian writings the idea of the cross is not symbolic of a world of orthodox faith as it is today; rather the cross is the instrument of torture and death for Jesus. His loving family, followers and friends

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<sup>243</sup> The phrase: οὐ βαπτίζειν ἀλλὰ εὐαγγελίζεσθαι literally means: "not to baptise but to evangelize".

would mourn his death with grief even though they trusted in eternal resurrected life. In Philippians 1:22-24 Paul writes,

22 εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου· καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω. 23 συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο, τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, πολλῷ [γάρ] μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον· 24 τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαιότερον δι' ὑμᾶς.

22 But if it is life in the flesh, there is the fruit of my work: and I do not know what to choose. 23 I am of two minds; I have a wish to leave and be with Christ, for that is far better, 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

To be united to Christ in death is the goal of living. When one considers that Paul, who has written of a thorn in the flesh and various physical trials (2 Cor. 12:7), may be close to death as indeed these verses in Philippians might indicate, what really matters to him in death is union with Christ. The work of life, the mission, is of course important, but the goal is eternal union with Christ. This beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla* expresses this later thinking about the significance of baptism. It is not simply the common Jewish ritual washing; it is the unity with God of eternal life. It means that you give all of your life, even as much as your death, to Christ. Christ, the innocent victim, is the sign that violence has no part in the good news. Death cannot mean anything else then except this one thing that is left, unity with Christ.

In the *Acts of Thecla* it is also evident that Thecla has already become committed to Christ before her baptism. The baptism is the celebration of the decision that she made much earlier when she listened to this beatitude and the other parts of Paul's sermon from her window. That decision was already being lived out in her following Paul, and listening further to his teaching about Christ. It was further lived out in her continuing witness and missionary journey. She will embrace the cross in her own life, in her struggles with her family relationships and in the threats and violence that come to her. She will remain fearless because the decision that she first made will hold her in good stead. Her clear purpose to be one with Christ and in death with God and Christ will endure throughout her life.

So we see that the focus on afterlife with Christ is genuinely part of the Pauline message. This beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla* places emphasis on the baptism that is Thecla's, that is: a martyr's baptism. Paul cautions

against relying solely on the baptism, for the water ritual must be the recognition of her witness and her faithfulness. It is the witness and the faithfulness that are the focus of the narrative. Securing baptism here is a matter of winning the recognition that is appropriate for a martyr. Securing baptism is celebrating the commitment already made to Christ.

The verb in this beatitude τηρήσαντες comes from τηρέω and means to secure or to preserve or keep, to pay full attention to, or to observe. Other translators have at times supplied the concept of purity to this beatitude. It is not in the Greek. For example an online translation has: “Blessed are they who keep their baptism pure”.<sup>244</sup> Schneemelcher argues that this may be a matter of scribal interpretation, following the example of 2 Clement 6:9.<sup>245</sup>

9 εἰ δὲ καὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι δίκαιοι οὐ δύνανται ταῖς ἑαυτῶν  
δικαιοσύναις ῥύσασθαι τὰ τέκνα αὐτῶν, ἡμεῖς, ἐὰν μὴ τηρήσωμεν  
τὸ βάπτισμα ἄγνόν καὶ ἀμίαντον, ποία πεποιθήσει  
εἰσελευσόμεθα εἰς τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ θεοῦ; ἢ τίς ἡμῶν  
παράκλητος ἔσται, ἐὰν μὴ εὗρεθῶμεν ἔργα ἔχοντες ὅσια καὶ  
δίκαια;

9 But if even such righteous men as these cannot by their righteous deeds deliver their children, with what confidence shall we, if we keep not our baptism pure and undefiled, enter into the kingdom of God? Or who shall be our advocate, unless we be found having holy and righteous works? (J. B. Lightfoot’s translation accessed online)<sup>246</sup>

This development of conventional language for the effect of baptism is much later than the actual Pauline tradition where baptisms are on the one hand not yet the fully accepted initiation requirement of the Jesus movement. Circumcision is still discussed and Paul writes about not baptising in 1 Cor 1:14. On the other hand baptism as a washing, in Judaism, is something that is done daily in regard to food and other life matters, care of the sick, purifications, and ceremonies. The oral tradition of Thecla’s self-baptism is plausibly quite early, possibly as early as the undisputed Pauline letters.

<sup>244</sup> <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/thecla>.as translation by Jeremiah Jones (1693—1724) public domain site, accessed 14 June 2013. The quotation above is found at verse 1:18 in the unusual numbering of the Acts as they are found on this website.

<sup>245</sup> Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1992, p 354.

<sup>246</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/2clement-lightfoot.html>, accessed on 14 June 2013.

The tendency of scholars to conform the understanding of the *Acts of Thecla* to other early writings is not surprising. Elliott's translation, "Blessed are those who have kept the baptism, for they shall be refreshed by the Father and the Son," can be understood in this vein. The idea is that the seal of baptism should not be broken. We find this idea in *The Shepherd of Hermas* in the eighth similitude 6.3.<sup>247</sup> These traditions found in Clement and Hermas could well have influenced later translations and interpretations of the *Acts of Thecla*.

At its earliest levels of tradition it is likely that the sense of this beatitude is securing unity with Christ in the afterlife. It is unlikely to have had a sense of keeping baptism intact like a seal, the breaking of which meant that the initiated person was again subject to other popular religions and debauched life choices. One takes the meaning of the beatitude in context of the overall story of the *Acts of Thecla*, where union with Christ in life and death and in afterlife is a major theme.<sup>248</sup>

6b <> μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται ἡμέραν κρίσεως πικράν.

6b Blessed are the merciful, for they will have mercy done them and they will not see the bitter day of judgment.

There is a strong comparison here between this beatitude and the Matthean one. At Mt 5:7 we find:

7 μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (NRSV)

This beatitude, like the first of the beatitudes in the *Acts of Thecla*, does not give reason to think that this verse of the *Acts of Thecla* is copied from the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>249</sup> This beatitude is formulaic and would

<sup>247</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas* is dated somewhere between 70 and 175 CE. See *Shepherd of Hermas, A Commentary* by Carolyn Osiek, Hermeneia Series, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 206. "Hermas gives his usual request for explanation of the whole story. The reference to 'the seal' (ἡ σφραγίς) in the first part of the sentence surely refers to baptism, after the analogy of the clay or wax impression made by another party, or to mark the object as property or authentic document."

<sup>248</sup> For those who might think that a major theme is keeping pure and not returning to debauchery, the onus of proof is on them. The only characters who return to a life of debauchery are Demas and Hermogenes and there is nothing about their baptisms in the narrative. It would seem obvious, if this were a theme, to mention something about them not keeping the seal of baptism, if indeed they ever were baptised.

<sup>249</sup> Pál Herczeg, "New Testament parallels to the apocryphal Acta Pauli documents", in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 149. "The fact that the AP do not quote the important words of Paul from Rom or do not think about the resurrection according to 1 Cor 15 and so on,

have been a part of the oral Jesus tradition. If the Gospel of Matthew were known to the author of the *Acts of Thecla*, the addition of the final clause concerning the “day of judgment” would be surprising. It contains an early eschatology. The simpler tradition would be more likely to be preserved in oral tradition. It is likely, as McDonald proposes,<sup>250</sup> that there is legendary and oral tradition from which the *Acts of Thecla* draws. This would also be true of the Gospel of Matthew.

The “bitter day of judgment” is a theological idea which is consistent with both Pauline theology and the theology of the *Acts of Thecla*. This early eschatological emphasis is typical of the Pauline epistles; see for example Rom 2:5; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 6:2; Phil 2:16.

Paul’s eschatology is a topic of recent and classical debate. An example of trying to pull the threads together is given by Douglas Campbell in his work, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy*. In his book on p. 39 he writes about Albert Schweitzer:

Schweitzer held that Paul’s mind was dominated by a stark division of reality into good and evil powers which were struggling within history, while history itself was rushing towards a great climax in a fiery day of judgment and cosmic catastrophe. Driven by this knowledge that time was extremely short, Paul began his extraordinary missionary labours, gathering as many believers as he could into the safety of the Christian community before the end of the age.<sup>251</sup>

Later Campbell also writes:

Hence Paul can speak of a new creation, or of a new Adam, that is, a new humanity, refashioned and remade ‘in Christ’ as anyone experiences his resurrection – and here the connection with broader eschatological categories becomes apparent.<sup>252</sup>

Paul’s eschatology is not the criterion by which one ought to decide how to interpret the *Acts of Thecla*. The *Acts of Thecla* is a separate narrative with its own unique theology; however, this thesis shows New Testament

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demonstrates to me, or at least suggests, that no effort is being made to alter the canon or to enlarge it. To quote the expression of F. Bovon, one can sense an outburst of ‘narrative energy’, but one which was not based on the use of the canonical texts.”

<sup>250</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, p. 14.

<sup>251</sup> Douglas Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy*, JSNT Supplement Series 274, T&T Clark, London, 2005, p. 39.

<sup>252</sup> D. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy*, p. 40.

intersections and Paul's theology are significant in that regard. In the imagining of the narrative actions moving forward it is helpful to recognize that this beatitude would fit easily with what one can recognize as Pauline. If there were an historical core to the Thecla story in the history of Saint Paul, these beatitudes would be consistent with Pauline theology.

The meaning of this beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla* is coloured by the last phrase. The reward for showing mercy is related to the eschatological reckoning. The simple conjunction can contain a meaning of separation or one of continuance. It can mean "they shall obtain mercy, that is on that last day they will not see the bitterness". In this case καί is used in the way a colon would be today to produce the idea that the mercy *is* not seeing the bitter day. Otherwise it can mean, "they shall obtain mercy here on earth and then later in heaven they will also be rewarded". It is not possible to know here which was intended. The third possibility is that not seeing the bitter day can read like a postscript, especially if the beatitude is already well known. This sense is: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall have mercy done them and, Oh and by the way, and they will not have a bad result on judgment day". Of these three, the most likely is the first since the previous beatitude is also concerned with afterlife. So we would understand this beatitude as saying those who are merciful now will experience God's mercy on judgment day. This is the primary meaning. The other meanings would have no doubt been attached to it by various listeners in its actual settings.

The idea that mercy shown on earth merits reward on judgment day is a strong statement about care and compassion in daily living. It is a serious recommendation for the believers to serve one another and anyone who is in need of help or support. The addition of the eschatological phrase enhances the meaning with a certain urgency. It is not only necessary to show mercy if you would like others to be merciful to you. You had better show mercy and do it now; otherwise you will see the bitter day of judgment!

The combining of the advocacy of merciful behaviour and escape from eschatological bitter judgment is significant also because mercy is singled out as absolutely necessary for the believers. In this narrative of martyrdom and mission mercy is a key to the resolution of the story.

The "merciful" here may be a reference to several things in the story of Thecla. The attitude of Tryphaena comes to mind and the support of the women when Thecla is in the circus. Her reprieves after both trials are

merciful. Her continued mission of evangelism, healing and teaching is also of this order, for all of this work is of benefit to others, not to herself. Thecla's attitude to Saint Paul is also merciful, not only when he will not baptise her, but more importantly when he will not defend her before Alexander. One might expect Thecla to turn against Paul, but she is full of mercy and steadfast loyalty to Paul in her service of God.

6c μακάρια τὰ σώματα τῶν παρθένων, ὅτι αὐτὰ  
εὐαρεστήσουσιν τῷ θεῷ καὶ οὐκ ἀπολέσουσιν τὸν μισθὸν τῆς  
ἀγνείας αὐτῶν·

6c Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they will be acceptable to God and they will not lose the reward of their purity,

The second half of this sentence is found in 6d. It has been divided off for convenience only and refers to detail of the reward of purity.

This beatitude may be an encouragement for young women to remain unmarried. We know in 1 Timothy 5:1-16 that there were young women who took with them monies from their family's wealth to work as widows i.e. unmarried pastoral workers. If 1 Timothy is written after the oral tradition of Thecla is developed, then it is showing a reaction against successful single women following the example of Thecla.<sup>253</sup> The practice of these women is being written against in this disputed Pauline Epistle for reasons similar to the protests of Thecla's mother at Thecla's response to Paul. It is also possible that this beatitude is a defence of such unmarried women, which would suggest a later tradition at a time when the matter had become more controversial. In the story Thecla certainly takes it as an encouragement, if not as an inspiration and legitimacy. This beatitude compares well with Paul's writing in Romans 12:1-2. See below:

1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν· 2 καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός, εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

<sup>253</sup> J. Behr, "Social and Historical Setting", in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 63-64. "Something of the impact and controversy created by the new roles which women were assuming within the Christian communities is reflected in the popular apocryphal acts, especially those claiming the authority of Paul. In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, a betrothed virgin called Thecla chances to overhear Paul speaking publicly about virginity. She is converted to this new lifestyle, miraculously escapes the male authorities, who are furious with Paul, 'a sorcerer who has misled our wives' (*AcPT* 15), but is supported by the women of the city."



1 I beseech you therefore, brothers, through the compassion of God, to offer your bodies as a holy and living sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world; be rather transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may determine what is the will of God: the good, acceptable and perfect.

In this passage we see Paul's theology of presenting oneself for service, body and soul, as we might say. The body is specifically mentioned and its acceptability in the same vocabulary as the beatitude in the *Acts of Thecla*. The meaning also seems to be thoroughly Pauline and in contrast to the later corrective tradition in 1 Timothy which is probably not written by Paul<sup>254</sup>.

The Christian practice of not marrying in order to serve God in Christianity gave freedoms which married life would have denied. This was true for both men and women.<sup>255</sup> Paul himself is the example of how this is so for men. He writes about this in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 32-34a. He also describes the purity of the body of virgins in 1 Corinthians 7 at verse 34b:

34b καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κυρίου, ἵνα ᾖ ἁγία [καὶ] τῷ σώματι καὶ τῷ πνεύματι· ἡ δὲ γαμήσασα μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, πῶς ἄρῃ τῷ ἀνδρί.

34b A virgin being an unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord so that she can be holy both in body and spirit, but a married woman cares for the things of the world and how she can please a husband.

The strong parallels here with Pauline thought make this beatitude seem very natural on the lips of Paul in the *Acts of Thecla*.<sup>256</sup> In marriage wealthy women not only took on reproductive duties but at times also management responsibilities concerning matters of the family estate. Although some wealthy married women travelled, this travel was often

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<sup>254</sup> Scholars mostly agree that 1 Timothy is deutero-Pauline. See, for example, Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 436.

<sup>255</sup> Gillian Beattie, *Women and Marriage in Paul and his Early Interpreters*, T&T Clark, London, 2005, p. 34. Beattie explores 1 Cor 7:34 from a variety of angles including the following. "According to this view, Paul is at pains here to portray marriage and celibacy as equally valid (or, in this case, equally anxiety-ridden) states; he presents himself as enabling people to live in 'unhindered devotion to the Lord' in the way that is appropriate for them."

<sup>256</sup> A contrasting position is put forth by W. Edward Glenny, "1 Corinthians 7:29-31 and the Teaching of Continence in the Acts of Paul and Thecla", *Grace Theological Journal*, vol.11, no. 1, 1991, pp. 53-70.

related to the business and politics of their family estate. The Christian eschatological practice of not marrying gives a very different kind of freedom to women.<sup>257</sup> Wealthy women were often able to mobilize financial resources and this gave even more possibilities.<sup>258</sup>

The exploration of the meanings of purity in the New Testament is extensive and varied. The more socially defined roles appear in documents which are dated later than others in the New Testament, and when controls were being put in place in reaction to the freedom that first resulted from the radical message of Jesus and his earliest advocates.<sup>259</sup>

6d ὅτι ὁ λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς ἔργον αὐτοῖς γενήσεται σωτηρίας εἰς ἡμέραν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν ἔξουσιν εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος.

6d because the word of the Father will be a work of salvation for them on the day of his Son, and they will have rest forever.

This ὅτι clause is the second half of the sentence begun in verse 6c. It is the further description of the reward of those who do not marry for the sake of the Gospel. It is also the finishing clause for all of the beatitudes. The longer sentence here is partly a matter of style since this is the last beatitude. The formula εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος “forever and ever” is a common ending for prayers and other sayings and gives a sense of completion.

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<sup>257</sup> Stephen Barton, “The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions”, in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, Halvor Moxnes, ed., Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 81-83, 97. Barton describes a wide range of evidence in Jewish and Graeco-Roman contexts which shows that family ties were subordinated to pious ideals, and that in some cases religious and philosophical conversion overtook duties of natural kinship. Also see James Kay, “Becoming Visible: Baptism, Women, and the Church”, in *Women, Gender, and Christian Community*, Jane Dempsey Douglas and James Kay (eds.) Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997, p. 94. Kay suggests that perhaps there was more freedom and equality in leadership positions for women among the early Christians in their societies.

<sup>258</sup> Eva Marie Lassen, “The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor”, in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, Halvor Moxnes, ed., Routledge, London, 1997, p. 106. Lassen notes that many women behaved actively and independently, often handling large fortunes.

<sup>259</sup> Some examples will illustrate the point: the adjective ἄγνος “pure” appears in 2 Cor 7:11, “In all things you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter”; 2 Cor 11:2, “I have espoused you as a pure virgin to present you to one husband, Jesus Christ”; in Phl 4:8, “whatsoever is just, pure, lovable, and virtuous think on these things”; in Titus 2:5, “that they may teach the young women to be sensible, pure, housekeepers, good, and subservient to their husbands”. The noun is found in 2 Corinthians 6:6: purity listed as an element in the catalogue of sufferings; then in 2 Corinthians 11:3: the purity of mind is to be preserved from those who would beguile. Contrast these above to the controlling reference in 1 Timothy 5:22: “keep yourself pure” σεαυτὸν ἄγνον τήρει. This admonition is part of a series of instructions concerning the conduct of elders and community members. It is included with taking only a little wine, and rebuking sinners. Another late reference is 1Pet 3:2: “Wives, submit to your husbands . . . out of fear . . . for they observe your pure conduct”.

The meaning of how the word of the Father is a work of salvation is obscure. This is not the preexistent “word made flesh” of the Gospel of John’s prologue. Logos has no metaphorical sense as a reference to Jesus. It may be a reference to preaching, which would make sense of the dative plural pronoun “for them”. The idea then would be that the work of virgins is preaching and this gives them salvation as a reward. This would compare well with the idea quoted above in Romans 12:2 concerning the renewal of the mind. It also is the most likely strong sense here because of its resonance with the beatitude in verse 5h where the God-fearing will become messengers of God. This has an active sense, “speaking the word” but it is equally possible that the sense of listening to the word is meant.

This would be a matter of the word of the Father in the fulfilment of the scriptures which early Christians found in the life of Christ. A good example of this is found in the Gospel of Luke 24:44. In this passage of the narrative the Risen Christ speaks.

44 Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι μου οὓς ἐλάλησα πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔτι ὧν σὺν ὑμῖν, ὅτι δεῖ πληρωθῆναι πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς περὶ ἐμοῦ.

44 He said to them, these are my words which I spoke to you, while I was with you, that all the things concerning me must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms.

Sitting to listen (Lk 10:39) to interpretation of scripture is a common practice in households as well as in synagogues. Later Thecla will sit to learn even in the prison (verse 18d).

“The day of the son” is another way of referring to the “day of judgment” as in verse 6b. The promise of rest gives this beatitude a link with 6a. Rest as a final reward after death, eternal rest with God, is a notion found in Judaism in the inter-testamental period and in the New Testament and Apostolic period.<sup>260</sup> Thecla and Paul will both come very close to dying at times. The promise of rest in the afterlife is a very significant way to end these beatitudes which will inspire Thecla to be baptised. This again emphasizes the meaning of baptism, to die and rise with Christ. This is

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<sup>260</sup> Some examples include: Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-3: The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God . . . they are at peace; Revelation 14:13: Blessed are the dead . . . they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them; Clement of Rome’s first letter to the Corinthians 59:3: . . . holy, resting among the holy.

the higher purpose which will take Thecla from her family duties to her missionary life.

## Verse Seven

**7a** Καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ Παύλου λέγοντος ἐν μέσῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας  
ἐν τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ,

**7b** Θέκλα τις παρθένος, Θεοκλείας μητρός,  
μεμνηστευμένη ἀνδρὶ Θάμυρι,<sup>261</sup>

**7c** καθίσασα ἀπὸ<sup>262</sup> τῆς σύνεγγυς θυρίδος < ><sup>263</sup> ἤκουεν  
νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας τὸν τῆς παρθενίας<sup>264</sup> λόγον  
καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς.<sup>265</sup>

**7d** καὶ οὐκ ἀπένευεν ἐκ<sup>266</sup> τῆς θυρίδος,  
ἀλλὰ τῇ πίστει ἐπείγετο<sup>267</sup> ὑπερευφραϊνομένη.

**7e** ἔτι δὲ καὶ βλέπουσα πολλὰς γυναῖκας<sup>268</sup>  
εἰσπορευομένας πρὸς τὸν Παῦλον,

**7f** ἐπεπόθει καὶ αὐτὴ καταξιωθῆναι κατὰ πρόσωπον στήναι  
Παύλου καὶ ἀκούειν τὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον.

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<sup>261</sup> In the Lipsius text has Θαμύριδι.

<sup>262</sup> In the Lipsius text we have here: καθεσθείσα ἐπὶ.

<sup>263</sup> The added words τοῦ οἴκου appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>264</sup> Instead of the words τῆς παρθενίας the Lipsius text has περὶ ἀγνείας.

<sup>265</sup> Instead of the words καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς the Lipsius text has λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου. The resultant Lipsius clause in total reads: καθεσθείσα ἐπὶ τῆς σύνεγγυς θυρίδος τοῦ οἴκου ἤκουεν νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας τὸν περὶ ἀγνείας λόγον λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου. It means: (She) “was sitting at the window close by and listened day and night to the discourse of virginity, as proclaimed by Paul” This is the translation of J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 365. This is plausibly a later example of the Thecla tradition, at a time when Paul’s teachings were more highly regarded. Certainly Lipsius’ argument that heretical material was removed from some manuscripts does not hold here. There are no gaps in understanding when reading the Tischendorf text which is based on the majority of manuscript evidence. There can be no theological reason concerning orthodoxy for not including that the teaching was also on prayer. The addition of “prayer” is the more difficult and more likely original reading because the beatitudes which are Paul’s teaching do not include prayer. A later scribe would see this and correct accordingly.

<sup>266</sup> In the Lipsius text the preposition ἀπὸ is used instead of ἐκ.

<sup>267</sup> In the Lipsius text the verb spelled with η rather than with ει is ἐπάγω. Lipsius’ choice: ἐπήγετο not ἐπείγετο has no Greek manuscript support listed in his apparatus (p. 241). He does list in manuscript c, *ducebatur* the Latin meaning “she was being led” which offers some support for a form of ἐπάγω. Tischendorf is following manuscript C. Lipsius here is consistent with his usual practice, which avoids C and Tischendorf.

<sup>268</sup> The Lipsius text adds the two words καὶ παρθένοισι. J. Elliott *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 365, has: “many women and virgins going in to Paul”. The sense is that both older and younger women are attending.

**7g** οὐδέπω γὰρ ἵδει<sup>269</sup> τὸν χαρακτῆρα αὐτοῦ < ><sup>270</sup>  
ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἤκουεν μόνον.

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<sup>269</sup> This word is not found in the Lipsius text.

<sup>270</sup> The Lipsius text includes the proper noun Παύλου instead of the pronoun αὐτοῦ and the verb εὐωράκει is added. The proper noun is more likely to be the later improvement in order to clarify. Lipsius' choice of verb does not alter the overall meaning of the sentence significantly.

## Translation

**7a** And as Paul was speaking in the midst of the assembly in the household of Onesiphorus,

**7b** a certain virgin, Thecla, whose mother was Theocleia and who was betrothed to a man named Thamyris,

**7c** seated herself<sup>271</sup> close to the window and listened night and day to the teaching about celibacy and prayer.

**7d** and she did not move away from the window, but pressed on in faith with great joy.

**7e** As moreover she saw many women going in to Paul

**7f** she herself aspired to be counted worthy to stand before Paul and hear the word of Christ,

**7g** for she did not yet know his appearance but she only heard the word.

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<sup>271</sup> I have added the word “herself” to the translation, assuming from the context that she seated herself. This is the ordinary sense of this action; only in a special circumstance would one be seated by another person.

## Commentary and Notes

7a Καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ Παύλου λέγοντος ἐν μέσῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας  
ἐν τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ,

7a And as Paul was speaking in the midst of the assembly in the  
household of Onesiphorus,

Paul addressed the community gathered at the home of Onesiphorus. We can expect that this is a gathering of some numbers. Not only are the other members of Onesiphorus' family expected to be present but also Demas and Hermogenes and the women of verse 7e and those who escort them. Did they gather in a triclinium or in an open courtyard? We have no clues to describe the setting better except for the fact that Paul speaks in the midst or middle of them and that the women are said not to be seated as if participating in a banquet, but as going in to him as he speaks. Thecla later in this verse is said to be listening but not able to see him. And then there is the window. We do not actually know if the window is in a wall of a room or of a courtyard. We do not even know in fact if the window is the window of Thecla's parents' household or of Onesiphorus' household. Sheila McGinn<sup>272</sup> even imagines two windows: one into the room in Onesiphorus' dwelling and one near enough to it in the home of Thecla's family. I take it this does not include a street between. Such housing existed,<sup>273</sup> but that it was appropriate for the powerful first families of Iconium, as is Thecla's family, is difficult to accept.

Ancient windows might have shutters though they have no glass, of course; they are simple openings.<sup>274</sup> In fact they are openings out of

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<sup>272</sup> S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 810. "While Paul addresses this sermon to the Christians gathered in Onesiphorus's (sic) house, Thecla sits at a nearby window in the house of her mother, Theocleia."

<sup>273</sup> It housed mainly poor families in single rooms and could have been a place where disease, collapse, and fires were risked. In Rome there is record of wealthier families at times in apartments; see for example: <http://www.crystalinks.com/romebuildings.html>. Accessed on 21 January, 2014. "Cicero says that Caelius had rented an apartment in Clodius' building for 10,000 sesterces a year. This rent would have been ten times the annual salary of a labourer of that period (*Cael.* 17). The occupants of apartment buildings were also subject to a great deal of noise from the street. Their apartment windows at best had some kind of shutter or curtain that let every sound in. The poet Martial lived on the third floor of an *insula* on the Quirinal hill, where he found sleep difficult because of the noise."

<sup>274</sup> <http://www.ephesus.us/ephesus/celsuslibrary.htm> This site accessed on 21 January 2014. This library is still very beautiful. It is one of the most interesting archaeological sites in Ephesus in Turkey. It was built in 117 CE and was the third richest library in ancient times after those at Alexandria and Pergamum. The facade of the library shows two stories, with Corinthian style columns on the ground floor and three entrances to the building. There are three window openings in the upper story. A photograph is available on the internet site. Although expensive Roman dwellings often had few windows on the outside, this building shows that it was possible in Turkey in the period of the



which a person might even fall, as does Eutychus in Acts 20:9. How Eutychus could have fallen into such a deep sleep in the same room where Paul spoke until midnight in this third storey building intrigues us. How could he not have been noticed until he fell to his death? That Paul continues after reviving Eutychus to go back inside to break bread and eat and to converse until daybreak simply astounds us. This scene from the canonical Acts is an aid to us in understanding this scene from the *Acts of Thecla*. Paul is portrayed in all seriousness by Luke as a man of great energy demanding the sort of attention of his followers that is characteristic of sectarian or ecstatic movements today. The *Acts of Thecla* portrays Paul similarly as a charismatic figure who speaks for long periods and commands surprising attention.

The group gathered in any case seems, later in the *Acts of Thecla*, to be large enough to have caused a problem for the entire town (cf. verse 15g-15h “he corrupted all our women and the masses were convinced.”).

The most probable solution to the location of Thecla is that she is at a window in her home in an upper room looking down on Paul preaching in an open courtyard at the home of Onesiphorus. This allows for the large crowd, for Thecla to see the women coming in to him and for the sound to rise so that Thecla can hear Paul. It also gives her the idea that Paul is commanding and powerful and that many gratefully receive his message. It makes it possible that she would not see his face, as she would see the top of his bald head and not his facial features. In verse 42b of the *Acts of Thecla*, she returns to the home of Onesiphorus “and she fell on the pavement where Paul sat teaching”. This language is probably indicative of an outside courtyard. We can imagine that Paul sat down at some stage during the night, as Thecla is said to stay at the window day and night listening.

The “assembly” here are those called together for the occasion and the members of the household. The group may have included both slave and free, Jew and Gentile, men and women.

7b Θέκλα τις παρθένος, Θεοκλείας μητρὸς, μεμνηστευμένη  
ἀνδρὶ Θάμυρι,

7b a certain virgin, Thecla, whose mother was Theocleia and who was  
betrothed to a man named Thamyris

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composition of the *Acts of Thecla*, as I argue, at the end of the first century or early in the second century.

There is only one textual variant between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts here. It is the spelling of Thamyris' name in the dative. The Lipsius text has the longer perhaps more pretentious version: Θαμύριδι.

Thecla is described clearly as a virgin. The term παρθένος can also mean unmarried young woman, but here it is probably a reference both to her physical and social status, as the betrothal is also mentioned in this sentence. She is identified by the two relationships here, which will join forces to be adversative soon in the story. Thamyris will conspire with Theocleia and the two of them will cause Thecla to be condemned to being burned alive. At this stage however, she is identified by her relationship to these two. We who know the story also realize that she will become the adopted daughter of the Queen Tryphaena. This relationship to Tryphaena will also be identifying for Thecla. It is from Tryphaena that Thecla will receive her financial independence by the inheritance of Tryphaena's fortune.

We can assume that Theocleia has organized the betrothal to Thamyris. Betrothal in the ancient Greco-Roman world was a serious matter concerning the family's financial arrangements. It was of advantage usually to all concerned. The bride-to-be could be the one least advantaged by the arrangements.<sup>275</sup>

7c καθίσασα ἀπὸ τῆς σύνεγγυς θυρίδος < > ἤκουεν νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας τὸν τῆς παρθενίας λόγον καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς.

7c seated herself close to the window and listened night and day to the teaching about celibacy and prayer.

To be seated<sup>276</sup> is the traditional posture of a Jewish student. We note, for example, John 1:7 with Nathaniel seated under the fig tree, and the

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<sup>275</sup> E. Lassen, "The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor", in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, pp. 105-106. In the principate and later Roman Empire, a *filius* and *filia* could only get married if they themselves consented. That, at least, was the leading principle, but the law gave room for enforced marriages. A *filius* could find himself married against his will (*Digesta* 23.2.22), and a *filia* had even less chance to resist the marital arrangements of her father: 'But if she does not oppose her father's wishes, she is held to consent. A daughter can only refuse to give her consent where her father chooses someone who is unfit for betrothal because of his bad behaviour or character' (*Digesta* 23.a.12). The control of the *paterfamilias* did not stop at the doorstep of the married couple. The *filius* remained subordinate to the *potestas* of his *paterfamilias*. In the late Republic and the Principate, the same applied in most cases to the married *filia*. A *paterfamilias* even had the right to dissolve the marriage of his *filius* or *filia*, even if the couple lived happily together."

<sup>276</sup> The Lipsius text has "she seated herself", the middle passive participle with ἐπί. The Tischendorf text has the aorist active participle καθίσασα from καθίζω. It is difficult to argue that either is the more original reading. The Lipsius could be an awkward correction or the Tischendorf could be a koine simplification in an intransitive sense.

comments of Raymond Brown<sup>277</sup> suggest that this is a significant position. The story of Mary seated at Jesus' feet Luke 10:38-42 can also be compared here. Mary is seated as a rabbinical student<sup>278</sup> and Martha is busy as the householder with many tasks. Thecla is being portrayed with the overtones of a rabbinical student but even more than that she has caught the extreme enthusiasm of Paul's intense delivery. This reference to Thecla's ability to remain seated for the night and day to listen shows the determination that will later blossom into a martyr's witness and an ascetic's commitment to the healing and the life-giving message of Jesus. Thecla will go on to show the same detachment from earthly concerns and will be intent on alternative and spiritual ways of living.

The teaching is about celibacy<sup>279</sup> and prayer. Celibacy offers to women of the time opportunities that do not exist in marriage. The freedom from childbirth, the most frequent cause of death among young women, would no doubt be in Thecla's mind. Nothing was more dangerous than marriage for a young woman. That marriages were arranged is not a surprise; they often benefited the parents and extended family much more than the young woman.

As well as the advantage of physical safety, there was the possibility of not being under the immediate control of a husband. Thecla's father is not mentioned nor are any brothers. Her mother is the one who is controlling both the public and private family matters in the story. If her father has died and she does not marry, she is likely to have more freedom than most women, the sort of freedom her mother has. That the names of mother and daughter here are very similar has a dramatic effect in terms of this comparison. The story will also come back to Thecla's relationship to her mother at its end. In verse 43c and d Thecla offers her mother money as well as a good relationship with her. The tables are turned at the end of the story and Thecla has achieved financial security for herself and for her mother without marrying. Thecla has proved the point that this can be done in more ways than the expected social stereotype.

Instead of the words τῆς παρθενίας which I have translated "about celibacy" the Lipsius text has περὶ ἀγνείας. Elliott translates, "the

<sup>277</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966, p. 83.

<sup>278</sup> Fred Benning Craddock, *Luke*, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990, pp. 152-153.

<sup>279</sup> M. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, p.166: "Experiments with sexual abstinence were not unknown in the period before, and contemporary with, the birth of the church. The remarks of both Philo and Galen, discussed previously, illustrate that under certain circumstances the celibacy of women could be admired greatly. There is good reason to believe that in many cases female asceticism may have contributed to Christianity's growth and popularity."

discourse of virginity”. The topic of celibacy is more appropriate if those who had wives are now going to live as if they did not have them (verse 6). Virginity gives more a sense of the physical state in English where celibacy refers more to the spiritual commitment.

The topic of prayer is also mentioned. Thecla is clearly devout and will pray in the story at significant times. Her interest in prayer may have existed before she heard Paul, as it was common in the ancient world<sup>280</sup> for prayer practices to exist in the cultures of these geographic areas. Her listening to Paul teach about prayer is consistent with the sort of instruction in Paul’s canonical letters. For example: 2 Cor 1:10-11.

10 ὃς ἐκ τηλικούτων θανάτων ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς καὶ ῥύσεται, εἰς ὃν ἠλπίκαμεν καὶ ἔτι ῥύσεται, 11 συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει, ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

10 He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, 11 as you also join in helping us by your prayers so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. (NRSV)

In this passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul is instructing concerning prayer and its relationship to life and faith. We can imagine that in the home of Onesiphorus similar teaching took place.

7d καὶ οὐκ ἀπένευεν ἐκ<sup>281</sup> τῆς θυρίδος, ἀλλὰ τῇ πίστει ἐπείγετο<sup>282</sup> ὑπερευφραϊνομένη.

7d and she did not move away from the window, but pressed on in faith with great joy.

This steadfast vigil at the window listening to Paul shows Thecla’s determination. The language, “she pressed on in faith with great joy”, is reminiscent of language in the Pauline epistles; for example see: Phil 2:17 and 2 Cor 1:24, where faith and joy follow a progression in Pauline thought.

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<sup>280</sup> Praying for favours, prayer washings, prayer at festivals, prayer with offerings all are commonplace in any number of religious traditions.

<sup>281</sup> In the Lipsius text the preposition ἀπὸ is more finessed. She is moving from the window not out of it.

<sup>282</sup> The verb here is ἐπείγω, meaning “I press on”. The Lipsius choice is the more correct, the more formal and classically accepted. It could be the later correction. In the Tischendorf text the augment is missing, it is the more difficult reading. See note 265 above.

She is full of joy as she listens to Paul preach. Thecla's mother's objection to her sitting at the window listening to Paul will be intensified by the fact that she listens with great joy. The joy Thecla experiences shows that she has taken the message of Paul personally.

7e ἔτι δὲ καὶ βλέπουσα πολλὰς γυναῖκας εἰσπορευομένας πρὸς τὸν Παῦλον,

7e As moreover she saw many women going in to Paul

The relationship of Thecla's joy to her seeing so many women going in to Paul shows her serious interest in not marrying, and learning the way of prayer and the way of God in Jesus Christ.

Who are these many women going in to Paul? We imagine some of them are not wealthy; they may be workers or servants or just those who live near. If wealthy women were also going in to hear Paul we might imagine that they were escorted by servants from their households.

7f ἐπεπόθει καὶ αὐτὴ καταξιωθῆναι κατὰ πρόσωπον στήναι Παύλου καὶ ἀκούειν τὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον·

7f she herself aspired to be counted worthy to stand before Paul and hear the word of Christ.

There is no reason to think that any particular qualification is required for Thecla to "be worthy" to stand before Paul and hear the word of Christ. Women of the city going to see him would presumably include some women with their husbands, some of servant class and some wealthy, some slaves, some accompanied and some unaccompanied, old and young. There is no mention of any membership dues or fees to be paid as might be paid in banquet societies of the time. There is also no mention of baptisms or any other rituals of initiation. There is no mention of any spiritual qualification such as giving away possessions and accepting a symbol of spiritual dedication, such as for example sackcloth and ashes. Many women simply come in to Paul. Thecla is described then as one who imagines for herself a certain standard of worthiness in a circumstance where there is no prescribed entrance standard. This shows with what great seriousness she understands the message of Paul. She is being portrayed by the author as a listener who is absorbing the commitment to "the way" as a change required in her life.

Note that while Thecla is seated in student posture the others seem to stand before Paul. There is a distinction drawn subtly between those who have come to hear Paul and Thecla who is so drawn into the message of Paul that she will give her entire life to the message of Jesus.

The reference to the word of Christ is very interesting. The standard after the second century will be “the word of God” rather than the “word of Christ”. The distinction will develop to show that the Gospels, which are mostly the word about Christ not Christ’s own words, are to be heard in gatherings of those who follow Jesus. The understanding is that Paul is speaking the teachings of Jesus as he has learned them, for example the beatitudes in verse 6. This phrase, “the word of Christ”, is an indication of the *Acts of Thecla* being early rather than late second century by when the other usage is more ordinary.

7g οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδει τὸν χαρακτῆρα αὐτοῦ < > ἀλλὰ  
τοῦ λόγου ἤκουεν μόνον.

7g for she did not yet know his appearance but she only heard the word.

This comment on Paul’s appearance is not only a reference to the relative locations of Paul and Thecla—she looking down on him in the open courtyard from her window above as we have conjectured—but it is also a reference to the special character of his appearance. He appears as if an angel to Onesiphorus and he appears to Thecla in verse 21 as if he were the Lord Jesus. These references to the special symbolic effect of his appearance are part of the spirituality of the text. They are not references to magic or to fantasy or to mental illness for example, but rather they are a part of the relationship to God of the characters involved, part of the spirituality embedded in the story.

The recounting of Paul’s physical appearance in the *Acts of Thecla* stands in contrast to the effect that his appearance has on the spirituality of those involved in the story. In his missionary journeys he preaches so as to change lives. The memory of him and the looking forward to seeing him again enliven and encourage those in the Jesus movement.

“She heard the word” has significant impact here. This is not simply an auditory hearing; she is taking in the significance of Paul’s words, coming to know Jesus the divine word of God and preparing herself for the life commitment and witness that she will give.

## Verse Eight

**8a** Ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἀφίστατο ἀπὸ τῆς θυρίδος, πέμπει  
ἢ μήτηρ αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν Θάμυριν·

**8b** ὁ δὲ ἔρχεται περιχαρής, ὥς ἤδη λαμβάνων αὐτὴν  
πρὸς γάμον.

**8c** < ><sup>283</sup> καὶ εἶπεν ἡ Θεοκλεία Καινόν σοι ἔχω  
εἰπεῖν διήγημα, Θάμυρι.

**8d** καὶ γὰρ ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ νύκτας τρεῖς Θέκλα ἀπὸ τῆς  
θυρίδος οὐκ ἐγείρεται, οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ φαγεῖν οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ πιεῖν,  
ἀλλὰ ἀτενίζουσα ὥσπερ εἰς <sup>284</sup> εὐφρασίαν,

**8e** οὕτως πρόσκειται ἀνδρὶ ξένῳ ἀπατηλοῦς καὶ ποικίλους  
λόγους διδάσκοντι,

**8f** ὥστε με θαυμάζειν πῶς ἡ τοιαύτη αἰδὼς τῆς παρθένου  
χαλεπῶς ὀχλεῖται.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> The Lipsius text includes the following here: εἶπεν οὖν ὁ Θάμυρις πρὸς Θεοκλείαν Ποῦ μού  
ἐστιν ἡ Θέκλα;

<sup>284</sup> Instead of the words ὥσπερ εἰς the Lipsius text has ὡς πρὸς.

<sup>285</sup> Instead of the word ὀχλεῖται the Lipsius text has ἐνοχλεῖται.

## Translation

**8a** As she did not leave the window, her mother sent for Thamyris.

**8b** He came rejoicing greatly as if he already was receiving her for marriage.

**8c** And Theocleia said, “Now I have news to tell you, Thamyris.

**8d** Indeed for three days and three nights Thecla has not raised herself from the window, neither to eat nor to drink, but she gazes as if enthralled.

**8e** She is so taken in by this strange man who teaches dubious and fanciful ideas,

**8f** that I am amazed how such a modest maiden<sup>286</sup> could be so severely distressed.

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<sup>286</sup> Others translate “virgin” but here it is only about Thecla and elsewhere it is about men and women; therefore, “maiden” seems clearer and truer to the overall context.



## Commentary and Notes

8a Ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἀφίστατο ἀπὸ τῆς θυρίδος, πέμπει  
ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν Θάμυριν·

8a As she did not leave the window, her mother sent for Thamyris.

This paragraph indicates that Thecla's behaviour is unusual. If a window of their home did overlook the courtyard of Onesiphorus, there may have been many opportunities for Thecla to sit and listen at the window, but this time is somehow strikingly different or else she has not until now been attracted to what is happening in the neighbours' gardens.

Theocleia understands this as a matter meriting the summons of Thamyris. Thecla has done nothing so far except exhibit this unusual behaviour of sitting at the window. Has Theocleia also sat listening and does she have worries because of what Paul is teaching, or is it that Thecla seems mesmerized by something that Theocleia counts as sinister? Another possibility is that Theocleia is carefully watching over the matters of the household and she is disturbed because Thecla neither comes to meals nor to bed. Perhaps Theocleia thinks that Thecla is attracted to the man who speaks in the courtyard below when she is already promised to another. Thamyris is a good prospect as a husband. The marriage will be a benefit to Theocleia and to all of her household, for Thamyris is a very important and wealthy person in Iconium.

The development of the story here is paralleled by the contemporary understanding that early Christianity promoted the autonomy and economic independence of women. Though this story is set at the time of Paul, very early in the history of Christianity, it is perhaps a part of that understanding of greater autonomy which other writings will attempt to suppress.<sup>287</sup>

8b ὁ δὲ ἔρχεται περιχαρής, ὥς ἤδη λαμβάνων αὐτὴν  
πρὸς γάμον.

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<sup>287</sup> See here Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999, trans O.C. Dean, Jr., p. 407. In this volume an argument is put forth that the terms of the whole society were "connected with their economic conditions and in the *ekklesia* in particular with the charismatic experiences of equality in the origin of Christ-confessing communities." Also in Stegemann and Stegemann, p. 403, we read, "In summary R. S. Kraemer writes about 1 Tim 2:11ff.: 'Good Christian women keep their mouths shut, exercise authority only over their households and children and never over men, and generally confine themselves to the private sphere.' Like Schottroff she presumes that the real background of these prescriptions is the exact opposite of the behaviour asked of women."

8b He came rejoicing greatly as if he already was receiving her for marriage.

Thamyris seems to think highly and confidently of his position as bridegroom-to-be. The text here may be laughing at him in the sense that readers would already be aware that Thecla will not marry him. When he comes so joyfully to see that she has already oriented herself toward missionary life and martyrdom, he looks a fool to those who know the story. His immediate response says more about the power of Theocleia than it does about his presumptions. Theocleia must have been accustomed to getting what she wanted and in this she is an excellent role model for Thecla. Translating “receiving” rather than “taking” is respectful of Thecla’s social status. The reference is respectful in the sense that it carries with it the understanding of the joy of the wedding taking place, so it is the sort of reference that in this context might indicate well-to-do families who can afford a celebration. This no doubt would also please Thamyris, since the chance to be groom at a splendid wedding would have been a wonderful social opportunity.

One can compare this to the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. Those who refuse to come even though there is the slaughter of fattened animals for this grand wedding are seen as fools. The point of the parable is that the kingdom of God invites many, but not all come. The final verse says many are called but few are chosen. The comparison of the service of faith in God to marriage appears also in the Gospel of Luke and in the wedding feast of the lamb in the book of Revelations. The *Acts of Thecla* shows no knowledge of these New Testament references. The *Acts of Thecla* does, however, enact the message of the wedding of Thecla not to Thamyris but to her vocation. She contracts her life in baptism, as if in a marriage, to service of the Living God. Thamyris cannot compete with this high ideal. His presumption that he can is like the attitude of those who do not come to the wedding feast of the King’s son in the Gospel of Matthew. His understanding does not have room for this high ideal. Thamyris has not taken into his heart the transforming message of Jesus as it is taught by Paul. He cannot hope to appreciate why Thecla will give her life for this.

8c < > καὶ εἶπεν ἡ Θεοκλεία Καίνόν σοι ἔχω εἰπεῖν  
διήγημα, Θάμυρι.

8c Then Theocleia said, “Now I have news to tell you, Thamyris,

Theocleia is clearly in charge here. She is addressing Thamyris personally and engaging him. She knows something that he knows nothing about, and she is going to shock him with this strange knowledge. She does not approach this communication with a sense of concern for Thecla, with worry or compassion. For example, this could say something like, “Then at length Theocleia said, I have sad news to tell you, Thamyris.” There is no sense of Theocleia feeling any sympathy for her daughter here, and in fact she engages Thamyris in a very familiar way which the readers are not expecting. The author of course realizes that Theocleia and Thamyris will conspire against Thecla, and so there is no pretending that Theocleia is a supporter to her daughter here.

The Lipsius text adds a phrase where Thamyris opens the conversation and asks “Where is my Thecla?” This surprises because it is Theocleia who sends for Thamyris and her purposes are in play here. In the additional phrase Thamyris is portrayed perhaps as unreasonably presumptuous about his relationship to Thecla. Thecla will belong to the world and to the history of Christianity not to him. The additional phrase certainly would be better left in place if an editor were trying to eliminate any abrasive sense of women in leadership, since the man rather than the woman would then be the initiative taker, at least in the conversation. This would be consistent with the orthodox attempts to establish men in leadership positions. It would be the opposite of the lesson of the story of the *Acts of Thecla* however, in as much as this story is among other things about the two strong women, Theocleia and Tryphaena, who take opposite positions regarding Thecla’s freedom to follow her vocation and express her faith rather than bow to economic and domestic convention.

It is a pity for the drama that Theocleia is not a character who develops more across this period of the narrative. She appears as a static character, an opponent of Paul and Thecla. Were she to have more depth the story would have greater dramatic effect. For example in the adventure of Callirhoe, her father, Hermocrates, appears to be on her side even when her marriage with Chaereas is thought to be a bad match.<sup>288</sup>

8d καὶ γὰρ ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ νύκτας τρεῖς Θέκλα ἀπὸ τῆς  
θυρίδος οὐκ ἐγείρεται, οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ φαγεῖν οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ πιεῖν,  
ἀλλὰ ἀτενίζουσα ὥσπερ εἰς εὐφρασίαν,

8d For three days and three nights Thecla has not raised herself from the window, neither to eat nor to drink, but she gazes as if enthralled.

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<sup>288</sup> Chariton *Callirhoe*, G. Goold, (ed.), pp. 32-33.

The word εὐφρασία means “good cheer”. Elliott translates “pleasant sight”.<sup>289</sup> I have translated “enthralled” as this expression in English expresses the pleasant joy of seeing something.

The verb ἀτενίζω is intransitive and it can be followed by εἰς or πρὸς or a dative.<sup>290</sup> Instead of the words ὥσπερ εἰς the Lipsius text has ὡς πρὸς . The use of contracted or combined particles is characteristic of the unpolished Koine Greek which also often overuses certain particles such as καί: another common characteristic of the *Acts of Thecla*. The variety of particles in the classical period disappears and combinations appear. Here the words ὥσπερ εἰς (for example ὡσπερεὶ or ὥσπερ εἰ) are typical Koine.

It is not clear why ὥσπερ should be followed by εἰς. Thecla is clearly not going into anything. The Greek expression ὡσπερεὶ or ὥσπερ εἰ (most Greek NT manuscripts do not have spaces between words) is used like an adverb in 1 Corinthians 15:8 meaning “even as if”, or “just as if”.<sup>291</sup> The meaning in the Tischendorf text is somewhat similar. The Tischendorf text is not unusual for a Koine text.

The Lipsius choice here also has the meaning “as if” but it uses the preposition πρὸς. Elliott translates ὡς πρὸς with “as if upon”. Barrier translates the Lipsius, “as though” and seems to avoid translating the word πρὸς.<sup>292</sup>

Tischendorf has taken his text from C but Lipsius relies here on what he must see as the strength of the manuscript tradition and his practice of avoiding C. Tischendorf notes that πρὸς appears in AB but Lipsius expands this to ABFEIK. Both texts are certainly difficult in terms of the grammar and translation. Both texts seem to result in almost identical translations in regard to these words. The conditional comparative “as if”

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<sup>289</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 366.

<sup>290</sup> *LSJ*, p. 269.

<sup>291</sup> See F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p.57, paragraph 107. And note also p. 236, paragraph 453 (3) on comparative conjunctions. “When used to introduce single words or phrases, ὡς may be replaced by ὥσεί, with much variation between them in the MSS; ὡσπερεὶ and ὡσαν likewise, though less often.” Compare also the use in 1 Cor 15:8. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (NRSV) ἐσχάτον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερεὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὥφθη καί μοι.

<sup>292</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 88-91. Barrier seems to think that this phrase and the sentence following are about a sexual metaphor concerning the “evil eye” and lovesickness, and a spiritual raping of Thecla. Barrier’s idea seems rather fantastic and does not seem plausible. He translates “she is gazing intently as though enraptured” and this translation supports his views of the sexual nature of the passage.

seems to be the basis of all of these possibilities. The preposition governs the case of εὐφρασία.

We have already mentioned the parallel in the discussion of Eutychus in Acts 20:9. Eutychus has sat by the window until unable to stay awake any longer, and deep into the night. Is Thecla uncomfortably long at the window? We do not know these details. Given that she is the daughter in an important house with slaves and servants, one might assume that her requirements were brought to her. That she does not join the others of her family to eat is the most obvious sign that she is so occupied with listening that she cares for nothing else. The idea to be conveyed is that she wishes to do nothing other than to listen to Paul.

This description of Paul's behaviour also implies that he is teaching and preaching for hours on end. Does Paul's audience eat in the courtyard as he continues to enlighten those gathered around him? Perhaps the audience changes even though Paul continues. Does Paul stop to eat or is he also fasting while he proclaims? We are not certain. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul breaks bread with those to whom he preaches. Paul's behaviour in the *Acts of Thecla* is very much like his extreme behaviour in the Acts of the Apostles where he continues conversing and breaking the bread until daybreak after Eutychus is restored to life. There is no literary comparison and no textual dependence; one is not copied from the other. Both documents are evidence perhaps of Paul's historical behaviour or at least of Paul's reputation as a missionary and preacher.

8e οὕτως πρόσκειται ἀνδρὶ ξένῳ ἀπατηλοῦς καὶ ποικίλους λόγους διδάσκοντι,

8e She is so taken in by this strange man who teaches dubious and fanciful ideas,

Theocleia now expresses why she has taken action and how she evaluates the situation. She explains that her daughter has been taken in— πρόσκειται - by Paul whose teachings are not acceptable; they are said to be dubious and fanciful ἀπατηλοῦς καὶ ποικίλους. This gives the impression that they are not true and they are not what is expected here in Iconium. The reader who knows the rest of the story of course can imagine that the main problem is that these teachings give Thecla a cause beyond Iconium, and they give her a reason not to marry.

The reader ought to know that Theocleia does not really understand the teachings of Paul. She may well have listened to some of his preaching—

that would only be expected—but the ideas have not affected her in the way that they affected Thecla. For Theocleia these teachings are still the stuff of foreigners. She has her own plan and wants to carry it out despite these teachings of Paul. Paul’s teachings were the stuff that changed lives. His teaching was like the word of God that falls on different kinds of ground in the parable of the sower of the seed. Thecla is fertile ground and Theocleia is rocky ground.

8f ὥστε με θαυμάζειν πῶς ἡ τοιαύτη αἰδῶς τῆς παρθένου  
χαλεπῶς ὀχλεῖται.

8f that I am amazed how a maiden of her modesty could be so severely distressed.

Lipsius has ἐνοχλεῖται rather than ὀχλεῖται. Tischendorf again is following manuscript C. The difference in the meaning of the two terms is minimal. The prefix adds nothing appreciable, which is typical of Koine rather than classical Greek. Certainly in this and in 8d there are no theological matters which could possibly cause a later scribe who was trying to rid the document of heresy any cause for action. There has been no confirmation of this idea of Lipsius in these first 8 verses.

Thecla is described as possessing αἰδῶς (modesty). The sense of this word is that she is well behaved. We imagine her to be an exemplary daughter until this point. Women were protected in this shame culture so that they could be used for marriage. The sexual state of a woman, her physical virginity, was a commodity traded by men and even by powerful women. Young women would have been keenly aware of the expectations placed upon them. This verse means that Thecla cooperated until now with those expectations.

The quality of modesty is emphasized in this verse. Literally it says “the modesty of the maiden”. Other turns of phrase could have conveyed that Thecla was modest; however, this way of expressing it focuses on “modesty” itself. The idea may be that “modesty” is such a strong and good thing that one might expect it to protect a woman from any discomfort.

In translating χαλεπῶς ὀχλεῖται the translator needs to consider what this means in the eyes of Theocleia and Thamyris in the developing action as the drama of the narrative increases. Does it mean that they blame Thecla, for she is upset by her own choice, or is she upset as a kind of victim of this foreigner? Whereas the preservation of modesty is seen

as the duty of the young female, if an intervening element is present, the assessment of the situation can change. It is the case, for example, that whether in the legend the relationship with Paris is or is not considered to be Helen of Troy's fault, matters to the advancing drama.<sup>293</sup> Such considerations are important to the possessing of the honour that attaches to the young woman's physical state.

A translation for χαλεπῶς ὀχλεῖται could be "extremely churned up" or one might say "severely troubled". Elliot translates the Lipsius text giving the more dramatic translation: "such extreme discomfort".<sup>294</sup> This gives the more severe criticism of Theocleia in the text, as one who exaggerates in what is already a difficult situation. The Greek can well mean "intensely upset" or as is translated here "severely troubled". Either of these translations make it seem that it is not Thecla's fault, leaving Theocleia somewhat sympathetic as a mother ought to be. We know that Theocleia will eventually come round to be a supporter of Thecla and beneficiary of Thecla's financial resources. There is no reason unnecessarily to blacken her character at this early stage in the narrative by an overly dramatic and accusatory translation.

Thecla is described as παρθένος a maiden or virgin. Whether this is a sexual reference or not is difficult to assess throughout the narrative. Where there is the assumption that this is about sexuality and has some factual reference to Thecla's sexual experience or lack thereof, for example as Barrier claims, the burden of proof lies with those who make such claims.<sup>295</sup> Prima facie there is no discussion of sex here.

It is important to remember that there were young women who were not sexually inexperienced but who were marriageable. Widows in particular were marriageable. Apuleius, son of a high official of Madaurus, for example, in the second century BCE on his return to North Africa married a wealthy woman older than himself. She was a widow and her son brought a law case against her new husband on the grounds that he was a fortune-hunter.<sup>296</sup> The Augustan family laws prohibited marriage between, for example, freeborn persons and prostitutes and between a senator and a former slave woman. These prohibitions imply

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<sup>293</sup> Dio Chrysostom will discuss this matter, and long before Homer's *Iliad* it takes various forms in the mythological layers in different locations. See Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1994, pp. 97, 123-125.

[http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/helen/a/Helensportrayal\\_4.htm](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/helen/a/Helensportrayal_4.htm) . Accessed 14 June, 2013. *Iliad* Book III line 450 Helen describes herself as a "despised" woman.

<sup>294</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 366.

<sup>295</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>296</sup> Moses Isaac Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1973, p. 37.

that such relationships were an actual danger. Examples of a punishment by exile are recorded. Eva Marie Lassen writes:

Should, for instance, a senator choose to marry a former slave – even if it meant that sanctions would be imposed against him because he had married *contra legem* – the state could not prevent it.<sup>297</sup>

No doubt there was a great deal of variety in sexual relationships, sexual abuses and marital and extra-marital unions in the ancient world.

The reference here is about Thecla's role as a maiden. It is about her piety, her obedience and the deference paid to her mother, who is head of the household. Those who believe the *Acts of Thecla* to be a later composition might translate to emphasise the physical.

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<sup>297</sup> E. Lassen, "The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor", in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, pp. 108-109.



## Verse Nine

**9a** Θάμυρι, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος τὴν Ἰκονιέων πόλιν ἀνασεΐει,

**9b** ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν σὴν Θέκλαν· πᾶσαι γὰρ αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ οἱ νέοι εἰσέρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν,

**9c** διδασκόμενοι < ><sup>298</sup> φοβεῖσθαι θεὸν<sup>299</sup> καὶ ζῆν ἀγνώως.

**9d** ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ μου ὡς ἀράχνη ἐπὶ τῆς θυρίδος δεδεμένη τοῖς ὑπὸ Παύλου<sup>300</sup> λόγοις κρατεῖται ἐπιθυμία καὶ παθεῖ δεινῶς.

**9e** ἀτενίζει γὰρ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐάλωται ἡ παρθένος.

**9f** ἀλλὰ πρόσελθε αὐτῇ σὺ καὶ λάλησον· σοὶ γάρ ἐστιν ἡρμοσμένη.

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<sup>298</sup> Here the Lipsius text has this additional phrase: παρ' αὐτοῦ ὅτι Δεῖ, φησὶν, ἓνα καὶ μόνον.

<sup>299</sup> In the Lipsius text these two words appear in reversed order: θεὸν φοβεῖσθαι.

<sup>300</sup> The Lipsius text has the pronoun and the elision of the preposition to accommodate the initial vowel: ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

## Translation

- 9a** Thamyris, this man is upsetting the city of Iconium,
- 9b** including your Thecla, for all the women and young people go in to him,
- 9c** as they are taught to fear God and to live purely.
- 9d** And even my daughter, transfixed like a spider at the window, is overcome with a new desire and a fearful passion because of Paul's words;
- 9e** for she is intent on the things he is saying, and the maiden is taken captive.
- 9f** But you, yourself, go and talk to<sup>301</sup> her, for she is betrothed to you.”

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<sup>301</sup>He is going to talk to her in order to persuade her.

## Commentary and Notes

9a Θάμυρι, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος τὴν Ἰκονιέων πόλιν ἀνασείει,

9a Thamyris, this man is upsetting the city of the Iconium,

Again, Theocleia addresses Thamyris. This gives the impression that she is in control. Thamyris will be the one who goes before the public officials making accusations, but Theocleia is the one who instigates this opposition to Paul. Paul is being accused by Theocleia here of teaching things that are problematic for her daughter and other wealthy young people. He is accused here by Theocleia not only of upsetting the group that comes to hear his preaching at the house of Onesiphorus. The accusation that Paul is upsetting the city makes of Paul's influence much more than a personal matter. This portrayal of Paul is not based on anything in the story and it seems most unfair.

We can be prepared at this point for the kind of scenario that we have in the canonical Acts of the Apostles 13:50-51 in Pisidian Antioch. In verse 50 we read that it was the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city who stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas. Of course Thamyris is a leading man of Iconium and Theocleia is a respectable woman of high standing, but we are in a different city and Paul is with different travelling companions here. The noun for the persecution in the canonical Acts of the Apostles is ὁ διωγμός, whereas in the *Acts of Thecla* the word translated “he is upsetting” or “he is stirring up” is ἀνασείει from ἀνασείω, which means “to shake back”, “to threaten”, or “to stir up”.<sup>302</sup>

This is not an historical or even a literary or narrative parallel but it is certainly a serious comparison. The sort of message Paul brought could upset persons of such standing. In the canonical Acts of the Apostles chapter 13: 50 we read:

50 οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι παρώτρυναν τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρῶτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπήγειραν διωγμὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν, καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων αὐτῶν.

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<sup>302</sup> *LSJ*, p. 120.

50 And the Jews exhorted the devout and respectable women and the leading men of the city, and instigated persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out beyond their boundaries.

The message of Paul which was upsetting in the Acts of the Apostles is about resurrection and the lack of bodily corruption of Jesus as compared to David, and the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. Here in the *Acts of Thecla* the main concern is the “upsetting” of the youth. The similarity is that the physical body is made to seem less important than the resurrected Jesus who is raised by God never to know corruption (verses 36-37). These are points of similarity in that Thecla will be thrilled by the higher spiritual truths preached by Paul, and she will leave her prospects for marriage behind because of them. Paul’s message in both Acts is about the life-changing effect that embracing the risen Christ has on everyday living. When the expectations of families and communities are threatened by these bold new ideas, it is not surprising that there are strong reactions. Thamyras and Theocleia had every reason to expect Thecla to marry. Her decision to become an itinerant so that she could pursue these teachings would have certainly upset them.

9b ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν σὴν Θέκλαν· πᾶσαι γὰρ αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ οἱ νέοι εἰσέρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν,

9b including your Thecla, for all the women and young people go in to him,

Theocleia now refers to the immediate, vested interest of Thamyras. His Thecla is also upset. That Thecla is upset is a prejudiced description from the point of view of Theocleia of what has happened. Theocleia is thinking of herself and of Thamyras. She seems to be very familiar with Thamyras and very fond of him. He would bring quite some wealth to her and her household when the marriage took place. This might have been a factor in securing more luxury in her old age. We know he is wealthy not only because persons are arranged to marry those of similar station and Thecla has a household with servants but because in the story Thamyras organizes very quickly a sumptuous feast. This sort of thing can only be done by people of means, especially when it is done quickly.

The second half of 9b continues the overstatement by Theocleia, πᾶσαι γὰρ αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ οἱ νέοι εἰσέρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν, for all the women and young people go in to him. This phrase is a further exaggeration. It is not possible for all of the young people and women of the town to go in to hear Paul preach; how would they fit in this

dwelling? There has been no description in the narrative to this point that all of the women are going in to Paul. After all Theocleia is a woman of Iconium and she is not going in to Paul. Thamyras is a young person and he is not going in to Paul. That Theocleia reports in precisely this fashion provides innuendo to blacken Paul's character, as if Paul were the corruptor of all women. The words, οἱ νέοι, could be translated either as "young people" or "young men". As the women are not specified as young there is not the literary balance that might demand translating "young men"; therefore I have translated "young people". The sense is that those who are vulnerable and perhaps without the most pressing financial and social obligations, who have time for such foolishness (or idealism), are attracted to Paul and are being used by him. To go in to him really means more than locating themselves within the range of hearing Paul: here it means becoming a devotee of his.

Any misconstrued understanding to find sexual overtones here would be negligent of the context. There is no privacy which might indicate personal intimate encounters. When for example a term such as "goes into" has a sexual reference, it would be likely to be the powerful one exerting power over another in order to gain sexual privileges. Here the balance of power in the relationships would be reversed, so as to render the meaning very strange and highly unlikely.

9c διδασκόμενοι < > φοβεῖσθαι θεὸν καὶ ζῆν ἁγνῶς.

9c as they are taught to fear God and to live purely.

This phrase gives the impression that no matter whether there is any innuendo in the previous phrases which are meant to blacken the character of Paul or Thecla, the actual teachings are good and able to be approved. "To fear God", as opposed to "fearing the gods" indicates that our author is Jewish or Jewish-Christian. The author is writing what Theocleia ought to have understood rather than what she may have understood, unless of course she was Jewish. There is no indication of Jewish practices so it is better to assume that she is not Jewish. The author is being exposed by this phrase. It is the author who believes in one God.

The Lipsius text adds further teaching: διδασκόμενοι <παρ' αὐτοῦ ὅτι Δεῖ, φησὶν, ἓνα καὶ μόνον> φοβεῖσθαι θεὸν καὶ ζῆν ἁγνῶς. Elliott translates: "as they are taught by him. He says one must fear only one God and live in chastity." The most striking thing about this phrase is how explicitly orthodox it is, and how it would be very odd to omit it to

make the story seem more orthodox. In fact it would be just the opposite. Further, the Tischendorf appears to be the less complete and the less careful theologically, suggesting that it is more original. A scribe could easily have added Lipsius' tidy orthodox additional gloss. It seems more likely that the extra words in Lipsius' text would be added to make the text more explicitly orthodox than that a later editor shortened it, making it less orthodox in a period where orthodoxy was gaining more importance.

In previous translations of the *Acts of Thecla* ζῆν ἄγνως is often translated continence or virginity to give the idea that Paul is preaching that no one should marry. There is of course a tradition in the Pauline literature which recommends that not to marry is best for those who are preparing for Jesus' return, but this does not mean that all marriage is to be frowned upon. Ἄγνως does mean "purely", and pure living may mean many things, including careful eating customs, obedience to parents, faithfulness to spouses, not cheating in business deals, etc.

9d ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ μου ὡς ἀράχνη ἐπὶ τῆς θυρίδος δεδεμένη τοῖς ὑπὸ Παύλου λόγοις κρατεῖται ἐπιθυμία καὶ νῆ καὶ πάθει δεινῷ.

9d And even my daughter, transfixed like a spider at the window, is overcome with a new desire and a fearful passion because of Paul's words;

One of the most well-known images from the *Acts of Thecla* is this one of her transfixed like a spider at the window. The image is gripping. One imagines her with hands on the window edge, straining to hear as she tries to stay awake, not wanting to miss anything. It is a graphic depiction of her attention. As a spider is thought to be constantly alert in order to take any opportunity to capture its prey, so Thecla is seen as keeping this vigil out of sincere devotion as if her life depended on it. In fact her new life is dependent on taking in what Paul teaches this night, for on the strength of it she will find her initial transformation into a witness for Christ and a missionary of the Gospel. This night will change her life and determine that it is spent for Christ. This night is the making of her as a saint.

Paul's words are said to overcome her (κρατεῖται). They have a strength which she lends herself to willingly. She wants this life, she wants to embrace the ideals of Christian service. This is the kind of preaching that transforms individuals, preaching with conviction and

absolute trust of the audience, with the power to strongly influence those who want to hear the good news. Theocleia has presumably also heard Paul but she has not responded in her heart, and she sees his message as nonsense. We understand from the New Testament that Paul's skill in rhetoric was impressive.

Paul's words have awakened a new desire in Thecla. This is a desire that the reader or listener might assume is unprecedented in her life. In light of the rest of the narrative we might consider this new desire to be the desire to serve Christ. It is a desire to travel as a missionary and to pray and live simply as a convert to the way of Christ. Eventually her ministry will also be to give advice and to heal. This desire is not compatible with being a rich young bride as she sees it. She will rather give up her riches to follow Christ. Like the rich young man of the Gospel, she has been challenged to give up all that is hers and to care for the poor and to follow Christ. He would also have had the expectations of his family heavily weighing upon him. He would be expected to marry and to continue the family enterprises, take responsibility for the family slaves, employees, land and buildings. We see this especially in verses 21-22 of Mt. 19.

21 ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι, ὑπάγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δός τοῖς πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολουθεῖ μοι. 22 ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ νεανίσκος τὸν λόγον ἀπῆλθεν λυπούμενος, ἦν γὰρ ἔχων κτήματα πολλά.

21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, leave, sell your wealth and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow after me." 22 When the young man heard this teaching he left grieving, for he had much property.

In his story in Mt 19:16-22 the young man will abandon Jesus and Jesus' disciples and he will grieve, for he has much property (or "many possessions" as NRSV translates κτήματα πολλά). He is unable to make the decision to leave his wealth for the sake of the Gospel. While his demeanour turns to grief, in contrast Thecla's is joyful for she sees her wealth as no impediment. In fact it becomes her passion to follow the way of Christ as it is expounded by Paul. There have been interpretations of the problem of the young man which do not understand well the ancient circumstances of wealth. It is not like the acquisitions of modern times which can be locked away in bank vaults or include expensive vehicles. In the ancient world inheritance was the most common means of acquisition among the wealthy. For the merchant class, it is likely that

a merchant was not considered wealthy until he had land and slaves which his children would inherit, or at least ships and carts and store-houses. On his own portion of land his wife would enjoy the gracious living which his children would inherit. Those who advanced among the merchant class did not do so as youths. Youths are wealthy only if their families are wealthy.

There were no banks, so coins are often thought of as a kind of liability since they can be stolen, whereas a building or land could not be stolen except by war or some other unusual social-political change. This young man would have his property at home, and at home he would have all the sorts of expectations foisted upon him that Thecla had, except that he will fulfil his role as the heir and eventual master of the estate or enterprise of his family.

Thecla if she married would also be very powerful like her mother, but usually not as powerful as her husband, especially if he was of the same social class, as Thamyras no doubt was. She would have a life without the pain and strife of the poor if she did what her family expected of her. This result would also limit her. She chooses none of it. Her mother is right in that her passion is now for Christ. She chooses the way of Christ as her security, as it is indeed described in the Pauline beatitudes (*Acts of Thecla* verse 6). Her mother sees this new passion as frightening, not because she has reason to know that it is dangerous, as indeed it will become very dangerous for Thecla. Theocleia sees this passion as frightening because it will seem to undermine their social status, honour and financial stability.

9e ἀτενίζει γὰρ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐάλωται ἡ παρθένος.

9e for she is intent on the things he is saying, and the maiden is taken captive.

Here again Theocleia puts emphasis on the fact that Thecla is eligible to be married (she is παρθένος ) but this potential is threatened by the teachings from Paul on which she has become so intent. For those who know the story there is foreshadowing here. Actually it is Paul who will be imprisoned and Thecla will visit him in the prison. This is already a very bold thing for her to do. She will later be detained but not in prison, rather at the home of Queen Tryphaena. It is a serious matter of house arrest. However, this night she has been taken captive because of the things that Paul is saying.



9f ἀλλὰ πρόσελθε αὐτῇ σὺ καὶ λάλησον· σοὶ γάρ ἐστιν  
ἡρμοσμένη.

9f But you, yourself, go and talk to her, for she is betrothed to you.”

Now Theocleia finishes her address to Thamyras with this request. Theocleia is hoping that Thecla’s betrothal to Thamyras will act to help dissuade her from this new passion. Of course the readers know that her betrothal is the very thing that she will escape, by becoming a follower of Christ after hearing Paul’s teachings. It seems to the reader or listener that Theocleia is working against her own purposes. The futility in Theocleia’s actions is a hallmark of the work in general. Not until Theocleia is recruited to Thecla’s way of thinking will she be able to act in a way that will actually benefit her and her family’s welfare. The message is quite clear. The way of Christ is not only the preferable way, it is, according to this work, the only viable option.

## Verse Ten

**10a** Καὶ προσελθὼν Θάμυρις, ἅμα μὲν φιλῶν αὐτήν, ἅμα δὲ καὶ φοβούμενος αὐτῆς τὴν ἐκπληξιν,<sup>303</sup>

**10b** εἶπεν Θέκλα ἔμοι μνηστευθεῖσα, τί τοιαύτη κάθησαι; καὶ ποῖόν σε πάθος κατέχει ἐκπληκτον;

**10c** ἐπιστράφηθι πρὸς τὸν σὸν Θάμυριν καὶ αἰσχύνθητι.

**10d** ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς τὰ αὐτὰ ἔλεγεν < ><sup>304</sup> Τί τοιαύτη κάτω βλέπουσα κάθησαι, τέκνον, καὶ μηδὲν ἀποκρινομένη ἀλλὰ παραπλήξ;

**10e** καὶ οἱ μὲν ἔκλαιον δεινῶς, Θάμυρις μὲν γυναικὸς ἀστοχῶν, Θεοκλεία δὲ τέκνου, αἱ δὲ παιδίσκαι κυρίας.<sup>305</sup>

**10f** πολλὴ οὖν σύγχυσις ἦν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ πένθους.

**10g** καὶ τούτων οὕτως γινομένων Θέκλα οὐκ ἀπεστράφη, ἀλλ' ἦν ἀτενίζουσα τῷ λόγῳ Παύλου.

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<sup>303</sup>The word order is different in the Lipsius text. It reads: τὴν ἐκπληξιν αὐτῆς. There is no difference in meaning.

<sup>304</sup> Here the Lipsius text has the word Τέκνον in direct address. Tischendorf has it later in the phrase, where it is also direct address just not at the beginning of the spoken communication. The position of the word has no appreciable effect on the meaning.

<sup>305</sup> Both the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts have a comma or raised dot here. I have changed it to a full-stop in the English translation.

## Translation

**10a** And Thamyris went to her, at one and the same time loving her yet afraid of her distraction.

**10b** He said, “Thecla, my betrothed, why do you sit in this way? And what is this passion that holds you distracted?”

**10c** Turn to your Thamyris and be ashamed.”

**10d** And her mother also said the same, “Why do you sit like this, Child, looking down and stricken so as to make no answer?”

**10e** And those in the house wept bitterly, Thamyris for the loss of a wife, Theocleia for the loss of a child, and the housemaids for the loss of a mistress.

**10f** So there was much sharing of mourning in the household.

**10g** And while this was happening, Thecla did not turn away but went on concentrating on Paul’s words.

## Commentary and Notes

10a Καὶ προσελθὼν Θάμυρις, ἅμα μὲν φιλῶν αὐτήν, ἅμα δὲ καὶ φοβούμενος αὐτῆς τὴν ἑκπληξιν,

10a And Thamyris went to her, at one and the same time loving her yet afraid of her distraction,

Thamyris is not characterised in the static way that Theocleia is. He is depicted as ambivalent here. As the story progresses, he will fall into bad company, working with Demas and Hermogenes, the saboteurs of Paul's mission. Here it is as if he would want to understand if he could. He loves her, the verse says, but he is afraid. There is often a fear of the unknown; in this case the ideas of Paul are thought to be strange or foreign. Indeed in Asia such Jewish thought would seem very exotic and perhaps impenetrable to all those who did not wholly subscribe to the mindset. It after all is a description of an entire way of life, not an interest but a distraction from the normal things of life for the sake of the kingdom. It must have seemed very odd. The word ἑκπληξις “distraction” is helpful here because it both refers to the fact that Thecla is drawn away from ordinary life and also refers to this new desire and passion of hers. The possessive pronoun gives the sense that the decisions are already made by Thecla. “Her distraction” αὐτῆς τὴν ἑκπληξιν not only gives a sense of what she is neglecting but also an idea of the strength of what draws her.

10b εἶπεν Θέκλα ἐμοὶ μνηστευθεῖσα, τί τοιαύτη κάθησαι; καὶ ποῖόν σε πάθος κατέχει ἑκπληκτον;

10b He said, “Thecla, my betrothed, why do you sit in this way? And what is this passion that holds you distracted?”

Thamyris begins his plea with direct address and a sense of relationship, if not ownership, of the future prospects of Thecla and her obligations to him. He is expecting this to weigh heavily in his favour. “Thecla, my betrothed” is precisely what he can no longer assume. She has found another life commitment to a greater ideal. Thamyris has already lost her. The reader is discovering with Thamyris and Theocleia that the decisions have already been made by Thecla.

The reference to her posture is a reference to her as disciple. Just as Mary sat at Jesus' feet<sup>306</sup> or Nathaniel sat under the fig tree,<sup>307</sup> she sits as a rabbinical student attentive and absorbing the message of the teaching.

Thamyris describes her absorption as a passion. This shows real development in the narrative; the passion is not fearful for Thecla, only for those who do not understand it. For Thecla the passion is freedom from fear. His questions show that Thamyris is not part of what is happening to Thecla, and that he does not understand. He asks questions like those of Martha in the Gospel of Luke that show that he does not understand what it is to be a disciple.<sup>308</sup>

10c ἐπιστράφηθι πρὸς τὸν σὸν Θάμυριν καὶ αἰσχύνθητι.

10c Turn to your Thamyris and be ashamed.

Finally he seems to give up trying to make the link. One wonders, if he had persisted, whether her evangelical calling would have required her to explain to him the life-changing experience. There is no opportunity however, since he now shows his hand, asking for her to recant that which has so empowered her. He asks her to be ashamed, in other words to repent and beg forgiveness for her foolish behaviour which has so upset everyone and caused him to be summoned.

10d ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς τὰ αὐτὰ ἔλεγεν < > Τί τοιαύτη κάτω βλέπουσα κάθησαι, τέκνον, καὶ μηδὲν ἀποκρινομένη ἀλλὰ παραπλήξ;

10d And her mother also said the same, "Why do you sit like this, Child, looking down and stricken so as to make no answer?"

We expect this sort of behaviour from Theocleia now. She is frustrated in the extreme. Her manipulative plotting using Thamyris as her instrument of persuasion is a total failure. She can see the behaviour, the sitting, but she attributes to it a negative meaning when in fact Thecla is enraptured and too certain of her choice to be in any way disturbed by her mother's strained attempts at management. The phrase Τί τοιαύτη κάτω βλέπουσα κάθησαι gives a further clue to the position of Thecla relative to Onesiphorus' courtyard where Paul is speaking. Theocleia means it

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<sup>306</sup> Luke 10:39.

<sup>307</sup> John 1:48,50.

<sup>308</sup> Martha has the function of asking questions so that Jesus can explain. This happens not only at Lk 10:40-41 but also at John 11:21-25. It is an ordinary storytelling technique.

otherwise; her meaning is that Thecla is in some way bringing herself to a lower attitude or position. The reader knows that this is just the opposite of *παραπλήξ* (stricken). She is completely focused and animated in spirit by what she has heard and it will change her life and set her free. She will serve the Living God. The conviction with which she will demonstrate her belief will carry her through many trials and she will become a source of wisdom and inspiration to many.

10e καὶ οἱ μὲν ἔκλαιον δεινῶς, Θάμυρις μὲν γυναικὸς  
ἀστοχῶν, Θεοκλεία δὲ τέκνου, αἱ δὲ παιδίσκαι κυρίας.

10e And those in the house wept, Thamyris for the loss of a wife,  
Theocleia for the loss of a child, the housemaids for the loss of a mistress.

This is the famous verse quoted in the *Life of Eugenia*, the Alexandrian story of the early third century.<sup>309</sup> It is not a scripture verse and not otherwise known in antiquity except in this Acta. We know then that the *Acts of Thecla* has been widely circulated by the beginning of the third century, making its composition in the late second century highly unlikely. An early second-century dating is much more plausible. In the Conybeare translation of the Armenian *Life of Eugenia* we have: “The parent mourned for a daughter, and the brothers for a sister, and the slaves for a mistress”. Eugenia<sup>310</sup> like Macrina<sup>311</sup> (sister of Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great and Peter of Sebaste), is to fashion her life after the life of Saint Thecla. In such learned circles it is assumed that Thecla is a real historical figure. The ideas of Tertullian have not taken hold and Thecla is clearly seen to be the role model of those great women who take Christian leadership over men and women and carry out their apostolic vocations empowered by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>309</sup> F. Conybeare, ed., *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, pp. 149-151.

<sup>310</sup> F. Conybeare, ed., *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 168. From the Acts of Eugenia paragraph 8: “The parent mourned for a daughter, and the brothers for a sister, and the slaves for a mistress, and every one of the citizens mourned because of the parents’ bereavement and of the affliction which had befallen the family.” See also footnote 1: “This is imitated from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, ch. 10.”

<sup>311</sup> “The Life of Macrina”, on *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on CD-ROM, University of California, 1999, 2.22-27. εἰς ὕπνον καταπεσοῦσα φέρειν ἐδόκει διὰ χειρὸς τὸ ἔτι ὑπὸ τῶν σπλάγγων περιεχόμενον καὶ τινα ἐν εἵδει καὶ σχήματι μεγαλοπρεπεστέρω ἢ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ἐπιφανέντα προσειπεῖν τὴν βασταζομένην ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος Θεέκλης, ἐκείνης Θεέκλης, ἥς πολὺς ἐν ταῖς παρθένοις ὁ λόγος. She fell asleep and seemed to be carrying in her hands that which was still in her womb. And some one in form and raiment more splendid than a human being appeared and addressed the child she was carrying by the name of Thecla, that Thecla, I mean, who is so famous among the virgins. Fordham University’s Medieval Sourcebook: Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-d.c.395): *Life of Macrina*. trans. by W.K. Lowther Clarke, (London: SPCK, 1916), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/macrina.asp> accessed 21 January, 2014.

The feminine force of this verse is very prominent; it is the weeping of a mother and the female servants as well as the weeping of Thamyras that grieves this household to its core. It is no wonder that in early Christianity the conversion of whole households was common. The way of Christ demanded such commitment that all those in relationship with one another were affected by that commitment. The story of Perpetua and the reaction of her father are other examples of the division of a household by the conversion of one of the members to Christianity. These stories make the sayings of Jesus truly come to life: Mk 3:31-35 Mt 12:46-50, Lk 12: 49-53 and Mt 10:34-39. Matthew 10:37 illustrates this point sharply:

37 Ὁ φιλῶν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ὑπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος·  
καὶ ὁ φιλῶν υἱὸν ἢ θυγατέρα ὑπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος·

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;  
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

10f πολλὴ οὖν σύγχυσις ἦν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ πένθους.

10f There was much sharing of mourning in the household.

The ancient customs of mourning in households are not familiar to westerners today. The hiring of professional mourners for funerals and the continued period of mourning are customs that are still maintained in some Middle Eastern and other cultures. That suitable mourning take place whether or not there is a family member who spontaneously continues to wail aloud is important, to show how respected the deceased is.

The sharing of mourning is perhaps a matter of spreading the news that Thecla is not responsive to her mother and fiancé, which will have disastrous effects for the other servants and household members. As well a kind of pseudo-death ritual may be meant here. Thecla is in effect baptised by her accepting of the spirit of Christ in her heart, though her baptism with water will accompany her near death in a later episode of the story. Here she is non-responsive to her duties in the household, which will mean hardship for everyone involved. Some of this mourning is a case of individuals feeling sorry for themselves and some of this mourning is the pain of the separation of Thecla from the family by her decision that the way of Christ is more important to her than her brilliant prospects as a rich bride.

10g καὶ τούτων οὕτως γινομένων Θέκλα οὐκ ἀπεστράφη,  
ἀλλ' ἦν ἀτενίζουσα τῷ λόγῳ Παύλου.

10g And while this was happening, Thecla did not turn away but went on concentrating on Paul's words.

This sentence closes the scene. Thecla is even non-responsive to the whole household's overt protest and grief at her decision. She is the disciple now and will inexorably be the teacher soon. She has found a new life and she will never turn away from it. This sentence echoes Lk 9:51 referring to Is 50:7, where Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. There would be no turning back from that direction. For Thecla too will never turn away from the Gospel.



## Verse Eleven

**11a** Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις ἀναπηδήσας ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον,

**11b** καὶ παρατήρει τοὺς εἰσερχομένους πρὸς αὐτὸν < ><sup>312</sup> καὶ ἐξερχομένους.

**11c** καὶ εἶδεν δύο ἄνδρας εἰς ἑαυτοὺς μαχομένους πικρῶς,<sup>313</sup>

**11d** καὶ εἶπεν < ><sup>314</sup> ὦ ἄνδρες, < ><sup>315</sup> εἵπατέ μοι, καὶ τίς οὗτος ὁ < ><sup>316</sup> μεθ' ὑμῶν, πλανῶν ψυχὰς νέων καὶ παρθένους<sup>317</sup> ἀπατῶν,

**11e** ἵνα γάμοι μὴ γίνονται<sup>318</sup> ἀλλὰ οὕτως μένουσιν.<sup>319</sup>

**11f** ὑπισχνοῦμαι οὖν ὑμῖν δοῦναι χρήματα ἱκανά,<sup>320</sup> ἐὰν εἴπητέ μοι περὶ αὐτοῦ.

**11g** εἰμὶ γὰρ πρῶτος τῆς πόλεως.

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<sup>312</sup> The Lipsius text specifies τὸν Παῦλον here and omits the word αὐτόν.

<sup>313</sup> Lipsius uses a full stop rather than a comma at this point.

<sup>314</sup> The Lipsius text has the extra words πρὸς αὐτούς.

<sup>315</sup> The additional words τίνες ἔστε appear here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>316</sup> An additional adverb ἔσω is found here in Lipsius.

<sup>317</sup> The case in Lipsius is genitive παρθένων, but in the Tischendorf text it is accusative παρθένας.

<sup>318</sup> The Lipsius text has γίνονται rather than γίνονται.

<sup>319</sup> The verb in Lipsius has μένωσιν rather than μένουσιν. Without access to the actual manuscripts, we have to take the accents as read. Accented with a circumflex, the Tischendorf choice could be future.

<sup>320</sup> In Lipsius this phrase reads: πολλὰ χρήματα and the Tischendorf text reads: χρήματα ἱκανά.

## Translation

- 11a** Then Thamyris got up and went into the street,
- 11b** and watched those who went into him and came out.
- 11c** and he saw two men quarrelling bitterly with each other
- 11d** and he said, “Men, tell me, who is this with you leading astray the souls of young men and deceiving young women,
- 11e** so that they will not come<sup>321</sup> to be wed, but remain single?
- 11f** Now then<sup>322</sup> I promise to give you a suitable payment if you tell me about him,
- 11g** for I am number one in this<sup>323</sup> city.”

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<sup>321</sup> I have translated as future though this is really present tense with future meaning.

<sup>322</sup> I have translated οὐν as “now then”.

<sup>323</sup> A literal translation is “of the city”. I have translated “this city” because “the city” is the city where they are and in English “this” is more natural to refer to the city where one is.

## Commentary and Notes

11a Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις ἀναπηδήσας ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον,

11a Then Thamyris got up and went into the street,

Now Thamyris will attempt to deal with matters in his own way. This is the first scene where Thamyris is not being manipulated by Theocleia. This is his own decision to investigate and do something about what has happened to Thecla. At this stage the entire household is in mourning and as Thecla's father never appears in the story, we assume her mother is the head of their household. It is more fitting for Thamyris who is a strong young man to investigate than for Theocleia to do so. He will get close enough to actually question people about what has been going on, much like a news-reporter would in today's world.

11b καὶ παρετήρει τοὺς εἰσερχομένους πρὸς αὐτὸν < > καὶ ἐξερχομένους.

11b and watched those who went into him and came out.

From his more proximate place of observation Thamyris studies the phenomenon. There are "those going in". This is expressed in the participial form and gives the sense that there are both men and women attending the preaching. There are those coming out as well as those going in. This is reminiscent of liturgies that are very long today where people go outside and sometime later on return inside for further prayer and listening. They may leave for many reasons, to feed children, to attend to responsibilities, for refreshment of various sorts. Some may not have come back. No doubt Thecla would have known many of them and all of this would have intrigued her.

This does not mean that people are only filing in, for example, to touch the hem of Paul's robes or his handkerchief (as in Acts 19:11-20), but rather that, since the preaching is more than a few hours, they are taking time to do what is needed, so that they are then able to return later and continue listening. This going in and coming out is more like a lecture break during a three-hour lecture than like a queue which goes past some object of interest. The Lipsius text here specifies that it is Paul whom they go in to see and omits the word αὐτόν "him". This is more likely to be a later editorial clarification. There would be no reason to replace the name by a pronoun making the text less specific in a later version.

11c καὶ εἶδεν δύο ἄνδρας εἰς ἑαυτοὺς μαχομένους πικρῶς,

11c and he saw two men quarrelling bitterly with each other

Now Thamyras sees two men quarrelling bitterly with each other. This is superfluous to the plot except that it helps to characterise further Demas and Hermogenes who are already known to the reader as untrustworthy. They are now seen to be unable to control their passions and are at odds even with each other. Those who know the story are given an opportunity to laugh at Demas and Hermogenes here. They appear to be buffoons.

11d καὶ εἶπεν < > ἄνδρες, < > εἵπατέ μοι, καὶ τίς οὗτος ὁ < > μεθ' ὑμῶν, πλανῶν ψυχὰς νέων καὶ παρθένους<sup>324</sup> ἀπατῶν,

11d and he said, “Men, tell me, who is this with you leading astray the souls of the young men and deceiving young women,

The Lipsius and Tischendorf texts have different readings in this segment. Lipsius is following manuscripts A and B (except in accepting πρὸς αὐτοῦς which is CE). Tischendorf follows C which he often prefers. It is no surprise that Lipsius does not use the accusative of παρθένους found in C because he claims that C is a very poor representation of the earliest text. Perhaps this is all that Lipsius intends: just to avoid C. Lipsius by determining not to use παρθένους (which usage is the correct case) but rather using παρθένων perhaps is working in the direction of completeness in meaning but this causes a cumbersome text. It would not be difficult if it were not for the second participle which one would normally expect to take the accusative. On balance, it is not easy to mount an argument for either reading being earlier on grammatical grounds.

Speculation as to what meanings Lipsius may have seen in the text is interesting here. There are a number of possibilities here. For example, Lipsius may be striving for symmetry in reading that “the souls of the young men and also the souls of the young women are both led astray and both are deceived”. On the other hand, it is just as likely that there may be behind Lipsius’ text the idea that it is only young women and not

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<sup>324</sup> The case in Lipsius is genitive παρθένων but in the Tischendorf text it is accusative παρθένους. The case difference is not so much a matter of correctness as it results in two different meanings.

young men being led astray, as is suggested by Barrier.<sup>325</sup> For Lipsius this could have been “the souls of the young ones (i.e. girls) and of the virgins”. Barrier translates the genitive of the Lipsius text but his resultant English translation reads as if he were translating an accusative. This is also true for Elliott.<sup>326</sup>

The accusative gives a very different meaning with the additional participle. A complete equality between the νέοι and παρθένοι is lacking but the style impresses as more sophisticated. When the accusative plural of ἡ παρθένοϛ is used the question is left: “Is it only young men who have souls?” It is highly unlikely that the text is trying to raise such a question. Rather the implication is that souls led astray are deceived, that is; deception is the leading astray of souls. The two participles are used in what amounts to hendiadys: the deceptive leading astray of souls. This reading recognizes a chiasmic structure in 11d.

My translation indicates the inclusion of both young men and young women. This is consistent with the matters discussed in verse twelve following. With the involvement in 11c of the two young men, Demas and Hermogenes, who are clearly young men “led astray” by Thamyris, a certain irony is also at play.

The direct address here refers to the fact that Demas and Hermogenes are adults and responsible for their bad behaviour. They are addressed as men in contrast to the young persons who are said to be led astray. Their actual age cannot be known and certainly they are an example of foolishness. Perhaps the direct address is meant to flatter while at the same time giving the readers an opportunity to think of them as young and foolish. They are travelling disciples of Paul and one might expect them not to be senior men, so the irony is likely, even if we cannot know this with certainty.

Thamyris is interested to hear some accusations against Paul; his request is already prejudicial. He is as it were “leading the witnesses”. He tells

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<sup>325</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 96,97. Barrier offers this thought following consideration of the Coptic translation: “It is equally likely that the young children, young ones are young girls, and not young men. There is nothing in νέων (genitive plural of νέος, α, ον) or the remaining context to indicate that these individuals are male.” Barrier gives a set of further references to support this view from the Bible and from various dictionaries and other sources. Then Barrier goes on to say that the context is important here and in comparison to verse 7 one might expect young women and virgins but here in comparison to verse 12 one might prefer that both sexes are mentioned. In his translation he seems to have a non-committal position. He has: “deceiving the souls of young ones and defrauding virgins”.

<sup>326</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 366. Elliott has: “leading astray the souls of young men and deceiving virgins”.

them that the souls of the young men are led astray, while the young women are being deceived. There is no suggestion anywhere else in the story that the behaviour of anyone at Onesiphorus' house is bad at this point. In fact all they are doing is listening. The description of the young men and women is not an accusation against them; it is an accusation against Paul. Those reading or listening to the *Acts of Thecla* will understand that Thamyras' motives are not honourable.

11e ἵνα γάμοι μὴ γίνονται ἀλλὰ οὕτως μένουσιν·

11e so that they will not come to be wed, but rather remain single?

The Lipsius text corrects to γίνονται and μένωσιν. The subjunctive is more correct with μὴ. The meaning of the sentence is clearer with the subjunctive. The Lipsius choice is a correction, and is the later text rather than the more difficult and therefore the more original text which is found in Tischendorf.

This is obviously about Thamyras and Thecla. There is no evidence that the others who are listening to Paul are affected in this way. This is also not about Demas and Hermogenes staying single. The indicative of the Tischendorf text, μένουσιν, suits the story better, since Thamyras is not really presenting two possibilities but rather is complaining about his own situation where (as those familiar with the story know) Thecla will never marry. The Lipsius choice of the subjunctive may be a later flourish, making the ἵνα clause more complex in the counterfactual meanings it presents, as one might find in philosophical rhetoric.

The beatitudes are what the text gives us as an example of Paul's teaching and they contain this: (6c) "Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they will be acceptable to God and they will not lose the reward of their purity." This is the dangerous doctrine according to Thamyras. In his situation as a man betrothed who now finds his fiancée no longer responsive, this teaching undermines the fabric of social stability.

The beatitude of course does not teach that those who are single may not wed, but Thamyras' situation causes him to have this interpretation. Never in the story do we hear that all of those who were single who heard Paul never married. Thamyras' interpretation is an exaggeration both of what is here and what we know of Paul's teaching from the Pauline corpus. This exaggeration has also become one of the main ways that this

text and its heroine, Thecla, have been maligned as it has been compared with Gnostic writings<sup>327</sup> rather than with Paul's undisputed letters.

11f ὑπισχνούμαι οὖν ὑμῖν δοῦναι χρήματα ἱκανά, ἐὰν εἴπητέ μοι περὶ αὐτοῦ·

11f Now then I promise to give you a suitable payment if you tell me about him,

Now Thamyras bribes Demas and Hermogenes. We are aware of the lack of honour among these two and we have no doubt that they will accept the bribe. Thamyras has promised and he will keep that promise. He will provide a sumptuous meal for them and lavish upon them the luxurious commodities and comforts of his home.

This is a strong parallel to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas in the canonical Gospels. The same vocabulary is not used. As elsewhere this can be explained by access to New Testament oral tradition, but not to a copy of the New Testament. This is perhaps an indication that the *Acts of Thecla* is written late in the first century or early in the second century and is based on an earlier oral tradition.

The Lipsius text has πολλά rather than ἱκανά. Πολλά is likely to be a later exaggeration. As the hagiography of Thecla develops she becomes so important that only a “great payment” is appropriate.

11g εἰμι γὰρ πρῶτος τῆς πόλεως.

11g for I am number one in this city.”

Thamyras' status in Iconium is important to understanding the social status of Thecla and Theocleia. They are among the wealthiest persons of the city. This has in fact complicated the matter greatly. Had Thecla been only a poor young woman the story would not have the same impact. We know of the help of women of means in the ministry of Jesus and of Paul. It is a particular phenomenon in Christianity that wealthy women were attracted to this message and way of life.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read of Lydia who is a mistress of a household. It is a household wealthy enough to invite guests and has its

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<sup>327</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, p.63. “First, it must be judged highly unlikely that the *Acts of Paul* ever was Gnostic.” See also Pieter J. Lalleman, “The Resurrection in the Acts of Paul”, in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 135.

own commercial enterprise (see Acts 16: 13-15). She is the mistress of a household which has a leading role in the synagogue in Thyatira.<sup>328</sup> Also John Mark's mother, Mary, is a householder with slaves and a house with an outer and inner gate, large enough not only to host guests but also to hold a large number of worshippers (see Acts 12:12-14). Acts 17:4 notes that a number of "leading women" joined Paul and Silas in the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. Not only in Acts but also in the Gospel, Luke records that the Jesus movement is reliant on wealthy women. They see to the material needs of Jesus (and the twelve) from their own wealth and include the wife of King Herod's steward (Lk 8:3). Perhaps Luke is reflecting to some extent the phenomenon of the time of the writing of Luke-Acts. However, even in the earliest New Testament writings there are wealthy women followers of Jesus. Paul has in Romans 16:1 that Phoebe is a *προστάτις πολλῶν* "a benefactor of many". Thecla exemplifies this aspect of early Christianity. She is the model of wealthy women who find freedom from the pressures of society as they fulfil their ministries and vocations as followers of Jesus.

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<sup>328</sup> I. Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 78-98, who argues convincingly from inscriptional evidence and a significant array of texts that this is not just a "place of prayer" but that a *προσευχή* is a synagogue.



## Verse Twelve

**12a** Καὶ ὁ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης εἶπον αὐτῷ Οὗτος μὲν τίς ἐστίν, οὐκ οἶδαμεν·

**12b** στερίσκει<sup>329</sup> δὲ νέους γυναικῶν καὶ παρθένους ἀνδρῶν,

**12c** λέγων Ὡς ἀνάστασις ὑμῖν οὐκ ἐστίν<sup>330</sup> ἐὰν μὴ ἀγνοῖ μείνητε καὶ τὴν σάρκα μὴ μολύνετε ἀλλὰ τηρήσητε ἀγνήν.

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<sup>329</sup> The Lipsius text reads στερεῖ here.

<sup>330</sup> The Lipsius text inserts a comma here.

## Translation

**12a** And Demas and Hermogenes said to him: “We do not know who this man is,

**12b** but he deprives young men of wives and young women of husbands.

**12c** saying: “Unless you remain pure,<sup>331</sup> and do not defile the flesh, but keep it pure, there is for you no resurrection.”

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<sup>331</sup> One could translate, “holy”, but here Demas and Hermogenes are trying to blacken the character of Paul.

## Commentary and Notes

12a Καὶ ὁ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης εἶπον αὐτῷ Οὗτος μὲν τίς ἐστίν, οὐκ οἶδαμεν·

12a And Demas and Hermogenes said to him: “We do not know who this man is,

We know that Demas and Hermogenes are not loyal to Paul but this is a phrase that we do not expect here, until we realize that it is meant to be a reference to the denial of Jesus. Demas and Hermogenes are being portrayed by this answer as a single false voice. They are dishonest; the audience knows this from verse one. It is demonstrated here. The drama would have moved on more quickly had they simply said, “yes”, since they will not hesitate to betray Paul. It is helpful to the understanding of what follows, however, that they are seen to be dishonest even in this matter that is inconvenient to the moving forward of the drama, so that the audience is clear that all that they say is not to be trusted.

This verse is a dramatic parallel to Peter’s denial of Jesus in Mk 14:70b-71 and in the other Synoptics.<sup>332</sup>

70b καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν πάλιν οἱ παρεστῶτες ἔλεγον τῷ Πέτρῳ, Ἀληθῶς ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, καὶ γὰρ Γαλιλαῖος εἶ. 71 ὁ δὲ ἤρξατο ἀναθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνύειν ὅτι Οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον ὃν λέγετε.

70b And again after a little while the bystanders said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them for you are a Galilean”. 71 Yet, he began to curse and to swear, “I do not know this person about whom you speak.”

This tradition in Mark and in the other two Synoptic texts (shown in the footnote) attests to the Synoptic theory of literary copying where the words “I do not know” (οὐκ οἶδα) and “man” or “person” (ἄνθρωπος) appear together in both Luke and Matthew which copy Mark. The word “man” or “person” (ἄνθρωπος) is used differently in each of the three Gospels. Perhaps the tradition of the *Acts of Thecla* knows the oral reports of Peter’s denial but does not know the New Testament texts. The literary comparison with the *Acts of Thecla* is not exact with any of the three Synoptic Gospels but the dramatic comparison is significant.

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<sup>332</sup> In Mt 26: 69-74 the phrases used are: Οὐκ οἶδα τί λέγεις and Οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

12b στερίσκει<sup>333</sup> δὲ νέους γυναικῶν καὶ παρθένους ἀνδρῶν,

12b but he deprives young men of wives and young women of husbands.

For people who protest that they do not know who this man is they seem to know plenty about him. There is an assumption made in the telling of the story concerning this particular matter of Thamyras being a young man who now considers that he will be deprived of a wife. Demas and Hermogenes would have had no way of knowing that this was a concern of Thamyras except that the omniscient perspective of the text requires that they know this. What they say is exaggerated. As readers, we know of no other young men who will be deprived of wives because of Paul's teachings.<sup>334</sup>

In terms of his husbandly ambitions, Thamyras has unfortunately made arrangements with the wrong woman.<sup>335</sup> Thecla has a particular vocation as an apostle, and those of us who are aware of her history appreciate that this is a singular vocation. She becomes the most famous woman in early Christianity; her commitment and influence are unparalleled even by those great women who are known from the canonical Gospels. She is not just any young woman.

The teaching of Paul in the beatitudes is not that all or even many should forgo marrying; on the contrary one would assume that teachings of

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In Lk 22: 54-62 we have more variety. First we have Peter say: Οὐκ οἶδα αὐτόν, γύναι. Then he responds: Ἄνθρωπε, οὐκ εἰμί. Finally we read: εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Πέτρος, Ἄνθρωπε, οὐκ οἶδα ὃ λέγεις. Like the Markan example none of these are exact parallels. The text of the *Acts of Thecla* is most likely influenced by the oral tradition but not by the written New Testament.

<sup>333</sup> The Lipsius text has στερεῖ here. Στερίσκει and στερεῖ both mean “he deprives”. As Koine Greek develops it tends to prefer the simpler forms for verbs and so στερίσκει is perhaps the older form. This would support the Tischendorf being the earlier text.

<sup>334</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 99. Although he does not agree with them, Barrier notes a number of scholars who believe that Paul's teachings are misrepresented here. He writes, “If they (Demas and Hermogenes) are misrepresenting Paul, then the APTH are not encratite.” This statement could be clearer. Perhaps what Barrier means is that if Paul is misrepresented throughout the story then the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are not an example of later Christian or Gnostic encratic writing. Encratism is not a simple category of literature; rather there is a complexity of encratic characteristics in many texts, sometimes in exaggerated and therefore negative senses and sometimes in positive and virtuous senses. Encratism is known not only in the New Testament, but it also pre-dates the New Testament, in writings such as the book of Judith where fasting and praying are daily fare, and in Stoic and other philosophical writings on virtue. Also Demas and Hermogenes are being characterised by the writers or by the tradition of the *Acts of Thecla* as misrepresenting Paul as part of the development of the plot. Their voices do not speak the theology of the *Acts of Thecla*.

<sup>335</sup> Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994, p. 11. Demand notes from the earlier classical period, “Marriage was viewed as a practical business arrangement” and “inquiries about the suitability of prospective candidates were conducted surreptitiously to avoid the affront to the honour of the house that would be entailed by a public rejection.”

purity are for both the married and the unmarried. This is slanderous speech by Demas and Hermogenes in order to accuse Paul unjustly, just as Jesus was unjustly accused of bearing false witness, and false charges were laid against him. This slander was in fact accepted by many throughout the Western tradition (but not in Eastern Christianity) as the truth about the *Acts of Thecla* when attempts were made to discredit it. This is a clear misunderstanding of the meaning and plot of the *Acts of Thecla*.

It is a matter of interest that the report to Thamyras is so evenhanded in regard to men and women, both being equally deprived of spouses (as also in verse 11). This trumped up accusation hardly reflects the inequality of the times. Phrases like this one invite theories that the authorship and following of the *Acts of Thecla* may well have been the work of women in the ancient Christian world. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner in their book, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla*, write about the work of Lin Foxhall in “Pandora Unbound”.<sup>336</sup> The idea of Stichele and Penner is that there is a complexity of the roles of women in the ancient world. In particular they note that “there is a complex dynamic here with respect to the kinds of women who could be active in the public sphere, insofar as they are typically elite females, being socially and economically advantaged.”<sup>337</sup>

The textual variant στερεῖ in Lipsius is likely to be a later correction. The Koine moves toward the simplest of forms.

12c λέγων ὅτι ἄλλως ἀνάστασις ὑμῖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐὰν μὴ ἀγνοῖ μείνητε καὶ τὴν σάρκα μὴ μολύνετε ἀλλὰ τηρήσετε ἀγνήν.

12c saying: “Unless you remain pure, and do not defile the flesh, but keep it pure, there is for you no resurrection.”

This is a clever slander. It is close enough to what Paul is teaching and yet the intentional slippage is extremely damaging. Never in the beatitudes or anywhere else in this work or even in the canonical letters or Acts does Paul teach that there is no resurrection for those who do not remain pure—although remaining pure and not marrying are two entirely

<sup>336</sup>Lin Foxhall, “Pandora Unbound: A Feminist critique of Foucault’s History of Sexuality”, in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, David Larmour, Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter (eds.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998, p. 123.

<sup>337</sup>Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla*, T&T Clark International, New York, 2009, p. 55.

different things. As discussed above, purity is a virtue practised in the ancient world not only by the unmarried but also by the married. Even so, those who have fallen into sin may of course still be saved; this is the good news of Jesus Christ.

Demas and Hermogenes are not only misrepresenting Paul; here they are also misrepresenting the Gospel. Christians and those of the Jesus movement through the ages who hear this saying concerning holiness and purity would find it represents a kind of elitism that is foreign to the Christian mainstream and Pauline traditions.

The strong portrayal of Demas and Hermogenes as liars lets us know how to understand this saying: it is a lie. The *Acts of Thecla* then is saying something very different from this lie. The resurrection is available to all who turn to Christ no matter what they have done in the past. Baptism is the way one expresses this turning to Christ. In turning to Christ in baptism persons die and rise with Christ, and the new life of grace is one of holiness and mercy for all those who turn to Christ, both those married and those not married.

Belief in God's mercy and following in the ways of Christ's compassion are essential features of this understanding of the new life. This is the very attraction of the message of service of the Living God. It is the merciful who will obtain mercy. As it says in the *Acts of Thecla* verse 6b μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται ἡμέραν κρίσεως πικρᾶν. (Blessed are the merciful, for they will have mercy done them and they will not see the bitter day of judgment.)

The later tradition of the miracles of Thecla will have her giving advice for healing and well-being to both married and unmarried women and men. Her advice is sensible and practical in the tradition of the *Acts of Thecla* which is her earliest written portrayal.

## Verse Thirteen

**13a** Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Δεῦτε < ><sup>338</sup> εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε. < ><sup>339</sup>

**13b** καὶ ἀπῆλθον εἰς πολύτιμον δείπνον καὶ πολὺν οἶνον καὶ πλοῦτον μέγαν καὶ τράπεζαν λαμπράν·

**13c** καὶ ἐπότισεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Θάμυρις,

**13d** ποθῶν <sup>340</sup> τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ θέλων τυχεῖν γυναικός.

**13e** καὶ εἶπεν ἐν τῷ δείπνῳ ὁ Θάμυρις ὦ Ἄνδρες, < > τίς ἐστὶν ἡ διδασκαλία αὐτοῦ, εἵπατέ μοι,<sup>341</sup> ἵνα καγὼ ἴδω.<sup>342</sup>

**13f** οὐ γὰρ μικρῶς ἀγωνιῶ περὶ τῆς Θέκλης, ὅτι οὕτως φιλεῖ τὸν ξένον καὶ ἀποστεροῦμαι γάμου.

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<sup>338</sup> The Lipsius text has the extra word ἄνδρες here following a comma.

<sup>339</sup> The Lipsius text also has the words μετ' ἐμοῦ.

<sup>340</sup> This word is different in the Lipsius text. It is not ποθῶν but rather φιλῶν.

<sup>341</sup> The word order for this clause varies between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts. The position of εἵπατέ μοι is different. Lipsius reads ὦ Ἄνδρες, εἵπατέ μοι, τίς ἐστὶν ἡ διδασκαλία αὐτοῦ, and the Tischendorf places the two words as above at the end of the clause.

<sup>342</sup> The word ἴδω in the short text is replaced by γνῶ in the Lipsius text.

## Translation

**13a** Thamyris said to them, “Come to my house and rest.”

**13b** And they went off to a costly meal with much wine and great luxury, and a splendid table.

**13c** And Thamyris offered them drinks,

**13d** desiring Thecla and wishing to take her as wife.

**13e** and during the dinner Thamyris said, “Men, what is his teaching?<sup>343</sup> Tell me so that I too may understand.”

**13f** I am in not a little agony over Thecla, because she so loves the stranger and I am deprived of marriage.

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<sup>343</sup> This question mark and sentence division is not in the Tischendorf text.



## Commentary and Notes

13a Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Δεῦτε, < > εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε. < >

13a Thamyris said to them, “Come to my house and rest.”

Thamyris recognizes that he has found what he sought, someone to give him information which he could use against Paul. The story portrays Demas and Hermogenes as dissembling characters. They say they know nothing of Paul and then immediately are spouting information that is negative, exaggerated and pejorative about Paul, as if they indeed knew a lot about him but did not want themselves to be associated with him for fear that it would not be to their advantage. Thamyris must recognize them for what they are, men who are concerned with their own advantage. It is for this reason that he invites them for recreation at his estate. It is clearly part of the bribe that he will offer for information against Paul.

When Thamyris invites Demas and Hermogenes to his house, this is not just an invitation for them to satisfy their hunger and assuage their thirst. He is inviting them to sumptuous eating, unlimited drinking and the pleasures that he as a rich man can afford them. They would have understood that the invitation was not to a simple meal and discussion.

This excessive banquet stands in the text as an example of what is not necessary for happiness and meaning in life. When Thecla is taken into the home of Tryphaena no such excessive luxury is described; rather it is a time of prayer and concern for Tryphaena as a mother grieving for her daughter. It is a strong contrast to the invitation to Thamyris’ wealthy home. Excess can be the opposite of asceticism, but in these two invitations excess is set in contrast to the balanced life-style that is inspired by mercy. We see Tryphaena’s compassion for the condemned Thecla, and Thecla (the saint) is at work showing compassion to her bereaved hostess.

The Lipsius text adds the direct address, ἄνδρες. The translation would be: “Men, come to my house and rest with me”. The Lipsius text also adds the prepositional phrase “with me” to the end of the invitation. This presents as padding to make the invitation seem all the more personal and friendly. More than likely it is a later addition. There would be no reason to remove such words if the Tischendorf text was a later abridgment. Adding them does, however, supply a more persuasive and polite form of

invitation and it adds to the elegance and convincing tone of this part of the drama. It enhances the sense that the people depicted are in society's upper levels.

Certainly Lipsius' thesis that unorthodox theological matters were removed in certain manuscripts in order to make what is a heretical text seem more acceptable cannot be applied to the comparison of variants like these. No examples to support Lipsius' thesis have been found to this point in this commentary; on the contrary, in every case to this point the shorter Tischendorf text appears to be the more original text.

13b καὶ ἀπῆλθον εἰς πολύτιμον δεῖπνον καὶ πολὺν οἶνον καὶ πλοῦτον μέγαν καὶ τράπεζαν λαμπράν·

13b and they went off to a costly meal with much wine and great luxury, and a splendid table.

The description of the meal and its context is lavish. This is a banquet which has a purpose. It is the substitute for the wedding banquet for Thamyras. The underlying idea is that Thamyras is from this point on in the drama wedded to deception, misconduct, and hypocrisy. Perhaps the author is impressed by all of this extravagance; it is certainly described in some detail.

Thamyras has begun his own plan of bribery and dishonesty. He now has taken initiative, independently of Theocleia, to try to get what he wants. We see at this point in the story why Theocleia attempted to elicit his help. He really did want beyond all reason the same thing that she wanted: for Thecla to be married to him and the obvious advantages that entailed.

In contrast to Thamyras, Thecla will soon partake of a simple Eucharist. The contrast is blistering. Thamyras has given in to his own selfish appetites, even to an appetite for unwarranted revenge and vile plotting against Paul. Thamyras shows no sense of grief over a shared life of any kind with Thecla. He is jealous of Paul and is single-minded and calculating in his revenge. He is presented as a most unsavoury character.

13c καὶ ἐπότισεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Θάμυρις,

13c And Thamyras offered them drinks,

This phrase makes it clear that Thamyris' interest is personal and that he has gone to great lengths to see to it that he is in the most powerful position possible to attempt to undermine and destroy the ministry of Paul. He could have obtained the information that he wanted by simply paying for it but in fact what he does is establish a relationship with these disreputable characters.

He cares for their wants himself while they dine. This means that he will order the servants to bring them whatever they desire. He will not wait on them, but will show them how powerful he is so that they will feel that their alliance with him will advance them to a position of greater power than their alliance with Paul could have. In this they will see themselves as even greater than Paul, because they are able to contribute to Paul's demise. As the drama plays out it will be discovered that they are wrong about these matters.

13d ποθῶν τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ θέλων τυχεῖν γυναικός.

13d desiring Thecla and wishing to take her as wife.

The difference between the Tischendorf and the Lipsius texts is not substantial. Lipsius is again avoiding manuscript C which Tischendorf has chosen.

Sheila McGinn understands this phrase to be romantic<sup>344</sup> but she is commenting on the Lipsius text and has the word φιλέω to interpret. She supports the idea that Thamyris loves Thecla. Barrier, following Schmidt, brings up the possibility that this is about lust and sexual gratification.<sup>345</sup> In the context of the story neither seems plausible. If Thamyris is being characterised as a man who loves Thecla, or lusts after her, why will he be so willing to have her burned? Whatever his wish to have her for his wife may entail, the readers or listeners will not accept that he is sincere.

Thamyris is characterised as wealthy. Therefore one can assume that he gets as much sexual gratification as he wants. The wealthy in the ancient world are powerful and sexual favours are commonly for sale. Domestic sexual assault is not often punished, unless the victim or victim's family is wealthier or more powerful than the assailant. If Thamyris was uncontrolled in his sexual passion for Thecla (like Amnon for Tamar 2Sam.13:4-15) then one might expect the drama to include some attempt

<sup>344</sup> S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 812.

<sup>345</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 101.

to lure her into a situation where he could rape her. When he last saw her, Thamyris was in her home at her mother's request. That would not be a likely setting for a sexual assault. Nothing in the drama indicates that such lustful intentions on Thamyris' part are involved. Although there has been some interpretative discussion in relation to sexual assault by Alexander in Pisidian Antioch, there is none in relationship to Thamyris. Thamyris is portrayed in 13e as dishonest but not as lustful or uncontrolled in his desires.

Thecla is a prize because of her social status, family connections and wealth. There could be competition for her in the city (compare Callirhoe), and Thamyris' pride may well be hurt. His desiring her, from the information that we have and the context of the story itself, is most likely to be a matter of his ambition, wealth and pride. This makes it possible that he wants her to die, so that no one else can have what he has not secured. This will also eliminate the living evidence of his shame at having been jilted. Thamyris now is intent on punishing Paul and Thecla. In contemporary contexts "honour killings" come to mind.

Couching the reasons for Thamyris' revenge as a matter of desire and Thecla's "love" of Paul is part of the deception of this entire section of the drama. Thecla's devotion is at least misunderstood and at most misrepresented. Thamyris is attempting to deceive Demas and Hermogenes in order to secure their assistance. The descriptions here show Thamyris to be duplicitous. It is entirely possible that his love for Thecla is feigned and her devotion to Paul is misrepresented in order to dupe the guests into cooperating with Thamyris' violent plan. In the following section 13e it is even clearer that Thamyris is not honest in this scene.

13e καὶ εἶπεν ἐν τῷ δείπνῳ ὁ Θάμυρις ᾧ ἄνδρες, < > τίς ἐστὶν ἡ διδασκαλία αὐτοῦ, εἵπατέ μοι,<sup>346</sup> ἵνα καὶ γὼ ἴδω.<sup>347</sup>

13e and during the dinner Thamyris said, "Men, what is his teaching? Tell me so that I too may understand."

The sentence as it is punctuated in Lipsius is livelier in English translation as an actual question. It follows more the modern style of storytelling rather than the more elegant and reserved ancient style where

<sup>346</sup> The word order does not affect the meaning.

<sup>347</sup> The word ἴδω in the short text is replaced by γνῶ in the Lipsius text. The meaning is not very different. Tischendorf is following AB and G, which is a frequent choice of his. It is surprising that Lipsius does not do the same, but he is following CEF here, although he is usually wary of relying on C.

questions are often implied rather than actually asked. For a modern audience this is more what one would expect in the reading. Since no punctuation is in the ancient texts, the lively question form is as acceptable as any.

Thamyris is portrayed here as mendacious. He is pumping Demas and Hermogenes for information that can be used against Paul. Rather than saying this is what he is about he pretends to be genuinely interested in understanding.

The dinner is a part of Thamyris' plan to get the information he needs to cause problems for Paul and restore Thecla, were it possible, to her former self or else punish her. Banquets have a scriptural tradition of sedition.<sup>348</sup> Note the banquets in the books of Esther and Judith which are used for purposes of controlling others. In this banquet Thamyris is manipulating in order to get the information he needs to accuse Paul. He doesn't want to understand anything; he wants to repay his annoyance with accusation that could result in Paul's death. The wish to understand is deception.

Demas and Hermogenes will answer in terms of Paul's teaching; this in itself shows misunderstanding of Paul's ministry and mission. Paul speaks not on behalf of himself but in order to make available the teaching of Jesus. Thamyris and his guests are simply operating at a totally different level, which has no understanding of Paul's mission.

13f οὐ γὰρ μικρῶς ἀγωνιῶ περὶ τῆς Θεκλῆς, ὅτι οὕτως φιλεῖ τὸν ξένον καὶ ἀποστεροῦμαι γάμου.

13f I am in not a little agony over Thecla because she so loves the stranger and I am deprived of marriage.

Here again Thamyris shows his cards. He is portrayed as thinking that Thecla's interest in Paul is romantic rather than idealistic. The readers or listeners know that he is wrong and his misunderstanding of the relationship will make his attack on it all the more futile. His own anxiety is expressed in this sentence. He is in agony over Thecla, not only in terms of financial and future security, social status and honour in the community, but also his personal feelings (his agony) are at stake.

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<sup>348</sup> Some examples include: the last supper, Mt 26:20ff; Vashti's banquet, Esther 1:5,9,18-19; Judith beheads Holofernes, Judith 12:16-13:10; Abigail betrays her husband, Nabal, 1 Sam 25:36-38; the promise of the death of John the Baptist, Mt 14: 1-12, where food is not described per se, but there is a birthday, dancing for guests and a platter, so perhaps food is assumed.

One might question if this is meant to describe the hurt at his sincere affection being jilted, but anyone with a genuine and sincere affection would not consent to burning her.

The text presents him as deprived of something that he could expect, marriage to Thecla. This is presented as if it were hard for Thamyras to take. He seems to be over-confident in his expectation of marriage, although in the ancient world no doubt most engagements involved the will of the parents of both bride and groom and most resulted in marriage. We hear nothing of Thamyras' parents. We do not know his circumstances in the story, other than his wealth. Perhaps he has been invited into the family for other reasons; one could only speculate. Perhaps he is older than Thecla, perhaps even more the age of Theocleia. Provided that it had Theocleia's blessing, this would still be an engagement, which would be expected to result in marriage. He would be at a loss.

## Verse Fourteen

**14a** Εἶπον δὲ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης

**14b** Προσάγαγε αὐτὸν τῷ ἡγεμόνι Καστελίῳ ὡς ἀναπείθοντα τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπὶ καινῇ διδαχῇ Χριστιανῶν,

**14c** καὶ < ><sup>349</sup> ἀπολέσει<sup>350</sup> αὐτὸν ταχέως<sup>351</sup> καὶ σὺ ἔξεις τὴν γυναικὰ σου Θέκλαν.

**14d** καὶ ἡμεῖς σε διδάξομεν, ἣν λέγει οὗτος ἀνάστασιν γενέσθαι,

**14e** ὅτι ἤδη γέγονεν ἐφ' οἷς ἔχομεν τέκνοις,<sup>352</sup> καὶ ἀνιστάμεθα θεὸν ἐπεγνωκότες ἀληθῆ.

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<sup>349</sup> The Lipsius text adds the demonstrative here: οὕτως.

<sup>350</sup> This word is in the form ἀπολεῖ in the Lipsius text.

<sup>351</sup> This word does not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>352</sup> After the word τέκνοις the Lipsius text includes in square brackets this phrase including the comma at the beginning [, καὶ ἀνιστάμεθα θεὸν ἐπεγνωκότες ἀληθῆ].

## Translation

**14a** And Demas and Hermogenes said,

**14b** “Bring him to governor Castellius because he seduces the crowds into the new teaching of Christians,

**14c** and he will kill him quickly and you will have your wife, Thecla.

**14d** And we will teach you that the resurrection of which he speaks is come to be,

**14e** that<sup>353</sup> it has already happened, in the case of children that we have,<sup>354</sup> and we are risen having come to know God to be true.”<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> I have translated ὅτι “that” since this is further explanation of the kind of resurrection which they will teach.

<sup>354</sup> The case of the relative pronoun οἷς comes about by its attraction to τέκνοις. This is not an error but a matter of literary style also found in Demosthenes. The translation means : “of children, the ones that”. This would have sounded over-translated so I have only “of children that”.

<sup>355</sup> The adjective is the same case as the noun but not in the attributive position. Most translators prefer “the true God” but I have represented the possibility that this means God is true in the sense of trustworthy, faithful or truthful. The idea is not that this God is the correct one in comparison to others but rather that God can be counted on for resurrection as it is known in the children of married persons. The idea is that one lives on in one’s children. This idea is known in Judaism and in the Greek and Roman cultures.



## Commentary and Notes

14a Εἶπον δὲ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης

14a And Demas and Hermogenes said,

We note that these two continue to speak with one voice. They have not only been pumped for information, they have taken Thamyris' side entirely and are now suggesting a manner of revenge. The reader is expecting Thamyris to come up with the idea, since his intentions in the bribe and information gathering are clear. When Demas and Hermogenes are first to announce this plan, some blame is diverted to them, leaving Thamyris less harshly characterised.

14b Προσάγαγε αὐτὸν τῷ ἡγεμόνι Καστελίῳ ὡς ἀναπείθοντα τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπὶ καὶνῇ διδαχῇ Χριστιανῶν,

14b “Bring him to governor Castellius because he seduces the crowds into the new teaching of Christians,

It is the idea of Demas and Hermogenes to bring Paul before the civil authorities. The governor of Iconium is named Castellius. Barrier tells us that there is no archaeological or literary evidence for a governor with this name.<sup>356</sup>

The charge against him as Demas and Hermogenes envision it is that Paul persuades the crowds to embrace the new teaching of the Christians. This formulation does not indicate that being a Christian is a crime. Rather the problem is that the teaching is new and that the crowd is persuaded by it. There is no indication of irreverence toward the Roman pantheon or for that matter any affront to the ancient deities of Iconium. There is no charge implying that an offence has been committed against the Emperor or any particular institution which originates from Rome.

The reader will soon find out that the “crime” is the disruption of society in terms of the lack of interest of Thecla in carrying through with her engagement. Her mother's complaints will weigh heavily in the case against her.

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<sup>356</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 103. He is following the tradition of Ramsay and Conybeare. See F. Conybeare, *The Apology and Acts of Apollonius and Other Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 55.

Demas and Hermogenes are keen to continue teaching about the resurrection, but for married persons rather than for those who choose not to marry. Perhaps they see these as the old teachings of the Christians. Another possibility is that they have no interest in a distinction between various teachings; they are only trying to get Thamyras to favour them in service of their own personal gain. Certainly they do not see these new teachings as so dangerous that they need to keep their distance from them for fear of also being charged. They entered the city with Paul; what they say could easily be suspect. Their lack of reticence would indicate that there is no need to fear.

14c καὶ < > ἀπολέσει αὐτὸν ταχέως καὶ σὺ ἔξεις τὴν  
γυναικά σου Θεκλάν.

14c and he will kill him quickly and you will have your wife, Thecla.

Demas and Hermogenes have travelled to Iconium with Paul from Syrian Antioch, yet they purport to have knowledge of the tendencies of the local governor. This sounds false to any reader, and serves to further characterise Demas and Hermogenes as liars and fools.

As the story unfolds it is certain that they were speaking nonsense: Thamyras will never have Thecla as a wife. Castellius will not kill Paul. Demas and Hermogenes will not teach anything. Their plan is malicious, very bold and filled with bravado. A reader who does not know the outcome would be drawn into the drama by this daring and lethal plan, but a reader or listener who knows the story will only form the view that Demas and Hermogenes are really bad characters, in what they intend, in what they say, in what they do and in their own self-importance.

“Thus”, οὕτως, in the Lipsius text is a simple addition for the sake of clarity. The emphasis acts as a dramatic overstatement of what the audience knows will not happen. Tischendorf finds the adverb ταχέως in C which Lipsius avoids. These choices are true to form for both nineteenth-century editors.

The adverb ταχέως “quickly” gives more animation to the promise of these two schemers. It makes them seem all the more presumptuous and evil in their plans. They seem to be putting forth the scenario to Thamyras that very soon indeed there will be no opposition to his wedding, and then the joy of offspring from a good, socially respectable wife will also be his.

Notice that this is a plan to kill Paul and not in any way to endanger Thecla. In fact, remarkably, the idea is that with Paul out of the way, Thecla will simply resume her duties as daughter and fiancée. Demas and Hermogenes put it with even more presumption. They say that Thamyras will have Thecla as his wife. They are characterised as presumptuous because they already they have the wedding feast completed in their minds. This shows that they will never understand the urgency and joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ that Paul preaches.

14d καὶ ἡμεῖς σε διδάξομεν, ἣν λέγει οὗτος ἀνάστασιν  
γενέσθαι,

14d And we will teach you that the resurrection of which he speaks is come to be,

Demas and Hermogenes continue in one voice. They recognize that Thecla is a student of Paul's thought. They purpose to alter Paul's thinking slightly. They will simply teach that the resurrection is not in the future but rather is in the present. Then Thecla will have no reason not to marry. They are assuming incorrectly that Thecla is impressionable, and that would seem to be a reasonable assumption given her strong reaction to Paul's teaching. In fact just the opposite will prove to be true. Thecla has embarked upon a path for life and she will never waver.

The unfolding drama which presents this alternative teaching asks the readers to question the difference between this and Paul's teaching as it is presented in the story. Paul never teaches that marrying and having children is not an option, but he does teach that being single is an option along with being married. The support of persons who are single is part of early Pauline eschatological thought. It is germane to and consistent with Paul's teaching in the early letters such as 1 Thessalonians and both 1 and 2 Corinthians. The New Testament eschatology develops from the prophetic movement and shows a commitment to justice and care for the people while preparing for the final judgment, the "Day of the Lord".

Demas and Hermogenes are not presenting an alternative realized eschatology as McGinn holds.<sup>357</sup> They are harking back to the role of a

<sup>357</sup>S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 812. "The *Acts of Thecla* certainly permits a marriage in which both partners are continent; this is a true marriage because it supports rather than interferes with one's relationship to God, the true Spouse." See also S. McGinn, p. 813, "The realized eschatology of this anti-gospel is in sharp contrast to the apocalyptic framework of the gospel of the *Acts of Thecla*." McGinn reads the Acts of Thecla from the Lipsius text as if it were a late second-century perhaps early third-century text. She sees it as a part of the study of Apocryphal works

good and obedient daughter in Greek, Roman and Jewish culture. Resurrection in Judaism in particular has deep roots in the prophetic tradition. The expectation of things to come gives hope for the future and courage for the present even in difficult times.

14e ὅτι ἤδη γέγονεν ἐφ' οἷς ἔχομεν τέκνοις, καὶ ἀνιστάμεθα θεὸν ἐπεγνωκότες ἀληθῆ.

14e that it has already happened, in the case of children that we have, and we are risen having come to know God to be true.

Is it that Thamyris is concerned that he will never have appropriate heirs if Thecla does not become his bride? Thamyris has never spoken about the need of an heir. This would be the introduction of a new motive on his part. Some men in the ancient world were desperate to sire an heir; others may have many children before they marry and they may have intentions concerning those children or even intentions for slaves or business associates to inherit their wealth. It is not possible to know Thamyris' thoughts on this personal matter. The drama would suggest that he wishes first to acquire as much wealth as possible, before planning to hand it on to anyone.

Resurrection in one's children is a very Jewish way of understanding afterlife. The idea is also familiar to Greeks and Romans in the ancient world.<sup>358</sup> People even today are thought to live on in their children. It is a natural and comfortable concept. Demas and Hermogenes are proposing this idea because it is compatible with the idea of marrying Thecla.<sup>359</sup> There is no sense that they are considering marrying or living on in their children.

Having children is also described as the way people come to knowledge of God to be true. The implication is that there is falsehood in Paul's teaching. God is truthful and trustworthy and Paul is not. Marriage is God's way and refusing marriage is false and objectionable. For many

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especially where men's views about women are expressed. She sees this happening in a patriarchal church with the interests of men taking an institutional role. Her eschatological analysis seems to be made in an effort to reclaim something of value for women and enlightened men from such a text.

<sup>358</sup> Isis, for example, is known in the Mediterranean world from the second century BCE. She promises blessed resurrection to her devotees after death, provides the services of Aphrodite, and is concerned with matters of life and death. See Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, Schocken Books, New York, 1975, pp. 217-219. See also Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come, Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2003, pp. 6-8, 97, 137-138. Miller-McLemore discusses the value of children in Greco-Roman society.

<sup>359</sup> E. Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla-Paulusschülerin wider Willen?*, p. 59. Esch-Wermeling notes that when Demas and Hermogenes speak about this form of soteriological understanding of resurrection, Thamyris' resolve is strengthened to get what he wants.

women even in today's world, this sort of idealization of marriage is used against them as their freedom is taken from them. For Thecla the good news is her liberation in Christ. She is set free to be herself. This is her salvation. Some may be able to find this freedom in marriage and others can only find it by avoiding marriage.

Elliott translates the Lipsius text in this way: "that it has already taken place in the children whom we have and that we rise again, after having come to the knowledge of the true God". This has a possible tone of coming to "special knowledge" of the true God as in 1 John 5:20:

20 οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει, καὶ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν  
διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν· καὶ ἐσμὲν ἐν τῷ  
ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ  
ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος.

20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us knowledge so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (NRSV)

Reliance on what one assumes to be natural is threatened by concepts of resurrection other than this one of "living on in one's children". Wilken in his discussion of Celsus writes:

Celsus located the theological difficulty of the resurrection in the Christian understanding of God, specifically in God's relation to the created order. Christians did not have a rational view of the deity. Instead of recognizing that God was subject to the laws of nature and reason, Christians believed in a God who stood completely above and beyond nature and was therefore capable of doing whatever he willed no matter how much it disrupted the order of the world.<sup>360</sup>

"To know God to be true" (θεὸν ἐπεγνωκότες ἀληθῆ), in terms of resurrection as it is on the lips of Demas and Hermogenes, is perhaps a reference to the feelings of security in preserving the status quo which would of course be threatened if one's daughters could opt to be Christian missionaries, prophets or healers. Christianity even in its earliest expressions threatens this stability and reliance on the "faithfulness of God" which preserves the status quo, especially of wealthy society.

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<sup>360</sup>Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984, p. 104.

## Verse Fifteen

**15a** Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις ἀκούσας < ><sup>361</sup> ταῦτα,

**15b** < ><sup>362</sup> πλησθεὶς ζήλου καὶ θυμοῦ ὀρθροῦ ἀναστὰς  
ἀπῆλθεν<sup>363</sup> εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ὀνησιφόρου

**15c** μετὰ ἀρχόντων καὶ δημοσίων καὶ ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ μετὰ  
ξύλων<sup>364</sup>

**15d** λέγων < ><sup>365</sup> Διέφθειας τὴν Ἰκονιέων πόλιν καὶ τὴν  
ἡρμοσμένην μοι,

**15e** ἵνα μὴ θελήσῃ με· ἄγωμεν ἐπὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα Καστέλιον.

**15f** Καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἔλεγεν Ἀνάγαγε<sup>366</sup> τὸν μάγον·

**15g** διέφθειρεν γὰρ ἡμῶν πάσας τὰς γυναῖκας,

**15h** καὶ συνεπείσθησαν οἱ ὄχλοι.

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<sup>361</sup> The Lipsius text adds two words here: παρ' αὐτῶν.

<sup>362</sup> The addition of the conjunction, καὶ, is here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>363</sup> There is a difference in word order here. The word ἀπῆλθεν in the Lipsius text follows the word Ὀνησιφόρου.

<sup>364</sup> The Lipsius text inserts a comma here.

<sup>365</sup> The indirect object τῷ Παύλῳ is specified in the Lipsius text.

<sup>366</sup> The Lipsius text has Ἀπάγαγε.

## Translation

- 15a** Thamyris, having heard this,
- 15b** filled with jealousy and anger, rose at daybreak and went to the house of Onesiphorus
- 15c** together with the officials and representatives and a considerable crowd with sticks
- 15d** saying, “You corrupted the city of the Iconians and my betrothed,
- 15e** so that she might not want me, let us go to governor Castellius.”
- 15f** And all of the crowd said, “Take away the magician,
- 15g** for he has corrupted all our women.”
- 15h** And the masses were convinced.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> I have altered the punctuation of the Tischendorf text in order to close the quotation after γυναῖκας.

## Commentary and Notes

15a Ὁ δὲ Θάμυρις ἀκούσας < > ταῦτα,

15a Thamyris having heard this,

The Lipsius text adds παρ' αὐτῶν “from them”; it is a simple clarification.

The character description of Thamyris vacillates between showing him as taking initiative against Paul and being the victim of manipulation. Does Thamyris go to the governor because of what Demas and Hermogenes say? The text seems to say this but at the dinner Thamyris is the one who has begun the process of trying to stop Paul and his ministry.

Thamyris is the one who is influenced in the story, first by Theocleia and then by Demas and Hermogenes. He is needed in order to bring the matter to the governor. He is a man of importance in the city and a claim that he makes against someone will be taken seriously. Although some women do approach courts<sup>368</sup>, it is ordinary in Roman society for a man to go to court even to represent a woman's interests.

15b < > πλησθεὶς ζήλου καὶ θυμοῦ ὀρθροῦ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ὀνησιφόρου

15b filled with jealousy and anger, rose at daybreak, and went to the house of Onesiphorus

The variation in word order between the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts has no overall effect on the meaning of the sentence.

Thamyris rises at daybreak. He has not drunk too much at the banquet. His purpose has been to gain information about Paul. He is angry at what he has learned; he presumably considers that the situation is worse than he first thought.

To our surprise, he goes first not to Castellius, but to the home of Onesiphorus. He will lead an arresting party. This naturally reads as a parallel to the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

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<sup>368</sup> S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Antiquity*. See especially “The Letter of the Law . . . and the Reality” pp. 150-163.



15c μετὰ ἀρχόντων καὶ δημοσίων καὶ ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ μετὰ ξύλων

15c along with the officials and representatives and a considerable crowd with sticks

The arrest is done with what seems to be a vigilante mob. This is very dangerous for the person accused if the mob should attempt to take justice into their own hands. In such circumstances in the canonical Gospels and Acts, Jesus and later the apostles often flee. The reader who is new to the story will be wondering if Paul will make an escape, or if the crowd will turn violent. The excitement of the story at this point is heightened by such suspense.

That the crowd has sticks is a parallel to the Markan arrest of Jesus. The sticks will not be used except as a threat. This is the same in the story of Jesus. In Mark 14:43 we see the similarities.

43 Καὶ εὐθὺς ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος παραγίνεται Ἰούδας εἰς τῶν δώδεκα καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὄχλος μετὰ μαχαιρῶν καὶ ξύλων παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν γραμματέων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων.

43 And immediately while he was still speaking, Judas one of the twelve arrived, and with him a crowd with swords and sticks,<sup>369</sup> from the high priest and the scribes and the elders.

As is typical of the *Acts of Thecla* there is no literary dependence. The parallel is plausibly taken to be to the oral tradition of the arrest of Jesus. Both Jesus and Paul are arrested by officials accompanied by a crowd with sticks.

Unlike the group that comes to arrest Jesus, the group that will arrest Paul is mixed. There is a crowd but there are also important persons present, those who would be responsible to see that justice is done. This is unusual since officials would not usually accompany a rabble. Vigilante mobs are not predictable and anyone who did not want to be associated with crowd violence would normally keep at a distance.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> We find various English translations including: "swords and clubs" in Revised Standard Version, "swords and cudgels" in *The New Testament*, Richard Francis Weymouth, ed., James Clarke & Co., London, 1924 and "swords and staves" in *The Holy Bible* Authorised Version, (the Charles Batey edition), The Oxford University Press, London, 1950?

<sup>370</sup> John Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995, pp. 264-265. Rousseau and Arav note several recorded examples of spontaneous lynching and murder done by mobs, especially those throwing stones.

In Mark's account of the arrest of Jesus the officials do not accompany Judas and the crowd, but there is a guard present (verse 44). In the *Acts of Thecla* officials and representatives accompany the crowd.

In the Matthean account of the arrest of Jesus there is a crowd sent from the Jewish leaders (Mt 26:47). In the Lukan account the officials of the temple are present at the arrest with the crowd of people (Lk 22:47,52).

52 εἶπεν δὲ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς παραγενομένους ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἄρχιερεῖς καὶ στρατηγούς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ πρεσβυτέρους, Ὡς ἐπὶ ληστὴν ἐξήλθατε μετὰ μαχαίρων καὶ ξύλων;

52 Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police and the elders who had come to arrest him, "Have you come with swords and sticks as if I was a bandit?"

The translation of τὸ ξύλον in the Synoptic accounts depends on the context. It is often translated as "clubs" in Lk 22:52 as the police of the temple are more likely to have clubs than sticks, but it is the same word as we find in Mark, Matthew and the *Acts of Thecla*. The word is perhaps firmly fixed in the oral tradition, so that it appears even in the Lukan account where it is an unusual choice given Luke's heightened Christological account.

The words for officials and representatives in the *Acts of Thecla* do not appear in the Synoptic arrest accounts. The sense of what happens in the arrest of Paul and Jesus is not dissimilar. There is a crowd and also persons who can legally arrest. In both stories there is also someone as leader of the expedition. In the arrest of Jesus the leader of the group is Judas. In the arrest of Paul in the *Acts of Thecla* the leader of the group is Thamyras.

15d λέγων < > Διέφθειρας τὴν Ἰκονιέων πόλιν καὶ τὴν ἡρμοσμένην μοι,

15d saying, "You corrupted the city of the Iconians and my betrothed,

The Lipsius text has the additional helpful name, Paul. As mentioned earlier this is probably a later scribal addition.

Thamyras shows real boldness here. He accuses Paul of corrupting the city and Thecla. The closest parallel to this phrase is not in the New

Testament; it is in Plato's account of the death of Socrates in *The Apology*.<sup>371</sup> Socrates is accused of corrupting the youth by his teachings. This is a weighty comparison. It would be one familiar to many in the ancient world who heard the story of Thecla.

This is an oblique way of saying that Paul is a venerable and just teacher who has done nothing wrong. Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth and introducing new gods. Both accusations are interesting in light of the comparison with Paul. Paul introduces Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, and this new way of thinking turns young people away from their duties.

15e ἵνα μὴ θελήσῃ με· ἄγωμεν ἐπὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα Καστέλιον.

15e so that she might not want me; let us go to governor Castellius.

The subjunctive is used in this phrase to express how Thecla may still be committed to Thamyras. Is it that he does not want to believe that he has lost her or even more to the point that she does not want him? The subjunctive purpose clause could have the stronger meaning, "so she will not have me". Thamyras is transferring the blame for his actions to Thecla. This way of expressing what he has experienced saves him the embarrassment of being the definitive jilted fiancé. Is it Thamyras' fond hope that with Paul out of the way Thecla will return to her former interest in their marriage? There is also the possibility that he has already "lost face" and all he wants now is to reassert his social power by punishing both Paul and Thecla.

The idea that they will go to the governor is not an invitation. The meaning is more like, "OK, that's it, off we go, to the authorities!" The translation above is more literal but the meaning is not polite. It is also not a challenge; it is a threat and perhaps borders on a command. It is as if now that Thamyras has the information that he wants and the following of Demas and Hermogenes in his plot he takes command.

15f Καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἔλεγεν Ὁ ἀνάγαγε τὸν μάγον·

15f And all of the crowd said, "Take away the magician,

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<sup>371</sup>Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant, trans., London, Penguin, 1969, p. 46. "It runs something like this: 'Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in supernatural things of his own invention instead of the gods recognised by the State.'"

The Lipsius word Ἀπάγαγε is an improvement since the readers or listeners already know about Thamyras' plot and to whom Paul is being led and why. The Lipsius text has more the sense of "lead away by force", whereas the Tischendorf choice can have the sense of "bring before" or "lead up". My translation, "take away", is accommodating the narrative.

Although it is an exaggeration—not all of the crowd are likely to have said the same thing—this phrase shows the important role of the crowd in this part of the drama. They are there to exert pressure on Paul and to influence the governor when Paul is presented to him. The crowd here can also be compared to the crowd at the trial of Jesus.

"Take away the magician" implies that Paul is guilty and thus is a very derogatory accusation. Magicians were thought to take advantage of their clients.<sup>372</sup> There are Roman documents which caution people against magicians and teach them how to recognize them so as not to be defrauded or deceived.<sup>373</sup>

The New Testament has a polemic against magicians especially in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>374</sup> It is a common matter throughout antiquity for those who made money by false means to be exposed and accused. Paul has not shown any special power nor referred to any magical books or traditions. He is presented as a travelling rabbi, a teacher of religious thought. This dangerous accusation is false.

15g διέφθειρεν γὰρ ἡμῶν πάσας τὰς γυναῖκας,

15g for he has corrupted all our women."

In the narrative the crowd is not all of the women of the city. All of them could not have been led astray. This also seems to be an inconsistency in the presentation of the argument against Paul. In the argument against Paul is it all the women or is it only those unmarried women who are influenced by Paul? This may also be a veiled reference to the effect of Pauline thought on women in that Christianity is ultimately a way of freedom and empowerment for women, actually for all women married or not. In the canonical Pauline correspondence Priscilla who is married and

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<sup>372</sup> R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. Concerning superstition and the obstinate behaviour of magicians and Christians see pp. 22-23, 61.

<sup>373</sup> R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, pp.109-110. Wilken cites Celsus concerning Jesus' reliance on magic, and how the resurrection is used to exploit hearers by deceit.

<sup>374</sup> See for example Acts 13:6-8; 8:9-13; 19:19.

Phoebe who may not be, as well as Tryphosa and Tryphaena<sup>375</sup> who very likely are both single, all seemed to be empowered because they were in the orbit of Pauline ministry.

The crowd now accuses Paul of corrupting all of the women of the city. This is an astounding accusation. It is interesting in that it does not only specify the unmarried women but clearly states “all of our women”. It must be an exaggeration even in terms of the story. This makes the arrest scene seem as if Paul is being unfairly accused, partly because the narrator here is describing a scene that is unbelievable.

15h καὶ συνεπείσθησαν οἱ ὄχλοι.

15h And the masses were convinced.

This is an intriguing phrase. “And the masses were convinced” is the best translation. The other possible interpretation is that “he (Paul) convinced the crowds”. The idea is that the women are corrupted and the crowds are corrupted by Paul as well. The first problem with this idea would be that one would have to think back to at least two crowds (other than this one), perhaps the one at the home of Onesiphorus and another hypothetical one, in order to make sense of the plural noun. Another reason not to translate in the sense that Paul convinced the crowds is that the present crowd of course is not convinced by Paul; rather they are convinced that Paul is an offender and has to be judged.

We know of only one crowd at this point in the drama, and so the meaning of the plural here seems to be that a lot of people were convinced to side against Paul. The translation “the masses” conveys the meaning that many who joined in the arrest and came for the spectacle were convinced by Thamyras that Paul had done wrong.

This phrase is a report of the effect of Thamyras’ speech to this point. He will continue in the next verse, now that he has the people advocating for him, to convince the proconsul. The pressure that the people will put on the judgment of the court will be significant.

This phrase parallels the crowd crying out, “crucify him”, at the trial of Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>376</sup> Because of the parallel with the crowd supporting the death sentence for the innocent Jesus, the early Christians

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<sup>375</sup> Rom 16:1 Paul recommends Phoebe, Rom 16:3 Paul sends greetings to Priscilla and Rom 16:12 Paul send greetings to Tryphosa and Tryphaena.

<sup>376</sup> Mk 15:13; Mt 27:23-24; Lk 23:21; John 19:15.

who heard or read this story of Thecla would automatically make the connection with the innocent Paul.

## Verse Sixteen

**16a** Καὶ στὰς πρὸ τοῦ βήματος ὁ Θάμυρις κραυγὴ μεγάλη εἶπεν

**16b** Ὑψάπατε, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος, τίς ἐστίν<sup>377</sup> οὐκ οἶδαμεν, < ><sup>378</sup>

**16c** ὅς<sup>379</sup> ἀγάμους ποιεῖ τὰς παρθένους·

**16d** εἰπάτω ἐπὶ σοῦ τίνοσ ἐνεκεν ταῦτα διδάσκει.

**16e** Ὁ δὲ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης εἶπον τῷ Θάμυρι<sup>380</sup> Λέγε αὐτὸν Χριστιανόν, καὶ οὕτως < ><sup>381</sup> αὐτόν ἀναιρεῖς.

**16f** Ὁ δὲ ἄνθῡπατος<sup>382</sup> ἔστησεν τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸν Παῦλον λέγων

**16g** Τίς εἶ, καὶ τί διδάσκεις;

**16h** οὐ γὰρ μικρῶς σου κατηγοροῦσιν.

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<sup>377</sup> The Lipsius text omits the words: τίς ἐστίν and the preceding comma here.

<sup>378</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional phrase πόθεν ἐστίν, here. Thus, Ὑψάπατε, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐκ οἶδαμεν πόθεν ἐστίν, The Lipsius text also does not include the comma after οἶδαμεν of course.

<sup>379</sup> Instead of ἀγάμους ποιεῖ here the Lipsius text reads οὐκ ἐὰν γαμῆσθαι.

<sup>380</sup> The Lipsius text has Θαμύριδι here instead of Θάμυρι.

<sup>381</sup> The Lipsius text includes the word ἀπολέσεις before αὐτόν in this phrase and omits the word ἀναιρεῖς following αὐτόν.

<sup>382</sup> The word ἄνθῡπατος is replaced at this point by the word ἡγεμὼν in the Lipsius text.

## Translation

- 16a** Thamyris stood before the bema<sup>383</sup> and said with a loud voice,
- 16b** "Proconsul<sup>384</sup>, we do not know who this man is,
- 16c** the one who makes the virgins (stay) single.
- 16d** Let him say, before you, why he teaches these things."
- 16e** Demas and Hermogenes said to Thamyris, "Say he is a Christian, and you will best him."
- 16f** The proconsul, however, made up his own mind and summoned Paul saying,
- 16g** "Who are you, and what do you teach?
- 16h** For they accuse you of more than a minor matter."

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<sup>383</sup> The transliteration is enough, since the word "bema" is common in English, especially in English-speaking Jewish culture where it is the place from which the scriptures are read at synagogue worship.

<sup>384</sup> The proconsul will later in 19f be referred to as the "governor". It is not likely that a Roman proconsul was installed in Iconium. The term must be used very loosely and later corrected so that only one term, "governor", is used in more advanced manuscripts which are drawn on for the Lipsius text.



## Commentary and Notes

16a Καὶ στὰς πρὸ τοῦ βήματος ὁ Θάμυρις κραυγῇ μεγάλῃ εἶπεν

16a Thamyris stood before the bema and said with a loud voice,

Thamyris most likely was of quite some standing in the city to be able to stand before the proconsul with such confidence. Here Thamyris is Paul's accuser. He speaks in a loud voice so that the proconsul and all those listening can hear. The bema is the bench in this case, where the proconsul stands or sits. The term bema is also used in Mt 27:19.

19 Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ λέγουσα, Μηδὲν σοὶ καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ, πολλὰ γὰρ ἔπαθον σήμερον κατ' ὄναρ δι' αὐτόν.

19 When he sat down at the bema, his wife sent to him saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous one, for I have suffered much today because of him in a dream.

Pilate's wife has suffered over this innocent man, Jesus, who is taken before her husband to the place of sitting in judgment. The parallels with this passage in Matthew are not strong enough to make much of a comparison except in the most important point, that Jesus and Paul are both righteous and innocent.

Bema is a term commonly used still today in English to indicate the place from which the scriptures are read in Synagogue. In the Greco-Roman world the term has secular usage as well as religious usage. We know that the *Acts of Thecla* were read at liturgy as scripture in the ancient world.<sup>385</sup> The word when transliterated has the appeal of this possible double meaning which is appropriate.

16b Ἄνθύπατε, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος, τίς ἐστὶν οὐκ οἶδαμεν, < >

16b "Proconsul, we do not know who this man is,

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<sup>385</sup>J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, p. 122.

Lipsius is avoiding C again with the absence of τίς ἐστίν. There is no substantial difference in meaning between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts on account of this variant. The Lipsius addition of πόθεν ἐστίν from manuscripts ABEFGd would be a helpful detail since the place of origin of a person is often taken into account in ancient judgments. It is a helpful addition to the text and there would be no reason to omit it in a text which develops by attrition. This sort of example is the very reason that the Lipsius version does not read as the earlier text.

As Thamyras says this, the meaning of the term οἶδαμεν is that he and Demas and Hermogenes all are denying any association with Paul. It does not mean that he is not aware of Paul's name or of Paul's activities for the last few days.

Demas and Hermogenes are strangers in this town and so it would be a much more difficult claim for them to make than Thamyras. Perhaps the verb is in the plural both to indicate that Thamyras is still in collusion with them, or perhaps to echo their denial in 12a. Another possibility is that Thamyras is speaking on behalf of the masses of people gathered, οἱ ὄχλοι, in 15h. The sense then would be that Paul is not from "our" city.

The structure of the phrase is rhetorical in order to point out Paul. It could easily have been said, "we do not know this man" with ὁ ἄνθρωπος in the accusative, but this formulation is more dramatic and more natural as an introduction in a speech as an accusation.

The New Testament denial of Peter comes to mind as a possible parallel. In Mark and in Matthew it is: οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον; neither is an exact parallel.<sup>386</sup> In both Gospels the denial is a response to Peter being accused of being Galilean; perhaps there is more of a conceptual link between the Lipsius text for this segment and the Gospel denials since they both concern place. On the whole however, they are not close enough to count as copying. There is an important difference in that whereas Thamyras in fact does not know Paul or from where he has come, Peter certainly does know Jesus and that Jesus is from Galilee.

16c ὃς ἀγάμους ποιεῖ τὰς παρθένους·

16c who makes the virgins (stay) single.

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<sup>386</sup> This has already been discussed in this thesis in relation to the Acts of Thecla verse 12a. See above.

The Lipsius inclusion of οὐκ ἐὰν γαμεῖσθαι (he does not allow to marry) is the very sort of thing that one might have excised from the text if one wanted to make it seem more orthodox. There is a grave difference between “remaining single” and becoming “averse to marriage”.<sup>387</sup> To be averse to marriage in the end is the demise of the human race, and is certainly unorthodox teaching. Even in this part of the drama where the accusations are known to be false one might argue that the omission of this phrase would be helpful overall so as not to mislead in any accidental way. On the other hand a greater false accusation against Paul is a sign of a more developed hagiography. Even with such an accusation, Paul will still be freed and continue to preach the good news of Christ’ mighty deeds and resurrection. The outcome of the drama shows that the accusations are false. Since either interpretation is possible, no position is taken in this thesis concerning this particular variant and it is not counted in the conclusions.

Here the sense must be that both young men and women are encouraged by Paul not to marry. We who know the story are more clearly aware that the problem is that Thecla no longer seems to want to marry Thamyras. There are no other cases noted anywhere in the story.

Paul’s teaching that it is good not to marry but better to marry than to burn is well known from the New Testament and has been discussed in conjunction with 6c of the *Acts of Thecla* above. Not to marry for the sake of the Gospel is a central and repeated instruction in the Pauline corpus of the Bible. It is also known in Matthew 19:12. The effect of the freedom that such an understanding carries is significant. It is possible that from this fully orthodox New Testament understanding there were many disagreements between young persons and their parents. Such conflict might also arise from the Gospel sayings where Jesus is portrayed demanding more loyalty of his followers than they give to their families.<sup>388</sup>

16d εἰπάτω ἐπὶ σοῦ τίνος ἔνεκεν ταῦτα διδάσκει.

16d Let him say, before you, why he teaches these things.”

This accusation seems less elaborated than it might be. In the development of the narrative this is a strategy of the author in order to

<sup>387</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 367. Elliott’s translation is “this man makes virgins averse to marriage”.

<sup>388</sup> See Mt 12:48-49.

allow for Demas and Hermogenes to show their true colours in the following phrase.

In this way Thamyris is shown only representing his own grievance. If he were also to use whatever information he received from Demas and Hermogenes, though he had no actual evidence of it and whether or not he understood what it was to be Christian, he would appear at least an opportunist and at most dishonest. Now that he is before the proconsul he is on his best behaviour as an upstanding wealthy resident. He expects to appear and to be thought honest, whether he is scheming or not.

16e Ὁ δὲ Δημᾶς καὶ Ἑρμογένης εἶπον τῷ Θάμυρι Λέγε αὐτὸν Χριστιανόν, καὶ οὕτως < > αὐτὸν ἀναιρεῖς.

16e Demas and Hermogenes said to Thamyris, “Say he is a Christian, and you will best him.”

This gives the sense that Thamyris does not yet have any idea that being a Christian might be something negative. He has to be encouraged to make this accusation by Demas and Hermogenes, who themselves could be accused of being Christians. This gives the text a very early feel.

If being a Christian was already really dangerous, if widespread persecutions had already taken place, Demas and Hermogenes would not have suggested this in public, in order to protect themselves. Furthermore Thamyris would have mentioned it as the first and most important matter for the proconsul to consider.

The New Testament records many incidents of violence and civil action against Jesus and his followers. We also know from the New Testament that followers of “the way” of Jesus were thought by conservative Jews to be a group that ought to be brought back into line in Judaism. It is possible to interpret ἀναιρεῖς as more severe than “bring into line”. The Lipsius text, however, implies that if he is a Christian then he will surely die, shows a certainty that is likely to be later, after widespread persecutions of Christians have become more commonplace.

16f Ὁ δὲ ἀνθύπατος ἔστησεν τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸν Παῦλον λέγων

16f The proconsul, however, made up his own mind and summoned Paul saying,

The Lipsius text has the word ἡγεμὼν. This is plausibly taken to be a later edition trying to clarify the confusion of two titles for the judging dignitary. There is clearly only one person who is judge. With time manuscripts are corrected so that confusions are clarified. Scribes were helping the text to be more easily readable and understandable.

It is also possible that this change develops in order to make the *Acts of Thecla* agree with the New Testament especially Mt. 27:11 where the judge is referred to as the ἡγεμὼν. For those for whom the *Acts of Thecla* were scripture such an agreement would be significant.

The proconsul does not respond to the accusations of Thamyras, and the accusation of Demas and Hermogenes never seems to be made to the proconsul. The conceit of the development of the drama in this verse suggests that these sorts of accusations do not have precedents so that the proconsul wishes to make up his own mind. This passage portrays the proconsul as a just judge.

Perhaps there is a parallel to Pilate who washes his hands of the death of Jesus. That parallel becomes more likely in 16g and 16h so it will be considered in comments on those sections which follow.

16g Τίς εἶ, καὶ τί διδάσκεις;

16g “Who are you, and what do you teach?”

One of the crucial matters is that Paul is a stranger in town. Foreign teachers would be welcomed due to customs of hospitality but they would also be expected to repay that hospitality by not disrupting the life of that place. As a stranger, Paul is particularly vulnerable to accusations of disturbing the peace because by all rights he should be grateful to be welcomed to this place, and causing trouble should be the last thing that he would do. As a stranger, Paul is also now in a dangerous position, for there will be few to defend him. His actions will be taken to be an insult to the generosity of his hosts and he will be far from family and old friends who could vouch for his good character.

All this would have been evident to Paul and to the author of these Acts, so this scene also suggests that the message of Christ is so important to Paul that he exposes himself to be this vulnerable in order to announce what he believes in principle to be for the good of all people, the message of total life commitment, to the way and grace of Jesus. This question offers Paul the opportunity to make a speech as he does in the canonical

Acts of the Apostles before Festus and Agrippa, and in the unfolding of the narrative he alerts the listener or readers to an opportunity to hear the kerygmatic proclamation.

Paul of course teaches the way of Christ Jesus, but this includes the notions of fidelity in marriage and also fidelity to the missionary message, which is easiest to proclaim if marriage does not settle a person down with local responsibilities. A variety of life choices concerning marital status makes it possible for the urgency of the spreading of the Gospel to be honoured. Although we know that married couples travelled as well as single persons, the acceptance of such variety allows the most possibilities to spread the good news.

16h οὐ γὰρ μικρῶς σου κατηγοροῦσιν.

16h For they accuse you of more than a minor matter.”

This has a parallel in the trials of Jesus. Jesus will be silent in the face of such a prompt but Paul will speak clearly of the message of Jesus. This is the characteristic of the post-Pentecostal work of the followers of Jesus. The New Testament parallel is strong especially in the Gospel of Matthew. In Mt 27:13-14 Pilate challenges Jesus to answer.

13 τότε λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πιλάτος, Οὐκ ἀκούεις πόσα σου καταμαρτυροῦσιν; 14 καὶ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ πρὸς οὐδὲ ἓν ῥῆμα, ὥστε θαυμάζειν τὸν ἡγεμόνα λίαν.

13 Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?” 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. (NRSV)

It is not an exact parallel however, and does not show copying from the New Testament. Although the Jesus tradition might be familiar to the author of the *Acts of Thecla* it is different from this scene in that Paul will make answer whereas Jesus did not.

## Verse Seventeen

**17a** Καὶ ἤρην τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ὁ Παῦλος λέγων Εἰ ἐγὼ σήμερον ἀνακρίνομαι τί διδάσκω, ἄκουσον, ἀνθύπατε.

**17b** Θεὸς ζῶν, θεὸς ἐκδικήσεων, θεὸς ζηλωτῆς, θεὸς ἀπροσδεής, χρήζων<sup>389</sup> τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίας ἔπεμψέν με<sup>390</sup>

**17c** ὅπως ἀπὸ τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τῆς ἀκαθαρσίας ἀποσπάσω αὐτοὺς καὶ πάσης ἡδονῆς καὶ θανάτου, ὅπως μὴ ἀμάρτωσιν.<sup>391</sup>

**17d** διὸ ἔπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ παῖδα, ὃν ἐγὼ εὐαγγελίζομαι

**17e** καὶ διδάσκω ἐν ἐκείνῳ ἔχειν τὴν ἐλπίδα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,

**17f** ὃς μόνος συνεπάθησεν πλανωμένῳ κόσμῳ, ἵνα μηκέτι ὑπὸ κρίσιν ᾧσιν, ἀνθύπατε,<sup>392</sup>

**17g** ἀλλὰ πίστιν ἔχωσιν καὶ φόβον θεοῦ καὶ γνῶσιν σεμνότητος καὶ ἀγάπην ἀληθείας.

**17h** εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ τὰ ὑπὸ θεοῦ μοι ἀνακεκαλυμμένα<sup>393</sup> διδάσκω, τί ἀδικῶ;<sup>394</sup>

**17i** Ὁ δὲ ἀνθύπατος<sup>395</sup> ἀκούσας ἐκέλευσεν δεθῆναι τὸν Παῦλον καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν ἀποκατασταθῆναι,<sup>396</sup>

**17j** μέχρις οὗ εὐσχολήσας, φησίν, ἀκούσομαι αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελέστερον.<sup>397</sup>

<sup>389</sup> The Lipsius text has this word spelled with the eta having the iota subscript: χρήζων.

<sup>390</sup> The Lipsius text adds a comma here.

<sup>391</sup> The Lipsius text has here μηκέτι ἀμαρτάνωσιν instead of Tischendorf's μὴ ἀμάρτωσιν.

<sup>392</sup> Here the Lipsius text reads: ᾧσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, instead of ᾧσιν, ἀνθύπατε.

<sup>393</sup> The Lipsius text has a different prefix on this verb. In the Lipsius text it is: ἀποκεκαλυμμένα.

<sup>394</sup> The punctuation in the Lipsius text here is a comma instead of the question mark and the word ἀνθύπατε follows the comma and then the question mark follows ἀνθύπατε.

<sup>395</sup> The Lipsius text has a different word here. Instead of Tischendorf's ἀνθύπατος Lipsius has the word ἡγεμών.

<sup>396</sup> This verb is also different in the Lipsius text. Lipsius has ἀπαχθῆναι instead of ἀποκατασταθῆναι.

<sup>397</sup> The last phrase of this verse is substantially different in the two texts in content and word order. The Lipsius text reads: μέχρις ἂν εὐσχολήσας ἐπιμελέστερον ἀκούσῃ αὐτοῦ. The Tischendorf text reads: μέχρις οὗ εὐσχολήσας, φησίν, ἀκούσομαι αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελέστερον.

## Translation

**17a** And Paul lifted up his voice saying, “Today, if I myself give an account of what I teach, listen, Proconsul.”<sup>398</sup>

**17b** “The Living God, the judging God, the jealous God, the all-sufficient God, the God desirous of salvation of human beings sent me

**17c** so that I may shield them from destruction and impurity and all selfish pleasure and death, so that they do not sin.

**17d** For this reason God sent his own servant<sup>399</sup> whom I preach,

**17e** and I teach people to have hope in him

**17f** who alone has had compassion for the wayward world, in order that they be no longer under judgment, Proconsul,

**17g** but that they might have faith and fear of God and know due reverence<sup>400</sup> and love truth.

**17h** If then I teach what God has disclosed to me, what wrong do I do?”

**17i** The proconsul having listened ordered Paul to be bound and taken away to prison,

**17j** until “having leisure”, he said, “I will hear him more attentively.”

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<sup>398</sup> We are not sure of the political position of this official since the term “governor” will be used to refer to him in 19f.

<sup>399</sup> Literally it is his own child. Πᾶς can also mean “servant” as translated here.

<sup>400</sup> I have translated σεμνότητος “with due reverence”; it can mean “solemnity” or “gravity” or “majesty”. “Knowledge of reverence” is not a common English expression, so I have preferred to use a verbal form rather than translating γνώσιν as “knowledge”.



## Commentary and Notes

17a Καὶ ἤρεν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ὁ Παῦλος λέγων Εἰ ἐγὼ σήμερον ἀνακρίνομαι τί διδάσκω, ἄκουσον, ἀνθύπατε.

17a And Paul lifted his voice saying, “Today, if I myself give an account of what I teach, listen, Proconsul.”

In this phrase we see that Lipsius notes but does not choose manuscript s<sup>401</sup> which has ἡγεμών, but this is a clear illustration of how a scribe can help the reader by eliminating any inconsistencies. Although Lipsius does not take the liberty to include something from the Syriac versions here at 17a, it is surprising that he apparently does not see the scribal tendency to use ἡγεμών as he has included it in 16f above.

Thecla is not present when Paul is arrested by an unanticipated mob. She could not have been informed of this or we would certainly expect her presence in the crowd to be noted. She will reappear the night following this eventful day. The reader assumes that she comes to Paul once she has learned of his misfortune. News of the day is often shared at the time of the evening meal. Perhaps this explains why she leaves the house in the dark; it could have been a dark evening.

The introduction of this defence is reminiscent of the introductions when Paul speaks before Festus and Agrippa. It shows that skill of rhetorical polish for which Paul was well known in the undisputed Pauline epistles. The author is painting a picture of Paul as supremely confident and capable. He lifts his voice in his own defence so that not only the officials can hear him, but also all spectators. He is both defending himself and he is again preaching to all who have come out for the spectacle. His teaching is for everyone whether they are friend or foe.

In Acts 25:8 before Festus and in Acts 26:2 before Agrippa, Paul makes a defence. Neither defence compares exactly to the defence here in the *Acts of Thecla*. In Acts 25:8 and in Acts 26:2 Paul speaks for himself as he does here but Luke’s wording is not copied into the *Acts of Thecla* and Paul’s arguments are different. There is no reason to think that the *Acts of Thecla* is written after the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 25:8 has:

8 τοῦ Παύλου ἀπολογουμένου ὅτι Οὔτε εἰς τὸν νόμον τῶν Ἰουδαίων οὔτε εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν οὔτε εἰς Καίσαρά τι ἥμαρτον.

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<sup>401</sup>Lipsius, p. cii, Lipsius uses s to indicate the Syriac manuscript, “signaui uersionem syriacam siglo s”.

8 Paul said in his defence, “I have in no way committed an offence against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor.” (NRSV)

Acts 26:2 has:

2 Περὶ πάντων ὧν ἐγκαλοῦμαι ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, ἡγῆμαι ἑμαυτὸν μακάριον ἐπὶ σοῦ μέλλων σήμερον ἀπολογεῖσθαι,

2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews." (NRSV)

The interesting matter is that in the *Acts of Thecla* Paul never speaks of being a Roman citizen. Citizenship would have offered certain protections.<sup>402</sup> Pauline scholars agree that this idea that Paul is a citizen is Lukan. Paul's Roman citizenship cannot be verified by his letters.<sup>403</sup> This is an indication that the *Acts of Thecla* does not fully know the Lucan traditions concerning Paul and is an argument for an early date for the Thecla tradition.

17b Θεὸς ζῶν, θεὸς ἐκδικήσεων, θεὸς ζηλωτής, θεὸς ἀπροσδεής, χρήζων τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίας ἐπεμψέν με

17b “The Living God, the judging God, the jealous God, the all-sufficient God, the God desirous of salvation of human beings sent me

Χρήζω is used by poets: Homer, Aeschylus and Aristophanes.<sup>404</sup> The word adds colour to the opening of Paul's speech. With the genitive it means to be desirous. The correct spelling is in the Lipsius text and here in the Tischendorf text the iota subscript is missing. The Koine use eventually loses the iota subscript as the spelling reflects the word being said more quickly in casual uses. The Lipsius text is the later correction, restoring the classical spelling.

The rhetorical flourish characterizing Paul continues in this phrase. The references to God are chosen to be appropriate to a situation of judging while at the same time announcing the salvation of all humanity. It is as if Paul speaks directly to the proconsul on an equal basis with him. One

<sup>402</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 39 footnote 54 refers to the *lex Julia*.

<sup>403</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 39. “On the other hand, however, nothing in the Pauline letters confirms the Apostle's citizenship.”

<sup>404</sup> *LSJ*, p. 2004.

might even say that Paul is announcing credentials that are superior to those of the proconsul because he claims to be the one sent by God who is “the judge and all-sufficient one”.

The term “Living God” is central to the theology of the *Acts of Thecla*; it is the term used by Thecla at her baptism. It is a very interesting designation of God. It refers both to the fullness of liberty and life that Thecla experiences when she is free from the obligations of social convention including marriage, and at the same time it refers to the gift of life after death for Falconilla (see verse 29) and for all those who are a part of the resurrection. It is also a reference to Thecla’s survival in the arena against the wild beasts since it is found in 1 Sam 17:36-37 in the story of David and Goliath.

36 καὶ τὴν ἄρκον ἔτυπεν ὁ δοῦλός σου καὶ τὸν λέοντα, καὶ ἔσται ὁ ἀλλόφυλος ὁ ἀπερίτμητος ὡς ἐν τούτων· οὐχὶ πορεύσομαι καὶ πατάξω αὐτὸν καὶ ἀφελῶ σήμερον ὄνειδος ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ; διότι τίς ὁ ἀπερίτμητος οὗτος, ὃς ὠνείδισεν παράταξιν θεοῦ ζῶντος; 37 κύριος, ὃς ἐξείλατό με ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ λέοντος καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς τῆς ἄρκου, αὐτὸς ἐξελεῖταί με ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀλλοφύλου τοῦ ἀπεριτμήτου τούτου. καὶ εἶπεν Σαουλ πρὸς Δαυὶδ Πορεύου, καὶ ἔσται κύριος μετὰ σοῦ.

36 “Your servant has killed both bears and lions; and the uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, will I not go and attack him, and remove this day a reproach from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised one, who has defied the armies of the Living God? 37 The Lord, who saved me from the claw of the lion and from the claw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this uncircumcised Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go and may the Lord be with you!”<sup>405</sup>

In his introduction of himself, Paul has already begun his defence. He will speak of those whom he has been sent to protect in the next phrase. In light of this it is important to note that the God who sent him is desirous of the salvation of all humans, not solely of virgins or of the enlightened as one might expect in an extreme Gnostic text.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> As in NRSV, I have translated ὁ ἀλλόφυλος ὁ ἀπερίτμητος as “uncircumcised Philistine”. A more literal translation would be “uncircumcised foreigner”. “Bear” and “lion” are in singular form in Greek but both have a collective meaning so I have translated both words as plurals in English. The NRSV translation for this verse also uses plurals in English.

<sup>406</sup> Madeleine Scopello, “Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library”, in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. by Karen L. King, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 71-90. On p. 72 we read: “Exegesis on the Soul is a short tale (only ten pages of papyrus) based on the gnostic myth of the fall of a Soul into the world and her return to heaven.” Then further on p. 73 continues: “The Soul remains in this sexual and psychic captivity until the day she perceives her situation and repents. She

17c ὅπως ἀπὸ τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τῆς ἀκαθαρσίας ἀποσπάσω  
αὐτοὺς καὶ πάσης ἡδονῆς καὶ θανάτου, ὅπως μὴ ἀμάρτωσιν·

17c so that I may shield them from destruction and impurity and all  
selfish pleasure and death, so that they do not sin.

Here those shielded from destruction, impurity, selfish pleasure and death  
are all people. Paul's message is general and not, as Thamyras has  
misrepresented it, only for the young. Paul preaches Christ, salvation and  
resurrection—the *Acts of Thecla* never indicates otherwise.

The Lipsius text is more dramatic with the emphatic negative μηκέτι.  
This more dramatic style would heighten the drama and portray Paul as a  
more persuasive orator. These details feed a later hagiography.

17d διὸ ἐπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ παῖδα, ὃν ἐγὼ  
εὐαγγελίζομαι

17d God sent his own servant whom I preach.

Paul is clear that he comes not to promote a particular moral code or  
himself; he comes to preach Christ the servant of God, as in Isaiah the  
יהוה עבד. Christ is both the Son and Servant of God. The choice of the  
vocabulary in Greek encompasses both—Christ is παῖς. It is remarkable  
that on the lips of Paul we have this particular phrase  
τὸν ἑαυτοῦ παῖδα "his own servant" or "his own child" and not the  
more developed ὁ υἱὸς ὁ μονογενής "his only-begotten son" that we  
find in John's Gospel and the Apostles' Creed. John 3:16 becomes the  
standard way of describing the relationship of Jesus to God.

16 Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν  
μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν,

16 God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son.

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asks for help from her Father, reminding him about the time when she stood by him still a virgin:  
‘Save me, Father, for behold I will render an account to Thee, for I abandoned my house and fled from  
my maiden's quarters; restore me to Thyself again.’” This is just one example of a Gnostic text where  
extreme matters concerning gender and virginity appear. See also *Gospel of Thomas* and the  
*Hypostasis of the Archons* among many examples. Ross S. Kraemer, “Response to ‘Virginity and  
Subversion: Norea Against the Powers in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*’ by Anne McGuire”, also in  
*Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. by Karen L. King, pp. 259-264, p. 263. For the *Gospel of  
Thomas* see *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, ed. by Kurt Aland, Deutsche Bibelstiftung, Stuttgart,  
1976, pp. 517-530. Verse 114 p. 530 has “For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the  
kingdom of heaven.”

This document does not show signs of familiarity with John's Gospel or the Apostles' Creed, which attests to its early tradition. One might expect, if it were from the end of the second century, at least a mention of the Holy Spirit. It in fact records Paul's language as if it came from Paul's own time before the development of the Johannine tradition and the use of the creeds for baptism and the promotion of orthodoxy.

17e καὶ διδάσκω ἐν ἐκείνῳ ἔχειν τὴν ἐλπίδα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,

17e I teach people to have hope in him

This encapsulates what Paul teaches. He teaches people to hope in Christ. This is something that is not given but must be learned. Again it is not just young unmarried persons whom Paul teaches but all people.

Hope is an important theme in Pauline theology. See for example: Rom 5:2, 5; 8: 24; 12:12; 1 Cor 9:10; 2 Cor 3:12 and quite a few other examples in the letters.

17f ὃς μόνος συνεπάθησεν πλανωμένῳ κόσμῳ, ἵνα μηκέτι ὑπὸ κρίσιν ᾧσιν, ἀνθύπατε,

17f who alone has had compassion for the wayward world, in order that they would be no longer under judgment, Proconsul,

The Lipsius avoids the confusing ἀνθύπατε by choosing οἱ ἄνθρωποι from manuscripts E and F against the strong tradition ABCG. Perhaps he is also avoiding C. The result is not different in meaning but avoids the second term for the official who is judging. It eliminates the direct address.

One might consider if this choice could be the first so far where a later editor would want to eliminate heresy, following Lipsius' hypothesis. It is possible that "people are no longer under judgment" is at some period considered to be an overstatement of the redemption brought by the suffering of Christ. However, even without the words οἱ ἄνθρωποι this sentence means that the "people are no longer under judgment" because of the reference back to τοὺς ἀνθρώπους in the previous phrase. Therefore the elimination of these words will have no effect and cannot be thought to be intentional in order to eliminate heresy.

More importantly, this idea is completely compatible with the Pauline notion of the reconciliation of all of creation in 2 Cor 5:18-19:

18 τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ  
διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς,  
19 ὥς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ  
λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν  
τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, 19 in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (NRSV)

In 2 Corinthians trespasses of human beings are not counted against them and here in the *Acts of Thecla* Christ is the one who stands with those who go astray. This going astray we might imagine is vile behaviour, including impurity and selfish pleasure. He is the judge par excellence. Christ can free all those with these wrong behaviours from the judgment they incur because of them. This wrong behaviour would certainly not include marrying, as Thamyras, Paul's accuser, would have it.

That all the world is included in the redemption of Christ shows a universal characteristic of Christianity. This is also known in a more developed form in the letters to Ephesians and Colossians and especially in John's Gospel. This universalism is also known in the reconstruction period of the temple in Israel and is especially compatible with the notion of the Living God. The title, the "Living God", has resonance with the God who created all things living and not living on the earth below and in the heavens above in Genesis.

17g ἀλλὰ πίστιν ἔχουσιν καὶ φόβον θεοῦ καὶ γινώσκιν  
σεμνότητος καὶ ἀγάπην ἀληθείας.

17g but that they might have faith and fear of God and know due reverence and love truth.

All people are taught to hope in Christ who can release the wayward from the consequence of their wrong actions; then they can move on to a virtuous life. The focus on Christ is on his great compassion. Christ's compassion is remarkable because it is not for the innocent but for the wayward who can have access to the gift of life from the Living God. This life for all people includes having faith and a fear or respect of God.

This means that they will act reflectively, considering first what their responsibilities are to God and others in this created order before they make a decision.

This respect for God and faith will be their greatest aid in doing what is best for all concerned, and not just acting out of selfish interest or pleasure-seeking. This faith will lead them to love the truth and to show due reverence.

These virtues are the ones that the proconsul will be looking for in those who come before him. Those who do not lie or participate in any kind of falsehood and those who show proper respect are those who are trusted in what they say before a proconsul. At the same time that Paul is describing what he teaches he is making a defence for himself before the proconsul.

The question arises for those of us who are reading in the twenty-first century: does this love of the truth and reverence have as its object God or Jesus Christ? Jesus himself showed due reverence for God (see for example: Mk 10:9; Lk 8:39; Mt 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus himself was one who loved the truth. Christians today who know of the Johannine saying on the lips of Jesus, “I am the way, the truth and the life”, might think that Jesus is the object of this love and reverence but it is not the case. This is to be read together with φόβον θεοῦ “the fear of God”, and the reverence is reverence of God and of things godly; the love of truth is love of God’s truth.

17h εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ τὰ ὑπὸ θεοῦ μοι ἀνακεκαλυμμένα διδάσκω, τί ἄδικῶ;

17h If I teach what God has disclosed to me, what wrong do I do?

Lipsius has sided with the strong manuscript evidence and, as is his habitual pattern, against Tischendorf and manuscript C. His choice is the perfect participle of ἀποκαλύπτω rather than ἀνακαλύπτω.

Ἀνακαλύπτω is never used in the New Testament, while ἀποκαλύπτω is used more than 25 times. Ἀνακαλύπτω shows no conformity to this standard type of literature and it is therefore more likely to be the original word. If one or the other is a correction, ἀποκαλύπτω would have to be considered likelier to be the correction since it becomes the accepted term to describe such revelations or disclosures in Christian writings.

A second argument for the Tischendorf reading to be the original is that the word ἀποκαλύπτω is used already by this author in 1g and the scribe may simply be making the two uses coincide. This sort of consistency is often valued by scribes, whereas there is no such reason to create diversity when the meanings are basically the same.

Paul's entire explanation of what he teaches is in fact also his defence. In this phrase Paul continues to speak about what God wishes for him in particular. He used the personal dative pronoun to shift the emphasis. Paul's teachings come from what is disclosed to him and not to others. Paul claims special revelation in his letters as well as here. Here he is doing what God expects of him in presenting these teachings.

This matter of disclosure to Paul from God has been discussed at length in relation to Paul's conversion as it is told in Galatians and to his visions in 2 Cor 12:1-5 in relation to verse one above, specifically to 1g. The question, "What wrong do I do?", is rhetorical expecting a negative answer.

17i Ὁ δὲ ἀνθύπατος ἀκούσας ἐκέλευσεν δεθῆναι τὸν Παῦλον καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν ἀποκατασταθῆναι,

17i The proconsul, having listened, ordered Paul to be bound and put into prison,

The choice of verb for Tischendorf comes from AB and for Lipsius from E. Ἀπαχθῆναι "sent" to prison rather than "put" in prison is perhaps somewhat more respectful of Saint Paul. It is also better with the preposition εἰς. It is more likely the improvement along with the substituted ἡγεμῶν.

Although Paul has been heard, the expected answer is not forthcoming; on the contrary Paul is bound and incarcerated. It is made very clear that this is after the proconsul has listened to Paul. The proconsul is not being characterised as unjust or arbitrary, but rather careful and patient.

Although he has Paul detained there is no sentence, since as we learn in the following phrase he wishes to hear Paul further at a later time. The incarceration and binding is the sort of experience that is familiar from Paul's letters in his peristatic catalogues, where he presents himself as the suffering servant.



17j μέχρῃς οὐ εὐσχολήσας, φησὶν, ἀκούσομαι αὐτοῦ  
ἐπιμελέστερον.

17j until having leisure, he said, “I will hear him more attentively”.

The Lipsius reading tidies up the sentence, especially the awkward move from third person to first.

The proconsul here seems both genuinely interested in what Paul has to say, and also conscientious about his role in the practice of justice for this district. Readers and listeners will be aware of this sympathetic characterization and will then assign the blame where it belongs. The text blames Demas and Hermogenes, Theocleia and Thamyras for this imprisonment of Paul.

## Verse Eighteen

**18a** Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα νυκτὸς περιελομένη τὰ ψέλια ἔδωκεν τῷ πυλωρῷ,

**18b** καὶ ἀνοιγείσης αὐτῇ τῆς θύρας ἀπήλθεν εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν·

**18c** καὶ δοῦσα τῷ δεσμοφύλακι κάτοπτρον ἀργυροῦν εἰσῆλθεν εἰς<sup>407</sup> τὸν Παῦλον,

**18d** καὶ καθίσασα παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἤκουεν<sup>408</sup> τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ.

**18e** καὶ οὐδὲν ἔδεδοίκει ὁ Παῦλος,

**18f** ἀλλὰ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ παρρησίᾳ ἐνεπολιτεύετο·

**18g** κακείνης ἡῤξανεν ἡ πίστις, καταφιλούσης τὰ δεσμὰ αὐτοῦ.

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<sup>407</sup> The preposition πρὸς is used in the Lipsius text instead of εἰς.

<sup>408</sup> The aorist tense of this verb is in the Lipsius text: ἤκουσεν. Tischendorf has the imperfect.

## Translation

**18a** In the night, Thecla took off her bracelets and she gave them to the warder,

**18b** and when the gate had been opened to her, she went forward into the prison,

**18c** and she gave to the prison guard a silver mirror and she went into Paul

**18d** and she sat at his feet and heard of the mighty deeds of God

**18e** and Paul feared nothing,

**18f** but was exercising his citizenship in the liberty of speech (given)<sup>409</sup> by God.

**18g** and as she kissed his fetters her faith increased,

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<sup>409</sup> The sense here is that Paul's liberty of speech is a gift granted by God much like citizenship, i.e. he has a certain right to speak because this right is granted to him by God. Compare Romans 8:21.

## Commentary and Notes

18a Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα νυκτὸς περιελομένη τὰ ψέλια ἔδωκεν τῷ  
πυλωρῷ,

18a In the night, Thecla took off her bracelets and she gave them to the  
warder,

Thecla ventures out at night to be with Paul who has been sent to prison by the proconsul. It is unusual for a young woman of means to venture out at night but there is nothing in the text to make us think that she is bribing her own house servants or those of her mother. These servants would certainly have been part of the household who mourned as they realized that Thecla no longer wished to marry Thamyras. They would be well apprised of the situation in the house concerning Thecla's future and the wishes of her mother. The servants will not benefit in terms of stability and welfare because of Thecla's choice: on the contrary her marriage to Thamyras would be a benefit to them and her decision not to marry would be a disadvantage.

Her bracelets are hardly what would be given to house servants at night. It would be disastrous for anyone in the household found with these bracelets. It would be too great a risk to accept them and to keep them in the household even for a night, before they were able to somehow be traded or sold. Even in the city, these bracelets would be incriminating if they were found with anyone other than Thecla, since all ancient jewellery is hand-made and distinctive. If she wished to bribe house personnel she would give something that could not be traced back to her. It is unlikely that she would not know how to leave her own dwelling, and it is also likely that the prison would not be under the care of only one person for security.

In this commentary, therefore, it is envisioned that there are two levels of security at the prison, a warder at the front gate to the prison and a prison guard who knows where each person in restraints is being kept. A single individual with keys or access to other mechanical devices which restrain is not likely to be accessible to the public. Such a person would need to be inside the prison. Then how would someone find their way inside?

This idea is also supported by the knowledge that prisoners were not fed and tended to by guards and warders. The families and friends of these prisoners would see to such needs. For this reason there would need to be

a way that family and friends could deliver these things to the prisoners. It is not likely that only one person managed all this coming and going.

Thecla's wish to visit at night is very unusual. The timing would be the most difficult matter involved in her visit but it shows her daring character. It is also a reason why she needs significant bribes. On the other hand the night conceals her visit from the public and would protect her family from further scandal.

18b καὶ ἀνοιγείσης αὐτῇ τῆς θύρας ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν·

18b And when the gate had been opened to her, she went forward into the prison,

When Thecla was allowed into the prison, she did not hesitate nor find distraction with the sights or sounds of this disturbing place. Rather she went forward with her continued single-minded purpose to see Paul yet again.

At this point the reader does not quite understand what Thecla wishes to do when she finds Paul. Is she trying to form a plan for his escape; is she wanting to bring him comforts, food or medicine or clothing or coverings? The reader cannot know at this point.

18c καὶ δοῦσα τῷ δεσμοφύλακι κάτοπτρον ἀργυροῦν εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν Παῦλον,

18c and she gave to the prison guard a silver mirror and she went into Paul

Lipsius has the more correct preposition πρὸς “toward” Paul.

The mirror is a bribe just as the bracelets were. They are a mid-range bribe, not the most expensive item she might have had but something valuable that the warder or guard could trade or sell.

The choice of what Thecla is willing to part with as a bribe is significant. They are symbolic of Thecla's denial of vanity and self-focus in life now that she has met Paul. Women of means could spend much time and wealth on their appearance, dress and adornment. The reader imagines that Thecla has not been immune from these interests. Never again in her story will the reader be told that these things are of further interest to her.

When she is again financially well off, Thecla will not recover or replace these bribes. They belong to her past, before her commitment to Christ.

Now we are told that rather than going into the prison, she now goes in, the reader assumes, to see Paul. She has been shown where he is. He could have been among others whose crimes are perhaps violent or despicable.<sup>410</sup> Her focus is never thwarted. She wants to hear more about the mighty deeds of God in the death and resurrection of Christ (see 1f and 1g above). This will result in her wanting to be baptised.

18d καὶ καθίσασα παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἤκουεν τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ.

18d and she sat at his feet and heard of the mighty deeds of God

Lipsius has the tense variant ἤκουσεν. Tischendorf's text has the imperfect tense also used in Lk 10:39. The story of Thecla may have influenced the story of Mary as it is told by Luke, or the story as told by Luke may have influenced the story of Thecla, but there is no exact copying. It is significant that Thecla sits at Paul's feet; sitting is the posture for a disciple. As we see in Lk 10:39, Mary (and we assume also Martha) sits at Jesus' feet to listen to his teachings when he visits as a travelling Rabbi. Mary's posture and Thecla's posture are best understood as deferential, attentive and devout.

39 καὶ τῇδε ἦν ἀδελφὴ καλουμένη Μαρίαμ, [ἡ] καὶ παρακαθεσθεῖσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας τοῦ κυρίου ἤκουεν τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his word.

Sitting at the feet in the *Acts of Thecla* is a meaningful gesture. This instance of Thecla sitting at Paul's feet foreshadows the lioness sitting at Thecla's feet later in the story (see 33b). On the one hand, it seems a letdown to the reader that Thecla does not have something more practical or adventurous planned, while on the other hand it may be a relief that she is not mistreated. This makes more sense when it is remembered that this

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<sup>410</sup> A description of a group of prisoners at about 180 CE is supplied by Maximus of Tyre. "To describe each of these lives by a simile: that "noble" and variegated kind is like a dreadful prison in which unhappy men, confined in a dark cell, with great irons on their feet, heavy weights about their necks, and grievous fetters on their hands, pass their days in filth, in torment, in weeping and groaning." This translation is from H. Hobein ed., "Maximus of Tyre Discourse 36" paragraph 4b, in Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 76.

work was used as Holy Scripture before the fifth century and is not an adventure story. Thecla's acts of devotion show her sincerity in conversion not her ingenuity in escapes. It is appropriate that she sits learning as a student; this seems to have been her constant purpose.

Her desire is to learn this new message which has already spoken so powerfully to her heart. She sits and listens as Paul recounts the mighty deeds of God. We imagine Paul explaining to Thecla how Jesus Christ is God's most wonderful gift to humanity, but we are not told that this is what Paul teaches. In verse one, we know that Paul speaks about the death and resurrection of Christ, and we know from Thamyras' banquet that the resurrection is an identified topic of Paul's teaching. We know from his speech before the court that he teaches about Christ, God's servant who has compassion for the world, and about faith, love of truth and respect for God.

Paul is a Jew and the mighty deeds of God could also be creation, the stories of the matriarchs and patriarchs or the stories of sages and prophets. The mighty deeds of God could also include the story of the Passover or the story of the dedication of the temple. The recounting of such mighty deeds is part of the ritual for Passover and is still done in our Eucharistic prayers today. We do not know what is told in this scene and can only speculate. It could also be the story of Paul's journeys to date and what God has done to bless him and protect him throughout his mission.

18e καὶ οὐδὲν ἐδεδοίκει ὁ Παῦλος,

18e and Paul feared nothing,

This phrase is again not specific enough for us to know what the exact meaning could be. Does it refer to Paul's fears of prison and judgment? Does it refer to Paul's fears in his suffering in past missionary travel? Does it refer to Paul's understanding of the stories of his people, the Jews and how many, including Jesus, suffered? We cannot know the answer to these questions but we do know that Paul is fit to teach Thecla, not being overly burdened by fear from any memory or circumstance, not even this present difficult circumstance. It is as if being imprisoned is about as important as bracelets and mirrors. Nothing save that God is with them seems to have any effect.

18f ἀλλὰ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ παρρησίᾳ ἐνεπολιτεύετο·

18f but exercising his citizenship in the liberty of speech (given) by God.

It is quite remarkable really that Paul takes up where he left off, simply speaking about God and faith. Thecla also takes up where she left off, listening intently, taking everything in and accepting it with devotion. This is described by the author of the text as Paul exercising the liberty of speech that God has given him. He can speak, so he does.

It is also remarkable that this expression about liberty of speech includes the reference to citizenship. Citizenship in the Lukan Acts becomes Roman citizenship. Did Luke learn about Paul's citizenship from stories like the *Acts of Thecla* and then apply his own meaning?

18g κακείνης ἡῶξανεν ἡ πίστις, καταφιλούσης τὰ δεσμὰ αὐτοῦ.

18g and as she kissed his fetters her faith increased,

The result of this seemingly foolhardy way that Paul and Thecla spend their time is wonderful. It is the great gift of Thecla's increase in faith. Her faith will be an example to many for thousands of years to come. It is more important than any recording of daring actions or miraculous escapes. The increase of faith is also the purpose of the recording of the story of Paul and Thecla. The increase of faith among all who hear this account is what is wanted.

This phrase is inspiring and also intriguing. Why does Thecla kiss Paul's fetters? Is it a sign of devotion to Paul? Is she saying that even his imprisonment has become a blessing to her? Is she wanting to give comfort to Paul but has not been practical enough to have brought any other means, so this token of her affection will have to say that she cares about him?

This is not personal love for Paul; otherwise she would have kissed him, not his restraints. Barrier's argument that this is an erotic episode<sup>411</sup> "as Thecla takes hold of Paul's bonds while kissing them" is an unwarranted over-translation of the participle, with a neglect of the other verb in the sentence. The increase in faith is what this is about. The use of the English word "bonds" and the addition of the English words "takes hold of" gives an inappropriate English sense to what is a straightforward matter in Greek. The Greek says only, "as she kissed his fetters her faith

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<sup>411</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 115.



increased”. Barrier’s translation takes too great a risk over this quite prosaic Greek.

The faith of conversion has an energy that is full of mystery. Perhaps this action is meant to convey that sense of mystery that is found in a mystical experience. Thecla is enthralled in this part of the story; her life is in a state of renewal and awakening. The experience she is having with Paul is most essentially a religious experience, an experience of God. Her actions are symbolic of this life-altering experience, and words are inadequate to explain the power of this encounter.<sup>412</sup> The description of her action is like the description of the burning coals touching the lips of the prophet Isaiah. It is a life-altering experience.

One could compare the devotion of the woman who kissed Jesus’ feet at the home of the Simon the Pharisee Lk 7:38. Jesus accuses Simon saying, “I come into your house . . . (but) you gave me no kiss” (φίλημά μοι οὐκ ἔδωκας). The story concludes with Jesus saying to the woman, “your faith has saved you; go in peace” (ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην).

We know of the power of God in Thecla’s life because of the strength of her tradition, and the retelling of this part of the narrative will encourage a similarly wonderful experience for its audience. Rather than analyzing that unique mystical experience that is Thecla’s own, the readers or listeners are inspired to seek such an increase in faith themselves.

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<sup>412</sup> S. McGinn, “The Acts of Thecla”, in *Searching the Scriptures*, pp. 813-814. McGinn sees this passage as Thecla’s conversion and call narrative. McGinn compares other Biblical prophetic call narratives.

## Verse Nineteen

**19a** Ὡς δὲ ἐζητεῖτο Θέκλα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων

**19b** καὶ Θάμυρις<sup>413</sup> ὥς ἀπολομένης<sup>414</sup> αὐτῆς ἐδίωκεν<sup>415</sup> κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς,

**19c** καὶ τις τῶν συνδούλων τοῦ πυλωροῦ ἐμήνυσεν ὅτι νυκτὸς ἐξῆλθεν.

**19d** καὶ ἐξελθόντες<sup>416</sup> ἀνήτασαν τὸν πυλωρόν, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι πεπόρευται πρὸς τὸν ξένον εἰς τὸ δεσμωτήριον·

**19e** καὶ ἀπελθόντες<sup>417</sup> < ><sup>418</sup> εὑρον αὐτὴν τρόπον τινὰ συνδεδεμένην τῇ στοργῇ.

**19f** καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκείθεν τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπεσπῶντο<sup>419</sup> καὶ τῷ ἡγεμόνι ἐνεφάνισαν.

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<sup>413</sup> Thamyris' name appears in the genitive case Θαμύριδος in the Lipsius text.

<sup>414</sup> The Lipsius' text has the present participle ἀπολλυμένη which in this sentence refers to Thecla. The Tischendorf text also has the participle from the verb ἀπόλλυμι but in its second aorist form. The verb means "lost" and is used this way in the Septuagint in 1 Kings 9:3 concerning wine that has been poured out. J. Elliott, p. 367, translates the Lipsius text, "And when Thecla was sought by her family and Thamyris they were hunting through the streets as if she had been lost". The grammar is awkward in the Tischendorf text and the Lipsius text simplifies it by using a passive form of διώκω.

<sup>415</sup> The word αὐτῆς is missing from the Lipsius text and ἐδιώκετο appears instead of ἐδίωκεν.

<sup>416</sup> An additional word ἐξελθόντες is in the Tischendorf text here.

<sup>417</sup> The Lipsius text has ἀπῆλθον, the aorist form of the verb, while the Tischendorf above has the participle.

<sup>418</sup> The Lipsius text includes these additional words καθὼς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς καὶ here.

<sup>419</sup> The Lipsius text has ἐπεσπάσαντο instead of ἐπεσπῶντο.

## Translation

- 19a** But when Thecla was sought by her own household
- 19b** and, as if she were lost, Thamyras searched through the streets,
- 19c** and one of the warder's fellow-slaves disclosed that she went out during the night,<sup>420</sup>
- 19d** they went<sup>421</sup> and inquired of the prison guard, and he said to them that she has gone into the prison to the foreigner.
- 19e** And they went on and found her, as it were,<sup>422</sup> bound by love.
- 19f** And when they went outside, they rallied the crowd and they reported to the governor.

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<sup>420</sup> This comma is not in the Tischendorf test. Tischendorf has a full-stop. I have translated a comma because otherwise there is not a main verb. The καί of 19d is not translated and a full stop is inserted after "foreigner".

<sup>421</sup> The Greek has "and they went". I have not translated the καί.

<sup>422</sup> τρόπον τινά here means in such a manner, or in such a state.

## Commentary and Notes

19a Ὡς δὲ ἐζητεῖτο Θέκλα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων

19a But when Thecla was sought by her own household,

The gaps in the narrative leave us without knowing the time of these matters. The only thing that we know is that Thecla is still in the prison. How long does it take Theocleia to realize that Thecla is missing? Does she send for Thamyris again? Do they all search throughout the household or do the house members search first and then when Thamyris arrives does a second search take place? If all this is happening, it would be expected that any collusion with Thecla concerning her night-time expedition would come to light. Servants helping her might well have fled.

If we knew more of what happened at this point, we would be better placed to decide with greater confidence that the bribe was to a prison security person and not to someone in the household of Theocleia as others have suggested. In the search, servants would probably tell what they knew, any objects used for bribery might be found and servants involved punished or punishments planned. Yet we hear nothing of such matters. The *Acts of Thecla* is not a novel of manor intrigue.

It is a more cogent assumption that those who were bribed are all at the prison and that as the search reaches beyond the house to the streets those who know the prison security staff give the information needed to the family.

19b καὶ Θάμυρις, ὡς ἀπολομένης αὐτῆς ἐδίωκεν κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς,

19b and, as if she were lost,<sup>423</sup> Thamyris searched through the streets,

There are quite a few differences between the two texts in this verse. The Lipsius text for 19a and 19b is: Ὡς δὲ ἐζητεῖτο Θέκλα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων καὶ Θαμύριδος, ὡς ἀπολλυμένη ἐδιώκετο κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς. Thamyris' name appears in the genitive Θαμύριδος in the Lipsius text. In the Lipsius text the segments 19a and 19b mean "And

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<sup>423</sup> The meaning here is "lost" or "dead". "Lost" makes more sense in this context. From the description here there is no indication that they are searching for her corpse. See W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 358. Schneemelcher's translation has "lost".

when Thecla was sought by her own household and Thamyras she was hunted through the streets as if she was getting lost”. The Lipsius text has ἀπολλυμένη here which is the middle/passive present participle of ἀπόλλυμι. Tischendorf’s choice from AB and C is the more difficult form since it is in the aorist, and clearly “the loss of Thecla” has more of a present continuous sense to the action at this point in the drama.<sup>424</sup> Without αὐτῆς the Lipsius text uses the middle/passive ἐδιώκετο which Elliott translates “they were hunting”.<sup>425</sup> His translation almost sounds like a translation of the Tischendorf text. Barrier<sup>426</sup> however, translates ἐδιώκετο in the natural way to read the Lipsius text: She (Thecla) was being hunted or pursued in the streets. This tidies up the translation problems with the Tischendorf text which has the extra αὐτῆς, Thamyras in the nominative and the second aorist participle followed by the imperfect active.

It is not surprising that Thecla is presumed lost. All of her recent behaviour would be thought to be out of character. There would be an assumption in the household that by not marrying Thamyras she is throwing her life away. It would be very dangerous for her to stay out through the night; she would be recognized as wealthy by her clothing, hair grooming and jewellery. She could be killed even to rob her of her personal items. We know from verse 18 that she is wearing bracelets. It is not ordinary for wealthy young women to leave their households overnight. The household would certainly fear at least for her safety if not for her life. This would be the case whether she is accompanied or alone. If they suspected that she wanted to visit the prison, it would add further anxiety.

Some exaggeration seems to be characteristic of the style of the telling of this narrative; it could be that the presumption of her being lost is simply the overreaction of the household staff. For Thamyras however, the readers and listeners know his caring for Thecla is a “lost cause” now. He has in fact “lost her”. He has falsely accused Paul from whom Thecla has heard of the Living God and of God’s servant who brings salvation. Thamyras’ chances with Thecla are over. No amount of searching or running through the streets looking for her will repair their relationship.

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<sup>424</sup> *LSJ*, p. 207 B II. Although the verb’s first meaning is “to die” the meaning “to lose” is also found. In passive form as it is here it means “to be lost”.

<sup>425</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 367.

<sup>426</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 116.

Thamyris does not seem to understand this in the way that the audience does. He is out searching in the streets. We assume he is asking if anyone has seen Thecla.

19c καί τις τῶν συνδούλων τοῦ πυλωροῦ ἐμήνυσεν ὅτι  
νυκτὸς ἐξῆλθεν.

19c and one of the warder's fellow-slaves disclosed that she went out during the night,

As Thamyris searches through the streets, he comes upon a fellow-worker of the warder. This fellow-worker says that he has seen Thecla going out in the night. This is by far the most difficult passage when translating that Thecla has bribed both persons at the prison.

The first problem is that the phrase literally means she exited into the night. A reader has to ask: exited from where? —from her household or from the prison? We will find her still in the prison in the next verse so this must mean that she has left her household. How does this fellow worker of the prison staff know that she exited her household? Given all of the other considerations already described, we can add that no worker from her household would be found in the streets who could not have been found in the first instance in the household.

The second problem is that this person does not tell that she has gone to the prison. Are we to think that he must know more but does not tell at that stage? Perhaps he does not want to be implicated in cooperating with her plan to get to see and learn more from Paul. Her plan will certainly bring reproach to her; she may even be accused of something more shameful. The informant probably wants to distance himself from the matter. None the less, his own associations have said enough to lead them to the prison, because in the next phrase the warder says that she has been in to see the foreigner (Paul).

In this interpretation the preposition ἐξ- is taken to have lost some of its meaning. In Koine Greek this often happens. The resultant meaning is then just that she was seen out during the night. It is not a fully satisfactory solution but it is better than thinking that a co-worker of a gate-keeper of Thecla's own staff is found on the streets to give information, or that she would be as silly as to try to bribe her own servants with her bracelets, or that the prison would have only one security person. Perhaps those who have been reading the *Acts of Thecla* have been influenced by the stories of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles

where getting in and out of prison is very easy and incredibly fantastic, with angels appearing and chains falling off<sup>427</sup> and prison staff converting with all their families. It is Luke's stories that are hard to believe. In an ancient prison it is almost certain that the person with the keys is not at the front door!

It is also implausible that Thecla has been kept in her own household under lock and key. She seems to know her way to the prison easily enough without any instructions. How is it that she knows her way around town in the dark if she has been locked in?

19d και ἐξελθόντες ἀνήτασαν τὸν πυλωρόν, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι πεπόρευται πρὸς τὸν ξένον εἰς τὸ δεσμωτήριον·

19d they went and inquired of the warder, and he said to them that she has gone into the prison to the foreigner.

There are now companions with Thamyris; we had no previous knowledge of them in the Tischendorf text. In the Lipsius text this matter has been corrected by what has the appearance of being a later scribal tradition which had Thamyris' name in the genitive.

The answer of the warder is straightforward, as if her visit were the usual act of mercy that a prison visit would entail. He speaks as if there is no embarrassment in it even though he has accepted a bribe. This makes him look as if he is careful and respectful of her. Nothing is said about the inappropriate hour at which she came.

As commented earlier, relatives and friends brought food and other comforts and necessities to those who were imprisoned. It would not have been beyond imagining that Thecla would be about that sort of mission of mercy. It would not have been a neglect of the warder's duties to let her into the prison; there is no reason for him not to tell what has happened. The acceptance of the bribe, he obviously thinks, is his own business not anyone else's. The bribe was no doubt because of the late hour and to sweeten the deal, that is, to make it possible for Thecla to stay through the night. Visits by prostitutes or wives would not be necessarily acceptable in certain cases in prisons, as the punishment of prison would not be thought to include such ministrations. The warder simply acts as if everything is normal, and he will let Thamyris discover anything else for himself.

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<sup>427</sup> Acts 12:6-8; 16:26-30 are two good examples.

19e καὶ ἀπελθόντες < > εὑρον αὐτὴν τρόπον τινὰ  
συνδεδεμένην τῇ στοργῇ.

19e And they went on and found her, as it were, bound by love.

The Lipsius text notes the verification of the warder's information: "just as he said to them". This is simply an expansion adding that the facts match the information gained. The removal of these words has nothing to do with the orthodoxy of the text of the *Acts of Thecla*.

They go further into the prison. As above in verse 18, it is clear that this prison has more than one area and chamber. The imagery here suggests that metaphorically Thecla is also imprisoned. She is bound or shackled by love.

The form of expression shows that this is not meant literally. They find her τρόπον τινά "as it were", "in a certain manner" or "seemingly" or "in a state of being". This state is that she is "bound by love". The reader imagines that she is enthralled by the message Paul expounds, and in love in a spiritual sense with Jesus Christ or with God. The text is not saying that she lusts after Paul. There is no erotic language. Those who have suggested such things have not understood the religious significance of Thecla's experience. To say that this is sexual is like saying that when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples it was sexual.

19f καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκεῖθεν τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπεσπῶντο καὶ τῷ  
ἡγεμόνι ἐνεφάνισαν.

19f And when they went outside, they rallied the crowd and they reported to the governor.

The Lipsius choice of aorist is a stylistic improvement.

After leaving the prison and returning to the streets, they take with them those available to form a contingent to give weight to their claim as they approach the governor. We are expecting to hear of the proconsul, who has previously said that he would hear Paul at his leisure, but Thamyras has reported not to the proconsul but to the governor. The two titles must refer to the same person as there is no indication of two persons.

The text is simply inconsistent. The Tischendorf text carries the inconsistency while the Lipsius text corrects by changing the words



previously and in 20e. These corrections are more plausibly seen as later editorial work. In this commentary we have to struggle to make sense of what the arguably earlier and more original Tischendorf text has.

## Verse Twenty

**20a** Καὶ ἐκέλευσεν ἄγεσθαι τὸν Παῦλον ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα·

**20b** ἡ δὲ Θέκλα ἐκυλίετο ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου οὗ ἐδίδασκεν < ><sup>428</sup> καθήμενος ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ.

**20c** < ><sup>429</sup> ἐκέλευσεν δε κἀκείνην ἀχθῆναι ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα· ἡ δὲ μετὰ χαρᾶς προσίει<sup>430</sup> ἀγαλλιωμένη.

**20d** ὁ δὲ ὄχλος προσενεχθέντος<sup>431</sup> τοῦ Παύλου περισσοτέρως ἐβόα Μάγος ἐστίν, αἶρε αὐτόν.

**20e** ἡδέως<sup>432</sup> δὲ ἤκουεν ὁ ἀνθύπατος<sup>433</sup> τοῦ Παύλου ἐπὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις ἔργοις τοῦ Χριστοῦ·

**20f** καὶ συμβούλιον ποιήσας προσεκαλέσατο<sup>434</sup> τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ<sup>435</sup> Διὰ τί οὐ πείθει<sup>436</sup> κατὰ τὸν Ἰκονιέων νόμον < > Θάμυρι,<sup>437</sup>

**20g** ἡ δὲ εἰστήκει Παύλῳ ἀτενίζουσα· τῆς δὲ μὴ ἀποκρινομένης,

**20h** < ><sup>438</sup> ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς ἀνέκραγεν λέγουσα Κατάκαιε τὴν ἄνομον, κατάκαιε τὴν ἄνυμφον μέσον<sup>439</sup> θεάτρου,

**20i** ἵνα πᾶσαι αἱ ὑπὸ τούτου διδαχθεῖσαι φοβηθῶσιν γυναῖκες.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> The clarifying proper name is added in the Lipsius text: ὁ Παῦλος.

<sup>429</sup> The additional words ὁ δὲ ἡγεμὼν appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>430</sup> The Lipsius text has the word ἀπίει instead of προσίει .

<sup>431</sup> This phrase in Lipsius includes an additional word and a different participle. In Lipsius it reads: προσαχθέντος πάλιν.

<sup>432</sup> The Lipsius text begins this word with an upper case letter.

<sup>433</sup> The official is known as a ὁ ἡγεμὼν in the Lipsius text. This is a more powerful official and shows a developed hagiography. Another possibility is that it is a correction and assimilation to 19f.

<sup>434</sup> In the Lipsius text this verb is ἐκάλεσεν.

<sup>435</sup> Instead of the words καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ the Lipsius text simply has λέγων here.

<sup>436</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is γαμεῖ.

<sup>437</sup> As we have seen before the Lipsius text here has the longer form Θαμύριδι and Lipsius also has the dative article τῷ.

<sup>438</sup> The Lipsius text includes the proper name here: Θεοκλεία.

<sup>439</sup> The Lipsius text has ἐν μέσῳ.

<sup>440</sup> These two words are in the reverse word order in the Lipsius text: γυναῖκες φοβηθῶσιν.

## Translation

- 20a** And he ordered that Paul be brought to the bema,
- 20b** but Thecla crouched in the place where he taught as he sat in the prison.
- 20c** And he (the governor/proconsul) ordered that she also come to the bema, and she went with joy, exalting.
- 20d** The crowd shouted excessively, when Paul was brought forward, “he is a magician, away with him!”
- 20e** The proconsul gladly heard Paul concerning the holy works of Christ,
- 20f** and having taken counsel, he called Thecla and said to her, why do you not trust yourself to Thamyras, according to Iconian law?
- 20g** But she stood,<sup>441</sup> gazing at Paul, and as she did not answer,
- 20h** her mother cried out saying, “Burn the lawless one, burn the unmarried one in the middle of the theatre,
- 20i** so all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid.”

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<sup>441</sup> This verb can be either the present of εἰστήκω “to pine away”, “long for”, or the pluperfect of ἵστημι “to stand”.

## Commentary and Notes

20a Καὶ ἐκέλευσεν ἄγεσθαι τὸν Παῦλον ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα·

20a And he ordered that Paul be brought to the bema,

The bema is the place of judgment. As noted in this study in relation to verse 16, it is a word known well in English especially in Jewish circles where it indicates the place where the sermon is delivered in a synagogue. Here it is the place where the governor/proconsul sits to listen and give the sentence or make other decisions concerning the dispute between persons or accusation of a person.

Paul will be heard when the governor requests it, not at any regular or expected or preferred time. Paul is a prisoner and has no choice but to come to the bema. It is remarkable that Thecla is not yet requested to come.

20b ἡ δὲ Θέκλα ἐκυλίετο ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου οὗ ἐδίδασκεν < ><sup>442</sup>  
καθήμενος ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ.

20b but Thecla crouched in the place where he taught as he sat in the prison.

When Paul is brought before the bema a second time, Thecla simply patiently awaits his return to prison. She remains in a humble position in the place where he taught her through the night. This lack of desire to move is characteristic of Thecla's reaction to Paul. She behaves as if she is somehow immobilized. Is she thinking about what he has taught her or is she waiting to learn more? We do not know, but the effect Paul has on her is remarkable. It reminds one of contemplative prayer where a person sits for relatively long periods without speaking. It also has resonances with the lying down in front of the altar that is part of many rituals of ordination. One might assume that Paul's teaching had a prayerful effect on Thecla.

There has been some comment on Thecla's position which is translated "crouched" in this study. Others translate "rolled" or "grovelled".<sup>443</sup> The

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<sup>442</sup> The clarifying proper name is added in the Lipsius text: ὁ Παῦλος. This is a sign of a later text according to the criterion in the introduction to this thesis pages 1 and 2.

<sup>443</sup> S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla", in *Searching the Scriptures*, has "rolled" p. 814. J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, has "grovelled" p. 118. Barrier is over-translated in the sense that there is no indication in this word of obeisance to Paul.

notion of continued motion is less likely than the idea of a posture where one is “curled up” with the spinal cord curved: much like fetal position while kneeling, but with both knees on the floor and the head near the knees. This is the prayer posture of Muslims. The Acts of Thecla knows the posture of kneeling as a significant part of prayer (see verse 5). Ἐκυλίετο from κυλίω means “I roll up”.<sup>444</sup> Klauck and Elliott<sup>445</sup> both have “riveted” to the place.

20c < > ἐκέλευσεν καὶ κείνην ἀχθῆναι ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα· ἡ δὲ μετὰ χαρᾶς προσίει ἀγαλλιωμένη.

20c And he ordered that she also come to the bema, and she went with joy, exalting.

The governor seems to know that Thecla was with Paul and has remained in the prison. This knowledge could only have come from Thamyris’ report. The subtlety of the unfolding drama allows Thecla to show her grasp of the meaning of witness and of being a suffering servant like Paul.

She goes to the bema with joy. Is she full of joy because this is the first time that she has the opportunity to publicly declare her new found faith? Perhaps her joy is simply because she will be with Paul again and have yet another opportunity to listen and learn. In either case her joy bespeaks a triumphant entry rather than fear and worry. She has certainly made a decision about the meaning of her life.

The Lipsius text clarifies that it is the governor who is ordering Thecla to come. This has every appearance of being a later addition for the sake of clarity. The verb in the Lipsius text is also made to conform to the summons. The verb ἀπίει instead of προσίει gives the sense that “she came from there” rather than that “she went towards”.

20d ὁ δὲ ὄχλος προσενεχθέντος<sup>446</sup> τοῦ Παύλου περισσοτέρως ἐβόα Μάγος ἐστίν, αἶρε αὐτόν.

<sup>444</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1008.

<sup>445</sup> H. Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55. J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 368.

<sup>446</sup> In Lipsius it reads: προσαχθέντος πάλιν and Elliott translates: “when Paul had been led forth”. He does not include the word “again” but Barrier does. Barrier has: “having brought Paul forward again”. J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 368. J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 118. Although both Elliott and Barrier are translating the Lipsius text, a few times Elliott’s translations are closer to the Tischendorf text; there is no apparent reason for this.

20d The crowd shouted excessively, when Paul was brought forward, “he is a magician, away with him!”

The weight of the reaction of the crowd to Paul is very negative. He is accused of being a μάγος. This can mean a mighty one, one of the magi, a wise one, or a magician. It is the word used to describe the visitors from the east who come bearing gifts to the infant Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Here the word most likely means “magician” as it also does in the canonical Act of the Apostles.<sup>447</sup>

His magical powers are seen in the way that Thecla refuses what appears to all to be a wonderful future married to Thamyras. This otherwise inexplicable behaviour is credited to Paul’s power to control Thecla with magic.

20e ἤδεως δὲ ἤκουεν ὁ ἀνθύπατος<sup>448</sup> τοῦ Παύλου ἐπὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις ἔργοις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

20e The proconsul gladly heard Paul concerning the holy works of Christ,

The “proconsul” is the term used here in contrast to “governor” in 19f and 21a. These two terms refer to one person in the story. The Lipsius tendency to replace the term ἀνθύπατος with ἡγεμών is likely to be a scribal improvement, clarifying and producing more consistency in the text.<sup>449</sup> It is not likely that a later text introduces more confused terms for the official or officials who are supposed to adjudicate.

Could it be that the author is not clearly aware of the distinction between a proconsul and a governor? On the other hand does this (like the “we” passages in Acts of the Apostles) indicate two sources or even two written traditions that have been conflated? We cannot know at this point. More evidence is required. Tischendorf is right to leave the mistake, since the more consistent version is likelier to be the less original text. It is just such anomalies that give the clues that are needed for further research.

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<sup>447</sup> See for example Acts 13:6, 8.

<sup>448</sup> The official is known as a ὁ ἡγεμών in the Lipsius text, which is a more general term for an official. It is a correction of and assimilation to 19f.

<sup>449</sup> This is not a complete tidying up. There are three places where Lipsius still has ἀνθύπατος. These are in verses 16, 17 and 32 and all three are in the vocative case. There are fourteen times that ἡγεμών is used in the Lipsius text.

The proconsul<sup>450</sup> does not immediately give in to the shouting of the crowd. This is typical of good Roman governance. He is listening carefully to Paul. His responsibility is to judge fairly after hearing the parties involved. His attentions to his duties here point to the truth of Paul's teaching, so much so in fact that what he hears from Paul is referred to by the text as "the holy works of Christ". This sounds like something to which there can be no objection.

"The holy works of Christ" is a reference back to 1g, where in 1g Paul does not look upon the hypocrisy of Demas and Hermogenes with ire but rather he teaches them, explaining "the great deeds of Christ". Paul is portrayed as a consistent character to this point in the drama. No matter what unfair or subversive actions are taken against him, he continues resolutely to tell of the great "deeds of Christ". Nothing can dissuade him from his purpose.

"Holy works" is an interesting choice for description because ὅσιος "holy" is a term used in disputed Pauline letters.<sup>451</sup> Most interesting is its use to describe Jesus as high priest in Hebrews 7:26. Nowhere in the New Testament is the word ὅσιος used with ἔργον to refer to "holy works" of Christ or of anyone.

20f καὶ συμβούλιον ποιήσας προσέκαλέσατο<sup>452</sup> τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Διὰ τί οὐ πείθει κατὰ τὸν Ἰκονιέων νόμον Θάμυρι;

20f and having taken counsel, he called Thecla and said to her, why do you not trust yourself to Thamyras, according to Iconian law?

The reader is aware why Thamyras is not trustworthy; however, his bad character is not the reason why Thecla is not interested in marriage. She wants her freedom to serve the Living God. The meaning of life is different for her now: it is not about affluence. It is about goodness, virtue and the joy of believing.

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<sup>450</sup> This is clearly the same person. In the developing drama it is certain that this is only one person even though he is referred to as both the proconsul and the governor. We do not know why two separate terms are used but certainly the earlier text has the two and the later text (Lipsius) has moved toward tidying things up. There are several literary and social dynamics which may have occasioned the two terms: just trying to get it right, using a more exalted term to be safe in deference to a dignitary, multiple sources or traditions or using the more exalted term as a general term if unfamiliar with the actual local term.

<sup>451</sup> Note for example: 1 Tim 2:8 "holy hands"; Tit 1:8 in a list of virtues; Heb 7:26 to describe Jesus as high priest.

<sup>452</sup> In the Lipsius text we find the simpler more familiar form which is likely a latter substitution. Koine Greek prefers the simple aorist to the middle aorist participle.

The proconsul takes time to discuss with advisors what he has heard from Paul and then moves on to what is in fact the crux of the matter. The fact here is that the complaint against Paul is all about Thecla not marrying Thamyris. The question to Thecla is not only why does she not trust herself to Thamyris, but also why does she not submit to the law of Iconium in this trusting of herself. This form of the question does not bode well for Thecla. She is being accused not only of not marrying but of not acting lawfully. It is as if the governor has already made up his mind; if Thecla is not prepared to marry then judgment will be against Paul and her.

It is amazing that Thecla is not considered a victim. It is also astounding that Thecla will be subject to judgment and not just Paul. Even when Paul is thought to be a magician, Thecla is not thought to be someone who is “taken in”. This is all about Thamyris’ selfish concern about his own “loss of face” in the society. His shame drives everything, even the attempt to kill the woman he says he loves. In many societies even today women are injured and killed because of a shame/honour culture which considers a woman to be a possession which either adds to the man’s power and prestige or detracts from that man’s position of honour in society.

It is not surprising that no comment is made about Paul’s teachings. It leaves the readers or listeners wondering if someone has spoken to the proconsul about the matter. The impression is given that this is a “set up”.

20g ἡ δὲ εἰστήκει<sup>453</sup> Παύλῳ ἀτενίζουσα· τῆς δὲ μὴ ἀποκρινομένης,

20g But she stood, gazing at Paul, and as she did not answer,

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<sup>453</sup>This verb is the same in both the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts. This verb can be either the pluperfect of ἵστημι “to stand” or the present of εἰστήκω “to pine away”, “long for”. Tischendorf has a rough breathing giving the meaning “stood”. Lipsius retains it; there is no controversy here. The impact of this possible near pun in the ancient world and today is worth a fleeting thought only. Barrier has the most remarkable view about verse 13, “Also, one must consider that as Thamyris and his guests increase the amount of the aphrodisiac that they are drinking, Thamyris is probably sexually aroused, consistent with the tone of the AP, and quite simply might be wishing to have Thecla there with him at the time for sexual favors, and more generally, her accompaniment.” This is an astounding view with no textual support; it is most inappropriate and disrespectful of the story of St. Thecla. See J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 101-102. Views like these have erroneously influenced the discussion of verse 20.



Now everything rests with Thecla. Her yea or nay will either save or condemn both her and Paul. She reacts like Jesus before his accusers; she says nothing, gives no answer. She stands looking intently at Paul. Does she expect Paul to speak for both of them? Is this her way of saying that she will never marry Thamyris especially now that he has brought this case against Paul? Is she remembering Paul's teachings and longing for her freedom in Christ? We can only imagine as we do in the trials of Jesus. There is a certain sense where the reader either does or does not understand. The readers and listeners are drawn in and use their imaginations and this helps them to feel involved in the drama, as one would in listening to a parable.

It is understandable that the crowd thinks this is magic. Theocleia surprisingly in the next phrase reacts as if Thecla is nothing to her if she is not prepared to marry. Even justice is beyond Theocleia's reach. This helps the reader appreciate how valuable Paul's message about resurrection and baptism and a life of virtue and good works is to Thecla. She cannot have heard such philosophy from her mother. Her mother's values are on display at this hearing and contrast sharply with Thecla's own.

20h < > ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς ἀνέκραγεν λέγουσα Κατάκαιε τὴν ἄνομον, κατάκαιε τὴν ἄνυμφον μέσον θεάτρου,

20h her mother cried out saying, "Burn the lawless one, burn the unmarried one in the middle of the amphitheatre,"<sup>454</sup>

The name Theocleia in the Lipsius text is an example of a likely addition of a proper-name as a scribal clarification offering a more precise understanding for the reader or listener. In particular if portions of the *Acts of Thecla* are read in liturgy, names that may have appeared in earlier paragraphs might have been repeated by a helpful scribe so that any given paragraph would record the proper-name of the character. This preempts the listener questioning during sacred liturgy; for instance in this case, "what was the name of her mother?"

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<sup>454</sup> There is a difference between a theatre and an amphitheatre. However, as Welch explains with clear photographic examples, theatres are primarily for the performance of plays and similar entertainment, while amphitheatres are for more dangerous events including; fighting, animals, fires, and water displays. Theatres were adapted as amphitheatres by erecting a barrier in front of the bottom row of seats. Dangerous spectacles in unsafe settings as well as temporary barriers are attested. According to Welch, Pliny the Elder writes of a wooden structure for plays that could be adapted for gladiatorial combat with nets and fences. Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 63, 169-176.

Theocleia reacts strongly by crying out and asking the governor to burn Thecla. Theocleia has nothing to say initially about Paul. This is aimed with real anger at her daughter. The readers feel how deeply disappointed Theocleia is that Thecla will not go along with the marriage she has arranged with Thamyris. Is it the public shame that she incurs because her daughter will not obey her will, or is it the financial deficit that animates her? Perhaps there is more here than that; one could easily imagine Hollywood making a great deal of the relationship between Theocleia and Thamyris, were the plot to be filmed.

Theocleia and Thamyris share the public shame and it seems they think that they will be rid of that shame when Thecla dies. It seems the opposite of Paul's teachings and the teachings of Jesus which ask for deep goodness, kindness and humility. Their motives appear, if nothing else, to be strikingly shallow. Of course there would be public reproach, reprehension and shame from killing Thecla as well as from Thecla refusing to marry. Maybe they feel they would be protected by the sharing of that shame with all those who are involved.

The request of Theocleia is not just that her daughter be punished, but that she be killed and that the execution be public. Those who know the story realize that this will only give opportunity for Thecla to be publicly vindicated by miraculous divine intervention before a large audience. Like the crucifixion and resurrection, Thecla's trial will be for the greater glory of God. The rain will be interpreted as divine blessing. This will begin Thecla's fame as an apostle and representative of the Gospel. The mixed symbolism of fire and water will launch her into her new role. Her likeness to Jesus at his trial will be more easily recognized by audiences as the years go by and more people know both stories.

20i ἵνα πᾶσαι αἱ ὑπὸ τούτου διδαχθεῖσαι φοβηθῶσιν  
γυναικες .<sup>455</sup>

20i so all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid.”

This must have been what persuades the governor to take such punitive action toward Thecla. Theocleia is arguing that the welfare of all women is at risk as long as Paul is able to teach. Her love for her daughter cannot be very genuine if she does not simply ask for Paul to be executed and Thecla to be saved.

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<sup>455</sup> These two words: γυναικες φοβηθῶσιν are in the reverse order in the Lipsius text. It has no influence at all on meaning.

When Paul is set free plenty of women and men will be taught by him. Theocleia is not really acting for all women. She wants the women of Iconium to feel guilty with her for Thecla's execution. The freedom that comes with the understanding of the Gospel is treated as if it is acceptable for men but not for women.

The most effective way of keeping a marginalized group under control is to have someone who is a representative of that group enact the oppression.<sup>456</sup> Note that Thamyras is silent here while a woman asks for the unjust execution of a woman in order to prevent more women from breaking free of the stereotypes and demands of role fulfilment that are forced upon them.

The *Acts of Thecla* as a whole teaches that this sort of control of women is unacceptable. This is the opposite of the teachings found in other late writings in the New Testament, including the pastoral epistles of Paul.

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<sup>456</sup> There are many examples of this in history: women bound the feet of girls in ancient China, African slaves were set as foremen and managers over groups of slaves in the Americas, and so on.

## Verse Twenty-one

**21a** Καὶ ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἔπαθεν μεγάλως,

**21b** καὶ τὸν μὲν Παῦλον φραγελλώσας ἔβαλεν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως < >,<sup>457</sup> τὴν δὲ Θέκλαν ἔκρινεν κατακαῆναι.

**21c** καὶ εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν < ><sup>458</sup> ἀπίει ἐπὶ<sup>459</sup> τὸ θέατρον· ὁ δὲ<sup>460</sup> πᾶς < ><sup>461</sup> ὄχλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν θεωρίαν Θεέκλης.<sup>462</sup>

**21d** ἡ δὲ < ><sup>463</sup> ὥς ἄμνός ἐν ἐρήμῳ περισκοπεῖ τὸν ποιμένα, οὕτως ἐκείνη τὸν Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

**21e** καὶ ἐμβλέψασα εἰς τὸν ὄχλον ἵδεν<sup>464</sup> τὸν κύριον καθήμενον ὡς Παῦλον,

**21f** καὶ εἶπεν Ὡς ἀνυπομονήτου μου οὔσης ἦλθεν Παῦλος θεάσασθαί με.

**21g** Καὶ προσεῖχεν αὐτῷ ἀτενίζουσα· ὁ δὲ εἰς οὐρανούς ἀνίει.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> The Lipsius text has the verb ἐξέβαλεν with the added prefix here rather than after φραγελλώσας.

<sup>458</sup> There is the additional word ἀναστὰς at this point in the Lipsius text.

<sup>459</sup> Where the Tischendorf text has the word ἐπὶ here, the Lipsius text has the more correct εἰς.

<sup>460</sup> Instead of ὁ δὲ the Lipsius text has καὶ.

<sup>461</sup> The Lipsius text has the article with this noun: ὁ ὄχλος.

<sup>462</sup> Instead of the words θεωρίαν Θεέκλης the Lipsius text has ἀνάγκην τῆς θεωρίας. The Lipsius version of the first half of this verse is: Καὶ ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἔπαθεν μεγάλως, καὶ τὸν μὲν Παῦλον φραγελλώσας ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἐξέβαλεν, τὴν δὲ Θέκλαν ἔκρινεν κατακαῆναι. καὶ εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἀναστὰς ἀπίει εἰς τὸ θέατρον· καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάγκην τῆς θεωρίας. ἡ δὲ Θεέκλα ὥς ἄμνός ἐν ἐρήμῳ περισκοπεῖ τὸν ποιμένα, οὕτως ἐκείνη τὸν Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

<sup>463</sup> The Lipsius text adds the name Θεέκλα here.

<sup>464</sup> This word is εἶδεν in the Lipsius text.

<sup>465</sup> This word is ἀπίει in the Lipsius text.

## Translation

**21a** And the governor was greatly affected

**21b** and having had Paul scourged, he cast him out of the city, but Thecla he sentenced to be burned.

**21c** and immediately the governor left<sup>466</sup> to go to the theatre and all the crowd went out to the spectacle of Thecla.

**21d** But as a lamb in the desert looks<sup>467</sup> for the shepherd, thus this woman was searching for Paul.

**21e** and as she gazed at the crowd, she saw the Lord sitting as Paul

**21f** and she said, “As if I were not able myself to endure, Paul came to watch over me.”

**21g** And she observed him, keeping her eyes on him and he went up<sup>468</sup> into heaven.

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<sup>466</sup> Literally “went away”.

<sup>467</sup> Prefixes are losing their force in Koine Greek; although literally this has “looks around” it just means “looks”.

<sup>468</sup> ἀνίημι means, when transitive, to send up or let come up especially from the grave, when intransitive, to cease, to relax, to have relief. Here this means that Paul vanished into heaven. This is not the same verb as when Jesus becomes invisible in the Lukan Emmaus story, and again is not the same verb used of Jesus who ascends in Luke’s Acts.

## Commentary and Notes

21a Καὶ ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἔπαθεν μέγας,

21a And the governor was greatly affected

The governor was persuaded by the statements of Theocleia. He was moved that even a mother should react with such extreme suggestions. Violence of parents against children or children against parents is the subject of Greek theatre and poetry. It is a topic addressed by many cultures. It is commonly considered to be most unnatural. We do not quite understand what this means, that the governor was greatly affected or moved. Whom does he pity?

The governor must have found what was happening in the town with respect to Paul and Thecla to be so severe that it required immediate and drastic action. What is required by his judgment is less than what we might have expected for Paul and worse than we might have expected for Thecla. For Thecla we who know the story understand that all this is done to give glory to God, but in the ordinary course of events it is too harsh a punishment for such a crime.

21b καὶ τὸν μὲν Παῦλον φραγελλώσας ἔβαλεν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως < >, τὴν δὲ Θέκλαν ἔκρινεν κατακαῆναι.

21b and having had Paul scourged, he cast him out of the city, but Thecla he sentenced to be burned.

Paul is scourged. We hear about such beatings in his letters.<sup>469</sup> He is then cast out of the city. A person who is no longer provided for by the hospitality of the city is no longer a threat to the city. In the Acts of the Apostles 13: 50-51, we hear that Paul and Barnabas are both expelled from Antioch and after that they went to Iconium. This would be on Paul's first missionary journey. The working hypothesis for this thesis on the *Acts of Thecla* is that the third missionary journey of Paul is described. It is interesting to compare Luke's description to 21b in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. There is no reason to think that the *Acts of Thecla* is copying from the Acts of the Apostles here. The Lipsius text has the same verb but that is not enough to show copying.

50 οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι παρώτρυναν τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς

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<sup>469</sup> See 2 Cor 11: 24-25.

εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπήγειραν  
διωγμὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν, καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτοὺς  
ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων αὐτῶν. 51 οἱ δὲ ἐκτιναζάμενοι τὸν κονιορτὸν  
τῶν ποδῶν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἦλθον εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

50 But the Jews incited the devout and pious women and leading men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their boundaries. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.

In the *Acts of Thecla* Paul is not with Barnabas but he is going from Iconium to Pisidian Antioch. Perhaps there is some common oral source behind both of these readings but since there is not literary dependency one cannot know for sure. Note the mention of the women and of the leading men; in 11g Thamyras speaks of himself as a leading man, in fact number one of the city, πρῶτος τῆς πόλεως.

Thecla is sentenced to death, but a public death by fire. Like Polycarp, the attempt to burn her will result only in the understanding by the public that she is special and chosen by God as a witness to Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus’ death is the beginning of new life for the Christian community and eternal life for the world, so too the attempt to burn Thecla will give new life to her missionary and apostolic commitment and a life of faith to those who believe, having witnessed her miraculous rescue.

21c καὶ εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν < > ἀπίει ἐπὶ τὸ θέατρον·  
ὁ δὲ πᾶς < > ὄχλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν θεωρίαν Θεκλῆς.

21c and immediately the governor left to go to the theatre and all the crowd went out to the spectacle of Thecla.

The word ἀναστὰς in the Lipsius text appears to have been added for further dramatic refinement by a later scribe for there cannot be any reason to remove this word. That the governor was seated to give judgment is completely ordinary and his rising to leave is a simple embellishment, an added detail. The Lipsius text appears to be a later correction including the correct preposition for travel to the theatre, which is εἰς (καὶ εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἀναστὰς ἀπίει εἰς τὸ θέατρον).

Elliott translates the Lipsius text: “the whole multitude went out to witness the spectacle”.<sup>470</sup> In the Lipsius text this part of the drama is

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<sup>470</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 368.

expressed more accurately than in the Tischendorf text. Thecla herself is not a spectacle; it is the action of her being put to death that is the spectacle. The expression in the Lipsius text, ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάγκην τῆς θεωρίας (to the necessity of the spectacle), is translated more literally by Schneemelcher.<sup>471</sup> He has: “and all the crowd went out to the unavoidable spectacle.” That the spectacle is “unavoidable” is a later gloss.

The governor himself will be at the spectacle along with the crowd. This is disappointing in the unfolding drama since the readers or listeners might have hoped that the judge would have been above this source of common entertainment. One might have hoped that he would lament his harsh judgment and with suitable decorum and studied disinterest he would preserve at least the illusion of his objectivity by not attending.

The spectacle will attract a large crowd, for it is quite shocking that a young woman of an important family should be sentenced to such a violent public death for having done so little. The crowd, we can assume, will be composed of persons who attend for many different reasons. Some may attend because they have also been persuaded by Paul’s teaching, as Thecla was. Some others may attend because they see Paul’s teachings and Thecla’s lack of respect for her mother’s wishes as truly disgraceful. Still others may attend out of simple curiosity and presumably a range of other possible motives.

The expeditiousness (καὶ εὐθέως) of the move to the theatre gives a sense of inevitability. No one will intervene. No one will prevent her witness. We also find this commonly in the New Testament. The adverb, εὐθύς, is found forty-two times in Mark’s Gospel. That is quite a lot for a short Gospel of only sixteen chapters; a lot of things are happening quickly. The form, εὐθέως, is not found at all in Mark but is found nine times in the Acts of the Apostles; seven of these are in stories about Paul. The term is not used often in the *Acts of Thecla*. No ideas are proposed here about the reasons why such expressions are used. The Greek words are so very common; it seems that the adverb simply enhances a gripping tale.

21d ἡ δὲ < > ὥς ἄμυνος ἐν ἐρήμῳ περισκοπεῖ τὸν ποιμένα, οὕτως ἐκείνη τὸν Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

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<sup>471</sup> W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 358.



21d But as a lamb in the desert looks for the shepherd, thus this woman was searching for Paul.

It is typical of Lipsius to add the proper nouns for clarity as Θέκλα here. This phrase, ὥς ἀμνὸς ἐν ἐρήμῳ περισκοπεῖ τὸν ποιμένα, has no New Testament exact parallel. It does have several New Testament resonances, however. It reminds us of Jesus in the desert where he is tempted by Satan, concerning his divine power and authority, before he begins his ministry. It also has resonances of the teachings of Jesus about sheep without a shepherd and the lost sheep. None of these New Testament references has the exact meaning of this phrase in the *Acts of Thecla*. Here Thecla is continually searching for Paul; he is her new shepherd along with Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep.<sup>472</sup>

This phrase describes both Thecla's spiritual state and also her physical appearance. To the crowd she would appear to be looking around and searching for Paul, not weeping or crying out loud, or indignant because of this evil judgment or terrified of the fire. She remains the disciple seeking her teacher.

She has become a seeker, one who will follow the teachings of Christ wherever they take her. We can imagine her, as the story suggests, looking out into the crowds, searching for that serene focus of her heart, the one who has given her a new hope in life, a hope greater than life itself.

21e καὶ ἐμβλέψασα εἰς τὸν ὄχλον ἶδεν τὸν κύριον  
καθήμενον ὥς Παῦλον,

21e and as she gazed at the crowd, she saw the Lord sitting as Paul

The Lipsius text has εἶδεν instead of ἶδεν. The word εἶδεν is the common second aorist of ὁράω. It is more familiar, while ἶδε would usually be used as an imperative also from ὁράω but meaning “behold”. It can be found in the dictionary but is poetic found in Homer.<sup>473</sup> Here ἶδεν seems to mean “she beheld” or as above “she saw”. The more difficult reading is ἶδεν. Lipsius' εἶδεν is more likely to be the correction.

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<sup>472</sup> See Heb 13:20; this is one early way to refer to Jesus. It is unlikely that Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament. NRSV translates: “Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant”. However, see 1 Cor 9:7 where Paul uses the image of shepherd to refer to himself.

<sup>473</sup> *LSJ*, p. 817.

As she comes to the theatre she is overcome gazing at the crowd, and she has a heavenly revelation. It is a vision of Christ in the form of Paul. Christ is seated as a teacher, as Paul was seated in the prison. The vision seems to focus her; it is the relief that she needs in this circumstance of panic and terror.

Thecla's vision is not unlike that of Paul, in Galatians 1:15-17.

15 ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ 16 ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἑμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι, 17 οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἑμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν, καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. (NRSV)

This experience is greatly expanded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles where it is told as a story three separate times. The revelation of Galatians becomes a heavenly light and a voice in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Paul's case and in Thecla's case both are given purpose, courage and comfort by the revelation of Christ that they experience. We can only imagine how Thecla would have described her experience if she were to write a letter telling of it.

Notice that Thecla's revelation is not of "Jesus as a light" or "Jesus as a voice" but rather of "Jesus as Paul". The two compare closely. Paul will be blinded as part of his experience as Luke describes it, not as Paul describes it himself. This is why the light is so integral to the Lukan story. In Paul's own story it is as if he is being born again with the reference to the womb. Thecla sees Jesus but sitting in the posture of Paul. This is very important to the theology of the work. Tryphaena will see Thecla as another daughter. Onesiphorus sees Paul as an angel. It is the seeing of others in the way that God sees them that matters in this theology. When we look at others with faith we see Christ. Thecla sees

Paul but really she sees Christ. This is starkly compared to Thamyras who sees Thecla as his possession or as his shame or as the death of his shame, but he cannot see the saint.

21f καὶ εἶπεν Ὡς ἀνυπομονήτου μου οὔσης ἦλθεν Παῦλος θεάσασθαι με.

21f and she said, “As if I were not able myself to endure, Paul came to watch over me.”

The reader or listener has by now been led to think that this is a crisis and that Thecla is in need of something like this vision in order to endure these trials. There would be no shame in this since saints are human and fear is a normal human reaction. Thecla speaks now, explaining that the vision was not because she was unable to endure. Rather, Paul comes to watch over her in her test of endurance. The sentence has two meanings; the first that she would have endured even if she did not have the vision, the second that Paul has appeared as a gift to her to give her that courage to endure had she needed it—which in fact she did not. Still it was a wonderful gift to have such a vision. She is crediting Paul with coming to her and she speaks showing gratitude. It is difficult to show both of these meanings in English.

21g Καὶ προσεῖχεν αὐτῷ ἀτενίζουσα· ὁ δὲ εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀνίει.

21g And she observed him, keeping her eyes on him and he went up into heaven.

Ἀπίει in the Lipsius text means he “went away” into heaven. The meaning is not much different. Lipsius is using the manuscripts C and E and is avoiding manuscript A as he often does. Oddly Elliott translates “went up”.<sup>474</sup>

As she watches the vision of Christ, he ascends to heaven. In this action, it is Christ who appears like Paul, who has ascended. As the story goes, Paul himself, we know, is simply travelling outside of the city by now. This is not a premonition but a spiritual experience to strengthen her in her time of trouble. It is a gift of faith.

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<sup>474</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 368.

The ascent of Christ and her own ascent are placed here as a diptych in the story. Christ ascends to God on high, being a vision of the victorious and risen Christ who is accepted once and for all by Almighty God, after his earthly mission is completed. Thecla will ascend the pyre of her death, but she too will find in her ascent acceptance by God on high and a victory over death.

## Verse Twenty-two

**22a** Αἱ δὲ παιδίσκαι<sup>475</sup> καὶ < ><sup>476</sup> παρθένοι ἤνεγκαν τὰ<sup>477</sup> ξύλα < ><sup>478</sup> ἵνα Θέκλα κατακαῇ.

**22b** ὡς δὲ εἰσῆλθεν<sup>479</sup> γυμνή, ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν καὶ ἐθαύμασεν τὴν ἐπ’<sup>480</sup> αὐτῇ δύναμιν.

**22c** ἔστρωσαν δὲ τὰ ξύλα < ><sup>481</sup> οἱ δῆμιοι ἐπιβῆναι τῇ πυρᾷ.

**22d** ἡ δὲ < ><sup>482</sup> τύπον < ><sup>483</sup> σταυροῦ ποιησαμένη ἐπέβη τῶν ξύλων· οἱ δὲ ὑψήψαν.

**22e** καὶ μεγάλου πυρὸς λάμψαντος οὐχ ἤψατο αὐτῆς· < ><sup>484</sup>

**22f** ὁ γὰρ θεὸς σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἤχον ὑπόγαιον ἐποίησεν,

**22g** καὶ νεφέλη ἄνωθεν ἐπεσκίασεν ὕδατος πλήρης καὶ χαλάζης, καὶ ἐξεχύθη πᾶν τὸ κύτος, ὥς πολλοὺς κινδυνεύσαι τοῦ<sup>485</sup> ἀποθανεῖν

**22h** καὶ τὸ πῦρ σβεσθῆναι,<sup>486</sup> τὴν δὲ Θέκλαν σωθῆναι.

<sup>475</sup> The words Αἱ παιδίσκαι are Οἱ παῖδες in the Lipsius text. The gender is changed to suit the activity, as the gathering of firewood for a public execution is not likely to be done by girls.

<sup>476</sup> The Lipsius text has the article with the noun: αἱ παρθένοι.

<sup>477</sup> The article is not in the Lipsius text.

<sup>478</sup> The Lipsius text has καὶ χόρτον “and straw”.

<sup>479</sup> Instead of εἰσῆλθεν the Lipsius text has εἰσήχθη.

<sup>480</sup> Instead of ἐπ’ the Lipsius text has ἐν.

<sup>481</sup> The Lipsius text includes these words here: καὶ ἐκέλευσαν αὐτήν.

<sup>482</sup> The Lipsius text includes τὸν here.

<sup>483</sup> The Lipsius text includes τοῦ here.

<sup>484</sup> The Lipsius text includes τὸ πῦρ here and he eliminates the raised dot used for a partial stop.

<sup>485</sup> Here instead of τοῦ the Lipsius text has καί.

<sup>486</sup> In the Lipsius text there is no comma here but rather there is a comma after the word ἀποθανεῖν.

## Translation

**22a** Women servants and maidens brought wood in order to burn Thecla.

**22b** And as she went out naked, the governor wept and marvelled at the power in her.

**22c** The public labourers spread the wood for her to climb the pyre.

**22d** Making the sign of the cross, she stepped up onto the wood, and they set it alight underneath.

**22e** and the great blazing fire did not touch her.

**22f** for God had compassion and caused a tremor<sup>487</sup> under the earth,

**22g** and a cloud from above overshadowed them, full of rain and hail and the whole contents of it poured out, so that many were in danger of death

**22h** and the fire was put out, and Thecla was saved.

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<sup>487</sup> The sense here is that the tremor under the earth would include a rumble or threatening sound, not only a shaking.

## Commentary and Notes

22a Αἱ δὲ παιδίσκαι καὶ < > παρθένοι ἤνεγκαν ξύλα < > ἵνα  
Θέκλα κατακαῇ.

22a Women servants and maidens brought wood in order to burn  
Thecla.<sup>488</sup>

It is shocking to a modern readership that those who bring the wood for the fire are women. The ancient audience might or might not have been as surprised. On the one hand, much that was required for a wealthy young woman like Thecla<sup>489</sup> would normally be accomplished by female servants or slaves.<sup>490</sup> There is, however, more being said here. It is not because of their low status in society that these maidens are bringing wood. Thecla is being presented as a role model for young women in the story as a whole. On the other hand, it appears that later scribes correct the text here by substituting young men to bring wood for the fire.<sup>491</sup> This might be more believable in terms of the simple matter of employing a workforce, but it is not likely that this is only a matter of getting the job done. It is also saying something about Thecla's sainthood and about her as a role model for young women.

Who are these maidens and women servants and why are they participating in this way? Are they those who would like to support the status quo, where a young woman is expected to marry whomever her parents recommend? Are they the conservatives of ancient Iconium? Perhaps they offer a representation of all conservatives who would burn someone who steps outside of what society expects of her. When they are all females in the story, is this saying something particular about how it is the responsibility of the women themselves to find their freedom in society? One can imagine this story being told in the women's quarters of ancient households, and the laughter and wagging of fingers as they say to one another, you, you are one who brings wood for the fire. It is a cautionary tale, about what not to do, while Thecla's story is an example of what to do. It would be precisely these sorts of details that would make the *Acts of Thecla* a text that powerful men would want to suppress if they wanted women not to take leadership in Christianity.

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<sup>488</sup> Literally, "so that Thecla might be burnt".

<sup>489</sup> In the Acts of the Apostles 12:12-14, the slave of Mary is Rhoda, a female slave for a female householder.

<sup>490</sup> S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, p. 191.

<sup>491</sup> Manuscripts EF and G add οἱ παῖδες. Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, footnote to sect. 22 p. 250.

Again, maybe these women appear here in the narrative so that their role will be all the more dramatic when Thecla is freed from the pyre. As a matter of dramatic irony it has its own value. Their involvement is very significant, as will be the role of the women when Thecla is subjected to the beasts later in the story. There is much in this story that is about young women, how they are enslaved and how they claim freedom, what destructive fires they are constrained to prepare and how they support women victims. Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling compares the first judgment and ordeal with the second judgment and ordeal of Thecla. Figuratively the women servants might represent oppression here, while Thecla represents freedom. In the second ordeal the women who support Thecla might represent freedom. These gender political issues could be borne out in a study on the *Acts of Thecla* which has them as its subject.<sup>492</sup> The main subject of this study is the primacy of the Tischendorf text and so comments on gender politics must be kept to a minimum despite their importance.

Without these critical thoughts the natural balance of women and men bringing fuel for the fire would seem the obvious correction for a scribe whose consciousness has never been raised concerning these gender political matters. Adding men would just produce symmetry.

22b ὥς δὲ εἰσῆλθεν γυμνή, ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν καὶ ἐθαύμασεν τὴν ἐπ’ αὐτῇ δύναμιν.

22b And as she went out naked, the governor wept and marvelled at the power in her.

Lipsius has εἰσῆχθη from εἰσάγω which means “she was led in”. This verb can mean to be conducted with force or dragged in. It can also mean to herd animals. It is a strong contrast to the dignified “she went out”. The Lipsius reading could signify the greater suffering of the saintly Thecla and fits better with a later hagiography. Some might think that the more dignified reading shows the later saintly character better. It would be hard to choose. Lipsius, true to form, is choosing manuscripts EFG while Tischendorf is relying as usual on A and B. The use of ἐν instead of ἐπ’ appears to be a correction. In the Tischendorf text one could

<sup>492</sup> C. Janssen, U. Ochtendung, B. Wehn, *Transgressors*, work with gender political approaches and Thecla is addressed on pp. 19-24, 27-28, 33-34. See also E. Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla-Paulusschülerin wider Willen?*, pp. 75, 121.



translate “power upon her” as if it were her clothing,<sup>493</sup> but “in her” seems better to express the overall meaning without making the preposition do more work than is reasonable.

Her nakedness seems not to daunt her. She is seen by the governor as powerful in her nakedness. She must be confident and unafraid; this lack of shame and embarrassment may have been taken to testify to her innocence. It is relevant that Jesus was crucified naked.<sup>494</sup> The governor weeps. Is he weeping in remorse or in awe of her? We cannot know but we imagine her stately and courageous approach to such a terrible death as deeply moving. The power in her must be her spiritual power to face death. This is also the meaning of baptism; we die with Christ that we might rise with him.

There is little that is more impressive than those who are brave in the face of death. Perhaps the governor weeps for the dignity of her humanity. Perhaps his tears are meant to be an inspiration to those who hear or read the text. Are they too meant to weep for all the innocent who are tortured like Christ and all of his martyrs? Christ’s suffering is also accompanied by the weeping of the women (Lk 23:27). Jesus addresses those women saying, “Daughters of Jerusalem; weep not for me but for yourselves, and for your children”. Weeping for the death of the innocent is the work of the pious; it helps prevent further innocent suffering. Hiding atrocity is the surest way of allowing it to perpetuate itself. It is the work of good people to weep for the death of the innocent Christ and his innocent martyrs.

22c ἔστρωσαν δὲ τὰ ξύλα < > οἱ δῆμιοι ἐπιβῆναι τῇ πυρᾷ.

22c The public labourers spread the wood for her to climb the pyre.

Now that the wood has been collected the city workers or public labourers have the job of laying the fire. Elliott’s translation of οἱ δῆμιοι as “executioners” is odd, not that the word cannot be used in this way, as we find it in Aeschines, *Orator*, 2. 126 in the fourth century BCE. One might well ask, however, why it is in the plural here if it means executioner, and why are these executioners spreading wood. The

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<sup>493</sup> See for example Col 3:10, 12, 14. These are baptismal images and not irrelevant to the theology of the *Acts of Thecla*.

<sup>494</sup> Mk 15:24. See also Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Doubleday, New York, 1994, p. 953. “The normal Roman pattern would have been to crucify criminals naked.” Brown refers to various ancient authors who understand this normal pattern applies to Jesus and he discusses the New Testament terms for clothing, arguing that the clothes removed from Jesus were the garments next to the skin.

Lipsius text also has καὶ ἐκέλευσαν αὐτὴν “and commanded her”. It must be in light of this “commanding” that Elliott decides for “executioners”.

Reading the Tischendorf text, it seems clear that they are common folk. Both Lipsius and Tischendorf have the reading οἱ δῆμιοι. If indeed they are spreading wood, which is the work of common folk or public labourers, it is not likely that they also “command” Thecla. This exposes layers in the textual tradition. The Greek is difficult without the “command” and the story is difficult both with and without καὶ ἐκέλευσαν αὐτὴν. Without it, spreading wood does not indicate the necessity of climbing. With καὶ ἐκέλευσαν αὐτὴν there is the confusion about public workers giving commands. Common folk<sup>495</sup> or “public labourers” do not command beautiful, naked, rich, young women to do anything. Is this detail, which seems to be added, a further humiliation of the condemned Thecla who has lost all social status? Is this an addition to finesse the grammar which causes a confusion in the story or is this an advanced hagiography that could be compared to the humiliation of Jesus in his passion? Jesus was taunted by those who were “more common” than he was. This example cannot be decided with confidence and will not be counted in the conclusions.

Note that the fire is arranged with room for air to circulate. It will be arranged so that it burns quickly when lit from underneath. Thecla will climb up the wood heap expecting that she will die there.

22d ἡ δὲ τὸν < > τύπον < > σταυροῦ ποιησαμένη ἐπέβη τῶν ξύλων· οἱ δὲ ὑψήσαν.

22d Making the sign of the cross, she stepped up onto the wood, and they set it alight underneath.

It is very interesting that this could be the earliest reference to the “sign of a cross”. I have translated with the articles in English. The articles do not appear in the Tischendorf text but are in the Lipsius text where they are likely a later formulaic addition. I have assumed that the same meaning is in the Tischendorf text even if it appears in a less than formulaic expression. In a document about martyrdom and baptism it is not surprising that there is an emphasis on the cross. Thecla is known as

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<sup>495</sup> ὁ δῆμιος means “those of the people”, “belonging to the people”, or “those chosen by the people”. See *LSJ*, p. 386.

the first martyr.<sup>496</sup> In iconography saints who have been martyrs carry the martyr's cross. It is a small, usually black, cross held in the hand. Priestly blessings are also made in Eastern Christianity by tracing a cross in the air while holding a small cross.

The medieval promoter of the “sign of the cross” was Saint Cosmas<sup>497</sup> of Turkey; perhaps he was aware of the Thecla tradition. In Turkey she is highly venerated until today. Though intriguing, questions about the development of such historical details are outside the scope of this thesis.

A τύπος can be an impression or imprint. We do not know that Thecla has raised her hand to bless the people as a priest would. She may have. It is also possible that she has made the sign of the cross on the pyre with two pieces of wood. She may be carrying two pieces of wood held as a cross. Would she be doing this to show her union with Christ or as a kind of protection against being burned?

Another possibility, given the themes of the work as a whole, is that she is making this sign onto herself as a sign of her baptism in the absence of water. Perhaps she traced the cross onto herself with one or both of her hands. She may have crossed her arms to signify the cross.<sup>498</sup> It is not impossible even though ancient depictions have her most frequently in orans position, even when she is shown with the fire rather than with the beasts.<sup>499</sup> This might suggest she traced the sign as if it were a priestly blessing for those gathered.

A set shape of the cross of Christ may not yet have become standard. The “tau” cross is ancient as is the “plus sign” and the Saint Andrew’s cross is an X or “chi”. In later hagiographical depictions of Thecla we see the “plus sign”, “a lower case letter t” shape, and “the Greek letter *tau*”.<sup>500</sup> The Romans crucified criminals on several kinds of structures and hence the variety of depictions.

<sup>496</sup> She shares this honour with Stephen and Jesus. They are the only three to be called “the first martyr”. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14564a.htm> accessed 26 June, 2013.

<sup>497</sup> [http://www.orthodox-christian-comment.co.uk/sign\\_of\\_the\\_cross\\_and\\_its\\_meaning.htm](http://www.orthodox-christian-comment.co.uk/sign_of_the_cross_and_its_meaning.htm), Accessed 26 June, 2013. St Cosmas and St Thecla are both called “equal to the apostles”.

<sup>498</sup> S. McGinn, “The Acts of Thecla”, in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 826. She cites 2 Timothy 2:8.

<sup>499</sup> S. Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla*, pp. 215-237.

<sup>500</sup> A. Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*. On the front cover is an icon of Thecla and the cross. See also: [https://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&site=img&tpb=isch&source=hp&biw=1366&bih=673&q=St+Thecla+Martyr&oq=St+Thecla+Martyr&gs\\_l=img.3...2387.14571.0.16532.16.11.0.5.2.0.318.26.03.0j1j0j8.9.0...0...1ac.1.32.img..7.9.2008.U5pojs384dc](https://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&site=img&tpb=isch&source=hp&biw=1366&bih=673&q=St+Thecla+Martyr&oq=St+Thecla+Martyr&gs_l=img.3...2387.14571.0.16532.16.11.0.5.2.0.318.26.03.0j1j0j8.9.0...0...1ac.1.32.img..7.9.2008.U5pojs384dc). Accessed 21 January, 2014. And see: [http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com/ministry\\_resources/consecratedlife/windows\\_to\\_heaven.htm](http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com/ministry_resources/consecratedlife/windows_to_heaven.htm). Accessed 21 January, 2014. This last link shows Thecla with the *tau* shaped cross.

Martyrs are said to be baptised in blood if they have not yet been baptised with water. Baptism is a public witness, but clearly martyrdom is also a public witness and a stronger one. It is clear that the cross is what is relevant to Thecla at this point in the drama. She is naked and climbing up to her execution after a trial in which she was found guilty. Jesus in the Gospels is stripped of his clothing and there are no loin cloths in descriptions for the first hundred years or so.<sup>501</sup> The parallels with the trial and crucifixion of Jesus are obvious.<sup>502</sup>

Thecla steps up bravely. This cannot have been easy if she was naked and the heap of wood was high. It is remarkable that she is not restrained in any way. This too is a testament to her faith: she serves the Living God, a God of liberty. The workers light the fire from underneath, which is the normal way to light a fire. The upper layers of fuel will catch if the sticks underneath are alight.

22e καὶ μεγάλου πυρὸς λάμπαντος οὐχ ἥψατο αὐτῆς· < >

22e and the great blazing fire did not touch her.

The Lipsius text has the words τὸ πῦρ “fire” in the nominative as a help in understanding what touched her. It is more explicit and makes it easier for the reader to grasp the meaning. Neither text is grammatically superior to the other. Lipsius punctuates with the pause (the raised dot often referred to as the Greek semi-colon) coming after τὸ πῦρ as expected and Tischendorf uses the same punctuation mark after αὐτῆς.

The fire is obviously well constructed for soon it is a great blaze, and yet this phrase tells us that the fire does not touch Thecla. At this point in the narrative the fears of the readers and listeners are beginning to be relieved, for Thecla seems to be protected by God. It is miraculous that the fire does not burn her. The author is clearly sympathetic to Thecla in that, more than the fire not burning her, it does not even touch her.

22f ὁ γὰρ θεὸς σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἤχον ὑπόγειον ἐποίησεν,

22f for God had compassion and caused a tremor under the earth,

<sup>501</sup> Judith Couchman, *The Mystery of the Cross*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2009, p. 35. See also R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, p. 953. Brown refers to Melito of Sardis in the late second century on the naked body of Jesus. Brown also refers to John Chrysostom and Ephraem the Syrian on the naked body. The earliest example that Brown notes with a loincloth is found in the *Acts of Pilate* of the second century.

<sup>502</sup> S. McGinn, “The Acts of Thecla”, in *Searching the Scriptures*, pp. 809, 814. E. Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla—Paulusschülerin wider Willen?* pp. 133, 135.

The tremor under the earth is reminiscent of Matthew's crucifixion account Mt 27:51. Typically the comparable descriptions in the *Acts of Thecla* and the Gospels are not the same. In the Gospel the phrase is: καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη "the earth quaked".

The disturbance of the earth is understood as an act of God. This would be very helpful if the fire were well laid, because the disturbance would slow the flame. This dampening of the fire, by a tremor shifting the wood, is interpreted as divine intervention, a demonstration of God's compassion.

22g καὶ νεφέλη ἄνωθεν ἐπεσκίασεν ὕδατος πλήρης καὶ χαλάζης, καὶ ἐξεχύθη πᾶν τὸ κύτος, ὥς πολλοὺς κινδυνεύσαι τοῦ ἀποθανεῖν

22g and a cloud from above overshadowed them, full of rain and hail and the whole contents of it poured out, so that many were in danger of death

The Lipsius text substitutes the word καὶ for τοῦ.<sup>503</sup> This small change shows an enormous development in hagiography. Many actually dying from hail and rain makes the story much more fantastic. Such a change will make the text sound as if it is written much later. Tischendorf is following A and B as he often does, while Lipsius is following EFG here. Tischendorf notes the reading καὶ but rejects it as the later development which it must be. If one were to ask, in order to test Lipsius' theory, whether heresy is later removed, one would find that there is no point served in editing the text to eliminate the καὶ. If those who attempt to kill a saint die themselves of an act of God while the saint is saved, there is no heresy in that.<sup>504</sup>

The overshadowing cloud and the earth tremor are both features of divine intervention. Mary is overshadowed by the power of the Spirit at the conception (Lk 1:35).<sup>505</sup> The cloud overshadows Jesus at the transfiguration (Mk 9:7; Lk 9:34; Mt 17:5). The earth shakes at Jesus'

<sup>503</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 368. Oddly, as has been seen a number of times already, Elliott seems to be translating what is in the Tischendorf text at this point even though on the whole he is using the Lipsius text. Barrier translates Lipsius correctly, "so that many were at risk and died". J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 124.

<sup>504</sup> In the ancient world our contemporary questions concerning the problem of evil do not obtain. Many a population is killed or threatened to be killed in the scriptures at God's behest or by God's champions: See Ex 14:26-15:1; Judges 8:16-21; Hosea 13:7-8; Acts 5:5-10 as well as many other examples.

<sup>505</sup> ἐπισκιάζω is used five times in the New Testament but never with rain and hail.

death (Mt 27:51). Peter's shadow falls on the sick to heal them in Acts 5:15. Here we have the signs of Jesus' incarnation, transfiguration and death. There is not literary dependency but a creditable case could be made for the traditions sharing some oral knowledge of each other. The theological significance of Thecla's witness to Jesus is very clear. She is born anew in this baptism by fire and she is willing to die with Christ. She wishes only to be united to Christ and to be one with him, in the baptism of his death and resurrection.

These symbols of Jesus' story further unite Thecla's story with the story of Jesus. She is a Christ figure just as Stephen is. In martyrdom the martyr tells the story of Christ with her life, rather than with words in a treatise or sermon. The martyr lives the life and is willing to die the death of Christ. This is her witness.

The cloud pours forth rain and hail. This is more than sufficient to save Thecla. A rain storm is the most natural way for a fire to be put out. The text includes here the idea that, rather than only Thecla being in danger of death from the fire, the situation is dangerous to the point of death for many. This is an exaggeration to show that the rescue of Thecla is undoubtedly the will of God and not an accident of weather.

This is the interpretation of the believing author and listener or reader. The crowd who were frightened for their lives will certainly recognize the innocence and holiness of Thecla now. In the more advanced Lipsius text many die. Lipsius' text is more fantastic but not more encouraging of faithful response. Many readers will relate positively to the crowd which now has reason to believe in God's compassion. Thecla's holiness and Paul's message about Jesus and his teachings are seen as miraculously sanctioned.

22h καὶ τὸ πῦρ σβεσθῆναι, τὴν δὲ Θέκλαν σωθῆναι.

22h and the fire was put out, and Thecla was saved.

No comment is made concerning the death of any others, so we can assume that not only is Thecla saved but no one else is reported killed.

Here the sense of "saved" is the fundamental sense of her being saved from death, but there is certainly also a double meaning, for she is saved in Christ Jesus as a martyr (witness) to his good news. Those watching are "witnessed to". If most (or all) of those watching die, it is counterproductive of Thecla becoming known as a martyr.

This early form of martyrdom without death will eventually disappear from the hagiography of saints. By 249CE Apollonia of Alexandria in Egypt will throw herself into the fire and be burnt to ashes.<sup>506</sup> Apollonia will not cooperate with those who are torturing her—her witness is her death and so she hastens it. In the *Acts of Thecla* the witness does not include dying. It is the public expression of faith while living. This emphasis on life is reinforced in the traditional Jewish<sup>507</sup> description, the “Living God” in verses 17 and 37.

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<sup>506</sup> Joanne Turpin, *Women in Church History*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1990, p. 22. Turpin writes, “In a letter to the bishop of Antioch, Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, describes the terrible ordeals suffered by members of his congregation. Among the tragedies he recounts: ‘Next they seized the wonderful old lady Apollonia, battered her till they knocked out all her teeth, built a pyre in front of the city, and threatened to burn her alive unless she repeated after them their heathen incantations. She asked for a breathing space, and when they released her, jumped without hesitation into the fire and was burned to ashes.’” For more about Apollonia and Dionysius’ letter see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01617c.htm> accessed 26 June 2013.

<sup>507</sup> Dt 5:26; Josh 3:10; 1Sam 17:26,36; Psalm 42:2; 84:2; Jer 10:10; 23:36; Dan 6:26; Hosea 1:10

## Verse Twenty-three

**23a** Ἦν δὲ ὁ Παῦλος νηστεύων μετὰ Ὀνησιφόρου καὶ τῆς  
γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν τέκνων ἐν μνημείῳ καινῷ,<sup>508</sup> < ><sup>509</sup> ὥς<sup>510</sup>  
ἀπὸ Ἰκονίου εἰς Δάφνην πορεύονται.

**23b** ἡνίκα δὲ ἡμέραι πολλαὶ ἐγίνοντο,<sup>511</sup> νηστευόντες<sup>512</sup>  
< ><sup>513</sup> οἱ παῖδες εἶπον<sup>514</sup> τῷ Παύλῳ Πεινώμεν,<sup>515</sup> καὶ<sup>516</sup> οὐκ  
< ><sup>517</sup> εὔρομεν<sup>518</sup> ἄρτους ἀγοράσαι.<sup>519</sup>

**23c** κατέλιπεν γὰρ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος καὶ < ><sup>520</sup>  
Παύλῳ ἠκολούθησεν<sup>521</sup> πανοικί.

**23d** Παῦλος δὲ ἀποδυσάμενος<sup>522</sup> τὸν ἐπενδύτην < ><sup>523</sup> εἶπεν  
Ὑπαγε, τέκνον, ἀγόρασον ἄρτους πλείονας καὶ φέρε.

**23e** Ὡς δὲ ἠγόραζεν ὁ παῖς, εἶδεν Θέκλαν τὴν γείτονα, καὶ  
ἐθαμβήθη καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα, ποῦ πορεύῃ;

**23f** ἡ δὲ εἶπεν Παῦλον διώκω, ἐκ πυρὸς σωθεῖσα.

**23g** καὶ<sup>524</sup> ὁ παῖς εἶπεν Δεῦρο, ἀπαγάγω σε πρὸς αὐτόν·  
στενάζει γὰρ περὶ σοῦ καὶ προσεύχεται < ><sup>525</sup> ἡμέρας < ><sup>526</sup> ἕξ.

<sup>508</sup> The Lipsius text has ἀνοικτῷ instead of καινῷ.

<sup>509</sup> The Lipsius text has ἐν ὁδῷ ἐν ἧ here to begin this phrase and omits the word ὥς.

<sup>510</sup> As mentioned in the previous footnote, this word is omitted in the Lipsius text.

<sup>511</sup> Instead of ἐγίνοντο the Lipsius text has διήλθον.

<sup>512</sup> This word is in the form νηστευόντων in the Lipsius text.

<sup>513</sup> Here the additional pronoun, αὐτῶν, appears in the Lipsius text.

<sup>514</sup> The word order is different in the Lipsius text which reads: εἶπον οἱ παῖδες.

<sup>515</sup> The Lipsius text has a full stop here.

<sup>516</sup> The Lipsius text uses uppercase to begin this word: Καί.

<sup>517</sup> The words εἶχον πόθεν appear here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>518</sup> This word does not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>519</sup> Instead of ἄρτους ἀγοράσαι followed by a full stop, the Lipsius text reads ἀγοράσωσιν ἄρτους.

Note that there are different forms of the verb, the word order is reversed, and instead of a full stop Lipsius provides a partial stop with the raised dot.

<sup>520</sup> Here the Lipsius text includes the word: ἠκολούθει.

<sup>521</sup> This word does not appear in the Lipsius text. However, note that another form of the verb (the imperfect) was found preceding the proper noun and it is noted in the footnote immediately preceding this one.

<sup>522</sup> Instead of ἀποδυσάμενος the Lipsius text has ἀπεδύσατο.

<sup>523</sup> The Lipsius text has the word καὶ here.

<sup>524</sup> In the Lipsius text this word begins with κ in upper case.

<sup>525</sup> The Lipsius text includes the words καὶ νηστεύει here.

<sup>526</sup> The Lipsius text includes the word ἤδη here.



## Translation

**23a** As they are going from Iconium to Daphne, Paul was fasting with Onesiphorus and his wife and the children in a new tomb.<sup>527</sup>

**23b** At the time when many days had passed as they were fasting , the boys said to Paul, “We are hungry, and we have not found (the means or opportunity) to buy bread”.<sup>528</sup>

**23c** For Onesiphorus left the things of the world and followed Paul with all the household.

**23d** Paul taking off his cloak said, “Go, child, buy plenty of bread and bring it.”

**23e** While shopping, the boy saw Thecla, his neighbour,<sup>529</sup> and was astonished and said, “Thecla where are you going?”

**23f** And she said, “I seek Paul, I was saved from fire.”

**23g** And the boy said, “Come, I will take you to him, for he has been mourning on your behalf and praying for six days.”

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<sup>527</sup> Vivid present tenses are used representing in effect past actions.

<sup>528</sup> The Koine Greek use of εἶπομεν with ἄρτους ἀγοράσαι means “we are not able to buy bread”. This is a general comment and does not specify whether the problem is money or time or available bread. In English, in order to retain the common translation of εὕρισκω “I find” or “I discover”, I have added in brackets “the means or opportunity” but literally the meaning is more general than that.

<sup>529</sup> Τὴν γείτονα here means his fellow Iconian.

## Commentary and Notes

23a Ἦν δὲ ὁ Παῦλος νηστεύων μετὰ Ὀνησιφόρου καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν τέκνων ἐν μνημείῳ καινῷ, < > ὥς ἀπὸ Ἰκονίου εἰς Δάφνην πορεύονται.

23a As they are going from Iconium to Daphne, Paul was fasting with Onesiphorus and his wife and the children in a new tomb.

A new tomb is an open one; if no dead body or expensive clothing or objects are in the tomb it does not need to be closed. Lipsius has it that the tomb is open, along the road. There is no great difference in meaning between these two readings. Perhaps the Lipsius reading is a little clearer. The mention of newness has a stronger parallel to the burial of Jesus (see Lk 23:53) though it is not an exact copy.

53 καὶ καθελὼν ἐνετύλιξεν αὐτὸ σινδόνι, καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐν μνήματι λαξευτῷ οὗ οὐκ ἦν οὐδεὶς οὐπω κείμενος.

53 And taking it down he wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb cut in stone where no one yet was ever laid.

In John's Gospel (John 19:41-42) Jesus is described as buried in a μνημεῖον καινόν "a new tomb" in a garden. In the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 27:60) the tomb is also new but it is Joseph's own "new tomb", presumably for his own burial. This tradition of the "new tomb" is quite strong, being found in Luke, Matthew and John. There may be a patterning of the *Acts of Thecla* on the oral tradition of Jesus' burial, or it may be that new tombs are just very convenient places to shelter.

Paul is travelling with Onesiphorus and his family on the road from Iconium to Daphne<sup>530</sup> and they are all fasting. They have come to a new tomb where they have taken rest and shelter and they are making religious observances with their fasting. The fasting may well be a part of the mourning process since they believe that Thecla is at least under the death sentence and at worst already dead.

The new tomb may well be a reference to Jesus' burial in a new tomb in the Gospels, but it may also simply be a convenient cave cut into the rock which is available to these travellers. The tomb only needs to be closed when a body is placed in it. Ascetics living, praying and fasting in tombs

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<sup>530</sup> This is not Daphne, a suburb of Syrian Antioch.

is an early Christian paradigm. Perhaps the best known tombs for this purpose are the Roman catacombs.<sup>531</sup> The practice symbolizes leaving this world and concentrating only on the next life. Does this tradition begin here with this story of Saint Paul? We know that the story of Thecla is popular in the first four centuries. She is the best known of all women saints in this period. Similar stories of ascetic dwellings exist concerning the Greek Cynics. Diogenes of Sinope was reputed to live in a large earthenware jar or tub in the fourth century BCE.<sup>532</sup>

Paul is travelling with Onesiphorus and Lectra and their two sons, Silas and Zeno. The sons are referred to in verse 2 above.<sup>533</sup> The two youths had gone out onto the road to meet Paul. The whole family is obviously dedicated to Paul and to the Christian message. Onesiphorus and Lectra seem to have no objection to itinerant life, no matter how difficult it might be for them and for their children. They obviously lived comfortably in Iconium. Now, after Paul and Thecla have been accused of wrongdoing, perhaps it is also practical for them to leave Iconium at least for a time, because their association with Paul and Thecla might make it difficult for them to live peacefully in their own home. Vigilante activity would have been frowned upon by governors and leaders during Roman rule, yet it still would have occurred.

Aside from such considerations, we do not know that there is a reason for the family to flee. Perhaps they have heard the message of Paul and wish to follow it in the same way that Thecla wishes to live this message. Itinerancy is an ancient form of leaving behind the luxuries of wealthy living. In the Gospels, when Jesus sends out the disciples they are instructed to be conservative in what they take with them (for example, Mt 10: 9-10). Thecla is a missionary like Paul in that she is itinerant. Women and men prophets who also travelled were among the earliest ancient adherents of the Jesus movement.<sup>534</sup>

23b ἡνίκα δὲ ἡμέραι πολλαὶ ἐγίνοντο, νηστεύοντες < > οἱ παῖδες εἶπον τῷ Παύλῳ Πεινῶμεν, καὶ οὐκ < > εὕρομεν ἄρτους ἀγοράσαι.

<sup>531</sup> James Stevenson, *The Catacombs, Life and Death in Early Christianity*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978, pp. 24-25.

<sup>532</sup> Nicholas Geoffrey Lemprière Hammond, *A History of Greece*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, p. 591.

<sup>533</sup> Verse 2 reads, "Now a certain man, named Onesiphorus, hearing that Paul was approaching Iconium, went out to meet him with his children, Silas and Zeno and his wife, Lectra, in order that he might receive him as a guest, for Titus described to him in detail Paul's kind of appearance, for he (Onesiphorus) did not see him in the flesh but only in the spirit."

<sup>534</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1998, pp. 363-368.

23b At the time when many days had passed as they were fasting, the boys said to Paul, “We are hungry, and we have not found (the means or opportunity) to buy bread”.

The first variant does not affect the meaning of the sentence to a large extent; however, the addition of εἶχον πόθεν could change the meaning significantly. With the negative particle it means “they had nothing” with which to buy bread as Elliott translates. It will soon be clear in the story that they have neither bread nor money with them, since Paul will offer his cloak to be used to bargain for bread. The additional words here are simply a clarification and therefore probably a later addition.

This story is reminiscent of the disciples who advise Jesus to send the crowd away so that they can buy something to eat, before the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Mk 6:36). Here the emphasis is on the boys who would have to be cared for whether the family was in principle fasting or not. The young and the old are not able to fast like adults, as they weaken and become sick much more quickly than adults.

Onesiphorus must have been a man of some means, since his sons seem to use money. They do not say that no one has offered them bread but rather that they have not been able “to buy bread”. Travellers would stop to refresh themselves at various places.<sup>535</sup> Homes kept rooms for travellers and various inns existed along major roads. Sometimes food, drink, balms or other comforts might have been offered or sold, while at other times only a space to sleep safely was offered. They could have been travelling for up to six days, yet they cannot have been very far from Iconium or some settlement near Iconium where the boy will meet Thecla in the marketplace. This verse might also mean that the boys did not have the ability to buy bread, meaning they did not bring money, because in 23b Paul gives them his cloak to barter. It could also mean that they stopped to buy drinks or perhaps find lodging, but there was no bread available. It could also mean that there was no person who was willing to give or sell them bread. Perhaps the boys spent the money they had and would have been willing to barter their possessions for food. We cannot know. These are gaps in the narrative and any solutions will remain speculative. The narrative portrayal of the family is, however, of a wealthy family. It would be one thing if Onesiphorus or Lectra had money or if their stewards used money to provide for the household, but for their sons to use money probably means that there was plenty of

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<sup>535</sup> L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, pp. 89-90, 204.

money in the family. The leaving without much money shows their commitment to their faith as well as their confidence in Paul.

23c κατέλιπεν γὰρ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Ὀνησιφόρος καὶ < > Παύλῳ ἠκολούθησεν πανοικί.

23c For Onesiphorus left the things of the world and followed Paul with all the household.

The difference between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts is the form of ἀκολουθέω which is used. The imperfect tense in Lipsius gives more a sense of continual following as Onesiphorus fasts and travels with Paul. The aorist of the Tischendorf text agrees with κατέλιπεν and gives a sense of suddenness. Either choice is acceptable.

Leaving things for the sake of marriage or for the sake of God is well known in the New Testament<sup>536</sup> and is based on similar actions in the Torah, where the original idea in Genesis is to leave parents and to cling to one's wife.<sup>537</sup> In the *Acts of Thecla* this following Paul is a form of following God. It is not marriage to Paul; rather, the metaphor is used to signify a new focus in life.

This verse seems to mean that Onesiphorus has left all his money and valuables at home. He has not brought food. He is not able to go forth into the town to buy food because he has nothing with which to pay and nothing to trade. He has trusted that following Paul would be enough for him and for his household. The fact that his sons would need to eat seems not to have occurred to him.

Was this early enough in Paul's ministry, that the message of Jesus' return was one of immediacy? Was it because they all left in such a hurry due to Paul's legal problems? Or was it simple neglect of practical forethought? It is hard to know. In any case there seems to be no prolonged difficulty since Paul himself is ready to help.

23d Παῦλος δὲ ἀποδύσαμενος τὸν ἐπενδύτην < > εἶπεν Ὑπαγε, τέκνον, ἀγόρασον ἄρτους πλείονας καὶ φέρε.

23d Paul taking off his cloak said, "Go, child, buy plenty of bread and bring it.

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<sup>536</sup> See Lk 5:28; 19:5, 21; Mk 10:7; Eph 5:31.

<sup>537</sup> See Gen 2:24; Dt 25:5.

The Lipsius text adds καί and creates two clauses with finite verbs. There is no difference in meaning. The Tischendorf is the more polished grammar here, but the Lipsius could be seen as a simplification. The simplification might be a help to readers. Neither text appears to be more original on the strength of the inclusion or omission of καί .

Since Onesiphorus is not able to give more money to his sons to purchase enough food at the markets, Paul offers his cloak. He speaks in a familiar and friendly way to the youth. He encourages him to buy perhaps a bit more than is needed. In the narrative Paul is portrayed as assuming that his cloak will fetch enough money to feed the family well. Paul's selfless act shows his love and trust of Onesiphorus and his acceptance of responsibility for the possible reasons that they have left Iconium in such an unprepared state. They are in a tomb outside of Iconium and on the road to Daphne. In the narrative it is assumed that the boy has gone back to Iconium for they would not have sent him to discover a new place especially while in such a state of hunger.

23e Ὡς δὲ ἡγόραζεν ὁ παῖς, εἶδεν Θεκλὰν τὴν γείτονα,  
καὶ ἐθαμβήθη καὶ εἶπεν Θεκλὰ, ποῦ πορεύῃ;

23e While shopping, the boy<sup>538</sup> saw Thecla, his neighbour, and was astonished and said, "Thecla where are you going?"

While Onesiphorus' son was shopping he saw Thecla. He knew her of course. In the ancient world it was very important to know who lived in your town. Thecla lived next door to Onesiphorus and so the boy would have seen her many times.

He is astonished because when he and his family and Paul were leaving Iconium, Thecla was mounting the pyre to be burnt alive as a punishment for her unusual behaviour in refusing to marry Thamyris. He is astonished that she is alive and also astonished that she is in the same markets. It is indeed a most amazing coincidence.

The boy does not ask how it is that she is alive but rather he asks about her destination. He is interested to know where she is going, probably because he wishes to invite her to come along with him back to his family and to Paul.

23f ἡ δὲ εἶπεν Παῦλον διώκω, ἐκ πυρὸς σωθεῖσα.

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<sup>538</sup> Literally this is "while the boy was shopping".

23f And she said, “I seek Paul, I was saved from fire.”

The answer is that she is seeking Paul. This is what is most important in her life still. That she was saved from being burnt to death is further information added to clear up any confusion. The main reason for her not marrying Thamyras is that she has become committed to the way of Christ as it is taught by Paul. She seeks Paul since he is the source of information concerning her new life.

This is the first time that the reader or listener is aware that Thecla has come through her trial with even more conviction to live her new life. She does not go back to her mother’s home nor does she attempt to take refuge with Thamyras. She has not yet left Iconium, but the marketplace setting indicates that she no longer lives at home. She has become itinerant, seeking after Paul. We do not know how she has managed to regain her clothing and the things that she needs to travel. It has been six days since the pyre. As she enters Antioch, she appears attractive, so the reader fills in the gaps in the narrative with her somehow acquiring garments befitting her social class and perhaps useful objects for travel.

We are aware now that she is still filled with the same resolve that led her with such bravery to mount the pyre. This is a wonderful high point in the unfolding drama for the audience. They know that she is not only alive but she is still confident in her new found faith.

23g και ὁ παῖς εἶπεν Δεῦρο, ἀπαγάγω σε πρὸς αὐτόν·  
στενάζει γὰρ περὶ σοῦ καὶ προσεύχεται < > ἡμέρας < > ἕξ.

23g And the boy said, “Come, I will take you to him, for he has been mourning on your behalf and praying for six days.”

The Lipsius text adds the information that Paul was fasting as well as praying already for six days. This is a reiteration of information gained earlier in this verse. There could be no reason to omit it. It is therefore likely to be a later expansion.

In the story, it must be a wonderful surprise to Thecla that the youth can take her to Paul. It is made clear that Paul’s prayer and mourning on account of his concern for Thecla. Paul’s concern for her would also be a source of great joy. One could imagine the staging of this sequence with wonderful surprise and consolation.

No mention is made of Paul's cloak. Does Thecla have money and food with her which she can share, or is the cloak already sold? The narrative does not give us any information which can help us answer these questions. What about dinner? It has paled into insignificance in light of this remarkable meeting of Thecla and Onesiphorus' son in the marketplace. No doubt they will go back with some food.



## Verse Twenty-four

**24a** Ἡ<sup>539</sup> δὲ ἐπέστη ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον, <sup>540</sup> ὅπου ἦν<sup>541</sup> Παῦλος<sup>542</sup>  
κεκλικῶς <sup>543</sup> τὰ γόνατα

**24b** καὶ προσευχόμενος<sup>544</sup> καὶ λέγων Σῶτερ Χριστέ,<sup>545</sup> μὴ  
ἀψάσθω Θεέκλης τὸ πῦρ, ἀλλὰ παράστα<sup>546</sup> αὐτῇ, ὅτι σὴ ἐστίν.<sup>547</sup>

**24c** ἡ δὲ ὀπισθεν ἐστῶσα ἐβόησεν Πάτερ, ὁ ποιήσας τὸν  
οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν,

**24d** ὁ τοῦ ἁγίου σου<sup>548</sup> παιδὸς < ><sup>549</sup> πατήρ, εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι  
ἔσωσάς με < ><sup>550</sup> ἵνα Παῦλον ἴδω.<sup>551</sup>

**24e** καὶ<sup>552</sup> ἀναστὰς Παῦλος εἶδεν αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν Θεὲ  
καρδιογνώστα,

**24f** ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

**24g** εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι ὁ ἡρετισάμην<sup>553</sup> ἐτάχυνάς < ><sup>554</sup> μου  
ἐπακούσας.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> The Lipsius text has Ἡ Ως.

<sup>540</sup> There is no comma in the Lipsius text here.

<sup>541</sup> These two words ὅπου ἦν do not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>542</sup> This proper name, Παῦλος in the Lipsius text, is in the dative in apposition to κεκλικότι.

<sup>543</sup> Instead of κεκλικῶς the Lipsius text has κεκλικότι. The Tischendorf has Paul bending the knees in the nominative as subject of the sentence, rather than as Lipsius has it with Paul in the dative case.

<sup>544</sup> Instead of προσευχόμενος the Lipsius text has προσευχομένῳ in apposition to Παύλῳ.

<sup>545</sup> Instead of λέγων Σῶτερ Χριστέ, the Lipsius text has λέγοντι Πάτερ Χριστοῦ, here. To this point the Lipsius text reads: Ἡ Ως δὲ ἐπέστη ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον Παῦλος κεκλικότι τὰ γόνατα καὶ προσευχομένῳ καὶ λέγοντι Πάτερ Χριστοῦ,

<sup>546</sup> Instead of παράστα the Lipsius text has πάρεσο.

<sup>547</sup> Lipsius has a comma here instead of a full stop. Lipsius has one long sentence rather than the two that Tischendorf has.

<sup>548</sup> The words ἁγίου σου do not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>549</sup> Here the Lipsius text has these additional words: τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ σου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

<sup>550</sup> The Lipsius text includes the words ἐκ πυρός here.

<sup>551</sup> This portion of the Lipsius text reads: ὁ τοῦ παιδὸς τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ σου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πατήρ, εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι ἔσωσάς με ἐκ πυρός, ἵνα Παῦλον ἴδω.

<sup>552</sup> In the Lipsius text this word begins in upper case.

<sup>553</sup> Instead of ἡρετισάμην the Lipsius text has ἡρώτησα.

<sup>554</sup> The Lipsius text includes the words μοι καὶ here.

<sup>555</sup> These two words are in reverse word order in the Lipsius text which reads εἰσήκουσάς μου. The resultant Lipsius text reads: εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι ὁ ἡρώτησα ἐτάχυνάς μοι καὶ εἰσήκουσάς μου.

## Translation

- 24a** And she came to the tomb where Paul was kneeling<sup>556</sup>
- 24b** and praying and saying, “Saviour Christ, do not let the fire touch Thecla, but stand by her, for she is yours.”
- 24c** And standing behind she cried out, “Father, maker of heaven and earth,
- 24d** Father of your Holy Child, I praise you for you saved me so that I could see Paul.”
- 24e** Paul stood up and saw her and said, “O God, knower of hearts,
- 24f** Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 24g** I praise you for you did quickly what I asked, having heard me.”

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<sup>556</sup>This is a perfect participle and literally means: “Paul having bent the knees” or “Paul having knelt” and praying (present participle) and saying . . . The idea is that he knelt before he prayed and continued to kneel while he prayed. This is the same meaning in Lipsius’ text but the participles in the Lipsius text are in the dative.

## Commentary and Notes

24a Ἡ δὲ ἐπέστη ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον, ὅπου ἦν Παῦλος κεκλικῶς τὰ γόνατα

24a And she came to the tomb where Paul was kneeling

The Lipsius text adds Ὡς and removes ὅπου and the verb to be and changes the cases in order to produce a proper dependent clause. After Ὡς the verb ἐφίστημι can have a special meaning in reference to apparitions when used with the dative.<sup>557</sup> The sense would be something like: while he was kneeling and praying, she appeared in the tomb to Paul. This has the resonances of advanced hagiography. One might translate the Lipsius text using this special sense or just translate the datives as datives of the indirect object of advantage<sup>558</sup> perhaps (she came to the tomb *to Paul* or *for Paul*: for his benefit). In any case, it is more sophisticated than the Tischendorf text.

When Thecla came to the tomb Paul was absorbed in prayer. She saw him but he did not see her. They must have approached quietly or else Paul must have been very deeply in prayer. There is no word here of Onesiphorus or Lectra or either of their sons. Thecla's approach is what we are following in the narrative now.

Kneeling is more a Gentile posture<sup>559</sup> for prayer than a Jewish one,<sup>560</sup> but it does occur in Isaiah 45:23, 1 Kgs 8:54 and Ezr 9:5, as well as in the Synoptic Gospels and in Paul's letters and Acts. There are sixteen occurrences in the New Testament. See for example: Mk 1:40 where the leper kneels before Jesus saying, "If you will, you can make me clean." Jesus himself kneels at the agony to pray, "thy will be done" in Lk 22:41-42.

24b καὶ προσευχομένος καὶ λέγων Σῶτερ Χριστέ, μὴ ἀψάσθω Θέκλης τὸ πῦρ, ἀλλὰ παράστα αὐτῇ, ὅτι σή ἐστιν.

24b and praying and saying, "Saviour Christ, do not let the fire touch Thecla, but stand by her, for she is yours."

<sup>557</sup> *LSJ*, p. 745, entry B, III, ref. to Herodotus 1. 34, cf. 7.14 and Lk 2:9. Those to whom the dream or vision appears are in the dative.

<sup>558</sup> W. Goodwin, *A Greek Grammar*, p. 247. See also J. Brooks and C. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, p. 33.

<sup>559</sup> Robert Flacelière, *Daily Life in Greece at the Time of Pericles*, Phoenix, London, 1965, p. 194.

<sup>560</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *The Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible*, Sterling Publishing, New York, 2005, p. 782.

The Tischendorf form παράστα is difficult. Several possibilities exist. It seems to be an imperative of παρίστημι in its context. It could be a misspelling or simplification of the second aorist middle imperative singular, normally παραστάσο.<sup>561</sup> Another possibility is that it is a Koine form of the second aorist imperative active (intransitive) as is ἀνάστα (for ἀναστῆθι) in Acts 12:7.<sup>562</sup> In Acts it is “stand up!” The form in the *Acts of Thecla*, 24b is “stand beside!” It could mean “stand by” with the dative of the personal pronoun in the sense of “defend” or “help”.<sup>563</sup>

The Lipsius text uses πάρεσο, the imperative of πάρεμι<sup>564</sup> or perhaps of παρίημι rather than the imperative of παρίστημι. Either of these is a little less difficult. The image of Jesus “standing” in the fire beside Thecla is a strong metaphor. The verb πάρεμι “be present by” has a less odd literal sense as the presence of Christ would be entirely spiritual, there being no body of any kind needed for “standing”. The basic meaning of παρίημι is “allow to pass”. In this sense the verb can have an understood infinitive and can be constructed with a dative of the person allowed.<sup>565</sup> In the sentence, this would mean, “Let not the fire touch Thecla, but allow to her (to be safe from it), for she is yours.” The form of either verb would be the present imperative middle singular like τίθεσο of the verb τίθημι. There is in both cases a problem with recognizing the stem of either πάρεμι or παρίημι. This is seen most clearly in the lack of the circumflex accent to compensate for the absorption of the stem’s vowels.<sup>566</sup> These are still two of the better options in this context. The meaning of the sentence with either of these verbs could be understood as more accurate, since Jesus cannot literally stand with Thecla in the fire, with the exception that there is the meaning of παρίστημι to “help” or “defend” with the dative personal pronoun.

<sup>561</sup> David Holly and Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, 1977, p. xxxii. And see also Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 141. More helpful is Blass, Debrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 48 paragraph 95 (3) which lists the form ἀνάστα in Acts 12:7 meaning: “rise up”.

<sup>562</sup> Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 1993, p. 389. Zerwick and Grosvenor suggest the second aorist imperative active (intransitive) ἀνάστα (for -στῆθι).

<sup>563</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1340 παρίστημι, B. 2.

<sup>564</sup> *LSJ*, p. 487 εἰμί see middle imperative form ἔσσο.

<sup>565</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1340 παρίημι, IV. 2.

<sup>566</sup> Eric G. Jay, *New Testament Greek*, SPCK, 1961, London, pp. 109-118. This grammar explains carefully concerning verbal morphology about the contraction of vowels, or their absorption and the corresponding changes to accents.

To sum up, both texts are difficult. The verbs are probably both imperatives. The meanings are different. The Lipsius text has the possibility of a more Gnostic meaning, since in these suggestions the meanings are either to ask Jesus to be spiritually present or ask God to let her pass through fire. In this case Lipsius is choosing the text that could more easily be interpreted as later though it is not truly unorthodox. The Tischendorf text is not more difficult or less developed. Neither is it more correct. They are both difficult choices.

Paul is praying out loud. The narrator tells the readers or listeners what Paul is saying and the readers also imagine that Thecla can hear. She must have been touched that Paul was praying for her to Jesus Christ. Paul addresses Jesus as Saviour Christ. This is a reference both to the saving actions of Jesus that we know in the Gospels and to Thecla's salvation from the fire. These words are spoken by Paul as reported by an omniscient narrator. It might also be a reference to Paul's own experiences of being saved by Christ. The Lipsius text addresses the prayer to the Father of Christ rather than to Saviour Christ. There are a great variety of addresses in the manuscripts including a Trinitarian formula in manuscript G which is probably a significantly later correction. "Saviour Christ" comes from manuscript C and suits the context best because Thecla is saved having made the sign of the cross.

If it is a way of invoking this action of Jesus, that he would save Thecla from the fire, it follows that Paul is being portrayed as having no knowledge of what has happened. Paul is not yet thought to be so saintly that he cannot be portrayed as mistaken about this information. This shows that the *Acts of Thecla* is likely not to be a late account written after Paul is thought to be a great saint. There are several places in the *Acts of Thecla* where Paul is far less grand than we will eventually know him to be in his developed hagiography. Even in the Acts of the Apostles Paul has a more highly developed hagiography. We are indeed very fortunate to have the *Acts of Thecla* with this early account of Paul the man and the apostle.

Paul proclaims in his prayer what many of the readers and listeners knew, that Thecla belongs to Christ. He prays that the Saviour Christ will not let the fire even so much as touch her and that Christ will continually stand by her. More than praying that Christ will continually stand by her, Paul prays that she is Christ's: that is that she belongs to Christ. This is the language of those who are baptised into Christ. They are Christ's own. They belong to the body of Christ. They are joined to Christ in his death and resurrection. Thecla has now experienced that belonging to

Christ by her witness at the pyre. She is baptised by fire as a martyr. Even though she has been saved from the fire, her willingness to die is her witness. She has proven that she belongs to Christ.

24c ἡ δὲ ὀπισθεν ἐστῶσα ἐβόησεν Πάτερ, ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν,

24c And standing behind she cried out, “Father, maker of heaven and earth,

Now Thecla prays to God the Father rather than to Jesus Christ. She prays in joy to God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth. This is a very Jewish way to pray, recalling the first chapters of Genesis. It is a way of referring to Paul as part of this wonderful creation which she still enjoys. Her time to die and to be united to Christ for eternity has not yet come.<sup>567</sup>

As Thecla prays her voice is loud; ἐβόησεν means she cried out, not that she simply spoke. Her exuberance is very dramatic as if the scene is staged for reenactment by early communities. She is praying to God the Father, the creator, which might indicate that she is being characterised as coming from a Jewish family or has had some experience as a God-fearer attached to a synagogue. There is nowhere in Paul’s letters where he describes the creation of the heavens and the earth, and this is the precise terminology of Genesis in the LXX.<sup>568</sup> If Thecla has not heard this language from Paul in the story, it is unlikely that she would know it. The readers or listeners understand that she is relating to God as father. They will have noticed that her earthly father is absent, and that her relationship to God shows special devotion to God as a father-figure.

This passage is characterizing her as having a history with the Jewish community. This is interesting alongside the fact that there is no attention to eating or washing according to Jewish customs in the story. Perhaps the story originated among Jews and found its way to Gentiles. Perhaps the author is a Gentile who has become a follower of Jesus the Jew. After all this reference to God comes from the very first verse of the Torah; one would not have to know a lot about Judaism to know this verse.

24d ὁ τοῦ ἁγίου σου παιδὸς < > πατήρ,  
εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι ἔσωσάς με < > , ἵνα Παῦλον ἴδω.

<sup>567</sup> Paul writes in Phil 1:23 that he would rather die and be with Christ. He is clear though that it is also a blessing to be alive so that he can be with those whom he cares about in Philippi.

<sup>568</sup> Gen 1:1: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

24d Father of your Holy Child, I praise you for you saved me so that I could see Paul.”

This further addressing of God, as the Father of his Holy Child, is very beautiful. In the Lipsius text the address is more stylized, more developed, and more in keeping with New Testament references.<sup>569</sup> In Lipsius it is: ὁ τοῦ παιδὸς τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ σου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πατήρ. The translation is: the Father of your beloved child Jesus Christ. The addition of the words ἐκ πυρός in the Lipsius text are a simple clarification.

In this further address to God according to Tischendorf,<sup>570</sup> Thecla refers to Jesus Christ as God’s Holy Child. It is a beautiful address for God though not an address that we know from the New Testament. Thecla praises God because she is saved and able to see Paul again.

24e και ἀναστὰς Παῦλος εἶδεν αὐτήν καὶ εἶπεν Θεὲ καρδιογνώστα,

24e Paul stood up and saw her and said, “O God, knower of hearts,

Paul stands and presumably turns around to see Thecla. He has heard her praying. His seeing her inspired him to further prayer. He continues his prayer standing and now adds to the praise of God the Father. He is no longer petitioning Jesus for Thecla’s safety. Now he is joining her in praising God. His address is also beautiful: O God, knower of hearts. He must mean that God knew the wishes of his heart and Thecla’s. His prayer was that she would live. Her prayer was to see Paul again.

Paul’s prayer may have been partly motivated by the fact that it would have been more just for him to go to the pyre than her. She would never have been in her situation if it had not been for him. We are not sure if his guilt for her presumed death was a motivating factor in his prayer, but it could have been, given the narrative structure of the story.

Thecla, we might think, was concentrated on her union with Christ in his death and resurrection until she was freed from the fire and then she

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<sup>569</sup> For example Mark 9:7.

<sup>570</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 131 footnote 12. Barrier changes back to the Tischendorf at this point and offers an argument from Schmidt, *Acta Pauli*, 41.

sought Paul, for he was the source of her knowledge of Jesus Christ.<sup>571</sup>  
The compound noun καρδιογενῶστα is found in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>572</sup>

24f ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

24f Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This form of direct address to God is ordinary for Paul. It is well attested in his letters.<sup>573</sup> It echoes Thecla's prayer and makes more specific reference to Jesus not only as Holy (a term used of saints and members of the community) but also as Lord<sup>574</sup> which is an affirmation of Christ's superior status to anyone who simply belongs to the community.

24g εὐλογῶ σε ὅτι ὁ ἡρετισάμην ἐτάχυνάς < > μου  
ἐπακούσας.

24g I praise you for you did quickly what I chose, having heard me."<sup>575</sup>

Lipsius has ἡρώτησα the aorist active from ἐρωτάω "I ask" and the additional words μοι καὶ. The preference for the active voice and the addition of the dative pronoun are a simplification. The addition of the conjunction is helpful with the three verbs here.

This phrase in the Tischendorf text is strange and difficult because it could mean that Paul imagines that God has freed Thecla just then and she appeared miraculously in the tomb, having been taken by God directly from the pyre and placed in front of him. This would be such a magical act that it would have to be the least likely acceptable interpretation.

Perhaps what is meant is that Paul has been praying now for six days and this is only a short time to pray for such a monumental result. For Thecla to appear there with him would have been astonishing to Paul in the

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<sup>571</sup> There is nothing in this to indicate any romance as Barrier suggests. J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 132. The comparison that Barrier makes with Chariton is untenable. The story here is markedly different, there are no pirates, no treasures of gold, no secret hidings, no petitioning of parents to marry, no weddings, no children who secretly belong to another husband, no fine ladies masquerading as maids, etc.

<sup>572</sup> Acts 1:24; 15:8. Similar references include Lk 16:15.

<sup>573</sup> See for example Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; Col 1:3.

<sup>574</sup> This is also the ordinary term for head of household. In this case since Jesus is already dead, the reference is to the household of faith. Jesus is the head of the body the church. Jesus is the head of the community forming in his name.

<sup>575</sup> One could translate with a temporal adverbial clause: "when you heard me."



narrative since he could not have known that Onesiphorus' son had happened upon Thecla in the marketplace.

## Verse Twenty-five

**25a** < ><sup>576</sup> Εἶχον<sup>577</sup> δὲ ἄρτους πέντε καὶ λάχανα καὶ ὕδωρ,  
< ><sup>578</sup> καὶ εὐφραίνοντο ἐπὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις ἔργοις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

**25b** καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα < ><sup>579</sup> Παύλῳ Περικαροῦμαι καὶ  
ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου δ' ἂν<sup>580</sup> πορεύῃ.

**25c** ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Ὁ καιρὸς αἰσχυρὸς, καὶ σὺ εὐμορφος·

**25d** μὴ ἄλλος σε πειρασμὸς λήψεται χείρων τοῦ πρώτου, καὶ  
οὐχ ὑπομείνης ἀλλὰ δειλανδρήσης.

**25e** καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα Μόνον δός μοι τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ  
σφραγίδα, καὶ οὐχ ἄψεταιί μοι πειρασμός.

**25f** καὶ εἶπεν Παῦλος Θέκλα μακροθύμησον, καὶ λήψῃ τὸ  
ὕδωρ.

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<sup>576</sup> The Lipsius text has an additional sentence in the story here. It reads: Καὶ ἦν ἔσω ἐν τῷ μνημείῳ ἀγάπη πολλή, Παύλου ἀγαλλιωμένου καὶ Ὀνησιφόρου καὶ πάντων.

<sup>577</sup> This word, εἶχον, begins with a lower case letter in the Lipsius text.

<sup>578</sup> The Lipsius text includes two words here but they appear in angle brackets: <καὶ ἄλας>

<sup>579</sup> The article, τῷ, is included before the proper name in the Lipsius text.

<sup>580</sup> These three letters are combined to make a word in the Lipsius text δᾶν while here they are written as the conjunctive particle contracted and the conditional particle: δ' ἂν.

## Translation

**25a** They had five loaves and herbs and water, and they were rejoicing in the holy works of Christ.

**25b** And Thecla said to Paul, “I will cut my hair and follow you wherever you go.”

**25c** But he said, “The time is not right,<sup>581</sup> and you are beautiful;

**25d** let not another temptation worse than the first come to you, and you may not endure to the end but may act in a cowardly way.”<sup>582</sup>

**25e** And Thecla said, “Only give me the seal in Christ, and temptation will not touch me.”

**25f** And Paul said, “Thecla, be patient and you will receive the water.”

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<sup>581</sup> *LSJ*, p. 43. def.2. 3 has the sense of ὁ καιρὸς αἰσχροῦς as “the time is not right”; the sense is that the time is ill-suited as in the entry for αἰσχροῦς and an example is in Demosthenes 18.178 αἰσχροῦς ὁ καιρὸς.

<sup>582</sup> Perhaps this phrase could be translated as a rhetorical question rather than a statement: “May not another temptation worse than the first come to you, and you may not endure but may act in a cowardly way?”

## Commentary and Notes

25a < > Εἶχον δὲ ἄρτους πέντε καὶ λάχανα καὶ ὕδωρ,  
< > καὶ εὐφραίνοντο ἐπὶ τοῖς ὁσίοις ἔργοις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

25a And they had five loaves and herbs and water, and they were rejoicing in the holy works of Christ.

The Lipsius text adds another sentence here about the loving character of the relationships and the general rejoicing in the cave now that they have all assembled. Paul, Onesiphorus, Lectra and both sons and Thecla are together. They are all safe and they have food, so this is a cause for thanksgiving. There is a lot of manuscript evidence for the sentence but Tischendorf has followed manuscript C as he often does. The sentence does not move the drama forward in any way, and has the force of a summary statement. There is an expectation that something will happen now that the scene is set.

The narrator continues to describe the activity in the tomb for the entire group of main characters. Including Thecla, there are six persons in the tomb. The reference to loaves is to five not six. If there are servants with them, they are not in focus in the narrative at this point, (see 23c) as there are not enough loaves even for the main characters. This reference to five loaves is undoubtedly a reference to the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves and the fishes (see for example Mk 6:38).

This time of prayer and eating is possibly a Eucharist. It is perhaps an early example of a Eucharistic meal, more like the one in 1 Corinthians 11, than like those in the Synoptic Gospels. The comparison with 1 Corinthians 11 is not in terms of there being some who are not fed; the comparison is that it is an actual “prayer meal” where persons are expected to be nourished and satisfied at the end of it, as Jews would have been at the end of the Passover meal. Later Eucharists are ritualistic and the amount of eating and drinking is not meant to satisfy hunger.<sup>583</sup>

This is clearly a “prayer meal” begun with praise and focused on Christ. Instead of thanksgiving it is described as a meal of “rejoicing in the holy works of Christ”. “Rejoicing in the holy works of Christ” could approximate giving thanks for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We

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<sup>583</sup> Both spiritual and physical eating and drinking have religious meaning in the period of early Christian writings. See for example Graham Stanton on “Other early Christian writings: *Didache*, Ignatius, *Barnabas*, Justin Martyr” in John Barclay and John Sweet eds., *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p.182.

must remember that the time in which the narrative is set is before there are New Testament documents to be read. Recalling stories would have been not only by reading but also by recitation. The stories of the holy works of Christ could well be those such as the teaching of the five thousand. Any other ordinary things that Christ did, such as fasting or praying or washing his disciples' feet, could be recalled as evidence that he was holy. These "holy works" could also include anything extraordinary that has drawn attention to Christ as holy, such as the multiplication of the loaves and other miracles, or his crucifixion and resurrection. It is not clear if the stories told at this "prayer meal" would also include those with such a developed Christology.<sup>584</sup>

The reference to the mighty works of Christ in 1g is not unlike this reference to the holy works of Christ. The practice of continually recounting the example of Christ is a way of showing Christ's faithfulness. This faithfulness of Christ is an important theme of early Christology. The reference in 1g does not include the ritual meal as we have it here.

25b καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα < > Παύλῳ Περικαροῦμαι καὶ ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου δ' ἂν πορεύῃ.

25b And Thecla said to Paul, "I will cut my hair and follow you wherever you go."

The Lipsius text includes the article τῷ. Including the article in this sentence is more correct, and therefore the Tischendorf text is the more difficult and is likely to be the earlier text. The Lipsius text also simplifies δ' ἂν to δᾶν which is perfectly acceptable and more elegant.

Thecla at this point decides to embrace the itinerant life of an apostle. She does not want ever to be parted again from this focus in her life, the rejoicing in the holy works of Christ, the "sacred meal" with the believers who have left the things of this world, and learning about Christ from Paul. Her offer to cut her hair like a slave<sup>585</sup> is an act of self-control and piety. She is declaring that she has no interest in any men. Her motives are spiritual and merciful. She will dedicate herself to service and she comes to know herself as the servant of the Living God.

<sup>584</sup> Willy Rordorf, *Sunday*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 196-197. Rordorf cites the story of Eutychus as an example of the sort of celebration that took place on the first day of the week. The story contains the breaking of bread but no wine is mentioned. See Acts 20:7-12. This story in Acts is an interesting parallel story to verses 5-8 of the *Acts of Thecla*.

<sup>585</sup> S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, p. 83. Women's hairdos could be complicated but female slaves usually had their hair cropped.

Cutting her hair will give her freedom to escape the control that men have over the movement of unmarried women. She hopes she will not need the protection appropriate to young women and will be able to get about in relative ease. If she cannot be recognized as a young woman, charges such as those brought against her in Iconium would be highly unlikely to surface again.

This she hopes will persuade Paul that it is safe to travel with her. We remember that he was not sentenced to death by fire, but was imprisoned because of Thecla's relationship to him and his teaching.

25c ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Ὁ καιρὸς αἰσχρὸς, καὶ σὺ εὐμορφος·

25c But he said, "The time is not right, and you are beautiful

Paul does not react positively to Thecla's suggestion that she follow him with her hair cut.<sup>586</sup> He does not think that this will be sufficient to ward off any possible difficulties. He responds not in terms of the past being a lesson to caution them both, but with a hypothetical view of the future. He is trying to help Thecla understand that she will be at risk even if her hair is cut. He says that the time is not right. Those who know the story already will assume at this point that her public baptism is the high point in the story.<sup>587</sup>

Quite a bit of drama will unfold before she is in the arena and ready to baptise herself. If Paul were to agree to baptise her now, then she would not have the opportunity later to baptise herself. Baptising herself and declaring publicly that she is baptised legitimates women acting in leadership roles preaching and baptising in the early church.<sup>588</sup> The

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<sup>586</sup>See M. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, p. 174. MacDonald discusses the tendency of women to transgress the conventional boundaries of the women's sphere when they leave family and private obligations behind. See also François Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, p. 167. Bovon understands the Apocryphal traditions as a challenge to the process of establishing orthodoxy. "My own theory is that the authors of the apocryphal Acts did not want to counter so much the book of Acts itself as the claims of those who were canonizing it. They show no aggressive feelings toward it and are sometimes inspired by it, though with great liberty." I would argue that the tendency to work against convention and social control is inherent in the earliest historical layers of the Jesus tradition.

<sup>587</sup>We are not overly surprised that Paul does not baptise Thecla. The image of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles in his own letters and in the developing tradition about Paul does not seem to give a high priority to baptism in the way that Luke does for instance in the canonical Acts. See here Martinus C. de Boer, "Images of Paul in the Post-Apostolic Period", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 42, 1980, pp. 359-380.

<sup>588</sup>R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, pp. 17-21. There would be no need to have restrictions against women baptising if they were not actively baptising. Note especially that Gryson says that Tertullian writes, "How many men and how many women in ecclesiastical 'orders' owe their

development of ritual baptism is found in a diversity of practices in ancient times.<sup>589</sup> Philip does baptise the Ethiopian Eunuch with only the two of them present and without much preparation (Acts 8:34-38). There is even baptism for the dead in the New Testament, see 1Cor 15:29.

We know, because Tertullian tried to stop it, that women did take Thecla's self-baptism as a mandate and authorization.<sup>590</sup> Those who continued to hear or read the story of Thecla would be waiting for this authorizing climax in the narrative.<sup>591</sup>

The matter of whether Paul was in favour of baptising at all as a ritual of initiation is dubious as witnessed to by his first letter to the Corinthians. Whatever Paul's early thoughts on the matter, it does become a ritual of initiation for Christianity in the apostolic period. It is very important in the Acts of the Apostles, which may have been written at a similar time to the *Acts of Thecla* late in the first century or early in the second century.

25d μὴ ἄλλος σε πειρασμὸς λήψεται χείρων τοῦ πρώτου, καὶ οὐχ ὑπομείνης ἀλλὰ δειλανδρήσης.

25d let not another temptation worse than the first come to you, and you may not endure to the end but may act in a cowardly way.

Now Paul plainly refers to matters back in Iconium. Is it that Thecla has been so brave in the face of these that she underestimates how close to death she was? Perhaps it is rather that she is so fixed on Christ that death is no longer something to be feared? In either case Paul is cautious and does not have confidence in Thecla's ability to remain focused on Christ. Those who know the story will realize that Paul is simply wrong

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position to the practice of continence! They have preferred to be wedded to God. . .” Gryson also notes the prohibition against women baptising in the Apostolic Constitutions, “Now, as to women's baptizing, we let you know that there is no small peril to those that undertake it.” p. 56. According to Gryson, regarding women preaching and baptising, there seems to be a great effort at trying to get the genie back into the bottle.

<sup>589</sup> R. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, pp. 2-3, 171, 210. Jensen exploring the Alexandrian traditions of the fourth century in the writings of Didymus explains that, following the washing, the nakedness of the newly baptised is covered by the white wedding garment, and a banquet in honour of the Divine Bridegroom takes place.

<sup>590</sup> R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, pp. 18-19. R. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, pp. 96-97. See also L. Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, Paulist Press, New York, 2001, pp. 106-107. Swan writes: “Deanconesses were fairly common in the early church.” and “Many were actively involved in outreach to the poor, training and baptizing female catechumens, and preparing women to receive the sacraments.” She cites early written sources and inscriptions.

<sup>591</sup> Fred Lapham, *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha*, T & T Clark, London, 2003, p. 143. “In neither the canonical nor the Apocryphal versions of what happened at Iconium is the power and will of God thwarted: in the former, it is the Gentiles who receive the salvation the Jews have forfeited; in the latter, it is the women who renounce a life of corruption and impurity through marriage who win their eternal freedom.”

about this. Those who do not know the story will imagine that he is being protective of her as a parent might be.

There has been no indication that Paul ought not to have confidence in Thecla; perhaps it is because she is a young woman that he has such a low opinion of her ability to act courageously. One can imagine the women listeners and readers smiling at Paul's silly error of judgment. Thecla will be far braver than anyone could expect. She will never falter as she gives witness to Jesus Christ. She is the very model of courage and witness and faithfulness.

25e καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα Μόνον δός μοι τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ  
σφραγίδα, καὶ οὐχ ἄψεται μοι πειρασμός.

25e And Thecla said, "Only give me the seal in Christ, and temptation will not touch me."

Thecla pleads for baptism. The term "seal" is very important as a reference to baptism. It is not a term used in the New Testament but it will become an important term in Patristic texts.<sup>592</sup> Is this perhaps one of the first uses of it? Thecla feels certain that no temptation will distract her from her purposes. She sees baptism as a strengthening of her resolve as well as a mark that identifies her as belonging to Christ.

She does not claim to be baptised because of her witness at the pyre. She does not claim no longer to need to be baptised because she has been baptised by fire. By the time of Ignatius of Antioch this witness of martyrdom is more prestigious than any seal of orthodoxy.<sup>593</sup> At least the narrative content (the story) of the Acts of Thecla reads as if it is first-century rather than second-century.

25f καὶ εἶπεν Παῦλος Θέκλα μακροθύμησον, καὶ λήψη τὸ  
ὔδωρ.

25f And Paul said, "Thecla, be patient and you will receive the water."

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<sup>592</sup> Lampe, p. 1356. σφραγίς entry C lists a large number of references for "the seal given to Christians in baptism, considered as distinguishing mark of Christ's flock and also as protection against evil, demonic powers, etc." Just a few of the relevant authors include: Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Hippolytus of Rome, Didymus of Alexandria, John Damascene.

<sup>593</sup> William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985, p. 156. "This meant claiming for the emerging orthodoxy the prestige of the martyr and associating an unquestioning willingness to die for the faith with the simplest and most direct requirements of Christian living." Ignatius died in the year 117CE. At this period martyrdom was more prestigious than established orthodoxy and its control of sacraments. Ignatius advocated submission to the bishops; see his letter to the Trallians 2:1 as an example of several references, and in Schoedel, p. 140.



Paul asks Thecla to be patient. Waiting patiently is a conventional behaviour of women.<sup>594</sup> Thecla is not characterised as prone to such conformity. Perhaps this is more a comment about Paul than about Thecla. It would seem that she has already merited baptism by her trial by fire and public witness there. Whether willingly or not Thecla will wait and she will become the role model of women who baptise and take leadership in many important ways as witnesses to Christ. Her first martyrdom will be followed by another public witness. She will receive baptism before a large and impressive audience in Antioch.

“To receive the water” is an unusual term for baptism. It is clear what is meant but it is a surprise to hear of it spoken about in this way. It is important to note that in the Corinthian correspondence Paul writes that he has baptised no one except Crispus and Gaius and Stephanas and his household. This episode in the *Acts of Thecla* agrees with the historical account given by Paul himself in 1 Corinthians.<sup>595</sup> If he had baptised Thecla it would be more difficult to show that the Thecla tradition agrees with the Pauline tradition. Perhaps the author of the *Acts of Thecla* is aware that Paul does not usually baptise his converts.

According to his letter, the reason Paul does not baptise is so that no one can say that they belong to Paul. This is very important in understanding the relationship between Paul and Thecla. Thecla does not belong to Paul, she belongs to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, we read:

12 λέγω δὲ τοῦτο, ὅτι ἕκαστος ὑμῶν λέγει, Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ.  
13 μεμέρισται ὁ Χριστός; μὴ Παῦλος ἐσταυρώθη ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἥ εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου ἐβαπτίσθητε;

12 What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” 13 Has

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<sup>594</sup> Sarah Jane Boss, “The Virgin Mary and Other Women”, in Lawrence Osborn and Andrew Walker, eds., *Harmful Religion: An Exploration of Religious Abuse*, SPCK, London, 1997, p. 125. Boss explains how modern European women are influenced to be passive by the presentation of Mary as a model. She describes Mary as “entirely passive and compliant”. Another perspective is given by Elizabeth Asmis, “The Stoics on Women” in Julie Ward, ed., *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy*, Routledge, New York, 1996, pp. 88-89. Asmis describes virtue in the Stoics and how women are included in or excluded from these virtues. She writes on duties and “nature” in the Stoics and how these concepts are used in relationship to women. See also Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996. This volume explores the topic in detail.

<sup>595</sup> 1Cor 1:12-17.

Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (NRSV)

## Verse Twenty-six

**26a** Καὶ ἀπέπεμψεν Παῦλος < ><sup>596</sup> Ὀνησιφόρον πανοικὶ εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

**26b** καὶ οὕτως λαβόμενος < ><sup>597</sup> Θέκλης<sup>598</sup> εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν εἰσῆλθεν.

**26c** ἅμα δὲ τῷ εἰσέρχεσθαι αὐτοῦς, συριάρχης τις Ἀλέξανδρος ὀνόματι ἰδὼν τὴν Θέκλαν ἠράσθη αὐτῆς,

**26d** καὶ ἐξελιπάρει τὸν Παῦλον χρήμασι καὶ δώροις.

**26e** ὁ δὲ Παῦλος εἶπεν Οὐκ οἶδα τὴν γυναῖκα ἣν λέγεις, οὐδὲ ἐστὶν ἐμῇ.

**26f** ὁ δὲ πολὺ δυνάμενος, αὐτὸς αὐτῇ περιεπλάκη εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον·

**26g** ἡ δὲ οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλὰ Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

**26h** καὶ ἀνέκραγεν πικρῶς λέγουσα Μὴ βιάσῃ τὴν ξένην, μὴ βιάσῃ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην.

**26i** Ἰκονιέων εἰμὶ πρώτη, καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ θέλειν με < ><sup>599</sup> Θαμύριν,<sup>600</sup> ἐκβέβλημαι τῆς πόλεως.

**26j** καὶ λαβομένη τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου περιέσχισεν αὐτοῦ τὴν χλαμύδα καὶ περιεῖλεν αὐτοῦ<sup>601</sup> τὸν στέφανον,<sup>602</sup> < ><sup>603</sup> καὶ ἔστησεν αὐτὸν θρίαμβον.

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<sup>596</sup> The Lipsius text includes the article τὸν here.

<sup>597</sup> The Lipsius text includes the article τὴν here.

<sup>598</sup> Lipsius has Θέκλαν, thus the article and proper name agreeing in case.

<sup>599</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional word γαμηθῆναι here.

<sup>600</sup> The proper name Θαμύριδι, is in the dative case in the Lipsius text. She does not want to be married “to Thamyris”.

<sup>601</sup> The words περιεῖλεν αὐτοῦ do not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>602</sup> There is no comma here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>603</sup> The additional phrase: ἀφείλετο ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, appears here in the Lipsius text.

## Translation

**26a** And Paul sent Onesiphorus and all his household back to Iconium,

**26b** and so, accepting Thecla,<sup>604</sup> he entered Antioch.

**26c** At the same time as they entered it, a Syrian dignitary,<sup>605</sup> one Alexander by name, seeing Thecla lusted after her,

**26d** and he petitioned Paul with money and gifts.

**26e** But Paul said, “I do not know the woman of whom you speak: she is not mine.”

**26f** But he (Alexander),<sup>606</sup> being very powerful, embraced her in the open street,

**26g** but she would not tolerate it, and she looked around for Paul.

**26h** And she cried out bitterly saying, “Do not rape the foreign woman, do not rape the servant of God.

**26i** Among the Iconians, I am the first, and through my refusal of Thamyris, I am rejected by the city.”

**26j** And taking hold of Alexander, she ripped his cloak, and stripped off his crown and humiliated him.

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<sup>604</sup> The middle voice expression indicates something more than that Paul took Thecla with him. It indicates that as the others are sent back to Iconium Paul has singled out and chosen Thecla to continue on this missionary journey with him, promising her baptism. This is the same as when Paul travels with other evangelist companions, such as John Mark or Silas. A companion must be selected for a journey. This is seen as Thecla's acceptance and commissioning as an evangelist. Paul had made the decision to take her with him when he sent the others home.

<sup>605</sup> Though Alexander is a Syrian he is most likely not in Syrian Antioch at this time; otherwise there would be no reason to say that he is a Syrian.

<sup>606</sup> The antecedent here is clearly Alexander.

## Commentary and Notes

26a Καὶ ἀπέπεμψεν Παῦλος < > Ὀνησιφόρον πανοικὶ εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

26a And Paul sent Onesiphorus and all his household back to Iconium

Lipsius' addition of the article here is simply a refinement.

Paul sent Onesiphorus and his family home to Iconium. Now that Thecla has been found, Paul continues his journey with her. This is odd for two reasons: he has said that she is beautiful and may fall into another temptation, and we have already heard in the narrative that Onesiphorus has left all worldly attachments behind, so Thecla could have remained with Onesiphorus.

It is difficult to see why Paul allows Thecla to continue with him when he could have sent her back with Onesiphorus. Perhaps Onesiphorus did not want her to go back to Iconium with him. It would have been a risk for Onesiphorus and he has two sons to look after. The sons clearly needed to eat and this may be involved in the decision for Onesiphorus to return home. Perhaps Paul simply has Thecla continue with him as far as the city where she might be able to find some accommodation.

We know from Paul's letters and the canonical Acts that Paul is very particular about who travels with him. His choice to have Thecla with him is no small matter.

26b καὶ οὕτως λαβόμενος < > Θέκλης εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν εἰσῆλθεν.

26b and so, accepting Thecla, he entered Antioch.

The addition of the article here is also a refinement added by a scribe. In the Lipsius text the case of the proper noun is corrected to accusative and the article is supplied in agreement with it. The Tischendorf is the more difficult reading and therefore is probably the more original.

Thecla was in this way accepted by Paul as he travelled to Antioch. This is very significant. She is received by Paul. Where on the one hand we cannot expect this phrase καὶ οὕτως λαβόμενος to carry a meaning like baptism, on the other hand there is some clear decision on the part of Paul for Thecla to accompany him at least as far as Antioch. His acceptance of

her and his decision to send Onesiphorus, his friend, and all the family back home stand in contrast to each other.

26c ἅμα δὲ τῷ εἰσερχεσθαι αὐτούς, συριάρχης τις Ὀνόματι Ἰδὼν τὴν Θεκλάν ἠράσθη αὐτῆς,

26c At the same time as they entered it, a Syrian dignitary, one Alexander by name, seeing Thecla lusted after her,

They travel to Antioch of Pisidia. As they enter the city a Syrian named Alexander sees Thecla. Alexander is identified as a Syrian dignitary since they are in Antioch of Pisidia. Were they in Syrian Antioch identifying him as a Syrian would be less likely a necessary detail.

The narrative tells us that when he saw her he lusted after her. There is no mention of marriage arrangements; Alexander simply wants to use Thecla for his sexual desires. He assumes that use of her is for sale. The readers and listeners are already aware of Thecla's strong resolve and her decision not to be married to the wealthy Thamyris. They are expecting this not to go well. It is what Paul predicted when he asked Thecla to wait for baptism.

26d καὶ ἐξελιπάρει τὸν Παῦλον χρήμασι καὶ δώροις.

26d and he petitioned Paul with money and gifts.

Alexander is trying to buy from Paul Thecla's sexual services. This is reminiscent of Genesis 12:10-20 where Abraham pretended that his wife, Sarah, was his sister, which meant that he did not stand in the way of a powerful man like Pharaoh making arrangements for her to be his wife. If Abraham had said that Sarah was his wife, the only way for a powerful man to obtain Sarah as wife would be for him to kill her husband. Unmarried women are also seen to be more valuable to wealthy men. This is why Abraham pretended that Sarah was his sister. In this way he saved his own life, even though Sarah was taken into the harem of the Pharaoh.

Here in fact Paul is not a guardian of Thecla who could make arrangements for her marriage. He will not pretend to be either her relative or her husband. No Jewish man is ever authorized to make arrangements for a female relative to be used as a prostitute; not even a female slave or concubine is thought to be so much an object of property

that she can be sold indiscriminately for occasional sexual use.<sup>607</sup> Such behaviour is seen as abhorrent.<sup>608</sup> Paul will not participate in any negotiation and we will not hear any more talk of money and gifts, for this would not be acceptable, no matter what the arrangement or how it might profit Paul.

26ε ὁ δὲ Παῦλος εἶπεν Οὐκ οἶδα τὴν γυναῖκα ἣν λέγεις, οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐμή.

26ε But Paul said, “I do not know the woman of whom you speak: she is not mine.”

This is another denial, much like that of Demas and Hermogenes at Iconium when Thamyris questions them about Paul in 12a. They respond, “We do not know who this man is. . .”. Both denials in the *Acts of Thecla* are reminiscent of Peter’s denial of Jesus in the Gospels (Mk 14:70-71).

It is obvious that Paul cannot say that Thecla is his wife; she is not and if he said she was and Alexander still wanted her, Paul’s life might be at risk. Paul also should not say that he is a relative of Thecla, thereby putting himself in a position to be able to accept a suitable offer for her as a bride. It would be difficult to explain that they are both unmarried envoys of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but that is precisely what would be the honest and honourable thing for him to do. When he does not do it, he is offending seriously against the honesty and integrity of an apostle. He is not answering honestly and his dishonest answer puts Thecla at greater risk than if he had answered honestly.

The offence then is not only that he has lied; it is also that he is not prepared to protect Thecla, who is in grave danger of sexual abuse. Paul’s acceptance of Thecla in 26b is very clear. He has not sent her home with Onesiphorus; therefore he should treat her with respect at least

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<sup>607</sup>For example see: Lev 19:20, 29, “If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, designated for another man but not ransomed or given her freedom, an inquiry shall be held. They shall not be put to death, since she has not been freed; but he shall bring a guilt offering.” and “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity.” (NRSV) See also: Lev 20:10 “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.” (NRSV)

<sup>608</sup> C. Osiek, M. MacDonald, with J. Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place, House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, pp.101-107. Female slaves were freed in order to marry their owners. Whereas slaves were used sexually by their owners, damages could be claimed by a slave’s owner against someone else who had “corrupted” a slave. Musonius Rufus argues that the husband ought to think how he would feel if his wife had sex with a male slave and then deport himself appropriately by not having sex with his female slave. In Jewish and Christian society more restraint is expected.

and at most he should protect her as one of his students<sup>609</sup> and as a fellow follower of Jesus Christ and servant of the Gospel.

It has taken centuries for society to learn that respect for victims of sexual abuse is of paramount importance and that those who are vulnerable must be protected from sexual abuse.<sup>610</sup> In the canonical Acts, Paul has at other times acted inappropriately toward women; for example he pays no heed to the problem he has created for the young woman with the Pythian spirit in chapter 16:16-18. Another example may be before his conversion (Acts 8:3): “But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.”

In his own letters Paul can be excessively harsh especially in relation to sexuality. In 1 Corinthians 5:9,12-13 Paul writes;

9 Ἐγραψα ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι πόρνοις,  
12 τί γάρ μοι τοὺς ἔξω κρίνειν; οὐχὶ τοὺς ἔσω ὑμεῖς κρίνετε;  
13 τοὺς δὲ ἔξω ὁ θεὸς κρινεῖ. ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν  
αὐτῶν.

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. Drive out the wicked person from among you. (NRSV)

There is no distinguishing between those who are forced or pressured into immoral acts and those doing that forcing; there is no distinction between those who choose to be in unacceptable relationships and those who are forced by others to be in such positions. The shame culture problem is precisely this, that those who cause sexual offence and their victims all carry shame and all suffer some kind of social shunning.

26f ὁ δὲ πολὺ δυνάμενος, αὐτὸς αὐτῇ περιεπλάκη εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον·

26f But he (Alexander) being very powerful, embraced her in the open street,

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<sup>609</sup> They are not travelling together to model for encratic reasons the relationship of husband to wife where there is no sexual relationship. There is simply no evidence in the *Acts of Thecla* for thinking this, any more than one would for example think that Lydia had a sexual desire to see Paul in the canonical Acts.

<sup>610</sup> B. Wehn, “I am a Handmaid of the Living God!”, in C. Janssen, U. Ochtendung, B. Wehn, *Transgressors*, pp. 23-24.



Now that Paul has denied knowing Thecla, Alexander assaults her in the street. It is clear that he is attempting to satisfy his lust. She appears to have no defenders, so Alexander attempts to take advantage of her. “He is powerful” here probably means that he is big and strong. We will later learn that he also has high standing in the town but at this point δυνάμενος is a reference to his physical advantage over her.

26g ἡ δὲ οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλὰ Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

26g but she would not tolerate it, and she looked around for Paul.

I have translated the δέ as “but” and the ἀλλά as “and” in 26g. This assumes that the δέ has adversative force and that the adversative force distributes to the following phrase ἀλλὰ Παῦλον ἐζήτει.

Thecla will not cooperate with this unwelcome assault. One can imagine that a less proud woman may have to save herself from a worse fate, death or battering. Thecla is probably not accustomed to even being approached by a man who has not been introduced to her properly. She will not endure Alexander’s abuse. She must have struggled energetically against him.

As expected she looks for Paul, no doubt hoping for assistance. She should expect that Paul will come to her aid. Now no matter what he said, his actions should speak louder than his words and he should help her. Her vision of Paul as she mounted the pyre was a source of consolation. Clearly she counts on Paul to provide for her protection.

26h καὶ ἀνέκραγεν πικρῶς λέγουσα Μὴ βιάσῃ τὴν ξένην, μὴ βιάσῃ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην.

26h And she cried out bitterly saying, “Do not rape the foreign woman, do not rape the servant of God.”

She has either not seen Paul or he is not responding, so she begins to defend herself verbally. She cries out, drawing attention to Alexander’s violent behaviour. She refers to the teachings of the prophets, that the stranger—ξένη—and the widow and the orphan are to be treated with respect.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>611</sup>See for example Jer 7:5-7 and note Jer 22:3: “Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.” (NRSV). This does not mean that Thecla is Jewish, but there is likely to be Jewish influence in the telling of the story again as

She also refers to herself in priestly terminology; she is the servant of God. The Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures both understood that priests were referred to as servants of God.<sup>612</sup> Thecla is struggling here for her safety and she is aware that her newly chosen life as a servant of God has put her at risk. She is also counting on it to be what saves her. Thecla is claiming the dignity of a temple virgin, one who is never approached sexually, or shame and punishment will be a consequence for the one who would dare to offend the god in this highly inappropriate way. The things that Thecla is saying are chosen to dissuade Alexander from his evil intent. This is not a speech to claim any honour or privilege beyond her status; it is in order to win her freedom from this strong assailant.

26i Ἰκονιέων εἰμὶ πρώτη, καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ θέλειν με < >  
Θαμύριν, ἐκβέβλημαι τῆς πόλεως.

26i “Among the Iconians, I am the first, and through my refusal of Thamyras, I am rejected by the city.”

The Lipsius adds the verb “to marry” and puts Thamyras’ name in the appropriate case. This is likely to be an addition for greater clarity.

Now Thecla explains that she is a woman of substance and high social status who has been driven from her own city because she has refused Thamyras. This plea is to say that there is a reason that she is travelling; she is not just an itinerant and prostitute who has arrived in town. It is also to say that consequences from assaulting her may well come from her town.

She was very important before this single action of hers, and wealth often has a way of reinstating those who may have fallen out of favour for a time. She will have many powerful friends and relatives even perhaps beyond her city. Alexander should beware whom he is mistreating for he may be very sorry if this news reaches her powerful and wealthy family and friends.

26j καὶ λαβομένη τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου περιέσχισεν αὐτοῦ τὴν  
χλαμύδα καὶ περιεῖλεν αὐτοῦ τὸν στέφανον, < > καὶ  
ἔστησεν αὐτὸν θρίαμβον.

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in verse four and elsewhere. It is true that other cultures also offer moral advice concerning not harming itinerants and visitors from other locations.

<sup>612</sup>See for example Num 17:6-7 and 1Kings 16:31-32. Paul is referred to as servant and apostle in Titus 1:1 “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ”.

26j And taking hold of Alexander, she ripped his cloak, and stripped off his crown and humiliated him.

The words περιεἶλεν αὐτοῦ are not found in the Lipsius text. Interestingly Barrier<sup>613</sup> has reinstated them, as he has a number of other readings from C and Tischendorf, after his consultation of the Coptic manuscripts. Lipsius adds the description of the crown coming off the head of Alexander.

When the verbal retaliation is not effective, Thecla attacks Alexander physically. She tears at his clothing and knocks off his crown. A στέφανος can also be a wreath. Whether the head ornament is a wreath or a crown, it signifies the importance of this man. The damage to his cloak and the indignity of his losing his headgear is not the main problem, even though both cloak and crown may have been very valuable. The main problem is that he is humiliated in front of everyone in the open street. A mere woman, a woman no one even knows, who is travelling like a homeless and pathetic outcast, has dared to attack him physically and actually to damage his personal possessions. The affront of this action is too much for him to bear. Θρίαμβος has a metaphorical meaning of “scandal”; here the “scandal” is personal and immediate. A literal translation of ἔστησεν αὐτὸν θρίαμβον would be “made him a scandal”. “Humiliated him” has the same meaning and flows better in English.

It is of no matter to him at all that he attacked her first or that his intentions were much worse than hers. Whether he thinks there is any truth to her claims to be important or not, he does not think that he should have restrained himself. The fault in his mind is all hers. The blaming of the victim has been part of sexual abuse for centuries.

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<sup>613</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, pp. 139-142.

## Verse Twenty-seven

**27a** Ὁ δὲ ἄμα μὲν φιλῶν αὐτήν, ἄμα δὲ καὶ αἰσχυρόμενος  
τὸ γεγονός < >,<sup>614</sup>

**27b** προσήγαγεν αὐτὴν τῷ ἡγεμόνι, κάκεινης ὁμολογησάσης  
ταῦτα πεπραχέναι κατέκρινεν αὐτὴν εἰς θηρία.

**27c** αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἐξεπλάγησαν καὶ ἀνέκραξαν παρὰ τὸ βῆμα  
Κακὴ κρίσις, ἀνοσία κρίσις.

**27d** ἡ<sup>615</sup> δὲ < ><sup>616</sup> ἡτήσατο τὸν ἡγεμόνα ἵνα,<sup>617</sup> φησὶν,<sup>618</sup>  
μέχρις οὗ θηριομαχήσω<sup>619</sup> μείνω ἀγνή.<sup>620</sup>

**27e** καὶ τις < ><sup>621</sup> Τρύφαινα, ἥς ἡ θυγάτηρ ἐτεθνήκει,

**27f** ἔλαβεν αὐτὴν εἰς τήρησιν, καὶ εἶχεν εἰς παραμυθίαν.

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<sup>614</sup> The Lipsius text includes the pronoun αὐτῷ here.

<sup>615</sup> The Lipsius text has an upper case letter for the article Ἡ.

<sup>616</sup> The proper name Θέκλα is added here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>617</sup> The comma does not appear here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>618</sup> Instead of the word φησὶν and the comma the Lipsius text has ἀγνή μείνη. The Tischendorf is first person direct speech and the Lipsius is indirect speech.

<sup>619</sup> This word θηριομαχήσω has the form θηριομαχήση in the Lipsius text and is followed by a full-stop.

<sup>620</sup> These two words μείνω ἀγνή do not appear here in the Lipsius text, but see the footnote above.

<sup>621</sup> Here the Lipsius text includes the three extra words <βασίλισσα> πλουσία, ὀνόματι with βασίλισσα in angle brackets and a comma following πλουσία.

## Translation

**27a** But he, while fond of her, and at the same time ashamed of what happened,

**27b** took her to the governor, and when she confessed to having done these things, he (the governor) sentenced her to the beasts.

**27c** But the women were aghast and they cried out to the bema,<sup>622</sup> “an evil judgment, an unholy judgment.”

**27d** But she asked the governor saying,<sup>623</sup> “until I am in battle with the beasts, let me remain<sup>624</sup> pure.”

**27e** And a certain Tryphaena, whose daughter had died,

**27f** took her under her protection, and had her as a consolation.

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<sup>622</sup> As noted before this is the authorities in charge of the proceedings.

<sup>623</sup> Literally this is “that, she says”, which is pleonastic.

<sup>624</sup> I have translated the ἵνα clause and the present subjunctive here as ‘Let me remain’. Other possibilities would include “that I may remain”. It is clearly Thecla’s intention to protect herself.

## Commentary and Notes

27a Ὁ δὲ ἄμα μὲν φιλῶν αὐτήν, ἄμα δὲ καὶ αἰσχυρόμενος  
τὸ γεγονός < > ,

27a But he, while fond of her, and at the same time ashamed of what happened,

The addition of the pronoun αὐτῷ in the Lipsius text simply makes the meaning clearer. Both texts read that Alexander is ashamed of what Thecla did to him; he is not repentant for what he did to her.

Now Alexander acts with very mixed feelings. He is attracted to Thecla and is ashamed, because of her having publicly humiliated him, and he has decided to take her to the governor to accuse her. This is very difficult to understand. Clearly the shame he felt due to her rejection of him was greater than his attraction to her. This still happens in many “honour/shame” cultures. Men even kill their sister, wife or mother rather than live with what they understand to be shameful.<sup>625</sup> It is a cultural phenomenon which is often detrimental to many, but in particular to women. In these cultures women are thought of as belonging to men and the sexuality of the woman is strongly controlled by the man to whom she is thought to belong.

27b προσήγαγεν αὐτήν τῷ ἡγεμόνι, κακείνης ὁμολογησάσης  
ταῦτα πεπραχέναι κατέκρινεν αὐτήν εἰς θηρία.

27b took her to the governor, and when she confessed to having done these things, he (the governor) sentenced her to the beasts.

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<sup>625</sup> Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p. 93. Using ancient sources, Williams explores the intricacies of honour/shame culture and thought. On page 93 he considers how one can feel a sense of unreasonable guilt occasioned by reactions of others where that guilt and shame look to “what I am”. Identity is at stake especially in irrational guilt or shame. See also Andrea Dworkin, *Scape Goat: The Jews, Israel and Women’s Liberation*, Virago, London, 2000, pp. 256-257. Dworkin describes the social transactions of “bodies” in violent social oppression and the production of shame. See also Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985, p. xix. Daly describes “disgust” as a way of expressing the violence that women tolerate. See also Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream*, SPCK, London, 1989, pp. 13-19, for a theology of redemption in the face of women’s suffering, and the cultivation of their silence in suffering. For theory and social analysis of domestic abuse in Australia see Anne Amos, *Victims into Victors*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1991.

Alexander takes her to the governor. Alexander must have known that the consequences could have been grave. Thecla on the other hand seems not to pay any attention to the danger. She also knows that the consequences could be a matter of life or death, but she is focused only on Jesus Christ. She is honest and confesses without restraint that she has publicly affronted Alexander.

One might imagine that she also spoke of Alexander's attack on her, but there is no mention of her reporting these things in the story. It would seem a very strange thing for her to not give this explanation, because there would otherwise have been no reason at all for her behaviour. It might perhaps be assumed by the governor that Alexander made his attack first.

Whatever the case, the narrative simply has Thecla confessing the truth and there is no mention of her making accusations against Alexander. The narrative has told us that she called out loudly, and that they were in the open street. A reader is meant to assume that there is quite a crowd of spectators; otherwise there would be no humiliation for Alexander. Paul has looked on as this terrible thing has taken place, just as Luke reports that Paul watched Stephen being murdered by stoning in the canonical Acts of the Apostles.<sup>626</sup>

Thecla is sentenced to the beasts. We are soon to learn that Alexander is the sponsor of the animal show. The beasts that Thecla is sentenced to are ones he provides for public spectacle. This gives the sense that it is a deal between himself and the governor to trap unsuspecting foreigners into death sentences for the sake of entertainment. It amounts to premeditated murder. This is indeed a severe miscarriage of justice and in fact a criminal racket in the town.

27c αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἐξεπλάγησαν καὶ ἀνέκραξαν παρὰ τὸ βῆμα  
Κακὴ κρίσις, ἀνοσία κρίσις.

27c But the women were aghast and they cried out to the bema, “an evil judgment, an unholy judgment.”

The fact that the women are disturbed by the judgment and respond so strongly leads us to believe that there were a number of witnesses who

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<sup>626</sup> Stephen's stoning takes place at a time in Paul's life before he is committed to Jesus and while he is known by the name Saul. Acts 8:1 has Σαῦλος δὲ ἦν συνευδοκῶν τῇ ἀναιρέσει αὐτοῦ. “And Saul was consenting to his murder.”

saw clearly what happened to Thecla and they know that the judgment is not just. They call out to the governor that the judgment is “evil” and “unholy”. They may well know that Alexander has economic motives and is in some way involved in a shady deal with the governor.

27d ἡ δὲ < > ἡτήσατο τὸν ἡγεμόνα ἵνα, φησὶν, μέχρις οὗ θηριομαχήσω μείνω ἄγνή.

27d But she asked the governor saying, “until I am in battle with the beasts, let me remain pure.”

The Tischendorf text is improved upon by the addition of the proper-name, Thecla, in the Lipsius text and the omission of the pleonastic construction and the correction of the form of the verb μένω to the third person subjunctive: μείνῃ.

Thecla does not contest the judgment. Rather she asks that she may not be raped while waiting for the judgment. She sees her choice not to marry as a dedication of herself to the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. She is called an apostle in later tradition both because of her travels and because of her many disciples. She has dedicated herself to the life of an apostle, by choosing not to marry, and she wishes this symbolic reference to her life of faith to remain intact as she suffers and perhaps dies.

27e καὶ τις < > Τρύφαινα, ἥς ἡ θυγάτηρ ἔτεθνήκει,

27e And a certain Tryphaena, whose daughter had died,

The Lipsius text has the further description: <βασίλισσα> πλουσία, ὀνόματι Τρύφαινα, the wealthy Queen named Tryphaena. This is a typical expansion.

Now Queen Tryphaena<sup>627</sup> appears in the story. She is a very important character in the narrative. There was also an historical person of the

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<sup>627</sup>Tryphaena was a client Queen of the Polemo dynasty in Asia at the time of St. Paul’s ministry. There are two runs of coins with her image on them. A scholarly account is available; see: “Client-Kingdom of Pontus between Philomithridatism and Philoromanism” by Andrea Primo, pp. 159-179, in *Client-Kings and Roman Principalities*, ed. Ted Kaizer and Margherita Facella, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2010 p. 173. “From 38/39 coins of Antonia Tryphaena and Polemo II (mother and son respectively) began to be minted. They were figured both alone and together. The years 38/39 therefore constituted a terminus ante quem for the death of Pythodoris, which most probably took place a little time before. Antonia inherited from her mother not only the Pontic kingdom, but also her close relations with exponents of the imperial family. An inscription from Cyzicus in honour of Antonia Tryphaena shows that she was also priestess to Livia Augusta and Drusilla. Polemo II reigned in Pontus with his mother Antonia Tryphaena at least up until AD 55/56. The coins of Polemo II confirm



name Tryphaena. We have two runs of coins with her image on them. At this time of Paul's third missionary journey she was retired and her son was king. In her retirement it would not be unreasonable to imagine that she had a household in Pisidian Antioch. Tryphaena's daughter Falconilla has died, which must have caused her great grief.

27f ἔλαβεν αὐτὴν εἰς τήρησιν, καὶ εἶχεν εἰς παραμυθίαν.

27f took her under her protection, and had (her i.e. Thecla) as a consolation.

Tryphaena took Thecla under the protection of her own roof. Since Tryphaena's own daughter had died, Thecla would have been a great comfort to her. Thecla was young, of marriageable age, as we expect Tryphaena's own daughter would have been. If this were the historical Tryphaena, her son would have been an adult and able to rule without his mother's regency so her daughter might well have also been a young adult at the time. Thecla will be a consolation to Queen Tryphaena in more than one way as the story unfolds. This relationship between the older Queen and beautiful young Thecla is key to the success of Thecla's ministry throughout the rest of the story. Tryphaena herself has something like a priestly role in the narrative—she is pastoral, supplies protection and is a defender of the faith in that she cares for the saint in the story. Her support of Thecla is sympathetic and understandable. Wealth knows wealth. Thecla would easily be recognizable by her bearing and clothing as an upper-class woman.

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his good relations with several of the Julio-Claudians, bearing on their reverse from time to time portraits of Claudius, Claudius and Nero, Agrippina, Nero, Britannicus." See also R.A. Kearsley, "Asiarchs, Archiereis, and Archiereiai of Asia: New Evidence from Amorium in Phrygia", in *Epigraphica Anatolica*, Rudolf Habelt, Bonn, no. 16, 1990, p. 71. This article describes the women in powerful positions in the first century CE in Anatolia and includes the information that some even at a distance remained powerful.

## Verse Twenty-eight

**28a** Ἡνίκα δὲ τὰ θηρία ἐπόμπευεν, ἐπέδησαν<sup>628</sup> αὐτὴν λεαίνη πικρᾶ, καὶ ἡ < ><sup>629</sup> Τρύφαινα ἐπηκολούθει αὐτῇ.

**28b** ἡ δὲ λέαινα ἐπάνω καθεζομένης Θέκλης περιέλειχεν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας,

**28c** καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐξίστατο· ἡ δὲ αἰτία τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς αὐτῆς ἦν Ἱερόσυλος.

**28d** αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες < ><sup>630</sup> ἔκραζον ἄνωθεν < ><sup>631</sup> Ἀνοσία<sup>632</sup> κρίσις γίνεται ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ.

**28e** καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πομπῆς πάλιν λαμβάνει αὐτὴν ἡ Τρύφαινα·

**28f** ἡ γὰρ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς Φαλκονίλλα ἦν τεθνεῶσα, καὶ κατ' ὄναρ εἶπεν αὐτῇ

**28g** Μῆτερ, τὴν ξένην ταύτην<sup>633</sup> Θέκλαν ἔξεις εἰς τὸν ἐμὸν τόπον,

**28h** ἵνα εὕξηται περὶ<sup>634</sup> ἐμοῦ καὶ μετατεθῶ εἰς τὸν τῶν δικαίων τόπον.

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<sup>628</sup> The prefix to the verb is not the same in both texts. Tischendorf has ἐπέδησαν and the Lipsius text has προσέδησαν.

<sup>629</sup> The title βασίλισσα is added in the Lipsius text.

<sup>630</sup> The Lipsius text has the added phrase μετὰ τῶν τέκνων here.

<sup>631</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words λέγουσαι ὦ θεέ, here followed by a comma.

<sup>632</sup> The Lipsius text does not begin the word ἀνοσία with an uppercase Α because the sentence in his text begins with the direct address.

<sup>633</sup> Instead of the word ταύτην the Lipsius text has the two words τὴν ἔρημον here.

<sup>634</sup> Instead of περὶ the Lipsius text has ὑπὲρ here.

## Translation

**28a** And when the beasts were paraded, they<sup>635</sup> bound her to a fierce lioness, and Tryphaena followed her.

**28b** When Thecla was seated upon the lioness, it licked her feet,

**28c** and the whole crowd was astounded, and the substance of the charge against her was sacrilege.

**28d** And the women cried to the heavens,<sup>636</sup> “An unholy judgment is given in this city.”

**28e** And Tryphaena took her away from the parade once again,

**28f** for her daughter, Falconilla, was dead, and in a dream she said to her,

**28g** “Mother, you will have this stranger Thecla in my place,

**28h** so that she may pray for me and so that I may be taken into the place of the righteous.”

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<sup>635</sup> There seem to be workers in the animal show who bound her. The subject of the sentence at this point could be clearer.

<sup>636</sup> ἀνωθεν literally means “from above” or “over again”. In this context “to the heavens” is better because at this point in the narrative it is not clear that the women are anywhere above anyone, nor is it clear that they have already cried out.

## Commentary and Notes

28a Ἡνίκα δὲ τὰ θηρία ἐπόμευεν, ἐπέδησαν αὐτὴν λεαίνῃ  
πικρᾷ, καὶ ἡ < > Τρύφαινα ἐπηκολούθει αὐτῇ.

28a And when the beasts were paraded, they bound her to a fierce lioness, and Tryphaena followed her.

The differences between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts are that Lipsius includes Tryphaena's title, and the prefix of the verb is πρὸς rather than ἐπι. Whether Thecla is bound to or on the lion makes little difference to the story. The difference of preposition cannot be used to indicate an earlier text. The addition of proper-names and titles is usually a sign of a later edition because there would not be any likely reason to remove a name or title once it was in a text. The Lipsius text adds numerous titles and proper-names.

There is a beast parade before the spectacle in the arena. This is much like a circus parade to entice people into the arena to watch the spectacle. The parade of the beasts involved a lioness that was not caged but rather walking in the parade through the streets. Thecla is brought to the lioness. Thecla is not frightened by the lioness. The readers and listeners know that Thecla has already shown herself to be brave in the face of death even when the fire was being lit beneath her. The lioness cannot be too dangerous if "they" (more than one person) are employed to bind Thecla to it. There is more drama and less danger in this description. Also if these animals were really dangerous, the Queen would not follow after Thecla and the lioness. The fact that Tryphaena follows along probably beside the beast parade shows her deep, personal commitment to Thecla. A parade to entice people to the arena would have a crowd. One might assume women, men, children, grandparents. The lion cannot have been very dangerous if such a crowd is gathered and it is not caged or severely restrained.

The storyteller here shows her or his hand. From this point in the narrative we are not really expecting Thecla to be endangered by such an animal. For all readers and listeners, the fierce beasts just do not seem so fierce after this parade. In the narrative the parade serves as a foreshadowing of the continued safety of Thecla, no matter what challenges come her way. Although the storyteller continues to describe the challenges as formidable, the listeners and readers become more and more immune to any anxiety on behalf of Thecla's well-being.

28b ἡ δὲ λέαινα ἐπάνω καθεζομένης Θέκλης περιέλειχεν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας,

28b When Thecla was seated upon the lioness, it licked her feet,

The force of this phrase in the narrative is not to let us know how tame the lioness is, although such an idea is likely to occur nonetheless. The force of this phrase is that Thecla is different from anyone else who might be seated on the lioness. She is saintly and the lioness seems to sense this and is affectionate to her rather than hostile. This feet-licking is of the friendly kind, not to torture by tickling or to frighten with the sense that biting will be next. This is simply recognition of the special character of Thecla. The idea is that if Alexander and even Paul do not recognize that Thecla is special, this beast does understand that she is a woman of God, not to be harmed but to be protected.<sup>637</sup> This is like the story of Saint Francis and the wolf. Both stories are told to emphasize the sainthood of the individual. At the time of the writing of the story of Thecla there are several relevant “lion” stories circulating. Some are the stories of Aesop.<sup>638</sup> There is also the story recorded by Aulus Gellius as Androcles and the Lion in his tales called “Attic Nights”<sup>639</sup> and another is the story of Daniel in the lion’s den.<sup>640</sup> Cybele is depicted with attending lions.<sup>641</sup> The story of Thecla shows likenesses to several of these. Perhaps after her escape from these trials, as the story develops, the part of the lioness becomes enhanced by its conflation with these two other stories.

28c καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐξίστατο· ἡ δὲ αἰτία τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς αὐτῆς ἦν Ἱερόσυλος.

<sup>637</sup> <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-antony.asp>. Accessed 21 January, 2014. *Life of Antony*, (Text here is from Athanasius: *Select Works and Letters*, Volume IV of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, editors) Paragraph 51, “Surely it was a marvellous thing that a man, alone in such a desert, feared neither the demons who rose up against him, nor the fierceness of the four-footed beasts and creeping things, for all they were so many. But in truth, as it is written, ‘He trusted in the Lord as Mount Sion,’ with a mind unshaken and undisturbed; so that the demons rather fled from him, and the wild beasts, as it is written, ‘kept peace with him.’”

<sup>638</sup> Ben Edwin Perry, ed. and trans., *Babrius and Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1965, pp. 59, 448-450, 484. These various fables include bulls and a lion, lions fighting with other beasts including a boar, lions with various associations with weaker creatures or people, a lion and a dolphin.

<sup>639</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, pp. 22-23. MacDonald says that the story of Androcles is borrowed from Apion’s *Aegyptiaca* (first century CE), but no doubt the story originated in oral tradition. In other words the story was available at the time that the *Acts of Thecla* was first circulated orally, perhaps fairly early in the second half of the first century CE. See also John Carew Rolfe, trans., *Aulus Gellius, The Attic Nights*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946, p. xiii. Aulus Gellius refers to Aesop pp. 223-229. See also Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1988, pp. 122, 178-191.

<sup>640</sup> C. Burris, *The Reception of the Acts of Thecla in Syriac Christianity: Translation, Collection, and Reception*, p. 74. Burris explores the connection of the Thecla tradition and the prophet Daniel.

<sup>641</sup> N. Hammond and H. Scullard, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 303. See entry Cybele.

28c and the whole crowd was astounded, and the substance of the charge against her was sacrilege.

The contrast between the way the crowd acts in the trial of Jesus in the New Testament and the way the crowd acts here is very strong. In the Gospels the crowd is opposed to Jesus and the crowd expresses the wish that Jesus should be executed (Mt. 27:22). Here the story is very different. The crowd is astounded and supportive of Thecla as the crowds are during Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem before his arrest and trial (Mt 21:5-11).

The grammar and meaning here are difficult but there are no variants. The conjunction "δέ" is very general and does not help with the meaning. Thecla has been sentenced to "the beasts" by the governor because she has attacked Alexander,<sup>642</sup> defending herself as he attempted to sexually assault her. The sentence is given as a result of her confession. It is highly unlikely that she has confessed to "sacrilege".

There are several possibilities here. The first is that the sacrilege is the charge against her and it is a result of her physically defending herself. Perhaps Alexander's crown or cloak was decorated with the image of a goddess or god, a patron of his or a patron of his enterprises. If the "crown" of verse 26j was more like a wreath perhaps it symbolized some important deed or relationship to a goddess or god.<sup>643</sup> If this were the case, normally some explanation of this would be included in the narrative. Perhaps Alexander was seen to be so important in the city as to be under the protection of some deity related to the city, in which case the attack against his person was the sacrilege.

There are more possibilities. It is possible that the "charge was sacrilege" is a reference to the irony that the circus owned by Alexander was in need of a spectacle and that the sexual assault was a ruse in order to provide a victim for the spectacle. This would be a dishonest and malicious manipulation on the part of Alexander. If indeed the goddesses or gods were praised in any way before or during the animal show this vicious act of Alexander's would be a sacrilege. Here the understanding is that the

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<sup>642</sup> Compare here the subversive story of Arachne. See Eve D'Ambra, *Private Lives, Imperial Virtues*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, p. 51. "For Arachne weaving becomes a means of subversion because she has brought a feminine accomplishment and wifely duty into the arena of divine competition and mortal fame. Rather than instilling the matronly virtues of modesty and humility in Arachne, weaving has made her bold and reckless."

<sup>643</sup> N. Hammond and H. Scullard, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 300. See entry crowns and wreaths.

charge against Thecla was in fact Alexander's sacrilege. The comparison with the inscription on the cross of Jesus could possibly weigh in favour of an explanation like this. Pilate has the truth inscribed: "the king of the Jews". It is the believer who reads or hears the Gospels who knows that this is actually true. Similarly it is the believer who knows that in this narrative it is Alexander who is the one who has done wrong.

There is another possibility which is that this phrase comes from a layer of telling the story where Thecla is known to be the religious heroine, saint and example of devout Christian women. In this case, the charge, although it has no connection with the story so far (Thecla has committed no act against any deity), is recorded in order to support the tradition of Thecla's witness to her Christian faith. Related to what she has actually done, escaped her mother's plans for her marriage, she may be accused of filial impiety. This impious behaviour may simply have been designated 'Ιερόσυλος "sacrilegious".

The crowd in the streets was astounded: ecstatic or in a frenzy. The crowd was highly animated. Was this because the lion was so tame and affectionate to Thecla or was it because they deemed the judgment to be unjust? The whole crowd is animated: it is inappropriate for such a manifestly special person as Thecla to be suffering under such a judgment.

28d αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες < > ἔκραζον ἄνωθεν < > Ἄνοσία  
κρίσις γίνεται ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ.

28d And the women cried to the heavens, "An unholy judgment is given in this city".

The Lipsius text adds "with the children". This appears to be a later assimilation to the Gospel of Matthew account of Jesus' triumphal entry and cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem. It is a potent theological passage referring to Psalm 8:1-3. It assumes gratitude for human life and for justice and it witnesses to the praise of God's majestic name in all the earth. Mt 21:15-17 reads:

15 ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τὰ θαυμάσια ἃ  
ἐποίησεν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς κρίζοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ  
λέγοντας, Ὡσαννὰ τῷ υἱῷ Δαυίδ, ἠγανάκτησαν 16 καὶ εἶπαν  
αὐτῷ, Ἀκούεις τί οὗτοι λέγουσιν; ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς,  
Ναί· οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι Ἐκ στόματος νηπίων καὶ  
θηλαζόντων κατηρτίσω αἶνον; 17 Καὶ καταλιπὼν αὐτοὺς

ἐξῆλθεν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως εἰς Βηθανίαν, καὶ ἡλίσθη ἐκεῖ.

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David”, they became angry 16 and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and babies you have prepared praise for yourself’?” 17 He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

In the Gospel of Matthew the voices of the children have a legitimizing impact. In the *Acts of Thecla* it is arguable that the same legitimizing impact in the Lipsius text would add to the confusion about which deity is responsible for Thecla’s vindication, unless the direct address is maintained which is what Lipsius prefers. In this case Lipsius has eliminated the possible questions about orthodoxy himself by his choice of the expansions. “The children” is found in manuscripts ABEFH while the direct address to God is found primarily in Latin manuscripts.

The children are crying with their mothers “to the heavens” or “from above”. The Lipsius text’s direct address, “O God”, adds a Jewish and Christian universalizing element. It is highly unlikely that this city crowd would cry out “O God” as if they were all Jews or Christians and there were only one God. The Lipsius text is showing a late theology where the Christian community has corrected to make the text seem more clearly orthodox. The Tischendorf text is more true to the historical time of Paul. The crying to the heavens could be petitioning of any deities or powers. This historical perspective may have found mistrust among later Christian scholars and scribes. It may have been thought of as unorthodox that prayers to various deities resulted in Thecla’s vindication. The variant chosen by Lipsius would then have to be seen as a correction, therefore the Tischendorf text is more likely earlier.

The women of the crowd in the streets all cry that this is an “unholy judgment”. The general reference is itself an indication of an early date for the *Acts of Thecla*. At a later time there might be descriptions of which deities were addressed. It might say something like: the Christians and Jews cried to God and even the Romans cried out to their idols. Such distinctions probably do not exist at the time of Paul’s ministry; hence they cried that the judgment was unholy before the God of the Jews and the gods of the imperial pantheon and any local deities or gods of foreigners present.



The mention of “in this city” is interesting. It is a complaint against civic malpractice supporting the wealthy owner of the beast games and not protecting the ordinary person. This is just the opposite of what civic government is expected to do. An ethical comment like this is consistent with the theology of the *Acts of Thecla* that does not accept injustice.

28e    Καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πομπῆς πάλιν λαμβάνει αὐτὴν ἡ Τρύφαινα·

28e    And Tryphaena took her away from the parade once again,

Now that the parade is finished Queen Tryphaena takes Thecla to her home to protect her. The advertisements and preparations for the spectacle will continue for some time. During that time Thecla will be safe in the home of Queen Tryphaena. This is the second time that Tryphaena takes Thecla away. The first time is after the sentencing. When Thecla is brought back for the parade, the narrative reads as if Tryphaena stays with her the entire time and then takes her away again. This time the death of Falconilla is the focus of Thecla’s visit. Thecla’s soothing presence brings healing to the bereft Queen and mother in her extreme grief.<sup>644</sup> That this care of women for women in home settings is brought into the realm of the Gospel imperative is very important for understanding the impact of Christianity through the centuries. This is an important theological contribution of the *Acts of Thecla*.

28f    ἡ γὰρ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς Φαλκονίλλα ἦν τεθνεῶσα, καὶ κατ’ ὄναρ εἶπεν αὐτῇ

28f    for her daughter, Falconilla, was dead, and in a dream she said to her,

Queen Tryphaena’s daughter, Falconilla, has died. This is information that was presented in 27e. This is the first time her daughter is named. It is a suitable name for a royal daughter but we do not have historical evidence that she existed. We have coins of the historical Tryphaena’s son, Polemo, but nothing about this daughter. Falconilla though dead spoke to Tryphaena in a dream. Messages or ideas that come to a person in dreams are very common in the ancient world. In the Torah are the stories of Joseph the son of Jacob, interpreter of dreams (Gen 40:4-43:32). In the New Testament another Joseph, the father of Jesus, will dream of an angel warning him to take his family to Egypt (Mt 2:13). In

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<sup>644</sup> E. Wainwright, *Women Healing/Healing Women: The Genderization of Healing in Early Christianity*, pp. 40-55 especially p. 42. Wainwright describes the ministry of medical and personal care of women for women in home settings in the ancient Greco-Roman and Middle Eastern world.

Aristotle's treatise on dreams he notes the widespread interest in divination by dreams.<sup>645</sup>

28g Μῆτερ, τὴν ξένην ταύτην Θέκλαν ἔξεις εἰς τὸν ἐμὸν τόπον,

28g “Mother, you will have this stranger Thecla in my place,

The Lipsius text substitutes “the forsaken” for the word “this”. Lipsius finds “the forsaken” in manuscripts ABFH. Barrier does not comment on this word ἔρημον which he translates as “deserted”, but he comments on the meaning of this phrase: “This is an affirmation of Thecla’s approval by God”.<sup>646</sup>

Falconilla tells Queen Tryphaena in a dream that Thecla will take her place as a daughter. This is a very powerful communication. Coming from Falconilla herself it is clearly not a substitute per se of one daughter for the other, but it is a consolation in life that Thecla will relate to Tryphaena as a daughter. Thecla’s own mother has not protected her. In fact at this stage in the story Theocleia has disgraced herself as a mother by requesting her own daughter’s death. Tryphaena will be wonderful in the role of mother to Thecla and eventually both she and Theocleia will be supporters of Thecla in her ministry and apostolate. Tryphaena will provide the money for Thecla to keep Theocleia into her dotage. The two families will unite and allow Thecla to fulfill her vocation and also attend to her financial duty to Theocleia, thereby demonstrating her filial piety.

28h ἵνα εὖξηται περὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ μετατεθῶ εἰς τὸν τῶν δικαίων τόπον.

28h so that she may pray for me and so that I may be taken into the place of the righteous.”

The verb εὖξηται is the aorist subjunctive of εὐχομαι, which normally is used with the preposition ὑπέρ as is found in the Lipsius text.<sup>647</sup> This appears to be a later correction.

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<sup>645</sup> Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, W. D. Ross, ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1955, pp. 47, 279 and 462b12-18. See also Emily Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2010, pp. 94-101.

<sup>646</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 148.

<sup>647</sup> *LSJ*, p. 739, and Lampe, p. 584.

Falconilla's reason for suggesting this "mother" and "daughter" kind of relationship is so that Thecla can pray for her to be taken to the place of the righteous.<sup>648</sup> Barrier interestingly perceives the importance of justice in this narrative and he writes, "Falconilla desires to be in a place of justice".<sup>649</sup> Paul has of course written about baptism of the dead (1Cor 15:29). Is this a kind of achievement of salvation through the prayers of others? The idea that one can pray for those who have died is easier to understand than baptising another on behalf of a dead person. Today there are Christians who pray for those who have died; see for example in The Sunday Missal of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>650</sup> This is a very important reason for Tryphaena to care for Thecla. Tryphaena sees Thecla as the holy person who has this power to assure that Falconilla will rest in peace<sup>651</sup> experiencing her eternal reward, though there is no mention of her resting in peace as a Christian. This idea is very important to today's pluralistic theological inter-faith dialogues.

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<sup>648</sup> This term is perhaps related to the use of the title "the Righteous One" ὁ δίκαιος for Jesus. It is a very old Christian usage found in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and in Justin Martyr and has a distinctively Jewish character harking back to Isaiah. See Leslie William Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, Schocken, New York, 1966, p. 69.

<sup>649</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 148.

<sup>650</sup> *The Sunday Missal*, Harold Winstone, ed., Collins, London, 1982, p. 80. There are many examples in this missal; the one on page 80 serves only as an example.

<sup>651</sup> In the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, Perpetua has a vision of her brother, Dinocrates, who died at a young age. She sees him change to be joyful as a child and released from pain.  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.asp> Accessed 21 January, 2014.

## Verse Twenty-nine

**29a** Ὅτε δὲ<sup>652</sup> ἀπὸ τῆς πομπῆς ἐλάμβανεν αὐτὴν ἡ Τρύφαινα,

**29b** ἅμα μὲν ἐπένθει ὅτι ἔμελλεν εἰς τὴν αὐρίον θηριομαχεῖν,

**29c** ἅμα δὲ καὶ στέργουσα ἐμπόνως ὥς τὴν θυγατέρα  
Φαλκονίλλαν εἶπεν Τέκνον μου δεύτερον Θέκλα,

**29d** δεῦρο πρόσευξαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ τέκνου μου, ἵνα ζήσεται εἰς  
τοὺς αἰῶνας· τοῦτο γὰρ εἶδον ἐν ὕπνοις.

**29e** ἡ δὲ μηδὲν<sup>653</sup> μελλήσασα ἤρεν<sup>654</sup> τὴν φωνὴν < ><sup>655</sup> καὶ  
εἶπεν Ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος,<sup>656</sup>

**29f** < ><sup>657</sup> δὸς αὐτῇ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτῆς,

**29g** ἵνα ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς Φαλκονίλλα ζήσεται εἰς τοὺς  
αἰῶνας.

**29h** καὶ ταῦτα εἰπούσης Θέκλης ἐπένθει ἡ Τρύφαινα  
ἐπέχουσα τοιοῦτον κάλλος εἰς θηρία βαλλόμενον.

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<sup>652</sup> Instead of δὲ the Lipsius text has οὖν.

<sup>653</sup> Here instead of μηδὲν the Lipsius text has only μὴ.

<sup>654</sup> Here instead of ἤρεν the Lipsius text has the prefixed form ἐπῆρεν.

<sup>655</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional word αὐτῆς here.

<sup>656</sup> Here instead of ὁ ὑψίστος the Lipsius text has only the possessive pronoun μου.

<sup>657</sup> The Lipsius text includes this address followed by a comma: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ὑψίστου ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

## Translation

- 29a** When Tryphaena took her away from the parade,
- 29b** she was both grieving, for (Thecla)<sup>658</sup> was to fight the beasts on the next day,
- 29c** and at the same time, also loving (Thecla) steadfastly as her daughter Falconilla, she said, “Thecla, my second child,
- 29d** come pray for my child, in order that she will live in eternity, for this I saw in dreams.”
- 29e** And without delay she lifted her<sup>659</sup> voice and said, “O Most High God,
- 29f** give to her according to her will
- 29g** in order that her daughter, Falconilla, will live forever.”
- 29h** And when Thecla said this, Tryphana mourned that she had care of such a beauty, destined to be tossed to the beasts.

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<sup>658</sup> The feminine pronoun is unhelpful here as the sentence concerns three women, Tryphaena, Thecla and Falconilla.

<sup>659</sup> Literally, “she lifted the voice”.

## Commentary and Notes

29a Ὅτε δὲ<sup>660</sup> ἀπὸ τῆς πομπῆς ἐλάμβανεν αὐτὴν ἡ Τρύφαινα,

29a When Tryphaena took her away from the parade,

There is a variant in the Lipsius text. Instead of δὲ the Lipsius text has οὖν. Lipsius is choosing “therefore” to say that due to the communication in Tryphaena’s dream, and for that reason Tryphaena took Thecla away from the parade. This makes better sense in the narrative. If οὖν were in an earlier text, it is unlikely to have been substituted with δέ.

This is a very important threshold in the narrative. Thecla is being taken away from the humiliation of the public spectacle. It is a refuge and safety for Thecla at least for a period of time. It is also the first time in the narrative that Thecla is being hosted in a household. Itinerant Christian missionaries visited households as we have Paul at Onesiphorus’ house in the opening scenes of the *Acts of Thecla*. The expectation of Tryphaena because of her dream of Falconilla is controlling these actions. This “being taken” is very different to the other “being taken” scenes in the narrative. This time Thecla is taken for her care and at her own request “to be kept pure”. In the narrative, Tryphaena as the initiator of the action is showing herself to be a strong character who will influence the outcome of events overall. The intervention of a powerful person on Thecla’s behalf would give hope to the readers or listeners.

29b ἅμα μὲν ἐπένθει ὅτι ἔμελλεν εἰς τὴν αὐρίον θηριομαχεῖν,

29b she was both grieving, for (Thecla)<sup>661</sup> was to fight the beasts on the next day,

On the trip away from the parade to Tryphaena’s home, Tryphaena suffers emotionally. Both the young woman and the older woman are suffering in this scene of the narrative. They are support and comfort to each other. The conversation in 29d lets the readers and listeners know that Tryphaena and Thecla are together at this point which might not have

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<sup>660</sup> Instead of δὲ the Lipsius text has οὖν.

<sup>661</sup> The feminine pronoun is unhelpful here as the sentence concerns three women, Tryphaena, Thecla and Falconilla.

been expected. A powerful rich person could be said to “take someone”, when in fact the work was done by slaves or servants. In other words, Tryphaena could have commanded her attendant to bring Thecla. This is a much more sensitive and personal encounter. Tryphaena is weighed down with grief because Thecla is to fight the beasts the following day and at the same time Tryphaena is joyful to have this precious time with Thecla. In the narrative, the two women would have been ministering to each other even if no conversation took place. To be companioned in grief or in anxiety is a great comfort, just as to be alone in grief or anxiety is a heavier burden.

29c ἅμα δὲ καὶ στέργουσα ἐμπόνως ὥς τὴν θυγατέρα  
Φαλκονίλλαν εἶπεν Τέκνον μου δεύτερον Θέκλα,

29c and at the same time, also loving (Thecla) steadfastly as her daughter Falconilla, she said, “Thecla, my second child,

Tryphaena’s affection for Thecla is already very pronounced because she sees her as a second daughter representing Falconilla and also as Falconilla’s advocate for eternal life. Tryphaena’s love for Thecla is described as στέργουσα ἐμπόνως, strong or steadfast love. This is the family love of a mother for a daughter.

29d δεῦρο πρόσευξαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ τέκνου μου, ἵνα ζήσεται εἰς  
τοὺς αἰῶνας· τοῦτο γὰρ εἶδον ἐν ὕπνοις.

29d come pray for my child, in order that she will live in eternity, for this I saw in dreams.”

Both the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts have the future indicative in the ἵνα clause. This is a Hellenistic and New Testament usage instead of the aorist subjunctive to give the sense of something that is not yet a realized fact. Zerwick discusses the future indicative in ἵνα clauses in two paragraphs in his grammar.<sup>662</sup> I have translated “in order that she will live in eternity” but in this sentence “in order that she may live in eternity” would also carry the sense that this has not yet happened.

At this point in the narrative, Tryphaena petitions Thecla to pray for Falconilla that she may have eternal life. Tryphaena has seen this in her dreams and feels compelled to see it worked out in real life. She trusts

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<sup>662</sup> M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, p. 117.

that this will secure Falconilla's afterlife. It is a kind of spiritual healing that she is requesting.

29e ἡ δὲ μηδὲν μελλήσασα ἤρεν τὴν φωνήν < > εἶπεν  
Ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψιστός,

29e And without delay she lifted (her) voice and said, "O Most High God,

There are several variants in this segment at the beginning of the prayer. Lipsius has μή instead of μηδέν. This appears to be an attempt at the elimination of repetition, since δε already appears immediately before this word. The Tischendorf text has ἤρεν from αἶρω "I lift" but Lipsius seems to improve with ἐπῆρεν from ἐπαίρω "I lift up". There is very little difference between the sense in the narrative, depending on which verb is used, because αἶρω "I lift" already has the sense "I lift up". To "lift the voice" or "lift up the voice" in prayer is a dramatic way to introduce an important quotation in the narrative. Lipsius adds the personal pronoun and the conjunction αὐτῆς καὶ. This is not necessary. In Greek, to "lift the voice" is already understood as "lift her voice". It is less stylish to add the personal pronoun, but it might be giving more information, though unnecessary, especially to listeners or readers who may not originally be Greek speakers.

Thecla wastes no time but begins her prayer immediately. Thecla raises her voice in prayer. She addresses God in the Jewish way, ὁ ὑψιστός "O Most High" (see LXX Gen. 14:22; Num 19:16; Ps 97:9; Dan. 4:2 and other examples). The Lipsius text shortens this to Ὁ θεός μου "my God" but expands as well, as will be seen in the next segment.

29f < > δὸς αὐτῇ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτῆς,

29f give to her according to her will

The Lipsius text has a significant expansion in the addressing of God in this prayer. The address to God includes: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ὑψίστου ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ "the Son of the Most High in the heavens". There is nothing in this address of God that is not orthodox. It is difficult to see why anyone would have wanted to abridge the text here.

Thecla prays that what Tryphaena wants will be granted to her by God. For those who know the New Testament prayer of Mt 6: 9-14, the Our



Father or Lord's Prayer, praying that Tryphaena's will be done could seem odd. Christians are instructed to pray that God's "will be done". This could be an indication that the *Acts of Thecla* does not know the Gospel of Matthew and may be written at the end of the first or beginning of the second-century.

29g ἵνα ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς Φαλκονίλλα ζήσεται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

29g in order that her daughter, Falconilla, will live in eternity."

Thecla also specifies what it is that Tryphaena wants, namely for Falconilla to live in eternity. One could look at this from the point of view of the caring for Tryphaena rather than from the point of view of caring for Falconilla. The way loved ones are remembered affects those remembering.

29h καὶ ταῦτα εἰπούσης Θέκλῃς ἐπένθει ἡ Τρύφαινα ἐπέχουσα τοιοῦτον κάλλος εἰς θηρία βαλλόμενον.

29h And when Thecla said this, Tryphaena mourned that she had care of such a beauty destined to be tossed to the beasts.

When Thecla fulfils Tryphaena's hopes by praying so beautifully and powerfully, this sets Tryphaena grieving again. She can see how compatible she and Thecla are and how Thecla is eager to help. Tryphaena clearly considers it a special privilege to have Thecla as a visitor. Thecla is described by the text as "such a beauty". Thecla's beauty is not only physical, but also spiritual and emotional. It is something of great sorrow that such a good and beautiful young woman will be thrown to beasts, especially when she does not deserve this evil judgment.

## Verse Thirty

**30a** Καὶ ὅτε ὄρθρος ἐγένετο, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος  
παραλαβεῖν αὐτήν, αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐδίδου τὰ κυνήγια,

**30b** λέγων Ὁ ἡγεμὼν κάθηται καὶ ὁ ὄχλος θορυβεῖ ἡμᾶς·  
δοῦς ἀπαγάγω τὴν θηριομάχον.

**30c** ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα ἀνέκραξεν ὥστε καὶ<sup>663</sup> αὐτὸν φυγεῖν,<sup>664</sup>

**30d** λέγουσα<sup>665</sup> Φαλκονίλλης μου δεύτερον πένθος ἐπὶ τῆς  
οἰκίας<sup>666</sup> μου<sup>667</sup> γίνεται,

**30e** καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ βοηθῶν· οὔτε τέκνον, ἀπέθανεν γάρ, οὔτε  
συγγενῆς, χήρα γάρ εἰμι.

**30f** ὁ θεὸς Θέκλης < >,<sup>668</sup> βοήθησον αὐτῇ.<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> The Lipsius text omits the conjunction καὶ here.

<sup>664</sup> These two words are in reverse order in the Lipsius text and no comma follows: φυγεῖν αὐτὸν.

<sup>665</sup> The Lipsius text adds a partial stop λέγουσα here. This divides the verse differently producing:  
ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα ἀνέκραξεν ὥστε φυγεῖν αὐτὸν λέγουσα· Φαλκονίλλης μου. . . |

<sup>666</sup> In the Lipsius text this is accusative, τὴν οἰκίαν.

<sup>667</sup> The pronoun μου is missing from the Lipsius text.

<sup>668</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words τοῦ τέκνου μου here.

<sup>669</sup> Instead of the word αὐτῇ the Lipsius text has the proper name Θέκλῃ here.

## Translation

**30a** And when dawn came, Alexander came to seize her, for he himself sponsored the games,<sup>670</sup>

**30b** saying, “the governor is seated and the crowd is clamouring for us. Let me take away the beastfighter.”

**30c** And Tryphaena cried aloud so that he fled,

**30d** saying, “a second mourning for my Falconilla is coming to my household,

**30e** and there is no one to help, neither child, for she is dead, nor a relative, for I am a widow

**30f** O God of Thecla, help her!”

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<sup>670</sup> Literally these are beast or animal games, or the spectacle where animals hunt or are hunted. When human persons are introduced unarmed among the animals, it is expected that the animals will injure or kill those persons. For background to these spectacles from the late republic to the time of Nero see Richard Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999, pp. 197-223.

## Commentary and Notes

30a Καὶ ὅτε ὄρθρος ἐγένετο, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος παραλαβεῖν αὐτήν, αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐδίδου τὰ κυνήγια,

30a And when dawn came, Alexander came to seize her, for he himself sponsored the games,

Alexander came very early to get his main attraction. In the ancient world the day began with the sun. Alexander was a main sponsor of the games. This is relevant to the way he has treated Thecla from the first moment he saw her. Perhaps this is all that he wanted—to have her in his games. The games would not start at first light; they would begin when the sun was up and people could see as clearly as possible. There would be quite a few tasks to do that could only be done that morning. It is significant that Alexander comes himself to collect Thecla. He is wealthy and could have sent an envoy to get her but he comes himself, perhaps because he realizes that he has to contend with Tryphaena and she still wields power even though she is retired. He comes to take Thecla against her wishes and against the wishes of Tryphaena.

30b λέγων ὁ ἡγεμὼν κάθηται καὶ ὁ ὄχλος θορυβεῖ ἡμᾶς· δὸς ἀπαγάγω τὴν θηριομάχον.

30b saying, “the governor is seated and the crowd is clamouring for us. Let me take away the beastfighter.”

He exaggerates and of course Tryphaena would realize that he is not speaking the exact truth. The governor and the crowd will not be seated at dawn. It is not a comfortable time of day to be a spectator in the open air. The arena will have to fill up before the games begin. Thecla is referred to as the beastfighter. This becomes a way that she is designated in later hagiographic literature and iconography.<sup>671</sup> She will contend with a number of animals and yet be successfully released. Alexander speaks respectfully to Tryphaena, asking permission to take Thecla away. He would not be likely to do this if Thecla were in any other custody. We have seen earlier in the story how rude and aggressive he can be.

30c ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα ἀνέκραξεν ὥστε καὶ αὐτὸν φυγεῖν,

30c And Tryphaena cried aloud so that he fled,

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<sup>671</sup> S. Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*, pp. 117-119.

Tryphaena will not give permission for Alexander to take Thecla, but rather she begins a loud and disturbing lament. Alexander has authority from the governor to take Thecla but he flees quickly before any of Tryphaena's servants begin to give him a hard time, and before he sees and hears everything that Tryphaena has to say. He avoids her sadness for fear of his own safety. He is being characterised as a coward.

30d λέγουσα Φαλκονίλλης μου δεύτερον πένθος ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας μου γίνεται,

30d saying, “a second mourning for my Falconilla is coming to my household,

The Lipsius change of case with the preposition is more correct.

The readers and listeners to the story cannot flee. They hear everything that the ancient author records that Tryphaena had to say. Her lament is for both her daughter Falconilla and for Thecla her new daughter. She laments on behalf of all of her household. All of her servants will also mourn with her. This was common practice in the ancient world.<sup>672</sup>

Extra mourners may also be hired who are professional mourners, to help the household to remain suitably in grief for some time. Professional mourners would play instruments that made sad melodies and they would call out, wailing and weeping in order to let everyone who approaches the dwelling know that it is a household in mourning. In the Gospel of John we have a good example of this kind of mourning practice in chapter 11 for the death of Lazarus. We also have reference to it in the Gospel of Matthew when the children are imitating the ritual funeral actions of the adults.<sup>673</sup>

30 καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ βοηθῶν· οὔτε τέκνον, ἀπέθανεν γάρ, οὔτε συγγενῆς, χήρα γάρ εἰμι.

30e and there is no one to help, neither child, for she is dead, nor a relative, for I am a widow

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<sup>672</sup> The entire household mourns. See S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, pp. 44, 57, 80. Mourning happens in groups and professional mourners could be hired for funerals. See also John M. G. Barclay, “The Family as the Bearer of Religion in Judaism and Early Christianity”, in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, Halvor Moxnes, ed., Routledge, London, 1997, p. 68. Barclay writes of the participation of the whole household in honouring its deceased members not only at funerals. See also Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2001, p. 203.

<sup>673</sup> Mt 11:16-17.

Tryphaena continues her lament. There is no one to help her, no one who is a relative left to comfort and care for her. Tryphaena refers to Falconilla since she was the one who recommended Thecla to her mother. Tryphaena is a widow. The historical Queen Tryphaena reigned for some years after her husband's death and before her son ascended to the throne. This historical matter might be a background for this part of the narrative. It is not a perfect match since her son would still be living. It is not the purpose of this study to argue for historicity at such a level of detail in this story. In the narrative Tryphaena is recounting her sorry circumstances verbally. Today this is considered wise as it is known to be an aid to processing grief. Tryphaena's grief is threatened to be exacerbated by the further loss of Thecla, her newly adopted daughter. Tryphaena's speaking has the effect of drawing the sympathy of the readers or listeners.

30f ὁ θεὸς Θέκλης < >, βοήθησον αὐτῇ.

30f O God of Thecla, help her!"

Access to Thecla's God was one of the main reasons that Tryphaena harboured Thecla. Thecla's God would be able to bring eternal life to Falconilla and this was what Tryphaena wanted. The idea of eternal life being available must have been an exciting idea to many at this time in history.<sup>674</sup> The Egyptian religions were also popular, perhaps because they devoted a great deal of energy and thought to afterlife. The Christian message is very straightforward about eternal life. The resurrection is the proclamation of eternal life for all who believe. It is the victory over death.

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<sup>674</sup> The Intertestamental period in Israel shows a marked interest in the Egyptian ideas of eternal life. This is seen for example in the book of Sirach 38: 23; 41:4. and in the Wisdom of Solomon 3:2-7: "In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction: but they are at peace." These works written in Greek show Egyptian interest and influence. See for example the Wisdom of Solomon 12:23-27; in Sirach in the Prologue: "When I came to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Euergetes and stayed for some time, I found opportunity for no little instruction." (NRSV) See also Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993, pp. 252, 258. "The Egyptian deities were thoroughly Hellenized, at least in externals—the statues, temples, and language—yet maintained the appeal of the foreign in their ceremonies." A temple of Isis existed in Rome.

## Verse Thirty-one

**31a** Εὐθέως δε<sup>675</sup> πέμπει ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἄκτον<sup>676</sup> ἵνα Θέκλα ἀχθῇ.<sup>677</sup>

**31b** ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα < ><sup>678</sup> λαβομένη αὐτήν<sup>679</sup> τῆς χειρὸς < ><sup>680</sup> εἶπεν<sup>681</sup> Τὴν μὲν θυγατέρα μου Φαλκονίλλαν ἀπήγαγον εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον·

**31c** σὲ δέ, Θέκλα, εἰς θηριομαχεῖον<sup>682</sup> ἀπάγω.

**31d** καὶ ἐδάκρυσεν<sup>683</sup> Θέκλα πικρῶς < ><sup>684</sup> λέγουσα Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ᾧ ἐγὼ πιστεύω, ἐφ' ὃν ἐγὼ κατέφυγα,

**31e** ὁ ῥυσάμενός με ἐκ πυρός, ἀπόδος μισθὸν Τρυφαίνῃ < ><sup>685</sup> τὴν δούλῃν σου συμπαθησάσῃ,

**31f** καὶ ὅτι ἀγνὴν με<sup>686</sup> ἐτήρησεν.

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<sup>675</sup> Here the Lipsius text has Καὶ instead of Εὐθέως δε.

<sup>676</sup> Here the Lipsius text has στρατιώτας instead of ἄκτον.

<sup>677</sup> The Lipsius text has these two words in reverse order; instead of Θέκλα ἀχθῇ Lipsius has ἀχθῇ Θέκλα.

<sup>678</sup> The Lipsius text includes these four extra words and a comma separating the pairs here: οὐκ ἀπέστη, ἀλλὰ αὐτή.

<sup>679</sup> This word does not occur here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>680</sup> The Lipsius text has these three extra words here: αὐτῆς ἀνήγαγεν λέγουσα.

<sup>681</sup> This verb εἶπεν does not occur in the Lipsius text here.

<sup>682</sup> In the Lipsius text this word is θηριομαχίαν.

<sup>683</sup> Instead of ἐδάκρυσεν the Lipsius text has ἔκλαυσεν.

<sup>684</sup> These additional words appear in the Lipsius text: καὶ ἐστέναξεν πρὸς κύριον.

<sup>685</sup> These two additional words appear in the Lipsius text: τῇ εἰς.

<sup>686</sup> These two words appear in reverse order in the Lipsius text as: με ἀγνὴν.

## Translation

**31a** Immediately the governor issued a warrant in order<sup>687</sup> to arrest Thecla.

**31b** But Tryphaena took her by the hand and said, “Whereas I took my daughter, Falconilla, to the grave

**31c** you, Thecla, I am leading to the beast-fighting”.

**31d** And Thecla wept bitterly, saying, “Lord God in whom I trust, with whom I have taken refuge,

**31e** who delivered me from fire, give to Tryphaena the reward<sup>688</sup> for her compassion on your servant,

**31f** and because she kept me pure.”

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<sup>687</sup> The Greek is not so specific as this English would suggest. The Greek is general: an order is sent to bring her away, literally “so that she may be taken”. I think that my English rendering is accurate in terms of the sense of what happens here in the narrative; that is, a written communication is received the result of which is that she is again taken into custody.

<sup>688</sup> Eternal reward.



## Commentary and Notes

31a Εὐθέως δε πέμπει ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἄκτον ἵνα Θεκλα ἀχθῇ.

31a Immediately the governor issued a warrant in order to arrest Thecla.

The governor issues official documentation for Thecla to be arrested. Other manuscripts used by Lipsius have στρατιώτας and translations have “soldiers”. The Lipsius text is easier since a soldier could very well have been sent to collect her into custody even when Alexander has already tried to take her and failed. The word ἄκτον is a transliteration of the Latin. One would have more likely expected it in the plural as “acta”. In the plural it could express documentation or written instructions giving authorisation. Here we seem to have a single paper, so “warrant” is our best attempt to translate.

The idea of soldiers coming would have reminded the listener of the story of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden according to the Gospel of John. Lipsius’ choice suggests that the story of Thecla is copying from the story of the arrest in the Gospel of John. The Tischendorf text has no pretensions to making this agree in any way with the Gospel of John, which perhaps was not yet written, and if it was written quite likely was not yet widely circulated and known. In the other Gospels Jesus is not arrested by soldiers and police but by a crowd, with temple guards and elders.<sup>689</sup>

Since the sentence was announced publicly everyone knows that Thecla will appear in Alexander’s games. There is no reason why he cannot take her when the games are ready. The warrant is simply a matter of red tape. It makes it clear that Alexander has this authority, especially since he must take Thecla from Tryphaena the retired Queen. The text also assures the reader or listener that try as she might Tryphaena could not keep Thecla safe.

31b ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα < > λαβομένη αὐτὴν τῆς χειρὸς  
< > εἶπεν Τὴν μὲν θυγατέρα μου Φαλκονίλλαν ἀπήγαγον  
εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον·

31b But Tryphaena took her by the hand and said, “Whereas I took my daughter, Falconilla, to the grave

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<sup>689</sup> Mk 14:43; Mt 26:47; Lk 22:47-52; John 18:3.

“Tryphaena took Thecla by the hand” is a touching phrase, showing tenderness and affection. Tryphaena speaks trustingly to Thecla of her daughter’s death. The reference to Tryphaena’s companionship for Falconilla is not explicit but perhaps it means that Tryphaena held Falconilla’s hand as she died. This would be a part of all the expected attention that a mother would naturally lavish on her dying daughter. The passage brings to mind all those in the New Testament who mourn the death of loved ones, the widow of Naim, Martha and Mary, John the Beloved and Mary the mother of Jesus.

31c σὲ δέ, Θέκλα, εἰς θηριομαχεῖον ἀπάγω.

31c you, Thecla, I am leading to the beast-fighting”.

Tryphaena feels somehow responsible that she cannot protect Thecla. She is of course not literally leading Thecla to the arena but as Queen<sup>690</sup> perhaps she would have had the power to stay the carrying out of the sentence. As retired monarch she has no expectation of being able to help against these powerful men who have sentenced Thecla to the ordeal of the arena. As a woman she would feel the helplessness of Thecla’s situation and its deep inherent injustice. As a mother she already begins grieving for the loss of the life of another promising young woman. Tryphaena’s words show deep trust in and love for Thecla in these dire circumstances. To readers and listeners, Tryphaena is like the mother Thecla ought to have had. She stands in stark contrast to Theocleia who calls out for Thecla’s death. Tryphaena has only regret at the possible loss of Thecla’s life in this trial in the animal games. Tryphaena is not yet convinced that Thecla’s Living God can save her. Saving Falconilla was somehow easier since she was already dead and her mortality was never in question. Tryphaena has prayed in the last verse, 30f, but what sort of prayer was it?

31d καὶ ἐδάκρυσεν Θέκλα πικρῶς < >, λέγουσα Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ᾧ ἐγὼ πιστεύω, ἐφ’ ὃν ἐγὼ κατέφυγα,

31d And Thecla wept bitterly, saying, “Lord God in whom I trust, with whom I have taken refuge,

The Lipsius text adds καὶ ἐστέναξεν πρὸς κύριον which Elliott translates, “and (she) sighed to the Lord”. This is an embellishment

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<sup>690</sup> See further in verse 38b, where it is made explicit in the Tischendorf text that Tryphaena is Queen.

which adds to the dramatic characterisation of Thecla and heightens the dramatic tone in this passage.

Thecla weeps. In this she is like Jesus who weeps at Lazarus' grave. Although Thecla does not have foreknowledge of her victories and vindication in the arena her tears are very likely because of her ministry to Tryphaena, the Queen, and the bond that has been established through the spirit of Falconilla. The old woman and the young one have become like blood relatives in their common understanding and love. The parting is painful and they share each other's pain. The reader or listener knows of Thecla's undaunted courage in the face of death and so understands that these are not tears of fear but of sympathy and separation. After the arena the story will show the continued relationship of these two women. Their lives have become inseparably entwined. Thecla weeps and laments together with Tryphaena in this phrase but she also does what the reader or listener would expect, she prays. The prayer mirrors the trust between the two women. The holding of hands shows their trust for one another. In the prayer, God is the one in whom Thecla trusts and by extension of the circumstance, the one in whom Tryphaena ought to trust. God is the one in whom Thecla takes refuge.

31e ὁ ῥυσάμενός με ἐκ πυρός, ἀπόδος μισθὸν Τρυφαίνῃ < >  
τὴν δούλῃ σου συμπαθησάσῃ,

31e who delivered me from fire, give to Tryphaena the reward for her compassion on your servant,

The Greek here literally has "give to Tryphaena the reward". The meaning is "reward Tryphaena". The implication, since Thecla has nothing tangible to give, is that this is a prayer for Tryphaena's eternal reward.

Thecla remembers that previously she has been freed from the fire unharmed. She remembers the hail storm and the miraculous divine attestation of her virtue. Thecla is praying to God who has shown this steadfast support in the past, expecting to be upheld further as these trials unfold. They are her opportunity to give witness and she is the martyr of the living God. Nothing, not even death, could stop her witness for she is the servant of the compassionate God.

31f καὶ ὅτι ἀγνὴν με ἐτήρησεν.

31f and because she kept me pure."

This is a reference to the protection of Tryphaena. While Thecla was condemned to the arena she would have been considered as good as dead by those who had custody of her if she were imprisoned. She would have been considered as worthless as discarded rubbish.<sup>691</sup> It would have been nothing for her to have been violently and repeatedly raped and beaten. She could have been used and abused in every most disgusting and distasteful way, tortured and shamed, made a spectacle both by being the victim of sexual and physical violence and the victim of sadistic torment and exhibition. In her day jailors and spectators would have unscrupulously both laughed and wept at her plight, but it would have all been entertainment for them.<sup>692</sup>

Now in her prayer Thecla thanks God that mercifully she has been spared these accompanying assaults to her sentence through the mercy of the Queen. The language of purity is appropriate because Thecla has consecrated her life to God as a virgin martyr. Her purity is symbolic of her choice to follow Christ. It is precisely that quality of being set apart for the glory and honour of God. For Thecla to have been subjected to such demeaning pre-arena violence would have been exactly the opposite of being set apart: she would have been used as the common object available to all who wished to take out their angry, sadistic or lustful aggression upon her.

Today when one imagines this sort of violence done to Thecla, one would not conclude that she would have fallen into a state of being impure herself but rather that she was being used and not respected. Those who are the victims of violence do have a special holiness in their union with Christ, who was also a victim of torture and violence.

In the story, Thecla suffers in the arena but is spared death. This is for Christ's sake. She will witness to Christ in the arena in her full

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<sup>691</sup> Ideas in the cultural background help one to understand the concern for purity in the *Acts of Thecla*. See Jennifer Larson, *Greek Heroine Cults*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1995, p. 117. Larson describes the failure to make the transition to wedded mother because of rape or attempted rape. She also notes that the simple fact of dying while still a maiden, for whatever reason, associates a woman with Artemis.

<sup>692</sup> R. Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome*, p. 64. Beacham describes the tearing apart of people by beasts and the hunts as recorded in Cicero's letters. The distaste for violence is evident in the letters, and the tears of spectators are mentioned by Beacham as recorded by Pliny. The very fact that an animal spectacle was the fate of Thecla would be enough to cause her shame. James C. Walters describes the case of Clemens and Domitilla treated in Cassius Dio, 67. 14. 1-3. Walters notes that both Jewish associations and amphitheatre trials are reason for accusation. James Christopher Walters, "The Impact of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations", in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. by Karl Paul Donfried and Peter Richardson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 187.

confidence and beauty. She is ready to die but her vindication comes before death. This highlights a theology of the cross that says torture and violence should never be done again.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> M. Grey, *Redeeming the Dream*, pp. 118-125. Grey discusses the violence of the cross as something unacceptable to feminist salvation. Instead of understanding the cross as paying in some way for salvation, Grey sees the suffering of the innocent Jesus as an atrocity and she understands salvation as the end to innocent suffering which Jesus represents. This theology fits well with the story of Thecla. Although a full theological treatment is not possible while arguing for a text, as I am doing in this thesis, theological expositions and extrapolations of this text would have many benefits in today's communities of faith. One may suppose that the theology of the story of Thecla had a significant impact in the ancient world. We know from the later traditions of the miracles that health, healing and wellness of women were valued in the theological tradition of Thecla. The limitation of this thesis will not allow further development of these important concepts here. It is important, however, to further note that women could become a part of the covenanted redeemed people without circumcision. This detail no doubt had an effect on the understanding of women concerning their inclusion in the dispensation of grace that is the message of Christ. See Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women*, Continuum, New York, 2005, p. 107.

## Verse Thirty-two

**32a** Θόρυβος οὖν ἐγένετό < ><sup>694</sup> καὶ βοή τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν γυναικῶν ὁμοῦ καθεσθειςῶν,

**32b** τῶν μὲν λεγόντων Τὴν ἱερόσυλον εἰσάγαγε· τῶν δὲ λεγουσῶν Ἐρθέτω ἡ πόλις ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ ταύτῃ·

**32c** αἶρε πάσας ἡμᾶς, ἀνθύπατε· πικρὸν θέαμα, κακὴ κρίσις.

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<sup>694</sup> At this point, the Lipsius text has these additional words: τε καὶ πάταγος τῶν θηρίων.

## Translation

**32a** Now there came a clamour, and a cry of the crowd and of the women seated together.

**32b** Some were saying, “lead in the sacrilegious one,” and others were saying, “may the city be destroyed for this lawlessness,

**32c** Will you destroy us all, proconsul?<sup>695</sup> Bitter spectacle! Bad judgment!”

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<sup>695</sup> I have read this as a question of protest, as it would be shouted out from a crowd, despite the Tischendorf punctuation. They are questioning the actual judgment. It is a taunt. Slay us all! And it is meant to challenge the proconsul’s authority.

## Commentary and Notes

32a Θόρυβος οὖν ἐγένετό < > καὶ βοή τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν γυναικῶν ὁμοῦ καθεστεισῶν,

32a Now there came a clamour, and a cry of the crowd and of the women seated together.

The Lipsius text adds τε καὶ πάταγος τῶν θηρίων which Elliott translates, “the wild beasts roared”: literally it is “and a roar of the wild beasts”. This is a colourful embellishment of the drama.

The seated women are in the arena. The spectators are anxious for the games to begin. The crowd is both noisy in an unorganized way (a clamour) and also has enough cohesion to express a single view (a cry). The idea of the women seated together is very interesting. They will act as a group supporting Thecla. There is evidence that the women of the ancient world at times band together. For example see the practices of the Magna Mater cult in the heart of Rome, which was “a constant and undermining threat to Roman patriarchal society”.<sup>696</sup>

32b τῶν μὲν λεγόντων Τὴν ἱερόσυλον εἰσάγαγε· τῶν δὲ λεγουσῶν Ἄρθήτω ἡ πόλις ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ ταύτῃ·

32b Some were saying, “lead in the sacrilegious one,” and others were saying, “may the city be destroyed for this lawlessness,

This sentence is written to say that there is division among the crowd. The μὲν, δέ construction seems to mean that while some are calling out that Thecla is sacrilegious and ought to be brought immediately to her punishment, others are calling out that this is a lawless judgment and will bring disaster upon the entire city. The participles of the μὲν, δέ construction are different (the first is masculine and the second is feminine) so the sense is that the men cry against Thecla while the women support her. Much more emphasis is given to those who are supporters of Thecla. This cry of the crowd, “may the city be destroyed” recalls to the mind of the reader or listener the destructive influence of the hail storm earlier in the story. The second cry is longer, involves a threat

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<sup>696</sup> Deborah Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 124. See also Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, pp. 31-74. Turcan gives a detailed description with many excellent illustrations of Cybele and the Great Mother cult. There are a number of comparisons as well as contrasts with the episode of Thecla in the Antioch arena.



and is in the position in the sentence with greater emphasis. It is followed by 32c which continues to protest the judgment of the proconsul. The idea is not that a lesser punishment was warranted, but rather that the opposite judgment was the truthful one. So many voices crying out against the proconsul would have been an embarrassment not only to him but also to Alexander. The construction of amphitheatres where Greek drama theatres once stood became a practice in Roman times throughout the Empire. Barriers to protect the audience from gladiators and animals were constructed in a variety of ways.<sup>697</sup>

32c αἶρε πάσας ἡμᾶς, ἀνθύπατε· πικρὸν θέαμα, κακὴ κρίσις.

32c Will you destroy us all, proconsul? Bitter spectacle! Bad judgment!”

Reference to the proconsul rather than to the governor is interesting. The emphatic calling out that the proconsul will destroy all those in the arena is the expression of fear in light of the fact that the story is written when it is already known that Thecla is an apostle and martyr. The idea that unjust judgments against innocent persons would bring natural disaster upon whole populations is an ancient one that is no longer thought to be rational. It is understandable that conclusions of that sort were arrived at by ancients who had little knowledge of weather or other natural phenomena. This story carries within it the idea that a dangerous storm has already come about because of an attempt to execute Thecla in verse 22g. Is the reader to think that word has travelled about this to Antioch? In the parameters of the narrative there has been plenty of time for this while Thecla and Paul and friends have been fasting and praying for days.

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<sup>697</sup> Ernst Karl Guhl and Wilhelm David Koner, *The Romans: Their Life and Customs*, Senate Press, London, 1994, p. 433.

## Verse Thirty-three

**33a** Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα ἐκ χειρὸς Τρυφαίνης ληφθεῖσα ἐξεδύθη καὶ ἔλαβεν διαζώστραν καὶ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὸ στάδιον.

**33b** καὶ ἀπελύθησαν ἐπ' αὐτήν<sup>698</sup> λέοντες καὶ ἄρκοι < ><sup>699</sup> καὶ πικρὰ λέαινα. ἡ δὲ λέαινα<sup>700</sup> προσδραμοῦσα εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς ἀνεκλίθη.

**33c** ὁ δὲ ὄχλος τῶν γυναικῶν ἐβόησεν μέγα. καὶ ἔδραμεν ἐπ' αὐτήν ἄρκος.

**33d** ἡ δὲ λέαινα ἀπαντήσασα τῇ ἄρκῳ < ><sup>701</sup> διέρρηξεν αὐτήν<sup>702</sup>.

**33e** καὶ πάλιν ἔδραμεν ἐπ' αὐτήν λέων δεδιδαγμένος ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους,<sup>703</sup> ὃς ἦν Ἀλεξάνδρου.<sup>704</sup>

**33f** καὶ < ><sup>705</sup> συνπλέξασα μετὰ τοῦ λέοντος<sup>706</sup> συνανηρέθη. πλείονα<sup>707</sup> δὲ ἐπένθησαν αἱ γυναῖκες,

**33g** ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἡ βοηθὸς αὐτῆς<sup>708</sup> λέαινα ἀπέθανεν.

<sup>698</sup> These three words ἀπελύθησαν ἐπ' αὐτήν do not appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>699</sup> Here the Lipsius text has ἐβλήθησαν ἐπ' αὐτήν with a full stop as punctuation.

<sup>700</sup> The Lipsius text does not include the full stop nor the repetitive subject: ἡ δὲ λέαινα.

<sup>701</sup> Instead of ἀπαντήσασα τῇ ἄρκῳ the Lipsius text has δραμοῦσα ὑπήντησεν καὶ here.

<sup>702</sup> Instead of αὐτήν the Lipsius text has τὴν ἄρκον here.

<sup>703</sup> The Lipsius text does not include this comma.

<sup>704</sup> The Tischendorf text includes this high dot to indicate a pause equivalent to an English semi-colon. The differences are in word order and sentence division. The Tischendorf text gives the phrase ἔδραμεν ἐπ' αὐτήν early in the sentence and the Lipsius text has that phrase last. There is no difference in meaning between the two texts.

<sup>705</sup> Lipsius has ἡ λέαινα.

<sup>706</sup> There is a case difference here. The Lipsius text has λέοντι and the Tischendorf text has λέοντος. The resulting phrases are: instead of καὶ συνπλέξασα μετὰ τοῦ λέοντος συνανηρέθη in the genitive construction, the Lipsius text has this in the dative construction: συμπλέξασα τῷ λέοντι συνανηρέθη. The participles have a difference in the prefix. Lipsius has συμ and the Tischendorf has συν.

<sup>707</sup> Lipsius has the word μειζόνως here instead of πλείονα.

<sup>708</sup> The Lipsius text has the dative: αὐτῇ.

## Translation

**33a** And Thecla was taken from Tryphaena's hands,<sup>709</sup> was stripped of her clothes and she put on a wrap<sup>710</sup> and was thrown into the stadium.

**33b** And lions, bears and a fierce lioness were loosed upon her. The lioness however, ran to her and lay at her feet.

**33c** And the crowd of women shouted out loudly. And a bear ran at her,

**33d** but the lioness, having intercepted the bear, tore it apart.

**33e** And again a lion, trained to attack people, which belonged to Alexander, ran at her,

**33f** and it (the lioness) having grappled with the lion, died with it. And the women mourned intensely,<sup>711</sup>

**33g** since her helper, the lioness, was dead.

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<sup>709</sup> The idiom is similar in Greek and in English; however, in the Greek here we have "hand" in the singular.

<sup>710</sup> This is a wrap for modesty, like a sarong in Australia today. It could have been tied above her breasts to cover her to above the knees or it could have been much less than that. It was important that she not appear as a wealthy woman in her own clothing, but this is not a belt because that would be useless.

<sup>711</sup> I have translated *πλείονα* as "intensely". There are several other English words which would have been possible translations for this very general term, including "greatly" or "even more".

## Commentary and Notes

33a Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα ἐκ χειρὸς Τρυφαίνης ληφθεῖσα ἐξεδύθη  
καὶ ἔλαβεν διαζώστραν καὶ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὸ στάδιον.

33a And Thecla was taken from Tryphaena's hands, was stripped of her clothes and she put on a wrap and was thrown into the stadium.

This verse seems repetitive, but in fact we left Tryphaena holding Thecla's hand as Thecla prayed for them both. From the way the sentence is constructed using the passive voice it seems that Thecla was taken against Tryphaena's will.

No doubt Thecla was stripped against her will. Fortunately she was given a διαζώστρα to protect her modesty. Some translators and commentators seem to think that this word means belt because it goes around her. I have translated wrap since giving her a belt is senseless. There are no tortures or trials related to any belt, nor does she seem to be tethered to anything. What would be the point of a belt? A wrap however, would be fitting for a young woman of such dignity. The wrap may be like a sarong or short "wrap-around skirt"; some cloth that covered her from the waist to above the knees would make sense. She will lose this item in the water and a belt or girdle<sup>712</sup> that was tied on would be less likely to loosen in the water. A wrap could come loose in a pool (see verse 34 below). If it is fixed by folding or tucking as an Indian sari is, for example, it would be likely to come loose in a pool of water.

Perhaps the word apron is helpful to English speakers in trying to imagine this διαζώστρα. The sort of thing that a belly-dancer might wear, a cloth tied round the waist and dropping in front is depicted in ancient

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<sup>712</sup>J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 370. Elliott has that she "received a girdle". Barrier has "she received underpants" and notes that "this is probably intended to be quasi-erotic". J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 158. Barrier offers no argument for this idea. If one were looking for a contemporary gender political deconstruction a similar interpretation could be invented to show the voyeurism of male readers or any readers who are attracted to the female form, but this would be about today's readers. The ancient Greco-Roman world knows how to display eroticism; see for example the Greek comedies or for example see the lamp terracotta with a scene of a woman being raped by a donkey in K. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 145. There is no indication that this kind of eroticism is being described here. Another matter is that the English word "underpants" is a term for which there is no equivalent kind of clothing in this period. Various cloth items tied around people's loins for various reasons do exist, but nothing that approximates what we mean in English when we say "underpants". A long lightweight cloth could be tied around the waist and around each thigh but this does not fit the details of this story. Underpants or anything tied like pants would not have come off in the water. The thing they give her is around her. The prefix of the verb indicates this. The ancient world would have known public nakedness much more frequently than we do today, and especially with athletes in stadiums. The main matter is that Thecla is being punished and humiliated in the arena and therefore an appearance in her wealthy attire is not appropriate to this scene.

iconography.<sup>713</sup> This could still present her as bare-breasted but would avoid further sexual voyeurism during what is expected to be a bloody death. In a societal setting where all babies are breast fed, we can only surmise that seeing breasts is recorded as a practical matter much of the time. In this case Thecla's clothing is likely to be valuable; there would be little sense in allowing it to be destroyed.

This scene can be compared to the stripping of Jesus before the crucifixion. In Matt 27:28-35 Jesus is stripped three times. The first time his clothes are stripped off and a scarlet robe is put on him. Then this is stripped from him and his own clothes are put back on him and subsequently when he is on the cross they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots. These strippings are humiliations, but there is no evidence that anyone is sexually interested. This matter of Jesus being crucified naked is recorded not only in the Gospel of Matthew but also in Mk 15:17-23; Lk 23:34; John 19:23-25.

The stripping also has theological impact. The idea is that of Job 1:21: naked we come into the world and naked we leave it. The amassing of possessions will not stop anyone from dying. Neither status nor success will save anyone from the radical equality experienced in death. Jesus is stripped of his possessions, his friends and supporters, and his dignity. Thecla is also stripped of her possessions, of her friends and supporters, and of her dignity. The theological understanding of this also includes the importance of solidarity with the poor and needy, an important theme in the *Acts of Thecla*. It would be a terrible humiliation and defeat to be killed in a public arena alone and one might expect to be very frightened. In the story Thecla is less affected than the listener or reader might expect. She seems to move forward with the same courage and confidence with which she faced the fire in verse 22.

Her being thrown into the stadium produces an image of violence. She has become a victim of actions against her will. Yet, we do not hear of any lack of courage on her part.

33b καὶ ἀπελύθησαν ἐπ' αὐτὴν λέοντες καὶ ἄρκοι < > καὶ πικρὰ λέαινα. ἡ δὲ λέαινα προσδραμούσα εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς ἀνεκλίθη·

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<sup>713</sup> A fifth-century Egyptian stone relief of Thecla has the wrap around her waist across her buttocks and covering her pubic area. It is the cover photo on the volume by C. Vander Stichele and T. Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla*, p. 55.

33b and lions, bears and a fierce lioness were loosed upon her. The lioness however, ran to her and lay at her feet.

The Lipsius text has the animals not just “released”, ἀπελύθησαν, but rather “thrown”, ἐβλήθησαν, “upon her”. The exaggeration would be consistent with a developing hagiography. The repetition of the “lioness”, as subject of the sentence, is not necessary as the participle is feminine singular. The sentence is finessed and the grammar improved by relying on the subject to be expressed by the verb in the Lipsius text. Elliott seems to translate the Tischendorf text at this point though there is no reason expressed for this.<sup>714</sup>

Several animals are released to attack Thecla. Among them is a lioness which defends Thecla. At first it lies at her feet. What the spectators see is the same affection from the lioness that was shown Thecla in the parade. In the parade we assume that the lion is fed and tame enough to be walked down the public street. Now in the arena the lioness is again non-threatening. Is it the same animal on which she was paraded? The reader cannot know. Only one lioness is mentioned per scene in the narrative of the *Acts of Thecla*; perhaps the intention is to convey that there is not more than one lioness in the menagerie. Has the lioness been fed before the games? Normally this is not done, so that the animal is hungry and will attack. Could Tryphaena or other supporters of Thecla have arranged a feeding? No doubt they could have done so but the story does not tell us this. Would the readers or listeners assume such bribery and subversion of the spectacle? There are only gaps in the narrative and no answers for these questions.

33c ὁ δὲ ὄχλος τῶν γυναικῶν ἐβόησεν μέγα. καὶ ἔδραμεν  
ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἄρκος·

33c And the crowd of women shouted out loudly. And a bear ran at her,

At this point in the story, the women are seated together and they shout out. Presumably they are cheering because the lioness seems to be no threat to Thecla. Their shout is described as loud or great. They may simply be uninhibited in the excitement of the spectacle or they may be convinced of Thecla’s innocence. It is significant that those who shout out are specifically noted to be women. Perhaps Alexander is known by the women of the area.

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<sup>714</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 370.

The following sentence states that the next animal to run out is a bear, which runs at Thecla, while the lioness is lying at her feet. The bear is portrayed as aggressive and threatening. This would have offered lively dramatic appeal to the audience when the story of Thecla was told or read.

33d ἡ δὲ λέαινα ἀπαντήσασα τῇ ἄρκῳ < > διέρρηξεν αὐτήν.

33d but the lioness, having intercepted the bear, tore it apart.

It is interesting to note that at this point in the story the readers become aware that the bear is also a female. Unlike the lion, the sex of a bear is a detail that could not easily be perceived in an historical setting as the description is laid out in this narrative. It is not likely that an audience, even an ancient audience, would be able to tell the sex of the bear as it rushed forward. There is a gap in the narrative concerning how anyone knew the bear was female—perhaps this information is only legendary.<sup>715</sup> There is no mention of the bear standing on its back paws, for instance. Neither is there anything mentioned about the posture of the bear as it is torn apart, in order to legitimate knowledge of the sex of the bear. It is intriguing why the oral tradition or the writers or scribes of the Greek written tradition would have chosen the feminine form. These feminine details can raise questions concerning the context of oral transmission or authorship. Is this a story that was told among women for an extended period of time before it was written down? We cannot know, but future scholars of the *Acts of Thecla* may devote attention to the probabilities in this regard. The *Acts of Thecla* is a sensitive narrative which champions the cause of a woman and which provides a theology for healing of bereavement with women role models both being healed and doing the healing.

The Lipsius text has the noun τὴν ἄρκον instead of the pronoun αὐτήν in the Tischendorf text above. This further specification is an improvement of the text. The Lipsius text replaces ἀπαντήσασα τῇ ἄρκῳ with the phrase δραμοῦσα ὑπήντησεν καί. This phrase means that the lioness “having run, met and” tore apart the bear. The grammar of both the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts is correct here. These textual differences do not necessarily indicate which text is earlier. However, arguably the Lipsius text in recording the three actions of

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<sup>715</sup> See my discussion of legend and history in the introductory section of this thesis.

running, meeting and tearing apart prior to specifying the object of the last two verbs, could be said to read as a higher literary level. In contrast the Tischendorf text specifies the object verb by verb perhaps suggesting a less refined literary sensibility. This may offer some weak evidence for the priority of the Tischendorf text.

Perhaps the reader or listener would think that the lioness interpreted the bear's actions as an attack. There are many details about these descriptions in the arena that are intriguing but to which there is no access. Exaggeration would also be expected in any account, even immediately after the event.

The lioness attacks the bear. Is the lioness actually protecting Thecla or is it protecting itself? To the crowd it will appear that the lioness is protecting Thecla. The reaction of the lioness is extreme; the bear is torn apart by it. Bear meat is particularly sweet and succulent. There is no report that the lioness feeds on the bear; perhaps the lioness is not hungry and is only acting in a self-protective way. There is no reason to tear at the bear except to render it inactive. Tearing it apart is more than what is required and this attack would have presented a terrible spectacle for the crowds. Is it the lioness's actions that show extra force or is it the report that is exaggerated? There is no way that one can know.

33e καὶ πάλιν ἔδραμεν ἐπ' αὐτὴν λέων δεδιδαγμένος ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, ὃς ἦν Ἀλεξάνδρου·

33e and again a lion, trained to attack people, which belonged to Alexander himself, ran at her,

The Lipsius and Tischendorf texts are identical except for word order. There is no difference in meaning. It is only because the Lipsius word order is easier to replicate in English that my English translation mirrors the Lipsius word order. No conclusions concerning difference in text can be drawn from this comparison of the English and the Greek word order.

This lion is a male. Males, we know, are not the hunters; the females hunt, but a male animal can be very dangerous, especially if it is forced to hunt for itself. This animal is said to be especially trained to attack people and owned by Alexander himself. It is necessary to record that this lion is trained to attack people because otherwise it would naturally pay no attention to Thecla if there is a bloody dead bear in the arena. In ordinary circumstances, the lioness kills and the male feeds on the kill. Ancient audiences may well understand these behaviour patterns of lions.



Modern audiences may also understand if they have any education in the behaviour of wild lions. The narrative seems to assume some knowledge.

33f καὶ συνπλέξασα μετὰ τοῦ λέοντος συνανηρέθη.

33f and it (the lioness) having grappled with the lion, died with it.

The dative construction<sup>716</sup> in the Lipsius text is the expected classical construction, which may be a later scribal correction.

The lioness, however, attacks the male and both animals struggle until they both die. This is fantastic and it is hard to see what sort of circumstance would occasion such a progression of actions and such a result. These large strong animals would not die easily. It is quite amazing to think that all three simply kill one another. Perhaps the story is legendary at this point.

33g πλείονα δὲ ἐπένθησαν αἱ γυναῖκες, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἡ βοηθὸς αὐτῆς λέαινα ἀπέθανεν.

33g And the women mourned intensely, since her helper, the lioness, was dead.

The Lipsius text has μειζόνως rather than πλείονα. The comparative adverb is translated by Elliott as “the more”.<sup>717</sup> There is no significant difference between the two texts. The use of the dative pronoun, on the other hand, is a correction.<sup>718</sup>

This is a marvellous sympathy of the females for the female. The sense is that the crowd has grown to love the lioness because it has helped Thecla. The underlying message is that the women in the crowd want Thecla to be saved from these trials.

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<sup>716</sup> *LSJ*, p. 1684 in the entry for συμπλέκω, paragraph II.1.

<sup>717</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 370.

<sup>718</sup> *LSJ*, p. 320 second column. In the entry for βοηθός the classical construction is with the dative but the genitive is found in later inscriptions suggesting a Koine usage.

## Verse Thirty-four

**34a** Τότε εἰσβάλλουσιν πολλὰ θηρία, ἐστώσης αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκτεινάσης<sup>719</sup> τὰς χεῖρας καὶ προσευχομένης.

**34b** ὥς δὲ ἐτέλεσεν τὴν προσευχήν, στραφείσα<sup>720</sup> < ><sup>721</sup> εἶδεν ὄρυγμα μεστὸν<sup>722</sup> ὕδατος,

**34c** καὶ εἶπεν Νῦν καιρὸς τοῦ λούσασθαί με.

**34d** καὶ ἀνέβαλεν αὐτὴν<sup>723</sup> λέγουσα Ἐπὶ<sup>724</sup> τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑστέρᾳ ἡμέρᾳ βαπτίζομαι.

**34e** καὶ<sup>725</sup> ἰδοῦσαι αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ < ><sup>726</sup> ὁ ὄχλος ἐκλαυσαν λέγοντες Μὴ βάλης ἐαυτὴν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ,

**34f** ὥστε καὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα δακρῦσαι, ὅτι τοιοῦτον κάλλος ἐμελλον φῶκαι<sup>727</sup> ἐσθίειν.

**34g** ἡ μὲν οὖν ἔβαλεν ἐαυτὴν < ><sup>728</sup> ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

**34h** αἱ δὲ φῶκαι πυρὸς ἀστραπῆς φέγγος ἰδοῦσαι νεκραὶ ἐπέπλευσαν.

**34i** καὶ ἦν περὶ αὐτὴν, ὥς ἦν γυμνή,<sup>729</sup> νεφέλῃ πυρός, ὥστε μὴ<sup>730</sup> ἄπτεσθαι αὐτῆς<sup>731</sup> μηδὲ<sup>732</sup> τὰ θηρία, μήτε δὲ<sup>733</sup> θεωρεῖσθαι < ><sup>734</sup> γυμνήν.

<sup>719</sup> Instead of ἐκτεινάσης the Lipsius text has ἐκτετακυίας.

<sup>720</sup> Instead of στραφείσα the Lipsius text has ἐστράφη.

<sup>721</sup> Consistent with the verbal forms Lipsius uses he adds the word καὶ here .

<sup>722</sup> Instead of μεστὸν the Lipsius text has μέγα πλήρες.

<sup>723</sup> Instead of ἀνέβαλεν αὐτὴν the Lipsius text has ἔβαλεν ἐαυτὴν.

<sup>724</sup> Instead of Ἐπὶ the Lipsius text has Ἐν.

<sup>725</sup> This word begins with an uppercase K in the Lipsius text.

<sup>726</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional word πᾶς.

<sup>727</sup> The word order is different in the Lipsius text. Instead of ἐμελλον φῶκαι the Lipsius text reads: φῶκαι ἐμελλον.

<sup>728</sup> The additional words εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ appear in the Lipsius text.

<sup>729</sup> In the Lipsius text the comma does not appear after αὐτὴν and the words ὥς ἦν γυμνή, with the comma following are absent.

<sup>730</sup> This word μὴ is absent from the Lipsius text.

<sup>731</sup> The words ἄπτεσθαι αὐτῆς in the Lipsius text follow the words τὰ θηρία.

<sup>732</sup> Instead of μηδὲ the Lipsius text has μήτε.

## Translation

**34a** Then they sent in many beasts, while she stood and stretched out her hands<sup>735</sup> and prayed.

**34b** As she was finishing the prayer, turning she saw a pit full of water.

**34c** and she said, “Now is the time of my washing,”

**34d** and she climbed up<sup>736</sup> saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I baptise myself, on the latter day”.<sup>737</sup>

**34e** And seeing this the women and the crowd wept saying, “Do not throw yourself into the water!”

**34f** so that even the governor wept, because the seals were about to devour such a beauty.

**34g** And she threw herself in, in the name of Jesus Christ

**34h** But the seals, seeing the flash of lightning, floated dead.

**34i** And there was round about her, naked as she was, a cloud of fire, so that neither could the beasts touch her nor could she be seen naked.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> The word δὲ does not occur here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>734</sup> The additional word αὐτὴν is included here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>735</sup> It is likely that this is the orans position, in which Thecla is often depicted.

<sup>736</sup> The noun, τὸ ὄρυγμα, means moat, pit, pool, or trench. From the digging a bank of dirt would surround the pool. The best translation of ἀνέβαλεν αὐτὴν is “she climbed up” but perhaps it is meant literally “she threw herself up”. One would not expect αὐτὴν if the meaning were “herself”.

<sup>737</sup> This means the last day of her life. There is another intriguing possibility for the translation of this verse, which would be: “In the Name, and by the womb of Jesus Christ, I baptise myself today.” This has the advantage of the feminine understanding of the Jewish notion of compassion and the sense of rebirth to new life as in the baptism dialogue in John’s gospel between Nicodemus and Jesus (John 3:1-7). The symbolism in John’s gospel is of birth when Jesus’ side is opened with the spear and both blood and water pour out (John 19:31-37).

<sup>738</sup> Either γυμνήν means she has lost the wrap in the water or it may mean naked from the waist up, depending on how the wrap is tied.

## Commentary and Notes

34a Τότε εἰσβάλλουσιν πολλὰ θηρία, ἐστώσης αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκτεινάσης τὰς χεῖρας καὶ προσευχομένης.

34a Then they sent in many beasts, while she stood and stretched out her hands and prayed.

The translation uses “they sent in” for εἰσβάλλουσιν which literally is the vivid present “they send in”. The vivid present is smoother in the story.

The Tischendorf text has both the perfect (ἐστώσης) and aorist (ἐκτεινάσης) participles with the present participle, προσευχομένης. The Lipsius corrects to use perfects for both standing and stretching ἐκτετακυίας. The aspect of the Lipsius text is clearer. In the Lipsius text, the sense is: “having stood and having stretched out her hands”. Elliott translates Lipsius with “as she was standing and stretching forth her hands”.<sup>739</sup> One comes to the same meaning reading the Tischendorf text but it is the awkward text and the Lipsius is the finessed text.

The continued report is that many beasts are then sent in as Thecla stands and prays. She is standing in the orans position with her hands stretched out as a modern priest holds them during the Eucharistic prayer. There are significant depictions of women in the early Christian world praying in this way. Some are saints depicted as dressed in what could be liturgical garb.<sup>740</sup> The Jewish custom of praying with arms outstretched is recorded in the Torah and continues through the inter-testamental period.<sup>741</sup> This is a brave and vulnerable position to take if various animals are moving in to attack her. Perhaps it goes some small way to discourage the animals from attacking. She would seem more like the keepers of the animals than like a victim in this unprotected pose. She does not run or hide as she would do if she were frightened. As previously when she walked to the pyre, she is simply fearless. There is no further report of what these animals do; it is as if the reader or listener ought to be disregarding them as easily as Thecla is herself.

34b ὥς δὲ ἐτέλεσεν τὴν προσευχήν, στραφείσα < > εἶδεν ὄρυγμα μεστὸν ὕδατος,

<sup>739</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 370.

<sup>740</sup> St Cominia appears to be praying in orans position wearing a prayer shawl or stole, as does her daughter St. Nicatiola. See J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Life and Death in Early Christianity*, p. 146.

<sup>741</sup> Susanna and Daniel both stand this way in the depiction in the Priscilla Catacomb. J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Life and Death in Early Christianity*, p. 79.

34b As she was finishing the prayer, turning she saw a pit full of water.

The Tischendorf text has the participle, στραφεῖσα, while the Lipsius has the finite verb and the conjunction. There is not much difference either in meaning or in literary style. The pool is described in more completeness in the Lipsius text. It is said to be “large and completely full of water”, ὄρυγμα μέγα πλήρες ὕδατος. There would be no reason to omit such detail in an abridged version. Perhaps the Lipsius text shows a more developed hagiography. We might assume that not all noble women would be able to swim; perhaps the description of the pool as large and completely filled is meant to heighten the drama. As such it would be a later development and addition.

Thecla is praying, it is assumed out loud. If it were a silent prayer, one would imagine the reporting to say that she stood silently with her hands outstretched. When she finishes speaking her prayer she notices immediately that there is water here. It is described as a pit full of water. A pit would have needed to be dug out; an embankment would form from the earth that was moved out of the hole. The water may have been as high as the embankment, depending on the consistency and solidity of the embankment. That Thecla turned to see the pool is a very general description, and without more detail it is difficult to imagine. Is she near the centre of the arena? One might imagine that the pool is in a place which would not first attract the animals, not near the place that they are released. Thecla in verse 33 is said to be thrown into the stadium. One imagines that she is not far from a gate and that the lions and bear are released from a gate not far from where she is. Perhaps the pool is closer to the centre of the arena.

34c καὶ εἶπεν Νῦν καιρὸς τοῦ λούσασθαι με.

34c and she said, “Now is the time of my washing,”

Thecla understands the Christian symbolism of baptism, that in baptism one dies and rises with Jesus Christ; in baptism one professes publicly one’s faith in Jesus Christ. Since her time of death may well be near and this circumstance is very public, she is clear that this is the time for her baptism. It is referred to here as “the washing”, which is an indication of the very early date of the tradition. This phrase might date from the time of Paul and be frozen in the tradition since it is so crucial to the telling of the story and since these are portrayed as the actual words of Thecla. This might have become formulaic.

The phrase is very potent. This is the appointed time—Νῦν καιρὸς. This time has been awaited since verse seven where she wishes to be one who goes to Paul and learns from him the good news. She wishes to belong to the group of followers of Jesus from the time of her introduction to the story. Baptism is also an initiation ceremony; she is included by baptism in the community of believers.<sup>742</sup>

It is the time of her washing. The verb for washing is in the middle voice and has the reflexive sense that she is washing herself. She expects to be cleaned of all her past sin and all that holds her back from total dedication to Jesus Christ and his new life of grace. She will be made new by this washing.<sup>743</sup> Thecla is very clear that she does not need someone to do this for her. Essentially baptism is done by God for the person who chooses to give their life to Jesus Christ. This story comes from a time before the firm establishment of hierarchy and institutional structures in the church.<sup>744</sup>

In Judaism most of the prayer washings are done by the individual. The baptism of John is a prophetic sign and so it involves the prophet John. In the early Christian practices that continue to use Jewish baptisteries we are not certain at what time in history an official of the church might be beside or in the pool with a person to be baptised. Many would have presumably walked through the baptistery on their own or with their children in their arms.<sup>745</sup>

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<sup>742</sup>See Elizabeth Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, Delaware, 1983, pp. 172-179, for a discussion of the role of women baptising and the reliance on the example of Thecla.

<sup>743</sup>R. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, p.159. "Neophytes are like these rescued biblical characters. They are also returned to the state of childlike innocence, a transformation symbolized by the depiction of small, childlike figures in Christian visual art." Jensen writes about the depictions of Biblical characters such as Daniel, Jonah, Lazarus and others who have escaped death and emerged alive from an enclosed place as nude figures and at times as small or childlike figures. These she argues represent the theology of renewal in baptism.

<sup>744</sup>Later traditions will include a more institutionalised ritual. See Emily Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 160-161. "The baptism outlined in the *Acts of Thomas* involves anointing with oil, baptizing in water, and then the sharing of a Eucharistic meal. So the sacraments are intimately linked, and a Eucharistic meal becomes part of the baptismal process. It is only after the sharing of bread and a mixture of water and wine that Judas Thomas turns to Mygdonia and tells her that she has received her 'seal' and gained eternal life." The baptism in the *Acts of Thecla* is an act of faith and a matter of spiritual union; it is not linked to Eucharist at this point in the narrative.

<sup>745</sup>R. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, pp. 160-161, 164. The baptismal font in the church of Vitalis, Tunisia from the sixth century (photo p. 164) is much like the Jewish baptismal pools, having steps in and out. "The design of early Christian baptisteries underscores the understanding of baptism as a move from death to rebirth. The transition from outdoor baptism to indoor facilities probably began in the early third century, although the oldest surviving example, the baptismal chamber in the house church at Dura Europos, was built in the 240s (fig. 3.6). The move indoors was possibly motivated by a desire to keep the rite relatively private (witnessed only by the

The fact that women baptised is assumed. Phoebe is the model of women deacons. Lydia and her family in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 16:13-15) are baptised at a synagogue near a water source.<sup>746</sup> She seems to have a high profile in the community there, as it is to her house that Paul is pressed to come. Tertullian's criticism of women baptising is evidence that such a practice existed.<sup>747</sup> Women deacons have an essential role in baptising women in the institutional rituals of early Christianity extending at least into the fourth century.<sup>748</sup>

By the mid-second century the various institutions of the church in diverse locations are trying to take over the local practice of these rituals.<sup>749</sup> One can assume that this happens to a certain extent but is never fully accomplished at any time in history.

34d καὶ ἀνέβαλεν αὐτὴν λέγουσα Ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑστέρᾳ ἡμέρᾳ βαπτίζομαι.

34d and she climbed up saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I baptise myself, on the latter day."

The Tischendorf reading is more difficult since the use of αὐτὴν is awkward without a rough breathing to give it a reflexive meaning. Instead of ἀνέβαλεν αὐτὴν the Lipsius text has ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὴν. Elliott translates "And she then threw herself in". This is less difficult to understand for those who are not imagining an embankment. It simplifies and clarifies the unexplained gap in the narrative which is: why must Thecla climb up to get into the water? The Lipsius is perhaps a later helpful change. It makes the actions seem more convincing. Without need for an explanation the story will have wider appeal. The Lipsius

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initiates themselves, their sponsors, and officiants) and to protect the modesty of those who were being stripped, anointed, and dipped in the font while nude." Figure 3.6 in Jensen's volume is on page 130.

<sup>746</sup> I. Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 111. Richter Reimer takes the position that Lydia is a very important person, the head of a worshipping community. "The women gathered in the synagogue, or some of them, may have been part of Lydia's house." The household was composed primarily of women. "*Purpurarii* were mainly freed persons who settled in other cities to do their work, normally in small groups; in such groups, women were frequently in the majority."

<sup>747</sup> The reason Tertullian cites the *Acts of Thecla* is to argue that women ought to stop baptising.

<sup>748</sup> R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, pp. 17-21, 64-74: "The legislation of Justinian clearly places deaconesses among the clergy." They are ordained. "Like other clerics, at the moment they assumed their function they received an ordination, designated by the terms *cheirotonia*, *cheirotonein*."

<sup>749</sup> W. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, pp. 197-198. "It is for this reason that in *Phd.* 4 he goes on to correlate the oneness of the flesh, cup, and altar with the oneness of the bishop and his colleagues. To conform to the passion is to submit to the bishop."

text also uses the formulaic ἐν rather than ἐπί. The formula with ἐν is well attested in the Septuagint and also in the New Testament.<sup>750</sup> Ἐν could be assimilation to the New Testament as a later scribal correction. Tischendorf has chosen the variants that are most likely to be earlier.

Ὑστέρῳ ἡμέρῳ could mean the last day of Thecla's life. It could mean the day of the last judgment. There is another intriguing possibility for the translation of this verse, which would be: "In the Name, and by the womb of Jesus Christ, I baptise myself today." One might expect a demonstrative adjective with ἡμέρῳ if this were the meaning. Yet another thought, though given the grammatical difficulties it is only a remote possibility, is that this could mean "In the Name, and by the womb day of Jesus Christ, I baptise myself." One might expect that for such a meaning there would be a connecting word like καί. As this is direct speech, either of these details could have been omitted, and especially in a document with so many examples of unsophisticated and mistaken usage. If one were to support such readings, searching for similar examples in inscriptions might prove helpful. Such translations have the advantage of the feminine understanding of the Jewish notion of compassion and the sense of rebirth to new life as in the baptism dialogue in the Gospel of John between Nicodemus and Jesus. This understanding of baptism as a new birth is common in early Christianity. The newly baptised person being clothed in white as a child who is born is wrapped in swaddling cloth is prominent imagery in early Christian baptismal rituals as is the giving of milk and honey. Baptismal fonts are even shaped to suggest this being born.<sup>751</sup> An argument for a translation where "womb" is included would have to be mounted, if it were suggested as the translation. Perhaps there are other similar usages in other religious thought in the ancient world. While as a possibility it has a lot of intrigue and advantage, it is beyond the scope of this study to include any more developed arguments for or against such translations.

Thecla speaks the words as she ascends the embankment. Her baptism is in the New Testament tradition of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. There is only one reference to baptism in the name of the trinity in the

<sup>750</sup> Psalm 116:26; Luke 9:49; 10:17; John 10:25; 14:13-14, 26; Acts 9:27; 1 Cor 5:4; 6:11 are examples. The modern Greek formula for the sign of the cross is: Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς . . .

<sup>751</sup> R. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, p. 165. "Other ancient fonts, especially two nearly identical ones in the North African site of Sufetula (modern Sbeitla), appear to have been designed to represent a women's vulva (fig. 4.10). These fonts' undulating and elongated shape allowed for entrance at one (probably the western) end, passage through the water, and emergence on the other side. The round center well with its Christogram may have been intended to symbolize either the womb or the birth canal. The font water was not only a cleansing substance but also a symbol of the amniotic fluid in the mother's womb. The newly baptized emerged from this womb wet and naked, just like infants coming out of their mother's body."



New Testament in Mt 28:28. All other baptisms in the New Testament are in the name of Jesus Christ. The middle passive form of the verb βαπτίζομαι here has the middle sense. In many translations one finds the passive, “I am baptised”. Translating in the passive is simply a way of trying to disenfranchise women from claiming this as the authority to baptise. Thecla and God are the only ones involved in this baptism. Washing is an action that is ordinarily done to oneself in the sense of the middle voice and so a translation in the passive will still amount to a middle sense. The translation ought to be with the reflexive pronoun since this most clearly describes the situation in the story. There is a sense in which God the Holy Spirit is always the one who baptises anyone. Here the ritual is clearly performed by Thecla for Thecla.

The question often arises: was it common for someone to baptise themselves? Ritual prayer washings are still commonly done by person for themselves even in today’s society among Jews, Muslims and Hindus. Christians have come to expect baptism to be conducted by an ordained person, but of course baptism in the Roman Catholic Church is a sacrament which can be performed by laity in exceptional circumstances. This tradition in the Roman Catholic Church goes back to earliest times.

Thecla’s baptism is dramatic and very public. It is in many ways the climax of the story. It is also the part of the story that remained the most significant since it is used to argue that women should be leaders in the Christian communities. As the administration of sacraments by priests becomes the norm, this story becomes an argument for women being priests. For example, Eugenia takes Thecla as her role model and in male disguise becomes the head of a male monastery.<sup>752</sup> It is likely that she presided at the Eucharist, baptised and anointed members of the community.

In the narrative, Thecla’s baptism is so early in history that many present would not be able to imagine that a simple prayer washing would later be expected to be under the authority of ordained leaders of the community. They would see her mounting the embankment and preparing to enter the water. It would be a worrying spectacle, whether they were familiar with the prayer washing called baptism or not.

The matter of the last day is very interesting. This is to be the day of Thecla’s death. Those familiar with the story of Thecla know that she

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<sup>752</sup> F. Conybeare, *The Armenian Apology and the Acts of Apollonius and Other Monuments of Early Christianity*, pp. 157-168.

will not die. The *Acts of Thecla* 38b certainly knows of the day of judgment. Barrier refers to 1 Tim 4:1,<sup>753</sup> where ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς “in the latter times” compares to this reference. MacDonald thinks that this 1 Tim 4:1 text is a reaction against the story and example of Thecla.<sup>754</sup> It is possible that this is the case. If the first letter to Timothy is a deutero-Pauline work written in the second century as late as 140 CE, it may be written after or roughly contemporaneous to the writing of the *Acts of Thecla*. This passage 1 Tim 4:1-4 is one of the texts most likely to give real substance to MacDonald’s thesis.

34e καὶ ἰδοῦσαι αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ < > ὁ ὄχλος ἔκλαυσαν λέγοντες Μὴ βάλης ἑαυτὴν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ,

34e And seeing this, the women and the crowd wept saying, “Do not throw yourself into the water!”

There are no significant differences in meaning between the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts. Even the sentence division difference does not alter the meaning significantly. Other than sentence division and word order, there is only the addition of πᾶς which is a detail that would be added as part of the later more developed hagiography. There would not seem to be any reason to omit πᾶς.

Both the women and the crowd in general weep for fear that Thecla will now kill herself, having survived the threat of the beasts so far. They all want her to be safe and well. It is a remarkable story; this is the opposite of what one would expect of a crowd at the games. They have clearly come to relate to her in an unusual way, wanting her to succeed in these trials and, victorious, to be released. At this point they call out, “Do not throw yourself into the water!” There is no knowledge of her ability to swim or what might be in the water that could harm her. The pool must appear somewhat deep or in some way ominous for them to be so upset. Perhaps the water is dark if the pool is recently dug.

34f ὥστε καὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα δακρῦσαι, ὅτι τοιοῦτον κάλλος ἔμελλον φῶκαι ἐσθίειν.

34f so that even the governor wept, because the seals were about to devour such a beauty.

<sup>753</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 162.

<sup>754</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, pp. 54-62.

The only difference between the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts is a matter of minor word order.

Now the greatest surprise of the story appears. The governor and the women and the crowd all are crying because Thecla is going to be eaten by seals. Seals are harmless to humans. So this part of the story begs for an explanation. The best solution is that the crowd does not know that the seals are harmless which is a further indication of the early date of the story. As it spread to North Africa and other places of learning, no doubt an editorial change to some animal that was in fact dangerous would have been very tempting. It is no wonder that Thecla is not harmed when she fearlessly enters the water for her baptism. If the hagiography was more highly advanced something more fantastic could have easily been imagined. This scene is surprising because it is so underwhelming. If that is the best that the games organizers could do, no one would be surprised that Thecla is safe and victorious.

34g ἡ μὲν οὖν ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὴν < > ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι  
'Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

34g And she threw herself in, in the name of Jesus Christ

The Lipsius adds the helpful detail εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ into the water. There could be no reason to remove such a detail. This is why the Tischendorf text is more likely to be the earlier one.

She must now be immersed to make the baptism complete. Anyone who has baptised an adult by immersion or witnessed such a baptism will understand that the words of the baptism are said first before the one to be baptised is immersed, because they cannot hear when their head is under water. So the way that this baptism is described, with Thecla saying, before she jumps into the pool, that she baptises herself, is precisely the ordinary way that such a thing is done. When she is immersed she joins Jesus in his death and when she comes back up out of the water she joins Jesus in his resurrection. It is in this way that she throws herself in, in the name of Jesus Christ.

34h αἱ δὲ φῶκαι πυρὸς ἀστραπῆς φέγγος ἰδοῦσαι νεκραὶ  
ἐπέπλευσαν.

34h But the seals, seeing the flash of lightning, floated dead.

We know that, as much as seals are not dangerous, lightning is dangerous to someone in the water. It is not possible that the lightning kills the seals and does not kill Thecla if she is still in the water. In order to make sense of the story here we have to imagine that Thecla has already left the pool when the seals are killed. It is possible for lightning to strike a certain spot and not injure those nearby. If Thecla is still in the pool the water would conduct the current and she would certainly die along with the seals. Seals are strong, large animals and any charge that is enough to kill them would also kill a woman, so either Thecla is not in the water when the lightning strikes or a miraculous status is being claimed well beyond the powers of nature. Any historical facts that might be of interest would require an explanation, whereas legend of this kind would support the saintly character of Thecla. Either is possible even when one takes into account that in the next phrase it seems Thecla is outside of the pool for the lightning strike.

34i καὶ ἦν περὶ αὐτὴν, ὡς ἦν γυμνή, νεφέλη πυρός, ὥστε μὴ ἄπτεσθαι αὐτῆς μηδὲ τὰ θηρία, μήτε δὲ θεωρεῖσθαι < > γυμνήν.

34i and there was round about her, naked as she was, a cloud of fire, so that neither could the beasts touch her nor could she be seen naked.

The differences between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts are able to be accounted for if one thinks of the Lipsius text simply removing the repetition of the information that Thecla is naked and the removal of the third superfluous negation. This is then a streamlining or tidying up of the Tischendorf text in order to make it read as less repetitive and cumbersome. There could be no reason to add these repetitive elements, so the Lipsius text again seems to be the later one.

This phrase makes it seem likely that Thecla is already outside of the pool during the meteorological phenomena of the lightning and fire. She is said to have a cloud of fire round about her so that her modesty was protected. We can assume that the wrap she was given is somehow displaced or has floated away or fallen off in the water. She is not seen naked and the cloud of fire protects her from the beasts, which are not the seals because they are dead. The beasts in the arena have not attacked Thecla while she has been baptising herself. Perhaps they continue to attack each other. The audience does not know.

Thecla has lost her wrap in the water and is now naked. The reference to her nakedness could be taken to be an interest of the author.<sup>755</sup> It could also be a recounting of the protection of God who is caring for her in extra special ways, miraculous ways in fact. For those who might argue that this is yet another example of the ascetic interest of the text, it is to be remembered that naked humans were more commonly seen in the era of the text and that it was ordinary for torture and punishment to include naked shaming. This is the case for the crucifixion of Jesus as well. Although most depictions today have Jesus with a loincloth on the cross, he was almost certainly naked. In this Thecla is both a Christ-figure and she enjoys the protection of God.

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<sup>755</sup> The notion of the “gaze” was written about by Jacques Lacan and used widely as a tool to interpret the sexist and abusive politics inspired by a text. Here it may or not be an indication of a voyeuristic male or female author. Certainly given its gratuity in the unfolding action such a dynamic should be considered by an interpreter and much could be made of it if that were the aim of the commentary. A less traditional approach would need to be adopted so that deconstruction could fuel and facilitate the critique. See: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 833-844.

## Verse Thirty-five

**35a** Αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄλλων θηρίων βαλλομένων < ><sup>756</sup>  
ὠλόλυξαν,

**35b** καὶ αἱ μὲν ἔβαλλον φύλλον, αἱ δὲ νάρδον, αἱ δὲ κασίαν,  
αἱ δὲ ἄμωμον, ὥς εἶναι πλῆθος μύρων.

**35c** πάντα δὲ τὰ βληθέντα θηρία ὥσπερ ὕπνω συσχεθέντα<sup>757</sup>  
οὐχ ἤψαντο αὐτῆς·

**35d** ὥς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον εἰπεῖν τῷ ἡγεμόνι Ταύρους ἔχω  
λίαν φοβερούς,

**35e** τούτοις<sup>758</sup> προσδήσωμεν τὴν θηριομάχον. καὶ στυγνάσας  
ἐπέτρεψεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν λέγων Ποίει ὃ θέλεις.

**35f** καὶ ἔδησαν αὐτὴν < ><sup>759</sup> τῶν ποδῶν μέσῃν <sup>760</sup> < >,<sup>761</sup>  
καὶ ὑπὸ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα τῶν ταύρων<sup>762</sup> πεπυρωμένα σίδηρα  
ὑπέθηκαν,

**35g** ἵνα πλείονα ταραχθέντα<sup>763</sup> ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτήν.

**35h** οἱ μὲν οὖν ἤλλοντο· ἡ δὲ περικαιομένη φλόξ διέκαυσεν  
τοὺς κάλους, καὶ ἦν ὥσπερ<sup>764</sup> οὐ δεδεμένη.

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<sup>756</sup> The Lipsius text has the extra word φοβερωτέρων here.

<sup>757</sup> The Lipsius text prefixes this word συσχεθέντα differently as κατασχεθέντα.

<sup>758</sup> Instead of τούτοις the Lipsius text reads ἐκείνοις.

<sup>759</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional word ἐκ here.

<sup>760</sup> The Lipsius text has μέσον instead of μέσῃν and it is followed by two additional words which are noted in the following footnote.

<sup>761</sup> The Lipsius text adds two additional words here: τῶν ταύρων.

<sup>762</sup> Instead of τῶν ταύρων the Lipsius text has αὐτῶν.

<sup>763</sup> Instead of ταραχθέντα the Lipsius text has ταραχθέντες.

<sup>764</sup> Instead of ὥσπερ the Lipsius text has ὥς.

## Translation

**35a** But the women cried aloud, as other beasts were released

**35b** and some (women) threw flowers, others nard, and others cassia and others amomon,<sup>765</sup> so there was a plethora of perfumes.

**35c** And all the released beasts, as if overpowered by sleep, did not touch her.<sup>766</sup>

**35d** So Alexander said to the governor: “I have some very fearsome bulls,

**35e** let us tie the beastfighter to them”. And the governor frowning gave his consent saying, “Do what you will.”

**35f** And they bound her by the feet in the middle and slapped red hot iron chains on the genitals of the bulls,

**35g** so that being more enraged they would kill her.

**35h** The bulls then, leapt forward, but a flame burning around her burnt through the ropes and she was as if she had not been bound.<sup>767</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Amomon is likely to be cardamom.

<sup>766</sup> The translation is with a full-stop here even though it is not in the text.

<sup>767</sup> The perfect participle with the imperfect tense of the verb functions like a pluperfect.

## Commentary and Notes

35a Αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄλλων θηρίων βαλλομένων < >  
ὠλόλυξαν,

35a But the women cried aloud, as other beasts were released

The comparative adjective φοβερωτέρων (fiercer or more fearsome) appears in the Lipsius but not in the Tischendorf text. It is an additional descriptive word. It makes this final release of animals seem dramatic before the audience will hear in the following sentence that these beasts are sleepy. It is an addition in the Lipsius text, not an abridgement in the manuscripts used for the Tischendorf text.

We already know that Thecla is surrounded by fire and is not likely to be threatened by this further release of beasts. Her protection is divine and the crowds in the text and the readers of the text will be feeling quite certain by now that the tide is turned already in her favour. One imagines ancient readers or listeners thinking that other beasts will not harm her now, surely. She is God's chosen one and baptised into Jesus Christ, who must be very powerful.

35b καὶ αἱ μὲν ἔβαλλον φύλλον, αἱ δὲ νάρδον, αἱ δὲ κασίαν,  
αἱ δὲ ἄμωμον, ὥς εἶναι πλῆθος μύρων.

35b and some (women) threw flowers, others nard, and others cassia and others amomon, so there was a plethora of perfumes.

At this point in the narrative, the women are throwing flowers and sweet herbs and perfumes to Thecla to show their love and support. Nard is one of the passion ointments for Jesus' death. The readers or listener must be meant to suppose that they have come to the arena ready with these. They must have already decided on their love of her before the games began and before the miracles of protection showed her to be God's holy one. This is not surprising if she stayed with Tryphaena. In the story, she would be renowned as a special guest in the city because she stayed with the Queen. Was there also the negative factor at play that these women were no supporters of Alexander? We cannot be sure, but it is not unlikely, since his offence against Thecla is an affront to her dignity as a woman. The herbs and perfumes in particular may well have been very expensive, while the flowers were probably commonly available. The group of women supporting Thecla may have been of mixed social economic classes. The very poorest of women did not attend games; they



laboured each day or begged in order to survive. Since Tryphaena attended these games, any of the wealthiest women would have seen fit to attend as well. Perhaps they brought their women servants with them; such an entourage would not be unseemly. This special show of support is an impressive example of women banding together to care for each other.

As the narrative unfolds, the caring is a joyful tribute to Thecla's escape from danger, but it could have just as easily been adornment for her burial. Certainly, even if the games had a dreadful outcome for Thecla, this gathering of women would have offered a strengthening for each woman there, as they saw that they all came prepared to show their affection for a woman who was twice wronged. First she was violently assaulted and then unfairly accused and condemned; in order to say "no" to such abuse it seems that these women come bringing their gifts of flowers, perfume and sweet herbs. It is also possible that these were not spontaneous supportive actions but were either customary or carefully planned. Even if there was considerable forethought the group of women present would have felt strength in their unity. In the narrative, the display is also support of Tryphaena who is suffering yet again, not only with the death of her daughter but now with Thecla in such danger. The theological lesson here is for those who are abused and treated cruelly to band together in support of one another. They form a community which is much stronger than any one individual.<sup>768</sup>

35c πάντα δὲ τὰ βληθέντα θηρία ὥσπερ ὕπνῳ συσχεθέντα  
οὐχ ἥψαντο αὐτῆς·

35c And all the released beasts, as if overpowered by sleep, did not touch her.

The variant συσχεθέντα in the Tischendorf text and κατασχεθέντα in the Lipsius text does not affect the translation significantly. The difference between the two prefixes is not so marked as to enable us to determine which text is the more original.

Now the beasts are not excited by the fire surrounding Thecla, as one might expect, or is it that the fire has died down or gone out at this stage? The text is lacking in detailed description, leaving us to imagine how

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<sup>768</sup> William Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1994, pp. 65, 214. Such matters of solidarity are seen by some theologians as the core of the Gospel message of Jesus. Herzog writes about communities of support and about a different order of human relations moulded by justice and mutual reciprocity.

these remarkable events proceeded. In any case the beasts are sluggish and uninterested in Thecla. This sort of thing can happen; if a person is not at all afraid around animals they often do not react in threatening ways. It is also possible that they may have been fed or drugged before the games. The idea that the herbs and flowers had a perfume that influenced the animals is less convincing.<sup>769</sup> With so many important Thecla supporters, there would have been ample opportunity for the animal keepers to be bribed before the animals were released.

The phrase οὐχ ἤψαντο αὐτῆς is reminiscent of the story of Mary in the garden of the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene is requested by Jesus not to continue to cling to him, not to hold him. Here the animals will not make contact with Thecla. The verb is aorist not the durative imperative as in the Gospel of John.<sup>770</sup> In the Gospel the sense is to not continue holding, where here it is never to touch. There is no actual literary relationship between this verse and John 20:17a. The comparison between the two comes to mind because Mary and Thecla are both known as apostles and both have key roles in the early church. They were role models in early Christianity not only for women, but especially for women.

35d ὥς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον εἰπεῖν τῷ ἡγεμόνι Ταύρους ἔχω λίαν φοβερούς,

35d So Alexander said to the governor: “I have some very fearsome bulls,

It seems that animals have to be drawn from Alexander’s private collection. Perhaps he and the governor are aware of a conspiracy of the women, or perhaps this decision is to attempt to preserve Alexander from shame. In either case, the bulls are selected to try Thecla next.

35e τούτοις προσδήσωμεν τὴν θηριομάχον. καὶ στυγνάσας ἐπέτρεψεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν λέγων Ποίει ὃ θέλεις.

35e let us tie the beastfighter to them. And the governor frowning gave his consent saying, “Do what you will.”

The Lipsius text has ἐκείνοις not τούτοις. It is probably a correction. The bulls cannot be near to Alexander and the governor, so the distant demonstrative pronoun is more accurate. This is likely to be a later

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<sup>769</sup> H. Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction*, p. 59. The beasts are “hypnotized” (by the aromas and herbs?) and do her no harm.

<sup>770</sup> John 20:17a λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς, Μὴ μου ἄπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀνα βέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα·

scribal correction and so the Tischendorf text appears to be the earlier one.

Thecla at this point is not wearing a wrap so the bulls are tied to Thecla's feet. She is referred to as the beastfighter here again. In early iconography she is often depicted accompanied by beasts. She has at this point done little or no fighting, but the title remains. The governor must be siding with the women; he is not content with this new suggestion but allows it none the less. Could it be that there is a slight reference to Pilate as he is portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew? In Mt 27:24 Pilate is described as saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood." There are no literary comparisons but the guilt is being removed from the political official to a certain extent in both cases. In the *Acts of Thecla*, Alexander must have been very persuasive for the governor to agree unwillingly to this request. Did Alexander's misuse of power extend beyond his personal lustful gratification to violence in order to influence political decisions? We cannot know, but speculation would naturally turn in such a direction.

35f καὶ ἔδησαν αὐτὴν < > τῶν ποδῶν μέσῃν < >, καὶ ὑπὸ τὰ ἀναγκᾶ τῶν τούρων πεπυρωμένα σίδηρα ὑπέθηκαν,

35f And they bound her by the feet in the middle and slapped red hot iron chains on the genitals of the bulls,

The variants in the Lipsius text tidy up the sentence, making the meaning clear. The additions and changes indicate that Thecla is tied not in the middle of her two feet but rather in the middle of the two bulls. In the Tischendorf text it is not specified "in the middle" of what she is tied, and since "her feet" is the only option, it is understood that the knots for the ropes are between her two feet, which are tied to each other. The sentence is awkward in that μέσῃν agrees with αὐτήν but must actually be referring to ποδῶν. This procedure would be in order to prepare for Thecla to be dragged behind the bulls like being dragged behind a chariot. The Tischendorf text is the more difficult text and so is likely to be the more original.

In the narrative the descriptions are surprising. The method of antagonizing the bulls may both have made them angry and also rendered them incapable of certain actions and, as in bull fights, the torture of the bull both antagonizes it and renders it less capable of killing the matador. In the *Acts of Thecla* the intention seems clear; the tormentors of the bulls

wish them to kill Thecla. In this text it is not clear how she is tied up, but no doubt it is in such a way that she is in grave danger from the bulls. I have translated “in the middle”, but in the Tischendorf text this could mean that her two feet are tied to each other and then those ropes are tied to the bulls. She is tied to be dragged behind the bulls. The body of Hector is tied and dragged behind the chariot of Achilles in desecration. This is done after he is dead. This is not to say that being dragged would not kill a person, for clearly it could easily kill someone. In this case the animals would not need to attack, but only to run. The method of antagonizing the bulls which is specified would not make running easier.

It is clear in the Lipsius text that Thecla is tied in the middle of the bulls, but that is not clear in the Tischendorf text. The sexual sadism hypothesis put forth by Davies and accepted by Barrier is dependent on the Lipsius text.<sup>771</sup> Phrase 36h has both bulls leaping forward in both the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts. There is no attempt to tear Thecla in two.

35g ἵνα πλείονα ταραχθέντα ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτήν.

35g so that being more enraged they would kill her.

In both the Tischendorf and in the Lipsius texts the verb ἀποκτείνωσιν is plural. The variant in the Lipsius text is ταραχθέντες. This is a correction because the masculine plural subject can take a plural verb. In the Tischendorf text ταραχθέντα the neuter plural participle should take a singular verb. It is also not clear to what the participle refers; two possibilities exist in this sentence, ἀναγκαῖα or σίδηρα, but neither provides a more satisfying reading in comparison to the clarity of the Lipsius choice. The Lipsius text is more correct and more stylish. Tischendorf’s use of ταραχθέντα seems to result in the less polished text here, and therefore probably represents the earlier text.

At this point in the narrative, the intention is spelled out clearly for the reading or listening audience so that it cannot be mistaken. At a later date when Thecla’s victory is already known, the purpose may have become ambiguous. This could have been seen as a further opportunity to show how holy and well-loved Thecla was by God. The intense description that “they would kill her” is at this late stage in the drama only another opportunity to extol Thecla’s wondrous victory. This point in the drama is like a sports game where the score is so unbalanced and there are so few minutes left that there can be no doubt whatsoever who will win.

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<sup>771</sup> J. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, p. 167.

The audience is behind Thecla; even the governor is expecting her to be safe. Therefore this is a gratuitous opportunity for the listening or reading audience to enjoy the extent to which Thecla is rescued.

35h οἱ μὲν οὖν ἤλλοντο· ἡ δὲ περικαιομένη φλόξ διέκαυσεν τοὺς κάλους, καὶ ἦν ὥσπερ οὐ δεδεμένη.

35h The bulls then, leapt forward, but a flame burning around her burnt through the ropes and she was as if she had not been bound.

The Lipsius text has ὥς instead of ὥσπερ. There is no significant grammatical difference. Tischendorf is following text C as he often does and Lipsius is following ABEFG.

This is the second time that Thecla is rescued by fire. It is the most dramatic of all the rescues in the story. That lightning could strike in the stadium is possible and that it could start a fire is also possible, even if not likely, but in this scene that fire should burn only the ropes and not Thecla is as fantastic as Peter's prison escape (Acts 12:6-19) or Saint Paul bringing Eutychus back to life in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 20:9). There is another possibility, that the burning of the ropes is from the red hot chains. This would also not be easily accomplished unless some serious sabotage was planned in advance, such as some kind of accelerant on the ropes near the bulls but not near Thecla. This part of the story is best seen as having legendary character.

## Verse Thirty-six

**36a** Ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα ὀλιγόρησεν<sup>772</sup> ἐστῶσα παρὰ τὴν  
ἄρῆναν,<sup>773</sup> < ><sup>774</sup>

**36b** ὥς εἰπεῖν τὸν ὄχλον<sup>775</sup> ὅτι Ἀπέθανεν ἡ βασίλισσα Τρύφαινα.  
καὶ ἐπέσχεεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν, καὶ ἡ πόλις<sup>776</sup> ἐπτύρη·

**36c** ὁ δὲ<sup>777</sup> Ἀλέξανδρος παρεκάλει τὸν<sup>778</sup> ἡγεμόνα λέγων<sup>779</sup>

**36d** ὅτι ἔλθῃς καὶ τὴν πόλιν, καὶ ἀπόλυσον ταύτην.<sup>780</sup>

**36e** ταῦτα γὰρ εἰπὼν ἀκούσῃ ὁ Καῖσαρ, τάχα ἀπολέσει σὺν  
ἡμῖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν.<sup>781</sup>

**36f** διότι<sup>782</sup> καὶ ἡ συγγενὴς αὐτοῦ Τρύφαινα ἡ βασίλισσα  
ἀπέθανεν παρὰ τοὺς ἄβακας.

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<sup>772</sup> Instead of ὀλιγόρησεν the Lipsius text has ἐξέψυξεν.

<sup>773</sup> There is no comma here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>774</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄβακας, ὥστε τὰς θεραπαινίδας here. The Lipsius text also omits the relative particle: ὥς which is in the Tischendorf text beginning 36b here.

<sup>775</sup> These two words τὸν ὄχλον do not appear here in the Lipsius text. The maidservants not the crowd say these words in the Lipsius text.

<sup>776</sup> The Lipsius text has πᾶσα ἡ πόλις.

<sup>777</sup> Instead of ὁ δὲ the Lipsius text has καὶ ὁ here.

<sup>778</sup> Instead of παρεκάλει τὸν the Lipsius text has πεσὼν εἰς τοὺς πόδας τοῦ here.

<sup>779</sup> Instead of ἡγεμόνα λέγων the Lipsius text has ἡγεμόνος εἶπεν here with the raised dot following εἶπεν.

<sup>780</sup> Instead of ταύτην the Lipsius text has τὴν θηριομάχον, μὴ καὶ ἡ πόλις συναπόληται here including a full-stop after συναπόληται.

<sup>781</sup> The Lipsius text has a comma instead of Tischendorf's raised dot which is equivalent to the English semi-colon.

<sup>782</sup> Instead of διότι the Lipsius text has ὅτι here.

## Translation

**36a** And Tryphaena was inattentive as she stood by the arena,

**36b** so that the crowd said, “Queen Tryphaena is dead”.<sup>783</sup> And the governor decreed (an end)<sup>784</sup> and the city was alarmed,

**36c** and Alexander implored the governor saying,

**36d** “Have mercy on me and the city and set her free,

**36e** for if Caesar were to hear these things, he would quickly destroy<sup>785</sup> both us and the city,

**36f** since his relative Tryphaena, the Queen, has died next to the walls”.

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<sup>783</sup> This could be translated “has died”; the sense of the aorist is very immediate, so “is dead” has been preferred.

<sup>784</sup> This means he stopped the games; ἐπέσχευ is the aorist of ἐπέχω, which can mean I decree, charge, enjoin, hold back, refrain. Here the governor dramatically puts an end to the torture of Thecla. The words “the end” are added for clarity.

<sup>785</sup> This verb is future tense; therefore, in English it would be translated literally: “he will destroy”. The mixture of tenses makes this sound awkward in English so I have translated: “he would destroy”.

## Commentary and Notes

36a Ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα ὀλιγόρησεν ἐστῶσα παρὰ τὴν ἀρήναν, < >

36a And Tryphaena was inattentive as she stood by the arena,

The Lipsius text is aware of the difficulty of Tryphaena appearing as if dead against the wall in 36f and the crowd being able to see her. The Lipsius text omits the ὁ ὄχλος in 36b and adds here in 36a ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄβακας, ὥστε τὰς θεραπαινίδας. This is most likely an effort to explain the use of ἄβακας in 36f, and deal with the matter of the crowd not being able to see Tryphaena. Elliott translates, “And Tryphaena fainted standing beside the arena, so that the servants said, ‘Queen Tryphaena is dead.’” In Elliott’s volume there is no translation of the words ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄβακας in 36a. It is as if he is translating the Tischendorf text at this point. And in 36f Elliott, who uses the Lipsius text translates, “Queen Tryphaena, has died at the theatre gate.” He must understand ἄβακας in 36f to be the theatre gate. Ἄβαξ means board or wall.

Ὀλιγοῦρειν means to esteem lightly, to take no heed, to be faint-hearted; to be discouraged or inattentive.<sup>786</sup> The idea conveyed is that Tryphaena appeared to be ill. From a posture where she was watching intently she discontinues watching and perhaps her head drops or she leans against something. The Lipsius text seems to correct this imprecision by substituting the clearer term ἐξέψυξεν meaning “she fainted”, from ἐκψύχω. This straightforwardly clarifies. She has swooned, she is not dead. There is no other reason for her lack of attention. Lipsius takes Ἐξέψυξεν from ABFG and some Latin sources, where Tischendorf continues to favour C as the more original attestation.

In the narrative, Tryphaena’s sickness marks the end of Thecla’s trials. It is as if Tryphaena shared Thecla’s pain not only in her affections but also physically. The two women have a bond that is deep and this is demonstrated bodily. The place where Tryphaena stood is said to be by the arena. In 36f it is made clear that this is the walls or boards. If they are in Pisidian Antioch’s arena with the tunnel entrance<sup>787</sup> perhaps she is

<sup>786</sup> *LSJ*, pp. 1215-1216; Lampe, p. 948.

<sup>787</sup> Stephen Mitchell and Marc Waelkens, *Pisidian Antioch*, Duckworth with The Classical Press of Wales, London, 1998, pp. 106-107.



in that entrance; from there she may well have seen the bulls and the fire, and the crowd could see her. The archeological evidence suggests historicity at this point when reading the Tischendorf text. At Antioch the arena was built with a special tunnel entrance that would have made it possible to be beside the arena and also fall against a wall, all in view of the crowd. Attempting to prove such historicity is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>788</sup> The Lipsius text corrects to having only servants see Tryphaena falling against the wall. Most arenas have walls at the outside, so the crowd inside would not be able to see.

36b ὥς εἰπεῖν τὸν ὄχλον ᾠπέθανεν ἡ βασίλισσα Τρύφαινα.  
καὶ ἐπέσχευεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν, καὶ ἡ πόλις ἐπτόρη·

36b so that the crowd said, “Queen Tryphaena is dead”. And the governor decreed (an end) and the city was alarmed,

The Lipsius text has the variant πᾶσα ἡ πόλις. This is an embellishment and shows a more developed textual tradition.

The crowd has overreacted to the fainting, and the false information that Tryphaena is dead has spread rapidly. The governor therefore ends the spectacle by decree. The entire city is said to be alarmed and in a panic because it believes that the Queen is dead. Blame for her death would certainly come from other royalty and important persons. It was clear that Tryphaena did not want Thecla to endure these trials.

36c ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος παρεκάλει τὸν ἡγεμόνα λέγων

36c and Alexander implored the governor saying,

In the story Alexander now feels that he will have to make some kind of reparation since he thinks that he has caused the Queen’s death by subjecting Thecla to these trials, and they have been singularly unsuccessful. Thecla is clearly under divine protection; no matter what Alexander does he cannot cause her harm yet he has harmed the Queen. This is an ironic twist which would be entertaining for those readers and listeners who know that Tryphaena is not dead.

The Lipsius text has the additional information that Alexander “fell down at the feet of the governor” (πεσὼν εἰς τοὺς πόδας). This is also ironic since the lioness licks the feet of Thecla and now Alexander grovels at the

<sup>788</sup> A study which does make and defend historical claims concerning the *Acts of Thecla* is A. Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*.

governor's feet. However, there would be no reason to abridge the text. This information is consistent with the Tischendorf story and is of the same ironic character. It is likelier to be an addition to heighten the drama, rather than the Tischendorf text abbreviating the Lipsius text.

36d Ἐλέησον κἀμέ καὶ τὴν πόλιν, καὶ ἀπόλυσον ταυτην·

36d Have mercy on me and the city and set her free,

Similar to the above, the addition of τὴν θηριομάχον, μὴ καὶ ἡ πόλις συναπόληται "free the beast fighter, lest the city also be destroyed" heightens the drama with additional information. This phrase is also likely to be from a later development of the text, as it is likelier that subsequent tradition adds dramatic detail than that it subtracts them.

Although Alexander is identified as a Syrian in the narrative, his business interests are now in Pisidian Antioch. He has gone to a great deal of trouble and taken a great risk to get Thecla into the arena and he seems to feel now that his animal games business is in jeopardy. In the story at this point, Alexander believes that Tryphaena's death will be blamed on him. He argues that the governor should set Thecla free to help the city. He is personally begging for mercy. However, his solicitations for mercy have a distinctively hollow ring; after all he has already sent more animals to attack this young woman than anyone might have thought necessary. The plea is for his own safety, given the mistaken information that Tryphaena is dead. If Thecla can be set free in order to appease Caesar, this casts doubt on Alexander's sincerity in his original accusation. Did he just want Thecla to be an attraction in his games? Or is it that Alexander is now even more embarrassed than he was when he first accused Thecla? In the story, Thecla's victory over and over again in this spectacle would have been another cause for Alexander's shame. One might also wonder how Alexander thought that releasing Thecla might do any good if indeed Tryphaena was dead. His irrational request may be an indication in the drama of his extreme panic.

Alexander's greatest shame is that he has tried very hard to kill a saint and his efforts are without any shadow of success. He has not only chosen a misconceived purpose but has also publicly failed at it. There seems to be no awareness that setting Thecla free will not solve his problem. The reader or listener, at this stage in the drama, knows that there will be no alternative other than for Thecla to be freed, not because Alexander wills it or because the governor does, but because God will

protect and defend Thecla until she is unimpeded by any adversaries. The reader is simply waiting to see how this will happen.

36e ταῦτα γὰρ ἐὰν ἀκούσῃ ὁ Καῖσαρ, τάχα ἀπολέσει σὺν ἡμῖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν·

36e for if Caesar were to hear these things, he would quickly destroy both us and the city,

Caesar is the overall power according to Alexander. This is very telling because the story is precisely about the fact that neither Alexander nor the governor nor Caesar can do anything if God does not allow it. In this case God will not allow Thecla to die. In the narrative this possible intervention of God is set against the hail storm in verse 22 where the people were in danger of death. So the God of the *Acts of Thecla* may well not preserve the entire city of Antioch, even though God clearly will preserve Thecla.

36f διότι καὶ ἡ συγγενὴς αὐτοῦ Τρύφαινα ἡ βασίλισσα ἀπέθανεν παρὰ τοὺς ἄβακας.

36f since his relative Tryphaena, the Queen, has died next to the walls.

The difference between the Tischendorf text and the Lipsius texts is minor. The Lipsius ὅτι is the standard form. The Tischendorf form διότι is discussed by Smyth who lists it (2240) as a word to introduce a causal clause meaning “since”. Smyth and *LSJ* both explain the contraction. Διότι is a contraction for διὰ τοῦτο ὅτι.<sup>789</sup> Where ὅτι can mean both cause and inference διότι more naturally means just inference in the sense of “since” rather than “because”. The Lipsius replacement of the contraction is probably a later tidying up. Contractions of this sort in Koine Greek are thought to be confusing, low literary style. The καί is best left out of the translation in English as the translation of διότι gives a more specific meaning than the simple connecting conjunction καί.

In the story this is the reason given that Caesar<sup>790</sup> would destroy the city.

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<sup>789</sup>*LSJ*, p. 435. H. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, p. 503. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 235, mention διότι as incorrect in Mt 27:8 and Lk 1:35 where διό is found meaning “for that reason” or “therefore”.

<sup>790</sup>A. Primo, “Client-Kingdom of Pontus between Philomithridatism and Philoromanism”, in *Client-Kings and Roman Principalities*, p.173. “Polemo II reigned in Pontus with his mother Antonia Tryphaena at least up until AD 55/56. The coins of Polemo II confirm his good relations which several of the Julio-Claudians, bearing on their reverse from time to time portraits of Claudius, Claudius and Nero, Agrippina, Nero, Britannicus.”

Tryphaena has not died but Alexander thinks that he is responsible for killing her. His motivations are selfish. He has no reservations in killing Thecla, a stranger to the city, but he is in a panic about the possibility of having killed the Queen. The relationship of the Queen and Thecla is very interesting at this point. It is as though they are united as women who can be victimized and both will be victorious in their goodness and care of others. Alexander, by contrast, is characterised as amoral and ineffective. This is the last appearance of Alexander in the story. His final scene shows him to be a defeated villain.

## Verse Thirty-seven

**37a** Καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἐκ μέσου τῶν θηρίων τὴν  
Θέκλαν<sup>791</sup> καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Τίς εἶ σύ;

**37b** καὶ τίνα τὰ περὶ σέ, ὅτι οὐδέν σου ἄπτεται<sup>792</sup> < ><sup>793</sup>  
τῶν θηρίων < >;<sup>794</sup>

**37c** ἡ δὲ εἶπεν Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος δούλη·

**37d** τὰ δὲ περὶ ἐμέ, εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς υἱὸν αὐτοῦ  
ἐπίστευσα· διὰ τοῦτο<sup>795</sup> οὐδὲ ἐν τῶν θηρίων ἥψατό μου.

**37e** οὗτος γὰρ μόνος σωτηρίας ὅρος καὶ ζωῆς ἀθανάτου  
ὑπόστασις ἐστίν·

**37f** χειμαζόμενοις γὰρ γίνεται καταφυγή, θλιβομένοις ἄνεσις,  
ἀπελπισμένων<sup>796</sup> σκέπη,

**37g** καὶ ἀπαξαπλῶς ὅς ἐάν μὴ πιστεύσῃ εἰς αὐτόν, οὐ  
ζήσεται < ><sup>797</sup> εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

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<sup>791</sup> The word order is different in the Lipsius text which reads τὴν Θέκλαν ἐκ μέσου τῶν θηρίων καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Τίς εἶ σύ;

<sup>792</sup> The three words οὐδέν σου ἄπτεται do not appear here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>793</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional words, οὐδὲ ἐν here.

<sup>794</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional words ἥψατό σου here.

<sup>795</sup> Instead of διὰ τοῦτο the Lipsius text has δι' ὃν here.

<sup>796</sup> Instead of ἀπελπισμένων the Lipsius text has ἀπηλπισμένοις here.

<sup>797</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words ἀλλὰ ἀποθνῄσκει here.

## Translation

**37a** And the governor summoned Thecla from among the beasts and said to her, “Who are you?

**37b** and what is it about you that no beasts touch you?”

**37c** And she said, “I am the servant of the Living God,

**37d** as to what it is about me - I have believed in him in whom God is well pleased, his son; for this reason not one of the beasts touched me.

**37e** For he alone is the goal<sup>798</sup> of salvation and the foundation of eternal life;

**37f** for to the storm-tossed he is a refuge, to the oppressed, he is relief, he is the shelter of the despairing,

**37g** and overall, whoever does not believe in him will not live forever.”

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<sup>798</sup> The sense of “goal” here is the “condition” for salvation.

## Commentary and Notes

37a Καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἐκ μέσου τῶν θηρίων τὴν  
Θέκλαν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Τίς εἶ σύ;

37a And the governor summoned Thecla from among the beasts and said to her, “Who are you?”

The difference in the Lipsius text and the Tischendorf text is that the word order in the Lipsius text is less ambiguous. The Tischendorf text at first seems to read that the governor is among the beasts when he summons Thecla. The reader then realizes that only Thecla has been among the beasts. The Lipsius text seems to be a correction because by placing the name Thecla before the phrase “from among the beasts” it never occurs to the reader that the governor would be in such an unlikely place. The Tischendorf text is then more likely to be the more original and the Lipsius seems to be a clarification.

The governor seems to understand that Alexander’s intentions do not only concern the safety of the city. He is certainly aware that Thecla seems to be unable to be harmed in the arena and summons Thecla from among the beasts. He has stopped the games in order to have her brought before him. Who leads her out of the arena, how dangerous it is for them to do this and the reaction of the crowd are all things that we cannot know. There is the example of her walking onto the pyre during her first trial in Iconium which awakens in the imagination of the reader an image of her simply walking out of the arena unaided, and in a very dignified way, as soon as the governor lifts a hand in summons. If she is not stopped at the gates one simply imagines her proceeding to the audience with the governor. Was she given some cloth to cover herself, as it would be unseemly for her to appear completely naked before the governor? At this stage in the drama she (having perhaps lost her wrap in the pool) is said to be naked, the fire having protected her from those who would look upon her nakedness (verse 34j). The governor is not asking her name or city of origin but rather the question really is, “What makes you different from what we expected?” “What is this relationship with Tryphaena, the Queen, all about?” “Why are you so successful in the arena?” “What is it about you that we do not know?” The readers and listeners would be thinking of their response to the question. Who is Thecla? She is the servant of the Living God. Questions from adversarial characters in a faith document can have this kind of significant effect in the encouragement of faith development for the audiences, as for example, Pilate’s question in John 18:38, “What is truth?”

37b καὶ τίνα τὰ περὶ σέ, ὅτι οὐδέν σου ἄπτεται < > τῶν  
θηρίων < >;

37b and what is it about you that no beasts touch you?"

The Tischendorf text has the genitive plural neuter noun τῶν θηρίων and the verb in the present middle/passive. The Lipsius text has the same noun but it has become partitive with the number ἐν and the verb has been changed to aorist middle. The Lipsius text arguably uses the more exact grammar and tense and has added the emphatic numeral. The Tischendorf text appears more likely to be original.

In the narrative the governor is now impressed by the obvious fact that none of the beasts is able to hurt Thecla; therefore he asks why the beasts do not touch her. In fact the lioness has touched her but in an affectionate way. His question is not meant to be taken literally, but rather is meant to ask, "Why aren't you injured by the beasts?" "What is it about you, that they do not harm you?" The listeners or readers may answer the question in their imaginations: She is Thecla of Iconium, martyr, apostle, servant of God.

37c ἡ δὲ εἶπεν Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος δούλη·

37c And she said, "I am the servant of the Living God,

Thecla uses this opportunity to witness to her faith. The *Acts of Thecla* is the story of her faith. She is indeed the servant of the Living God. An important New Testament parallel here is with the Acts of the Apostles chapter 16 where the Pythian oracle reports that Paul is the servant of the most high God (Acts 16:17). To be the servant or slave of God is a remarkable way for a person to describe themselves. Thecla now sees all of her life in the light of her devotion to God. She once had slaves; she knows the difference between being a servant and being the mistress of the household. She does not respond by saying to the governor that she is a very important woman with slaves and from a large and wealthy household in Iconium. She eschews the conventional social identifiers and answers his question: she has been protected by God in the arena as she sees it. She is saved by divine intervention, so her answer must witness to the power of God, since it is God who has saved her from the beasts. In her world she must define which God it is that she is serving because there are many gods in the Roman pantheon, and even more if



one considers the Greek and Asian deities who were likely to be known in Pisidian Antioch.

37d τὰ δὲ περὶ ἐμέ, εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς υἱὸν αὐτοῦ  
ἐπίστευσα· διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲ ἓν τῶν θηρίων ἥψατό μου.

37d and what it is about me—I have believed in him in whom God is well pleased, his son; for this reason not one of the beasts touched me.

The difference between the Tischendorf and the Lipsius text is significant. Lipsius has δι' ὃν instead of the Tischendorf διὰ τοῦτο. In the Tischendorf text the idea is that the beasts have not touched Thecla because she believed. The Lipsius text shows a more developed Christology. Thecla is not touched by the beasts because of God's well beloved son, the idea being that Jesus has protected Thecla. In the Tischendorf text it could well be God who has protected Thecla because she believed in his son. The Tischendorf text seems to be more Jewish and the Lipsius text seems to have a more developed Christian meaning. The Tischendorf text is more likely to be the earlier text.

There is nothing about herself that she proffers in explanation. Rather it is solely because she believes in Jesus the Son of God that she is not harmed by the beasts. The reference to Jesus as the Son in whom God is well pleased is a reference to the baptism of Jesus as we know it in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>799</sup> It is noteworthy that she refers to Jesus in this way. It is a reference to a story about Jesus rather than a reference to Jesus by name. Her story is about her baptism and she identifies Jesus in a reference to his baptism. Compare Mk 9:11.

11καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου  
ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

There is not literary dependence, but there is a theological relationship. She does not refer to herself as pleasing God but only as being a servant of God and believing in God's Son. It is because of this faith that the beasts do not harm her.

If one considers the historical setting of her story, it is so early, about the year 52-56 CE, that it is possible that the proper-name of Jesus followed by the term Christ (which means the Anointed) may not have meant anything to the governor. Jesus is a common Jewish name and many

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<sup>799</sup> Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22.

Jewish leaders are referred to as anointed.<sup>800</sup> Eventually, after more time has elapsed, the name Jesus with the title Christ will come to refer only to Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen one. At the historical setting of the story of Thecla, the baptism of Jesus where he is recognized as well-pleasing to God is an excellent story to use to say which Jesus she believes in. It is interesting that Paul also sees himself as the servant of God, just as Thecla sees herself as the servant of God. Jesus also saw himself as the servant of God. All three are basing their understanding on the Isaiah canticles of the suffering servant of God.<sup>801</sup>

37e οὗτος γὰρ μόνος σωτηρίας ὅρος καὶ ζωῆς ἀθανάτου  
ὑπόστασις ἐστίν·

37e For he alone is the goal of salvation and the foundation of eternal life;

Jesus has not yet come to be the suffering servant of Adonai par excellence as known in the Isaiah canticles. Thecla is aware that her service and the service of Jesus are of a different order. He is the foundation of eternal life and the goal or finishing-point of salvation. This is a wonderfully potent theological reference to Jesus; it produces a very interesting Christology. The “goal of salvation” for example leaves room for salvation as various experiences before Jesus, such as the saving of Noah and his family from the flood or the Passover from Egypt. The “goal of salvation” perhaps could refer also to the sort of salvation that Thecla has just received by not being killed in the arena. The foundation of eternal life is also very interesting theologically; could it mean that eternal life is somehow built on Jesus but is not experienced until one is incorporated into Jesus, by baptism? These highly packed theological phrases certainly deserve more attention than I can give them in this commentary. It is important to notice, however, that the foundation is often thought of as the beginning and the goal as the end. This presents a completeness in the understanding of the importance of Jesus.

37f χειμαζόμενοις γὰρ γίνεται καταφυγή, θλιβομένοις ἄνεσις,  
ἀπελπισμένων σκέπη,

<sup>800</sup> All kings of Israel and many prophets are said to be anointed. For example see: Ez 28:14; 1Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 1:14; 1 Chr 16:22; Ps 2:2; 18:50; Is 45:1; Lam 4:20.

<sup>801</sup> Raymond Francis Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2008, p. 186. “Often reflecting on his apostolic calling in the light of the Deutero-Isaian Servant canticles (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), Paul found in Isaiah 52:15 a scripture that helped him to make sense of his apostolic mission to Gentiles among whom the good news had not been proclaimed.”

37f for to the storm-tossed he is a refuge, to the oppressed, he is relief, he is the shelter of the despairing,

The Lipsius text uses ἀπηλπισμένοις in order to make it the same form as the other verbs in this sequence. Since this is a kind of poetic improvement, the Tischendorf text is more likely to be the more original.

This phrase is a beautiful expression of the compassion which will be a hallmark of Christian teaching. Jesus Christ is the refuge, relief and shelter of the suffering. Jesus Christ is seen as the answer to suffering and oppression both in its physical and psychological expressions. The canonical Gospels speak of oppression but not of those experiencing despair ἀπελπισμένων. Thecla, with the help of Tryphaena will serve the poor. The later traditions related to Thecla will describe how she helps and heals many. Her tradition is not one of only travelling and preaching, or only of praying and witnessing; her tradition involves as well the work of caring for those in need.

37g καὶ ἀπαξαπλῶς ὅς ἐάν μὴ πιστεύσῃ εἰς αὐτόν, οὐ ζήσεται  
< > εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

37g and overall, whoever does not believe in him will not live forever.”

In the Lipsius text the words ἀλλὰ ἀποθανεῖται are added. This is an expansion. There would be no reason to remove these words, but adding them gives a sense of a full or complete concept without changing the meaning. The sense is that there is an eternal condemnation, that the one who does not believe will “be dead forever”. This really does not suit the story as a whole because Tryphaena believes that her daughter lives an eternal life after death even though she has never met Paul or Thecla or heard of Jesus Christ. There are no condemnations in this story, and not even Alexander is eternally condemned. To be dead forever has the sense of final judgment where the good are rewarded with eternal life and the wicked are condemned to eternal punishment. This concept will be further developed in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of Matthew (see for example Mt 18:34-35). There is no reason to think that the *Acts of Thecla* knows these Gospel traditions. There is no reason to think that the theology of the *Acts of Thecla* knows the early creeds or doctrines of judgment.

The understanding of faith in Jesus Christ is the sole focus of faith here. This understanding of faith seems to have a division between those who believe and those who do not. Life forever is a gift from the Living God

to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Those who do not believe do not enjoy this kind of life. This divide will become a major issue for Christianity in the future. Even today it is an important question in faith communities, which have various views on this matter.

## Verse Thirty-eight

**38a** Καὶ ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἐκέλευσεν ἐνεχθῆναι ἱμάτια καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι αὐτήν. < ><sup>802</sup>

**38b** καὶ εἶπεν Θεέκλα<sup>803</sup> Ὁ ἐνδύσας με γυμνήν ἐν τοῖς θηρίοις, αὐτὸς<sup>804</sup> ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως ἐνδύσει σε<sup>805</sup> σωτηρίαν.<sup>806</sup>

**38c** καὶ<sup>807</sup> λαβοῦσα τὰ ἱμάτια ἐνεδύσατο.

**38d** < ><sup>808</sup> ἐξέπεμψεν οὖν<sup>809</sup> εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἄκτον λέγων Θεέκλαν τὴν θεοσεβὴ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην<sup>810</sup> ἀπολύω ὑμῖν.

**38e** αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες μέγα ὠλόλυξαν καὶ ἐνὶ στόματι ἀπέδωκαν<sup>811</sup> αἶνον τῷ θεῷ λέγουσαι

**38f** Εἷς θεὸς ὁ Θεέκλης,<sup>812</sup> ὥστε ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς σαλευθῆναι τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ θεάτρου.<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>802</sup> The words ἐνδύσασθαι αὐτήν are not in the Lipsius text here. Instead of ἐνδύσασθαι αὐτήν the Lipsius text has εἶπεν Ἐνδύσαι τὰ ἱμάτια here.

<sup>803</sup> Instead of καὶ εἶπεν Θεέκλα the Lipsius text has Ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, Thecla's name does not appear in this sentence in the Lipsius text.

<sup>804</sup> Instead of αὐτὸς the Lipsius text has οὗτος here.

<sup>805</sup> Instead of the second person the Lipsius text has first person με.

<sup>806</sup> The punctuation is different here. Lipsius has a full-stop.

<sup>807</sup> This conjunction begins with an uppercase K in the Lipsius text.

<sup>808</sup> The Lipsius text includes the word καὶ here.

<sup>809</sup> The Lipsius text does not include the word οὖν here.

<sup>810</sup> Instead of τὴν θεοσεβὴ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην ἀπολύω ὑμῖν the Lipsius text has this word order: τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην τὴν θεοσεβὴ ἀπολύω ὑμῖν.

<sup>811</sup> Instead of μέγα ὠλόλυξαν καὶ ἐνὶ στόματι ἀπέδωκαν the Lipsius text has πᾶσαι ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ καὶ ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς στόματος ἔδωκαν here.

<sup>812</sup> Instead of Θεέκλης the Lipsius text has Θεέκλαν σώσας here.

<sup>813</sup> Instead of σαλευθῆναι τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ θεάτρου, the Lipsius text has σεισθῆναι πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν here.

## Translation

**38a** When the governor heard these things, he commanded clothes to be brought and her to be clothed.

**38b** And Thecla said, “The one who clothed me, when I was naked among the wild beasts, he will clothe you with salvation on the day of judgment.”

**38c** And taking the clothes she dressed.

**38d** So immediately the governor issued a directive saying, “I release to you, Holy Thecla, the servant of God”.

**38e** And the women cried out loud, and with one voice they gave praise to God saying,

**38f** “The God of Thecla is One”, so that the foundations of the theatre were shaken by the sound.

## Commentary and Notes

38a Καὶ ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἐκέλευσεν ἐνεχθῆναι ἱμάτια καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι αὐτήν. < >

38a When the governor heard these things, he commanded clothes to be brought and her to be clothed.

The Lipsius text has the imperative instead of the infinitive: εἶπεν ᾿Ενδύσαι τὰ ἱμάτια instead of ἐνδύσασθαι αὐτήν. There is no indication which text could be more original.

Now the governor seems to be supportive of Thecla who has witnessed to the only-begotten Son of God and the gift of eternal life. He commands clothing to be brought to her and for her to be clothed. Nothing is said of her present nakedness. We do not know if she has anything to cover her or not. The command of the governor is powerful. In the story he appears symbolically in service to her baptism, since Christian baptism is often followed by clothing the baptised.

38b καὶ εἶπεν Θέκλα Ὁ ἐνδύσας με γυμνὴν ἐν τοῖς θηρίοις, αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως ἐνδύσει σε σωτηρίαν.

38b And Thecla said, “The one who clothed me, when I was naked among the wild beasts, he will clothe you with salvation on the day of judgment.”

The Lipsius text has ἡ δὲ εἶπεν “she said” rather than the proper-name. This is an expectation following the imperative immediately before. In effect he told her to put on the clothes, but she said, I have been clothed.<sup>814</sup> This difference in the textual tradition is not particularly significant and the change from the masculine pronoun to the demonstrative is also a minor change.

The big difference between the Lipsius and the Tischendorf texts in 38b concerns who will be clothed on the day of judgment. In the Tischendorf text the governor will be clothed; in the Lipsius text it is Thecla who will

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<sup>814</sup> In this verse of the *Acts of Thecla* clothing conveys images of salvation and dignity. See here Rosemary Canavan, *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae: A Visual Construction of Identity*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012, pp. 82-83; 192-195. Canavan explores the impact of clothing imagery and its significance in relationship to Colossae using a socio-rhetorical approach. Clothing imagery has a particularly strong relationship to matters of construction of identity and power. In this verse of the *Acts of Thecla* clothing conveys images of salvation.

be clothed with salvation on the day of judgment. This is the same issue as the salvation of Queen Tryphaena's daughter Falconilla. Very early in the Jesus movement those who have not been baptised could be saved. As has previously been discussed in relation to verse 28, the dead could even be included in baptism in the tradition of 1Thes 4:13-17 and 1 Cor 15:29. When Thecla speaks to the governor in the Tischendorf text saying that he will receive salvation on the day of judgment, she is acting like Christ on the cross as he tells the good thief that he will be "this day in paradise" (Lk 23:43). In the earliest layers of the historical Jesus movement, there are no liturgical requirements to enter into salvation. As the church develops as an institution this changes and there are requirements for salvation. The Lipsius text notes in 38f that "the God who saved Thecla is one";<sup>815</sup> therefore Thecla is the one whom God has saved. By this point in the story, Thecla has been baptised. The Tischendorf text, which is plausibly the earlier tradition, has Thecla acting like Jesus in forgiveness and generosity. She sees and pronounces that the governor will be gathered by the grace of God into eternal salvation. This is comparable to the Stephen tradition in Acts 7:60.

60 θεὸς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, Κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη.

60 Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this he died. (NRSV)

The *Acts of Thecla* does not copy the Acts of the Apostles but the same sort of theology is expressed. Both of these texts are not yet about whether the saint merits salvation, but about who acts like Christ. It is likely that this is a late first-century or early second-century theology.

Note that when Thecla speaks she says "when I was naked" in the past tense, as if she is now covered with something, though it may be a piece of cloth rather than the formal clothes to which she has been accustomed. What Thecla says is a kind of blessing and promise for the governor. "May the one who clothed me among the beasts also clothe you with salvation." This blessing or prayer relates to what Thecla has just witnessed, that those who believe in the Son of the Living God will be guaranteed eternal life. It is as if she assumes that because the governor protects the servant of God, herself, he also accepts the Son of God and believes. After all, this is the way that he can be clothed with salvation on the day of judgment. Taking the authority to bless the governor is

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<sup>815</sup> Literally "the God having saved Thecla is one".



another example of her confidence in her calling. She feels completely motivated by the Spirit and acts with the grace and assurance of a true leader. She is theologically confident and socially confident, acting as if the governor is her equal. She is not expressing thanks, but is saying, “God protected me and God will give you salvation too”.

It is not to be forgotten that only minutes before the governor was agreeing to her being tied to raging bulls. There is another way of understanding this passage in the story. It is perhaps anachronistic in that there is no such practice as far as we know in the Jesus movement at such an early date, but in today’s church the theology of reconciliation and absolution is based on just such passages, for example Jesus’ forgiveness of his executioners (Lk 23:34). This is an example of the rich theology yet to be mined in the *Acts of Thecla*.

38c καὶ λαβοῦσα τὰ ἱμάτια ἐνεδύσατο.

38c And taking the clothes she dressed.

Now although the governor has asked that she be clothed, just as in her baptism, she is independent in clothing herself. Perhaps this best preserves her modesty or perhaps she wishes to remain the servant and not have others serve her as they dress her. Those bringing the clothing would, we assume, have been women servants. We also do not know if they have brought her own clothing or other suitable clothing. Soon we will learn that her choice of clothing will make a difference to her ability to do the work of a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

38d < > ἐξέπεμψεν οὖν εὐθέως ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἄκτον λέγων Θεκλαν τὴν θεοσεβῆ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δούλην ἀπολύω ὑμῖν.

38d So immediately the governor issued a directive saying, I release to you, Holy Thecla, the servant of God.

The Tischendorf text has the redundant word οὖν, which is removed in the Lipsius text. Lipsius adds the word καί. This seems like a later correction since there is not an illative relationship between the dressing and the governor’s directive. The change in word order between Lipsius and Tischendorf does not offer a significant difference.

Now the governor pronounces the official release of Thecla. He speaks to the assembled crowd saying, “I release to you, Holy Thecla, the servant of God”.

Here it is made clear that Thecla is holy, that is duly reverential, of pious and devout demeanour and action. She is not called Saint Thecla at this stage but it will not be long before the story gives her the title saint. In some ways this description is even more meaningful because it points to her actions as those that verify that God is the one whom she serves. God and God's only-begotten Son remain the focus of the drama. Thecla is the servant of God, just as Paul was designated servant in the opening scenes. The theme of service to God is central to the theology of the *Acts of Thecla*.

38e αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες μέγα ὠλόλυξαν καὶ ἐνὶ στόματι  
ἀπέδωκαν αἶνον τῷ θεῷ λέγουσαι

38e And the women cried out loud, and with one voice they gave praise to God saying,

The Lipsius text is an amplification of the Tischendorf text. It adds that the loud cry is made by a great voice.<sup>816</sup> This would appear to be a later addition.

The New Testament parallel is the contrasting request to the crowd for the release of Jesus the king of the Jews, but in Jesus' case the crowd cries out, "Crucify him".<sup>817</sup>

This scene in the *Acts of Thecla* is in stark contrast to the response of the crowd in the trial of Jesus. Here the women are delighted at the pronouncement of Thecla's release. They cry aloud in prayer, praising God for this good outcome.

38f Εἰς θεὸς ὁ Θεὸς κληῖς, ὥστε ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς σαλευθῆναι τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ θεάτρου.

38f "The God of Thecla is One," so that the foundations of the theatre were shaken by the sound.

The Lipsius text has two interesting enhancements of the text here. First God who is one, is not the God of Thecla but the God who saves Thecla Θεὸς κληῖς σωσας. This places Thecla in the position of a recipient of

<sup>816</sup> The Lipsius text has πᾶσαι ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ καὶ ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς στόματος ἔδωκαν here.

<sup>817</sup> John 19:15 the dialogue involves innuendo and various speakers; the crowd and the priests. Pilate's question, "Shall I crucify your King?" can be interpreted as a request to not crucify him. NRSV translates: "They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' the chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.'"

God's salvation. It could be a later development. The second difference appears to be a hagiographical amplification. Instead of the theatre being shaken as Tischendorf has it, the whole city is shaken in the Lipsius text: σεισθῆναι πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν.

The shouting of praise and thanks to God continues in unison and is so loud that it seems to shake the theatre. The praise of God is very close to the *Shema*. God is One. This is a very Jewish response and it is a witness to the early character of the *Acts of Thecla*. Although in the Gospels we also find the words of the *Shema* on Jesus' lips (Mark 12:29), here it is clear that the crowd has listened and understood what Thecla has said in instruction. It is to her that they are indebted for their understanding. As one imagines this crowd in the story one has to think that they are not being portrayed as familiar with the Gospel text, or else they might have cried out that the God of Jesus is One. We recall that Thecla has taught that Jesus is the foundation of eternal life in verse 37e.

## Verse Thirty-nine

**39a** Ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα εὐαγγελισθεῖσα ἀπήντησε τῇ ἀγίᾳ  
Θέκλῃ<sup>818</sup> καὶ εἶπεν<sup>819</sup>

**39b** Νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται·

**39c** νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι τὸ τέκνον μου ζῇ·

**39d** δεῦρο ἔσω, καὶ τὰ ἐμὰ πάντα σοὶ καταγράψω.

**39e** ἡ μὲν οὖν < ><sup>820</sup> εἰσῆλθεν μετ' αὐτῆς καὶ ἀνεπαύσατο  
< ><sup>821</sup> ἡμέρας ὀκτώ,

**39f** κατηχήσασα αὐτὴν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ,

**39g** ὥστε πιστεῦσαι καὶ τῶν παιδισκῶν τὰς πλείονας.<sup>822</sup>

**39h** καὶ μεγάλη χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἦν.<sup>823</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> Instead of Ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα εὐαγγελισθεῖσα ἀπήντησε τῇ ἀγίᾳ Θέκλῃ καὶ εἰπεῖν the Lipsius text reads: καὶ τὴν Τρύφαιναν εὐαγγελισθεῖσαν ἀπαντήσαι μετὰ ὅχλου καὶ περιπλακῆναι τῇ Θέκλῃ.

<sup>819</sup> The Lipsius text has the infinitive εἰπεῖν here instead of εἶπεν.

<sup>820</sup> The Lipsius text includes the word Θέκλα here.

<sup>821</sup> The Lipsius text includes the words εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς here.

<sup>822</sup> Instead of the high dot for a partial stop the Lipsius text has a comma here.

<sup>823</sup> Instead of καὶ μεγάλη χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἦν the Lipsius text reads: καὶ μεγάλην εἶναι χαρὰν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ here.

## Translation

**39a** And when she was told the good news Tryphaena came to meet the saintly Thecla and said,

**39b** “Now I believe that the dead are raised:

**39c** Now I believe that my child lives.<sup>824</sup>

**39d** Come inside, and I will sign over to you all that is mine.”

**39e** So she (Thecla) went in with her and rested for eight days

**39f** instructing her in the word of God

**39g** so that the majority of the female servants also believed

**39h** and there was great joy in the house.

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<sup>824</sup> The Greek has a comma rather than a full-stop.

## Commentary and Notes

39a Ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα εὐαγγελισθεῖσα ἀπήντησε τῇ ἁγίᾳ Θεκλῇ καὶ εἶπεν

39a And when she was told the good news Tryphaena came to meet the saintly Thecla and said,

Following the ὥστε in 38f the Lipsius text continues with the accusative infinitive construction καὶ τὴν Τρύφαιναν εὐαγγελισθεῖσαν ἀπαντῆσαι μετὰ ὄχλου καὶ περιπλακῆναι τῇ Θεκλῇ. This is arguably a higher literary level than the finite aorist with the nominative as we have it in the Tischendorf text. Again the Lipsius text seems to be the more developed text and this is the case even though it omits the words τῇ ἁγίᾳ. In terms of the drama the entire crowd is included in the meeting of Thecla, and Tryphaena embraces her. This seems to be a development of drama. However, the infinitive εἰπεῖν in the Lipsius text does at first glance seem more difficult than εἶπεν, and unless it is a false pretension to politeness which could be seen as a hagiographical development, it would have to be considered the more difficult and earlier of the two readings. The consideration that the use of εἰπεῖν is for the purpose of continuation of the infinitive construction might also be a possibility in which case it may be seen as a correction to give greater consistency.

Word has reached the Queen, who is not dead, that Thecla has been freed. It is important that she is not freed because Tryphaena is the cousin of Caesar; she is freed because when the governor asked her why the beasts did not harm her she witnessed to the Son of the Living God.

Now when the news reaches Tryphaena she comes to meet saintly Thecla. Here the designation has changed from Thecla who is holy (38d) to saintly Thecla. The term saint and saints of God is used in the Pauline letters to refer to all the believers, and is consequently not a term that has only a late usage.

39b Νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται·

39b Now I believe that the dead are raised:

Tryphaena takes Thecla's release to be a verification that all that she teaches and all that she lives for is correct. This release from the arena is

further verification for Tryphaena that her daughter though dead is raised and lives in the afterlife just as Thecla has described it. It is eternal life for those who believe. The family relationship is such that with prayer Tryphaena believes that her daughter shares the benefits of her faith and the faith of Thecla. The dead are raised to this eternal life and have salvation.

39c νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι τὸ τέκνον μου ζῇ.

39c Now I believe that my child lives.

This is not a matter of Falconilla coming back to a mortal existence. It is the assurance that, because Falconilla came to Tryphaena in a dream advocating for Thecla and her message, now Falconilla enjoys eternal life as Thecla has described it. Earlier in relation to verse 38b this blessing for Tryphaena has been narrated, and so the reader or listener is familiar with this element in the story. The meaning of “now” spans these two verses 38-39 and includes verses 29-31. The presence of the memory of Falconilla is one of the beautiful theological motifs of this story. How people grieve and how they relate to their loved ones who have died is integral to their religious perspectives. This is evident in a very understandable way in the *Acts of Thecla* and is central to the theology of the narrative.

39d δεῦρο ἔσω, καὶ τὰ ἐμὰ πάντα σοὶ καταγράψω.

39d Come inside, and I will sign over to you all that is mine.”

Tryphaena now legally adopts Thecla as her daughter. If the historical Tryphaena has any relationship to the Tryphaena of the *Acts of Thecla*, then she had a son who was ruling Asia at this time. Much of her property was very likely already settled. Tryphaena’s son would have his own wealth and kingdom, while Tryphaena still enjoyed great wealth as the retired monarch. In the narrative Tryphaena will become Thecla’s patron for the rest of Thecla’s life. Tryphaena’s wealth will supply all of her needs and provide an income for her ministry and travel and security for Thecla’s mother and her household.

39e ἡ μὲν οὖν < > εἰσῆλθεν μετ’ αὐτῆς καὶ ἀνεπαύσατο  
< > ἡμέρας ὀκτώ,

39e So she (Thecla) went in with her and rested for eight days

The Lipsius text adds two details: the proper-name Thecla so that the subject of the sentence is clear when the story has been immediately before narrating about both women; and the phrase εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς “into her house”. The removal of these details would not be occasioned by any obvious motivation on the part of a scribe or storyteller, whereas on the other hand, adding them provides a precision that enhances the narrative. The Lipsius text seems therefore to be the later text.

Thecla stays with Tryphaena and is treated with luxurious hospitality, this time with no anxiety associated with her visit, for she has no further trial that she must endure as martyr.

39f κατηχήσασα αὐτὴν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ,

39f instructing her in the word of God

She spends her time at Tryphaena’s house as Paul spent his at the home of Onesiphorus, instructing in the word of God. The word of God is not the Gospels; it is the message about Jesus that is passed on by oral tradition by the apostles. Thecla is one of those early apostles.<sup>825</sup>

39g ὥστε πιστεῦσαι καὶ τῶν παιδισκῶν τὰς πλείονας·

39g so that the majority of the female servants also believed,

The only difference between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts is the punctuation. Tischendorf has a high dot for a pause and Lipsius a comma.

This has the ring of authenticity because it says that the majority of the female servants became believers. If it were fictitious it would most likely have said that all of the household came to believe. This having been said, the governor is a man who has come to believe because of the witness of Thecla.

39h καὶ μεγάλη χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἦν.

39h and there was great joy in the house.

The Lipsius text uses the accusative infinitive construction again as in 39a following ὥστε. The Lipsius text reads: καὶ μεγάλην εἶναι χαρὰν

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<sup>825</sup> See L. Honey, *Thekla: Text and Context*, p. 73.



ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ. This is literally a more sophisticated syntax and like 39a seems to show that the Lipsius text is the more developed and later text.

This great joy contrasts with the great mourning in the house of Theocleia when Thecla was found to be missing and it was speculated that she might have been dead. This is the great joy that comes both of the victory of Thecla over the forces of all her enemies and the great joy of belief that was enjoyed in the home of Tryphaena.

## Verse Forty

**40a** Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα Παῦλον < ><sup>826</sup> ἐζήτει,<sup>827</sup> καὶ ἐμηνύθη αὐτῇ ὅτι ἐστὶν<sup>828</sup> ἐν Μύροις τῆς Λυκίας.<sup>829</sup> < ><sup>830</sup> καὶ λαβομένη<sup>831</sup> νεανίσκους καὶ παιδίσκας

**40b** ἀνεζώσατο,<sup>832</sup> καὶ ῥάψασα τὸν χιτῶνα εἰς ἐπενδύτην < ><sup>833</sup> ἀνδρικὸν<sup>834</sup> ἀπῆλθεν ἐν Μύροις,

**40c** καὶ εὑρεν τὸν<sup>835</sup> Παῦλον λαλοῦντα τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>836</sup> < ><sup>837</sup>

**40d** ἐθαμβήθη < ><sup>838</sup> δὲ Παῦλος ἰδὼν αὐτὴν<sup>839</sup> καὶ τὸν ὄχλον τὸν μετ' αὐτῆς, λογιζόμενος<sup>840</sup> μή τις αὐτῇ πειρασμὸς πάρεστιν ἕτερος.

**40e** ἡ δὲ συνιδοῦσα εἶπεν < ><sup>841</sup> Ὑποτάξαι τὸ λουτρόν, Παῦλε·

**40f** ὁ γὰρ σοὶ συνεργήσας εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον κάμοι συνήργησεν εἰς τὸ λούσασθαι.

<sup>826</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words ἐπεπόθει καὶ here.

<sup>827</sup> The Lipsius text instead of having this comma has instead the phrase αὐτὸν περιέμπουσα πανταχοῦ· ending with the raised dot equivalent to a semi-colon.

<sup>828</sup> The words ὅτι ἐστὶν here are not in the Lipsius text.

<sup>829</sup> The words τῆς Λυκίας here are not in the Lipsius text.

<sup>830</sup> The Lipsius text has the two additional words εἶναι αὐτόν here followed by a full-stop.

<sup>831</sup> Instead of λαβομένη the Lipsius text has λαβοῦσα here.

<sup>832</sup> Instead of ἀνεζώσατο followed by a comma, the Lipsius text has ἀναζωσαμένη here with no punctuation following.

<sup>833</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional word σχήματι here.

<sup>834</sup> The Lipsius text has ἀνδρικῶ.

<sup>835</sup> The Lipsius text does not include the article τὸν here.

<sup>836</sup> The full stop is not included here in the Lipsius text.

<sup>837</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional phrase καὶ ἐπέστη αὐτῷ. ὁ δε here.

<sup>838</sup> The Lipsius text includes these additional words βλέπων αὐτήν here.

<sup>839</sup> The words δὲ Παῦλος ἰδὼν αὐτήν are not included in the Lipsius text.

<sup>840</sup> The Lipsius text has λογισάμενος here.

<sup>841</sup> The Lipsius text includes the word αὐτῷ here.

## Translation

40a But Thecla sought after Paul, and it was reported to her that he was in Myra of Lycia, and she took young men and women servants

40b and girded herself, and having sewn the tunic into a cloak for a male, she went off to Myra,

40c and found Paul speaking the word of God.

40d But Paul was astonished when he saw her and the crowd that was with her, considering whether another trial was not upon her.

40e But seeing it all at a glance, she said, “Paul, I have taken the plunge,<sup>842</sup>

40f for he who worked with you for the Gospel has also worked with me for my washing.”

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<sup>842</sup> The English idiom, “I have taken the plunge”, is used here to translate, “I have taken the washing” *Ελαβον τὸ λουτρὸν* in the Greek. Both the literal and figurative meanings are appropriate in the English idiom, for her baptism is a life-changing experience which she has decided upon herself.

## Commentary and Notes

40a Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα Παῦλον < > ἐζήτει, καὶ ἐμηνύθη αὐτῇ  
ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐν Μύροις τῆς Λυκίας· < > καὶ λαβομένη νεανίσκους  
καὶ παιδίσκας

40a But Thecla sought after Paul, and it was reported to her that he was  
in Myra of Lycia, and she took young men and women servants

The Lipsius text is significantly different from the Tischendorf text at this point. The Lipsius text for 40a reads: Ἡ δὲ Θέκλα Παῦλον  
ἐπεπόθει καὶ ἐζήτει αὐτὸν περιπέμπουσα πανταχοῦ· καὶ  
ἐμηνύθη αὐτῇ ἐν Μύροις εἶναι αὐτόν. καὶ λαβοῦσα νεανίσκους  
καὶ παιδίσκας. Elliott translates: And Thecla longed for Paul and  
sought him, looking in every direction. And she was told that he was in  
Myra. . . . she came with a band of young men and maidens.<sup>843</sup>

The Lipsius text is longer and adds information. It adds that Thecla  
looked in every direction and that she longed for Paul. These appear to  
be narrative embellishments, making the Lipsius text seem to be later.

Thecla has spent time teaching the ways of Christ in the household of  
Tryphaena, and now that she has received her patronage, she leaves and  
seeks Paul again, this time taking young men and young women servants  
with her. It is reported to her that Paul is in Myra and so she travels in  
that direction.

40b ἀνεζώσατο, καὶ ῥάψασα τὸν χιτῶνα εἰς ἐπενδύτην  
< > ἀνδρικὸν ἀπήλθεν ἐν Μύροις,

40b and girded herself, and having sewn the tunic into a cloak for a  
male, she went off to Myra,

The Lipsius text has the expected change in the verb form  
(ἀναζώσαμένη). Lipsius adds one word, σχήματι. This word means that  
the cloak is sewn in the “style” or “fashion” of a man. This helps the  
reader understand that Thecla will be wearing the cloak even though it is  
a masculine style. In the Lipsius text the dative of reference<sup>844</sup> means that  
it is the sort of cloak, long or loose, to be worn by a man<sup>845</sup> rather than the  
cloak of some man, but the addition of the word σχήματι in the Lipsius

<sup>843</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 371.

<sup>844</sup> J. Brooks and C. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, p. 36.

<sup>845</sup> This is still somewhat awkward without a noun for ἀνδρικῶ to qualify.

text makes this even clearer. The addition in the Lipsius text seems to be a later clarification.

Now Thecla changes her clothing to guard against any further advances like those of Alexander and to separate herself even further from the situation of being Thamyras' fiancée. She sews her dress, her tunic, into a male's cloak before she sets off to Myra. Thecla is sometimes referred to as a cross-dresser. She does not really qualify as a cross-dresser because her reasons for changing her attire are so that she can travel more safely, not so that she can, for example, sexually attract other women or feel herself to be more of a man. She is looking for Paul. There is the remote possibility that Paul is homosexual and that Thecla is lesbian but the evidence is inconclusive. Further, the story is not about sexual orientations; it is about the travel of apostles of the Jesus movement at its early stages. The road to Myra still exists today; it is not an easy road to travel but at that time would have been a great aid to travellers.<sup>846</sup>

40c καὶ εὗρεν τὸν Παῦλον λαλοῦντα τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. < >

40c and found Paul speaking the word of God.

The Lipsius text besides not having the article adds the words: καὶ ἐπέστη αὐτῷ. "and she went to him". This is simply explanatory and it appears to be an addition. There would be no reason to remove it as it is expected that when she finds Paul she will go to him. The Lipsius text then appears to be the more developed and less original.

When she found Paul he was preaching. The word of God in this text is not the written word since the New Testament is not yet compiled, nor is it the transcendental divine logos like that in John's prologue. It is simply the telling of the mighty deeds of Jesus Christ and explaining the impact of his life and death.

40d ἐθαμβήθη < > δὲ Παῦλος ἰδὼν αὐτήν καὶ τὸν ὄχλον τὸν μετ' αὐτῆς, λογιζόμενος μή τις αὐτῇ πειρασμὸς πάρεστιν ἕτερος.

40d But Paul was astonished when he saw her and the crowd that was with her, considering whether another trial was not upon her.

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<sup>846</sup> E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, pp. 80-81.

The Lipsius text adds βλέπων αὐτήν “at seeing her” instead of . . . δὲ Παῦλος ἰδὼν αὐτήν “but Paul when he saw her”. There is very little difference between the two texts at this point and not enough to form a view on which is earlier. The difference in the verb form—Lipsius has λογισάμενος—is only in tense, and also does not obviously indicate which text is earlier.

Paul deserted Thecla the last time when she was attacked and had legal action taken against her. This time he sees the young men and young women servants and wonders if another crowd has not gathered around Thecla because she is being accused of something else. One might expect Paul to leave if he thought there was trouble. The reader has no reason to think that Paul has any supportive role toward Thecla. It is Thecla who still seeks Paul not for any protection but because she wants to hear more of his teachings. Paul is within good sighting distance of Thecla but he does not call out or move to approach her. It is Thecla who calls to Paul, and what she wishes to tell him is that she has now been baptised even though he told her to wait with patience for her baptism. The reader does not imagine that Paul will have any knowledge of what has just happened to her.

40e ἡ δὲ συνιδούσα εἶπεν < > Ἔλαβον τὸ λουτρόν, Παῦλε·

40e But seeing it all at a glance, she said, “Paul, I have taken the plunge,

The Lipsius text has the dative personal pronoun αὐτῷ. The pronoun seems to be a simple addition for the sake of clarity. The Lipsius choice of text in regard to 40e would appear to be the later text.

Thecla glances over and sees that Paul is concerned, and she calls out to him that she has now been baptised, “I have taken the washing.” The translation here is “I have taken the plunge”; this also gives the sense that it is a significant wash involving the decision to jump into the pool with the—as far as she knew—“dangerous” seals.

40f ὁ γὰρ σοὶ συνεργήσας εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ μοὶ  
συνήργησεν εἰς τὸ λούσασθαι.

40f for he who worked with you for the Gospel has worked with me for my washing.”

Now Thecla gives credit to Jesus for the baptism; the one (we understand Jesus here) who worked with you, Paul, for the good news, has worked with me for the baptism. She will be the role model for women baptising for generations to come.<sup>847</sup> We will know her from her image on water flasks used for pilgrimage to her shrine.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> S. Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>848</sup> S. Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, p. 142.

## Verse Forty-one

**41a** Καὶ λαβόμενος ὁ Παῦλος < ><sup>849</sup> αὐτὴν ἀπήγαγεν<sup>850</sup> εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ἑρμαίου<sup>851</sup> καὶ πάντα ἀκούει παρ' αὐτῆς,

**41b** ὥστε ἐπὶ πολὺ θαυμάζειν<sup>852</sup> < ><sup>853</sup> τοὺς ἀκούοντας

**41c** καὶ<sup>854</sup> στηριχθῆναι καὶ προσεύξασθαι ὑπὲρ τῆς Τρυφαίνης.

**41d** καὶ ἀναστᾶσα < ><sup>855</sup> εἶπεν < ><sup>856</sup> Πορεύομαι εἰς Ἰκόνιον.

**41e** Ὁ δὲ Παῦλος εἶπεν Ὑπαγε καὶ δίδασκε τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

**41f** ἡ δὲ<sup>857</sup> Τρύφαινα πολὺν ἱματισμὸν καὶ χρυσὸν ἔπεμψεν αὐτῇ,

**41g** ὥστε καταλιπεῖν τῷ Παύλῳ πολλὰ<sup>858</sup> εἰς διακονίαν τῶν πτωχῶν.

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<sup>849</sup> The Lipsius text includes the phrase τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς here.

<sup>850</sup> Instead of αὐτὴν ἀπήγαγεν the Lipsius text has ἀπήγαγεν αὐτὴν.

<sup>851</sup> Instead of Ἑρμαίου the Lipsius text has Ἑρμείου.

<sup>852</sup> Instead of θαυμάζειν the Lipsius text has θαυμάσαι here.

<sup>853</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional words τὸν Παῦλον here and a comma follows them.

<sup>854</sup> Instead of τοὺς ἀκούοντας καὶ the Lipsius text has καὶ τοὺς ἀκούοντας.

<sup>855</sup> The Lipsius text includes the proper-name Θέκλα here.

<sup>856</sup> The Lipsius text includes the proper-name τῷ Παύλῳ here.

<sup>857</sup> Instead of ἡ δὲ the Lipsius text has ἡ μὲν οὖν here.

<sup>858</sup> This word πολλὰ is not in the Lipsius text here.



## Translation

**41a** And taking her (along with him),<sup>859</sup> Paul led her into the house of Hermaeus and he heard everything from her

**41b** so that those hearing marvelled greatly

**41c** and they were encouraged and prayed for Tryphaena.

**41d** And she (Thecla) arose and said, “I am going to Iconium.”

**41e** And Paul said, “Go and teach the word of God.”

**41f** And Tryphaena sent her much clothing and gold

**41g** in order to leave much for Paul for the service of the poor.

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<sup>859</sup> The words, “along with him,” have been added to make clear the sense of this verb in the middle voice.

## Commentary and Notes

41a Καὶ λαβόμενος ὁ Παῦλος < > αὐτὴν ἀπήγαγεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ἑρμαίου καὶ πάντα ἀκούει παρ' αὐτῆς,

41a And taking her (along with him), Paul led her into the house of Hermaeus and he heard everything from her

The Lipsius text has τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς “by her hand”. This is an expansion of λαβόμενος; the genitive after the middle voice has the sense of take heed of, for things held or taken. There is a sense in which it characterises Thecla as subordinate to Paul. It is a more polished literary form than the simple participle, which is a little puzzling so I have added “along with him” in brackets. The Lipsius text also has αὐτὴν ἀπήγαγεν in reversed word order which makes no real difference to the meaning of the sentence. The Lipsius text seems to be the later text. The reference to taking her hand establishes an acceptance that would seem predicated of her saintly character. When she is well known as Saint Thecla touching her or her robes would be a blessing and Paul could give such an example in a more developed hagiography.

There is no New Testament character named Hermaeus. Now that Thecla is freed, rich and famous Paul has no problem taking her along with him. It is as if she has earned her stripes. As they walk Thecla must be telling Paul of the marvels of her deliverance from the beasts at Antioch. He takes her to the home of Hermaeus there in Myra. At Hermaeus' house the missionary Paul and his fellow-travellers are welcome and so we expect that Hermaeus' household is what some scholars call an early “house church”. “House church” is a term used by Richard Ascough in his book, *What are They Saying about the Formation of Pauline Churches?*<sup>860</sup> In today's scholarly dialogue it is thought to be an anachronistic term, but it now has a place in the history of the discussion of the topic. Ascough writes that:

For example, we have inscriptional evidence of households which were structured as voluntary associations, and households which were the basis for both synagogues and the mysteries. Private households were also the locus for much philosophical teaching and even some philosophical schools.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> Richard S. Ascough, *What Are They Saying About the Formation of Pauline Churches?* Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 1998. pp.5ff.

<sup>861</sup> R. Ascough, *What Are They Saying About the Formation of Pauline Churches?*, p. 9.

In the household of Hermaeus the group will pray and listen to Thecla deliver the message. They seem to be a group of believers since they are already familiar with praying together. They are also interested in the instruction of the travellers, in particular in Thecla's instruction.

41b ὥστε ἐπὶ πολὺ θαυμάζειν < > τοὺς ἀκούοντας

41b so that those hearing marvelled greatly

The Lipsius text has θαυμάσαι and τὸν Παῦλον. The change of tense in the infinitive-accusative construction following ὥστε is probably more accurately in the past, but this is a small change as a lively present often appears in narrative. The words τὸν Παῦλον on the other hand change the meaning significantly. This seems to mean that Paul greatly marvelled. Those listening are then the ones who are encouraged in 41c. This is helpful in the sentence syntax. And although one might think that both Paul and those listening all marvel and are encouraged, the Lipsius text is very clear in supplying separate specified subjects for the actions. The emphasis on Paul may result from later orthodox thought which knows Paul as a great missionary and saint. The Lipsius text seems to be the later text.

In the narrative, those hearing Thecla are the household members and others gathered as in the home of Onesiphorus. There is a gathering and Thecla is telling the story of what has happened to her in Pisidian Antioch. She is presumably also telling of the kindness of Tryphaena and of the unacceptable behaviour of Alexander, and of the good judgment of the governor to free her after none of the animals harm her. This is the role of the travelling apostle or missionary, to tell the good news in households.<sup>862</sup>

41c καὶ στηριχθῆναι καὶ προσεύξασθαι ὑπὲρ τῆς Τρυφαίνης.

41c and they were encouraged and prayed for Tryphaena.

The only difference between the Lipsius and Tischendorf texts is the word order, which is suited in the Lipsius text to the syntax there, and in the Tischendorf text the position of καί suits the syntax here.

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<sup>862</sup> C. Osiek, M. MacDonald, J. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, pp. 230-243.

This is a typical early household gathering; they first hear the good news from the travelling apostles and then they continue with prayer.<sup>863</sup> These household gatherings were common in the early Jesus movement. In this case the household members are encouraged in their faith and community by Thecla's story, and they pray for Tryphaena, who has been such a great and significant benefactor. Tryphaena has also suffered greatly and she will be missing Thecla at this point. This household will pray for Tryphaena who now also lives in a household that is predominantly converted to Jesus and the Jesus movement.

41d καὶ ἀναστᾶσα < > εἶπεν < > Πορεύομαι εἰς Ἰκόνιον.

41d And she (Thecla) arose and said, "I am going to Iconium."

The Lipsius text has the two proper-names so that it is clear that Thecla says to Paul that she is going to Iconium. This seems to be a simple clarification. The Lipsius text showing this improvement seems to be the later text. There would be no obvious reason to eliminate the names.

After this time of prayer, Thecla declares that she is going back home to Iconium. It is an archetypal ending for the great journeyer to return home. Oedipus, Romulus and Remus, Jason and the voyagers on the Argo all return home.

41e Ὁ δὲ Παῦλος εἶπεν Ὑπαγε καὶ δίδασκε τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

41e And Paul said, "Go and teach the word of God."

At this point Paul commissions Thecla. He tells her to teach the word of God. As in the discussion of 6c, if 1 Timothy 2:12 is written after the oral tradition of Thecla, then it is showing a reaction against women teaching. As mentioned earlier, the word of God here is the apostolic oral witness to Jesus and the significance of his life, death and resurrection. With this commissioning Thecla is finally recognized by Paul as his co-worker, his fellow apostle, also sent by God to witness to Jesus Christ.

41f ἡ δὲ Τρύφαινα πολὺν ἱματισμὸν καὶ χρυσὸν ἔπεμψεν αὐτῇ,

41f And Tryphaena sent her much clothing and gold

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<sup>863</sup> C. Osiek, M. MacDonald, J. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, pp. 12-13.

The Lipsius text has ἡ μὲν οὖν instead of ἡ δὲ, adding the adverb. This is not a significant difference but it could be argued that it is helpful and an improvement of the text.

Now Tryphaena has sent envoys with even more material goods. Thecla must have stayed some length of time at Hermaeus' house before declaring that she would go home, and being commissioned as an apostle. She must have been there at least long enough for the messengers of Tryphaena to come with the gifts that were prepared and sent on to arrive when she reached Myra. The clothing is not for Thecla to wear but rather for her to use in her ministry.

41g ὥστε καταλιπεῖν τῷ Παύλῳ πολλὰ εἰς διακονίαν τῶν πτωχῶν.

41g in order to leave much for Paul for the service of the poor.

The Lipsius text does not include the word πολλὰ. The Lipsius text could mean: “so that the service of the poor is left to Paul” or “in order to leave to Paul the service of the poor”. This can again be a feature of a developed hagiography of Paul. In this sense the Lipsius text could be the more developed. However, simply on grammatical grounds the Tischendorf text seems to be the easier to read and understand here. Both of these factors make it difficult to make a judgment in regard to this variant. In terms of the consistency of the narrative, Thecla clearly has money in verse 43. This makes the Tischendorf text or a reading of the Lipsius text to mean, “in order to leave (something) to Paul for the service of the poor” the best choices.

With these additional gifts Thecla is able to leave money and clothing for Paul's ministry as well. We know that Paul was supported in his ministry by a number of wealthy women.<sup>864</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> See Rom 16:1-7; M. Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*, pp.231-249; C. Osiek, M. MacDonald, J. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, p. 217.

## Verse Forty-two

**42a** Αὐτὴ δὲ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς Ἰκόνιον. καὶ εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸν Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον,

**42b** καὶ ἔπεσεν εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος ὅπου Παῦλος καθεζόμενος ἐδίδασκεν < >,<sup>865</sup>

**42c** καὶ ἔκλαιεν λέγουσα Ὁ θεός μου καὶ τοῦ οἴκου τούτου, ὅπου μοι τὸ φῶς ἔλαμψας,<sup>866</sup>

**42d** Χριστὲ Ἰησοῦ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος,<sup>867</sup> ὁ ἐμοὶ < ><sup>868</sup> βοηθὸς ἐν πυρί,

**42e** βοηθὸς ἐν θηρίοις, αὐτὸς ὑπάρχεις δεδοξασμένος < ><sup>869</sup> εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

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<sup>865</sup> The Lipsius text has these additional words τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ here.

<sup>866</sup> Instead of ἔλαμψας the Lipsius text has ἔλαμπεν.

<sup>867</sup> The Lipsius text does not include the words τοῦ ζῶντος here.

<sup>868</sup> The Lipsius text has βοηθὸς ἐν φυλακῇ, βοηθὸς ἐπὶ ἡγεμόνων, here.

<sup>869</sup> Instead of ὑπάρχεις δεδοξασμένος the Lipsius text includes the words εἰ θεός, καὶ σοὶ ἡ δόξα here.

## Translation

**42a** And she went away to Iconium. And she came into the house of Onesiphorus,

**42b** and she fell on the pavement where Paul used to sit and teach,

**42c** and she wept saying, “my God and God of this house, where you shone the light for me,

**42d** Christ Jesus, Son of the Living God, my helper in fire,

**42e** my helper against wild beasts, you only are glorified forever. Amen.”

## Commentary and Notes

42a Αὕτη δὲ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς Ἰκόνιον. καὶ εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸν Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον,

42a And she went away to Iconium. And she came into the house of Onesiphorus,

The second verb εἰσέρχεται is in the historic present. Literally it is translated “she comes”. The sense is expressed in English with the simple past in this translation, “she came”.

Now Thecla’s wish to hear Paul and to go to the home of Onesiphorus will finally come true. She remembers well her time of conversion and when she returns to Iconium it is to Onesiphorus’ home that she goes first. This has become what is most important for her. As the Gospels teach (Mk 10:29-30; Lk 14:26-27), a follower of Jesus must put home and relatives second and the good news about Jesus must come first.

42b καὶ ἔπεσεν εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος ὅπου Παῦλος καθεζόμενος ἐδίδασκεν < > ,

42b and she fell on the pavement where Paul used to sit and teach,

The Lipsius text has the words τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ which is a further clarification that Paul was teaching “the words of God”. The removal of this could hardly be in order to remove unorthodox thought, along the lines that Lipsius argued concerning certain manuscripts. There would seem to be no reason to remove this phrase, so it appears to be a later addition.

Now Thecla’s behaviour is similar to that when she went to visit Paul in prison. She falls on the pavement where Paul had sat teaching in the courtyard. She remembers watching from her window and she lies down on the stones and prays in thanksgiving for her new life. Lying down is a posture for prayer still in today’s practice of Christianity. Priests lie down before the altar in prayer as part of the ordination ceremony in many Christian churches. This is an act of obeisance for Thecla and for today’s priests. The sense is that they give all of their life in service to Christ. There is nothing of their own interests or any need for them to protect themselves; they trust God entirely and wish to live according to God’s will and good purposes.



42c καὶ ἔκλαιεν λέγουσα Ὁ θεός μου καὶ τοῦ οἴκου τούτου,  
ὅπου μοι τὸ φῶς ἔλαμψας,

42c and she wept saying, “my God and God of this house, where you  
shone the light for me,

The variant in the Lipsius text, ἔλαμψεν, “where the light shone for me” removes the personal act of God doing the shining for Thecla and simply reports that the light did shine for her. This is interesting because the two readings are equal really in terms of grammar and style, as both are straight-forward and correct, but the Lipsius reading could perhaps be said to remove the intimate connection between God and Thecla. If this is a later reading then it may be part of the campaign to discredit her. If it is the earlier reading then the Tischendorf reading may be a more developed hagiography here. It is nearly impossible to know what dynamic has caused the change and which reading is the more advanced and which the more original.

She weeps and prays in thanksgiving, to her God. This first address shows her complete ownership of the tradition. The second address is to the God of Onesiphorus’ house, for he and his household are a conduit of faith in Iconium. This house is the place where the light of faith in Jesus Christ first infiltrated Thecla’s life.

42d Χριστὲ Ἰησοῦ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος,  
ὁ ἐμοὶ < > βοηθὸς ἐν πυρί,

42d Christ Jesus, Son of the Living God, my helper in fire,

The Tischendorf text, in specifying that Jesus is the Son of the “Living God”, leaves room for the thought that there may be other gods. Removing ζῶντος from this phrase makes it sound more orthodox, as if there is of course only one God. The removal of this word is likely then to be the work of later scribes who are making the story conform to later Christian expression. Similarly the phrase, βοηθὸς ἐν φυλακῇ, βοηθὸς ἐπὶ ἡγεμόνων, does seem to be a later addition. It is a simple recounting of events in the narrative, “helper in prison, helper before the governors”.

Thecla names that light in her prayer as Christ Jesus, the Son of the Living God. The Living God is also the title that she uses in the baptism scene and when she stands before the governor to be released. She sees

Jesus as her helper in the fires, both in Iconium and in Antioch. She was saved by the hailstorm from fire, and as the lightning hit the water the fire surrounded her to protect her from the beasts. In the progression of the story fire which had threatened her becomes her protection.

42e βοηθὸς ἐν θηρίοις, αὐτὸς ὑπάρχεις δεδοξασμένος < >  
εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

42e my helper against wild beasts, you only are glorified forever.  
Amen.”

Lipsius substitutes εἰ θεός, καὶ σοὶ ἡ δόξα. This results in: αὐτὸς εἰ θεός, καὶ σοὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. This seems to follow the thought above in 42d by stating that “you yourself are God and glory be to you forever, Amen”. This is a statement that there are no other gods. The Jesus movement grows up in a world of many gods. The teaching that there is only one God is related to the development of the doctrines of the Trinity. The Lipsius choices produce a doxology which could be from various periods of scribal embellishment since doxologies are common in Hebrew as well as in the New Testament and in later Christian literature. Overall the Tischendorf text presents as simpler and less embellished and theologically less developed.

From this simple beginning Thecla has now journeyed through high and dangerous adventures and finally returned in glory to this place of beginning. God has been her helper against the beasts and God has been adored because of her trials. God has been publicly proclaimed as the Living God and witnessed to before the governor and those at Tryphaena’s house and to those in the house of Hermaeus. God who exists into eternity has also taken Falconilla into eternity. Much good has come of Thecla’s choices. Whereas at first they might have seemed rash, in the end they have produced much good fruit.

## Verse Forty-three

**43a** Καὶ εὗρεν τὸν Θάμυριν τεθνεῶτα, τὴν δὲ μητέρα ζῶσαν·

**43b** καὶ προσκαλεσαμένη τὴν μητέρα αὐτῆς εἶπεν<sup>870</sup>

**43c** Θεοκλεία μήτερ, δύνασαι πιστεῦσαι ὅτι ζῇ κύριος ἐν οὐρανοῖς;

**43d** εἴτε γὰρ χρήματα ποθεῖς, δίδωσίν σοι δι' ἐμοῦ ὁ θεός.<sup>871</sup>  
εἴτε τὸ τέκνον, < ><sup>872</sup> παρέστηκά σοι.

**43e** καὶ ταῦτα διαμαρτυραμένη ἀπῆλθεν εἰς Σελεύκειαν,

**43f** καὶ ᾤκησεν ἐν σπηλαίῳ χρόνους ἑβδομήκοντα δύο,  
ἐσθίουσα βοτάνας καὶ ὕδωρ,<sup>873</sup> καὶ πολλοὺς ἐφώτισεν<sup>874</sup> τῷ λόγῳ  
τοῦ θεοῦ < >.<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>870</sup> Instead of εἶπεν the Lipsius text has λέγει αὐτῇ here followed by a raised dot to indicate a semi-colon or partial stop.

<sup>871</sup> Instead of δίδωσίν σοι δι' ἐμοῦ ὁ θεός the Lipsius text has δώσει σοι κύριος δι' ἐμου here.

<sup>872</sup> The Lipsius text has the additional word ἰδοῦ here followed by a comma.

<sup>873</sup> The Lipsius text does not include this phrase καὶ ᾤκησεν ἐν σπηλαίῳ χρόνους ἑβδομήκοντα δύο, ἐσθίουσα βοτάνας καὶ ὕδωρ.

<sup>874</sup> Instead of ἐφώτισεν the Lipsius text has φωτίσασα here.

<sup>875</sup> The Lipsius text includes the additional phrase μετὰ καλοῦ ὕπνου ἐκοιμήθη here.

## Translation

**43a** And she found Thamyris had died, but her mother was living,

**43b** and calling her mother she said,

**43c** “Theocleia, mother, are you able to believe that the Lord lives in heaven?

**43d** For if you desire money, God gives it to you through me, or if the child (myself), I stand with you.”

**43e** And having borne witness to these things, she left for Seleucia,

**43f** and she dwelt in a cave for seventy-two years, eating herbs and water, and she enlightened many in the word of God.

## Commentary and Notes

43a Καὶ εὗρεν τὸν Θάμυριν τεθνεῶτα, τὴν δὲ μητέρα ζῶσαν·

43a And she found Thamyras had died, but her mother was living,

During her time away from Iconium her former fiancé has died. He may have been young, so this is a surprise. There would be no reason from the story to think that he was advanced in age and we do not know what it was that caused his death. Thecla's mother Theocleia is still living, and the relationship between Thecla and her mother is part of the redemption of the story. We recall that Theocleia was not a supporter of Thecla when she made the decision to follow Paul. Theocleia in fact calls for her own daughter to be burned as a punishment for such impious behaviour, but even this most monstrous act cannot prevent the loving reconciliation between daughter and mother, now that Thecla serves the Living God and his Holy Child, Jesus.

43b καὶ προσκαλεσαμένη τὴν μητέρα αὐτῆς εἶπεν

43b and calling her mother she said,

Instead of εἶπεν the Lipsius text has λέγει αὐτῇ “she says to her”. This seems to be a simple further clarification and reads as the later text.

Thecla now has no fear of her mother and she calls out to her. The deeper meaning is of a “calling”. This “calling” is to be part of the redemption that Thecla now knows in her faith. Theocleia was most likely pleased by the wealth which Thecla now owned since it seemed all along that Theocleia was more interested in her own material well-being than in Thecla's future. Now that Thecla seems to be the senior partner financially, she calls to her mother. Normally the relationship of mother to daughter would have the mother calling the daughter, but here it is the other way around. This part of the Thecla story is an inspirational balance to the parable of the prodigal son. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father runs to meet the son when he returns. The prodigal has wasted the family money. Thecla calls out to her mother when she returns, bringing enough money for the whole family.

43c Θεοκλεία μήτερ, δύνασαι πιστεῦσαι ὅτι ζῇ κύριος ἐν οὐρανοῖς;

43c “Theocleia, mother, are you able to believe that the Lord lives in heaven?

Thecla addresses her mother by her first name and asks if she is now able to believe in the Lord who lives in heaven. This is the one eternal God. The first thing that Thecla communicates is the wish to share her faith, not boasting about her new wealth. In truth her genuine wealth is her faith and her ability to share it in liberty with those for whom she cares. Knowing that God lives in heaven makes all the difference to all those who live on earth and Thecla is inviting her mother into that knowledge and significant change in living.

43d εἴτε γὰρ χρήματα ποθεῖς, δίδωσίν σοι δι’ ἐμοῦ ὁ θεός·  
εἴτε τὸ τέκνον, < > παρέστηκά σοι.

43d If you desire money, God gives it to you through me, or if the child (myself), I stand with you.”

The Lipsius text is a little different here. It reads: εἴτε γὰρ χρήματα ποθεῖς, δώσει σοι κύριος δι’ ἐμοῦ εἴτε τὸ τέκνον, ἰδοῦ, παρέστηκά σοι. Elliott translates, “If you desire wealth the Lord will give it to you through me; or if you desire your child, behold, I am standing beside you.” The future tense of the verb is more appropriate. This seems to be a correction. The addition of ἰδοῦ is for dramatic impact. These corrections may indicate a later text.

Now it is explicit that Thecla knows her mother wants money. She says that there is plenty for her to have through her daughter. It is virtuous of her not to want revenge or to discontinue her filial relationship. In fact she is more than a good daughter; she is a good person. To stand beside her mother is a kind and encouraging description of loyalty, freedom and generosity: this is more than a common execution of her duty as a devoted child.

43e καὶ ταῦτα διαμαρτυραμένη ἀπῆλθεν εἰς Σελεύκειαν,

43e And having witnessed about these things, she left for Seleucia,

Now after Thecla has this reconciliatory and devotional homecoming she goes further on to Seleucia. This is the traditional place of her shrine, the

place to which Egeria travels and the place of the convent of sisters who claim Thecla as their founder.<sup>876</sup>

43f καὶ ὤκησεν ἐν σπηλαίῳ χρόνους ἑβδομήκοντα δύο,  
ἐσθίουσα βοτάνας καὶ ὕδωρ, καὶ πολλοὺς ἐφώτισεν τῷ λόγῳ  
τοῦ θεοῦ < >.

43f And she dwelt in a cave for seventy-two years, eating herbs and water, and she enlightened many in the word of God.

The Tischendorf text includes two phrases that seem to be reflections from a time after the story, perhaps after Thecla has died. They are “eating herbs and water” (ἐσθίουσα βοτάνας καὶ ὕδωρ), and also “she enlightened many” (καὶ πολλοὺς ἐφώτισεν).

The Lipsius text has the additional phrase: μετὰ καλοῦ ὕπνου ἐκοιμήθη, which means “she rested (or died) with a beautiful dream.” This provides a neat closure for the story and it appears to be a lengthened ending. There would seem to be no reason to eliminate it from other manuscripts if it were original; therefore it seems to be a literary improvement.

Thecla is reputed to have lived the life of an ascetic despite the great wealth which was given her. She is also reputed to have been a healer and giver of wise advice. Other trials and adventures are sometimes attributed to her, but this verse is the first ending to the *Acts of Thecla*.<sup>877</sup>

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<sup>876</sup> *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, p. 87. “On the third day I arrived at a city called Seleucia of Isauria. On arriving there, I went to the bishop, a very holy man and former monk. I also saw there in the same city a very beautiful church. Since it is around fifteen hundred feet from the city to the shrine of Saint Thecla, which lies beyond the city on a rather flat hill, I thought it best to go out there to make the overnight stop which I had to make. At the holy church there is nothing but countless monastic cells for men and women. I met there a very dear friend of mine, and a person to whose way of life everyone in the East bears witness, the holy deaconess Marthana, whom I had met in Jerusalem, where she had come to pray. She governs these monastic cells of aputactitae, or virgins. Would I ever be able to describe how great was her joy and mine when she saw me? But to return to the subject: There are many cells all over the hill, and in the middle there is a large wall which encloses the church where the shrine is. It is a very beautiful shrine. The wall is set there to guard the church against the Isaurians, who are evil men, who frequently rob and who might try to do something against the monastery which is established there. Having arrived there in the name of God, a prayer was said at the shrine and the complete Acts of Saint Thecla was read.” Concerning the location of Seleucia (Silifke) see: [http://www.google.com.au/#hl=en&scient=psy-ab&q=driving+distance+tarsus+to+silifke&oq=driving+distance+tarsus+to+silifke&gs\\_l=hp.3...2075.12277.0.13487.34.26.0.7.7.1.329.6302.2-24j2.26.0.les%3B..0.0...1c.1.5.psy-ab.c8NeV2T1KUE&pbx=1&bav=on.2.or\\_r\\_qf.&bvm=bv.43287494.d.dGY&fp=64a5155518d1f2bb&biw=1366&bih=673](http://www.google.com.au/#hl=en&scient=psy-ab&q=driving+distance+tarsus+to+silifke&oq=driving+distance+tarsus+to+silifke&gs_l=hp.3...2075.12277.0.13487.34.26.0.7.7.1.329.6302.2-24j2.26.0.les%3B..0.0...1c.1.5.psy-ab.c8NeV2T1KUE&pbx=1&bav=on.2.or_r_qf.&bvm=bv.43287494.d.dGY&fp=64a5155518d1f2bb&biw=1366&bih=673) accessed 8.September,2013. The distance from Tarsus to Silifke is about 130 kilometres.

<sup>877</sup> The Tischendorf text following the Parisian manuscripts includes an additional ending in verses 44 and 45. Those who might like to embark on the extended study should note that there are various

This thesis will not go on to comment on the longer endings to the *Acts of Thecla*. In its shortest version the *Acts of Thecla* is most credible as having possible historical content, as an early witness to the possibility of an actual historical person, Thecla of Iconium. She is known as apostle and martyr and companion of Saint Paul, a model of women in leadership administering the sacrament of baptism and preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Upon close examination this early text continues to present as completely orthodox. There seems to be no reason not to think that it was written at the end of the first or beginning of the second century. In comparison with the New Testament a date of composition at the end of the first or beginning of the second century is defensible and these ideas will be expressed more fully in my conclusions.

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additional endings. Some of these endings are quite long while others are shorter. See Tischendorf, p.61 for a short additional ending and pp. 62-63 for another longer additional ending.



## Conclusions

There are a number of different conclusions to be drawn from this thesis. There are the conclusions concerning the Tischendorf and Lipsius editions of the Greek text of the *Acts of Thecla* which a careful reader of the commentary will already have judged since this matter was clearly forecast in the introductory material. These conclusions concerning Greek editions and the manuscript traditions behind them are closely related to the findings concerning intersection with the New Testament. There are, in addition, conclusions concerning historical questions based on the shorter text. Finally, there are theological conclusions which are based on the translation and commentary on the *Acts of Thecla*. The theological conclusions will be in a very brief form as volumes could be written on the theology of the *Acts of Thecla* and hopefully one day they will be.

### I. Concerning the Manuscripts and Editions

Throughout this translation and commentary on the *Acts of Thecla*, attention has been carefully given to the standard criteria for an earlier or more original text. The criteria have been listed and explained in the section: I. Introduction: The Main Aims and Context. In the commentary I have argued for many examples which would indicate that the Tischendorf text is earlier. This section of conclusions counts the number of such examples. The enumeration follows broadly the order of the criteria as listed in the Introduction. The enumeration is of cases where the Lipsius text has what a given criterion would hold is the later text and the Tischendorf text has what the criterion would hold is the earlier text. The examples are qualified with “at least” because, where grammar and other readings or constructions are concerned, there is no hard and fast rule for division of clauses or sentences when these could be relevant to stating that there is one or more example in a given verse. A single word may even contain two examples, for instance a spelling mistake and an explanation. The enumerations are impressive as they provide an extremely strong case for the Tischendorf text. These have been counted modestly; where for example there is an example with more than one criterion applicable, it is counted as a single example, and a single word is always counted as only one example. The enumeration below is only of examples where the Tischendorf text appears to be the earlier text. No examples have been found that point to the Lipsius text being the earlier text according to these criteria. The discussion of

matters concerning the Lipsius hypothesis of abridgment will follow this enumeration.

1. A more advanced theology or thought betrays a later edition: there are at least 12 examples.<sup>878</sup>
2. Assimilating the text to other notable texts, especially New Testament texts: there are at least 11 examples.<sup>879</sup>
3. Explanations and elaborations, grammar and vocabulary corrections: there are at least 44 examples.<sup>880</sup>
4. Improvement of literary style: there are at least 29 examples.<sup>881</sup>
5. The use of proper nouns, and direct address, to prevent any ambiguity in sentences: there are at least 15 examples.<sup>882</sup>
6. The addition of further information: there are at least 24 examples.<sup>883</sup>

These examples represent at least 134 places in the *Acts of Thecla* where Lipsius has chosen what appears to be the more improved and therefore later text. There is no evidence of materials that are not orthodox in the additions. Tischendorf, on the other hand, has chosen the *lectio difficilior* or less elaborate text in all of these 134 cases. It is not a surprise that Tischendorf follows carefully the criteria for choosing the earlier text, as he is the scholar best known for inventing the criteria for this process. He is famous for this and for bringing the richness of codex Sinaiticus to New Testament study.<sup>884</sup>

It is also not surprising that 40 years later and after Tischendorf died Lipsius assumed that the *Acts of Thecla* was abridged. At that time the most popular theory of the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels was that the Gospel of Mark was an abridgement of the Gospel of Matthew. Today one would ask: why would anyone want to omit things like the nativity, the Lord's Prayer or the Beatitudes?

Similarly, with the *Acts of Thecla* one would ask: why should there be an abridgement? What would one want to leave out? Lipsius gives an

<sup>878</sup> See for example: 1f, 7c, 15f, 16c, 22b, 22c, 22g, 37d, 38f, 41g, 42d, 42e, in the commentary above.

<sup>879</sup> See for example: 1b, 1f, 1g, 2b, 14e, 16f, 17h, 24d, 28d, 31a, 34d, in the commentary above.

<sup>880</sup> See for example: 1f, 3a, 3b, 5f, 11d, 11e, 11f, 12b, 13a, 15a, 16b, 17b, 17f, 17i, 18c, 19f, 20c, 20e, 21c, 22a, 24d, 24g, 26i, 27a, 27d, 29a, 29e, 30d, 33f, 33g, 34b, 34d, 34e, 35a, 35e, 35f, 36a, 36b, 37b, 38d, 40b, 40e, 43b, 43d, in the commentary above.

<sup>881</sup> See for example: 2b, 7b, 8d, 8f, 11e, 15b, 17j, 19b, 19f, 20c, 20h, 21e, 22a, 24a, 24b, 25b, 26a, 26b, 27d, 33b, 33d, 34a, 34i, 35g, 36f, 37a, 37f, 39a, 39h, in the commentary above.

<sup>882</sup> See for example: 2b, 10d, 11b, 13a, 15d, 20b, 20f, 20h, 21d, 27d, 28a, 30f, 39e, 41b, 41d, in the commentary above.

<sup>883</sup> See for example: 6a, 8c, 9c, 19e, 22a, 23g, 25a, 27e, 29f, 30f, 31d, 32a, 34g, 36c, 36d, 37g, 38e, 40a, 40c, 41a, 41f, 42b, 42d, 43f, in the commentary above.

<sup>884</sup> Cf. p. 14 above.

answer to this in his volume. He says that the material left out was material that was not orthodox, not acceptable to mainstream Christian thought in the era of early Christianity. However, for many years, the version that he gives which he claims is prior to the abridgement has by most scholars been considered to be orthodox. His hypothesis has been accepted none the less by many who have not questioned it. The matter of things being abridged from a text which is already considered to be orthodox must in today's scholarly climate be subject to re-examination. At face value, the Lipsius hypothesis does not seem to make good sense, for time has not borne out the view that the text which Lipsius offered is anything but orthodox. Therefore the question must be asked what reason there would be for abridgment in any manuscripts. Close examination of even some of what is not chosen as original by Lipsius shows no evidence of his theory.

Like the comparison of the Gospel of Mark with the Gospel of Matthew, trying to show any abridgement would seem odd. One would be hard pressed to come up with a reason why some of the best-loved passages were removed. The same phenomenon occurs with the *Acts of Thecla*. In the comparison of the Tischendorf and Lipsius texts, the sections which one would have to consider to be "left out" are those that add clarification, grammatical or syntactical finesse and a sense of clarity and completion. No one has offered an argument for removing such things. Indeed it would be difficult to think of one, since such things are commonly thought of as improvements. There would be no reason to remove the improvements. For those who may have been enemies of the full participation of women in the early church this hypothetical abridgement never acted against the *Acts of Thecla* as it continued both in short and long form to be orthodox. Certainly those who were supporters of Thecla and her tradition would welcome any improvements as her cult began to develop more fully. The removal of improvements then is not good common sense. It is much more likely that the improvements are added in later texts to make the story clearer and easier to read, to fill out the theology and make it more comparable with the other accepted traditions, including the New Testament. When closely scrutinised this seems closest to the reality.

The most striking problem for Lipsius' argument is that as one goes through all of the verses of the *Acts of Thecla* and assesses possible abridgements by comparing with the shorter Tischendorf text and its choices from the manuscript tradition, there is no heretical material left out. In the shorter Tischendorf edition which most often relies on the shorter manuscripts we find a less developed and arguably earlier text,

but not a more orthodox text or one that has been “cleaned up” in any fashion. There is then no reason for Lipsius’ position that an abridgement in the manuscripts has taken place. There is not one example of material being omitted to make the text more acceptable to anyone. The Lipsius argument that there are omissions or gaps in some manuscripts which make the Greek difficult is a case still to be argued since Lipsius does not specify what these gaps are nor does he demonstrate that there was a previous tradition containing this missing information. On the contrary what he adds to the Tischendorf text is material that Tischendorf already possessed and sided against on the basis of the ordinary principles for choosing an earlier text.

Even more telling than the lack of reasons for abridgement, are the numerous times that what is found in the Lipsius text is correction, expansion, clarification or assimilation to later Christian doctrines. These make the text clearer, more thorough and arguably more orthodox and more acceptable. This is not to say that the shorter Tischendorf text is in any way not orthodox. Perhaps the most obvious example is this following one. Where the Tischendorf text has “God the Father and the Son”, the Lipsius text has “God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

Another simple example serves to illustrate. This matter concerns “copying”. In verse 1b Lipsius text has the word, χαλκεύς, and the Tischendorf text does not. If Lipsius were right, the omission in the Tischendorf text would be motivated by the heretical nature of what was omitted. Yet, it has never been heresy to have a coppersmith or even a blacksmith in your home or travelling with you. Why would a word like this be removed? There is no reason. Then, on the other hand, why might it have been added? There is a New Testament passage about Demas and Alexander, the blacksmith (χαλκεύς) in 2 Timothy 4:9-15. Assimilation to the New Testament is something that we might expect from ancient scribes. After all they would think that they were only being helpful.

Another less simple example illustrates the point further: the longest passage that is included in the Lipsius text and is absent from the Tischendorf text is in verse 5. It includes four beatitudes. They are the following ones:

A1 Μακάριοι οἱ τρέμοντες τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

A2 μακάριοι οἱ σοφίαν λαβόντες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου κληθήσονται.

A3 μακάριοι οἱ σύνεσιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χωρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐν φωτὶ γενήσονται.

A4 μακάριοι οἱ δι' ἀγάπην θεοῦ ἐξελθόντες τοῦ σχήματος τοῦ κοσμικοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀγγέλους κρινοῦσιν καὶ ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ πατρὸς εὐλογηθήσονται.

Elliott translates these:

A1 Blessed are those who respect the word of God, for they shall be comforted.

A2 Blessed are those who have received the wisdom of Jesus Christ, for they shall be called the sons of the Most High.

A3 Blessed are those who have come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, for they shall be in the light.

A4 Blessed are those who through love of God no longer conform to the world, for they shall judge angels, and shall be blessed at the right hand of the Father.<sup>885</sup>

It is understandable how these beatitudes could be later added to the story. The first may be a reference to developments in establishing a canon of scripture. The second may be assimilation to the Matthean beatitude Mt. 5:9 ending “called sons of God”. The third and fourth could be an assimilation to Johannine theology, emphasising the light, non-conformity to the world, and love (John 14:6, 23, 30-31, for example). It is not clear why they would be excised from the *Acts of Thecla* in an abridgement. They are not the Beatitudes which could be construed as sounding on the verge of non-orthodox practice. If any ancient scribe wanted to abridge the work in order to make it sound more orthodox the beatitudes listed below (5d, 5e, 5f, 5g, 5h) would be the ones more likely to be eliminated but according to Lipsius’ theory they were retained while those that are less likely to be difficult (A1, A2, A3, A4 above) were excised. Examination of the comparison with these beatitudes below illustrates this point.

5d Blessed are those keeping the flesh pure because they will become God’s temple.

5e Blessed are the self-controlled, because God will speak to them.

5f Blessed are those who renounced this world for they will be called upright.

5g Blessed are those who have wives as if they did not have them, because they will inherit God.

5h Blessed are those who fear God, because they will become messengers of God (ἄγγελοι θεοῦ).

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<sup>885</sup> J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p.365.

The orthodoxy and comparison with New Testament of the beatitudes 5d, 5e, 5f, 5g, and 5h has been considered in detail in the commentary. They do not go further than the New Testament in encouraging self-control. Yet they go further than beatitudes A1, A2, A3 and A4 by stating that the “flesh” is to be kept “pure”; self-control, renunciation of the world and not marrying wives is advised, and becoming angels is mentioned. Although these may seem extreme, all of these ideas appear in the New Testament. These beatitudes are not exact copies of any of the New Testament texts and simply agree with New Testament theology. Those that Lipsius includes in his edition which Tischendorf did not include (A1, A2, A3, A4) do not lack orthodoxy and in fact they are resonant with Johannean theology. If for example the word “σοφία” (wisdom) were used in A2 to refer to a deity or if the word “γνῶσις” (knowledge) in A3 were used for knowledge of secret things, there might be something to consider in terms of reason for scribes to later exclude these, but neither is the case. The knowledge of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of Jesus Christ are completely orthodox expressions, so when Lipsius includes them his edition of the *Acts of Thecla* remains completely orthodox. Lipsius’ text is far from being a heterodox or near heterodox text that would be a candidate for abridgement. In fact it is to be expected that it will remain an object of scholarly interest as an example of a later improvement of the more original *Acts of Thecla*.

From another angle one might consider what could have been left out to make the Acts of Thecla more consistent with the New Testament even if it had no reference to orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Reference to “the virtue (or goodness) of Christ” in verse 1d is something which could have been removed or altered in the *Acts of Thecla* if an abridgment to achieve New Testament consistency was the purpose. However, it does not happen. I think that it is quite unlikely that there was an abridgement in the manuscripts when we consider a variety of examples like these. It is more likely that as the manuscript traditions developed they were enhanced.

Lipsius notes abrupt changes of scene, unanswered questions and missing episodes in the Greek text of the *Acts of Thecla* in comparison the Syrian version. This does not offer any definitive or ever plausible understanding for why the earliest Greek text should not be closer to the Tischendorf text than to the Lipsius one. In light of the translation and commentary presented in this thesis, the Lipsius text reads as significantly later than the Tischendorf text. Furthermore, the Tischendorf text does not suffer any incomprehensibility due to “missing episodes”, “abrupt changes of scene”, “unanswered questions” or the like.

While no one example “proves” that the shorter Tischendorf text or one very like it is more original, when there are many examples, there is strong indication in that direction. This thesis shows that the longer version reads as if it is more orthodox, more grammatically acceptable, and more consistent with later theological development than the shorter version. The shorter Tischendorf version while being an example of earlier Christian thought is fully understandable without missing episodes or incomprehensible gaps of any kind. Therefore the Lipsius hypothesis fails.

The Lipsius theory, that abridgements took place in some manuscripts, cannot be borne out. The fundamental question why anyone would want to abridge this text has not been answered. I continue to put forth my theory, then, with Tischendorf that those particular materials included in the longer text consist of later additions, added to enhance, and assimilate to the New Testament. These and other examples in the longer text (chosen by Lipsius) are corrections, expansions and clarifications. My conclusions show that there is reason to reconsider the text of the *Acts of Thecla*. Scholars should return to the Tischendorf text until a more modern one very like the Tischendorf text is available and accessible to researchers.

## I. Comparison with the New Testament

The importance of comparing the *Acts of Thecla* with the New Testament cannot be underestimated. This comparison of the Tischendorf text with the New Testament is the first of its kind. Previous comparisons were with the Lipsius text and they have produced results like those above in these conclusions, where the words Holy Spirit are added to the Father and the Son and so it more closely resembles Matthew 28: 19. According to my argument, these are assimilations to the New Testament in later editions of the *Acts of Thecla*. The work in this commentary shows that there is no evidence of copying of the New Testament in the Tischendorf text. One of the closest possibilities of copying would be the beatitude: 5b Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται. “Blessed are the pure in heart because they shall see God.” This is highly formulaic and could easily be common oral tradition. In contrast, among the Lipsius variants at least eleven of them are New Testament assimilations. (One example of a detailed discussion of this is found on p. 111 above.)

The Tischendorf text shows no convincing evidence of literary assimilation to the New Testament canon. The only other close parallel besides 5b is 5g (Blessed are those who have wives as if they did not have them) which agrees with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It appears to be almost a copying, or perhaps a result of common oral tradition. The verb is a different mood and the clause appears in a different literary genre as a beatitude rather than as an instruction. Since the *Acts of Thecla* is a narrative about Paul, it is possible that this early Pauline thought or even the letter itself is known to the author of the *Acts of Thecla*, before a canon of the New Testament develops. Even this close comparison, since it is not an exact copy, is more likely to be a result of oral tradition. As an example, it is very formulaic like 5b. The Tischendorf *Acts of Thecla* shows no assimilation to the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, Revelation, the Catholic Epistles or most of the Pauline corpus. Though it is compatible with New Testament theology, it does not seem to show evidence of knowledge of the New Testament as a canon of Holy Scripture.

The *Acts of Thecla* may give an independent witness to details in the New Testament. The names of Onesiphorus and Demas are examples. While there is no sign of copying, these names in the *Acts of Thecla* add a literary witness to these persons being known to Paul at least in the developing Pauline tradition if not in history. This matter of the *Acts of Thecla* offering an independent witness along with the New Testament is related to McDonald's theory of a common oral tradition. It may well be the case that the common oral tradition is a reference to New Testament narrative which is not historical. For example, the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart because they shall see God", may be older than the Jesus tradition, and Jesus may or may not have said it. It does become a part of the New Testament narrative and the independent witness of it in the *Acts of Thecla* is significant, whether or not it has any historical basis in the life of Jesus. If indeed I am correct in my argument that the *Acts of Thecla* could be from the same period as the later part of the New Testament (perhaps from 80 CE to 115 CE), it offers a second witness that this beatitude is represented in the Jesus movement. There are no more encratic or gnostic ideas in the *Acts of Thecla* than in the New Testament. The theology of the *Acts of Thecla* is completely compatible with the New Testament theology and offers added breadth and richness.

The challenges in the translation and understanding of the story are not to be underestimated. In the story Paul travels from Antioch to Antioch. The very first such challenge is whether Paul is travelling from Antioch of Syria to Antioch of Pisidia or from Antioch of Pisidia to Antioch of



Syria. For many years it was assumed that Paul was travelling east in this story. The story was thought by some to be complete fiction and so it was not matched up to one of Paul's missionary journeys. According to this way of thinking, Paul in the *Acts of Thecla* was travelling in the opposite direction to the usual hypotheses of his three missionary journeys. It was argued that Antioch of Syria was the only place where there were sufficient public facilities for the arena scene where Thecla is subjected to beasts and receives her baptism.<sup>886</sup> In our lifetime, however, the archeological evidence of the first-century public infrastructure in Antioch of Pisidia has been recovered and documented. There were both circus and arena at the time. However, not only is this the case, but the unusual structure of the arena in Antioch of Pisidia suits the details of the actions of Queen Tryphaena in that part of the *Acts of Thecla*. My thesis argues for the travel of Paul from Syria to Pisidia. MacDonald has done the same, but McGinn holds that either direction of travel is possible.<sup>887</sup> McGinn's position points out the lack of specificity in the text itself. Working with the detail of ancient texts is often fraught with such a lack of specificity and we can only point in the direction of the greatest probability. However, the arguments above are strong for this change of hypothesis as to the direction of Paul's travel. As stated in the introduction this gives renewed scope for thinking about the relationship of this document in the reconstruction of Paul's journeys. As I am not a scholar who holds to the historicity of the Acts of the Apostles, I am satisfied with a lightly held hypothesis like the one in this thesis. Others will think differently about the possibilities.

The relationship of the *Acts of Thecla* and the Pastoral letters is of particular interest. As a result of this study MacDonald's theory appears to be more plausible than any other. Adjustments would need to be made in refining the MacDonald theory since he uses the Lipsius text. His theory might seem even more convincing if he used the Tischendorf text. It is not my purpose here either to prove or disprove his theory. That is another topic for another long and detailed study. My results agree with the general tendencies of MacDonald's views in principle and that is an important conclusion to my thesis.

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<sup>886</sup> W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 27. In this volume, published in 1893, Great Antioch in Syria is distinguished from Pisidian Antioch. Pisidia and Pisidian Antioch are described in this way: "Pisidia was the 'Barbarian' mountain country that lay between them and Pamphylia; it was a country almost wholly destitute of Greek culture, ignorant of Greek games and arts, and barely subjugated by Roman arms. Antioch [here Pisidian Antioch] was the guard set upon these Pisidian robbers, the trusted agent of the imperial authority, the centre of the military system designed to protect the subjects of Rome."

<sup>887</sup> D. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, pp. 37-40. S. McGinn, "The Acts of Thecla" in *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 803.

Development in New Testament thought, from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of Matthew for example, did not happen in a vacuum. People live out the Gospel message and come to understand it in their lives. The Gospel is a result of the faith expression of those who are living out the Gospel. The *Acts of Thecla* gives an example of someone living out the Gospel during New Testament times and for that reason alone is invaluable.

Development from the undisputed letters of Paul to the Pastoral Epistles is a special topic of study in itself. The *Acts of Thecla* stands alongside that topic of study and may well help explain some of the developments. Those developments have taken place in some persons' lives with or without the witness of the *Acts of Thecla*. Those men who chose the canon were no doubt aware of some of those developments and chose to include the Pastoral Epistles. Had women chosen the canon of the New Testament the *Acts of Thecla* might have been included and the Pastoral Epistles might have been ignored.

As it is we are fortunate to have the *Acts of Thecla* at least as a part of the background to the New Testament. Since the Acts of the Apostles tells us very little of the detail of Paul's travels in Asia (Turkey), the *Acts of Thecla* is important for its witness (whether literary, theological or historical) to Paul's mission in that location, so long as this claim is not pressed too precisely, remembering the perspective of Dibelius and his successors. Various theories have been offered in the past concerning which missionary journey the *Acts of Thecla* might describe. Further study of this question may prove to be very interesting. I have only used a working hypothesis that the *Acts of Thecla* describes part of the third journey, and the third journey as it is imagined by certain scholars, who see it as for the most part an overland journey. These ideas are summarized in section V. *Some Considerations Concerning the Voyages of Saint Paul* in this thesis. My investigations have not proved this to be impossible at any stage. This has been an easy working hypothesis since the third journey is, as it were, an "open book". There is very little about it anywhere in the New Testament. Other scholars may offer other suggestions for reasons of their own.

The more recent scholarly writing on Thecla, by Anne Jensen and Honey in particular,<sup>888</sup> encourages taking her seriously as an historical figure and taking the *Acts of Thecla* seriously in terms of the traditions and legends about Saint Paul. As clearly stated in the introduction, my purpose is not

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<sup>888</sup> A. Jensen, *Thekla—Die Apostolin*. L. Honey, *Thekla: Text and Context*.

to “prove” that everything, or, for that matter, that anything in particular that happens in the *Acts of Thecla* is verifiable fact. There are elements in the narrative that would have to be judged as theological rather than historical. These elements are generally less fantastic, less hagiographical, and less legendary than comparable ones in the canonical Acts of the Apostles.

When, for example, in the Gospels there is reference to a legend such as the story of Jonah, these legendary elements are considered to be part-and-parcel of the culture of the times. When the story of Thecla’s second trial is recounted, influence from legends known in the area, like the stories of Aesop about lions, is a simple means of interpreting the trial with the beasts that could easily have happened to her. This can be compared with the use of a legend like the story of Jonah to interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Linda Ann Honey has recently presented a PhD thesis which argues for the likelihood of Thecla being an actual historical person and companion of Saint Paul. Honey’s thesis is a study of the *Miracles of Thecla*, which is part of the “cult of Thecla”. Her investigation into the historical Thecla includes the references to Tryphaena who is easily dated and located. The further description of the geography, roads, theatres and legal matters underlying the *Acts of Thecla* all support an historical basis for the story, according to Honey.

Whether one thinks there is history in the *Acts of Thecla* or not, it will nonetheless remain important that we have any record of the travels of Paul and Thecla. That is also the case no matter what we think of the history of the Acts of the Apostles. I think there is very little, if any, history in the Acts of the Apostles, yet it remain a very important example of theology and an effort to make sense of the urgency of the Gospel. The *Acts of Thecla* may also contain only very little history, but it is an important example of theology and another effort to make sense of the Gospel in the history of the early church. In terms of the comparison of the theology and possible history in the *Acts of Thecla* with the undisputed Pauline letters there is in my opinion enormous scope for scholarly study and great potential for interesting results.

Given the ordinary trajectory of reports of the goodness and miraculous power of saints, the text with the less developed hagiography is most likely the earlier text. Concerning the developing hagiography of Saint Paul, the Tischendorf *Acts of Thecla* presents an early and believable characterisation of Paul. His refusal to defend Thecla against Alexander

is much like the characterisation of him in the Acts of the Apostles in relation to the Pythian Oracle of Apollo, the young woman in Acts 16:16. He has no concern that she has lost her livelihood and as a slave becomes useless to her owners when once she was very valuable. She had been speaking the truth as the oracle, she is not evangelized and does not become Christian in the story. In fact, one would hardly think it likely, once she had been demoted from such a high standing in her society to the level of the most useless and easily abused position of women slaves. Yet Paul has no interest in her plight which he has caused. Throughout the Acts and in his letters, Paul's taking on and dropping of companions is notable, as is his positive and negative relationship to Thecla, while she remains true to the Gospel and to him. This seems to be consistent with the characterisation of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and with his behaviour toward other companions as recorded in his epistles. These early images of Paul are helpful in understanding that saints are not other-worldly creatures who happen to be human. They are real human persons who because of their love of God during their lifetime are drawn to be with God for all eternity. However, they are not perfect; God whom they love is perfect. The extended *Acts of Paul* gives a very different picture of Paul. He becomes someone who talks to animals. This does not make a better role model for humans who are struggling with living the Gospel in their lives but rather presents as hagiographical embellishment.

The hagiography of Thecla also develops. The *Acts of Thecla* is a very early representation of her as a suffering woman. She loses her temper and attacks Alexander. This is foolhardy and may well be meant to portray the danger of pride among the wealthy and powerful women of the day. Thecla is also less than compassionate toward her mother and betrothed early in the story. Later in the story she is reconciled to her mother, though, it seems, at a price. She has been overcome by enthusiasm and enthralled by the teaching which offers her such freedom. She is not prudent about her decisions. It is dangerous to travel.

Were it not for Queen Tryphaena in the story, Thecla might have had a short-lived religious flight of fancy and died a brutal death. She was not sentenced to the arena for believing in Christ; neither was she baptised before she went to the arena. She might well have died a nameless example of an impious young Anatolian woman, but for Tryphaena's interference. She appears in the *Acts of Thecla* as a real person who is not managing very well the complexity of social expectations placed upon her. She is also a believable example of a young woman who is inspired by the possibility of freedom from the domestic expectations of her day. It seems there are other ways to be yourself in her world, other ways to

make a living, and other ways to provide for one's mother. She has discovered one. She becomes a follower of Paul, the itinerant, who teaches Jewish wisdom in the tradition of Jesus, the rabbi who is the Son of the Living God. She becomes an apostle and her benefactors are grateful for her ministry. Furthermore, in later more hagiographical texts she becomes a great healer and counsellor.

In even later hagiography, stories develop about how Thecla draws confidence and authority from her physical virginity. It is told how she miraculously melts into the rock side of a mountain. These are like the stories of Saint Rose with the gift of bilocation, attending mass and doing manual work at the same time, or Saint Christina flying.<sup>889</sup> They are like Paul talking to a lion and baptising it. They are of another genre altogether. It is not an uninteresting genre as it portrays many of the fears and hopes of the society in which it grew and where it was valued.

## II. Theological Conclusions

### A. The Jewish Character

One of the most important theological conclusions is the overwhelmingly Jewish character of the message of Paul in the *Acts of Thecla*. There are a number of references that are very Jewish in character in the *Acts of Thecla*. These have been discussed as they have been encountered in the text. God is addressed and referred to in a Jewish way at verses 17b, 29e, 37c and 42d. God is the Most High, the Living God. Beatitudes, a Jewish teaching genre, are one of the most important ways to communicate the Gospel in the *Acts of Thecla*. Beatitudes are a form of wisdom teaching and may have early ties to Jesus the Sage. Jewish expressions give this story in the Tischendorf text an early character. For example, the expression the "most high God" is typically Jewish. The lack of later doctrinal formulation, especially a Christological or Trinitarian formulation, is a further clue to its early dating. Communications concerning salvation, redemption and eternal life are not as developed as one would expect if New Testament writings were familiar to the author.

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<sup>889</sup> Theodore Maynard, *Saints for Our Times*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1960, p. 201. Giselle Potter, *Lucy's Eyes and Margaret's Dragon: Lives of the Virgin Saints*, Raincoast Books, Vancouver, B.C., 1997, p. 72.

## B. Theology of Healing Grief

The touching relationship between Tryphaena and Thecla is very important to the theology of the work. Thecla brings Tryphaena to a breakthrough in her grieving the death of her daughter. She listens to the Queen's mourning and provides the pastoral companionship that promotes healing. The understanding of salvation as safety in death is very important theologically. Through faith and trust in God in prayer the eternal life of Falconilla is known. This is very similar to the concerns of the Thessalonians concerning the salvation of their dear departed ones.<sup>890</sup> Tryphaena's adopting of Thecla is a witness to later descriptions of the Christian community as family. Those who find themselves alone can join together with other Christians who share similar values and beliefs to form one "body", one family in Christ. In this way support is given for those who suffer. Thecla, who is presented with the terrible prospect of the arena is sheltered by Tryphaena, while Tryphaena is comforted in her mourning by Thecla. Later as Tryphaena becomes Thecla's patron, Thecla is protected and provided for in this relationship that has grown because of the love of Jesus, the Son of God.

## C. Theology of Freedom

Thecla's freedom is salvation for her in this story. She is set free to serve the Living God and God's beloved Son. The glorious liberty of the children of God is the salvation that Thecla accepts in her baptism. The contrast between Thecla's salvation in her early life and Falconilla's salvation in afterlife shows a rich understanding of the concept of salvation that is beginning to reach across the boundaries of cultures. Thecla is saved from death, Falconilla is saved in death. The focus on salvation in this life is again very Jewish in character. Jesus' interest in the reign of God in this life as we know it from the Gospels is entirely in character with the story of Thecla. Jesus was a Jew, and the concept of shalom in this life is inseparable from the concept of God's reign.

## D. Simplicity and Good News

The theological importance of simplicity is often related to freedom. The *Acts of Thecla* is a good example of this. The freedom to travel and leave behind the care of buildings, fields and industry requires acceptance of a simple lifestyle. The *Acts of Thecla* gives example of this simple freedom

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<sup>890</sup> 1 Thes 4:13-18.

to travel much as it is depicted in the Gospel stories of Jesus. Saint Paul models this in the *Acts of Thecla* and Thecla follows his lead. The ascetic lifestyle will develop in Christianity in the second, third and fourth centuries. It will also reach extreme expressions. The choice to live simply seems to be at the heart of the Jesus message even with forms of asceticism that are more developed than those in the New Testament or in the *Acts of Thecla*. In the diary of Egeria, for example, the monasteries described are good examples of this more developed asceticism.<sup>891</sup>

Thecla is attacked by Alexander while she is wearing what one imagines are her sumptuous robes (verse 26). She is one of the wealthiest women of Iconium (verse 26i). Her decision to wear men's attire to travel (verse 40) is intriguing to the modern reader. Her main objective seems to be safety but it results in another kind of simplicity. One imagines that she chooses simple men's travel attire so as to not attract attention. There is no indication that she continues to wear men's clothing for reasons of sexual orientation when she is not travelling. That is a gap in the story however, and answering the question of what she does when not travelling can take different audiences to different imagined discussions. In her iconography in the East, she most often appears in the clothing of a female martyr. Further study of her iconography with emphasis on gender issues would be a very interesting topic. Certainly the travel clothing she chooses in the story is a choice of simplicity. The message is more important than material possessions. Thecla models this. However, at the end of the story she is supplied with all she needs by Tryphaena. This pleases Theocleia and is likely to be an important factor in the reconciliation of mother and daughter. Interestingly this restoration of wealth indicates that the *Acts of Thecla* is not a part of that genre of later Christian ascetic or gnostic writings where rewards are only spiritual. The argument for this in the commentary weighs substantially in support of the early dating argued for throughout this thesis.

Thecla's decision not to marry is also a part of the theology of simplicity in this story. Modern readers may ask whether there are sexual orientation issues here? The story presents Thecla as relating strongly both to Paul and to Tryphaena. This would indicate that a balanced rather than a sexualized characterisation is foremost in the narrative. There is room for speculation on this matter; a gender study might contain interesting ideas about what is not said in the story. The works of Jeremy Barrier and Beate Wehn show interest in opposite directions in relationship to gender construction approaches to this ancient text. Such

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<sup>891</sup> Egeria: *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, p. 87.

studies have a strong interest in comparing the ancient text with today's world and today's understandings of gender and sexual relationships. They are interesting studies in their own right together with the large body of feminist and politically-based studies which often have a psycho-sexual hermeneutic.

#### E. Filial Piety

Thecla's relationship to her mother and their household is an important social theme in the story. Her refusal to marry is the first offence for which she is condemned to fire. Impious behaviour toward family is an important theological motif. The Jewish fourth commandment, "honour your father and mother", and ancient cultures in general have high expectations of adult children in relationship to their parents. Marriage is more an obligation than a romantic contract. Thecla represents the idea that religious affiliation could be taken to be more expedient than obligations to parents, including marriage. This stabs at the stability of the social fabric. Religion in many settings over the ages has challenged social norms and this is no different.

Thecla's challenge to the powerful position of Alexander in his city is also a challenge to social norms. If she has arrived in a city without the expected protection of servant "bodyguards" or male relatives and yet she wishes to be treated with the respect due to a wealthy woman, she is challenging the norms. After Tryphaena's patronage is in place (verse 40), she travels with both male and female servants. Her financial position now provides her with the ability to have protection as she travels. She has won this privileged position by first following her heart and her commitment to what she thought was most important.

In both cases, her trials are for socially challenging behaviour and not because she is a follower of Jesus Christ. The obligations of social behaviour were an important part of morality and legal responsibility. This is, however, an indication that Thecla's story is early. The story itself may well come from the time of Saint Paul. The Tischendorf text reads as if it is later than the Pauline correspondences, as already mentioned, perhaps from around the same time as Luke-Acts.

#### F. Victim/Offender Theology

The exploration of victim/offender relationships is theologically important in this story. Alexander has time to plot the attempt on Thecla's life in the arena. It seems a thorough and effective series of



attacks. When Alexander sees that his attempts not only fail but that they cause the Queen to faint as if she had died, he changes his attitude suddenly. This is often the first step in the process of remorse. When he sees that his violent actions cause pain not only to the intended victim but to others as well, he reconsiders, then panics and begs for the games to end. Theocleia also plots her own daughter's death. Even today most murder is done to victims who have close relationships to the offender. The reconciliation between Thecla and her mother is an important witness to restorative justice. That is the case even if her mother's motives for reconciliation are not pure. The re-establishment of communication between mother and daughter is significant. Unlike Judas in the canonical Gospels, Theocleia becomes the object of her daughter's forgiveness. This is very important. Much like Jesus forgiving his executioners from the cross, Thecla forgives her mother, who would have killed her. More than that, Thecla represents all misunderstood adult children, like the eldest son in the prodigal's story. The forgiveness of parents is an important part of maturity and wisdom. The wisdom lessons concerning victim/offender relationships are theologically significant in the *Acts of Thecla*. They carry a moral impact, an example of generous love and forgiveness and the witness of remorse at beginning and more advanced stages.

#### G. Baptism, Witness and New Birth

Baptism is an important private and public ritual in Judaism. In the *Acts of Thecla* baptism is seen as the focus of martyrdom—i.e. witness. For Thecla the desire to be baptised is expressed early in the story. She is intent on making the commitment to Christ. Paul seems to think that it might be a problem to have this wealthy, eligible, and seemingly rebellious young woman associated with him and his message. Paul struggles to understand the depth of her commitment. Thecla on the other hand, in the face of misunderstanding, steadfastly continues to believe and to embrace her new found life. Her baptism is a new birth.<sup>892</sup> As if from the waters of a womb she emerges as a new person, now ritually identified with Christ as the servant of the Living God. The theology of baptism as public witness and as rebirth is ancient and contemporary. Because of her public witness Thecla carries the martyr's cross in her iconography.

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<sup>892</sup> See p. 59 above.

## H. Commitment to the Poor

Thecla's new life includes a commitment to the poor. The Christ of the *Acts of Thecla* is one who is virtuous. The goodness of Christ is an example to Thecla who becomes good to those who are poor and unfortunate. Her skills which grow in her attendance to the grieving Queen are later expanded to care for the needy by the benefaction of the Queen. This networking of care is a witness to the reign of God in practical theology. Thecla's own fearlessness in accepting simplicity makes her solidarity with the poor more convincing. Even though there is no reason to think that Thecla ever knows what it is to be poor, there is also no reason to think that she patronisingly pities the poor from on high. On the contrary, in her simplicity she stands alongside of the poor as well as being their helper in material matters. In her later hagiography she will continue to be sage advisor and healer for many, rich and poor.

There is a rich and positive theology in this text. It is a text which speaks of the witness of Christian freedom, the blessings of the Living God, the goodness of Christ and the Christ-like example of living simply and caring for one another sensitively. It shows the solidarity of those who have good purposes whether they are Christian or not. It exposes the selfish and revengeful purposes of those who are deceivers. It encourages believers to be true to themselves. It speaks of the love of those who have died and how our prayer for these loved ones really does make a difference. It encourages the care for the poor and needy. Above all, it speaks of Christians having the courage of their convictions and the energy and commitment to witness to their faith.

The history of women in the Jesus movement is greatly enhanced by reconsidering the likely historical details in the story of Thecla. Although my thesis does not do this, it is hoped that my thesis will make it easier for others to do. The influence of Thecla's story was enormous and it gives good evidence of the early appreciation of the ordinary human character of Paul as well as witness to his missionary travels in Turkey.

It is the virtue of Christ, his goodness, which is the Gospel in the *Acts of Thecla*. The theology of the *Acts of Thecla* is about the goodness of Christ, the freedom of Christians, the service of the Living God, the healing of grief, reconciliation and the service of the poor.

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