A Critical Note on the Meaning of in Gospel of Judas 33:1
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Résumé de l’article
A CRITICAL NOTE ON THE MEANING OF \( \text{\textnumero apofasic} \) IN GOSPEL OF JUDAS 33:1

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the meaning of the Greco-Coptic word \( \text{\textnumero apofasic} \) in Gospel of Judas 33:1. The most common way of translating this noun is “declaration”, “explanation” or “revelation”. Experts often refer to Simon Magus’ Apophasis megalē to legitimize this manner of translation. But in light of the use of \( \text{\textnumero pa\textgreek{ogoc}} \) et\textipa{\textgreek{gj\textipa{\textgreek{kh}}}n} in the immediate context, this choice of words is difficult to support. Scholars seem to have overlooked another possible way of translating \( \text{\textnumero apofasic} \). This paper proposes that we understand \( \text{\textnumero apofasic} \) as “denial”, “negation” or “exclusion”. This primary meaning is coherent with the narrative role of Judas and with this gospel as a whole.

The recent discovery of the Gospel of Judas has sparked quite some interest among scholars. At first, everyone embraced the idea that this gospel depicted Judas Iscariot as a close friend of Jesus, a hero who would liberate him from his mortal body in order to return to the Pleroma. This positive assessment of Judas stemmed from what some considered being a request on the part of Jesus (GosJud 56:17-20):

\begin{quote}
\textipa{\textgreek{ntok de kna\textipa{\textgreek{pra}}} go\textipa{\textgreek{yj}}\textipa{\textgreek{ob}}\textipa{\textgreek{ov}}\textipa{\textgreek{hjou} prwme gar et\textipa{\textgreek{p}} fop\textipa{\textgreek{e}}i \textipa{\textgreek{ymo\textipa{\textgreek{e}}i kna\textipa{\textgreek{pra}}} e\textipa{\textgreek{ugjace} \textipa{\textgreek{ymo}}\textipa{\textgreek{e}}}.
\end{quote}

1. Note 137 on page 43 of The Gospel of Judas reads as follows: “Judas is instructed by Jesus to help him by sacrificing the fleshly body (‘the man’) that clothes or bears the true spiritual self of Jesus. The death of Jesus, with the assistance of Judas, is taken to be the liberation of the spiritual person within” (see R. Kasser, M. Meyer, G. Wurst, ed., The Gospel of Judas, Washington, DC, National Geographic, 2006). In the following notes, the preliminary edition will be referred to as The Gospel of Judas (2006).

2. Judging by the photograph of page 56 of Codex Tchacos, the Coptic in lines 18 to 20 is quite visible and can be read without difficulty; see R. Kasser, G. Wurst, M. Meyer and F. Gaudard, The Gospel of
But you will do more than all of them, for the man who bears me, you will sacrifice him.3

However, a few weeks after the publication of the preliminary English translation by the National Geographic Society (NGS), doubts concerning this interpretation started to arise. Scholars began to seriously question the initial characterization of Judas Iscariot, to the point where some today adopt a completely different perspective: Judas Iscariot is no better in this gospel than the betrayer depicted in the canonical gospels.4

This short paper focuses on the meaning of apofasis found in the first lines of the Gospel of Judas (33:1-3). The manner in which one translates this noun can influence the way Judas Iscariot and the gospel as a whole is understood. In the first lines, the author gives us an important hermeneutical key. It is similar to what we find in the Gospel according to Thomas, where the interpretative key is at the beginning of the text. In the introduction, Thomas invites readers to seek the interpretation of the hidden words of Jesus. Unfortunately, most scholars strictly focus on the history of the text and never get around at interpreting the gospel. For many, Thomas is seen as a collection of random sayings having no relationship to one another. But despite initial appearances, the Gospel according to Thomas has a kind of logic that needs to be uncovered by the reader. How does one go about deciphering these hidden sayings? One must actively participate in constructing the meaning of the text itself. The Gospel according to Thomas has a variety of interwoven themes. In order to uncover the meaning of a number of logoi, one must carefully establish a correlation between various themes. This type of exegesis is done through what I call a network of meaning.5

The opening lines of the Gospel of Judas also give us a clue on how one should interpret the text. The beginning of the gospel reads as follows:


4. In a public lecture given on May 10, 2006 in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, I questioned the idea that Jesus asked Judas to betray him in order to be liberated from his physical body. It would be more accurate to say that Jesus knew that Judas would sacrifice him. This was a prophecy, not a command or a request on the part of Jesus. The Coptic future tense here should be understood as a prediction. But the most significant contribution that challenges the initial interpretation made by the NGS team of experts is credited to Louis Painchaud from Université Laval in Quebec. He has brilliantly argued against the positive characterization of Judas on a number of occasions in meetings held in Europe and Canada since August 2006. PAINCHAUD has recently published an article entitled: "À propos de la (re)découverte de l’Évangile de Judas", Laval théologique et philosophique, 63 (2006), p. 553-568.

A CRITICAL NOTE ON THE MEANING OF **ἀπόφασις** IN **GOSPEL OF JUDAS** 33:1

The secret word of declaration by which Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot.6

Before I specifically examine the expression **ἀπόφασις**, a few words need to be said on some of the difficulties encountered in the opening phrase.7 For example, one must determine the antecedent of the relative **ἡ**. The final preposition **ἐν** can shed light on the matter, since the masculine pronominal suffix -ός can only point to **πλογός** and not to **ἀπόφασις** which is feminine. **ἀπόφασις** is in fact the determinative of **πλογός** (the secret word). The relative **ἡ** (which) then clearly refers to the **λόγος** (word).8 There is also the necessity of figuring out the syntactical role of **ἡ**. Here again, **ἐν** can be of some help. We know, for example, that this preposition (ἐν) expresses notions of place (in, within), time (at, during) and instrument (by, through). Because of this, the syntactical role of **ἡ** will be to mark a circumstance. We should then translate the phrase as follows: the secret word of the **ἀπόφασις** by which (or in which; during which) Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot. Jesus did not tell the secret word to Judas; rather, he spoke in conversation with Judas by the secret word which the author understands to be an **ἀπόφασις**. But what exactly is the meaning of **ἀπόφασις** in GosJud 33:1? This is what I intend to examine here.

In the critical edition, M. Meyer and F. Gaudard translated the Greco-Coptic term **ἀπόφασις** (ἀπόφασις) by the word “declaration”.9 G. Wurst, in his introduction to the **GosJud**, appeals to Hippolytus’ *Refutatio omnium haeresium* by indicating that **ἀπόφασις** can mean “declaration”, “explanation” and even “revelation”.10 It seems that in his *Refutatio*, Hippolytus quoted from the *Apophasis megalē* (ἡ μεγάλη ἀπόφασις), a work he attributed to Simon Magus.11 A plurality of meanings for ἀπόφασις is confirmed by the ways it is rendered in the *Refutatio*. At times, some will translate

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7. G. WURST points out briefly some of the difficulties of this opening phrase in *The Gospel of Judas. Critical Edition*, p. 179-180. I will not comment on problems concerning the “eight days” and “three days” in the lines following the opening statement: ἡ ἀποφάσις ἐν ἡμέραις ἡμῶν ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ἀποφάσιος ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ἀποφάσιος. Cherix offers various ways to interpret this difficult line; see comments in his French preliminary translation at http://www.coptica.ch/EvJudas-tra.pdf.
ἀπόφασις with the expressions “decision” (Ref IV 17.7 ; 19.5) 12 or “revelation” (Ref V 9.20).13 Simon Magus’ Apophasis megalē (Ref VI 9.16 ; 11.4 ; 14.26 ; 18.6) is also understood as a “revelation”14 or an “announcement”.15 These different ways of translating ἀπόφασις all point in the same direction. According to the LSJ,16 the noun ἀπόφασις refers to a “sentence” (i.e. declaration) or a “decision”17, and derives from the verb ἀποφαίνω which means “to show forth”, “display” or “declare”.18 But at the same time, the LSJ considers the primary meaning of ἀπόφασις to be “denial”, “negation”19 and even “exclusion”.20 In this case the noun would derive from ἀποφαινέομαι.21 An example of this use is found in Aristotle’s De interpretatione where he clearly defines ἀπόφασις as “denial” or “negation”.22 This is also the case in his Metaphysics23 and in many of his other works.24 Ἀπόφασις also has the meaning of “denial” or “negation” in some Patristic texts, especially when it is used in negative theology as...

15. The Refutation of all Heresies 6.6.9 (ANF 5:76-77). It is interesting to note that SALLES-DABADIE translates the Greek dative τῇ ἀποφάσει (Ref VI 11.4 ; 14.26 ; 18.6) into French as “l’Apophasis” ; see Recherches sur Simon le Mage, p. 17, 25, 57.
17. Other more remote meanings of ἀπόφασις are “catalogue”, “inventory”, “assertion”, “judgment”, “answer” and “oracle” ; see LSJ, p. 226. K.L. KING has partially noticed the ambiguity of the word apophasis. She states that apophasis has a double connotation. It could be understood as “something declared openly” (which justifies King’s use of “pronouncement”) or as a “court judgment” (see Reading Judas, p. 123). But this double connotation strictly derives from the verb ἀποφαίνεσθαι. She has omitted a more important variant of apophasis, one that stems from ἀπόφημι. This other variant opens up new possibilities of interpretation.
18. According to LSJ, p. 225 and Bailly, p. 249, ἀπόφασις from ἀποφαίνεσθαι is also equivalent to ἀπόφημι which means “declaration” or “statement”.
19. It would seem that some late Latin writers have also retained the idea that apophasis means denial or negation, see ISIDORE OF SEVILLE’s Etymologiarum Lib. II Caput XXVII.3 (Migne 82, p. 145).
20. Ἀπόφασις is also used to refer to the exclusion of something, see LSJ, p. 225.
21. We can understand ἀπόφασις as the opposite of καταφάσις (affirmation), LSJ, p. 225 ; Bailly, p. 250.
23. See Metaph. 990b ; 1004a ; 1007a-b ; 1008a ; 1011b ; 1012a ; 1022b ; 1027b ; 1029a ; 1046b ; 1056a ; 1058a ; 1062a ; 1089b. An exception to this is the use of ἀπόφασις as an equivalent of ἀπόφημι (statement) in Metaph. 1079a ; see W.D. ROSS, Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Vol. II, London, Clarendon Press, 1958 (1924), p. 384. In a broader sense, H.G. APOSTLE defines apophasis as “something that does not belong to something else”; see his Aristotle’s Metaphysics, London, Indiana University Press, 1966, p. 456.
the only true way of speaking about the attributes of God. Negative theology, also called Apophatic theology, endeavors to describe God in negative terms. It expresses what God is not rather than what he is. Apophatic theology uses denial statements in order to talk about the attributes of God, i.e., God is not evil, God is not darkness, God is not hate, etc.

When translating the Greco-Coptic word ἀποφάσις, one must keep in mind that the noun can have a plurality of meanings. If one decides that ἀποφάσις comes from ἀποφαίνω, then expressions like “declaration”, “explanation” and “revelation” make sense. If, however, we argue that the noun derives from ἀπόφημι, the translation would be “denial”, “negation” and “exclusion”. How then should we understand ἀποφάσις in the first lines of the Gospel of Judas? Those who wish to make a case for ἀποφάσις as “declaration”, “explanation” or “revelation” need to carefully consider the meaning of πλογός ἐτηθή. Because of the immediate context, it is difficult to understand ἀποφάσις as a “declaration” or an “explanation”. According to the LSJ, λόγος already carries with it ideas such as “statement”, “sentence” and “explanation”.

25. The PSEUDO-DENYS’ Mystical Theology 1.2 uses ἀπόφασις as “denial” or “negation”: τὰς ἀποφάσεις ἀντικείμενα εἶναι ταῖς καταφάσεσιν… (the denials oppose themselves to the affirmations...). For other examples, see Lampe, p. 219.


27. See LSJ, p. 1057-1059.


29. PAUCHAUD states that the GosJud clearly displays the characteristics of Gnostic dialogues of revelation; see “À propos de la (re)découverte de l’Évangile de Judas”, p. 555.
The secret word of the denial by which Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot.

The Gospel of Judas would then be the secret word of the denial. This way of understanding ἀποφασις is coherent with the rest of the gospel. As a matter of fact, the idea of denial does explain several statements and actions therein:

1. ἀποφασις is first and foremost Jesus’ denial of Judas. This can be seen in several places. For example, when Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom to Judas, he calls him a demon (Δαίμων; GosJud 44:21).

2. As I already mentioned, we should certainly not interpret GosJud 56:17-20 as a command or a request. Jesus simply predicts that Judas will sacrifice the man that bears him: “But you will do more than all of them, for the man who bears me, you will sacrifice him.” In the Gospel of Judas, sacrifices are always seen in a negative light (GosJud 38:16ff; 39:26-40:1), and Jesus specifically orders his disciples to stop making sacrifices (GosJud 41:1-6).

3. To deny actually means to “say no”. It is important to note that the New Testament uses the Greek word ὑπερὶσσωμεν when it speaks of “denial” (Matt 19:33; Lk 12:9; John 13:38; Acts 4:16; 2 Tim 2:12-13). This being said, nothing prevents the author of the Gospel of Judas from using another word (ἀποφασις) when referring to “denial”.

30. This is similar to what is found in the Fourth Gospel. However, the expression used to characterize Judas in John 6:70 is διαβόλος and not δαίμων. On the other hand, some have established a connection between the Δαίμων and Socrates’ own personal daimon in Plato (Symposium 202e-203a). Whatever the connection one wishes to make, Judas, the thirteenth Δαίμων, will be denied access to the place reserved for the saints. This is certainly not a positive outcome for Judas! It seems that in his vision, Judas was duped by his erring star into thinking that he could live with the saints and holy angels in the eon (GosJud 45:1-23).


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33. The role of sacrifices in GosJud is explained by Painchaud in “À propos de la (re)découverte de l’Évangile de Judas”, p. 557-558.
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(GosJud 56:12-16). Judas will do more than all of them (\textit{knaip oyo epeoy thpoig}), that is, more evil than those who sacrifice to Saklas. According to Jesus, the pinnacle of wickedness is to sacrifice the man that bears him. How will Judas accomplish such an evil deed? The canonical gospels refer to Judas’ action as that of \textit{handing over} or \textit{betrayal} (\textit{παραδίδωμι}; Matt 26:46; Mk 14:14; Lk 22:21; John 6:71). This is also what happens in our text when Judas \textit{hands over} (\textit{παραδίδωμι}) Jesus to the high priests and scribes (GosJud 58:9-26). But why would Judas actually decide to hand over Jesus after having received this revelation from him? The reason seems obvious: Judas has been \textit{denied} access to the place reserved for the holy, making it impossible for him to ascend to the holy generation (GosJud 45:12-24; 46:24-47:1). He was displeased with the content of the revelation. This secret word or revelation didn’t turn out to his advantage, since it was an \textit{apofasis}. This secret word is to be understood as a denial or refusal. As a result, Judas negatively responds to Jesus’ \textit{denial} of him. This clearly explains Judas’ \textit{παραδίδωμι} of his master at the end of the gospel. Through his betrayal, Judas does exactly what Jesus predicted in GosJud 56:17-20. The \textit{παραδίδωμι} is a reaction to the \textit{apofasis}.

In conclusion, we have seen how our understanding of \textit{apofasis} can influence our interpretation of the GosJud as a whole. Deriving from the verb \textit{ἀποφαίνω}, the noun \textit{apofasis} can certainly mean “declaration”, “explanation” or “revelation”. It is difficult to make sense of such a choice of words in the GosJud, since these expressions are redundant with the use of \textit{πλογος etηπημ}. In the opening lines of the GosJud, \textit{apofasis} most probably derives from \textit{ἀπόφημι} and should be translated as “denial” (or “exclusion”). This fits perfectly with the overall thrust of the gospel: Judas is \textit{denied} access to the holy generation and deprived of true salvation. As we have seen, Judas realizes that he was separated from (\textit{denied, excluded}) from that generation (GosJud 46:16-18). His “denial” or “exclusion” from the holy generation is actually what constitutes the \textit{apofasis}. He violently retaliates by \textit{handing over} his master to the Jewish authorities (GosJud 58:9-26). This way, Judas finds himself fulfilling what was prophesied by Jesus in GosJud 56:17-20.