

Was Pseudo-Thomas a child? Psychological profile of the author of the Pseudo-Thomas's Apocryphal Gospel

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Abstract

Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas is very controversial apocryphal text of uncertain origin. More authentic recent Czech translation by Petr Peňáz (Dus, Pokorný 2001) tries to preserve original colloquial style and suggests an idea that the author of this text was not an adult person, but a child – boy at prepubescent age (10 – 12 years) with hyperactive tendencies. All the text represents childish megalomaniac imagination, which helps the child to cope with everyday conflicts with teachers, the father and friends by means of identification with young Jesus. The text had been probably forgotten in child's lair and revealed a few decades afterwards without recognizing the real childish author. This article illustrates this hypothesis by comparing the gospel's style with other literal works of similar age children and the Gospel of Mark and tries to depict a plausible psychological profile of the childish author by deliberate classification of his cognitive, emotional, moral, psychosexual stage of development.

Keywords: Pseudo-Thomas, apocrypha, psychology profiles, developmental stages, narration, Gospel of Mark

1. Introduction

Gospel of Jesus' childhood is ascribed to Thomas, an Israelite philosopher or Apostle Thomas, but real authors is unknown and real time of its origin as well. Earliest to mention of St. Hippolytus (155-235), Eirénaïos and Origen probably have on mind a different text, so there is a span of about 6 centuries when the text might have been written. It is to say that this gospel of Jesus' childhood is utterly different text from Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, which does not describe childhood of Jesus at all.

The apocryphal gospel of Jesus' childhood was controversial since very beginning, as Jesus is depicted as impulsive, authoritative persons which response to any interpersonal conflict by killing, blinding or otherwise hurting his opponents. So the text itself is source of perplexity of many believers, theologians and researchers. There are attempts to reduce the colloquial language by use of more noble style, and removing all grammar mistakes from translations. Other older attempts as Pseudo-Matthew Gospel tried to re-narrate selected parts of it and this way to acquire a more acceptable form.

There is though a remarkable attempt of philologists and Biblicists in Czech Republic to return to unmodified and unvarnished style of original text (Greek version A). This courageous translation of Petr Peňáz exploits colloquial Czech. It impresses on our feelings much more than original Greek version. If we submit this Gospel to deeper psychological analysis, we will find out that it carries all sings of childish text and thinking. Such

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psychological profiling might suggest a surprising idea that the puzzling author of the Gospel was a child, not an adult person.

This hypothesis brings a lot of questions:

Is a child able to write a text like that?

Do we have similar texts from contemporary children? What similarities and dissimilarities with the Gospel can we find?

What more can we guess about its personality and psychological development?

How old and what sex it probably was?

What was a motivation for writing this Gospel? What function has such a imaginary writing in children' mind?

Can we recreate its psychological profile?

How could such a childish author remain unrevealed?

Can the synoptic Gospels be also classified as childish work?

1. How old child is able to write a text like that?

Adults are often surprised that children as old as 10 years can write very impressive stories. The narrative form is really natural for children at this age and requires little intelligence. There are a few examples of child literal production in Czech language available at Internet. Stan Čelo (Vašina 2002), a cowboy story, was written at the age of ten. Toky's Time engine (2003) at 12 years. Both can be considered as bad adults' works, but excellent childish works. From Christian and not-Czech language area, we can recommend stories of Neapolitan pupils, collected by Marcello D'Orta (1994).

Children are much more limited by their writing and reading abilities than by narrative form as such. So we cannot use just fact of narrative form as cue in guessing the age of the author. So we have to have a look at indirect signs, as is cognitive, moral, emotional and psychosexual development.

Psychology has elaborated stages of development, which are characterized by presence of some sort of behavior and thinking and absence of another, which appears at later stages. This approach is also used in profiling in forensic psychology to depict probable psychological profile or image of a delinquent (for popular introduction see Douglas John, Olshaker Mark 1995). The question in profiling is whether all various developmental stages (say moral and cognitive) converge into one age and are therefore compatible, or are divergent, indicating uneven development of a person. So that is why we will go now through particular areas and look of milestones of developmental stages. The leading cues are psychosexual and intellectual development (Freud: Introductory Lectures²; Piaget, Inhelder 1969).

2. Milestones of child development

Let's have an example what psychology understands by developmental milestone (Dunbar 2004): "Sally and Ann are two dolls. Sally has a ball. She puts the ball under the cushion on the chair. Then, she leaves the room. While she is out of the room, Ann takes the ball out from under the cushion and hides it in the toy box on the other side of the room. Later, Sally comes back into the room. Where does Sally think her ball is?" Every adult would say: "Under the cushion." But children until the age of four would consistently reply: "In the toy box." They are unable to understand that Sally is having something else in her head than they are. This so-called theory of mind can serve as a milestone of their age.

It is important to point out that these milestones are independent of quality of language used: The same meaning might be expressed by high, cultivated rhetoric or by painfully low

² <http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/psychoanalysis/notes/standard.html>

colloquial language, but the structure of logical reasoning does not depend on the language but on maturing of the child's brain.

This theory of mind is nicely exemplified in Mark's Gospel (11, 28ff) by modeling of Jesus' reaction for each possible answer: "And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was [it] from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all [men] counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." This example brings not only a proof of used theory of mind, but also conditioning and bargaining ("If you do this, I will do that."). All these observable signs are common with younger school children, so they are obvious not only for Mark, but also for Pseudo-Thomas (even if we assume that he was a child). So we have to look not only for present, but also for absent milestones of development.

If we find just one milestone of childish thinking it is not that important, as it might be a coincidence. But if find that all developmental criteria converge and points at some level of psychological development, then it is quite convincing evidence of childish age of the author, as adults without proper education are not able to imitate child thinking at given developmental level. They usually mix many different milestones of personal development into one psychologically unreal picture.

There is another important difference of adults and childish works. When an adult describes thinking of a child. The child follows childish behavior and thinking, observed and remembered by the adult author, but depicted adults around the child follows developmental logic of the adult author. On contrary when a child writes about children and adults: All people in the narration follow the childish developmental perspective. In the pseudo Thomas Gospel, all adults also behave as simply as big-grown children.

Later attempts to correct the childish text, e.g. Mathew's Gospel, tried to bring commentaries and explication why small Jesus acted like this, but Pseudo-Thomas himself does not have this need at all. He perceives the logic of aggressive Jesus as straightforward and self-explaining. This utter absence of adult perspective throughout all the text also suggest that the author did not passed child level of thinking and identification with child's world, no matter how many of biological years he might have had in reality.

2.1. Psychosexual development – latency phase

The author writes exclusively about boys and interaction with male teachers, friends and father. Only women in the Gospel are his mother and a mother of some dead child. He seems to be inert to sexual polarities in general, which suggests that he has not achieved pubescence yet and was in the Freud's phase of latency (6 – 11 years). During this phase, child's identification with the parent of his own sex becomes stronger, and the child also incorporates more and more of the beliefs and values of his culture. Boys prefer the company of boys and consciously as well as unconsciously avoid girls and vice versa. It is true that ancient literature reflects the patriarchy a lot, but say in the Gospel of Mark we can find many more matured hints to world of women. (e.g. Mk 5, 25: "a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years").

2.2. *Intellectual and cognitive development – concrete operation, pre-stage of formal operation*

Piaget observed how children could analyze and combine parts of objects in so called operations or transformations. We will exploit this idea here to analyze the nature of Jesus' miracles in this Gospel. In general, we can understand a miracle only when we understand the underlying law, which is contravened by the miracle. Say if we want to understand Jesus miraculous transformation water into wine, we must first know law of quality conservation - water does not spontaneously change into wine.

The author is fascinated by a fact that Jesus was before birth of other people: "I know more than you, for I am before the ages. And I know when your fathers' fathers were born; and I know how many are the years of your life." This fascination is possible only when the author of this text understands seriation - ability to arrange object in some order. This ability appears in the stage of concrete operations (7 – 11 years). Multiple repetition of this simple time precedence can be understand so that the young author rehearses over and over recently acquired knowledge from the teacher.

Piaget's concrete operational stage is defined by mental operations that are focused on tangible events and objects.

What operations and analysis can or cannot we observe in the Gospel? Those are:

Reverse operation – resurrection or healing of people, who Jesus killed,

Understanding that there is no reverse operation to a once cut board, i.e. length conservation of board. (PsTm 13),

Understanding and fascination by time precedence (PsTm 6),

Analyses of geometrical shape of letter A (PsTm 6a),

Most of these marks we can observe in the gospel, but there are remarkable absence of any more general, formal or abstract operation – there is no theological overlap, reflection or morale. Striking is also total absence of any relation to God-Father. Jesus in the Gospel does not pray, nor prays people around him.

This disparity suggests that the author did not left a concrete operation stage of cognitive development.

Let's have an illustration of formal abstract reasoning, which is present in Mark's Gospel and absent in Pseudo-Thomas (Mk 12:42ff): "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called [unto him] his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all [they] did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, [even] all her living."

Concrete operations' level of reasoning is unable to make this inference and child does not understands the point, as it is driven and superficially amazed by observable amount of inserted money. The ratio between the money and the person's background is something that surpasses not only child understanding, but probably also many common adults, and therefore Jesus points at this fact and his disciples with Mark (the author of the Gospel) find it worth of recording. The same way of logic, we can assume that Jesus did many things that did surpass the intelligence of his disciples and these are not recorded in the Gospels. So absence of any sign of formal level reasoning in the Pseudo-Thomas is a convincing proof that the mind of the author did not reach this level of reasoning, and therefore these sings are filtered off also from adults persons in the story.

2.3. *Moral and emotional development - heteronomous morals*

When an adult author describes an imaginary interaction between a child and an adult, his description can contain childish thinking on the side of the child, but adult thinking on the

side of the adult hero. On contrary, when a childish author describes the same interaction, his adult actor thinks and acts as a child, because a childish author is unable to recreate higher way of consideration than is appropriate for the stage of his psychological development.

This is absence of higher moral feelings also typical for the author of the gospel. This can be also partly the source of the spurious feelings we have by reading this gospel. The whole gospel lacks any higher - adult reflection of Jesus' behavior. Everything is considered from (pre)adolescent egocentrism - belief that one is always the center of attention coupled with belief that one's situation is unique (Elkind David). In imaginary audience, the child has a belief that one is constantly being observed and judged, is extreme self-consciousness and it leads to desire to impress or please the imaginary audience. This is what the whole gospel is built up on.

The children can fabricate a personal fable where he believes that his experiences are unique, is immortal and invincible, than no one can understand his situation by virtue of its uniqueness, etc. When the author would be at this stage of development then identification with Jesus in imagination is at hand. Extraordinary abilities as sitting on a light beam (not in the Gree) are quite childish as well as the following interaction with parents.

Our author is typical with ultimate respect for power and punishment, as if following motto: "Might makes right." And he also seems to be self-serving. Jesus in his view lacks respect for the rights of others. Highest moral consideration is base on a rule "you give me and I'll give you," and there are no signs of loyalty, gratitude, or justice, which is typical for higher stages – neither on a side of young Jesus, nor on the surrounding adults.

It is inspiring to have a look at the way, how the interpersonal conflicts are solved. If Jesus were at the age concrete operation (7 – 11 years) also his moral development was at this stage, but adults around him should behave according their own higher levels of moral development. But if the author himself were in early developmental stage too then all people in the gospel would follow the same prism of developmental stage of the author. This is the case here. All actors in the gospels are described as having simple punishment - obedience or at most instrumental-relativist (reciprocal personal reward) way of dealing with interpersonal problems. This primitive moral thinking is according Kohlberg's moral development typical for perconventional level, characterized by concern for pleasure and avoidance of pain. (Approximate Ages: 4 - 10) and (at the same time) it lacks conventional way of thinking, which is based on authority and characterized by concern with traditional values and adherence to rules and laws.

According Erikson's psychosocial theory it is opposition of industry versus inferiority, which is typical for school age at 6-12 years. The writing of imaginary Jesus, which is superior in everything he did, can be well the coping strategies how to defend ego-devaluating memories from school and interactions with friends.

Also Piaget's heteronomous morality (lasting until approximately 8 years) well explains all the moral point of views taken in the gospel. Younger children around tend to conceive of wrongdoing in terms of fixed and absolute moral principles imposed by external authority.

The adults in the gospel should on contrary to little Jesus follow autonomous moral approaches, but this is not the case. Even the adults are viewed through very simple punishment obedience prism: "And no one after that dared to make Him angry, lest He should curse him, and he should be maimed." (PsTm 8) This also suggests that the young author projected his way of thinking into adult figures of his Gospel. If the author were adult he would at least make a commentary on Jesus' childish decisions, show that adults were patience with him, etc.

There is also very little empathy and no reflection of own feelings is typical for all the text. This way is typical for diaries of small children – they are describing their activities but without reflecting accompanying emotions. They have the emotions, the emotion influence

their behavior and decisions, but the children are unable to reflect them and consequently their narrative stories are without emotions.

Even more, a child is unable to understand way of thinking of a younger child. Therefore if a child (12 years) writes about younger children (8 years), then 8-year-old children behave and think as 12-year-old in his narration. This uniformity of all childish ages in the gospel is also well-observable phenomenon.

Let's again have contrasting example for Mark's Gospel, where we look for indicia of autonomous moral of Jesus in contrast to heteronomous moral of disciples (Mk 14,3): And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured [it] on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me."

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Comparing three factors of development - cognitive, psychosexual and moral - there is a uniform suspicion that the author of the gospel entered neither puberty, nor formal operations, nor autonomous moral stage. Therefore the best guess is that the author was a boy around 9 – 12 years old, taking into account with this guess that the children grew up bit more slowly than today. There might be also some signs of uneven development between emotional and intellectual sphere. The author's IQ seems to be above average (PsTm 6. And a certain teacher, Zacchaeus by name, [...] came to Joseph, and said to him: That is an intelligent boy of thine) also his language abilities would be above average, but emotional and moral development is retarding. Such combination of gifts on intellectual side and handicaps on the side of concentration and emotions is typical for hyperkinetic or hyperactive syndrom ADHD (F90; ICD10). Such children seems to adults to be clever enough to go in school, but are suffering there, as they are unable to sustain concentration for longer time span, and they cannot control their inner impulses to move. This way they provoke anger of teachers.

3. Social and motivational aspects

From the psychological point of view, every literal product is build up by use of mental representations of other people. These representations can behave in the mind of other people like alive person – then we call them "imaginal others" (Watkins 1986) or fantasy figures (Klimeš 2002). This fantasy figures or imaginal others form imaginary audience or mental companions (Nagera 1969; Myers 1976; Manosevitz, Fling, Prentice 1977; Harter, Chao 1992; Jalongo 1984; Bender, Vogel 1941; Taylor, Maring 2001).

Fantasy figures follow many laws that are different from laws that govern behavior of real people (Klimeš 2002). These rules can be useful in analysis of literal products. One of the rules sais that behavior of fantasy figures is simplified and pattern-like in comparison with behavior of real people (Klimeš 2002). Another rule says that one real person can be splitted into more fantasy figures or multiple mental representations. The imaginary audience is collection of all metal images of real people and also of pure imaginary persons (e.g. William Saroyan: Tracy's tiger). Behavior of imaginary audience follows the developmental stage of the author.

Main reason why people fabricate such imaginary interactions is coping with previous frustrating experiences in reality. Piaget describes his daughter who once did not want to eat soup by a lunch. It leaded to an unpleasant interaction between her and parents. A few hours later, Piaget saw her replaying the same interaction with a doll where she played parental point of view and it was the doll who did not want to eat the soup.

The author of the gospel worked with mental representation of his father - transformed into Joseph, teachers and friends. This mental work was a coping defensive mechanism that helped him to overcome conflicts in reality. Let's have an example: Paragraphs 14 – 15 probably reveal an interaction with one(!) real teacher despite the fact they are formally separated into two literal or fantasy teachers.

First let's notice that all stories are written in a sequential order, without any interconnection. Every paragraph is one story and probably a length what the author was able to write per day before he hid his text into some lair. Paragraphs 14 and 15 are the only case, which are interconnected by the last resurrection of the first killed teacher.

Taking into account the child logic, the paragraph 14 is quite true and realistic description of an interaction between the young author, his teacher and his father. The author's father put him to a teacher, the author was cheeky and consequently slapped by the teacher. This physical punishment made him feel bad and he came to his lair, and started to write down the same story, but now he was a young Jesus. Now he had the power, and he healed his hurt, inferior feelings by killing the literal teacher.

Following paragraph 15 is another fantasy instance of a good teacher, i. e. an image how a good teacher should look like. The second imaginary teacher gives a good answer that is appreciated by the author - Jesus. So he forgives the first literal or fantasy teacher and this way also the real teacher, so presumably one real teacher is split into two literal teachers in paragraphs 14 – 15.

Grandiose mental companions are hard to imagine to someone who never experienced them, and on contrary very natural to anyone who fabricated them in his childhood. Fortunately there are some illustrative examples in movies. First one is a French comedy, directed by P. de Broca (1973) called *Le Magnifique* (translated as *Muž z Acapulca* in Czech, or *The Magnificent One* in English). The main character is a writer of detective stories – Francois Merlin who produces a fantasy companion in a form of brilliant agent Bob Saint-Clair, both played by Jean-Paul Belmondo. There is an example from Hollywood production too: *Fight club* (director David Fincher, 1999) where Edward Norton, as an unnamed protagonist produces a mental companion – Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). Megalomaniac fantasies are taking form of *Fight Club*'s growing into a nationwide fascist group that escapes the protagonist's control.

The same way, there are many hints on presumable wisdom of the young Jesus in explaining shape of letter Aleph or talking about Hebrew alphabet. Neither here is understandable what author has on mind. May be nothing in particular, he only megalomaniacally describes the astonishment of people around his Jesus.

4. Psychological profile of the author

Psychological profiles are widely used in police and forensic psychology (Douglas John, Olshaker Mark 1995), as a tool to depict a probable picture of a criminal delinquent. A thorough analysis of findings must be made before creating the delinquent's profile.

Profile	Reasons
The author of the gospel is 9-11 old boy.	Cognitive, psychosexual and moral analysis above
His native language is Greek, Koine.	Language of the gospel, and first learn language ("I shall first teach him the Greek letters, and then the Hebrew." PsTm 14)
His name is Thomas and may be of Jewish nationality	Prolog of the gospel. The intention to teach him Hebrew. It would be no surprise when he would have had no Jewish background at all.
The religion of his parents is	He has knowledge only from New Testament, no hints to

though not Jewish but Christian

He is living with whole family in a town.

His father tries to provide him a good education, but the child is hyperactive and impulsive, although quite intelligent and that is why he has a lot of problems with all teachers and is changing tutors occasionally.

He can already write in Greek, but is to learn Hebrew alphabet which is very difficult to him and makes to feel bad, humiliated by teacher's criticism. New strange letters and their symbolical meanings are far beyond understanding of 10-year-old child and demands of teachers frustrate the boy. Grandiose Jesus is only a defensive reaction in the boy's fantasy to surpass this conflict.

The author writes a short paragraph occasionally and irregularly. His stories were hidden in a boyish lair.

The gospel was found accidentally, and rewritten despite the offensive way of Jesus' depiction.

Later redaction added intro and the story from Temple of Luke's Gospel, too keep the story of Jesus' childhood complete..

Old Testament. So he was not influence by Old-Testament commandments and Pharisees.

There are a town reality in the gospel - infrastructure. Prolog of the gospel. PsTm 15a

His intelligence is suggested by a teacher in PsTm 6 and by the fact that his writing and cognitive abilities are ahead of his moral and emotional development (He is still in heteronomous moral but, cognitively is well in concrete operation, at the age of formal operations). His impulsiveness is clear from the described conflicts. May be the discrepancy between emotional and cognitive development was the reason why he was prematurely put into school.

Description of "analysis" of the shape of the letter aleph is unclear. The author suggests that Jesus provided astonishing analysis of this shape, but any abstract meaning or more concrete hints are missing.

Typical behavior of children – having a secret. This behavior can explain why the real author could remain unrevealed. The gospel – child's secret – stayed hidden, abandoned, or forgotten in the lair. The author of the gospel could also move away, be killed or died. The lair might remain unfound for a few generations.

If any pious believer would find such a text of Jesus' childhood, would he dare to destroy it or through it away? No, he would rather think about how to extract some "true core" out of it. All other authors after Pseudo-Thomas made this attempt without just recognizing the childish origin and refusing it at all.

5. Conclusion - Summary

Psychological milestones of child development are mostly independent from the language used, so they can be used as a measure of the psychological age of the author. The authors of ancient texts are mostly adults as childish works were not worth of saving. The

Jesus' story is of course an exemption, as it has an authority derived from love of Christians to Jesus.

The Pseudo-Thomas, what we call the unknown author of the Gospel, has all sings of child. If it would not be an ancient text usually translated into not-colloquial language, no psychologist would reckon it to be a work of an adult. All main developmental sings converge into the age around 11 years. It is striking difference from synoptical Gospel of Mark, which has all milestones of fully adult work, despite the primitive language in which it is written.

The motivation behind is probably fantasy coping with traumas of the author, which resulted from his hyperactive nature and clashes with other people. His writing was hidden in some liar so well, that it was accidentally found a few generations after the authors had disappeared. The founder was happy that he found a story of Jesus' childhood, so he dare not to destroy it even when it was really offending text. He rather added the quotation of Luke to make the story of Jesus' childhood complete. All the other people worked with the text in a similar way.

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