

## **To Find a Priest and His Priesthood: Caiaphas and the Thomasine Community**

Erin J. Wright

**Abstract:** The Jewish high priest Joseph ben Caiaphas is best known for his central role in the Passion stories. As the root of the anti-Semitic charge of deicide against the people of Israel, the negative portrayal of Caiaphas and the Jews in these critical scenes of the Gospels has proven itself a source of eternal struggle within New Testament scholarship. In order to uncover a more historical understanding of this problematic figure, the Gospel of Thomas presents itself as a source for Caiaphas which is both removed from the Jewish-Christian conflict of the first centuries of this era, but still sharing in the Jesus tradition of the New Testament. Using a historical-textual approach, the sayings of Thomas are ‘canvassed for Caiaphas’ by applying historically-based search parameters. From this search a distinct anti-Pharisaical polemic, likely preserved from an earlier tradition, is detectable in Thomas. As a text which is theologically indifferent to the death of Jesus, Thomas’ unique contribution to the study of Caiaphas gestures towards an early tradition of negatively portraying Jewish authorities, which may be independent of the canonical Gospels.

### **Introduction**

The historicity of the high priest Caiaphas is attested to in both Jewish and Christian writings, as well as archaeological evidence. We know his name, his family lineage, his status in society, what some of his responsibilities as a high priest would have been, what he would have worn, and possibly even his final resting place. What we are lacking, however, is a satisfactory answer to the question that must be asked: what was Caiaphas’ role in the death of Jesus? While the canonical Gospels provide their own testimony on the subject, it is nearly impossible to wrench historical information about a Jewish figure from texts so

deeply implicated in the conflict between Judaism and the emerging Christianity in first century Palestine. One is tempted, then, to look outside of the Jewish-Christian milieu to find a source less coloured by hostilities towards the Jewish people.

A potential candidate that quickly surfaces is the *Gospel of Thomas*. While apocryphal, and likely representative of a Syrian community's teachings, *Thomas* has been described as "the Fifth Gospel," and shares some form of source relationship with the Jesus tradition of the New Testament. It is the intention of this study, then, to "find" Caiaphas where he might not belong: the *Gospel of Thomas*. In doing so, it will be necessary not only to define the validity of considering *Thomas* as a potential resource in the study of Caiaphas, but also to define certain known characteristics of Caiaphas in order to set the parameters of such a search. I would suggest that in doing this it might be possible not only to find Caiaphas within these set parameters, but also to show that *Thomas* possesses a unique value which might enhance the study of the high priest.

### **Argument for the Relevance of *Thomas***

Before proceeding, I feel that it is necessary to address an obvious concern with this study, that is, the validity and potential worth of considering *Thomas* in the study of a Jewish high priest. Thus, I will outline the most glaring of these problems (time, space, and soteriology), and then attempt to redeem the study in light of recent Thomasine research.

### ***Thomas* in Context: Date, Location and Soteriology**

To begin with, the dating of *Thomas* is problematic at best. First, the structure of the gospel, a list of sayings, lends itself to "easy" editing, leaving little trace of the addition and deletion of material. Supporting this presumption, we have an earlier and fragmented Greek version and the later Coptic version of Nag Hammadi. Adding to these complications, the striking parallels between many Thomasine logia to canonical Gospels have kept academics in quite a state for more than 50 years now.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the consequences of so much attention expended on determining canonical dependency, see Ron Cameron, "Ancient myths and modern

Scholars tend to be divided into two generalized camps: an “earlier” camp, claiming *Thomas*’ independence from these canonical sources, and thus dating the gospel in the 50 to 140 CE range; those of the ‘later’ camp, claiming *Thomas*’ dependence on the canon, argue dates ranging from 140 CE and onwards.<sup>2</sup> If one subscribes to this later camp, in consequence, *Thomas* is historically removed from Caiaphas and the priesthood, potentially by centuries. In subscribing to the more optimistic and earlier dating, ranking *Thomas* contemporary not with Caiaphas, but at least alongside the canonical gospels, there remains the problem of provenance.

Even if contemporary to the canonical gospels, the Thomasine community itself most likely existed outside the borders of the Judeo-Christian milieu of the New Testament. As a result of this differing milieu, that of early Syrian Christianity,<sup>3</sup> we find a soteriology in *Thomas* contrary to that of the New Testament; as DeConick explains: “In early Syrian literature, the human being regains Paradise lost through his or her own effort of righteous living as revealed by Jesus, not through some act of atonement on Jesus’ part.”<sup>4</sup> The soteriology of *Thomas*, therefore, renders Jesus’ death and crucifixion irrelevant in the eyes of the Thomasine community, and thus, one would also have to assume, waylay any concerns about those involved in Jesus’ death, including Caiaphas.

To paint this in the clearest of pictures, if we were to stand on Temple Mount alongside Caiaphas in first century Palestine, we would need both a time machine and a rather powerful telescope to even catch a glimpse of the Thomasine

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theories of the Gospel of Thomas and Christian origins,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999), especially 236-239.

<sup>2</sup> April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 7.

<sup>3</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 3-7.

<sup>4</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 5; for her fully developed argument, see April D. DeConick, “Fasting from the World: Encratite Soteriology in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research. Selected Proceedings of the XVIth IAHR Congress, Rome, 3rd-8th September* (Rome: L'Erma, 1990), 425-440.

community, who would have been too busy being indifferent to Caiaphas' role in the death of Jesus, to even notice.<sup>5</sup>

This all seems to point towards a rather disturbing question: why bother? How could *Thomas* possibly merit a “search” for Caiaphas? While unequivocally acknowledging these problems, I believe that there remains a light at the end of the tunnel: graciously lighting this path is the renowned and groundbreaking Thomasine scholar, April D. DeConick.

### **Re-contextualizing *Thomas*: DeConick and the “Kernel Gospel”**

Even before considering DeConick's work, it is clear in reading *Thomas* that there is some extant connection to Jewish-Christianity and the Jesus tradition of the New Testament. As already mentioned, *Thomas* contains sayings parallel to New Testament sources, many of which are introduced with the phrase “Jesus said,” and some of which obviously address Jewish-Christian concerns such as the Sabbath, dietary laws and circumcision. However, as also mentioned before, there has been no scholarly consensus reached concerning the source relationship between *Thomas* and the canonical gospels, with theories ranging from independence from the canonicals, to dependence, to shared sources. Thus, I would suggest that it is only in considering DeConick's research that we might begin to find answers.

In her most recent publications, the companion volumes *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (2005) and *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (2007), DeConick suggests a rather revolutionary understanding of *Thomas*. Notably, she strips from *Thomas* the label of “Gnostic” which has so long been taken for granted, arguing that no such “umbrella religion” as Gnosticism existed.<sup>6</sup> She instead refocuses *Thomas* as “an ancient “orthodox” text from early

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<sup>5</sup> In the same spirit, concerning instead modern indifference of Second-Temple scholarship towards Caiaphas, see Adele Reinhartz, “Who Cares about Caiaphas?” in *Identity and Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and Others. Essays in Honour of Stephen G. Wilson* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 31-40.

<sup>6</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 3.

Syrian Christianity.”<sup>7</sup> It is in this refocusing, interestingly enough, that we find the solution to the above problems of time and space. As DeConick explains, “The Christianity in Syria as it emerges in our texts shows strong roots and ties with traditions from Jerusalem.”<sup>8</sup> These “strong roots and ties” are in fact, as DeConick goes on to argue, material taken directly from the milieu of Second-Temple Judaism:

In *Recovering...*[I] have offered a new model for understanding the development of this Gospel, a model which is supported by studies in orality and rhetorical composition. The results of the application of my method has led to the identification of early sayings in *Thomas* which belonged to an old speech gospel from Jerusalem, as well as a set of later accretions.<sup>9</sup>

These earlier sayings are what DeConick refers to as “the Kernel Gospel,” and have led her to the conclusion that *Thomas* is therefore “neither early nor late, but both.”<sup>10</sup> Composed of some five speeches attributed to Jesus, and sharing direct commonalities to Q, DeConick concludes that “The contents of the speeches point to their origin in the Jerusalem mission prior to 50 CE.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in light of DeConick’s recent research, the problems with using *Thomas* for the study of a first century Jewish high priest begin to evaporate. We now have a gospel firmly rooted in the Jewish-Christian milieu, possibly earlier than 50 CE; but what of the gospel’s later, Syrian Christian accretions, and, of course, the lack of interest in Jesus’ death and resurrection? While these may seem to be further obstacles between this gospel and a search for Caiaphas, I would suggest that, in fact, it is these qualities which provide *Thomas*’ inherent *value* in a study such as this. However, before the value of finding Caiaphas within *Thomas* can even be considered, it must

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

first be proven that a depiction of the high priest can in fact be found.

### **To Find a High Priest: Who are we looking for?**

In order to find Caiaphas and his priesthood within the confines of *Thomas*, we must first define what we are searching for. Looking to Caiaphas scholarship, the high priest usually turns up in the work of New Testament scholars as a character irrefutably intertwined with the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>12</sup> There is one text, however, which provides a look into the life of Caiaphas, and which lends itself nicely to the task at hand: Helen Bond's *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (2004). In *Caiaphas*, Bond attempts most fully to recreate what Caiaphas' life would have been like as a high priest in Roman-ruled, first century Palestine. To accomplish this, she exhausts all available resources: relying heavily on the writings of Flavius Josephus, she also considers other Jewish writings (Philo, Ben Sira, Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic writings), archaeological sources, as well as Christian writings (Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, and John).<sup>13</sup>

Important to note is that Bond is by no means claiming to write a "biography" of Caiaphas. She is quick to point out that we really have no verifiable information about "Caiaphas the man," and the majority of the information we have about "Caiaphas the high priest" is, at best, historically questionable.<sup>14</sup> However, in terms of more verifiable historical fact, we do have a general understanding of the roles of the high priest and priesthood, specifically during the Roman occupation.

### **The Sadducees and the Priesthood of Second-Temple Judaism**

Though we know little about Caiaphas' family origins, Bond suggests that "it is probably safe to assume that by the first century B.C.E. they were aristocratic and wealthy, deriving their

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<sup>12</sup> See Reinhartz, "Who Cares," 31-40.

<sup>13</sup> Helen K. Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 17-22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

wealth most probably from large estates in and around Jerusalem.”<sup>15</sup> In consideration of the status Caiaphas achieved, Bond further suggests that his family was likely to have been Sadducean, as entry to the priesthood was traditionally dependent upon lineage.<sup>16</sup> Also important to note, “The hereditary priesthood was one of the defining characteristics of Judean society, and priests enjoyed considerable status and honor.”<sup>17</sup>

This priestly status would have been easily identifiable, at least while performing ceremonial duties within the temple, as they wore special “priestly” vestments. Bond provides a colourful account of Caiaphas donning his new priestly attire upon entry into the priesthood, based on the garments as described in the writings of Josephus:

In the course of this ceremony he would have exchanged his own tunic, soiled by city grime, for the colorful robes of a priest. First, he put on a linen tunic; over this went an ankle-length bodice. This was bound tightly to his chest with a beautiful sash embroidered with flowers of blue, purple, and scarlet. Finally, we would have put on a linen turban surmounted by a cloth cap.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally, the priesthood would have been, above all, focused on serving the temple, particularly on sacrifice and purity. Aside from specific daily and seasonal sacrifices, the priests would occupy their time accepting individual offerings, praying, and purifying the temple.<sup>19</sup> While these would have initially been Caiaphas’ temple duties as well, under Roman rule

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 24; Bond goes on to explain how this traditional hereditary lineage became complicated under Roman rule. The Roman prefects had the power to depose the current high priest and reappoint someone from a different family, which created complex rivalries within the nobility. However Caiaphas himself, although Roman appointed, is still thought to have been in the line of Zadok, and therefore of the ‘truest’ priestly lineage.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

he found himself rather quickly promoted to the office of high priest, a position he would hold for nearly two decades.<sup>20</sup>

### **Caiaphas the High Priest**

Having been appointed high priest by the Roman prefect Gratus, Caiaphas took on a more multi-faceted role in Jewish society. In his new role he would have found himself at the head of daily temple activity, overseeing the general maintenance and running of the temple; however, more importantly, “The high priest was the supreme cultic official in the Jerusalem temple. He was the mediator between the Jewish people and God: only he could make atonement for the sins of the people...”<sup>21</sup> Along with this promotion, Caiaphas’ duties were extended to the world outside of the temple. Now in the role of high priest, “he was the figurehead of the Jewish faith, the link with Jewish communities all over the Mediterranean world and as far away as Babylonia.”<sup>22</sup> Also, due to the Roman occupation, “He may have also engaged in politics, particularly when issues concerning the temple were at stake. In such cases his authority made him the natural spokesperson for the rest of the nobility...”<sup>23</sup>

Along with the priestly vestments Caiaphas would have worn as a member of the priesthood, there were also high priestly vestments: ceremonial robes worn on the Day of Atonement when the high priest would enter into the holy of holies and atone for the sins of the Jewish people.<sup>24</sup> As Bond describes:

First, he would put on the long blue seamless tunic and tie it with the brightly covered sash...Over this was a waistcoat...The waistcoat itself was richly decorated with embroidery in gold and bright colors. At the front was a breastplate on which were four rows, each with

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<sup>20</sup> Both Caiaphas’ appointment to and removal from the High Priesthood are recorded by Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities* (18:35, 95).

<sup>21</sup> Bond, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

three precious stones...The overall effect of the high priest in his robes was dazzling.<sup>25</sup>

To summarize, there are a few general characteristics which can be drawn out from this brief treatment of the priesthood and office of the high priest. First and foremost, the high priest represented the religious leadership of the temple cult, both in the maintenance of the temple, and as the “figurehead” of the Jewish faith. Second, in order to enter into the priesthood, one must have been of an aristocratic family. Thus, a high priest by nature, even before attaining this highest office, would have been of the wealthy elite, and had a certain amount of power and influence as a member of the nobility. And finally, the priesthood and high priest would have been easily recognizable to the public because of their special vestments, both those for day to day temple activity, as well as the high priest’s ceremonial vestments. Having considered this picture of Caiaphas and the priesthood painted by Bond, we now have a better understanding of who we are searching for in *Thomas*. Keeping in mind these particular characteristics, we can now turn to the text itself, and begin the search for Caiaphas and his priesthood.

## **Beginning the Search**

### **A Preliminary Search: *Thomas* on Judaism and Jewish Leadership**

Similar to the New Testament tradition, as already mentioned, *Thomas* reflects common Jewish-Christian concerns, containing logia which outline the Thomasine community’s take on Jewish law and issues of purity (L. 6, 14, 27, 53, 89, 104).<sup>26</sup> As Antti Marjanen explains, “none of the traditional Jewish religious practices has a favorable reception in the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is significant that they are not only regarded as expendable, but

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>26</sup> These logia are concerned, more specifically, with fasting, praying, almsgiving, dietary observations, purity, keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, and achieving the Kingdom, with Jesus providing the religious authority on all of these subjects.

some of them – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – can also be seen as harmful for one’s spiritual existence.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, these logia would seem to demonstrate a palpable opposition towards Judaism within the Thomasine community.<sup>28</sup> This hostility, however, is certainly not unique to *Thomas*: the canonical gospels also tend to portray Judaism and Jewish characters negatively; Bond addresses this touchy situation:

Although early Christianity developed from Judaism, the Gospels were written at a time of growing Jewish-Christian hostility. By the late first century, Jewish synagogues had begun to take firm measures against the new messianic sect and were expelling followers of Jesus from their membership...This historical process left its mark in the Gospels, both on a general level and in the shape of some ugly characterizations of Jesus’ Jewish opponents.<sup>29</sup>

Caiaphas, naturally, falls into this category of “Jesus’ Jewish opponents.” But can we find similarly “ugly characterizations” within *Thomas*? In fact, we can: there are three logia in *Thomas* which make direct reference to the Jewish people (L. 39, 43, 102), all of which are negative.<sup>30</sup>

Two of these logia (39, 102) are of particular interest to this study,<sup>31</sup> as both make reference to the Pharisees, a powerful Jewish religious group which, according to canonical gospel

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<sup>27</sup> Antti Marjanen, “*Thomas* and Jewish religious practices,” in *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Risto Uro (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 180.

<sup>28</sup> Although based on a communal theory vastly differing from that being assumed here (i.e. DeConick, *Translation*), for a commentary on the ‘anti-Jewish’ communal rules in *Thomas*, see David W. Kim, “What Shall We Do? The Community Rules of Thomas in the ‘Fifth Gospel,’” *Biblica* 88.3 (2007): 393-414.

<sup>29</sup> Bond, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Of these three logia, only one (L. 43) contains a general reference to the Jewish people, referring to them simply as “the Jews”.

<sup>31</sup> DeConick (in *Translation*) attributes both logia to the Kernel Gospel, which is to suggest that their origin is in the Jerusalem mission before 50 CE, and thus before the writing down of the canonical gospels.

accounts, were counted among Jesus' opponents.<sup>32</sup> Looking first at logion 39, "Jesus said, 'The Pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge. They have hidden them. Neither have they entered nor have they permitted those people who want to enter (to do so). You, however, be as prudent as serpents and as guileless as doves.'"<sup>33</sup> And, of a similar sentiment, in logion 102, "Jesus said, 'Woe to the Pharisees because they are like a dog sleeping in the cattle trough. For the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat.'"<sup>34</sup> Both of these logia portray the Pharisees, and in the case of logion 39 also the scribes, in a negative light. They are described as obstacles: they prevent everyone from achieving "knowledge," including themselves. But what does this tell us about Caiaphas?

While the Pharisees and Sadducees represent two different Jewish religious factions,<sup>35</sup> and Caiaphas thought likely to have been a Sadducee, New Testament accounts of the passion narrative place Caiaphas in the company of Pharisees:

So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed. (John 11: 47-50)

Bond suggests that "the presence of Pharisees here is probably best explained as John's attempt to implicate the Jewish leaders

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: a Sociological Approach* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 44

<sup>33</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that, according to rabbinic records, there appears to have been a rather hostile relationship between the Sadducees and Pharisees, particularly on matters of purity (see Bond 25).

of his own day (the heirs of the Pharisees) in the plot against Jesus.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, while logia 39 and 102 might be referencing a religious group of which Caiaphas may not have been a member, they are certainly still applicable to the high priest, especially when considered within the context of the Jesus tradition. From this first trace of Caiaphas in *Thomas*, then, we can see the beginning sketches of what the Thomasine community’s views on the priesthood may have been: as an “obstacle” to attaining knowledge. Unfortunately, two sayings are hardly enough to claim a “discovery” of Caiaphas in *Thomas*. I believe that these initial hints, however, can be amplified by broadening the parameters of the search for Caiaphas, and applying a slightly different methodology.

### **Reconstructing Thomasine Views of the High Priest and Priesthood**

Instead of considering only direct references to Caiaphas or the priesthood, I believe that in considering relevant teachings in *Thomas*, it is possible to reconstruct what the community’s view of the priesthood, and thus Caiaphas, likely would have been. As for what would constitute a “relevant” teaching, I turn back to the general characteristics of the high priest and priesthood as gleaned from Bond’s text: religious leadership, of the wealthy and elite, and recognizable priestly vestments. Thus, in considering logia which address any of these three characteristics, whether literal or thematic, I believe Caiaphas can be found.

### **The High Priest as a Religious Leader**

As mentioned before, the priesthood represented the religious leadership for the temple cult, a hierarchy in which the high priest represented the “figurehead” of the Jewish faith. In *Thomas*, the only discernable “figurehead” is Jesus. While fulfilling more the role of “teacher” than a religious leader per se, it is through Jesus’ teachings, as opposed to a “high priest,” that the community finds direction concerning the interpretation of Jewish law. There is also little evidence of a hierarchical

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<sup>36</sup> Bond, 132.

leadership like the priesthood within the Thomasine community, and instead an overall ideology of “masterlessness.” Risto Uro suggests that “In *Thomas* there is no corporate ‘body of Christ’ which would signify the unity and harmony of the Christian community. The self-sufficiency emphasized in *Thomas* is in this respect more ‘individualistic’...”<sup>37</sup>

This independence and lack of hierarchy would seem to be contradicted, however, by the teaching in logion 12: “The disciples said to Jesus, ‘We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?’ Jesus said to them, ‘No matter where you came from, you should go to James the Righteous One, for whose sake heaven and earth exist.’”<sup>38</sup> Uro provides a possible explanation for this contradiction, however, and from a complex comparison between *Thomas* and the role of James in the *Gospel of Matthew*, concludes that taken within the prescribed ideological framework, “*Thomas* adds to James’ leadership a different kind of model, one based on self-sufficiency and independence.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it is no surprise that *Thomas* contains teachings that negatively portray leadership. This is further attested in a

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<sup>37</sup> Risto Uro, “‘Who Will Be our Leader?’: Authority and Autonomy in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity. Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen*, eds. Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett and Kari Syreeni (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 483.

<sup>38</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Uro, “Leader?” 485. In her interpretive comments following the translation of logion 12, DeConick disputes Uro’s overall interpretation of this logion, suggesting that it in fact does imply that the Thomasine community had leaders. This does not necessarily challenge the idea that *Thomas* portrays a different “model” of James’ leadership than that of *Matthew* (representing here the Jerusalem tradition), keeping in mind that Uro forms this conclusion based on the differing ideological framework, which is specific to *Thomas*. Arguably one could interpret DeConick’s further comments on this logion (along with L.11) to support this idea: “The combination of sayings would have given members a sense of assurance that their commitment to this renunciatory lifestyle was worthy and in accordance with the teachings of Jesus and dependent upon the authority of James, Jesus’ brother” (*Translation* 82).

final logion (3), which represents the only generalized teaching about “leaders” in *Thomas*:

(Jesus said, ‘if ((your <<leaders>> [say to you, “Look!] the Kingdom is in heaven”, then the birds of heaven [will arrive first before you. If they say,] “It is under the earth,” then the fish of the sea [will enter it, arriving first] before you. But the Kingdom [of Heaven] is inside of you and [outside.] [Whoever] knows [himself] will find it. [And when you] know yourselves, [you will understand that you are the children] of the [Living] Father. [But if] you will not know yourselves, [you are impoverished] and you are poverty.))’,<sup>40</sup>

One might be quick to draw a direct line between this teaching and those concerning Jewish leadership, including, presumably, Caiaphas. However, also of note in Uro’s comparison between *Thomas* and *Matthew*, is the interesting contrast which Uro draws out between Matthean critiques of leadership, versus those of *Thomas*: “Whereas Matthew still largely defines the ideal communal structure against non-Christian formative Judaism, *Thomas* is engaged in criticism of Christian leadership and hierarchical formation *within* Christian communities.”<sup>41</sup> Following this, then, we must assume that any critique of leadership found in *Thomas* is *not* referring to Jewish leaders, and thus not referring to Caiaphas and the priesthood. How does this, then, change our interpretation of the negative references toward the Pharisees observed earlier? How are we to interpret this apparent contradiction? We will return to these questions,

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<sup>40</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 36. DeConick uses the following system of symbols to indicate problems or decisions in her process of translating the Thomasine logia: single parentheses surround words that are not in the manuscript but help capture meaning, double parentheses surround text where the translation is based on the Greek manuscript instead of the Coptic, single square brackets indicate lacunae or effacement and the possible reconstruction, double square brackets surround text where a correction of the manuscript tradition has been made, and double pointed brackets surround text based on a possible Aramaic text behind the Greek or Coptic (*Translation*, ix-x).

<sup>41</sup> Uro, “Leader?” 484.

with new insight, after considering some further qualities of the high priest.

### **The High Priest as a Member of the Wealthy Elite**

As members of the religious leadership, a second characteristic which defined the high priest and priesthood was status. As previously discussed, these priestly positions were attainable only to the wealthy elite. It is important to keep in mind that in the world of first century Palestine, wealth and power were generally synonymous, and, from *Thomas*, it is clear that wealth and power were not considered desirable traits within the Thomasine community (L. 35, 54, 63, 64, 81, 98, 110).

First of all, one motif utilized in *Thomas* is that of violence against the “strong” and “wealthy” (L. 35, 63, 98). The most vivid example of this motif is found in logion 98: “Jesus said, ‘The Kingdom of the Father is like someone who wished to kill a prominent man. While at home, he drew out his knife. He stabbed it into the wall to test whether his hand would be strong (enough). Then he murdered the prominent man.’”<sup>42</sup> While the violence here should certainly not be taken as a literal teaching, it is clear that, for the Thomasine community, no wealthy person would ever achieve salvation (L. 54, 64, 81, 110).

As opposed to the motif of violence, the actual community teaching concerning what is to be done with wealth and power, we have logia 81 and 110. In logion 81, “Jesus said, ‘Whoever has grown wealthy, that person should become a king. But whoever possesses power, let that person disown (his power).’”<sup>43</sup> As for the instruction in logion 110, “Jesus said, ‘Whoever has found the world and become wealthy, he should disown the world.’”<sup>44</sup> In light of these teachings, it is clear that for the Thomasine community, those of a certain station in life were not on the path to achieving salvation, the station of high priest certainly counting among these.

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<sup>42</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 40-1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

## The High Priests and their Priestly Vestments

The final defining characteristic of the high priest and priesthood to be considered is their priestly vestments, which would have visibly separated them from the masses. In *Thomas*, the image of garments proves to be a popular metaphor (L. 21, 36, 37, 47, 78). The portrayal of garments in *Thomas* oftentimes is coupled with the action of “stripping down” (L. 21, 36, 37); this encratite teaching<sup>45</sup> is most clearly conveyed in logion 37:

His disciples said, ‘When will you appear to us? When will we see you?’ Jesus said, ‘When you strip naked without shame, take your garments, put them under your feet like little children, and trample on them. Then [you will see] the Son of the Living One and you will not be afraid.’<sup>46</sup>

While logion 37, when taken in its entirety, has a debated theological significance,<sup>47</sup> what *is* significant for this study is simply the portrayed treatment of the garments (i.e. stripped off and trampled upon), and what this treatment of the garments represents: a metaphor with a rich prehistory. DeConick and Jarl Fossum, in a joint and in depth study of logion 37, explain that “Stripping off of garments is a common metaphor in Jewish and Christian literature for the removal of the material body.”<sup>48</sup>

The metaphor derives from the biblical account of the Fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), when “God clothed them with ‘garments of skin.’”<sup>49</sup> Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were considered “luminous beings,” and “this light could be seen as their garment, which they lost as a consequence of the Fall.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, when Jesus describes the act of stripping naked, the

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<sup>45</sup> On the development of the theory for an encratite soteriology in *Thomas*, see April D. DeConick and Jarl Fossum, “Stripped before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 123-150; DeConick, “Fasting.”

<sup>46</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> See DeConick and Fossum, “Stripped.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

trampling of the garments that follows represents “the act of renouncing these garments, that is, the mortal body.”<sup>51</sup>

In logion 21, Jesus portrays his disciples as fulfilling, in part, the instructions provided to them in logion 37:

Mary said to Jesus, ‘Who are your disciples like?’ He said, ‘They are like little children sojourning in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, “Leave our field!” In front of them, they strip naked in order to abandon it, returning their field to them.’<sup>52</sup>

The notion of stripping down is less explicit in logion 36, with Jesus instructing the audience not to worry, among other things, “about [your clothing] and what you [will] wear”; the action of stripping down is passed over here, but the logion assumes this action, ending with “As for you, when you have no garment, what [will you put on]? Who might add to your stature? He will give you your garment.’”<sup>53</sup> This final sentiment completes the metaphor which DeConick and Fossum describe, with a reference to the “original” garments of light being returned.<sup>54</sup>

This understanding of the metaphorical use of “garments” in *Thomas* informs our understanding of one further logion (78), in which garments are mentioned in conjunction with “kings” and “prominent men”: “Jesus said, ‘Why did you come out into the desert? To see a reed shaken by the wind and to see a man dressed in soft garments [like your] kings and your prominent men? They are dressed in soft garments, but they will not be able to understand the truth.’”<sup>55</sup> In this logion I believe that, at last, we have found the closest reference to Caiaphas in all of *Thomas*. We have a man who is dressed in soft garments (priestly vestments), who is therefore elevated to the status of “kings” and “prominent men” (the wealthy elite), and described as being unable to understand the truth. While this last characteristic could simply be indicating again towards the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>52</sup> DeConick, *Translation*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>54</sup> DeConick and Fossum, “Stripped,” 124.

<sup>55</sup> DeConick, *Translations*, 39.

general body of the elite, it also calls to mind the two logia describing the Pharisees (religious leadership), who are portrayed as obstacles to achieving salvation, which can also be interpreted as “understanding the truth.”

## ***Thomas on Caiaphas***

### **Has he been found?**

In a literal sense, we can only assume that the “man” is logion 78 is *not* the high priest Caiaphas. This man, however, shares with Caiaphas all of the considered traits of a high priest and member of the priesthood: he is dressed in soft garments, a member of the wealthy elite, and, as Jewish religious leaders are portrayed elsewhere in *Thomas*, unable to understand the truth, and thus achieve salvation. Thus, from this logion, as informed by all of the other relevant teachings uncovered in *Thomas*, we should now in theory be able to “reconstruct” what the community’s view of Caiaphas might have been. For this end, it is the last characteristic (religious leadership) to which I now turn my attention.

Returning to those questions posed earlier, I believe we can now explain the contradiction between the Thomasine critique of leadership, and the negative references to the Pharisees. As discussed before, based on Uro’s comparison to *Matthew*, we can assume that any critique of religious leadership found in *Thomas* is referring only to leadership within closed, Christian communities. Jewish religious leadership, such as the high priest Caiaphas and the rest of the priesthood, were of no concern to the Thomasine community, at least not because of their status as *religious leaders*. In keeping with Thomasine teachings on wealth and power, however, the high priest Caiaphas, along with all other priests, kings, and members of the nobility, would still have been viewed in a negative light, and unable to achieve salvation. Thus, the logia referencing the Pharisees are not in contradiction to Uro’s theory at all, as they too were often members of the wealthy and elite.

## Conclusions

It is in this reference to the Pharisees, I would argue, that we might find *Thomas*' added value to the study of Caiaphas. Unlike the canonical Gospels, the Thomasine community had no interest in the Jewish religious leadership as such. While rooted in the traditions of Jewish-Christianity, *Thomas* as we have it today represents an early Syrian form of Christianity. These later accretions to the original Kernel Gospel testify to an encratite soteriology, one which would have also exempted Caiaphas as a person of interest in the death of Jesus. Thus, the logia referencing the Pharisees (L. 39, 102) probably do not derive from the Thomasine community itself, and are likely indicative of a borrowed tradition—one which might have been preserved in *Thomas* simply because it was still in keeping with the community's teachings concerning the wealthy elite. Could this witness to a negative tradition concerning the Pharisees, possibly independent of the canonical gospels, add to our understanding of Caiaphas' portrayal in history? In answer to this I will caution only an optimistic maybe. If this independence could be established, we would possess in *Thomas* one of the earliest attestations to this anti-Pharisaical polemic within a Christian text. This would have serious implications for our understanding of Caiaphas and the high priesthood, especially for how we interpret the canonical portrayal of Caiaphas' role in the death of Jesus. More detailed research into the history of this negative portrayal of Caiaphas and the Pharisees, however, would necessarily be called for. Also, with no scholarly agreement on *Thomas*' source relationship to the canonical Gospels, the ship could be sunk before it even sets sail. However, this is a bridge yet to be crossed, and certainly the concern of another study into the high priest Caiaphas.

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