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VIRGIN MARY APOSTOLA APOSTOLORUM IN ARABO-COPTIC APOCRYPHAL TEXTS UNDER THE FATIMIDS

The Case of the *Lament of the Virgin* and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*

The Virgin Mary has a prominent place in Coptic Literature, Liturgy and Theology. Scholars have already studied some aspects of Coptic Mariology, but Mariology in Arabo-Coptic literature is yet to be researched, especially in apocryphal and pseudepigraphic patristic works. In this paper I aim to highlight this lacuna by examining the figure of the Virgin Mary in two Arabic apocryphal works – the Lament of the Virgin known also as the Arabic Gospel of Gamaliel and the Martyrdom of Pilate, written and redacted in Egypt during the 11th – 12th century, i.e., during the Islamic Fatimid dynasty. I will focus on the revival of the ancient tradition of Mary Apostola Apostolorum, according to which the Virgin was the first person to meet the risen Christ, and on the reasons behind this phenomenon. In fact, the important role that the Virgin Mary assumes in Arabic Christian apocryphal literature reflects the significant place she occupies in the Qur`ān and Islamic tradition, and therefore makes her the most appropriate figure to be used and instrumentalized as defender of Christian doctrines when Christians face difficult circumstances. She becomes the defender of the Christian faith against Islamic accusations of that period, i.e., the polemics against the resurrection of Christ. This paper, then, will bring to light, a new aspect of the veneration of Mary in mediaeval Egypt.

La Vierge Marie a une place importante dans la littérature, la liturgie et la théologie coptes. Les chercheurs ont déjà étudié certains aspects de la mariologie copte, mais la mariologie dans la littérature arabo-copte n'a pas encore fait l'objet de recherches, en particulier dans les écrits apocryphes et patristiques pseudépigraphes. Dans cet article, je mets en évidence cette lacune en examinant la figure de la Vierge Marie dans deux apocryphes arabes: la Lamentation de la Vierge, écrit connu aussi sous le titre Évangile arabe de Gamaliel, et



le Martyre de Pilate – écrits en Égypte durant les XI^e-XII^e siècles, c'est-à-dire pendant la dynastie fatimide. Je mettrai l'accent sur la reprise de l'ancienne tradition de Marie Apostola Apostolorum, selon laquelle la Vierge était la première personne à rencontrer le Christ ressuscité, et sur les raisons de ce phénomène. En effet, le rôle important que la Vierge Marie assume dans la littérature apocryphe chrétienne arabe reflète la place significative qu'elle occupe dans le Coran et dans la tradition islamique. Cela fait ainsi d'elle la figure la plus appropriée pour être utilisée comme défense des doctrines chrétiennes alors que les chrétiens font face à des difficultés. Elle devient la protectrice de la foi chrétienne contre les accusations islamiques de l'époque, à savoir les polémiques contre la résurrection du Christ. Cet article mettra ainsi en lumière un nouvel aspect de la vénération de Marie dans l'Égypte médiévale.

Introduction

The Virgin Mary has a prominent place in Coptic Literature, Liturgy and Theology. Scholars have already studied some aspects of Coptic Mariology;¹ Mariology in Arabo-Coptic literature is yet to be researched however, especially in apocryphal works and pseudepigraphic patristic homilies, which are still either unknown to researchers or unedited.²

1. See for example Tito ORLANDI, *Coptic Texts relating to the Virgin Mary. An Overview* (Unione Accademica Nazionale, Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari, Letteratura copta, Serie Studi), Rome, CIM, 2008; Gabriele GIAMBERARDINI, *Il culto mariano in Egitto*, 3 vols (Publicazioni dello Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Analecta 6-8), Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1974-1978; Mark SHERIDAN, "Maria nell'area culturale copta," in Enrico DAL COVOLO – Aristide SERRA (ed.), *Storia della Mariologia I. Dal modello biblico al modello letterario*, Rome, Città Nuova, 2009, pp. 337-349; Krzysztof MODRAS (ed.), *Omelia Copta attribuita a Demetrio di Antiochia sul Natale e Maria Vergine*, Rome, CIM, 1994; Marius CHAINE, "Sermon de Théodose Patriarche d'Alexandrie sur la Dormition et l'Assomption de la Vierge," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 29 (1933-1934), pp. 272-314; Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, "The Sahidic Coptic Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin Attributed to Evodius of Rome: An Edition from Morgan MSS 596 & 598 with Translation," *Analecta Bollandiana* 14 (1999), pp. 241-283; Antonella CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme. Omelie Copte sulla Passione, sulla Croce e sulla Vergine* (Testi e Documenti per lo Studio dell'Antichità 66), Milan, Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1980, pp. 152-195.

2. See for example S. NASHID (ed.), *Al-La 'ālī' al-saniyyah fī-l-mayāmir wa-l-'aḡā'ib al-maryamiyyah*, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-Amānah bi-Miṣr, 1966; Abullif Malik Awad WADI, "Stato d'animo di Maria nella fuga in Egitto nei vangeli apocrifi dell'infanzia e nelle omelie mariane dei copti," in Jean-Pierre SIEME LASOUL – Milagros GREGORIO (ed.), *De Trinitatis Mysterio et Maria. Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in Civitate Romae, Anno 2000 Celebrati*, vol. 2: *Sectio Africana et Asiatica*, Città del Vaticano, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 2006, pp. 3-27; Pierre DIB, "Deux discours de Cyrilaque, évêque de Behnésa sur la fuite en Égypte," *Revue de l'Orient*

Two Arabo-Coptic Apocryphal texts, namely the *Lament of the Virgin*, known also as the *Arabic Gospel of Gamaliel*, and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*, are to some extent related to each other. They were written and redacted in Arabic by unknown Copt authors between the 10th and 12th centuries, but both were attributed to the same ancient Christian personalities. Even if both deal mainly with the figure of Pontius Pilate, they feature an important role for the Virgin Mary. According to these texts, the risen Christ met his mother first, and not Mary Magdalene. In this paper, then, I aim to highlight this particular aspect of the two texts, in which a careful examination of the role of the Virgin Mary demonstrates that the Mariological material was inserted later into works that were originally focused on the figure of Pontius Pilate. My analysis of the profile of the Virgin will thus be followed by an attempt to examine and understand the reasons behind the insertion of such Mariological material into writings related to another Biblical figure.

My paper will start with a short presentation of the two works concerned. There follows an analysis of the profile of the Virgin presented in each text and I will try to identify the probable sources and traditions on which the Mariological material is based, and its relationship with the ancient profiles of the *Gnostic Mary* and *Mary Apostola Apostolorum*. Finally, through a reading of the historical context in which these apocryphal and apocalyptic works were composed, i.e., the Fatimid dynasty, I will explain the apologetic function the Virgin Mary assumes, which is the main reason why the Mariological material was inserted into them. Through a comparison, finally, between the *Islamic Mary* and the Mariological profile in our texts I shall demonstrate that the Virgin, the most highly honoured Biblical female figure in the Qur'ān, was selected by the redactors of these texts to be the defender of certain Christian doctrines that were rejected by Muslims, mainly that concerning Christ's resurrection, in a period when Christians (and especially Copts) were experiencing a hard time in Fatimid Egypt.

The *Lament of the Virgin* and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*

The *Lament of the Virgin*³ and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*⁴ both belong to the apocryphal tradition of the Coptic Church, and mainly to the

chrétien 15 (1910), pp. 157-161; Alin SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 370), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

3. This work was published and translated into English by Alphonse Mingana, see Alphonse MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, edited and translated with a critical apparatus*, vol. 2, Cambridge, W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1928, pp. 211-240 (edition), pp. 182-210 (translation). It is not certain whether the found Coptic fragments of the *Lament of the Virgin* are the Coptic original of this work, and then it is an Arabic translation of a Coptic text. According to A. Suciū these Coptic fragments



so-called *Apostolic Memoirs*.⁵ They were composed in Arabic but were based on previous Coptic apocryphal works like the *Coptic fragments* published by Eugène Revillout,⁶ the *Pilate cycle*,⁷ some Coptic pseude-

belong to the original text of the Coptic the *Lament of the Virgin*, see A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 85-86, but I think, and from a linguistic and stylistic point of view, the Arabic text is written in Arabic, but includes some parts translated or based on previous Coptic texts, see my analysis below.

4. This work was first published and translated by Alphonse Mingana, see A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 283-332 (edition), pp. 243-282 (translation). I made a new critical edition in my second doctoral dissertation based on more manuscripts, namely Ms BN Ar. 152, Ms Mingana Syr. 369, Ms BN Syr. 273, Ms Vat. Syr. 199, Ms Mingana Syr. 127 and Ms Mingana Syr. 355. I also provided an English translation for this edition, based on the one of Mingana, see Bishara EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος. Καινοδιαθηκικές και εξωκαινοδιαθηκικές αναφορές*, Dissertatio ad Doctoratum, Thessaloniki, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2019, pp. 4-534: <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/309628/files/GRI-2019-26280.pdf> (accessed 14th November, 2021). In this paper I will follow my critical edition and the division I made for it. There is also an edition with French translation made by Émile Galtier and based on one manuscript, see Émile GALTIER, "Le Martyre de Pilate," *Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale au Caire* 27 (1912), pp. 31-103.

5. On this literary genre see among others A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 70-138. For a possible relationship between this genre and the gnostic literature see Dylan M. BURNS, "From the Gnostic Dialogues to the Apostolic Memoirs: Literary and Historical Settings of the Nag Hammadi Apocalypses," in Jens SCHRÖTER – Tibias NICKLAS – Armand PUIG I TÀRRECH (eds), *Dreams, Visions, Imaginations: Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Views of the World to Come* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 247), Berlin – Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2021, pp. 343-384.

6. In the second volume of *Patrologia Orientalis*, Eugène Revillout published some Coptic fragments which, according to him, belong to a Coptic version of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, cf. Eugène REVILLOUT (ed.), *Les Évangiles des douze apôtres et de saint Barthélemy* (PO 7 [2.2]), Paris, Firmin Didot, 1907-1913, p. 123. In addition, the same scholar noted a relationship between these fragments and the *Acta Pilati* and the *Gospel of Gamaliel*, cf. *ibidem*, p. 126. Today, however, this opinion is considered erroneous because philological and linguistic analysis has demonstrated that these fragments belong to different works, cf. Mario ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. 1/2, Turin, Marietti, 1981, p. 345.

7. On the *Pilate Cycle* see among others, Bishara EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός;* (Critical Approaches to the Bible 25), Thessaloniki, Ostrakon, 2020; Rémi GOUNELLE – Zbigniew IZYDORCZYK (ed.), *L'Évangile de Nicodème ou Les Actes faits sous Ponce Pilate (recension latine A). Suivi de la lettre de Pilate à l'empereur Claude* (Apocryphes 9), Turnhout, Brepols, 1997; Rémi GOUNELLE, "Un nouvel évangile judéo-chrétien? Les Actes de Pilate," in Jens SCHRÖTER (ed.), *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology*, Leuven – Paris – Walpole, Peeters, 2013, pp. 357-402; the forthcoming study of Anne-Catherine BAUDOIN, *Ponce Pilate: la construction d'une figure dans la littérature patristique et apocryphe*, Turnhout, Brepols.

pigraphic homilies attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem⁸ and other early Christian legends. It seems that these two works developed over time, first orally and then in written form, until they reached the final form in which we know them today, incorporating ancient texts and legends, which probably took place in Egypt at the beginning of the second millennium, in the 11th and 12th centuries.⁹

The fact that these texts are attributed to the same personalities, Gamaliel, a Biblical figure,¹⁰ and Cyriacus,¹¹ a certain bishop of Bahnasa (Οξύρρυγχος),¹² led scholars to consider them as belonging to

8. In regards see A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 86-87.

9. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 257-258.

10. According to both the *Lament* and the *Martyrdom*, Gamaliel was a disciple of Nicodemus and of Joseph of Arimathea. On whether he was the Biblical rabbi who educated Paul the Apostle as referred to in Acts 5:34 and 22:3 or another figure confused with him scholars have tried to give answers, in this regard see M. ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi* (cited n. 6), p. 345; B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 216-217. Usually Gamaliel is considered one of the 72 disciples of Christ, see A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), p. 70.

11. Ève Lanchantin summarized the scholars' hypotheses regarding the bishop of Bahnasa Cyriacus, cf. Ève LANCHANTIN, "Une homélie sur le martyre de Pilate, attribuée à Cyriaque de Behnessa," *Apocrypha* 13 (2002), pp. 135-202. The opinion of Philippe Luisier seems to be the most rational. He sees behind this name the myth of the bishop of Jerusalem, Judas-Cyriacus, who was martyred during the time of the emperor Julian the Apostate, cf. Philippe LUISIER, "De Pilate chez les Coptes," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62 (1996), pp. 411-425 (pp. 411-412). It seems that this same Cyriacus is mentioned in some apocryphal texts with Mariological content, cf. Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, "A case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," in F. Stanley JONES (ed.), *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (SBL Symposium Series 20), Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2002, pp. 5-31 (p. 15); René-Georges COQUIN, "Cyriacus, bishop of al-Bahnasa," in Aziz Suryal ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopaedia* 3, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992, pp. 669-671. Till today we do not have any evidence that there were writings attributed to him in Coptic language, cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 85-87. Additionally, there is a need to study the Arabo-Coptic writings attributed to him to understand whether they are of the same author or not. Even though, I could demonstrate that the two works taken into examination here attributed to him, belong to different author, see below footnote 17.

12. Bahnasa is the Arabic name of the Ancient Egyptian City of Oxyrhynchus (Οξύρρυγχος); it was the chief town of an ancient district in Middle Egypt, on the west bank of the Bahr Yusuf, west of the Nile. It is famous because of the discovery of a number of Greek papyri from the time of Augustus to the eighth century, called and published under the name Oxyrhynchus Papyri, see Günter POETHKE, "Oxyrhynchus Papyri," in Aziz Suryal ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopaedia* 4, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 1857-1858.



the so-called Coptic *Apostolic Memoirs*, a literary genre that narrates the memories or diaries ascribed to one of the twelve Apostles or one of the 72 disciples. In fact, some of these *Apostolic Memoirs* which, according to the narrations, are usually deposited somewhere in Jerusalem, are incorporated into pseudepigraphic patristic sermons and homilies attributed to important figures of the Egyptian church. According to Alin Suciū, who includes our two texts in this literary genre, these patristic sermons were delivered on a specific liturgical occasion.¹³ It is known that for some period during the first half of the second Millennium both texts, the *Lament of the Virgin* and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*, being related to the passions and resurrection of Christ, were read during Holy Week in both the Coptic and Ethiopian churches. In fact, both texts were translated very early into the Ethiopian language, i.e., Gə'əz, probably by Abba Salāmāh in the 14th century.¹⁴

Even if considering these texts to be part of the *Apostolic Memoirs* is correct, maintaining that they were translated from previous Coptic originals is not very plausible. First, in neither text do we have indirect polemical element against the Chalcedonian Christology nor the use of the title Theotokos for the Virgin, as some of the Coptic *Apostolic Memoirs* do.¹⁵ In addition, I think that, besides the linguistic indications, attention should be paid to certain factors in these writings that demonstrate how they were elaborated over time and how their final redactors incorporated legends and inserted new elements.

Both texts are sermons attributed to Cyriacus of Bahnasa who narrates the *Memoirs* of Gamaliel (and Nicodemus) found in Jerusalem. As will be seen below, the main part of both texts, which can be considered the real *Memoirs* of Gamaliel, deals with the Biblical figure Pontius Pilate, while the rest of the events are related to the Virgin Mary and, in the case of the *Martyrdom*, some other legends. In addition, one might find a relationship between the material concerning Pontius Pilate in both texts. There was, in fact, a desire to consider the *Martyrdom of Pilate*, which narrates post-resurrection events, in particular the sufferings of Pilate, his martyrdom for the sake of Christ and the Dormition of the Virgin, to be the continuation of the *Lament of the Virgin* that describes the laments of the Virgin during the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the role of Pilate during these events.¹⁶ Despite this desire, probably of the final redactors, there are essential differences

13. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 70-71.

14. Cf. M. ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi* (cited n. 6), pp. 344-345, 367; Robert BEYLOT (ed), *Martyre de Pilate* (PO 204 [45.4]), Turnhout, Brepols, 1993; Marcus Antonius VAN DEN OUDENRIJN (ed.), *Gamaliel. Äthiopische texte zur Pilatusliteratur* (Spicilegium Friburgense 4), Freiburg, Universitätsverlag, 1959.

15. These were some of the factors that helped scholars to date several Coptic *Apostolic Memoirs*, cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 128-132.

16. Cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), p. 87.

and sometimes contradictions between the two works, which demonstrate that they belong to different authors.¹⁷ It is also evident that there is a relationship between the material concerning the Virgin Mary in both texts. This distinct Mariological material was used by the final redactors to emphasize the relationship between the two works and to make them seem as if they were written by the same author(s). To consider the Mariological material an incorporation into the texts, especially in the *Martyrdom*, is also demonstrated by the fact that these works were read during Holy Week and not during a Mariological celebration or feast.

The Virgin Mary and the *Lament of the Virgin*

The *Lament of the Virgin* should be considered a combination of two distinct parts,¹⁸ the first is concentrated upon the lament of the Virgin on the day of her son's crucifixion, and at the door of the holy sepulchre on the day of his resurrection when she still thought that her son was dead (p. 211-232 according to Mingana's edition; p. 189-202 according to Mingana's translation), while the second is related to the figure of Pontius Pilate as well as Herod, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and what happened to them after Christ's resurrection (p. 232-240 according to Mingana's edition; p. 202-210 according to Mingana's translation). This was in fact the reason for giving this work two titles: The *Lament of Mary* and the (*Arabic*) *Gospel of Gamaliel*.¹⁹

For the Mariological material, it is evident already from the introduction of the work that is based on the tradition that considers the Virgin Mary to be one of the women who went to Jesus' tomb on Sunday,²⁰ an element to which I will return later. After the introduction to the work, the author/redactor starts to justify how the Virgin Mary could weep for her son. His justification is based on comparing her weeping with that of Jacob over his son Joseph.²¹ The comparison is detailed; by a very careful reading, one might note how the author/redactor evidently uses an ancient, patristic and liturgical Christian tradition, i.e., the consider-

17. On the essential differences between these works see M. ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi* (cited n. 6), pp. 367-368. See also my analysis of both works, B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 216-259, where I highlighted the similarities and differences between them.

18. Cf. M. ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi* (cited n. 6), pp. 344-345.

19. See B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 217-218. In this paper I will refer to the whole work as the *Lament of the Virgin*.

20. See for example the introduction on the work, A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), p. 182.

21. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 182-184.



ation of Joseph as a figure or type of Christ,²² and how he elaborates it in his narrative making the Virgin the protagonist of the scene.

After this justification, the author/redactor mentions immediately that an angel came to Mary, who was at the house of John, and brought her the sad news of the crucifixion of Jesus at the Kranion.²³ That Mary had contact on various occasions with angels is not an original element in Christian literature,²⁴ but still it is very important for our topic, and I will discuss it further. The second important element one should note is the residence of Mary in the house of John, which reveals the sources of the author/redactor. It is certain, in fact, that some of the Mariological material here comes from the apocryphal literature on the life of the Virgin Mary, and especially those texts that deal with her relationship with John the Apostle after the resurrection of Christ,²⁵ an element very familiar in the Coptic literature regarding the Virgin.²⁶

On receiving the sad news Mary starts weeping and bewailing her son. The content of the first group of lamentations concentrates on the comparison between the good news the angel gave her at Nazareth, announcing the birth of her son, and the bad news the angel brought

22. Cf. Kristian S. HEAL, "Joseph as a Type of Christ in the Syriac Tradition," *Brigham Young University Studies* 41 (2002), pp. 29-49; A. W. ARGYLE, "Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching," *The Expository Times* 67 (1956), pp. 199-201; Martine DULAËY, "Joseph le patriarche, figure du Christ," in Pierre MARAVAL (ed.), *Figures de l'Ancien Testament chez les Pères* (Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 1), Strasbourg, Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristique, 1989, pp. 83-105; Jan H. BARKHUIZEN, "Romanos' encomium on Joseph. Portrait of an athlete," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 40 (1990), pp. 91-106.

23. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), p. 184.

24. Just to give some examples in this regard, one might remember the role of angels in the different Dormition narratives, when an angel came and spoke to the Virgin Mary regarding her death, cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, "A case of Mistaken Identity?" (cited n. 11), pp. 5-6; Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (The Oxford Early Christian Studies), Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 218; the same element is to be found and commented on in detail in a number of patristic homilies on the Dormition of the Virgin, cf. Brian E. DALEY, *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998. Another example comes from a Byzantine hymn of Eastertide, where an angel comes to the Virgin and announces the resurrection of her son, cf. <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/selected-liturgical-hymns> (accessed 14th November 2021).

25. On these apocryphal traditions see Simon C. MIMOUNI, *Dormition et assumption de Marie: Histoire des traditions anciennes* (Théologie historique 98), Paris, Beauchesne, 1995, pp. 585-597.

26. Cf. Mark SHERIDAN, *From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond. Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation* (Studia Anselmiana 156, Analecta Monastica 12), Rome, Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, 2012, p. 231; A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 180-181.

her now, announcing the crucifixion of that same son. After that, the Virgin starts to ask the disciples to go with her to Golgotha.²⁷ The narrative describes the lamentations of the Virgin after she had asked all the disciples and they refused to go with her and betrayed their Lord, all except John who indeed accompanied her to the Kranion. The content of her lamentation is concentrated on the betrayal of Peter who denied Christ, his Master. John reacts to this lamentation by explaining to the Virgin that the denial of Peter cannot be considered a betrayal, like the action of Judas, and that it was Christ who told Peter during the Last Supper that he would deny him. The denial of Peter, according to the narrative, was a symbol of repentance of sinners.²⁸ Certainly, one might read something symbolic underlying this affirmation, and I will examine this point at the very end of my paper. What interests me here is to highlight again that the author/redactor bases himself on previous apocryphal texts and some early Christian traditions such as the gnostic tradition, where the main figures are Mary Magdalene, Peter and John, and the main topic is the antagonism among them.²⁹ The author/redactor elaborates these sources in a special way so they can be applied to his narrative without its appearing anomalous to his readers.

The narrative describes in detail how the Virgin and John walk to Golgotha, then when the Virgin sees her son on the cross and hears his words addressed to her and to his disciple John (cf. Jn 19:26), she starts a new lamentation and wailing describing at the same time what was happening.³⁰ It is evident that the narrative here is based on the evangelical accounts, but it basically follows the previous Coptic apocryphal tradition regarding Pontius Pilate and the passion of Christ.³¹ One of the interesting elements that derived from the previous tradition and was elaborated by the author/redactor of the *Lament of the Virgin*, is the royal character of Jesus and his mother and the wish of the Emperor to make Jesus King of Judea.³² I shall re-examine this element in the next section of this paper, to understand how the royal status of

27. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 184-185.

28. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 185-187.

29. Cf. Ann Graham BROCK, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Harvard Theological Studies 51), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003; F. S. JONES (ed.), *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (SBL Symposium Series 20), Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

30. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 188-195.

31. Especially the Coptic Fragments mentioned above in footnote 6, and the apocryphal sources found in the homily of the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem, cf. Roelof VAN DEN BROEK (ed.), *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem, On the Life and the Passion of Christ. A Coptic Apocryphon* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 18), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2013.

32. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 192-193. While on this element in previous traditions see B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 185-230.



the Virgin was an important feature of her profile as presented in these Arabo-Coptic apocryphal texts.

The narrative continues and focuses again on the Virgin Mary, who is informed by John that Nicodemus and Joseph have laid Christ in a new tomb. The Virgin immediately starts weeping and wailing. At this point, the narrative offers us a new group of lamentations where the main issue is the Virgin's refusal to be comforted unless she can see her son's tomb. She again asks John to accompany her but this time the Apostle refuses saying that it would be difficult since the soldiers of the Governor are lying outside the sepulchre.³³

At this point, the scene changes for a while, and the narrative explains that the Jews promised to pay the soldiers to inform them first, i.e., before Pilate, if Christ should rise from the dead. When the resurrection takes place, the soldiers do go and inform the Jews, who feel confused; they cannot decide what to say when the news of the resurrection reaches Pilate and spreads around the city. They go to the tomb and check that it is empty.³⁴ At this point without any introduction by the author/redactor, the scene suddenly changes again: The Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene are approaching the tomb of Jesus; Mary Magdalene precedes the Virgin and notices that the stone has been rolled away from the door of the sepulchre.³⁵ It is clear that the narrative here is interpreting the synoptic Gospels where they report that Mary Magdalene with other women, went to the tomb of Jesus and discovered that it was empty (cf. Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11); one might well assume that the author of the narrative is closer here to the description of Matthew, who says that Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" went to the tomb, and in doing so he identifies this other Mary with the Virgin.³⁶ The main difference between the tradition transmitted by our narrative and that of the synoptic Gospels (and also John, cf. 20:1-2, 18, to whom I shall return later),³⁷ is that the principal figure in the scene is the Virgin Mary and not Mary Magdalene. The tradition as transmitted in our narrative follows, to some extent, the one found in other Coptic texts, like the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem's Coptic

33. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 195-197.

34. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 197-198.

35. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 198.

36. On the women who accompanied the Magdalene to the sepulchre of Christ see Claudia SETZER, "Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997), pp. 259-272; see also Carla RICCI, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1994; Elisabeth MOLTSMANN-WENDEL, *The Women around Jesus*, New York, Crossroad, 1982.

37. On the different traditions transmitted by the Gospels see Richard ATWOOD, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition* (European University Studies 457), Bern, Peter Lang, 1993, pp. 97-146.

homily *On the Passions*, where we read that both Marys, the Virgin and the Magdalene, went to the tomb and while they were crying, Jesus appeared to his mother and talked to her.³⁸

Although our narrative mentions both Marys at the beginning of this scene, the Magdalene, however, disappears immediately: The Virgin Mary is alone in front of the sepulchre and weeping because she cannot find the body of her son. In her lamentations the Virgin compares the birth of her son in Bethlehem, the joy she felt, the glory of the angels, the worship of the shepherds and the gifts of the Magi, with the crucifixion and death of that same son, his rejection by his people, the insults and sufferings they inflicted on him and the pain and sorrow she felt. Then, as she is weeping at the tomb, the risen Christ appears to her.³⁹ According to the narrative, it was the Virgin Mary to whom the risen Christ appeared first and not the Magdalene. It is not a simple confusion between the Virgin and the Magdalene, as Rendel Harris maintains,⁴⁰ but as many scholars have demonstrated, including Stephen Shoemaker based on Simon Mimouni and others,⁴¹ it is an early Christian tradition that considers Mary the mother of Christ to be the first person to see the risen Lord.

The author/redactor gives a detailed account of the dialogue between Jesus and his mother. The first part of this conversation is a notable development of the one transmitted in the Gospel of John, who narrates the conversation between Jesus and Mary Magdalene (cf. John 20:10-18),⁴² which is different from the description given by Matthew who says that Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (cf. Matt 28:1-10): 1) Jesus asks Mary why she is weeping; 2) Mary explains that the reason is that she did not find the body of her dead son, therefore she cannot feel comfort; 3) Jesus reveals to Mary that he knows what has happened to her son; 4) Mary thinks that Jesus is the owner of the garden where the tomb is sited and asks him to show her the place where the body was placed. After that, the account departs from the evangelical narrative, where Mary recognises the Lord after hearing him say "Oh, Mary" (cf. John 20:16); in ours Jesus himself

38. Cf. A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 48-49.

39. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 198-200.

40. Cf. Rendel HARRIS, "Introduction," in A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), p. 164.

41. Cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions* (cited n. 24), pp. 24-30; see also Simon C. MIMOUNI, "Controverse ancienne et récente autour d'une apparition du Christ ressuscité à la Vierge Marie," *Marianum* 57 (1995), pp. 239-268, reprint in S. C. MIMOUNI, *Dormition et assomption* (cited n. 25), pp. 129-156, in pp. 149-151 the scholar also refers to our texts.

42. John 20:11 mentions that Jesus appeared to Mary, without identifying which Mary; while in 20:18 he identifies her with the Magdalene. This element will be analyzed in detail in the last section of this paper.



reveals his identity to his mother and explains to her the mystery of resurrection.⁴³

In the Coptic tradition and literature, which probably follows the Egyptian Greek tradition⁴⁴ and some early Christian traditions, Christ's appearance to his mother after the resurrection is very common.⁴⁵ In addition, as Shoemaker notes, some gnostic apocryphal texts, like *Pistis Sophia*, describe the involvement of the *Gnostic Mary* in discussions with the risen Christ on the cosmic mysteries.⁴⁶ Usually these gnostic texts do not clarify precisely who the mentioned Mary is, so some scholars identify her with the Virgin others with the Magdalene, while a third group prefers to call her the *Gnostic Mary* without any specific identification.⁴⁷ In our text, however, it is clear that the mother of

43. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 200-201.

44. See for example Ciro GIANNELLI, "Témoignages patristiques grecs en faveur d'une apparition du Christ ressuscité à la Vierge Marie," *Mélanges M. Jugie, Revue des études byzantines* 11 (1953), pp. 106-119.

45. I have already mentioned the Fragments, but it is not the only Coptic text; there are pseudo-patristic texts, like the above-mentioned Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem (cf. R. VAN DEN BROEK [ed.], *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem* [cited n. 31], pp. 176, 177), which also speak of the apparition of the risen Christ to the Virgin Mary. See also Paul DEVOS, "L'apparition du Ressuscité à sa Mère: Un nouveau témoin copte," *Analecta Bollandiana* 96 (1978), p. 388; Paul DEVOS, "De Jean Chrysostome à Jean de Lycopolis: Chrysostome et Chalkèdon. Addendum. Deux autres textes. Appendice: Les apparitions des apôtres Pierre et Jean à Jean Chrysostome," *Analecta Bollandiana* 96 (1978), pp. 389-403. See also some other homilies attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem in A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 48-51, 56-57, 63-66; A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), p. 87.

46. Cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, "A case of Mistaken Identity?" (cited n. 11), p. 29.

47. Mary in the gnostic texts has an important place and symbolism. Scholars identifies her, sometimes with Mary the Magdalene, and other times with the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. It is clear, however, that the figure of Mary in the gnostic texts is distinct from the Biblical figures of the Magdalene and the Virgin, therefore, some other scholars call her *Gnostic Mary*. On the identification of the Gnostic Mary with the Magdalene see François BOVON, "Le Privilège Pascal de Marie-Madeleine," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984), pp. 50-62; Régis BURNET, *Marie-Madeleine. De la «pêcheresse repentie» à l'«épouse de Jésus»*. *Histoire de la réception d'une figure biblique*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2008. On the possibility of the Virgin Mary being identified with the Gnostic Mary, see Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, "JESUS' Gnostic Mom: Mary of Nazareth and the 'Gnostic Mary' Traditions," in Deirdre J. GOOD (ed.), *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, Bloomington Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 153-182; Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, "Rethinking the 'Gnostic Mary': Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 555-595. It must be mentioned that this position was rejected by other scholars, cf. Antti MARJANEN, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the so-Called Gnostic Christian Texts," in F. S. JONES (ed.), *Which Mary?* (cited n. 11), pp. 31-41; Ann Graham BROCK, "Setting the Record Straight-The Politics of Identification:

Christ is not the *Gnostic Mary*, this is evident in fact through the content of the text which is not gnostic at all. Nevertheless, the Virgin does assume some characteristics of the profile of the *Gnostic Mary* in this text, such as being the recipient of a theological message from Christ on the resurrection and its meaning, an element that is also found in previous Coptic pseudepigraphic patristic texts, like the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem's Coptic homily *On the Passions*,⁴⁸ in some *Apostolic Memoirs*,⁴⁹ and was to be developed further in the *Martyrdom of Pilate*, as will be analyzed below.

According to the different evangelical narratives (cf. Matt 28:7, 10, Mark 16:9-10; Luke 24:9-10 and John 20:17-18) the women who went to the sepulchre (for Matthew they were Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; for Mark and John it was the Magdalene alone; for Luke they were some women including the Magdalene), were told by the risen Jesus (according to Matthew, Mark and John) or by an "angel" (as Matthew and Luke describe), to go and announce the resurrection to the disciples. In our narrative, however, the Virgin alone received this order, becoming the person responsible for announcing the resurrection message to his Apostles and followers.⁵⁰

At this point, the Virgin disappears from the narrative, which from now on becomes concentrated on Pilate, Nicodemus and Joseph, their verification of the resurrection of Christ and the role of the Jews in all this.⁵¹ In fact, taking into consideration that 1) just in this second part Gamaliel asserts that he himself witnessed the events he describes;⁵² 2) the existence of some Coptic fragment that seems to describe some Virgin lamentations;⁵³ 3) a number of Mariological texts are attributed in the Arabo-Coptic literature to Cyriacus the bishop of Bahnasa, one

Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in *Pistis Sophia*," in F. S. JONES (ed.), *Which Mary?* (cited n. 11), pp. 43-52; Enrico NORELLI, *Marie des apocryphes. Enquête sur la mère de Jésus dans le christianisme antique* (Christianismes antiques), Genève, Labor et Fides, 2009, p. 70. In our texts, however, we can notice that the Virgin Mary has some elements or characteristics belonging to the profile of the *Gnostic Mary*, however she is not the Gnostic Mary but the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

48. Cf. A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 48-51.

49. On the dialogues between the risen Christ and other figures in the gnostic literature and its development in the *Apostolic Memoirs* see D. M. BURNS, "From the Gnostic Dialogues to the Apostolic Memoirs" (cited n. 6).

50. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), p. 202.

51. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 202-210.

52. *Ibidem*, pp. 207, 210.

53. Cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 85-86. As said above it is not certain whether these fragments derive from a work that can be considered the original Coptic text of the Arabic lamentations here, therefore, it might be more plausible to see in such Coptic work one of the sources of our text.



might maintain that the original *Apostolic Memoir* here is the second part that was combined, through a careful elaboration, with a homily on the Virgin Mary, her lamentations and the encounter with her risen son.

Mary and the *Martyrdom of Pilate*

This is not the place to discuss the elaboration this work had undergone before its final version⁵⁴ but the attribution to both Cyriacus of Bahnasa and to Gamaliel,⁵⁵ the Mariological material, which is clearly distinct from the material regarding Pilate and what happened to him after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, constitutes a strong indication of the hypothesis that the final redactor used at least two different sources for his single narrative. In addition, as in the *Lament* also in the *Martyrdom* the narratives relating to Pilate are witnessed by Gamaliel,⁵⁶ an element that makes me maintain that the *Apostolic Memoir* is this part of the final version of the work. In addition, there is a relationship between the material attributed to Gamaliel in the *Lament of the Virgin*, and what is attributed to Gamaliel in the *Martyrdom of Pilate*. Both aim to demonstrate the figure of Pontius Pilate in a positive light, a common feature in the literary genre of the *Apostolic Memoirs*,⁵⁷ and as said above, the second text aims to be a continuation of the first.

Unlike the *Lament*, where we have a clear combination of two distinct works, the Mariological material in the *Martyrdom*, at least the first part of it (i.e., part II in the following table), is to be considered insertions into the main work. However, before analyzing this Mariological material it would be useful to see the structure of the final version of the *Martyrdom of Pilate*, so the reader can easily see where this Mariological material was inserted, and understand the importance of the figure of Mary for the redactor of the work:⁵⁸

54. See the opinion of Erbetta regarding the different versions of the Ethiopic translation, M. ERBETTA (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi* (cited n. 6), p. 367. See also the introduction to my new critical edition of the *Martyrdom*, where I discuss the differences between the versions of the text in the Arabic and Arabo-Garshūni (Arabic with Syriac alphabet) manuscripts, B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 304-534.

55. See for example the preface, vv. 3-5, *Ibidem*, pp. 486-486; the epilogue vv. 373-374, *Ibidem*, p. 533.

56. See for example v. 43, *Ibidem*, p. 495; v. 202, *Ibidem*, p. 514; v. 299, *Ibidem*, p. 525.

57. Cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), p. 128.

58. As said above, I follow my edition, therefore, note that the division, the titles and the subtitles were added to the work by myself and are not original. On the methodology I followed in this regard, see B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 323-534.

Part	General title	Content
I	Preface (vv. 1-5)	The first attribution of the work (i.e., to Cyriacus) and the mention of the aim of the work (i.e., narrating the passion of Pilate for Christ); the second attribution (i.e., to Gamaliel) who witnessed, with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, what happened to Pilate.
II	Encounter of the Virgin Mary with the risen Christ at the tomb (vv. 6-33)	This part was inserted into the work very late, as I shall explain, at the point where Mary and Christ discuss the mysteries of the resurrection.
III	The main part: the Martyrdom of Pilate (vv. 34-306)	The sufferings inflicted on Pilate and his wife Procla by the Jews because of their belief in Christ and his resurrection. Pilate is summoned to Tiberius in Rome; Tiberius kills Pilate; Pilate is buried with his wife and children near the tomb of Christ. Pilate is considered a Martyr.
IV	Dormition of the Virgin and the mission of John the Apostle to Rome (vv. 307-367)	Tiberius wants to honor the mother of Christ and to make her queen; the Dormition of the Virgin (another encounter of the Virgin Mary and Christ before her dormition); Christ appears to John the Apostle and announces to him that he should go to Rome; John's mission to Rome; Tiberius wants to see Christ's face and form; John paints an icon of Christ on the cross; John returns to the Apostles and narrates what occurred in Rome.
V	Mary's visionary appearance to the Apostles after her Dormition (vv. 368-372)	Mary appears to the Apostles and affirms that Pilate and his family are in Heaven.
VI	Epilogue (vv. 373-375)	Gamaliel confirms that he has witnessed the passion of Christ and what happened after the resurrection; Cyriacus asks the readers to pray for him and to forgive him.

The Virgin Mary plays no role in the main part of the work, i.e., the Martyrdom of Pilate (part III); however, she is the principal figure in the rest of the work. As we shall see, the Mariological material is enriched with other legends and apocryphal traditions. One part of this material is probably related to the homilies attributed to Cyriacus in the Arabo-Coptic tradition and also to the Mariological material used for the *Lament of the Virgin*.

The encounter between the Virgin and the risen Christ, inserted into the *Martyrdom*, is a development of the encounter narrated in the



Lament. A linguistic and thematic examination demonstrates that verses 6-33 are an anomalous insertion. In fact, the end of verse 5 mentions the miracles which occurred at the empty tomb of Christ, an event that had already been narrated in the *Lament of the Virgin*,⁵⁹ and it is therefore certain that the author of the *Martyrdom* wanted to continue the narrative of the second part of the *Lament* belonging to Gamaliel. Verse 6, however, where we have again, according to one manuscript (BN Syr. 273), the attribution to Cyriacus of Bahnasa,⁶⁰ goes back to the time of the crucifixion and death of Christ, the desire of the Virgin to see her son's body and her lamentations because she could not go to the tomb.⁶¹ An attempt, I think, to link this part with the Mariological material of the *Lament*. Then, in verses 7-33, we have the description of the encounter of the Virgin with Christ, which I shall analyze later. In v. 34, the text returns to the miracles that occurred at the empty tomb of Christ and the fact that Pilate witnessed them.⁶²

For the encounter between the Virgin Mary and the risen Christ one might easily notice that in verse 7 the author combines elements from the four evangelical narratives (cf. Matt 28:1, Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1-2 and John 20:1). In this verse, the main figure is the Virgin Mary and not the Magdalene, whose name, unlike the *Lament of the Virgin* and the tradition it follows, is not mentioned here: the Virgin Mary goes to the tomb with some women; the Virgin precedes them and reaches the tomb alone and finds that the stone has been moved.⁶³ In verses 8-16,⁶⁴ instead, the author faithfully follows the narrative of John 20:11-16, where the Evangelist has *Mary* as the main figure, without any further identification,⁶⁵ though in our narrative she is identified with the Virgin, following the earlier Coptic tradition transmitted in some apocryphal texts and pseudepigraphic patristic writings like the Coptic homilies of Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem.⁶⁶

59. Cf. A. MINGANA (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies* (cited n. 3), pp. 202-210.

60. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 326 footnote 67.

61. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 488.

62. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 493.

63. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 488.

64. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 488-489.

65. On who this unidentified Mary was, see J. DUNCAN M. DERRETT, "Miriam and the Resurrection (John 20,16)," *Downside Review* 111 (1993), pp. 174-186. See also S. J. SHOEMAKER, "A case of Mistaken Identity?" (cited n. 11), pp. 9-17.

66. It is very interesting to note that the author of these homilies invents a relationship between the two Marys in order to resolve the problem of the identification of the unidentified Mary in John 20:11 with the Magdalene in John 20:18, the Magdalene was the sister of the Virgin's mother and they all lived in Magdalia, a village near Jerusalem; therefore he sometimes calls the Virgin Mary the Magdalene, cf. A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 26-31, 158-159.

The narrative continues with a conversation between Mary and Christ, based on John 20:16-17. The main topic of this conversation is the fact that Christ is risen, as he himself had said, and therefore Mary shall feel joy, and announce the resurrection to the disciples. A careful examination of the text of the *Martyrdom* and its counterpart in John, shows that here we have an insertion into the evangelical narrative which changes its final element; the author/redactor replaces John's account, which has Christ declaring that he is going to the Father, with material taken from the narrative of Matt 28:10 and Mark 16:7, i.e., the encounter of Christ with his disciples in Galilee.⁶⁷

In verse 20 the Virgin asks Christ to explain more concerning the mysteries and secrets of his passion, crucifixion and resurrection. Christ gives her a long answer (vv. 21-30)⁶⁸ formulated with high theological, especially soteriological, content. He explains for his mother that his passion, crucifixion, death, descent into and destruction of Hades were for the salvation of Adam. It is worth noting that the same elements present here in Christ's explanation, are mentioned in another work attributed to Cyriacus of Bahnasa. Indeed, an Arabo-Coptic homily *On the Assumption of Mary* attributed to him and preserved in MS Vat. Ar. 170 fols 317v-340r⁶⁹ contains a number of similarities. This leads to maintain that the Mariological material inserted into this work probably belongs to the production, in the Arabo-Coptic tradition, attributed to the bishop of Bahnasa, especially when we know that the distinct parts IV and V of the *Martyrdom* deal with the Virgin's Assumption.

The conversation between Christ and his mother prompts a return to the question on the *Gnostic Mary*. Through this insertion the redactor of the *Martyrdom* tries to develop the tradition already seen in the *Lament*. It is the Virgin Mary, not the unidentified Mary of the gnostic texts, who receives from her risen son the explanations concerning the secrets and mysteries of the passion and resurrection and their soteriological dimension. In fact, our text gives the Virgin one characteristic from the profile of the *Gnostic Mary*, but the conversation does not contain any gnostic elements. Having explained these mysteries and secrets to his mother, Christ, in verses 31-33, again orders the Virgin not to touch him but to go and announce his resurrection to the Apostles and tell them to go and meet him in Galilee.⁷⁰

67. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 489-490.

68. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 490-492.

69. The homily is still unedited, I read it in the manuscript MS Vat. Ar. 170, and I noticed the similarities between it and the content of the narrative in the *Martyrdom*. For an analysis of the content of the homily see Arnold VAN LANTSCHOOT, "L'Assomption de la sainte vierge chez les Coptes," *Gregorianum* 27 (1946), pp. 493-526.

70. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 493.



After this encounter the Virgin disappears from the narrative, which now concentrates on Pilate and the account of his sufferings and his martyrdom in Rome at the behest of Tiberius, i.e., part III. Linguistic analysis and several elements from its transmission in different manuscripts suggest that part III was probably a separate work, into which, as mentioned earlier, other material was inserted. The author uses and elaborates number of sources in his narrative, mainly the apocryphal cycle on Pilate, the Coptic tradition concerning Pilate and the early Christian legends about Tiberius and his baptism.⁷¹ It seems that the figure of Tiberius, an important presence in the legends about Pilate, was very popular among the Christians of Egypt and Ethiopia.⁷² This same figure played an important role in linking parts III and IV in the final version of the text of the *Martyrdom of Pilate* that we have today.

Without entering into too much detail, part III recounts that Tiberius' son was raised from the dead in the name of Christ, and this led to his father believing in Christ. Part IV starts with the scene in which Tiberius and his wife desire to make the Virgin, the mother of Jesus Christ, a queen so she would be honoured and protected (vv. 307-312).⁷³ This scene, in fact, is the introduction to the narrative of the Dormition of the Virgin (part IV), or as I said, the way the author/redactor managed to link both parts together.

It is not the only text in the Coptic tradition where legends concerning Tiberius are inserted or elaborated in the context of the Virgin Dormition. For example, in one Arabo-Coptic homily *on the Dormition of the Virgin* attributed to Cyril of Alexandria we have the legend on the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius.⁷⁴ Here, however, the author/redactor elaborates another tradition from Coptic apocryphal literature, that is, the element of royalty.⁷⁵ We saw above how the same element was used in the *Lament of the Virgin*. This legend therefore

71. See my analysis in B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 233-259.

72. Cf. Ernesta CERULLI, "Tiberius and Pontius Pilate in Ethiopian Tradition and Poetry," *The Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), pp. 141-158.

73. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 526-527.

74. Cf. A. VAN LANTSCHOOT, "L'Assomption" (cited n. 69), pp. 508-509. This same tradition regarding the Dormition is found in Ethiopian literature, cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions* (cited n. 24), pp. 375-396. On the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius see Ilaria RAMELLI, "The Possible Origin of the Abgar-Addai Legend: Abgar the Black and Emperor Tiberius," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 16 (2013), pp. 211-223. See also James CORKE-WEBSTER, "A Man for the Times: Jesus and the Abgar Correspondence in Eusebius of Caesarea's Ecclesiastical History," *Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017), pp. 563-587. On the Coptic translations of the Abgar legend see Søren GIVERSEN, "Ad Abgarum. The Sahidic Version of the Letter to Abgar on a wooden Tablet," *Acta Orientalia* 24 (1959), pp. 189-198.

75. In regards see, A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), pp. 132-138. See also E. REVILLOUT (ed.), *Les Évangiles* (cited n. 6), pp. 144-

forms a perfect link between the narrative about Pilate and the one of the Dormition, replacing Christ with the Virgin.

According to the narrative, Jesus, the king of kings, had appeared to the Virgin and to his Apostles and informed them regarding the desire of Tiberius to appoint the Virgin a queen (v. 313); he told John to go to Tiberius instead of the Virgin (v. 314); and then addressed a speech to his mother (vv. 315-322).⁷⁶

This is not the first text where it is said that Christ appeared to the Virgin and informed her of her Dormition,⁷⁷ but the content of Christ's speech is related directly to the weeping and lamentations of the Virgin we read in the *Lament*. Such an element demonstrates how the author/redactor also used the figure of the Virgin to link the two works. In this speech the author/redactor, in addition, sends his readers a clear message: The Virgin Mary deserves to be a queen not on earth and in this world, but in the Kingdom of Heaven. Immediately in verse 323 he follows one of the earliest Coptic traditions on the Dormition⁷⁸ and narrates that Christ removed the Virgin from this world and placed her in Paradise.⁷⁹

The Apostles, the narrative continues, felt sorrow and sadness at the transition of the Virgin, who had comforted them since Christ left them and ascended to Heaven. They expressed their feeling to Christ himself (vv. 324-325) who answered them with a long discourse (vv. 326-333).⁸⁰ That the Apostles felt sorrow and sadness is one element that appears in all the traditions concerning the Dormition. The same might be said of the fact that Christ addressed a discourse to his Apostles on the occasion of the Dormition or the Assumption of the Virgin. What is interesting, however, is that the contents of Christ's discourse and some of the apocalyptic images used in it, like visions and symbols, are mentioned in the homily *On the Assumption of Mary* attributed to Cyriacus of Bahnasa.

Again, the text underlines the fact that Christ ordered to John to go to Rome and to meet Tiberius and to bear witness to what occurred to him on the cross at the hands of the Jews (v. 334). Although the principal figure in the whole scene of our narrative is the Virgin Mary, our author/redactor inserted this apocryphal legend into his own narrative regarding the Dormition, elaborating what he found in his Coptic tradition. In fact, the mission of John to Rome is already mentioned in

146, 151-153 and my analysis in B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 186-196.

76. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 527-528.

77. Cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions* (cited n. 24), pp. 9-77.

78. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 57-58. On the different Coptic traditions regarding the Dormition see also A. VAN LANTSCHOOT, "L'Assomption" (cited n. 69), pp. 493-526.

79. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 528.

80. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 528-589.



early Coptic apocryphal texts.⁸¹ It is worthy of note that besides Mary and John, Tiberius also plays an important role in connecting the different narratives.

In Rome and before Tiberius John bears witness to his relationship to Jesus Christ (vv. 337-341). Amazed, Tiberius asks John how the Jews could pierce Christ's divine side with a lance (v. 342). The answer of John, whose Gospel is the only one to mention this event (cf. John 19:34), concentrates on the fact that the life of all believers depends on the water and blood that sprang from the side of Christ (v. 344). To confirm his assertion John recounts the miracle that occurred in Cana of Galilee, a miracle which is only mentioned in the Gospel of John (cf. John 2:1-11), and adds here that on this occasion Christ explained this mystery to his mother Mary (vv. 345-349).⁸² A connection between the Virgin Mary, the crucifixion and the miracle at Cana of Galilee is to be found in number of texts in the Coptic tradition, like the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem's Coptic homily *On the Passions*.⁸³ What is original in our text is that the Virgin, who asked Christ to perform this miracle and witnessed it, is the recipient of her son's explanation of its symbolism. Thus, the Virgin Mary is not simply connected to her son's public ministry⁸⁴ but participates in and witnesses a mystery and receives its meaning, i.e., the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and its symbolism, i.e., the life-giving Eucharist (and Baptism = the Church).

The author/redactor goes on to elaborate another apocryphal tradition, according to which Tiberius asks John to paint an icon of Christ on the cross (vv. 350-354).⁸⁵ This tradition is related to the one of the miracle of the image of Tiberias and the foundation of the monastery of Mār Ḥanīnā,⁸⁶ while its use by the author/redactor highlights the importance of the veneration of the icons and the cross among Christians and the meaning of the representation of the crucifixion (vv. 355-365),⁸⁷ an important element in understanding the dating of this kind of text, as I shall explain below.

In miraculous fashion, John returns to Jerusalem, precisely to the Mount of Olives, and narrates what happened to him in Rome before Tiberius (vv. 366-367). To conclude his narrative of John's mission

81. Cf. E. REVILLOUT (ed.), *Les Évangiles* (cited n. 6), p. 204.

82. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 529-530.

83. Cf. A. CAMPAGNANO (ed.), *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme* (cited n. 1), pp. 50-51.

84. Cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, "A case of Mistaken Identity?" (cited n. 11), pp. 21-22.

85. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 531.

86. Cf. Pietro D'AGOSTINO, "La légende du miracle de l'image de Tibériade (BHO 450) et la fondation monastique de Mār Ḥanīnā: un regard croisé sur les sources," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 82 (2016), pp. 403-420.

87. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), pp. 531-532.

to Rome and to relate it to the story of the Dormition, and also to insert this whole part IV into the narrative of the Martyrdom of Pilate, part III, the author/redactor again uses the figure of Mary as a connecting instrument (part V, vv. 368-372) narrating the story of its visionary appearance to the Apostles after her Dormition.⁸⁸ It is known that in some versions of the Dormition, like the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem's Coptic homily *On the Dormition*, Mary informs the Apostles of her coming death. In some other versions the Virgin appears to the Apostles after her Assumption. The circumstances of this appearance are different from version to version.⁸⁹ The author/redactor of our narrative uses this element here and successfully achieves his aim, i.e., to link all the parts of the narrative together and to conclude it. In his conclusion, the profile of the Virgin is also perfected. She is not the *Gnostic Mary* who communicates hidden mysteries with gnostic content regarding the resurrection to the Apostles;⁹⁰ she is rather the Virgin Mary who reveals the salvific mysteries of the resurrection and bears witness to the Apostles regarding the reality of the resurrection and life after death and confirming the orthodoxy of the martyrdom of Pilate and the correctness of his sanctification.

Mary *Apostola Apostolorum* and the Challenge of Islam

Why did the final redactors of the texts taken into examination incorporated into narrations related to Pontius Pilate Mariological materials? To answer this important question, we must return to the dating of these texts. From linguistic point of view, it is hard to assert that these texts are translated from Coptic, but it is clear that they are based on the previous Coptic literature, especially the one of the *Apostolic Memoirs*. It is known, in addition, that the Copts started to write in Arabic during the 10th century.⁹¹ Some elements of the material belong-

88. *Ibidem*, pp. 532-533.

89. Cf. S. J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions* (cited n. 24), pp. 9-77.

90. On the relation between the *Gnostic Mary* and the earliest tradition of the Dormition see *Ibidem*, pp. 238-256. See also Philip SELLEW, "An Early Coptic Witness to the *Dormitio Mariae* at Yale: P.CtYBR inv. 1788 Revisited," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 37 (2000), pp. 37-69. However, as we mentioned in footnote 47 the hypothesis of Shoemaker on the identification of the *Gnostic Mary* with Virgin Mary is rejected by other scholars. See also E. NORELLI, *Marie des apocryphes* (cited n. 47), pp. 129-132.

91. Cf. Georg GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Studi e Testi 133), Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1975, p. 295; Mark SWANSON, "Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā", in David THOMAS – Alex MALLET (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2 (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2010, p. 491.



ing to the tradition of Pilate help us to date it to the beginning of the 11th century.⁹²

The most important elements might be the burning of Christ's tomb by the Jews in the narrative of the *Martyrdom of Pilate* (cf. vv. 104-107),⁹³ and the topic regarding Christ's resurrection. If we take into consideration that in Arab-Christian texts we understand "Muslims" behind the term "Jews",⁹⁴ one might remember that the Fatimid Caliph al-Hākīm bi-Amr Allāh (985-1021), known as the *Mad Caliph*,⁹⁵ in 1009 ordered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to be demolished and the Holy Sepulchre to be burned. Although the reasons for this decision are still unclear, there are some Christian texts that consider the miracle of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the day of the Resurrection to be one of the reasons underlying this decision, especially since Muslims did not believe in the miracle and also had doubts about the death and resurrection of Christ.⁹⁶

The period of this Caliph is marked by severe persecutions and discriminations against Christians, especially the Copts.⁹⁷ In addition, the destruction and burning of the Holy Sepulchre, at least in the eyes of local Christians, was one of the reasons that gave rise to the First Crusade.⁹⁸ The end of the narrative on the *Martyrdom* mentions the

92. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος, άπιστος ή πιστός*; (cited n. 7), pp. 218, 240, 242, 257-258.

93. Cf. B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 503.

94. For more details see Sidney H. GRIFFITH, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988), pp. 65-94.

95. On the reign of this Caliph see Sadik A. ASSAAD, *The Reign of al-Hakim bi Amr Allah (386/996-411/1021): A Political Study*, Beirut, Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1974; Paul E. WALKER, *Caliph of Cairo: al-Hākīm bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2009; Michael BRETT, *The Fatimid Empire* (The Edinburgh History of the Islamic Empires), Edinburgh, University Press, 2017, pp. 125-156.

96. Cf. Jan M. F. VAN REETH, "Al-Qumāma et le Qā'im de 400 H.: le truage de la lampe sur le tombeau du Christ," in Urbain VERMEULEN – Daniel DE SMET (eds), *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras 2. Proceedings of the 4th and 5th international colloquium organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1995 and 1996* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 83), Leuven, Peeters, 1998, pp. 171-190; Marius CANARD, "La destruction de l'Église de la Résurrection par le Calife Hakim et la descente du feu sacré," *Byzantion* 35 (1965), pp. 16-43; Renata SALVARANI, *Il Santo Sepolcro a Gerusalemme. Riti, testi e racconti tra Costantino e l'età delle crociate* (Monumenta Studia Instrumenta Liturgica 68), Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012, 155-176.

97. Cf. Alberto ELLI, *Storia della Chiesa Copta*, vol. 2 (Studia Orientalia Christiana Monographiae 13), Cairo – Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 2003, pp. 86-99.

98. For John France, the event of the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been forgotten by the time of the First Crusade, but it is possible

destruction of Jerusalem by Tiberius (cf. v. 306),⁹⁹ but this information is historically incorrect, since this action was in fact carried out by the Emperor Titus in 70; the narrative might, however, be alluding to the Crusades and the occupation of Jerusalem in 1099.¹⁰⁰ In fact, one might not forget that the same *Martyrdom*, as already mentioned, narrates how the Jews burned the Holy Sepulchre (cf. vv. 104-107), which can allude to what al-Ḥākim have made, i.e., burning the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

All this might lead us to conclude that the material related to Pilate in the *Lament* and the *Martyrdom* was written and redacted during the period of al-Ḥākim, and the final elaboration probably took place after the First Crusade. Consequently, our narratives should be considered apocalyptic and written in apocryphal language, based on previous apocryphal traditions and legends circulating among the Copts.

Accepting this hypothesis one should understand that the “Jews and their chiefs” in our texts is an allusion to the “Muslims and their governors”, “Tiberius and the Romans” alludes to the “Crusaders and the Europeans” and “Pilate, his wife Procla and his family” alludes to the “Copts”, who believed in Christ and for their belief suffered persecution, discriminations and even martyrdom. In fact, whereas in the previous Coptic apocryphal literature Pilate is considered “Egyptian” and “Copt”,¹⁰¹ in our texts he is called “foreigner” (cf. v. 58)¹⁰² and “Copt” (cf. v. 80).¹⁰³

Other elements that help our understanding of these texts in their context, i.e., the Fatimid period of al-Ḥākim, include the following:

- 1) In the *Lament*, the denial of Peter, his betrayal of Christ and his repentance compared to the betrayal of Judas, are understood to refer to the denial and betrayal of Christ by persecuted Christians, and their repentance, behaviour compared with the betrayal of those who were eventually converted to Islam.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in

to maintain that for the local Christians it was still one of the reasons that led to the Crusade, cf. John FRANCE, “The Destruction of Jerusalem and the First Crusade,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47 (1996), pp. 1-17. See also the opinion of Jacques TAGHER, *Aqbāt wa-muslimūn: Munḡu al-faḡh al-‘arabī ilā ‘ām 1922*, Cairo, [s.n.], 1951, p. 129.

99. Cf. B. EBEID, Πόντιος Πιλάτος (cited n. 4), p. 526.

100. Cf. Christopher TYERMAN, *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 153-159; Susan B. EDGINGTON – Luis GARCÍA-GUIJARRO (eds), *Jerusalem the Golden. The Origin and impact of the first Crusade*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014.

101. Cf. A. SUCIU, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (cited n. 2), p. 128; B. EBEID, Πόντιος Πιλάτος, ἀπιστος ἢ πιστός; (cited n. 6), pp. 193-194, 229.

102. Cf. B. EBEID, Πόντιος Πιλάτος (cited n. 4), p. 497.

103. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 500.

104. About the Christians under the Fatimids, the persecutions they suffered and the conversion to Islam of some of them, see J. TAGHER, *Aqbāt wa-muslimūn*



fact, the text explains that Peter was symbol of sinners and their repentance.

- 2) In the *Martyrdom* the role of the icon of the crucifixion is evident. I have said that behind this part of the narrative, where Tiberius and John demonstrate their veneration of the icon of Christ on the cross, one might read a Christian apologetic response to the accusation of Iconolatry. In fact, very early on, Islam rejected the cult of icons and considered it Iconolatry.¹⁰⁵ Christians, in their polemics and apologetic works against Muslims, always underline the fact that for them the veneration of icons does not mean Iconolatry.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the fact that the icon in our text depicts Christ's crucifixion, there is no doubt that it should be seen as relating to the Muslims' rejection of the crucifixion of Christ and their opinion that someone other than Christ died on the cross (cf. Q 4:157); it follows that they reject the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection.¹⁰⁷ It seems that this narrative is an apologetic reflection of events that took place during the al-Ḥākīm reign, when these specific topics were of particular importance. In fact, we know that there is another Arabo-Coptic apologetic work that

(cited n. 98), pp. 118-152, especially pp. 126-135 where the scholar deals with the period of al-Ḥākīm.

105. Cf. Daan VAN REENEN, "The Bilderverbot: A New Survey," *Der Islam* 67 (1990), pp. 27-77; Terry ALLEN, "Aniconism and Figural Representation in Islamic Art," in Terry ALLEN (ed.), *Five Essays on Islamic Art*, Sebastopol, Solipsist Press, 1988, pp. 17-37; G. R. D. KING, "Islam, Iconoclasm and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985), pp. 267-277.

106. Cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, "Christians, Muslim and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times," in Brigitte GRONEBERG – Hermann SPIECKERMANN (eds), *Die Welt der Götterbilder*, Berlin – New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2007, pp. 347-380; Sidney H. GRIFFITH, "Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985), pp. 53-73; Sidney H. GRIFFITH, "Theodore Abū Qurrah's On the Veneration of the Holy Icons," *Sacred Art Journal* 13 (1992), pp. 3-19. See also Sidney H. GRIFFITH (trans.), *Theodore Abū Qurrah. A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (Eastern Christian Texts in Translation 1), Leuven, Peeters, 1997; Paola PIZZO (tr.), *Teodoro Abū Qurra, La difesa delle Icone. Trattato sulla venerazione delle immagini* (Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano 1), Milan, Jaca Book, 1995.

107. Cf. Todd LAWSON, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 2009; Mark N. SWANSON, "Folly to the Ḥunafā': The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," in Eammanouela GRYPEOU – Mark N. SWANSON – David THOMAS (eds), *The Encounters of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5), Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp. 237-256.

deals with the crucifixion and the veneration of Christ's cross,¹⁰⁸ which demonstrates the sensitivity of this question at that time.

- 3) Both our texts function as a testimony of Christ's resurrection. As just mentioned, Islam, which has its own doctrine concerning Christ, rejects the doctrine of his resurrection.¹⁰⁹ As I noted above, the disputation over this doctrine was probably one of the reasons behind the decision of al-Ḥākīm to demolish the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to burn the Holy Sepulchre itself. And this element can, in fact, help us understand the need for the figure of Mary to be inserted as *Apsotola Apostolorum* in the narratives about Pilate that are related directly to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

The Virgin Mary is the only female figure to whom the Qur'ān pays great attention. Besides being the only woman identified by name in the Qur'ān, and apart from the 70 verses that refer to her, there is a whole chapter in the Qur'ān with her name as its title, i.e., Sūrah 19. All this indicates the special place the Virgin Mary holds in the Qur'ān and the marked importance Muslims attach to her. Here one can understand why in our narratives Tiberius wished to make Mary a queen. This is not the place to analyze the profile of the Virgin Mary in the Qur'ān; what is important for me is to underline that for the Islamic tradition the Virgin Mary is an example of the true believer. She is chosen, like the prophets, receives visits from angels and is compared to other important female figures like Eve. She is a model of absolute obedience to divine will; and finally, she defends herself against her accusers.¹¹⁰

108. Cf. Stephen DAVIS – Bilal ORFALI – Samuel NOBLE (eds), *A Disputation over a Fragment of the Cross. A Medieval Arabic Text from the History of Christian-Jewish-Muslim Relations in Egypt* (Recherches, Nouvelle Série, B. Orient Chrétien 10), Beirut, Dar el-Machreq, 2012.

109. Cf. Tarif KHALIDI (ed.), *The Muslim Jesus. Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001; Neal ROBINSON, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1991; Gabriel S. REYNOLDS, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009), pp. 237-258; Mahmoud M. AYOUB, "Toward an Islamic Christology II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion," *The Muslim World* 70 (1980), pp. 91-121; Suleiman A. MOURAD, "Jesus in the Qur'an and Other Early Islamic Texts," in James H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *Jesus Research. New Methodologies and Perceptions. The Second Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research Princeton 2007* (Princeton-Prague Symposia Series on the Historical Jesus 2), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2014, pp. 753-765.

110. Cf. Barbara STOWASSER, "Mary," in Jane Dammen McAULIFFE (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 4, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2004, pp. 288-296; Hosn ABBOUD, *Mary in the Qur'an. A Literary Reading* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'an), London, Routledge, 2014; Suleiman A. MOURAD, "Mary in the



This, in fact, is the profile of the Virgin in our texts: she receives visits from angels, she is compared to the prophets, but above all she is considered the *Apostola Apostolorum*. The most important element, then, in Mary's profile according to our narratives is that she was the first person to see the risen Christ. This, as said above, is an ancient Christian tradition, also found in some Coptic pseudo-patristic and apocryphal texts. This tradition, however, was accorded a kind of revival in our narratives for apologetical reasons. The resurrection of Christ was not just rejected by Muslims, but also, during the period of al-Hākīm, celebrations of the feast of the resurrection at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were forbidden.¹¹¹ Our narratives are therefore a Christian reaction in apocryphal writing genre with apologetical and catechetical dimensions: it is the Virgin, the most honoured Lady for Muslims, who witnessed the resurrection, having seen the risen Christ¹¹² and conversed with him. She also, being a model of obedience, was given the order to announce this message of Joy. Moreover, her belief in the resurrection should be considered a model to be followed.

As a result, for their part, Christians should not doubt their beliefs but remain faithful and avoid being converted to Islam. And for their part Muslims, who respect and honour Mary, the mother of Christ, should follow her example, as a true believer. Since she was the first to announce the message of the resurrection, they, Muslims, should not have doubts about this belief and should not accuse Christians of false doctrines. Therefore, the author/redactor used Islamic language and doctrines so he could be understood by his probable Muslim readers.¹¹³

As *Apostola Apostolorum*, the Virgin also received explanations from her son on Christian mysteries such as the meaning of salvation,¹¹⁴ on sacraments like the Eucharist, and on other doctrines like the place of

Qur'ān. A Reexamination of Her Presentation," in Gabriel S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'an), New York, Routledge, 2008, pp. 163-174; IDEM, "On the Qur'anic Stories about Mary and Jesus," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999), pp. 13-24; Jane I. SMITH – Yvonne Y. HADDAD, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary," *The Muslim World* 79 (1989), pp. 161-187.

111. Cf. J. TAGHER, *Aqbāt wa-muslimūn* (cited n. 98), p. 129.

112. For the importance of having seen the risen Christ see Stephen T. DAVIS, "Seeing the Risen Jesus," in Stephen T. DAVIS – Daniel KENDALL – Gerald O'COLLINS (eds), *The Resurrection. An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 161-187.

113. See for example footnote 4107 in B. EBEID, *Πόντιος Πιλάτος* (cited n. 4), p. 491.

114. It must be noted, in addition, that the conversation between Christ and Mary on the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection reflects the difference between Christian and Islamic doctrines on salvation. In this regard see Mahmoud AYOUB, "The Idea of Redemption in Christianity and Islam," in Irfan A. OMAR (ed.), *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, New York, Orbis Books, 2007, pp. 90-97.

martyrs in the Kingdom of Heaven. All these topics, in fact, were central in the disputations between Christian and Muslim scholars, and we find them as principal points in theological texts produced during the Fatimid period.¹¹⁵ Consequently, this is the role of the *Apostola Apostolorum*: to announce and teach what she had witnessed and to defend what she had received against all accusations and doubts. Finally, from this apologetical perspective, one can understand the reasons behind the very early insertion of the Mariological material into the texts relating to Pilate, the passion and the resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

During the period of Fatimid Egypt, and in particular during the persecutions of Christians by the Caliph al-Ḥākīm and when the *Mad Caliph* decided to demolish the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to burn the Holy Sepulchre, a number of apocryphal works on the figure of Pilate and the resurrection of Christ were redacted with an apologetical dimension, as a Christian reaction to what was happening. The legend of Pilate and his martyrdom was not a new element, but the symbolism surrounding the figure of Pilate in these new circumstances was new and original.

Mariological material, distinct from the material on Pilate, was inserted into these works very early. The aim of this paper was to understand the reasons that made some Copts insert such material. The Virgin Mary is presented in these texts as *Apostola Apostolorum*, thus reviving an ancient Christian tradition according to which it was the Virgin Mary who was the first to meet the risen Christ and received from him the order to announce his resurrection to the disciples; a common feature in several pseudepigraphic patristic homilies, *Apostolic Memoirs*, and apocryphal texts in the Coptic literature. There is no doubt that the Virgin Mary in these texts possesses some elements of the profile of the *Gnostic Mary*, she received theological messages from the risen Christ and transmitted them to the Apostles. However, she is not identified with the *Gnostic Mary* since the texts contain no gnostic doctrines. She is, in fact, the defender of the orthodox Christian doctrine on Christ's resurrection from all its denigrators.

115. One example might be Rifaat EBIED – David THOMAS (eds), *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades. The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Tālīb al-Dimashqī's Response* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 2), Leiden, Brill, 2005, pp. 19-20 where we have the contents of the work and the topics dealt with. The same topics were also discussed, especially in Egypt, in subsequent centuries; see for example Diego R. SARRIÒ CUCARELLA, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean. The Splendid Replies of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi (d. 684/1285)* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 23), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2014.



Reading this Mariological profile in its historical context has also helped us to understand its apologetical function. In fact, the Virgin Mary has a respected place in Islam and in the Holy Book of Muslims. Therefore, her profile as *Apostola Apostolorum* could be perfectly instrumentalized and function as defender of Christian doctrines in such apocryphal texts and apocalyptic narratives with apologetical content and purpose: she is the ideal protector of Christians in hard times.

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