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# The Second Teacher's Story in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*: A Contribution to the Recent Discussion on the Developmental Interpretation

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## Abstract

The article explains the problematic Second Teacher episode in the so-called developmental interpretation of IGT recently proposed by M. R. Whinton and J. R. C. Cousland. The article shows that the killing of the second teacher in the text of Gs, which is appropriately identified as problematic for the developmental interpretation, appears to be a later version of the episode that most likely already sought to supplement a more original account. In the earliest recoverable form, preserved in the early versions (Syriac, Latin and Ethiopic), the story consistently does not blame Jesus for the death of the second teacher, either in the episode itself or in the other passages. So in the earliest surviving version(s), the teacher dies but not because of a curse from Jesus. Therefore, this episode does not disturb the so-called developmental interpretation.

**Keywords:** Infancy Gospel of Thomas; Child Jesus; Second Teacher's episode; developmental interpretation; textual criticism; Paidika; miracles of punishment

## 1. Introduction to the Problem

Two recently published studies on the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (IGT) indicate a growing tendency to see a gradual development associated with the process of maturing for the child Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It has been noted that the story of IGT is structured according to Jesus' various ages of growth. It begins with a more extensive description of the actions of the five-year-old Jesus (Gs 2–9), while other stories are situated in his seventh year (Gs 10–11),<sup>2</sup> eighth year (Gs 12–16), and, finally, twelfth year (Gs 17).<sup>3</sup> It is notable that while the five-year-old Jesus curses his peers and blinds their parents, his behaviour changes as he matures when he instead helps those around him and revives those who have died.

Michael Whinton in his insightful article contextualises Jesus' phases of maturity against the backdrop of various childhood developmental stages, which were allegedly

<sup>1</sup> These studies are M. R. Whinton, 'The Moral Character Development of the Boy Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas', *JSNT* 38 (2015) 219–40; J. R. C. Cousland, *Holy Terror: Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (LNTS 560; London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Other versions read six years (Ga, Gb, Gd, Lm).

<sup>3</sup> I quote the text of IGT with reference to the specific textual version. Most often, the Gs is used, as is increasingly customary in contemporary scholarship. For a more detailed discussion of textual issues, see below.

commonly recognised in antiquity. He outlines the ancient ideas associated with the stages of *infantia*, *pueritia*, and *adulescentia*, and shows that the IGT's depiction of the child Jesus generally corresponds to expected behaviour at each respective age.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of these stages, Jesus matures, and his moral character develops according to general expectations. Therefore, he grows from an impulsive, self-centred 'rowdy boy' to become a mature young man whose actions increasingly resemble the saviour from the New Testament Gospels.

Similarly, Robert Cousland follows Whitenton in discerning a 'developmental arc' within the narrative of IGT.<sup>5</sup> Cousland describes Jesus' change of behaviour as a result of Zacchaeus' education programme consisting of instruction in the alphabet, and more importantly, in 'social *paideia*', i.e., inculturation into normative social behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the story of IGT, Jesus learns 'to bless, and not to curse' (Gs 4.2) and also 'to love those his own age, honour old age, and revere elders' (Gs 6.2).<sup>7</sup>

However, both Whitenton and Cousland note that there is a major problem with this developmental interpretation, namely the second teacher's episode (Gs 13). This episode describes how Jesus, now eight years old, retaliates against his teacher with a curse that results in the teacher's death:

When Joseph saw his wisdom and understanding, he desired him not to be in lack of letters. So he handed him over to another master. The master wrote the alphabet for him and said: 'Say alpha.' Then the child said: 'First tell me what is the beta and I will tell you what is the alpha.' Becoming irritated, the teacher struck him. Jesus cursed him and the teacher fell and died. (Gs 13.1–2)

Within the developmental interpretation, Jesus largely left his immature and impulsive behaviour behind once he grew beyond the age of five. Thus, Cousland aptly notes that this episode can be considered as the 'principal objection' to this interpretation. It is shocking that Jesus acts more harshly against this teacher than he did as a five-year-old against Zacchaeus, who similarly struck him when he did not cooperate during class, but whom he did not kill (Gs 6.8).<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Whitenton acknowledges that the second teacher's story is a 'notable setback in Jesus' newly spotless record'.<sup>9</sup> It is, indeed, a major setback to both Jesus' spotless record and to the developmental interpretation itself. Cousland argues that a possible solution may be found in the fact that the second teacher episode is most likely a doublet of the Zacchaeus episode.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that the author of IGT probably wanted to include three teaching episodes, which would allow for the inclusion of both variations of Jesus' response to the teachers about the letters alpha and beta, and also to direct the narrative to culminate in the praise of a teacher. Cousland also notices that the Zacchaeus episode

<sup>4</sup> See also V. Dasen, 'Roman Childhood Revisited', *Children in Antiquity: Perspectives and Experiences of Childhood in the Ancient Mediterranean* (ed. L. A. Beaumont, M. Dillon, and N. Harrington; London/New York: Routledge, 2020) 105–20.

<sup>5</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 69–70.

<sup>6</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 60.

<sup>7</sup> All the translations from Greek are taken from the edition of T. Burke, *De infantia Iesu euangelium Thomae graece* (CCSA 17; Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Whitenton, 'Moral Character', 230.

<sup>10</sup> Compare the almost identical wording of Gs 6.2f and 13.1–2. Cf. Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 68. Similarly, R. F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Scholars Bible 2; Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995) 133, and R. Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus. Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2010) 43–4.

contains a 'reward motif', a pattern in that Jesus rewards his teacher who correctly testifies about his identity with a reversal of former punishments and killings (cf. Gs 8.1).<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this requirement of reward calls forth some harsh action on the part of Jesus that can be reversed after the third teacher's exemplary behaviour. Cousland argues that it is for this reason that the author of IGT found it necessary to insert the episode involving the second teacher. In the words of Cousland: 'in this instance the reward motif proves stronger than the developmental motif'.<sup>12</sup>

Whitenton offers a different solution when he considers this episode to be a moral lapse, underscoring that 'Jesus' moral character formation is certainly still in process'.<sup>13</sup> Although the eight-year-old Jesus would already be expected to manage self-control, this episode reveals that he is still, indeed, just an impulsive eight-year-old boy. According to Whitenton, there is, however, a bright side to this – Jesus brings this second teacher back from the dead in the end (Gs 14.4).

These explanations, however, do not sufficiently explain the previously mentioned problem with the developmental interpretation. While the second teacher episode seems to be a doublet as it offers nothing new, its placement toward the latter part of IGT is certainly problematic, and it is hard to reconcile Jesus' behaviour in it with other actions of the eight-year Jesus.

Having said this, however, I find the principal observation with regard to the logic of the developmental arc compelling. On a literary level, the structure according to Jesus' age seems to be the only clearly discernible pattern in the entire narrative. The emphasis on maturation is therefore quite evident, and, at the same time, the alteration of Jesus' behaviour is similarly apparent. Yet, a better explanation for the 'major setback' caused by the second teacher episode must be found. In the remainder of this article, I intend to show that an answer to this problem lies in a closer text-critical analysis of this episode. As will be demonstrated, our best textual evidence quite uniformly suggests that the child Jesus is in fact not responsible for the death of the second teacher. Any causal links between the teacher's immediate death and Jesus' vengefulness or anger are only present in the Greek recensions of IGT and most likely represent a later expansion. Nevertheless, the early versions' narration of the story does not provide any explanation for the teacher's death. And so, we must also focus on the question of how to understand this episode.

## 2. Textual issues of IGT

Both Whitenton and Cousland in their contributions work with the Greek *S-recension* (Gs), which was defined by Tony Burke based on the single surviving manuscript, *Codex Sabaiticus* 259 (Jerusalem, Bibliothek tou Patriarcheiu; 11<sup>th</sup> cent.).<sup>14</sup> This recension reflects the shortest and oldest extant Greek form of IGT, which is closer to the archetype than other Greek recensions (Ga, Gb, Gd). Nevertheless, it is important to understand this textual witness in a broader context of the textual history of IGT as evidenced in the extant versions. Since the pioneering work of Arnold Meyer, it has been noted that the early versions are witness to a more original text than the Greek recensions.<sup>15</sup> This

<sup>11</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Whitenton, 'Moral Character', 230.

<sup>14</sup> Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 127–8. For more information about this manuscript, see M. Vuković, *Survival and Success of an Apocryphal Childhood of Jesus: Reception of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas in the Middle Ages* (SBR 21; Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022) 56–9.

<sup>15</sup> A. Meyer, 'Kindheitserzählung des Thomas', *Handbuch zu den neutestamentlichen Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (ed. E. Hennecke; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904) 132–42, at 133–4.

observation has been further demonstrated with much more detail in recent research by Lucas von Rompay, Sever Voicu, and Tony Burke.<sup>16</sup> The most original recoverable form of IGT is to be found in the fifteen-chapter ‘short recension’, which is evidenced in the Syriac, Latin, Ethiopic, and partly in Georgian and Irish versions.<sup>17</sup> The primary witnesses of this short recension are the *A-recension* of the Syriac translation (Sa), two text types in the Latin translation belonging to the ‘First Latin Translation’, namely Lv (palimpsest section of the *Codex Vindobonensis lat.* 563 (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; 5<sup>th</sup> cent.)) and Lm (so-called *Pars altera* of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, chapters 26–42), and the Ethiopic translation, which is part of another text known as *Ta’ammra ‘Iyasus* (*Miracles of Jesus*).<sup>18</sup> The oldest witnesses to this recension are the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. manuscript of Lv and two 6<sup>th</sup> cent. Syriac manuscripts of Sa (MSS W and G). Furthermore, the Georgian and Irish versions also contain a text form close to the short recension, although in both cases only a limited amount of text is preserved. These versions are secondary translations since the Georgian text was translated from an unpreserved Armenian version and the Irish text from the Latin text of the First Latin Translation.

On the other hand, the *textus receptus* of Tischendorf’s Greek *A-recension* (Ga) preserves an expanded recension consisting of nineteen chapters, with additional chapters 1, 10, 17–18 in comparison to the short recension. Besides the difference in form and length, these recensions differ also in wordings and sentence structure (esp. in Ga 3, 5, 6, 15).<sup>19</sup> According to Reidar Aasgaard, the Ga recension most likely did not originate before the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> The other two Greek recensions, Gb and Gd, already presuppose the existence of the Ga text and thus their text-critical relevance is even smaller.<sup>21</sup>

As has been already noted, Gs offers an older and shorter text than Ga. On numerous occasions, it agrees with readings of the early versions in contrast to Ga. It also contains a text form close to the fifteen-chapter short recension, however with two additional chapters – Gs 1 and 16 (parallel to Ga 1 and 10). To a certain degree, it can therefore also be considered a witness to the short recension, as Burke suggests.<sup>22</sup> Considering the fact that Gs is, unlike the early versions, also a *Greek* witness, which means a witness in the original language of IGT, it is reasonable, as Burke writes, to suggest that it offers the closest representation of the archetype: Gs ‘surely provides us with the best available witness

<sup>16</sup> Cf. L. von Rompay, ‘De ethiopische versie van het Kindsheidsevangelie volgens Thomas de Israëliet’, *L’enfant dans les civilisations orientales* (ed. A. Théodoridès, P. Naster, and J. Ries; Acta Orientalia Belgica 2; Leuven: Peeters, 1980) 119–32; S. Voicu, ‘Verso il testo primitivo del Παιδικὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ “Racconti dell’infanzia del Signore Gesù”’, *Apocrypha* 9 (1998) 7–95; Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 173–222.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. U. U. Kaiser and J. Tropper, ‘Die Kindheitserzählung des Thomas’, *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. I. Band in zwei Teilbänden: Evangelien und Verwandtes* (ed. Ch. Marksches and J. Schröter; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 930–59, at 931–5.

<sup>18</sup> For the critical edition of the Syriac witnesses, see T. Burke, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas in the Syriac Tradition: A Critical Edition and English Translation* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 48; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017). The Latin versions are published by K. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha, adhibitis plurimis codicibus graecis et latinis maximam partem nunc primum consultis atque ineditorum copia insignibus* (Lipsiae: Avenarius et Mendelssohn, 1853 (1876)). All following references to Tischendorf’s *Evangelia apocrypha* are to the second revised edition from 1876. A better edition of Lv can be found in G. Philippart, ‘Fragments palimpsestes latins du Vindobonensis 563 (V<sup>e</sup> siècle?)’, *Évangile selon S. Matthieu Évangile de l’Enfance selon Thomas Évangile de Nicodème*, *AnBoll* 90 (1972) 391–411. The Ethiopic version was edited by S. Grébaut, ‘Les miracles de Jésus. Texte éthiopien publié et traduit’, *Patrologia Orientalis* 12/4 (1919) 555–652. On *Ta’ammra ‘Iyasus*, see also W. Witakowski, ‘The Miracles of Jesus: An Ethiopian Apocryphal Gospel’, *Apocrypha* 6 (1995), 279–98. For additional information on the early versions, see Vuković, *Survival and Success*, 40–64.

<sup>19</sup> Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 216–217.

<sup>20</sup> Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 218–219.

<sup>22</sup> Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 196.

to an early form of the gospel in its language of composition'.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, there are important cases in which Gs differs from the early versions. In some cases, it shares readings with the later Greek recensions, or, in other cases, a few unique readings that are not extant in any other textual witness.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, if we aspire to work with a text form as close as possible to the unpreserved archetype of IGT, using Gs alone is not sufficient. It is necessary to critically consider Gs against the evidence of the early versions. This is especially crucial in those cases in which it disagrees with the shared evidence of the early versions. In these cases, we must consider its value attentively and critically. The episode of the second teacher is just such a case, where the reading of Gs and the early versions significantly differ. It is for this reason that we must now concentrate on the available textual evidence for this episode.

### 3. The Second Teacher Episode's Text(s)

This episode, in its entirety, reads in Gs as follows:

When Joseph saw his wisdom and understanding, he desired him not to be in lack of letters. So he handed him over to another master. The master wrote the alphabet for him and said: 'Say alpha.' Then the child said: 'First tell me what is the beta and I will tell you what is the alpha.' Becoming irritated, the teacher struck him. Jesus cursed him and the teacher fell and died. And the child went home to his parents. And Joseph called his mother and commanded her not to let him out of the house so that those who make him angry may not die. (Gs 13.1–3)

It describes the story of the death of the second teacher as a result of Jesus' curse, and it also contains Joseph's subsequent order for Jesus' house detention. One other important aspect of this story appears in a causal connection in chapter 14, in which, according to the text of Gs, we read that in response to the exemplary behaviour of the third teacher, Jesus eventually restores the life of the second teacher. This is found in verse 4:

And he said to the teacher, 'Because you spoke rightly and testified rightly, on account of you the one struck down also shall be saved.' And immediately that teacher also was saved. And taking the child, he led him away to his house. (Gs 14.4)

Therefore, in the text of Gs, we can see the sequential (causal) relationship of three related aspects in this story, which, for clarity, can be presented as follows:

**A:** Becoming irritated, the teacher struck him. Jesus **cursed him and the teacher fell and died** (Gs 13.2d)

**B:** And Joseph called his mother and commanded her not to let him out of the house **so that those who make him angry may not die** (Gs 13.3c)

**C:** And he said to the teacher, 'Because you spoke rightly and testified rightly, on account of you **the one struck down also shall be saved.**' **And immediately that teacher also was saved.** (Gs 14.4a–c)

<sup>23</sup> Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 197.

<sup>24</sup> For examples of shared wording with other Greek recensions (esp. Ga) against the early versions, see, e.g., Gs 7.2, 8.1, 9.3, 13.3, 14.4, 15.2. For unique wording, see e.g., phrase *μέτα σωτηρίας* (7.4, 14.1, 3); *ἀρχιέρεως* (3.1); command to Zeno to sleep again (9.3, this is also extant in the Irish version); *μικροῦ ἀνθρώπου* (6.2a); *συμβάλλουσα* (17.5), etc.

The first text (A) describes Jesus cursing the second teacher, causing the teacher to fall and die.<sup>25</sup> The second text (B) describes the instruction of Jesus' father Joseph who commands Mary to prevent Jesus from leaving the house. The explanation for this restraint is that someone might make Jesus angry, and Jesus might curse and kill that person just like he did the second teacher. The third text (C) contains what Cousland calls the reward motif. Jesus speaks to the third teacher and responds to his exemplary attitude with the reward. He emphasises that the second teacher will live again on account of his truthful words. Similarly, this reaction reminds us in retrospect that Jesus had previously restored life to those whom he had cursed and killed as a five-year-old boy (cf. Gs 8.1). This story is thus narrated in Gs uniformly: Jesus curses and kills the teacher, then Joseph, fearing that Jesus will harm someone else, orders Jesus' house detention, and, after a positive experience with the third teacher, Jesus restores the life of the second teacher in a manner similar to his action in chapter 8.

The event (A), including the consequences (B, C), is, however, narrated quite differently in the early versions. It should be noted that the early versions contain not only minor textual variations but maintain a consistent (although different) rendering of the story, also with regard to the consequences. The individual witnesses of the early versions offer the following readings:

Syriac:<sup>26</sup>

- A:** Thereupon, the scribe became angry and struck him, and immediately fell down and died. (Sa 14.2)  
**B:** Jesus went back to his family. Joseph called his mother Mary and spoke to her and commanded her not to permit him to go out of the house, so that those who strike him will not die. (Sa 14.3)  
**C:** -----

Latin (Lm = *Pars altera* of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*):<sup>27</sup>

- A:** And getting angry<sup>28</sup> because of this, the teacher struck Jesus, and immediately after he struck him, he died. (Ps.-Mt. 38.1)  
**B:** And Jesus returned to the house of his mother. And Joseph, being afraid, called Mary to him and said to her: Surely know that my soul is sad even to death because of this boy. For it is possible that at some time or other, it will happen that someone would strike this boy with enmity and die. (Ps.-Mt. 38.2)  
**C:** -----

Latin (Lv = Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, lat. 563):<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> In the later Greek recensions Ga and Gd, Jesus also curses the teacher, but the teacher does not die, only faints (Ga 14.2; Gd 14.2). For that reason, also in response to the exemplary behaviour of the third teacher, Jesus does not resurrect him, but instead only heals him (Ga 15.4; Gd 15.4).

<sup>26</sup> Slightly modified translation of Burke, *Infancy Gospel*, 158–61.

<sup>27</sup> Translated from Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, 107. For a recent translation of Ps.-Mt. with introduction and commentary, see B. W. Hawk, *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary* (Early Christian Apocrypha 8; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Latin *iratus* (also in Lv) can be understood as the adjective 'angry', but also as the perfect active participle of *irascor*, which agrees with the expression of the other versions.

<sup>29</sup> Translated from Philippart, 'Fragments', 408. The parts B and C are not extant in the fragmentary manuscript.

**A:** The teacher became angry and struck him in the head, and immediately the teacher fell down and died. (fol. 142v)

**B:** N/A

**C:** N/A

Ethiopic:<sup>30</sup>

**A:** And getting angry, his teacher struck him. And immediately, his teacher fell down and died.

**B:** The Lord Jesus returned to his relatives. And he was ordered not to leave from his parents' so that if he was to curse someone, that person would not die. (Eth 13)

**C:** -----

As we can see, the story as narrated in the early versions presents several important differences:

1. The description of the event (A) does not mention, in any of the witnesses, that Jesus cursed the teacher or did anything else to cause his death. The early versions contain no explicit mention of the teacher's death resulting from Jesus' activity.
2. The section describing the 'reward motif' (C) is completely missing in all the witnesses of the early versions. Furthermore, a closer look at this section of the Gs text indeed suggests that the account of the second teacher's resurrection is a later interpolation. The subject of the final sentence 'and taking the child, *he* led him away to his home' (Gs 14.4d) is undoubtedly Joseph, who was mentioned at the end of verse 3. This however creates grammatical inconsistency because, after the insertion of the interpolation about the second teacher's resurrection, it appears that the child Jesus was taken home by the second teacher as he is the final antecedent and subject in 14.4c. This inconsistency is eventually corrected in the Ga text, where Joseph is explicitly named as the one who takes Jesus home. Therefore, it appears that the resurrection account of the second teacher is an interpolation, most likely created by the scribe of Gs.
3. Neither part C nor part B is preserved in the fragmentary manuscript containing Lv, but from the extant part A we can surmise that part C was also logically missing.<sup>31</sup>
4. The textual witnesses are not entirely unanimous in their description of Joseph's command regarding Jesus' house detention (B). Sa and Lm logically follow the description of the event (A) and justify Jesus' detention by saying that something would happen to the people who would strike him. There is no mention, therefore, that this misfortune was to happen to them because they would make Jesus angry, who, in turn, would curse them, as in Gs.
5. There is, however, an exception in the case of Eth, where we find a reference to cursing in Joseph's reason for Jesus' detention (B), even though the fact that the Ethiopic version, like other early versions, contains no mention of Jesus' active involvement in the death of the second teacher in its description of the event (A). Interestingly, the wording of cursing in the Eth part B is unique among all the witnesses and does not appear even in the Greek recensions. In fact, the entire

<sup>30</sup> Translated from Grébaud, 'Les miracles de Jésus', 637.

<sup>31</sup> Another possible indication supporting this claim may be that, as Voicu has shown, the First Latin Translation often shares unique readings with Sa. See S. Voicu, 'La tradition latine des *Paidika*', *Bulletin de l'AEALAC* 14 (2004) 13–21, at 15–16.

reading of part B in Eth is unique as it contains no mention of either Joseph or Mary by name, and the command for house detention is phrased in the passive voice. Jesus, on the other hand, is named with the Christological title, Lord. Considering that the Ethiopic text in part A contains the same reading as the early versions, and likewise contains no mention of the resurrection of the second teacher (C), it seems that part B was corrupted in the course of transmission.

What can we deduce from these observations? In the rendering of the story found in the early versions, nowhere do we find explicitly that the second teacher died by the will or active involvement of the child Jesus. His death is presumably related to his aggression towards Jesus (this is suggested in part B), but we do not know the explicit cause of his death. He immediately dies, so to speak, automatically. This automatic cause is also reflected in the wording of part B, in which Joseph also does not say that Jesus would kill the aggressor, but only that such a person might die. In this rendering of the story Jesus does not curse the teacher, and the fact that Jesus is not involved in the death seems to be supported by the absence of part C. Since the second teacher's death is not caused by Jesus (A), Jesus does not bring him back to life (C).

How then to explain the death scenario? First of all, the silence of the text on this matter should be emphasised. This means that any solution will always be hypothetical and uncertain. One explanation, following Cousland and Aasgaard, is to point out that the story of the second teacher was probably created as a doublet, fulfilling a structural function in order to set the stage for the third teacher story.<sup>32</sup>

However, this episode is also reminiscent of similar stories of unexpected miraculous death punishments (*Strafwundern*) in the Hebrew Bible, where individuals immediately die for committing some form of sacrilege (2 Sam 6.6–7; 1 Chron 13.9–10; Lev 10.1–2; Num 16.31–5). These stories share the same feature that the death penalty is unforeseen, unannounced, and immediate. However, unlike the second teacher's episode, the reason for the punishment is usually communicated right after the punitive act. However, the story of Elisha and the bears from 2 Kings 2.23–5 offers a slightly different case. In this story, Elisha curses the small boys who mock him, and they are subsequently torn apart by two bears. This story contains no explicit justification for the drastic punishment, although the reader can logically assume that it is related to the insult to a man of God.

Similar stories can be found also outside of a Jewish context.<sup>33</sup> As an illustration, in his work *De Natura Animalium*, the Roman rhetorician Claudius Aelianus tells the story of a sacred serpent from the Egyptian city of Metelis who lives in a tower and whose servants honour him with food and drink. There was a certain servant who really wanted to see the sacred serpent, for which he paid dearly:

Now the eldest servant felt a keen desire to set eyes upon the Serpent and coming by himself performed the usual duties and withdrew. And the Serpent mounted on the tabled and feasted. And this busybody in opening the doors (he had closed them as was the custom) made a loud noise. The Serpent was indignant and retired, while the man who had seen the creature whom he wished to see, to his own undoing, went out of his mind, told what he had witnessed, and confessed his impious deed, became dumb, and *shortly afterwards fell down dead* (εἶτα οὐ μετὰ μακρόν πεσὼν ἀπέθανεν). (*Nat. Anim.* 11.17, trans. A. F. Scholfield, LCL 448)

<sup>32</sup> Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 68; Aasgaard, *Childhood of Jesus*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> See the useful anthology in H. Havelaar, 'Hellenistic Parallels to Acts 5.1–11 and the Problem of Conflicting Interpretations', *JSNT* 67 (1997) 63–82.

This type of divine punishment was therefore understandable and used in wider cultural contexts. Gerd Theissen cites several other similar stories from Epidaurus and Lucian, which also demonstrate the presence of the classical principle of *ius talonis* in these stories, namely that the punishment matches the offence.<sup>34</sup>

Some instances of the miracles of punishment also appear in the New Testament, such as the curious account of the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11.12–25par.). An interesting similarity to the brief account of the second teacher's death can be seen in the story of the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.1–11.<sup>35</sup> In this well-known story, Ananias and Sapphira want to join the Jerusalem community, so they bring the apostles their wealth from the sale of their land, but the reader knows that they have kept part of the sale aside. Peter, endowed with supernatural knowledge, discovers the lie, and after confronting them with the truth, first Ananias and then Sapphira fall to the ground one by one and die immediately. What is surprising about the story is that it lacks a clear explanation for the immediate death. This has allowed many scholars to postulate different explanations and interpretations for this controversial story.<sup>36</sup> The reason for the killing of Ananias and Sapphira is probably to be found in Peter's accusation, but it should be noted that Peter does not pronounce words of condemnation over them, as for example Paul does several chapters later over the magician, Elymas (Acts 13.6–12).<sup>37</sup>

The scenes of the respective deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are narrated as follows:

But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.' When Ananias heard these words, *he fell down and breathed his last*. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. (Acts 5.3–5, ESV)

But Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' *Immediately, she fell down at his feet and breathed her last* (Acts 5.9–10, ESV)

Since the author of IGT knows the Gospel of Luke, it is possible that he could have also known Acts and, thus, it is conceivable that this brief scene may have served as an inspiration in writing the story of the second teacher. Especially if the story was created as a doublet for a structural function, it is reasonable to assume that the author had been inspired somewhere, and the story of Ananias and Sapphira seems a good candidate.<sup>38</sup> This is, of course, only conjecture, which we cannot verify.

<sup>34</sup> For other examples in Greco-Roman and also in Rabbinic literature, see G. Theissen, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten. Ein Beitrag zur formgeschichtlichen Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1974) 117–20, and Havelaar, 'Hellenistic Parallels', 67–73.

<sup>35</sup> This story has been taken as a prime example of the so-called 'rule miracle of punishment' (*bestrafende Normenwunder*). See Theissen, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten*, 117.

<sup>36</sup> See a brief survey in C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 261–4; A. J. Harrill, 'Divine Judgment against Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11): A Stock Scene of Perjury and Death', *JBL* 130 (2011) 351–3. For the early Christian reception, see R. H. van der Bergh, 'A Thematic and Chronological Analysis of the Reception of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) in the First Five Centuries CE', *JECH* 7 (2017) 1–16.

<sup>37</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987) 38.

<sup>38</sup> There are some verbal links between these stories, which are, however, also shared with some other examples of *Strafwundern*, for example with the story from Aelius mentioned above. These common elements are

This article merely points out the more original nature of the shorter form of the episode of the second teacher, in which this teacher dies not through the direct action of Jesus, but as a result of the divine punishment typical of the miracles of punishment. The potential theological issues following the punishment of the teacher and the distinction between Jesus and God, whom Jesus refers to as his Father (Gs 17.3), do not seem to be addressed by the author of IGT.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to offer a more plausible explanation of the problematic second teacher episode in the so-called developmental interpretation of IGT, which was convincingly suggested by Whinton and Cousland. As it was shown, the killing of the second teacher in the text of Gs, which is appropriately identified as problematic for the developmental interpretation, appears to be a later version of the episode that most likely already sought to supplement an otherwise concise and somewhat clumsy account. In the earliest recoverable form preserved in the early versions, Jesus does not kill his teacher. This form of the story consistently does not blame Jesus for the death of the second teacher in the episode itself and also in its consequences. Thus, in the earliest recoverable version(s), the teacher dies but not by a curse from Jesus. Hence, this episode does not disrupt the so-called developmental arc. This conclusion is intended to serve further reflection on the original, or at least the earliest recoverable form of the composition of IGT, and I believe that the developmental interpretation is on the right track. Our growing text-critical knowledge of IGT is enabling us to better understand the original text of IGT, which was written perhaps in the second- or third-century CE.<sup>39</sup> For many decades this text was studied on the basis of the *Textus Receptus*, which, however, became established only in the Middle Ages. I believe that in light of these new developments, we will be able to better understand this interesting early Christian narrative.

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primarily the description of death occurring ‘immediately’ after some offence in two steps as ‘falling down’ and ‘dying’. It is interesting that the closest connection is to be seen between IGT 13 and the Western text of Acts 5, in which Ananias also dies ‘immediately’. The IGT text is often close to the Western text in places where comparisons can be made, see e.g., Gs 17.1 / Lk 2.43 ἀπέμεινε; Gs 17.2 / Lk 2.44 + ἐν (also in the early versions) Gs 17.2 / Lk 2.46 καθήμενον Gs 17.2 / Lk 2.48 + καὶ λυπούμενοι (also in the early versions). See also Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 182–4.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion on the dating, see Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 200–5; Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 7–13.

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