

The Shroud in the Gospel following Gamaliel

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The author of this apocryphal Gospel is probably the Pharisee Gamaliel Rabban-Zaken the “Elder”, a teacher of the law, the former teacher of Saul, the later apostle Paul (Acts 22:3). He was an honoured member of the council, which passed judgement on Peter and some of the apostles, for preaching the word Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem. Gamaliel is the one who stood up in the Sanhedrin and advised the council to take no direct action, but to wait if the new movement would collapse of itself if it were from men. Like what happened to the followers of Theudas and of Judas the Galilean. In the case the word came from God, no one will be able to stop these man, because one will fight against God (Acts 5:33-35)

Because Gamaliel is named a saint in the “Martyrologium Romanum” (Holiday 3 August), this indicates that he became a Christian. He wrote a Gospel, which is in many ways dissenting from the Four Gospels. Following the text, a IV Century copy, the author was an eye-witness. The tomb of Gamaliel was discovered in 415 AD, near the city of Kafargamala, which means probably “Village of Gamaliel”.

The original French text is translated by Reverend Father van Oudenryn, published in “Le Figaro Littéraire” 13 April 1957. The Dutch text is taken from my book “Het Gelaat van Christus” (The Face of Christ), edited by “De Vlijt” Antwerpen 1986.

Very early in the Sunday morning, the sleeping Roman procurator Pilate had a vision. He saw, standing silently before him, the risen Jesus-Christ, the man who he had, three days earlier, condemned to be crucified till death.

In panic, full of doubt, he called for the scribes and the Elderly of the Sanhedrin. He urged them to explain his dream. The Jews tried to calm down Pilate, repeating: “Let his blood be on us and on our children”.(Mat 27:35). That very moment, came into the room a Roman soldier, who told Pilate about some strange events that occurred, during the night, on the tomb of Jesus. When Pilate heard that Jesus was indeed raised from the death, he lost his cool, crying out that he only had condemned Jesus to please Herod, who was in Jerusalem at that time.

Pilate ordered the scribes and the Elderly to go with him to the tomb of Jesus. Because the Jews refused, he tried in vain to persuade them to be repentant because they killed the Son of God. After Pilate said: “Let us weep over ourselves, because we committed a capital crime, In our recklessness we have crucified the Son of God.” The Jews burst out in laughter.

Finally Pilate obliged the members of the Sanhedrin, to accompany him to the sepulchre. From a fare, they saw that the area on the tomb was occupied by an excited crowd. The Roman guards blocked the entrance of the tomb. When Pilate and the Sanhedrin came close to the tomb, the crowd became silent and retired a little bit. Pilate and the scribes found that the stone was rolled away from the tomb, they became more and more nervous. The scribes were not at ease. Also the responsible centurion, who witnessed the events, was not at ease. This veteran of many battles was disfigured in the face and blind on one eye.

He was afraid, that Pilate would not believe his strange story about the events, he witnessed tonight. But Pilate did not ask one question when he entered the tomb. There I saw the linen lying there and said to the centurion: “I know that the man who was involved in this shroud, is indeed risen from the death.” Guided by a divine inspiration, Pilate took the Shroud and kissed the linen. He handed over the Shroud to the centurion and said: “This linen will restore the light in your blinded eye!” Amazed, the soldier took and after kissing the

Shroud, touched his eye with the linen and became seeing. The hideous scarf over his cheek disappeared at once. The astonished Jews were not able to comment on the events. Not one of them was able to find a single word to explain what happened. A number of the Jews begun to doubt, if they indeed did not kill the Messiah and retired in silence. But Pilate ordered the scribes to stay and he questioned them about the sweet odour of the linen, as if it were a royal purple shroud. The scribes replied: "Do You not know, Pilate that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodeme used a lot of myrrh and aloe? This explains the sweet odour !" But Pilate replied: "In the tomb, I do not smell the odour of death, but the sweet-smelling of freshly crushed nutmegs !" Following the scribes, this smell was caused by the wind, carrying the smell of the fragrances of the garden.

They warned Pilate not to listen to the whispers spread among the people, about the wonder-works performed by Christ. In fact most of these miracles were the work of Beelzebub, the devil in person.

At a sudden, one found in a water-well, the corpse of a crucified man, involved in a shroud.

For one moment, one believed the mystery of the risen Jesus to be solved. Pilate called Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodeme, to verify the identity of the dead man. By unfolding the shroud, it became clear, that this was not the corpse of Jesus. The crowd, agitated by the scribes, menaced to drown Joseph and Nicodeme in the water-well. At the last moment the Roman guards saved them.

Pilate ordered Joseph and Nicodeme to compare both shrouds. They indicated without any hesitation the clean linen cloth, in which they wrapped Jesus after they took the body from the cross. Then Pilate ordered Joseph and Nicodeme to involve the corpse of the unknown man and to bury him the same way they buried Jesus. Both men began their lugubrious task. As soon as they rolled the stone, before the entrance of the sepulchre, one heard a voice, calling loudly: "Let me out... Take away the rolling stone. Jesus-Christ brought me back to life."

Many of the spectators became terrified and ran away in panic. Other felt on their knees and praising the Lord, they became that day followers of Jesus-Christ.

When one rolled away the heavy stone, the man that was dead came out praising the Lord. He told to everyone how he was raised from the dead, by a shining appearance. He asked Pilate: "Do You not recognise me ? I am the culprit, crucified at the right side of Jesus. He promised me then: 'Today you will be with me in paradise', of which can smell here the sweet scent".

Pilate asked in vain the scribes for some explanation of the events. But all of the scribes were already out of sight. Pilate ordered the guards to arrest the scribes. The soldiers forcing the doors, sacked the Sanhedrin and arrested a number of scribes.

Back home, he gave the two shrouds to his wife Procla. She, who told Pilate during the trial: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Mat 27:19), indicated the true clean Shroud, without a shadow of a doubt and took the linen in her care.

Pilate asked the centurion for a complete report and ordered King Herode to restore urgently all "juridical errors" versus the risen Jesus.

Herode and the High Priest studied the letter of Pilate and decided to take action to stop all these nonsense's. At the advice of the Sanhedrin, Herode asked Pilate, the authorisation to interrogate the centurion, the four guards and the "man risen from the dead." He also required the return of the two shrouds, because all linens used during burials are following the "Law of Moses" ritual unclean. In good faith, Pilate agreed, in spite of the warnings of his wife Procla, who refused to return the true Shroud, because being a Roman, she was not bound by Jewish laws. The presentiment of Procla turned out to be justified. A group of

“unknown” hired murderers killed the centurion, his four companions and the “good culprit”. At the same moment, the ghost of the “good culprit” appeared to Pilate, telling him, how he was killed and foretelling Pilate how he will be die.

Some experts believe that following Gamaliel, Pilate took possession of “the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head” (John 20:7).

Following the tutor of the Holy Nina the “Enlighten”(306-337), Procla handed over the Shroud to Luke the Evangelist, who passed the cloth to Peter. He should have hidden the cloth so well, that after he left Palestine, no one could find it back. Following other sources, the cloth was venerated in a monastery along the river Jordan.

Pilate, after an attack on the Samaritans on the Holy Mount Gezerim, was called back to Rome and exiled to the region of Luzern. By tradition “Mount Pilate” recalls the suicide of Pilate.

Conclusion: for a modern observer, it is clear that this text is not realistic, but like in most of the fantastic sagas and myths, it probably contains a nucleus of truth.

If the people believed that he would be healed by touching the edge of the cloth of Jesus (Mark 6:56) or the handkerchiefs and aprons of Paul (Acts 19:12), it is clear that the same palladium was attributed to the shroud, drenched with his blood.

One should not forget, that many miracles are related in the Gospels following Matthew Mark, Luke, John and the Acts. Indeed, one may wonder, if Jesus really changed water to wine (John 2:9). But should one not read the Gospel of Gamaliel with the same conception, one reads Matthew (27:52/53): “The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

Many modern sceptics believe that Gamaliel was inspired by the resurrection of Lazarus in John (11:38-44), a dead girl (Mat. 9:18), a dead man (Mark 27:72)

The same goes for Jesus walking on water (Mark 6:45 & John 6:16), calms the water (Mark 4:35 & Luke 8:22), feeding the five & four thousand (Mat.14:11 & Mat. 15:29 & Mark 8:1 & John 6:1) and the many healings of sick, blinds; mutes, paralytics, crippled, leprous, possessed ...