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THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS AS CONFICTIO (IRENÆUS, ADV. HAER. I, 31, 1)

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The first testimony we have to the newly discovered Gospel of Judas¹ is in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I, 31, 1. Here it is said that certain Gnostics adduce a *confictio* which they call ‘the Gospel of Judas’.² The question is: what does the noun *confictio* mean here?

Up to now the word has been translated into English as ‘a fictitious history’,³ ‘a fabrication’,⁴ ‘a fabricated work’,⁵ ‘a fabricated book’.⁶ The suggestion in all of these translations is that the Gospel of Judas is considered to be ‘a fiction’.⁷ One may dispute this opinion, however.

According to *TLL*,⁸ *confictio* has a negative meaning indeed: *dolosa excogitatio*. But apart of this first (mentioned) meaning it also denotes *formatio*. The positive meaning of this last word is illustrated by a quote from the *Collectio Avellena*: *qui ... plasmatus est et confictionem* (Gr. σύστασις) *in muliebri accepit ventre*. Moreover, it is also indicated that the noun is derived from *confingere* and that its equivalent according to glossaria is σύνθεσις, σύμπλασις.⁹ For the correct understanding of *confictio* in the Latin Irenaeus we deem this information to be of vital importance.

As regards *confingere*, *TLL*¹⁰ starts by indicating that the verb is composed of *con* and *fingerere*. Its first and, so it appears on the basis of its many testimonies, preponderant meaning is: *fingerendo efficere comminisci*. Its second and, in view of the considerable number of testimonies, also well-attested meaning is *componere, conficere*. Among the testimonies of the second category one reads, for instance, one example from Varro belonging to the discipline of linguistics¹¹ and some from Pliny ‘the Elder’ belonging to natural history.¹² It is this second but at the same time most literal, elementary and hence basic meaning which, according to my opinion, the person who once¹³ translated Irenaeus original Greek into Latin had especially in view.

Evidence to support this claim is primarily found in Epiphanius. In his report on the Gospel of Judas and the Gnostics who adduce (φέρειν) it, he terms it a συνταγμάτιον.¹⁴ This seems to indicate a (small) work that has been put together from several components. From the Latin translation of Irenaeus’ testimony, it is true, one cannot deduce that the writing we are dealing with was small; the suggestion brought about by the word *confictio* is supported by Epiphanius’ συν-ταγμάτιον, however. It is fairly possible that

Irenaeus in his original Greek text used this word.¹⁵ It might also be possible that he termed the work a σύμπλασις or σύνθεσις. Be that as it may, one thing seems to be evident: both Irenaeus and, in his wake, Epiphanius hand down the information that the Gospel of Judas was a composition in the original sense of the word, i.e. a work put together from several (in all likelihood: Gnostic) traditions.

As a matter of fact the word *confictio*, like its suggested equivalent σύμπλασις,¹⁶ has the negative connotation of ‘feigned’ or ‘fabricated’. But this connotation is *not* inherent to the meaning of σύνταγμα/συνταγμάτιον (or σύνθεσις, for that matter).¹⁷ By opting for an ambiguous word such as *confictio* in order to indicate the peculiar work the Gospel of Judas according to Irenaeus’ description was, the Latin translator made an appropriate choice. His readers are endangered, however, to overlook the original meaning of the word and, in this way, to miss a cardinal characteristic Irenaeus intended to transmit. From the course of Irenaeus’ exposition in *Adv. haer.* it is clear that in I, 31 he is dealing with a group of Gnostics (later on, for instance by Epiphanius and Theodoretus, they are termed ‘Cainites’) whose teachings are based upon doctrines several of which we also find in other Gnostic groups.

A glance at the original meaning of *confictio* we finally get from Theodoretus of Cyrhus. In his *Haereticorum fabularum compendium* I, 15 he hands down an abstract from Irenaeus’ original Greek passage on the Gospel of Judas and their Gnostics. As regards the Gospel, he emphatically communicates:

ὅπερ ἐκεῖνοι συντεθείκασιν.¹⁸ The stress in this phrase, it should be observed, is on ἐκεῖνοι: Theodoretus is explaining to his readers that Judas did not write the Gospel named after him, but that it originated from others. In the choice of the verb συντίθημι, however, we may hear an echo of Irenaeus’ original Greek noun which his Latin translator transmitted as *confictio*.

Our concluding remarks may be brief. Already from Irenaeus’ testimony it may be derived that the Gospel of Judas was a composite, the word *confictio* at the same time bearing the negative connotation of something put together. But Irenaeus (and the same goes, in his wake, for Epiphanius and Theodoretus) does *not* term it a mere fabrication or fiction. From the recently discovered Gospel of Judas we learn that the information provided by Irenaeus is correct. The Gospel of Judas is a work composed of several Gnostic (mainly ‘Sethian’) and also other traditions.¹⁹

NOTES

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1 Best editions and studies: *The Gospel of Judas together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos. Critical Edition.* Coptic text edited by Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst. Introductions, Translations, and Notes by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, Gregor Wurst, and François Gaudart, Washington, D.C.: National Geographic 2007; *Codex Tchacos. Texte und Analysen.* Herausgegeben von Johanna Brankaer und Hans-Gebhard Bethge (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 161), Berlin-

- New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007; *The Gospel of Judas in Context. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Gospel of Judas: Paris, Sorbonne, October 27th–28th, 2006*. Edited by Madeleine Scopello (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 62), Leiden-Boston: Brill 2008; *The Judas Codex: Proceedings of the International Congress on Codex Tchacos held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13-16, 2008*. Edited by April D. DeConick (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies), Leiden-Boston: Brill (in print).
- 2 *Adu. haer.* I, 31, 1 (Rousseau & Doutreleau, I/2, 386): ‘Et confi(n)ctionem adferunt huiusmodi, Iudae Euangelium illud uocantes’. *Aduersus haereses* is quoted here according to the critical edition (with French translation, introduction, notes, and appendices) by Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, *Irenée de Lyon, Contre les hérésies, Livre I, Tome I + II (Sources chrétiennes 263–264)*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1979. Erasmus in his 1526 *editio princeps* of Irenaeus, Harvey in his influential edition (W. Wigan Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis Libros quique aduersus Haereses, I, Cantabrigiae: Typis academicis 1857, 242*) and Rousseau & Doutreleau opt for *confinctio* (perhaps according to the –disputed– principle of the ‘*lectio difficilior potior?*’); the important mss. Claromontanus and Vossianus read the common Latin noun *confictio*, however. In essence, all this does not effect the meaning while both *confinctio* and *confictio* derive from *ingere* which verb in first instance denotes the act of forming).
 - 3 See, for instance, Elaine Pagels & Karen King, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity*, New York: Viking 2007, xii; April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says*, London-New York: Continuum 2007, 174.
 - 4 Thus, for instance, in the wide-spread and influential anthology of Gnostic sources: Werner Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, vol. I: *The Patristic Evidence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972, 42.
 - 5 For instance: John D. Turner, ‘The Place of the *Gospel of Judas* in Sethian Tradition’, in: Scopello (ed.), *Gospel of Judas in Context* (n. 1), 191.
 - 6 For instance: Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas*, Oxford: University Press 2007, 116.
 - 7 Thus, indeed, the straightforward translation in Bart D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*, Oxford: University Press 2006, 63.
 - 8 *Thesaurvs Linguae Latinae editvs avtoritate et consilio academiavm qvinque Germanicarvm Berolinensis Gottingensis Lipsiensis Monacensis Vindobonensis*, Volumen IV, Lipsiae: In aedibus B.G. Tevbneri 1906–1909, 205.
 - 9 Cf. e.g. G. Loewe’s *Corpvvs glossariorvm*, vol. II, *Glossae latinograecae et graecolatino*, edidervnt Georgivs Goetz & Gottholdvvs Gvndermann, Lipsiae: In aedibus B.G. Tevbneri 1888 (repr. Amsterdam: Hackert 1965): σύμπλασις-confictio (p. 442); σύθθεσις-confictio, compositio (p. 446).
 - 10 *TLL* IV (n. 8), 213–214.
 - 11 Varro, *ling.* 5, 7: ‘quemadmodum quodque poeta finxerit verba, [quod] confinxerit, [quod] declinarit’.
 - 12 Plinius, *nat.* 10, 91: ‘nec unde confingantur (halcyonum nidi), invenitur’; 10, 93: ‘eadem materia confingunt nides’; etc.
 - 13 There is some discussion in regard to the date of the (unknown) person(s): see Doutreleau’s remarks in the various volumes of the edition of Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* in the Sources chrétiennes and, in particular, Sven Lundström, *Studien zur lateinischen Irenäusübersetzung*, Lund: Gleerup 1943 and idem, *Neue Studien zur lateinischen Irenäusübersetzung*, Lund: Gleerup 1948.

- 14 *Panarion* 38 (ed. Karl Holl, *GCS* 25, Leipzig: Hinrichs 1915, 63).
- 15 Cf. Bruno Reynders, *Lexique comparé du texte grec et des versions latine, arménienne et syriaque de l' "Adversus Haereses" de saint Irénée*, II, *Index des mots latins*, Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq 1954, 62.
- 16 See, for instance, *A Greek-English Lexicon. Compiled by Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott*. Revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Rodrick McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1973, 1683–164.
- 17 For σύνταγμα, see for instance Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1724 (e.g. ‘that which is put together in order’ and ‘treatise, work, book’); for συνταγματίον, see for instance G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1961 (repr. 1972), 1338: ‘dimin. of σύνταγμα, little treatise, little work’ (in regard to σύνταγμα in patristic sources, Lampe can confine himself to the just quoted meanings as found in Liddell & Scott); for σύνθεσις, see Liddell & Scott, 1716 (e.g. ‘putting together, composition, combination’) or Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1328-1329 (idem from a great variety of ‘patristic’ sources).
- 18 *MPG* (= *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Parisiis: Ex typis catholicis Migne, in vico dicto Montrouge 1860) 83, 368B.
- 19 See e.g. Scopello (ed.), *Gospel of Judas in Context* (n. 1). The major part of the essays included in this volume refer to ‘Sethian’ elements, some (e.g. J.-D. Dubois, ‘L’ Évangile de Judas et la tradition basilidienne’, 145–154) to ‘Basilidean’ elements, others to the apparent ‘Biblical’ traditions. As it is generally assumed (and becomes evident at first reading), the main contents of the Gospel of Judas as we now have it in a Coptic version consists of ‘(pseudo-) historical’ information on the one hand and highly interesting Gnostic (mainly ‘mythical’) information on the other.