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## THE EAGLE ON THE TREE: A HOMERIC MOTIF IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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This study examines the peculiar occurrences of the eagle in the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* (= *Par. Jer.*) and the *Acts of Philip* (= *Acts Phil.*). The parallels between those two episodes have been first noticed by F. Amsler.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I compared the two texts with each other as well as Jewish and Christian parallels.<sup>2</sup> The *Apocryphon of John* (= *Ap. John*) has not yet been examined in this context.<sup>3</sup>

### I

The *Par. Jer.* is an originally Jewish writing with a Christian ending and perhaps with Christian interpolations.<sup>4</sup> According to this book, the prophet Jeremiah accompanied the people of Jerusalem to the Babylonian exile, whereas his disciples Baruch and Abimelech stayed in Jerusalem. Later on (6.15–7.12), an angel dictates a letter to Baruch, and God sends an eagle (*aetos*) to deliver the letter to Jeremiah. Baruch calls the eagle “chosen (*eklektos*) from among all birds of heaven” and “king of the birds.” Finally he instructs it to fly “straight as a speeding arrow” in the power of God. The eagle flies to Babylon,

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<sup>1</sup> F. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, vol. 2: *Commentarius* (Turnhout, 1999), 172.

<sup>2</sup> I. Czachesz, *Apostolic Commission Narratives in the Canonical and Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (Diss. Groningen, 2002), 149–154.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Florentino Garcia Martínez has called my attention to this parallel. Professor Jan N. Bremmer kindly read the manuscript and made useful suggestions about the Greco-Roman material.

<sup>4</sup> The book is also known as *2 Baruch*, *3 Baruch*, *4 Baruch*, “The rest of the words of Baruch,” or “The rest of the words of Jeremiah.” Cf. Herzer, *Paralipomena Jeremiae* (Tübingen, 1994), 1. I quote the text after Kraft and Purinton, *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* (Missoula, Mont., 1972). Herzer, *op. cit.*, 177–192, dates the Jewish text between 125 and 132, the Christian ending (9.10–32) a little after 136. He rejects the idea of other Christian interpolations in the text. Recently Schaller, *Paralipomena Jeremiou*, 678–681, suggested A.D. 118–132 as the date of the Jewish writing, but left open the question of the date of the Christian redaction.

and sits on a post or tree (*xylon*) outside the city. Then (7.13–23) Jeremiah comes along with a funeral procession. The eagle greets Jeremiah, and tells him it brought a letter from Baruch and Abimelech. The prophet praises God and calls the people together. When the people arrive, the eagle comes down on the corpse and revives it. The people are astounded and cry out, “This is the God who appeared to our fathers in the wilderness through Moses, and now he has appeared to us through this eagle.”

The *Ap. John* is a Gnostic Christian writing. Its shorter version was written in Greek in the late second or early third century A.D.; later in the third century, it underwent a major redaction, which resulted in the longer version. Both versions were translated into Coptic in the fourth century.<sup>5</sup> The *Ap. John* is a Gnostic paraphrase of the story of creation, a subject that is reflected in a number of Nag Hammadi texts.<sup>6</sup> After the rulers and authorities create Adam, the Father gives him Reflection (*epinoia*) as a helper. The Chief Ruler, Yaldabaoth, desires Reflection, but he cannot reach her, as she is hidden in Adam. He therefore creates the woman, whom Adam recognises as his “fellow-essence.” In the short version, Reflection teaches them: “From the tree, in the form of an eagle, she taught them to eat of knowledge, so that they might remember their perfection, for both had undergone the fall in ignorance” (*NHC* III.30.17–21).<sup>7</sup> In the long version, it is the Saviour who teaches the couple: “I appeared in the form of an eagle on the tree of knowledge, which is the Reflection from the Providence of pure light, that I might teach them and awaken them out of the depth of sleep. For they were born in a fallen state and they recognised their nakedness” (*NHC* II.23.26–33).<sup>8</sup>

A Christian writing from late antiquity, the *Acts Phil.* (second half of the fourth century), reports a similar epiphany of Jesus (3.5–9).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The *Apocryphon of John* has survived in four Coptic manuscripts: *Nag Hammadi Codices* II, III, IV, and *Codex Papyrus Berolienensis* 8502. For a synopsis and translation of the texts, see M. Waldstein and F. Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (Leiden, 1995). Waldstein and Wisse, *ibid.*, 1, date the short version to the early third century. If Irenaeus knew the text, it dates to the second century; cf. G. Luttikhuisen, “A Gnostic Reading of the Acts of John,” in J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen, 1995), 119–152 at 124–125.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Luttikhuisen, “Gnostic Reading,” 125.

<sup>7</sup> In *BG* 60.19–61.7 Reflection teaches “him” (Adam).

<sup>8</sup> *NHC* IV,1 does not contain this passage.

<sup>9</sup> Text in F. Bovon et al., *Acta Philippi*, vol. 1: *Textus* (Turnhout, 1999), 89–95.

When the apostle Philip prays and beseeches the Lord Jesus to reveal himself, suddenly a huge tree appears in the desert. Philip sits down under the tree and begins to eat. When he looks upwards, he catches glimpse of the “image of a huge eagle,” the wings of which are “spread out in the form (*typos*) of the true cross.” Philip addresses the “magnificent eagle,” and asks it to take his prayers to the Savior. He calls it “chosen (*eklektos*) bird,” the beauty of which is “not of this place.” Suddenly he realizes that it is the Lord Jesus Christ “who revealed himself in this form (*typos*).” The apostle praises the Lord, and Jesus (still in the form of an eagle) exhorts the apostle.

A further text to be mentioned is *2 Baruch* (*Syrian Apocalypse of Baruch*). In *2 Baruch* 77 an eagle (*nešraa'*) delivers the letter of Baruch. The Most High, Baruch claims, created the eagle so that it may be elevated (*m'alay*) above all flying creatures. Baruch also instructs the bird not to rest anywhere until it arrives at the people beyond the Euphrates.

Given the evident parallels between the three texts, can we establish a literary dependence between them? In his commentary on the *Acts Phil.*, Amsler (see note 1 above) suggests the *Par. Jer.* as a possible source of the eagle epiphany. *2 Baruch*, in turn, has been suggested as a source of the *Par. Jer.*<sup>10</sup>

The relation of the texts has to be re-examined for different reasons. First, the *Ap. John* has not yet been examined in this context. Second, the identification of *2 Baruch* as the source of the eagle motif leaves unexplained a highly interesting feature of the *Par. Jer.*, the *Ap. John*, and the *Acts Phil.*, namely, the theriomorphic epiphanies. Whereas the eagle appears as a positive symbol in both religions,<sup>11</sup> the epiphany of God or Jesus in the form of an eagle is unusual. The eagles in the *Acts Phil.* and the *Par. Jer.* do not appear in dreams or visions. The heroes encounter them on the road at daytime, and identify them as appearances of the deity. There is, however, no trace of regarding the animal as an epiphany in *2 Baruch*. Provided that the writer of the *Par. Jer.* took the motif from the *2 Baruch*, there must have existed a different source that inspired the theriomorphic representation of God. Third, the *Par. Jer.*, the *Ap. John*,

The Greek *Acts of Philip* contains fifteen “acts” plus the martyrdom text. For the dating of the text cf. Czachesz, *op. cit.*, 136, note 1.

<sup>10</sup> Herzer, *op. cit.*, 72–77; Schaller, *op. cit.*, 670–673.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Czachesz, *op. cit.*, 151–153; add E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 8 (New York, 1958), 121–145.

and the *Acts Phil.* represent the deity not simply as an eagle, but rather as an eagle on a tree.

In this study, I will argue that Homer was the main source of the motif of the "eagle on the tree" for Jewish and Christian literature. I will examine how the *Par. Jer.*, the *Ap. John*, and the *Acts Phil.* used the Homeric motif and how the three writings relied on each other.

## II

The eagle was an important symbol in both Greek and Christian religions, and to a lesser degree, it played a positive role also in Judaism. The mutual associations between the eagle, the king, and the supreme god were so widespread in ancient cultures that it should be little surprising when Jewish and Christian texts call the eagle the king of birds and associate it with God or Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Instead of proceeding from a general comparison of the role of the eagle in those literary and religious traditions, I depart from the specific feature that the eagle passages in the *Par. Jer.*, the *Ap. John*, and the *Acts Phil.* have in common. The deity appears in the form of an eagle that sits on a pole or tree in our texts. There are parallels to this particular motif in Homer.

Gods appear in the form of birds or are compared to birds in a number of Homeric passages.<sup>13</sup> In two cases, gods sit on a tree in the form of birds: *Iliad* VII.58–61 and XIV.286–291.

In Book VII of the *Iliad*, Apollo convinces Pallas Athena to stop the fight and let the war be decided in a battle of two. Apollo inspires Hector to suspend the battle, and Agamemnon stops the Achaeans. Then "Athena and Apollo of the silver bow in the likeness of (*eoikôs*) vultures sat on the lofty oak of father Zeus who bears the aegis, rejoicing in the warriors."<sup>14</sup> After casting lots, Aias goes forth to fight with Hector. Their combat, however, remains unfinished when evening

<sup>12</sup> D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford, 1936), 2–16; Th. Schneider and E. Stemplinger, "Adler," in Th. Klauser (ed.), *RAC*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1950), 87–93; C. Hünemörder, "Adler," in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), *Der neue Pauly*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart-Weimar, 1996), 115–116.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Pollard, *Birds in Greek Life and Mythology* (London, 1977), 155–161. G.G. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1990), 239–240; P. Friedrich, "An Avian and Aphrodisian Reading of Homer's *Odyssey*," *American Anthropologist* 99 (1997) 306–320, Appendix.

<sup>14</sup> *Iliad* VII.58–61, trans. W.F. Wyatt in LCL.

falls. The parties agree to hold armistice and bury the dead. The second, perhaps less interesting text is *Iliad* XIV.286–291. At this place we read that Hypnos climbed the highest tree on Ida to observe Zeus without beings seen by him. Hypnos sits there like (*enalinkios*) a bird that has a clear sound and is called either *chalkis* or *kymindis*.<sup>15</sup>

The question whether these texts and many other Homeric passages about birds are metamorphoses or similes has generated endless scholarly debates for centuries. Did the gods put on the form of birds, did they become birds for a time, or were they only similar to birds in some respect? The problem becomes especially interesting if we relate it to the *Par. Jer.* and the *Acts Phil.* Whereas the rest of early Christian and Jewish literature uses the image of the eagle as a simile or metaphor, these two writings seem to surpass that level and describe theriomorphic epiphanies. Could they rely on Homer in doing so?

Authors made up various lists of Homeric passages that are likely candidates for being metamorphoses, and *Iliad* VII is one of the key texts. In fact, most authors have taken this locus as a case of metamorphosis. It is impossible to summarize the whole research at this place, yet it is worth mentioning four characteristic opinions in order to gain a general overview of the discussion. Nilsson marshals evidence from Mycaenean archeology to prove that birds were not only attributes of gods, but also their actual forms of appearance.<sup>16</sup> He reads Homer against that archeological background, and concludes that in a number of passages (also in *Iliad* VII.49) gods appear in the form of birds.<sup>17</sup>

In a well-argued study, F. Dirlmeier<sup>18</sup> attempted to dissolve the "phantom" of bird-gods. He examined the issue in general, and six passages in particular that had been widely quoted as metamorphoses. The first and the second items on Dirlmeier's list are our two examples from the *Iliad*. He concluded that all of his texts could be understood as finding similes referring to the motion of the birds.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The meanings of neither *chalkis* nor *kymindis* are known. For different ancient and modern explanations, see Pollard, *op. cit.*, 158–159. More recently see J.N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1999), 7.

<sup>16</sup> M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1967), 290–292.

<sup>17</sup> Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 349 (note 4).

<sup>18</sup> F. Dirlmeier, *Die Vogelgestalt Homerischer Götter* (Heidelberg, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> Dirlmeier, *op. cit.*, 35.

J. Pollard<sup>20</sup> describes several Homeric passages as "transformations" of the gods into bird form, including *Iliad* VII.61. He also writes about "half complete" transformations (e.g., *Odyssey* 5.337) and "mere similes" (e.g., *Iliad* XIII.62f.). Pollard remarks that the Homeric gods rarely appear in their own shape, except when consorting with one another. He notices that the presence of a god could be inferred from some internal crisis often coincident with the sudden appearance of a bird, and suggests that the importance given to "bird transformations" in such cases may well derive from the Bronze Age view that a god's presence was indicated by the presence of a bird.<sup>21</sup>

A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon lists three passages that she takes for metamorphoses, two of which are our examples.<sup>22</sup> She bases her argument on the whole context of Homer. When the gods appear as humans, sometimes the metamorphosis is so perfect, that the heroes do not recognize them.<sup>23</sup> This metamorphosis is often expressed by the same word (*eoikôs*)<sup>24</sup> that we find in *Iliad* VII.59.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the appearance of the gods as humans hides them, their subsequent metamorphosis into a bird sometimes reveals their identity. In Book I of the *Odyssey*, for example, Athene appears in a human form to Ulysses' son Telemachos, who recognizes her only when she flies away like a bird.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Walter Burkert warns against attributing theriomorphic beliefs to the Greeks. In the Minoan-Mycenaean religion, birds could be understood as epiphanies of gods, but "the owl of Athena, the eagle of Zeus, and the peacock of Hera-Juno are little more than heraldic animals for the Greeks."<sup>27</sup> "Myth, of course," Burkert remarks, "toys with animal metamorphoses."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Pollard, *op. cit.*, 154-161.

<sup>21</sup> Pollard, *op. cit.*, 159.

<sup>22</sup> A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques. Les interprétations de l'animal chez Homère* (Paris, 1981), 185-190.

<sup>23</sup> Dirlmeier, *op. cit.*, 16, reminds us to the elementary fact that Homeric gods have human forms also on the Olympus. One may answer, however, that they still need metamorphosis to assume the form of a particular human person.

<sup>24</sup> *Iliad* XXIV.347; *Odyssey* 13.222.

<sup>25</sup> Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *op. cit.*, 189, finds that the comparison of humans to animals follows a similar logic as the metamorphosis of the gods. The hero is a lion for a short moment.

<sup>26</sup> *Odyssey* 1.320. This is probably the passage that Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *op. cit.*, 188, has in mind. The word *anopaia* is much debated, but it does not influence the meaning of the sentence.

<sup>27</sup> W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (trans. J. Raffan; Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 65.

<sup>28</sup> Burkert, *op. cit.*, 64.

It seems almost impossible to judge what the Greeks actually meant by the animal metamorphoses in the Homeric texts, and how they understood those passages from the classical period onward. There might have been great differences in the reading of such passages across time and space. In the second century A.D., Tatian ridicules the metamorphoses of the Greek gods into various animals.<sup>29</sup> Although he does not mention Homeric texts in particular, it is likely that Christians of the same mind as Tatian were inclined to see (ridiculous) metamorphoses also in Homer. Animal metamorphoses were acceptable "toys" in Greek literature. They were, in contrast, highly unacceptable for most Jewish and Christian authors.<sup>30</sup>

### III

The motif of the eagle on the tree also played an important role in Greek art. Although we cannot fully exhaust that topic at this place, it will be useful to mention some examples. Birds sitting on posts or idols are widespread on Minoan representations: "Birds are seen to perch on the double axes at sacrifice in the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, on the columns from the Shrine of Dove Goddess, and on the heads of the idols from the Late Minoan period."<sup>31</sup>

A series of Cretan coins from Gortyn shows Europa as a young woman on a tree, with an eagle appearing on many of the coins.<sup>32</sup> Cook reads the series as a cartoon depicting the union of Europa with Zeus in the form of an eagle.<sup>33</sup> The scene, of course, also reminds one of the myth of Zeus and Leda. On one of the coins, Europa holds a scepter with a bird.<sup>34</sup> Another coin from Asia Minor shows Artemis Eleuthera on a tree.<sup>35</sup>

Pausanias describes the eagle on a pillar or scepter several times. He reports that before the altar of Zeus *Lykaios* there are two pillars

<sup>29</sup> Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 10; cf. Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.13.

<sup>30</sup> For *Revelation* 5-7 see below. In the *Acts of John*, Jesus changes his appearance several times, but never appears as an animal; cf. H. García, "La polymorphie du Christ. Remarques sur quelques définitions et sur de multiples enjeux," *Apocrypha* 10 (1999) 16-55.

<sup>31</sup> Burkert, *op. cit.*, 40-41.

<sup>32</sup> A.B. Cook, *Zeus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1914), 528-529.

<sup>33</sup> Cook, *op. cit.*, 532-533.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, *op. cit.*, 529, fig. 399; cf. p. 532.

<sup>35</sup> Burkert, *op. cit.*, 86.

on the east, "on which there were of old gilded eagles."<sup>36</sup> A scepter with an eagle sitting on it is held by the Zeus statues at Olympia<sup>37</sup> and Megalopolis.<sup>38</sup> Pindar, Sophocles, and perhaps also Aristophanes, refer to similar scepters.<sup>39</sup>

In the Roman world, the eagle was the most important military symbol.<sup>40</sup> During his second consulship (104 B.C.), Marius established it as the supreme standard of the legions.<sup>41</sup> The eagle standard (*aquila*) consisted of an eagle with stretched wings and a thunderbolt in its claws, sitting on a post with handles. The *aquilae* enjoyed religious veneration.<sup>42</sup> The same symbol could also signify the honour of single persons. The triumphant warlord carried an ivory scepter (*scipio eburneus*) with an eagle.<sup>43</sup> In the imperial period, the consuls and the emperors wore this decoration. When Juvenal (born in A.D. 67) ridicules the exhibitionism of the praetors, he mentions "the bird that stands on the ivory scepter."<sup>44</sup>

#### IV

Which of the above-mentioned occurrences of the "eagle on the tree" motif influenced the writers of the *Par. Jer.*, the *Ap. John*, and the *Acts Phil.*? Did they use the image of the Roman military standards? If the second Jewish war was the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Par. Jer.*, the author(s) had an immediate and long-lasting impression of the *aquilae*. They could easily decipher the symbolism of the eagle

<sup>36</sup> Pausanias 8.38.7. Trans. W.H.S. Jones in LCL; cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 398.

<sup>37</sup> Pausanias 5.11.1.

<sup>38</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 8.31.4.

<sup>39</sup> Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 1.6; Sophocles, fragm. 884 (Radt). For Aristophanes, see Pollard, *op. cit.*, 143.

<sup>40</sup> J. Yates, "Signa militaria" in W. Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London, 1875), 1044–1046; A.R. Neumann, "Aquila," in K. Ziegler et al. (eds.), *Der kleine Pauly*, vol. 1 (München, 1979), 478; Y. Lafond, "Feldzeichen," in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), *Der neue Pauly*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart-Weimar, 1996), 458–462.

<sup>41</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 10.16.

<sup>42</sup> Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Words and Deeds* 6.1.11 writes about *sacrae aquilae*. Cf. Neumann, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 3.61; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Words and Deeds* 4.4.5. Cf. W.H. Gross, "Skeptron," in *Der kleine Pauly*, vol. 5 (Munich, 1979), 327; R. Hurschmann, "Stab, Stock, Knüppel," in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), *Der neue Pauly*, vol. 11 (Stuttgart-Weimar, 2001), 884–885. In the latter example, there is a *scipio eburneus* but no explicit mention of the eagle.

<sup>44</sup> Juvenal, *Satires* 10.43, *da nunc et volucrem sceptro quae surgit eburno*.

with the thunderbolt, interpreting the figure as a storm-god.<sup>45</sup> However, it is difficult to believe that they were so much grasped by the image that they used it to represent their own deity in a religious legend. The *Par. Jer.* (similarly to the books of *Esdra* and *Nehemia*) condemns the mingling of Jews with foreigners and reports that Jeremiah was grieved when his afflicted compatriots prayed to a foreign god for deliverance (6.16–17; 7.30). Further, the eagle of the *Par. Jer.* is a symbol of life rather than war. It is never associated with war against Israel's enemies, but it resuscitates a corpse (7.19). Apart from the formal coincidence, it is difficult to find arguments for identifying it with the image of the Roman military standard *aquila*.

For similar reasons, it is unlikely that this motif was inspired by any of the Greco-Roman eagle images representing Zeus or Juppiter. To the reality of the second Jewish war, we have to add two historical records of instances when the image of an eagle scandalized the Jews. The first instance is the "desolating sacrilege," the altar that Antiochus Epiphanes set up in the temple, which most probably contained the winged image(s) of Zeus Olympius or Baal Shamem.<sup>46</sup> That the remembrance of this event was living is shown by the references of the New Testament.<sup>47</sup> The second case occurred under Herod the Great, who placed the image of an eagle above the temple gate, but had to remove it because of the general uproar.<sup>48</sup>

The influence of Greco-Roman tradition on the *Par. Jer.* was more subtle. The pagan idols of the day must have been overtly offensive for a Jew who wrote that his people must separate themselves from the foreigners and their gods. Yet, the same Jewish person had some Greek education, and therefore knew Homer. He was, in part, favorably disposed toward the image of the eagle, to which the Jewish Scriptures often compare God, God's court, or the faithful.<sup>49</sup> He probably relied on *2 Baruch* (in some form) when he had the eagle deliver the letter of Baurch to the Diaspora. In someone who was

<sup>45</sup> For a comparison of Zeus and Near Eastern storm-gods, see M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), 115–116, 580–581.

<sup>46</sup> *Daniel* 9:27; *2 Maccabees* 6:2. Cf. S. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder* (Freiburg, 1987), 352–53; K. Koch, *Daniel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986), 136–140; D. Wenham, "Abomination of Desolation," in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York, 1992), 28–31.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 24:15.

<sup>48</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.146–163; *Jewish War* 1.650–653.

<sup>49</sup> Exod 19:4; Ps 103:5; Isa 40:31; Ezek 1:10.

familiar with Homer, this motif evoked the role of the eagle as Zeus' messenger in Homer.<sup>50</sup>

Why did the author think of *Iliad* VII in particular? One may immediately object that the Homeric text mentions "vultures" (*aigypioi*), whereas the bird in the *Par. Jer.* is an "eagle" (*aetos*). This problem can be solved if one considers that the two species were often confused in antiquity and the usage of the two names varied.<sup>51</sup> The same ambiguity characterizes the Hebrew *nešer*, and probably the Syriac *nešraa'* used in *2 Baruch*.<sup>52</sup> The difference between the Homeric *fēgos* (oak) and the *xylon* in the other text is also not decisive, because the latter had a wide range of meanings, including pole, cut wood, and living tree.<sup>53</sup>

In order to understand why *Iliad* VII is a likely source for the *Par. Jer.*, we have to examine the broader context of the episode in both writings. The *Par. Jer.* reports that Jeremiah asked a place from the king to bury the dead of his people. When the eagle arrives, the people are busy carrying a corpse to bury it outside the city. This motif has its own significance in the narrative. Burying the dead was a pious act, of which the famous example was Tobit.<sup>54</sup> Living in the Assyrian diaspora, Tobit "performed many acts of charity to his kindred." He buried the corpses that he found outside the city, and went into much trouble doing this. The author of the *Par. Jer.* could have borrowed from the popular story of Tobit.<sup>55</sup> In the *Iliad*, the burying of the dead is discussed in detail after the metamorphosis of the two deities. The battlefield is already filled with corpses (VII.327–335) and the cease-fire gives an opportunity to collect them.

<sup>50</sup> E.g., *Iliad* XXIV.290–321 etc. Cf. A.B. Cook, *Zeus*, vol. 2/2 (Cambridge, 1925), 1360–1361.

<sup>51</sup> D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds*, 5–6, 25–26; Pollard, *op. cit.*, 76, quoting W.R. Halliday.

<sup>52</sup> L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1995), 731. R. Payne Smith (ed.), *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1901), 2479, s.v. *nešraa'*, does not indicate the polysemy.

<sup>53</sup> H.G. Liddel *et al.* (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement* (Oxford, 1996), s.v.

<sup>54</sup> Tobit 1:17–2:8; cf. Sirah 7:33; 38:16. See especially 4 Ezra 2:23: "When you find any who are dead, commit them to the grave and mark it, and I will give you the first place in my resurrection."

<sup>55</sup> Note that the delivery of Baruch's letter by the eagle is another motif that was originally related to the Assyrian diaspora. According to *2 Baruch* 77:19–25, the eagle took the letter to the "nine and a half tribes," whereas the letter to Babylonia was entrusted to three men.

Vultures are likely to appear under such circumstances, which probably explains why the two deities choose this particular form. If the author of the *Par. Jer.* already had in mind the motif of the eagle (probably from *2 Baruch*) and the burying of the dead (probably from *Tobit*) and also knew Homer, it is not any more surprising that he came upon *Iliad* VII.58–61.

May this sound speculative, one should keep in mind that the epiphany of God as an eagle on a tree is quite strange in the context of Jewish literature. Consequently, it is difficult to give it a self-evident explanation to it. I hope to have shown that *Iliad* VII.58–61 is at least a very likely source for that motif. Of course, that parallel does not explain every detail of the episode. Whereas sudden recognition has its parallels in Homer (see, for example, *Odyssey* 1.320 above), the resuscitation of the corpse by an eagle is unique to the *Par. Jer.* This feature is not Homeric, and must be read against the background of Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian miracle stories.<sup>56</sup>

In the short version of the *Ap. John*, Reflection (*epinoia*) sits on a tree "in the form of an eagle" (*nthe nouaetos* or *mpesmot nouaetos*). The relevant Homeric passages use similar expressions (*eoikōs* or *enalinkios*, see above). A similar phrase, in contrast, does not occur in either *2 Baruch* or the *Par. Jer.* Further, in the *Ap. John*, Reflection teaches Adam (and his wife), but does not do anything that resembles those two texts. It can be concluded that the short text of the *Ap. John* relied on the classical imagery of the eagle on the tree, possibly on Homer. Although it is later than *2 Baruch* and the *Par. Jer.*, it was probably not influenced by them. The longer text of the *Ap. John* dates to the middle or end of the third century. In this version, the eagle is not any more identified as Reflection, but rather as the Saviour. When the long version of the *Ap. John* was made, the eagle was already known as a symbol of Christ.<sup>57</sup> In the early third century, Hippolytus of Rome commented on *Revelation* 12.14:<sup>58</sup> "[The text is about] the two wings of the great eagle, that is to say, the faith of

<sup>56</sup> Luke 7:11–15; Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.45; *Mekhilta Beshallah* 1 (referring to 2 Kings 4:32–36). Cf. W. Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity. A Sourcebook* (London, 1999), 45–46 and *passim*; J. Blenkinsopp, "Miracles: Elisha and Hanina ben Dosa," in J.C. Cavadini (ed.), *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, 1999), 57–81.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Amsler, *op. cit.*, 172–173; Czachesz, *op. cit.*, 153.

<sup>58</sup> "The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness." (*New Revised Standard Version*).

Jesus Christ, who, in stretching forth His holy hands on the holy tree, unfolded two wings, the right and the left, and called to Him all who believed upon Him, and covered them as a hen her chickens." The reviser of the *Ap. John* evidently felt that the eagle on the tree must symbolise the Saviour rather than Reflection.

The *Acts Phil.* was not composed in its present form before the end of the fourth century. From this time there is archaeological evidence of the eagle symbolising Christ on the cross. An eagle on a cross is depicted on a sarcophagus and an eagle with a cross on its chest decorates a capital of a fourth century cathedral.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the *Acts Phil.* reports that the "wings of the eagle were spread out in the form of the cross." The text is not unique in fourth-century Christianity in employing an eagle on a tree to *symbolise* Christ on the cross. It remains unique, however, as far as the eagle in the narrative *is* Christ who acts and speaks.

The closest parallel to the scene is found in the long version of the *Ap. John*, where the Saviour teaches Adam and his wife in the form of an eagle sitting on a tree: "I appeared in the form of an eagle on the tree of knowledge, which is the Reflection from the Providence of pure light, that I might teach them and awaken them out of the depth of sleep. For they were both in a fallen state and they recognised their nakedness. Reflection appeared to them as a light and she awakened their thinking" (*NHC* II.23.26–35). We can compare this passage with *Acts Phil.* 3.8 (A): "Speaking from the mouth of the eagle, as it were, Jesus said to Philip, 'Behold I bless you on account of your prayer, and humiliate myself to you in my glory. I will strengthen you with my light before the ones who are ignorant of me.'" The concept of "light" and "ignorance" are common to the two passages, which increases the possibility of literary dependence. The *Acts Phil.* also seems to have been acquainted with other writings known to us from the Nag Hammadi Codices: *Letter of Peter to Philip*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Mary*.<sup>60</sup> In the fourth century, the widely accepted symbolism of Christ as an eagle made it unproblematic for the *Acts Phil.* to borrow the motif from the *Ap. John*.

The borders between comparison, symbolism, and metamorphosis were fluid in Homer as well as in early Christian literature.

<sup>59</sup> Schneider and Stemplinger, "Adler," 92; A. Negev, "Elusa," in D.N. Freedman, ed, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York, 1992), 484–487 at 486.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Czachesz, *op. cit.*, 136–148.

Schnapp-Gourbeillon argues that in Homer "the hero who is compared to a lion *is* the lion."<sup>61</sup> In the well-known passage of Revelation 5–6, the Lamb in the heavenly court *is* Christ. However, Revelation situates the whole account in the heavenly court, clearly separating it from (while emphasising its importance for) the events on earth. The *Ap. John*, where the Saviour appears in the form of eagle, clearly belongs to the same genre of revelation (*BG* 20.19–22.16). The *Acts Phil.*, in contrast, stresses the aspect of metamorphosis in a way unique among early Christian writings. Philip says, "How did you, who are mighty, appear on the top of this tree?" In the subsequent sentences, there is a gradual transition to the subject of Christ's incarnation. This association also supports the interpretation that the author viewed the eagle episode as a metamorphosis. Homeric gods show considerably more inclination to appear in the form of (or change into) animals in a story than God or Christ in Jewish and early Christian literature. It is remarkable that Philip asks the eagle to carry his prayers to God. Although the eagle carries letters in *2 Baruch* and the *Par. Jer.*, the motif could have been taken directly from Homer and Greek mythology, where the eagle is featured as Zeus' messenger.<sup>62</sup> The parallels with *2 Baruch* and the *Par. Jer.* cannot be neglected; however, their role as sources of the eagle episode in the *Acts Phil.* seems less important than it has been suggested.

<sup>61</sup> Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *op. cit.*, 189.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. note 50 above.