



23. JESUS THE CHRIST

In the popular use the binomial “Jesus Christ” has become a sort of name and surname. Nothing is more wrong: Christ in Greek means “anointed King”¹. It is therefore the exact translation of the Hebrew word Messiah (Heb. *māšīāh*), and it indicates the function of Jesus to the eyes of his disciples. The King who became such by inheritance or acclamation, had to be confirmed by the Temple priests (Heb. *kohen*, Sskr: *pujārī*) with the anointing ritual. A cruet of consecrated oil was kept in the Temple. It was used to “anoint” the head of every member of the priestly tribe of Levi who decided to devote his life to priesthood. Only the worthiest sovereigns of the regal tribe of Judah were chosen by the priests to be anointed Messiah, assuming in this way some priestly powers² as well. Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah on his father’s side and to that of Levi on his mother’s. This is why during his short public life sometimes he behaved as a Messiah pretender to the throne of the Jews and sometimes as a priestly Messiah.



1. The three King Magi

The Christian legend has emphasized this twofold origin with the story of the Three *Magi*. In this way the child Jesus³ was recognized as peer by the three King Priests proceeding from the East, the *Magi*⁴.

Up to the age of thirty, Jesus did not perform any public action. Probably, in that period he had carried out religious studies and obtained the title of *rabbi* (Master of Jewish Law), as he was often called in the Gospel. Presumably, he also became Nazorean⁵ and frequented Zealots⁶. The baptism of Jesus, the

¹ It must be remembered that the only original sources that explicitly speak of Jesus are the texts of the New Testament of the Bible that have come to us only in their Greek version. On the other hand, the original Aramaic and Hebrew texts disappeared. The New Testament texts were the numerous Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of the Apostles and some Apocalypses (Revelations). Over the centuries many of those texts have been set aside and no more recognized by ecclesiastical authorities; they are the so called “apocryphal” (occult) texts.

² See a certain analogy with the Vedic rite of *vājapeya*.

³ For the Christians the miraculous conception and the virginal birth of Jesus is of great importance. Actually this miraculous event is not unique: in his *Stromata* (I.15), Saint Clement of Alexandria mentions other two prodigious conception of Plato and Buddha. At his time Alexandria was an important Neoplatonic centre and also had a Buddhist monastery. Miraculous conceptions were well known in ancient civilizations: Zoroaster among the Persians, Hou Chi, Lao Tzu and Confucius in China, Pythagoras and Orpheus in the Greece and last but not least, Śrī Kṛṣṇa in India.

⁴ *Magus* was the title of the Zoroastrian priests.

⁵ The Gospels try to hide the fact that Jesus was a Nazorean, saying that he was an inhabitant of Nazareth: “He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called “a Nazarene” (St. Matthew 2. 22-23). However, the prophet doesn’t speak of a city called Nazareth: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch (*netser*) will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11.1).

⁶ At the time of Jesus, there were four currents of Judaism. The Essenes, who led a life of monastic asceticism avoiding society. The Pharisees had a social life strictly ruled by external law (*Tōrāh*), but privately they followed an initiatic *sādhanā*. Both these currents represented the Jewish esoterism and both could be defined as Nazoreans. The third current was the one of the Zealots, who proceeded from the Essenes as well as from the Pharisees. The Zealots had no contemplative



episode inaugurating his public life, was not just a Nazorean initiatic ritual, but also an event agreed upon with John the Baptist¹ in order to accomplish the Old Testament prophecies. Following the Essenic tradition², he withdrew for forty days in the desert to fast and pray, where he experienced the Devil's temptations. After that period of spiritual preparation, Jesus returned to social life.



2. The Devil tempts Jesus by offering him the kingdom over the world

From that moment he began to preach the coming of God's Kingdom on earth, fulfilling the Jews expectation of the Messiah's arrival and of the dominion of the "chosen people" over all the others. Even if he never patently proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, he never denied either, delegating his followers to declare it to the masses.



3. The sword called *sica*

Moreover, Jesus assumed a specific behaviour to fulfil "the biblical prophecies"³ related to the Messiah. He gathered around him a group of twelve apostles and seventy or seventy-two disciples, chosen among

attitude, on the contrary they preached and continuously practiced armed revolt against non-Jews. The Zealots were also called Sicarii (assassins) because they were armed with a short sword, called *sica*, or Iscariots, (killers). The Romans considered them as common bandits and terrorists. Among Jesus' disciples we find members of all these three currents. The fourth one were the Sadducees, mostly widespread among the *kohens* of the Temple. They were influenced by the Hellenistic Mystic doctrines and therefore they had a Gnostic initiatic view. The Sadducees, who were the fiercest enemies of Jesus, plotted his imprisonment and execution. Samuel G. F. Brandon, *Gesù e gli Zeloti*, Milan, Rizzoli Ed., 1983 (1st Ed. *Jesus and the Zealots* University of Manchester, 1967), pp. 43-47.

¹ Since Jesus and St. John the Baptist were second cousins, the deal was not a difficult one to stipulate.

² However, unlike the Essenes, he did not spend his whole life in the desert, nor did he avoid drinking wine and eating meat.

³ This quotation is repeatedly found in the Gospel; this confirms that Jesus deliberately followed a pre-established script to convince people that he was the Messiah.



the poor and humble classes in Galilee. Many of them were ignorant fishermen, one was a tax collector, and the rest were zealots who lived on the run. At first, he sent them to proselyte among the Jews of diaspora¹, forbidding to preach to Samaritans (heretic Jews) or to the “Gentiles” (foreigners). “I am sending you out like *sheep among wolves*.”



4. Zealot rebels

Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as cautious as doves.”² He failed this first attempt to be recognized as Messiah because his followers came back without converting anyone. For this reason Jesus cursed the cities that had rejected his message³. Because of that he changed his plans and decided to be recognized as King in Jerusalem, the heart of Judea.



5. Map of Glilee and Judea

While preparing his entrance in Jerusalem as King of the Jews and to be anointed Messiah by the Temple’s priests, Jesus said to his followers: “«But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in Me: “And He was numbered with the bandits.” For what is written about Me is reaching its fulfilment.» And they replied, “«Master, here we have two swords.» Then he said: «That's enough for me.»”⁴ In fact all zealots had to be armed with a short sword called *sica*, easily concealed under their garments. Indeed Jesus had declared: “«Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to

¹ Diaspora refers to the dispersion of Jews throughout the world after the deportations by both Assyrians (721 BC) and Babylonians (586 BC).

² St. Matthew, X.1-19.

³ St. Matthew, XI.20-24.

⁴ St. Luke, XXII. 36-38.

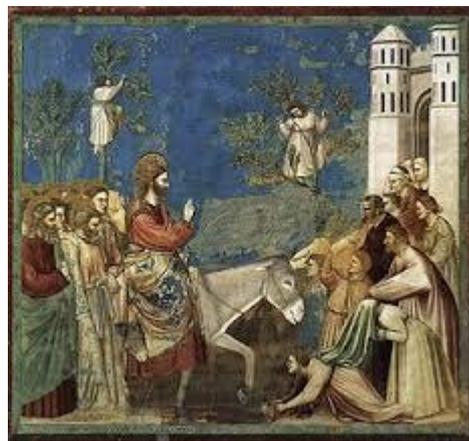


send peace, but a sword.»¹ In fact during the arrest of Jesus, his disciples reacted and St. Peter raising his sword cut off an ear to a servant of the High Priest.



6. St. Peter cutting off an ear to a servant of the High Priest

But due to the overwhelming number of Roman soldiers and Temple guards, Jesus gave orders to stand down their weapons saying: “«Put the sword back into its place. All those who use the sword will die by the sword.»”² Clearly the Christ was certainly neither peaceful nor pacifist, as the modern Christian interpretation. Jesus chose the days before Easter to enter in Jerusalem. On that occasion crowds of pilgrims coming from the Judaea and from Galilee gathered in the Temple. He was then hailed King of the Jews and escorted joyfully to the Gate of Jerusalem. The pilgrims laid down their cloaks and palm leaves so that his donkey’s hooves wouldn’t touch the muddy road. Until today this is called “Palm Sunday”. Supposedly Roman soldiers did not intervene not to spoil the Jewish festive atmosphere and cause accidents with the Zealots blended into the crowd.



7. Triumphal entry of Jesus in Jerusalem

Then, Jesus and his followers entered the Temple courtyard, where since immemorial time there were little shops selling animals and doves for the sacrifice and money changers for traditional ritual use. Armed with a whip, he drove out the merchants and threw away their stands, preventing them from gathering their merchandise from the ground. This was a clear attempt to occupy the Temple³ by arms.

¹ St. Matthew, X.34.

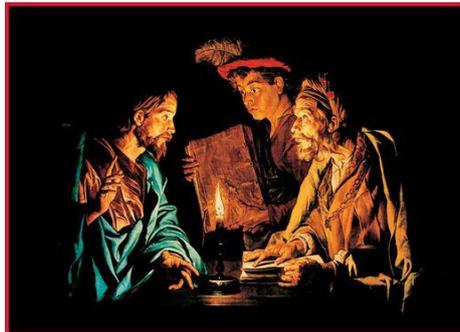
² St. Matthew, XXVI. 51-52.

³ St. Mark, XI.7-19; St. Matthew, XXI.8-19; St. Luke, XIX.35-48; St. John, II.12-25. It is completely out of place the moralistic explanation that the Gospels give of this incident; namely, that the merchants had transformed the Temple into a place of lucrative interests only: “You have turned it into a den of thieves!”. Such interpretation has no reason to exist. In



8. Jesus attacks the merchants of the Temple

The Gospel gives a moral explanation to the event, but doesn't say anything about the reaction of the Temple guards and mostly of the Roman garrison stationed in the Antonia Tower, just next to the Temple. Undoubtedly, after this event Jesus and his followers fled the city to spend the night in the nearby countryside. The next day they returned to Jerusalem, but this time they entered in secret avoiding any popular celebration and demonstration. Evidently, the surprise attack of the previous day with the purpose of taking the control of the Temple had failed. From that moment Jesus and his disciples remained hidden in Jerusalem¹. In those days he intensified his discreet meetings with his secret disciples initiated by him to the Essenian *dīkṣā*: Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and mostly with a mysterious *kohen* named John who was sheltering him.



9. Night meetings of Jesus with his secret disciples

However, the turmoil of the Temple unleashed a very bloody revolt also provoked by some zealots who were not his direct followers. The Roman army intervened, suppressed the mutiny and arrested one of the Zealot leaders, Barabbas². The Jewish population of Jerusalem was disappointed by the inactivity of Jesus, and instead considered Barabbas as a hero. Jesus was downhearted after failing to seize the throne of the kingdom of Judea. In the following days he then decided to play the role of the priestly

fact, the shops that Jesus devastated with violence were unquestionably necessary for the sacrificial activity of the Temple. Furthermore, since the Jewish religion was rigidly aniconic, the use of Roman coins with the image of the Emperor was forbidden in the temple. Therefore, even the money changers were needed to provide coins without images. Consequently, the Gospels clearly only want to justify the insurrectional attempt of Jesus.

¹ Hugh J. Shonfield, *The Pentecost Revolution: The Story of the Jesus Party in Israel, AD 33-66*, London, Element Books Ltd, 1974, pp. 267-338.

² The true meaning of Barabbas is "son of a priest of the Temple", Bar-Rabbas and not "son of the father", Bar-abbas, as usually translated (G. Bastia, E. Qimron, A. Israel, Y. Menachem Cochav, *Note relative al nome Barabba*, http://digilander.libero.it/Hard_Rain/Barabba.pdf, 29.04.2018, pp. 23-39). This explains why his arrest brought so much trepidation among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

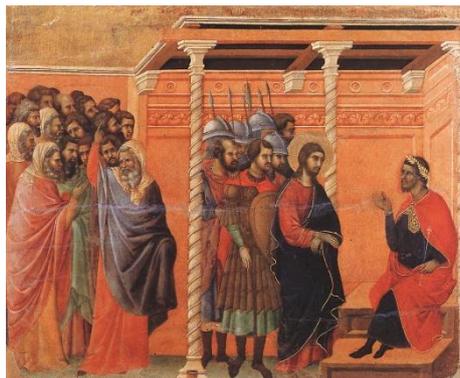


Messiah, giving up his ambitions of becoming Messiah-King. His choice of a more spiritual direction was interpreted by his Zealot followers as a betrayal¹. Thus, Judas Iscariot decided to punish Jesus by revealing to the priests of the Temple where he was hiding.



10. The capture of Jesus

During the night, the guards of the Temple together with six hundred Roman soldiers² broke into the garden of the *kohen* John, where Jesus was hiding with his apostles and disciples. After a brief resistance, Jesus was arrested and the others fled away. Led before the College of the *kohens* of the Temple (the *Sanhedrin*), he was accused of impiety and referred to trial before the court of Pilate, who was the Roman Governor.



11. Pilate questions Jesus

Pilate, awakened at dawn, did not find Jesus guilty of breaking any law of the Empire. He also wanted the Jews to resolve their religious quarrels among themselves, without involving Roman authorities. Therefore, being Jesus Galilean, he sent him to Herod Antipas, King of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem to celebrate Easter, so that he might judge him. On the contrary, Herod recognized him as King of Judea, made him cover a royal cloak, put on his head the royal crown of thorns, gave him the traditional cane sceptre, and sent him back to Pilate³.

¹ Also St. Peter was among them: he was in fact known as Simon the Zealot. He did not become completely unfaithful to Jesus, as Judas did; but he repudiated his master three times on the night of his capture.

² A cohort. Evidently the group of followers of Jesus was certainly not considered just composed of pacifists.

³ The Gospels give an interpretation of this episode as if it were a sacrilegious mockery. Instead, everything suggests that Antipas's decision was a recognition of the authenticity of Jesus' claim to the throne. In fact, the cane was the sceptre of the anointed Kings and "crown of thorns" was called the diadem of the ancient kings of Israel. Therefore, it was not at all the imposition of a sadistic torture consisting in surrounding his head with thorny branches.



11. 1,2,3 Historical crown of thorns. 4 Legendary crown of thorns

The priests of the Temple, then, accused Jesus of wanting to be proclaimed as King of Judea and to wage a Jewish war of independence against Rome. Thus, the Roman Governor of Judea reluctantly condemned Jesus to be crucified. The crucifixion was reserved for the rebels of the Empire and, as was required by Roman law, his indictment was carved on a table nailed to the top of the cross: JNRI, i.e. *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*: Jesus Nazarene King of the Jews. After a few hours of torment, Jesus died on the cross and was buried in the family tomb of Joseph of Arimathea¹.



12. Jesus' sentence of conviction

The Gospels narrate that two days after these events, that is to say on Easter Sunday, the tomb was found wide open and the body of Jesus had disappeared. Since then, the exterior Christian believers have celebrated the resurrection of Jesus from death. According to St. Paul, Jesus “had descended into the infernal regions of the earth. The one who descended is the same who then also ascended to the heavens”².



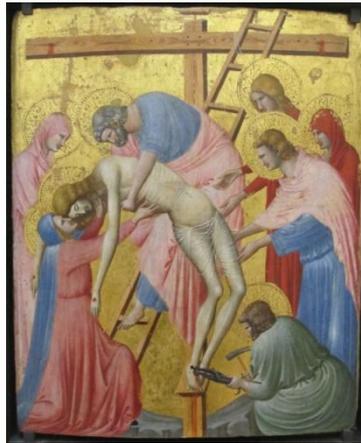
12. The descent into the underworld

¹ Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot: a New Interpretation of the Life and Death of Jesus*, New York, Bernard Geis Associates, 1965, pp. 114-157.

² St. Paul, Letter to the Ephesians, 4.10.



However, the descent into hell is another way to indicate initiatic death, that is, the experience of dying remaining alive. If we think only to the tale of the descent into the underworld of Naciketas in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and his dialogue with Mṛtyu, we might understand that such experience has to be reached through the practice of a *sādhana*¹. Therefore, it cannot have any relation with ordinary death (*dehānta*). That means that the descent of Jesus into the underworld and his ascent to heaven must have happened during his retreat in the desert. In fact, even the temptations to which Jesus was submitted by the Devil appear similar to those that Mṛtyu did to Naciketas with the purpose of diverting him from his quest for Brahman. That is to say, the offering to become the King of all the worldly Realms had Jesus agreed to devote himself to the practice of his powers (*siddhis*) instead of seeking the Truth.



13. Joseph of Arimathea lays the corpse of Jesus from the cross

Since the initiatic death can occur only in life, it is obvious that this event happened to Jesus while he was still alive, when he experienced his inner death while practicing his tapas in the desert. The resurrection of Jesus from the tomb is therefore an erroneous exoteric interpretation of a fundamental step in his path of spiritual realization. In fact, everything mentioned by the New Testament about the happenings after the “resurrection” is confused and contradictory. The fact that the resurrected Jesus reappeared to his most intimate apostles but no one among them recognized him testifies to the doubtfulness and uncertainty of the later account. As it will be demonstrated in the next chapters, the outward and superficial interpretation of initiatic spiritual events depicted from an exoteric point of view have created several serious confusions, failures and contradictions in the newborn Christian doctrine.

Gian Giuseppe Filippi

¹ In our book *Discesa agli Inferi: la morte iniziatica nella Tradizione Hindū*, Aprilia, Novalogos, 2014, we compared the stories of the descent into the hell and the ascent to the heavens of the *Hindū* Tradition with many examples of similar initiatic tales: among these we mention Naciketas, Bhṛṅgu, Utaṅka, Buddha and Māra and, more recently, Ramaṇa Maharṣi for India, Odysseus, Orpheus and Persephone for Greece, Aeneas for Rome, Jesus and Dante for the Christianity etc.