Marriages, Unions, and Bridal Chambers
in the Gospel of Philip

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In an article published in 2013, Karen King argues that the stance of the Gospel of Philip (Gos. Phil.) on marriage is basically a positive one. King places the Gos. Phil. inside of Christian "pro-marriage ethics" and interprets "marriage as a symbolic paradigm for the reunification of believers with their angelic (spiritual) doubles in Christian initiation ritual."[1] Thus, King avoids the alternative often found in scholarship between those who reclaim ascetic tendencies as the background of the Gos. Phil. and others who are finding some kind of "libertinism" in this text. Such an alternative is characteristic for the scholarship on the subject of so called Gnosticism, as Williams has shown.[2] From the church fathers to Hans Jonas and beyond,[3] "one of the most frequently repeated characterizations of ancient 'Gnosticism' is that it was a religious ideology that tended to inspire two divergent ethical programs, asceticism and libertinism. This characterization has been around in one form or another for a very long time and has been repeated so often that its essential validity has often been simply presupposed."[4] This alternative is also applied in interpretations of the Gos. Phil. and – in line of the general criticism of King on the concept of "Gnosticism" and its shortcomings[5] – I do not believe that it enhances the understanding of this Gospel which I am reading fundamentally as a Christian text. Below, I will therefore try to understand the statements that can be discovered in the Gos. Phil. concerning marriage, couples and their unions and separations and finally concerning the

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[1] Karen L. King, "The Place of the *Gospel of Philip* in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus' Marital Status," *NTS* 59 (2013): 587, 565.

[2] Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 139–188; on the history of research see also Philip L. Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Paraenetic Discourse: Determining the Social Function of Moral Exhortation in Valentinian Christianity,* NHMS 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1–7.

[3] See e. g. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil. Die mythologische Gnosis. Mit einer Einleitung zur Geschichte und Methodologie der Forschung,* 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964; repr. 1988), 233–238 (with emphasis on libertinism); Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion,* 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 262–283.

[4] Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 139.

[5] See Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) for the overall problem of the construction and usage of "Gnosticism."

"bridal chamber" (which are basically several "bridal chambers") while avoiding the said alternative and following King's ideas on the subject, although arriving in some points at different conclusions. The reason for the differences results from the problems in decoding the complex metaphorical language world of the Gos. Phil. which makes it difficult to figure out on which level a given statement may be understood. Therefore, I shall, as a first step, try to explain how the different levels in the Gos. Phil. are related to each other – undertaking an excursus into agriculture first in order to use a starting point that is a less disputed subject than marriage.[6]

1. Irritations and Disruptions in the *Gospel of Philip*

Throughout the Gos. Phil. we can find certain disruptions or irritations in the text. In the process of reading there are time and again sentences which do not fit into their context or seem to be plainly wrong. By encountering such disruption, the reading process has to slow down as it becomes unavoidable to think about the problems created by the apparently wrong statements and to decode what they might contribute to establishing sense in this complicated text. I start with one of the Adam-Christ passages in the Gos. Phil. which offers an interesting example for such an irritation just at the beginning:

Before Christ came, there was no bread in the world, just as Paradise, the place, where Adam was, had many trees as food for the animals, but no grain as food for the human beings. Humans were nourished like animals. But when Christ came, the perfect human being (ⲡⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲣ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ), he brought bread from heaven, so that human beings could be nourished with human food (ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲧⲣⲟⲫⲏ ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ).[7]

The statement that there was no bread in the world before the time of Christ seems to be simply wrong: Agriculture had already been established in neolithic times. And since there are many Old Testament narratives in which people are producing or eating bread, one can also not postulate that the ancient readers and writers of the Gos. Phil. were not aware bread existed even before the time

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[6] For methodical reasons I will not engage in the following with the church father accounts about Valentinians. I do not want to presuppose that the whole Gos. Phil. is Valentinian (even if it may be partly based on Valentinian ideas) – and Irenaeus and other church fathers are "hostile sources" anyway as for instance Ismo O. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 8, states, which means that there is always the danger of reading one-sided when following their perspective. See also Tite, *Valentinian Ethics*, 11–19, 309–313, for the methodological challenge of establishing "Valentinianism", and Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and Exegesis on the Soul*, NHMS 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 349–356, for problematic readings of the Gos. Phil. from the perspective of the church fathers.

[7] Gos. Phil. 15, p. 55,6–14.

of Christ. If we go on reading – still somehow wondering – we find ourselves in Paradise where the described situation without bread really took place: Only after they were thrown out of Paradise, human beings started to cultivate the earth (Gen 3:17–19) and only then the time of simple nourishment by fruits from the trees (Gen 1:29–30) came to an end. The story of Genesis is correctly narrated or at least alluded to.[8]

The text then contrasts this era of "animalistic" nourishment with the period after Christ came. As a perfect human being, Christ established human nourishment by bringing bread from heaven. This "bread from heaven" is clearly a reference to John 6, where the bread is not only given by Christ but also represents Christ himself as heavenly food, necessary to eat in the Eucharist to receive eternal live.[9] Since Christ gave this bread not immediately after Adam and Eve were thrown out of Paradise, the long time span between Gen 3 and John 6 (several thousand years of human civilization) is absent in the Gos. Phil. Normal bread seems to be utterly unimportant. The only real bread is the one that Christ brought, the heavenly, eucharistic one – which really did not exist in the era before Christ. Eucharist is thus proved to be the essential human nourishment.

Taking a step back one can define different levels of the text in the following way:

↑ level 3: ritual / community	Eucharist
↑ level 2: exegesis	Genesis + Gospel of John
↑ level 1: everyday life	agriculture

On the everyday level, the text deals with agriculture. On the exegetical level, it is connected with references to the story of Adam in Genesis and Christ in the Gospel of John. The combination of these two levels generates a third one in which the community ritual of the Eucharist enters the picture – without ever being mentioned directly.

One can detect those different levels also in many other passages of the Gospel of Philip.[10] The so called "disruptions" or "irritations" slow down the

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[8] For the (particularly Jewish) parallels see Jan Dochhorn, "Warum gab es kein Getreide im Paradies? Eine jüdische Ätiologie des Ackerbaus in EvPhil 15," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1998): 125–133.

[9] For Christ as bread and the interpretation of John 6 see Silke Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock. Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-bin-Worte,* NT.S 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 201–234; Silke Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'. Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," in *"Eine gewöhnliche und harmlose Speise"? Von den Entwicklungen frühchristlicher Abendmahlstraditionen,* ed. Judith Hartenstein, Silke Petersen, and Angela Standhartinger (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 105–130.

[10] See Silke Petersen, "Esel, Glasgefäße und pneumatische Schwangerschaften. Erkundungen bildlicher Sprache im Philippusevangelium," in *Gleichnisse und Parabeln in der frühchristlichen*

reading process and are, therefore, able to function as transfer signals pointing to the changing levels in the text.

2. Adam and Eve as Exemplary Couple

On the base of these insights and ideas, I will now switch from agriculture to the subject of marriages and couples. First of all, it might be helpful to consider some other passages – as a link between those two themes of everyday life – where the Gos. Phil. is also engaged with the course of events in Paradise, now explicitly including Eve. Since Adam and Eve are *the* exemplary exegetical couple, we may be able to learn something from them about the way the Gos. Phil. understands couples and their unions or separations. The fate of Adam and Eve can thus be used as a building block for understanding those concepts in principal, even though the fate of those two is not a happy one. Whenever Adam and Eve are mentioned, the central focus is on their separation and its consequences:

When Eve was still in Adam, death did not exist. When she separated (ⲡⲱⲣϫ) from him, death came into being. If he enters again and he takes him up into himself, death will be no more.[11]

Here, death is not the result of eating the forbidden fruit, but rather originates earlier, namely in the separation of Eve from Adam. This is likely to refer to Gen 2:21–23, where Eve comes into being from Adam's side (πλευρά).[12] Irritating here, however, is the continuation. The use of several masculine personal pronouns without clear referents causes confusion: Who goes into whom, and who takes up whom? I see different possibilities for understanding this passage: One may assume that Adam enters again *into Eve* and, therefore, annuls the separation of the two beings, which were formerly united. Surprising in this case is the fact that it was Eve who separated herself previously. Thus, it should be she who must enter again into him.[13] The reversal could indicate a positive assessment of sexuality, if one reads the text as saying: If he, the man, goes into the woman once again. Such a reading would place sexuality in a position where it is able to annul the original separation, thereby indicating a positive assent of (hetero) sexual unions. The next statement ("when he takes him up into himself") would then be interpreted in such a way that the original two-sex primordial human being is repaired through the act of taking up Adam again, which would imply an interesting reversal of the Genesis narration.

Literatur, ed. Jens Schröter, Konrad Schwarz and Soham Al-Suadi, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming 2019).

[11] Gos. Phil. 71, p. 68,22–26.

[12] Cf. King, "The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*," 574; Lundhaug, *Images*, 215.

[13] Lundhaug, *Images*, 216, discusses the possibility of such an emendation but rejects it.

Another reading possibility perceives Paradise as the location of "entering into" once again; the last part of the sentence then would mean: If Adam once again would enter *into Paradise* (or into a Paradisiac state) and would take up *Christ* in himself, then there will be no more death.[14] In the complex, multi-levelled world of language and understanding in Gos. Phil., both interpretations are possible. It becomes clear, however, that it is actually Christ who is the agent of annihilating death when we consider another passage in Gos. Phil. which in its beginning closely resembles the one just quoted:

If the woman had not separated (ⲡⲱⲣϫ) from the man, she would not die with the man. His separation (ⲡⲉϥⲡⲱⲣϫ) became the beginning of death. Because of this Christ came to repair the separation (ⲡⲡⲱⲣϫ) which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them.[15]

Here it is irritating that the text reads "his separation" (ⲡⲉϥⲡⲱⲣϫ) instead of "her separation" (ⲡⲉⲥⲡⲱⲣϫ), which would be the logical continuation of the preceding sentence. In this case, we can still understand the text as it is when we assume that the separation is reciprocal – and so also the union, matching the first interpretation of the Adam and Eve passage above. More complicated is the understanding of the following sentence, in which it is stated that Christ came to repair the separation through unification of the genders, but we learn nothing about how and in which manner Christ does this. Since it is nowhere mentioned in the canonical Gospels that Christ initializes a marriage or a union between Adam and Eve (or anybody else), how shall one understand the statement that Christ unites the two again? A possible answer may be found in the continuation, where the levels are changing again, this time from the paradigmatic exegetical couple to the level of everyday life – and back:

But the woman unites with her husband in the bridal chamber (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ). But those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated (ⲡⲱⲣϫ). Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ) that she united with him.[16]

The first sentence functions easily on an everyday level, talking about the heterosexual union in the "bridal chamber" (in this case: ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ). The second sentence is also still understandable on the same level: The union in the "bridal chamber"

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[14] This reading gains in plausibility when one incorporates the text appearing directly before it (Gos. Phil. 70, p. 68,17–22): "Before Christ some went out from a place where they are no longer able to enter (i. e., the Paradise), and they went in to where they were no longer able to leave (i. e., in the body / the world). Then Christ came. Those who went in he brought out, and those who went out he brought in (i. e., into Paradise)." My suggestions for a possible interpretation of the riddles are found in the parentheses. Traditions of Adams return to Paradise are also found in rabbinical sources, cf. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity. Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 57–58.

[15] Gos. Phil. 78, p. 70,9–17.

[16] Gos. Phil. 79, p. 70,17–22.

implies the consummation of the marriage which is now valid and will ideally not be separated again. But if there is no union in the "bridal chamber" – as in the case of Adam and Eve – the relationship will not endure. Naturally, there was no union in a "bridal chamber" because Adam and Eve did not have a house with a bedroom in Paradise (as well as there was no bread in Paradise). However, as in the case of the missing bread, this is true on an exegetical level but seems not to be the complete story. If we assume that the separation of Adam and Eve was the bodily separation of the primordial human being in Gen 2:21–23 (referred to directly before in Gos. Phil.), we cannot assume that the text deals with a usual kind of marriage and an everyday "bridal chamber," i. e. bedroom, for the consummation of marriage. We know from the Genesis story that "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" (Gen 4:1). But this happens only after they were thrown out of Paradise, so this union cannot be meant in the text. And the story of Cain has a problematic continuation, which is stated explicitly in another passage of the Gos. Phil.

First adultery (ⲙⲚⲦⲚⲟⲉⲓⲕ) happened, and afterwards murder. And he was begotten in adultery, for he was the child of the serpent. Therefore, he became a murderer, just like his father, and he killed his brother. But every union which has occurred between those who do not resemble each other is adultery.[17]

The "he," who was begotten in adultery, is Cain, who then becomes the murderer of his brother Abel. A surprising turn in this Genesis interpretation is the serpent, who is imagined here as a male (according to Coptic and Greek grammar), as father of Cain.[18] Something went terribly wrong with the fabrication of Cain. If one connects this story with the next sentence, one can assume that a human-animal relationship is not an ideal one because the two "do not resemble each other." Therefore, this relationship belongs to the category of adultery (ⲙⲚⲦⲚⲟⲉⲓⲕ) in the sense of mixing different categories which should be kept separated.[19]

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[17] Gos. Phil. 42, p. 61,5–12.

[18] The link between the devil and Cain is more common in rabbinic as well as Christian sources, cf. Grypeou and Spurling, *Book of Genesis*, 132–136.

[19] For those who are wondering about the practical aspect: Considering another passage in Gos. Phil. it would have been enough for Eve to fantasize about the serpent while having intercourse with Adam: "The children a woman generates resemble the man whom she loves. If it is her husband, then they resemble the husband. If it is an adulterer, they resemble the adulterer. Often, if it happens that a woman sleeps with her husband out of necessity, but her mind is with the adulterer, with whom she usually unites, the child she will bear she bears resembling the adulterer." (Gos. Phil. 112, p. 78,12–20). The necessity of unions between equals is stated shortly after this (Gos. Phil. 113, p. 78,25–79,13, considering animals again), making the connection to the above quoted text more obvious. – The idea that the children of a woman will resemble the man she has thought about during intercourse (or even the picture she has looked at) is an common one in ancient texts, in pagan as well as Jewish/Christian ones, see the collection of source texts in Max Küchler, *Schweigen, Schmuck und Schleier. Drei neutestamentliche Vorschriften zur Verdrängung der Frauen auf dem Hintergrund einer frauenfeindlichen Exegese des*

The story shows the consequence of a union which did not happen in the right way, i. e. it did not happen in the "bridal chamber" and Christ took no part in it. But the text does not tell how one has to imagine the ideal union of the "bridal chamber" and how Christ should be involved in this union. What we know so far is that the story of Adam and Eve can be used to show how it should *not* be. But where is the positive mirror image that could tell us something about the kind of necessary union in the "bridal chamber"? Are there any positively evaluated unions except the one in the "bridal chamber" about which we know nearly nothing so far? Or is the image of earthly marriages only used in contrast to the better heavenly union as well as the union of Eve and the serpent, which had a fatal result, and the union of Eve and Adam which has never been a perfect one? To put it differently: If one starts with Hugo Lundhaug's statement – "For what *Gos. Phil.* seems to be doing is to use the metaphorical input of human marriage, intercourse, and procreation in order to conceptualize central religious mysteries, mysteries that call for metaphorical modes of discourse in order to be understandable to the human mind"[20] – where are the good marriages or unions in the Gos. Phil. that can be used as a starting point to understand the metaphorical input for the level of religious rituals?

3. Searching for Good Marriages

If we look at the everyday level of human marriages, i. e. at the metaphorical input from the level of "usual" human marriages for the discussion, it is evident that the positive perspective is more difficult to find than negative examples. Some passages in the Gos. Phil. sound at the beginning as if there might be a good marriage involved but then the text takes an unexpected turn and leads the reader into doubt about the quality of earthly marriages:

No [one will be able to] know, when [the male] and the female unite with each other except they alone. For the marriage of the world (ⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ) is a mystery (ⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ) for those who have taken a wife. If the marriage of defilement (ⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲱϩⲙ) is secret, how much more (ⲡⲟⲥⲱ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲟⲛ) is the undefiled marriage (ⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧϫⲱϩⲙ) a true mystery! It is not fleshly (ⲥⲁⲣⲕⲓⲕⲟⲛ), but pure and something which belongs not to desire but to will, something which belongs not to darkness or night but belongs to day and light.[21]

Alten Testaments im antiken Judentum, NTOA 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 444–456.

[20] Lundhaug, *Images*, 277.

[21] Gos. Phil. 122a, p. 81,34–82,10. – King, "The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*," 582–583, also quotes this passage, interprets the defiled intercourse as non-Christian and concludes that (according to the Gos. Phil.) "only Christian marriage can be pure." My own conclusion is similar but slightly different because of the different role I assume for the marriage imagery in connection with the "bridal chamber," see below section 4.

This passage has been interpreted as a prove that the Gos. Phil. sees all "usual" earthly marriages as defiled and should be read entirely as an ascetic text. Thus Williams states after citing this text: "The simplest reading of this passage is to understand the 'undefiled marriage' to be a marriage lacking sexual intercourse, and it is possible to read the entire text of Gos. Phil. assuming this encratic perspective. In all of the places of the work where sexual intercourse is mentioned, it is either referred to as something defiling, or introduced to be contrasted unfavorably with something more sublime, or mentioned for analogical or metaphorical purposes."[22] Interesting is the alternative at the end of the quotation: "analogical or metaphorical" means that there is maybe something else going on than what "the simplest reading" might lead to: If the above quoted passage of the Gos. Phil. has an analogical or metaphorical meaning, we cannot simply assume that it propagates ascetic "undefiled" marriages. Instead a metaphorical reading would imply that one aspect of the marriage input is taken to another level of understanding whereas another part of the marriage image is rejected and not built upon. According to metaphor theories, not all aspects from the source domain are highlighted in the metaphorical process: "It is the salient features of the source domain that are in interaction with the target and mapped onto the target."[23] In an article on Jesus as "celibate bridegroom," Elizabeth Clark states: "In case of the 'celibate Bridegroom,' the adjective 'celibate' puts a restrictive brake on the sexual associations of 'bridegroom': as Derrida suggests, metaphor withdraws as well as supplements. 'Like a bridegroom *in certain – but not in all – respects*,' the addition warns."[24] Thus there has to be something both marriages have in common and something where they differ from each other.

Since the interpretation of this passage is central for every scholar who is writing about marriage and related topics in the Gos. Phil., I will spend some more time in trying to understand the argument.

One central feature is the expression "how much more" (ⲡⲟⲥⲱ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲟⲛ / πόσῳ μᾶλλον), which points to one of the rabbinical exegetical rules: *qal wahomer* ("the light and the heavy"), in the Latin version *argumentum a fortiori* or *argumentum a minore ad maius* (from the lesser to the greater), a kind of argument which is also used in the New Testament in several instances.[25] The movement of

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[22] Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 148.

[23] Hanne Løland, *Silent or Salient Gender? The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46 and 49*. FAT 2.32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 46.

[24] Elizabeth Clark, "The Celibate Bridegroom and his Virginal Brides: Metaphor and the Marriage of Jesus in Early Christian Ascetic Exegesis," *Church History* 77 (2008): 7. The metaphor can be found several times in the New Testament (2 Cor 11:2; Matt 25:1–13; Matt 22:1–14; John 3:29–30; Rev 19:6–9; cf. Clark, 10). Clark remarks: "Yet the metaphor does not escape its original habitat: the return of the repressed ensures that the 'celibate Bridegroom' still emerges as erotically desirable" (11).

[25] See Matt 7:11; 10:25; Luke 11:13; 12:24–28; Rom 5:9; 11:12–24; Heb 9:14, all using πόσῳ

the argument goes from "what is true" to "what is even more certainly true." The principle states that if something applies in a lesser case it will apply in a greater case as well. If the Torah says that you should take care for your neighbor's cattle or donkey in case of problems (Deut 22:1–4), it concludes that you should also rescue their child.[26] This conclusion is not dependent on the quality of the cattle or donkey; they do not have to be devaluated to make the conclusion work. Therefore, one might conclude that the Gos. Phil. does not disqualify earthly marriages to establish its argument. The above quoted text is not an ethical advice regarding earthly marriages.

On the other hand, the text seems to equate "the marriage of the world" (ⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ) with the "marriage of defilement" (ⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲱϩⲙ), which does certainly not sound like a positive description of earthly marriage. Even if defiled and undefiled marriages are both qualified as mysteries and, therefore, seem to have the mysterious character of the particular union in common, the uncommon (not salient) element is stated in the opposition between "defiled" (ϫⲱϩⲙ) and "undefiled" (ⲁⲧϫⲱϩⲙ). According to this, the question remains what exactly is meant by "defiled" in the Gos. Phil.[27] Looking at other instances where ϫⲱϩⲙ and its derivates are used, we unfortunately do not find something which resembles a definition, but have to work out the meaning of some obscure and/ or damaged passages. Particularly annoying for our subject are the gaps on the changeover from page 64 to page 65:

Great is the mystery of marriage! For [without] it the world would [not exist]. Now the existence of [the world depends on human beings], and the existence [of human beings on marriage]. Think of the [undefiled relationship], for it possesses [great] power. Its image (ⲧⲉⲥϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ) exists in [defilement].[28]

Even if not all of the reconstructions are equally reliable, the structure of the text implies in any case that it speaks about different marriages or unions on different

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μᾶλλον. See also Matt 12:12 (only πόσῳ)**;** Rom 5:17.19; 2 Cor 3:9.11 (πολλῷ μᾶλλον). For the Roman/Hellenistic background of this kind of exegetical rules see David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *HUCA* 22 (1949): 239–264.

[26] David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 34.

[27] According to Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 797b, ϫⲱϩⲙ can stand for quite different kinds of impurity or pollution, the references to biblical texts where Coptic bible translations use ϫⲱϩⲙ include e. g. Lev 10:10; 21:14; Amos 7:17; 1 Cor 7:14; Mark 7:5; Heb 10:29; 13:4.

[28] Gos. Phil. 60, p. 64,30–65,1, the reconstructions follow Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,3). Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt*, TU 143 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 38. Conf. Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 345–349, for a discussion of the reconstruction of the gaps and the grammar of the last sentence. Schenke translates at the end: "Ihr Abbild hat eine von Besud[elung] (bestimmte)." (39). Isenberg, 171, has: "Its image consists of a [defilement]"; Bentley Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 339, translates: "It is in pollution that its image resides," which implies a different understanding of the sentence.

levels, whereas the lower level is in a Platonic image relationship with the higher level. This implies that we can only gain access to the higher level through the lower level, even if the latter has not the same quality.[29]

Whether the text really says something specific about "defilement" is not equally certain since both instances of ϫⲱϩⲙ are (partially) reconstructed and the grammatical structure of the last sentence is not entirely clear.

Similarly complicated is another passage, which builds upon a Syriac etymology:

> Some said: "Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a female ever conceive by a female? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled (ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲉ ⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ϫⲁϩⲙⲉⲥ). (…)[30] This virgin whom no power defiled […] The powers defile themselves. And the Lord [would] not have said: "My [father who is in] heaven", unless he had another father, but he would have simply said: "[My father]."[31]

Erroneous is the idea that the Holy Spirit is the father of Jesus, since the Spirit is conceptualized according to Syriac (and Hebrew) grammar as female. Nevertheless, Christ has two fathers, one in heaven (which is stated via using a quotation of Matt 16:17, cf. also Matt 6:9) and another one, not in heaven. Considering another passage of the Gos. Phil. (91, p. 73,8–15) one has to assume that this other father is simply Joseph,[32] thus making it strange that Mary is, nevertheless, called a "virgin" (ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ). Qualifying her as a virgin is thus not necessarily a biological category – as well as fatherhood is not primarily a biological but a social category in antiquity, where there was no facility to prove biological fatherhood. Mary is called a virgin since "no power defiled" her, not because she did not have sex with Joseph, one of the two "fathers" of Jesus.[33] We can conclude that such a defilement would have destroyed her virginity, but it is, again, not stated what "defile" exactly might imply. What is clear is that defiling does not refer to intercourse between Mary and Joseph.

Another text points in a similar way to the opposition between virginity and defilement:

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[29] This Platonic structure of reality is explained in other texts of the Gos. Phil., see esp. 67a, p. 67,9–12 and 11–12, p. 53,23–54,18, cf. on this the last paragraph in my article "Esel, Glasgefäße und pneumatische Schwangerschaften"; cf. also King, "Place," 572–573.

[30] I skip one sentence here because it does not further my argument and adds other complications. For a discussion of the problems this sentence has to offer see Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium,* 214–215; Lundhaug, *Images,* 390–391.

[31] Gos. Phil. 17, p. 55,23–36.

[32] See Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium,* 211.

[33] Exact the same terminology is used for Norea in Hyp. Arch. (NHC II,4, p. 92,2–3), which according to Schenke qualifies both her and Mary in the Gos. Phil. as positive counter-images of Eve, who was defiled; for an interpretation of the entire passage cf. Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 209–216; Petersen, *"Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!" Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften,* NHMS 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 281–286.

There is no bridal chamber (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ) for the animals, nor is it for the slaves, nor for defiled females (ⲥⲅⲓⲙⲉ ⲉϥϫⲟⲅⲙ); but it is for free men and virgins (ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ).[34]

Based on the given oppositions and equations, one can conclude that virgins are free females, because they are not "defiled," which one can understand – when read together with the passage about the virgin Mary – as being free from the defilement of evil powers. This leads to the last and longest text where defilement plays an important role for the argument. Again, it starts with an everyday example about problematic relationships:

When the ignorant females see a male sitting alone, they leap down on him and play with him and defile him (ⲭⲟⲅⲙⲉϥ). So also the ignorant men, when they see a beautiful female sitting alone, they persuade her and compel her, wishing to defile her (ⲭⲟⲅⲙⲉⲥ). But if they see the man and his wife sitting together, the females are not able to go into (ⲃⲱⲕˋ ⲉⲅⲟⲩⲛˋ ϣⲁ) the male, nor are the males able to go into (ⲃⲱⲕˋ ⲉⲅⲟⲩⲛˋ ϣⲁ) the woman. So if the image (ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ) and the angel are united with one another, nobody will dare to go into (ⲃⲱⲕˋ ⲉⲅⲟⲩⲛˋ ϣⲁ) the male or the female.[35]

The first two sentences describe attempts by females and males to seduce members of the other gender and can easily be read as a description of an everyday situation. The only surprising feature is the priority of the female action in the texts. This runs against the usually androcentric language of ancient (and many modern) texts as well as against everyday experience which shows that the second case is much more common in (patriarchal) societies. This slight imbalance continues in the next sentence. Again, females are mentioned first and it is told about them in exact the same wording as for the male, that they go into (ⲃⲱⲕˋ ⲉⲅⲟⲩⲛˋ ϣⲁ) the males – which seems not to be a suitable description of usual sexual practices. One can conclude that this is told in preparation for the last sentence where the level changes to the union of image and angel, indicating the everyday level of sexual advances has been left. The union of those two protects from defilement, but it is far from evident how the relation of "image" and "angel" to the involved and protected fe/male person has to be imagined.

    The last sentence casts serious doubts on an everyday understanding of the previous two sentences. Are the fe/male persons mentioned in the last sentence to be understood on a different level – or on the same level *and also* on a different level? Did the text change the level from an everyday setting to a different setting after a kind of initiation ritual has taken place thus changing the quality of the persons involved? If one looks back from this passage to the directly preceding, the doubt deepens, as there a parallel story unfolds, but now it starts on a "spiritual" level where the same problem arises, but concerning souls and spirits:

The forms of unclean (ⲁⲕⲁⲑⲁⲣⲧⲟⲛ) spirits include among them male ones and female ones. The males are those that unite with the souls (ⲯⲩⲭⲏ) which inhabit a female form,

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[34] Gos. Phil. 73, p. 69,1–4.
[35] Gos. Phil. 61b, p. 65,12–26.

but the females are they which mingle with those in a male form through one who is not equal.[36] And no one will be able to escape them since they detain him/her if s/he does not receive a male power and a female one, which is the bridegroom (ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲓⲟⲥ) and the bride (ⲧⲛⲩⲙⲫⲏ). And one receives them in the iconic bridal chamber (ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ϩⲓⲕⲟⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ).[37]

Whereas in the afore quoted passage the problematic mingling is described as simply one between male and female, we have here unclean spirits of the two genders who mix with souls that inhabit the respectively opposite gender. Again, a kind of union between male and female can prohibit this. A common translation error shows where the main irritation in this text is to be located: "receive a male power *or* a female power" is to be found in several translations,[38] implying that one has to receive a power of the opposite gender to be protected – whereas the ⲙⲛ̄ of the Coptic text points to the notion that one has to receive *two* powers, one of each gender, which are in the next phrase referred to as bridegroom *and* bride – now in the normal androcentric sequence of mentioning the male element first. One can conclude from this sentence that what happens in the "iconic bridal chamber" is not a union of two but of three.[39] This is, indeed, not what one expects in a usual "bridal chamber." In addition, the existence of an "iconic bridal chamber" implies that there has to be a prototypical "bridal chamber" above, whose icon the one named in the text must be. I will get back to this surprising feature in the next paragraph.

So far we have collected several negative examples of problematic or dysfunctional relationships. The chart below provides an overview, which also organizes

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[36] The final phrase of this sentence (ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲁⲧˋⲧⲱⲧˋ) is rendered quite differently in the translations (e. g. Wesley W. Isenberg, trans., "The Gospel of Philip," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7*. Volume I, ed. Bentley Layton, NHS 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 171: "through one who was disobedient"; Lundhaug, *Images*, 497: "as a result of a lack of mingling"; Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 41: "wider die Natur"). In my translation I follow Schenke's commentary (351) but not his translation which involves a lot of interpretation. I understand this clause along the lines of the warning against mingling and mixing of entities from different categories which one can find in Gos. Phil. 42, p. 61,5–12 and 113, p. 78,25–79,13.

[37] Gos. Phil. 61a; p. 65,1–12.

[38] See e. g. Isenberg, "The Gospel of Philip," 171. Robert McLachlan Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip: Translated from the Coptic Text with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row/London: Mowbray, 1962), 41, translates even the second ⲙⲛ̄ as "or": "receive a male power or a female, which is the bridegroom or the bride." Walter C. Till, *Das Evangelium nach Philippos,* Patristische Texte und Studien 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 33, translates "und" but interprets as "or" by inserting "= beziehungsweise" in brackets, which implies the same understanding as the one shown by Wilson and Isenberg. Divergent translations offer Lundhaug, *Images*, 497 ("and" – "and"), as well as Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 41 ("und" – "und"). Schenke already had this rendering in his first translation of the Gos. Phil., which was published in ThLZ in 1959, see page 13.

[39] Looking back at the parallel passage about the fe/male advances in p. 65,12–26 one might conclude that the union between the "image and the angel" is not a union in which one of those two is identical with the person involved in the union, but a union between two powers which includes additionally the then protected person.

the examples into the different levels, adding a heavenly realm as level 4 above the others:

↑ level 4: heavenly realm	Mary and the Holy Spirit are not a productive couple since being both female
↑ level 3: ritual/community	unclean spirits unite with and detain souls of the opposite sex
↑ level 2: exegesis	Eve and the serpent produce Cain in adultery
↑ level 1: everyday life	ignorant fe/males make (hetero)sexual advances and defile the others

The different levels illuminate each other: So is the "defilement" which happens on level 1 not precisely explicated, but a case of defilement surely happens on level 2 when Eve produces Cain in adultery. Mary, as a counter-image of Eve, is free from defilement through the evil powers of whom we might think along the lines of the "unclean spirits" from level 3. The cases on level 1 and 3 are described in parallel passages following each other and thus showing that defilement can be at work in different kinds of unions. "Defilement" (ⲡϫⲱϩⲙ) thus seems to be a relatively open category in the Gos. Phil., being connected to adultery (and as we will see also to *porneia*). It is clearly a negative category and implies that entities or persons, which should not do so, are mixing. The counter-image of these "wrong" unions is, according to the last quoted text, the union in the "bridal chamber." This union protects against the wrong mingling, and it is also this union in the "bridal chamber" which was missing in the case of Adam and Eve and, therefore, they separated from each other.

The reason that we have not yet found any positive examples of marriage language is due to the fact that the positive side is hidden in the "bridal chamber" imagery. In the next section, I will try to figure out the place of the "bridal chamber" in the conception of marriages and unions. The "bridal chamber" seems be located on different levels of the text as a counter-image of the negative stories mentioned so far: It is something like a medicine against the negative unions we have encountered.

4. The Bridal Chamber(s)

In previous scholarship the "bridal chamber" has been described and explained in rather different ways. Some consider it to be a ritual or sacrament on its own, for instance a dying sacrament ("Sterbesakrament").[40] Others equate it with one or several of the other mentioned sacraments. As we have seen, some

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[40] So Hans-Georg Gaffron, *Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium unter besonderer*

scholars view the image of the "bridal chamber" primarily in contrast to the earthly "defiled marriage"[41] which would imply that the Gos. Phil. is critical of all "usual" marriages and has to be understood as an ascetic text. The opposite position is taken by some scholars who speculate about sexual activities included in the practical side of a "bridal chamber" ritual,[42] thus placing the Gos. Phil. among those texts that include acts which, at least according to the church fathers, have to be considered as "libertinism" (which primarily means that they oppose it).

Lundhaug has argued that there is "no single referent" for the terms "that are usually translated as 'bridal chamber.'"[43] Among other aspects, he points to the fact that there is no uniform terminology in the Coptic text. Instead three different Greek words are used: ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ, ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ, and ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ, whereas the possible Coptic equivalent ⲙⲁ ⲛ̄ϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ (which is used in other texts[44]) is absent in the Gos. Phil. The three Greek terms all occur several times in the Gos. Phil. even if

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Berücksichtigung der Sakramente (Diss. Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1969). – For other attempts to establish a sacramental system of the Gos. Phil. see Eric Segelberg, "The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and its Sacramental System," *Numen* 7 (1960); 189–200; Herbert Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus: Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3)*, VCS 88 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Bas Van Os, *Baptism in the Bridal Chamber. The Gospel of Philip as a Valentinian Baptismal Instruction* (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2007) (http://irs.ub.rug.nl/ppn/303088044, last viewed 25.8.2018). I am skeptical about using the terminology of "sacrament" etc. for the Gos. Phil., which (not being written in Latin) does not use such terminology but only ⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ which has a completely different meaning, and thus I use "ritual" as a more open term. For the terminological and other problems see Elaine Pagels, "Ritual in the Gospel of Philip," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years. Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration,* ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire, NHMS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 280–283.

   [41] For this contrast see e.g. Tite, *Valentinian Ethics*, 2; Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 144.148–150. Cf. also Kurt Rudolph, "A Response to 'The Holy Spirit Is a Double Name. Holy Spirit, Mary and Sophia in the Gospel of Philip' by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (SAC 4), ed. Karen L. King (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000), 236, who finds a "devaluation of the earthly marriage." One point of reference for the ascetical interpretation is found in Clement of Alexandria, who reports that Valentinian groups did not reject marriage but rather practiced "spiritual communities" (πνευματικὰς κοινωνίας, cf. *Strom.* 3.1.1 and 3.4.29), which might be interpreted as sexless marriages.

   [42] For such speculations see e.g. April D. DeConick, "The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in The Gospel of Philip," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001): 225–261; April DeConick, "The Great Mystery of Marriage: Sex and Conception in Ancient Valentinian Traditions," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 307–342; Jorunn J. Buckley, "A Cult Mystery in the Gospel of Philip," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980), 569–581. Jorunn J. Buckley, "'The Holy Spirit is a Double Name': Holy Spirit, Mary and Sophia in the Gospel of Philip," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 213, argues also that "the earthly marriage should be seen as a symbol and a prerequisite for the bridal chamber sacrament. In this regard, the earthly marriage warrants a positive evaluation." For an overview on the research see also Lundhaug, *Images*, 331–334.

   [43] Lundhaug, *Images*, 408, cf. also 334.

   [44] For instance in Tri. Trac. (NHC I,5), Gos. Thom. (NHC II,2), Ex. Soul (NHC II,6) and Auth. Teach. (NHC VI,3).

ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ is used mostly.[45] Several modern translations do not show an awareness of the possible differences, referring to all Greek words as "bridal chamber"[46] or switch sometimes between different renderings without being consistent with the source terminology.[47] In what follows, I will take the different terms into consideration, because even if the Gos. Phil. and many other Coptic texts do quite often use Greek words and their respective Coptic equivalents interchangeably, this is not equally common for parallel or similar Greek words. Therefore, one should conclude that there has to be a certain difference of meaning between ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ, ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ, and ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ. Looking into the most comprehensive Greek dictionary for the time span and context of the Gos. Phil., Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, there are, indeed, three different translations offered: "bed-chamber" for κοιτών, "bridechamber" for νυμφών and "bridal chamber" for παστός,[48] which can be perceived as an indication that the first term is used primarily for earthly matters but does not give a clear distinction between the other two.

Taking into consideration the possible differences in the terminology, I will now turn back to the text of the Gos. Phil. The passage about the defiled and undefiled marriages quoted above (at the beginning of section 3), has a continuation which uses two different terms for the "bridal chamber." At first, the movements of the bride are seriously restricted:

If a marriage is exposed, it has become *porneia*,[49] and the bride not only has committed *porneia* if she takes the seed of another man, but also if she leaves the bridal chamber (ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ) and they see her. She shall only show herself to her father and her mother and the friend of the bridegroom and the children of the bridegroom.[50]

At the beginning, we seem to hear one of those patriarchal voices which put restrictions on women and disparage them if they move around freely, but while

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[45] ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ: p. 82,13s; p. 84,21s; p. 85,21.33; ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ: p. 69,1.37; p. 70,18.19.[22]; p. 70,[33]; p. 71,7.9f; ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ: p. 65,11s; p. 67,5; p. 67,16.30; p. 69,25.27.[27].[37]; p. 72, [21].22; p. 74,22; p. 76,5s; p. 82,18.24; p. 86,5. While writing about Valentinians the church fathers mostly use νυμφών, see e. g. Irenaeus, *Haer.* I,7,1; I,21,3; Clement, *Exc.* 64; 68.

[46] Isenberg, "Gospel," translates the three Greek terms uniformly as "bridal chamber".

[47] See e. g. Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 14–79, who translates ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ consistently as "Schlafgemach" (p. 82,13s; p. 84,21s; p. 85,21.33), but ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ in the same context first as "Hochzeitssaal" and afterwards as "Brautgemach" (122b–d; p. 82,18 and p. 82,24), and ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ also as "Brautgemach" (e. g. p. 70,18. 19. 22).

[48] Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 764, 930 and 1046.

[49] I do not translate *porneia* in this case because it is not clear which behaviors are rejected here, for the problem of understanding the meaning of *porneia* cf. David Wheeler-Reed, Jennifer W. Knust, and Dale B. Martin, "Can a Man Commit πορνεία with His Wife?" *JBL* 137 (2018): 383–398. *Porneia* at first denoted prostitution but can refer to sex outside of marriage, sex with animals, homosexuality, sex not intending procreation also inside of marriage, in short: It is a term open for projection of any kind and can denote whatever a person or community does consider not acceptable behavior.

[50] Gos. Phil. 122b, p. 82,10–17.

reading on, this setting becomes more and more unreal. It might be understandable that a bride shows herself only to her parents, but already the "friend of the bridegroom" seems a little bit strange in a bridal context, and, finally, the "children of the bridegroom" are surprising. Why should a bridegroom of an undefiled marriage (i. e., one without *porneia*, which we might interpret along the lines of defilement and adultery) already have children – and why would the bride, after being seriously restricted in her movements, tolerate being exposed to the friend and the children of the bridegroom? Obviously, we have left the usual bridal setting at the conclusion of this text. The change of the level is confirmed in the next sentence where the term used for the "bridal chamber" also changes:

They are allowed to enter into the bridal chamber (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ) every day. But the others may desire at least to hear her voice and to enjoy her ointment (ⲥⲟⲟⲛ̄). And they may nourish themselves from the crumbs falling from the table – like the dogs. Bridegrooms and brides belong to the bridal chamber (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ). Nobody will be able to see (ⲛⲁⲩ) the bridegroom and the bride if [s/he does] not become this (i. e. the bridal chamber).[51]

This passage is especially rich in biblical references: the desire to "hear the voice" of the bride (Cant 2:14; cf. 8:13), the voice of Jesus which his friend is delighted to hear (John 3:29, where Jesus is a metaphorical "bridegroom" [νυμφίος]); the anointing through a woman (Matt 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:38; John 11:2) and the bread crumbs falling from the table for the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt 15:27; Mark 7:28). A reader with a knowledge of biblical stories could note all these allusions, and might additionally think of the parable of the virgins who wait to see the bridegroom, although only some are able to go inside with him (Matt 25:1–13). We have obviously left the setting of the enclosed bride and have moved on to a level of meaning where the subject is now the membership in the Christian community. Those outside, "the others," are equated with those non Christians who only get the crumbs and stay outside in their desire to hear the voice and receive the ointment. The exegetical input (level 2) leads to the level of ritual and community. Looking back at the passage quoted before, the "children of the bridegroom," i. e. the children of Jesus, are obviously the insiders, the Christians who belong to the bridegroom and enter the "bridal chamber." In the last quoted text, the "bridal chamber" (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ) therefore belongs to level 3 in my system, the level of community and ritual, whereas the "bridal chamber" from the text quoted before (ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ) should be assigned to level 1. The transition point is to be found in the "children of the bridegroom," who disrupt the picture painted before and indicate the change of levels.

The idea that one has to become the "bridal chamber" in order to see the bridegroom and the bride is interesting.[52] Again, as already in 61a, p. 65,1–12,

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[51] Gos. Phil. 122c–d, p. 82,17–26.
[52] The "bridal chamber" is not explicitly named here, but this interpretation is the only

there are three entities involved in the process, not two. One does not have to become a bride to receive the bridegroom – or *vice versa* – as we tend to assume at first sight, knowing a multitude of (mostly later) Christian texts, where e. g. the soul is metaphorized as bride who desires to receive Christ as her bridegroom. The idea is not that one has to become part of a couple which unifies but the union has to take place inside of the person who will then be protected and a member of the community. This conception is a strong argument against the notion that some kind of sexual activities might have been part of a "bridal chamber ritual." Instead, I conclude that the bridal and marriage imagery is used to speak about community and ritual in terms of union and separation, thus interpreting something else rather than denoting a discrete ritual.

Looking at the other instances of ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ in the Gos. Phil., one can observe that most of them are connected with level 3: The "children of the bridal chamber" (ⲛ̅ϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ, p. 72, [21].22; 76,5s; 86,5) are the Coptic equivalent for the Greek οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος (Matt 9:15, Mark 2:19, cf. Luke 5:34), and also a reference to the followers of Christ. Several other instances of ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ appear in settings where connections to rituals are obvious,[53] especially to the combined ritual of baptism-chrism, which was widespread in early Christianity from the late second century onwards.[54] Additionally the connection between "bridal chamber" and baptism is not a singular feature of the Gos. Phil., but appears in several other early Christian texts from quite different contexts.[55] We can conclude that the "children of the bridal chamber" are insiders because they

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plausible one, cf. Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 500. According to Lundhaug, *Images*, 264s, "this" refers to the bridal chamber where the Christian becomes like Christ in receiving the Logos (bridegroom) and the Holy Spirit (bride).

[53]   Cf. p. 67,5; p. 67,30; p. 69,25.27.[27].[37]; p. 74,22.

[54]   The probably oldest reference to baptism-chrism appears in Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum,* 12 (who died 183 CE). More evidence for such a ritual is found in the first half of the third century especially in Syriac sources. For the reference to Theophilus I have to thank Predrag Bukovec, Vienna, who works on a research project concerning baptism-chrism which he reported about at a meeting of the "Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften" in February 2018.

[55]   Links between "bridal chamber" and baptism appear e. g. in Tri. Trac. (NHC I,5), p. 128,33s: the baptism is called bridal chamber (ⲙⲁ ⲛ̅ϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ); Ex. Soul (NHC II,6) p. 132,13: the soul cleans herself in the "bridal chamber" (ⲙⲁ ⲛ̅ϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ) after having received baptism; the Flavia Sophe inscription (text in: Paul McKechnie, "Flavia Sophe in Context," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 135 [2001]: 117–124) with a connection between baptism, chrism and "bridal chamber" (νυμφῶν); Ammonios Alexandrinus (3th century), *frag. in John 3:29* (Migne 85.1413D), where it is stated that Christ is the bridegroom, the church the bride and the bridal chamber (νυμφῶν) the place of baptism (ὁ τόπος τοῦ βαπτίσματος). The connection is also to be found in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.3. Irenaeus writes about a Valentinian bridal chamber ritual where the bridal chamber replaces baptism, but this seems to be his misinterpretation, cf. Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 376, who argues that Irenaeus' bridal chamber rite "which he portraits not only as a separate rite, but also as one carried out instead of baptismal initiation, most probably is a product of his own imagination."

have received the baptism-chrism which is metaphorized as "bridal chamber" (ⲚⲨⲘⲪⲰⲚ).[56] Being a combined ritual in which water *and* ointment are used, baptism-chrism is suitable for speculation about other pairs of two, as the following text shows:

> Through the Holy Spirit we are in fact (ⲘⲉⲚ) generated again, but (Ⲇⲉ) we are generated through Christ in the two (ⲅⲘ̄ ⲡⲥⲚⲀⲨ). We are anointed through the Spirit. When we were generated we were united. None can see (ⲚⲀⲨ) himself either in water or in a mirror without light. Nor again can you (sg.) see in light without water or mirror. Therefore it is necessary to baptize in the two (ⲅⲘ̄ ⲡⲥⲚⲀⲨ), in the light and the water. But the light is the chrism (ⲡⲭⲣⲓⲥⲘⲀ).[57]

This passage is connected to the one quoted before also through the idea that to see (ⲚⲀⲨ) is desirable: In the text above one was able to see (ⲚⲀⲨ) the bridegroom and the bride, here one has to have water and light to see (ⲚⲀⲨ). The water is associated with baptism and Christ, whereas the light can be connected with chrism/anointment and the Spirit.[58] The "two" in the first instance can thus be interpreted not only as water and light, standing for baptism and chrism, but also as Christ and Spirit. Therefore, one can conclude that baptism includes chrism and implies some kind of union with Christ *and* the Holy Spirit. They can be interpreted as bridegroom and bride (the Spirit is female, as we have already seen, and it is even called a virgin in Gos. Phil. 83a, p. 71,16–18). The human being is thus the "bridal chamber," in which both Christ and the Spirit are united when s/he receives the baptism-chrism. The union is not a real union between human beings, but rather an image of the union of Christ and the (female) Spirit inside of the baptized person.

One of the remaining instances where ⲚⲨⲘⲪⲰⲚ is used had already been quoted. It states that one receives the bridegroom and the bride "in the iconic bridal chamber" (ⲅⲘ̄ ⲡⲚⲨⲘⲪⲰⲚ Ⲛ̄ⲅⲓⲕⲟⲚⲓⲕⲟⲥ, 61a, p. 65,11s.) Another passage also connects ⲚⲨⲘⲪⲰⲚ closely with the image or icon (ⲑⲓⲕⲰⲚ for the Greek εἰκών, 67c, p. 67,16–18). Thus, both instances put the whole subject in a Platonic context. Consequently, we have to find the heavenly "bridal chamber" of which the earthly one, called ⲚⲨⲘⲪⲰⲚ, is only the icon. This heavenly "bridal chamber" is,

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[56] This strong link between "bridal chamber" and baptism does not rule out connections with other rituals. Cf. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 100: "The fact that the notion of the bridal chamber may be associated with baptism and anointing as well as with the eucharist suggests that it does not represent a separate ritual event, but that it is rather an implied aspect in the process of initiation." See also Auth. Teach. (NHC VI,3) p. 35,11, for the use of "bridal chamber" (ⲘⲀ Ⲛ̄ϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ) in an eucharistic context.

[57] Gos. Phil. 73–75, p. 69,1–14. Cf. also Gos. Phil. 66, p. 67,2–9.

[58] This thinking might be inspired from some New Testament texts where baptism is connected with different elements, cf. Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16: baptism first with water (ἐν ὕδατι), then with Holy Spirit and fire (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί); cf. also John 3:5 about the (re)birth from water and Spirit (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος). Additionally, it is based on ancient practice since oil is used not only for ointment but also to produce light.

indeed, present in Gos. Phil. 82 (p. 71,3–13), where we encounter a "great bridal chamber" (ⲡⲛⲟϭ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ), in which Christ comes into being through a union of the father and the virgin (again, presumably the female Holy Spirit).[59] This passage is also connected to the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, spoken about directly before.[60] This can be linked to Gos. Phil. 96 (p. 74,21–24) where Christ receives the Holy Spirit in the "bridal chamber" (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ) and connects with the father. Thus, one can conclude that the "heavenly bridal chamber" is the original one which involved Christ, blending his baptism and incarnation, whereas the community ritual of the "bridal chamber" (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ) is to be perceived as the icon of this original heavenly great "bridal chamber", which is called ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ.[61]

Using another table, I will sum up the different "bridal chambers" in the Gos. Phil. we have encountered so far:

↑ level 4: heavenly realm	Christ / heavenly bridal chamber (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ)
↑ level 3: ritual / community	baptism / iconic bridal chamber (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ)
↑ level 2: exegesis	Adam and Eve / no bridal chamber (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ)
↑ level 1: everyday life	marriage / material or earthly bridal chamber (ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ)

In the table, we can observe that the "bridal chamber" – which was missing in the case of Adam and Eve – is also supposed to be the heavenly one (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ), thus linking level 2 to level 4. In my point of view the different usage of the terms affirms the productivity of distinguishing different levels in the Gos. Phil., even though here I cannot include a detailed interpretation of all remaining passages where some kind of "bridal chamber" is mentioned.[62]

To summarize: The "bridal chamber" can be located on different levels of the text, in the same way as the notion of marriages and unions is not restricted to only one level. The "bridal chamber" image does not denote a discrete ritual, but can be perceived as a counter-image to the negative examples which I listed in the table before.[63] Both sides are linked. Therefore, Adam and Eve were not

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[59] See Elaine Pagels, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the Hypostasis of the Archons and the Gospel of Philip," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 201; Lundhaug, *Images*, 184.

[60] For this connection see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 94; Lundhaug, *Images*, 182–184, 264.

[61] The rendering of a heavenly bridal chamber as ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ is not restricted to the Gos. Phil., cf. e. g. Treat. Seth (NHC VII,2) p. 57,17s: ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ is "of heavens and perfect"; Hippolytus, *frag. 4 in Prov.* (Migne 10.617A): παστός as heaven which is the bridal chamber of Christ.

[62] In the case of the probable ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ in p. 70,[33] there seems to be a connection with the baptism of Jesus again. The other instance of ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ not dealt with in this article is p. 69,37, again with many gaps (and I doubt Schenkes reconstruction in this case), but ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ seems to be linked with the "Holy of Holies" in the Jerusalem temple, which does not contradict an interpretation on the heavenly and/or exegetical level. I must admit not to be sure how the two instances where ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ seems also to appear in the context of the Jerusalem temple (p. 84,21s; 85,21) can be understood.

[63] Unlike Karen King, I do not think that we have enough information to make a connec-

united in the heavenly "bridal chamber" (ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ) and thus separated from each other. And the ritual "bridal chamber" (ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ) protects from the "unclean spirits" that try to detain the souls of members of the opposite gender. The bridal chamber language is part of the marriage imagery as well as the negative examples participate in those imagery.

This kind of language does not imply an evaluation of marriage *per se*, but uses the idea of a maximally close union inherent in the marriage imagery to speak about ritual, community, baptism, or incarnation. Thus, the Gos. Phil. neither argues for earthly marriages nor condemns them. They are simply a given factor in its everyday environment – just as agriculture is. And as agriculture enables speaking about bread and therefore also about the Eucharist, the Gos. Phil. uses the marriage imagery – including the "bridal chamber" language – to speak about other purposes without establishing an ethical doctrine of marriage. This also explains why the attempts to connect the Gos. Phil. with either asceticism or libertinism cannot achieve a satisfactory result.

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tion between Sophia (36, p. 59,31–60,1; 39, p. 10–15; 55, p. 63,30–64,5), Mary Magdalene (32, p. 59,6–11; 55, p. 63,30–64,5) and the twice mentioned kisses (31, p. 59,2–6; 55, p. 63,30–64,5) in the Gos. Phil. with the subject of this article. Marriages and the bridal chamber(s) are not mentioned in those texts and the first appearance of the "bridal chamber" theme appears only later in the Gospel (61, p. 65,11s). There is nowhere a connection between the kisses and the bridal chambers, instead they are linked with themes like barrenness, conception, children and other offsprings. The kisses seem to imply a passing on of knowledge and are a reference to an ordinary early Christian community ritual, see Silke Petersen, *Maria aus Magdala. Die Jüngerin, die Jesus liebte,* Biblische Gestalten 23. (Leipzig 2011, 2015), 128–143 (excursus: "Küsse im frühen Christentum"); Klaus Thraede, "Ursprünge und Formen des 'Heiligen Kusses' im frühen Christentum," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 11/12 (1968/69): 124–180; Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians. Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

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