

The Priestly Lineage of Mary and Jesus Reconsidered

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The commonly referred to story of „The fish and the stater“ in Matthew’s gospel (17,24–27) is probably well remembered by all those who hear the gospel preached because it is rather unique. Biblical scholars read it on two levels, that of the situation in which Jesus first spoke it, and that of the level in which the primitive Church adapted it to its own questions and needs. This latter level consists of Form-critical questions which do not concern us. The anecdote, as such, is peculiar to Matthew and has no counterpart in the other gospels. There is nothing strange about this since each evangelist includes material specific to his gospel.

What scarcely anyone knows is that this story seems to have a „continuation“ which we do not find in virtually any modern translation or critical note in editions of the Greek text. Nevertheless, the „continuation“ appears in one Greek codex of the eleventh century and has a parallel in the very ancient Diatesseron of Tatian which dates from the second century and is thus older than any of our earliest papyri and codices¹. Could one Greek manuscript have preserved an original reading? Some text-critics think so², and any reading from Tatian must be given serious consideration.

Now according to *codex Algerinae Peckover* (The one alluded to) Jesus tells Peter to go to the sea and let down his net (as in the commonly received text) but then says: „Since they have thought me a stranger, let the sea teach thee that I am not a priest only but even a king. Go thou therefore and give for Thyself and for me also, as if a stranger.“ This is strongly echoed in St. Ephraem’s paraphrase of Tatian’s text of this pericope: „And when he (Peter) had drawn out the fish which had in its mouth a stater, the symbol of dominion, those haughty ones were reprovéd and confounded because they believed not that he (Jesus) was a Levite to whom the sea and the fishes were witnesses that he is King and priest“³. Obviously this is an important

¹ TATIAN, of Syrian origin, was a disciple of JUSTIN MARTYR after whose death he began his own literary and philosophical works, many of which are lost. He wrote his Diatesseron — the first known ‚harmony‘ of the four gospels — around 170 A.D., first in Greek and then in Syriac. The Syriac text was used by the Syrian Church for liturgical purposes until the fifth century. There were later translations into Latin and Arabic all of which, together, give us a substantially accurate knowledge of his original harmony.

² K. ALAND has written that „Theoretically the original readings can be hidden in a single ms, thus standing alone against the rest of tradition“ (The significance of the Papyri for Progress in New Testament Research, in: *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J.G. HYATT, New York 1965, 340) and R. V. G. TASKER, even more strongly in: *The Greek New Testament*, Oxford 1964, viii: „The possibility must be left open that in some cases the true reading may have been preserved in only a few witnesses or *even in a single relatively late witness*“ (italics mine).

³ EPHREM de Nisibe, *Commentaire de l’Evangile ou Diatesseron* (Sources Chrétiennes 121, ed. L. LELOR), Paris 1966, 253.