

IN DETAIL: What Professor Bond and Dr Paul McKechnie had to say about the study of Stephen's Greek

[From a letter to Dr David Bell and Dr Leo Hobbis who were preparing a seminar (Auckland, 2003) where various scholars would be discussing my study of Stephen's Greek. It has been edited for greater clarity.]

I have been carefully studying again and pondering the written responses I originally received from the above Greek scholars.

Prof Bond received 18 pages of the MS of Part II covering all the data and references with regard to the Greek. He did not read the material regarding the Essenes, the Holy Family, and Stephen's ministry. On the basis of what I gave him, he was happy with my interpretation of the Greek, the parsing, and the relevant references to Celts, coins, William Ramsay etc. He seemed to regard it as believable that it was Stephen.

Dr McKechnie received the whole version then current. He too accepted my writing about the Greek, but dissented about the circumflex over the second **o** in **boro**. (A search on the Internet showed this to be a controversial issue.. Most importantly, he was clear that he did not suspect either myself or Thomas Ashman (the medium) of lack of integrity. In response to a specific question, he says he does not suspect hoax. I submit that those responses in themselves do help support the claim that we have to do with the historical Stephen the Martyr.

However Dr McKechnie regarded "some of your views about the Greek" etc. as "rather speculative" and wished to be recorded as saying "don't know" about all my use of the references.

I shall argue that some "don't know" seem questionable, yet I do think his "don't know" response is justified from his point of view, since, yes of course the writing does contain speculation as is the case with much Biblical criticism, and with the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The argument leading to the final and supposedly solid translation of the Greek, depends (1) on acceptance that we do in fact have to do with the historical Stephen, (2) that we accept Stephen's statement that they were words addressed to Joseph the father of Jesus (3) that Stephen was correct in saying that Joseph was an Essene. If we don't accept these three points, yes indeed the Greek is very strange and hard to explain. For Dr McKechnie to withdraw his "don't knows" he has to accept those three points. If he does so, he has to publicly proclaim himself a believer, and he can't do this without having had the experience of the teaching of Stephen, and the synchronicity surrounding it.

If those three points can be accepted, I believe that my translations and theories/speculations have a solid basis on the work of other scholars. I do speculate about the movements of his parents and their religious affiliation, and I speculate about what the life of Joseph and Mary would be like if they were in fact Essenes, and I speculate about their level of education, and whether they knew Greek. The testimony of the Scrolls suggests the constraints within which they would have had to live their lives, and their likely beliefs. Short of finding signed affidavits from the Holy Family, one can only speculate using what hard supportive evidence one can find. And in my writing, I do not suggest otherwise.

On the other hand Dr McKechnie did provide some interesting material of his own, some of which I have incorporated in my "speculations".

The point of the Greek was to establish the authenticity and reality of Stephen, for in the context of materialist Western culture, it seems an impossible event to occur, to converse with the spirit of one who had died 2000 years ago. I have a skeptical side to me, and always wanting to see both sides to a question, I had been a member of the Skeptics Society for two or three years. My book was published by an organising member of the Auckland Skeptics, who thought my scholarship stood up to scrutiny. Skeptics are quick to impute trickery, manipulation of evidence, dishonesty to people who think to demonstrate the other-dimensional, so I am quick to dream up imagined accusations. For that reason I have been extra careful to avoid giving ground to such accusations.

I've discussed the responses of Drs Bond and McKechnie in general. Now I list some detail.

I attach two scanned pages of the first typescript record of the Greek puzzle words, and first interpretations at the time. These show that original the Greek words have not been altered in any way in the interests of intelligibility, except "diesthai" instead of "diesta".

1. The question of stages of interpretation would be of interest, if there were question of hoax. I discuss this in the last page of the Appendix of *The Stephen Experience*.
2. In general I would maintain that the complexity, the way the internal evidence interlocks, the consistency with known but sometimes obscure historical data, each point being backed by references, all this tells against any theory that Thomas made up the words, and that I manipulated the facts in some way. In other words, the puzzle was received "paranormally" and is evidence for the authenticity of the supposed communicator.
3. Error in small details would not tell against this.
4. There are eleven Koine Greek words, of which three are repetitions. Karno dioti, diota dioti, karno dioti, boro zelai lenaika mela diesta. Anyone with a knowledge of the Greek alphabet, can look up a modern edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, and look up the eight words in question, and ascertain whether I have correctly copied the information about these eight words into Part II of *The Stephen Experience*. Anyone with knowledge of Greek grammar can confirm my parsing of the simple grammar of the words. No great expertise in Greek is required to do this. With regard to the question about what dialectical grammatical variations can be expected, and where, that is more the sphere of the expert. William W. Goodwin's *A Greek Grammar*, ed. 1894 confirmed that three endings were correct for the dialect. And Prof. Bond accepted that northern alpha. replaces Attic word endings eta subscript and epsilon iota.
5. I believe my references backing interpretations are sound. A good many of these references can be checked from theological libraries without too much difficulty .
6. The tone of Professor Bond's contributions seem to suggest that he accepts the reality of what is being reported as happening, and he does not basically quarrel with either the Greek or its parsing. Here is what he had to say in his letter of 22 March 01:
"I have read through your material with interest and have a number of marginal notes, some mere detail [about accents, iota subscripts, and the form of the final 's']. Other comments are more lateral which you may or may not want to take account of "

He asked "Are you absolutely sure of this" that Thomas could not have found this quote somewhere.

I had inserted punctuation into the puzzle words, and he remarks "The insertion of punctuation into the Greek, begs several questions "

With regard to "Celtic horn" he initially writes, "Is it possible that the horn may be a "drinking horn " with some sort of ambiguity or pun intended? I can't condone "born" really." He then retracts this and accepts my contention that it is a carnyx, and that it is indeed a symbol for the Celts. He writes "Good'.

He later suggested that I should give the reference for the quote from William Ramsay. [I have done that.]

With reference to **boro** he takes the nominative form **boros** and notes that it also means "juice of pressed grapes. Again, in the spirit of oracular and cryptic utterances, a pun ambiguity may be intended"

He says it is "good thinking" that the Thracian zelai implies that the speaker must have been in Thrace, as Thracian was not a written language. He notes that Thracians were also seen as drunkards.

With regard to word endings he notes "Variations are common even in classical Greek. Doric vowels are found in the lyrics of Attic tragedies, for example"

He notes as I do that Lenaika was in honour of Bacchus/Dionysus.

He agreed that about the northern vowel changes.

He agrees with the parsing of the Greek words.

He accepts that Roman coins celebrating victories over Celts used the Camyx as a symbol for "Celt"

In reference to Stephen's saying that he was born in Ancyra, he accepts the quote from William Ramsay about the concentration of Celtic Jews there.

He does not question the connection with the Essenes in Israel or that the Greek makes sense in the context of the Essene Messianic communion service.

[I didn't give Prof Bond the whole of Part 2 to read, with the quotes from the Dead Sea scrolls, theories about the Holy Family, or the ministry of Stephen]

Dr Paul McKechnie makes the following positive notes:

(A) he sees no reason to suspect the integrity either of Thomas Ashman or myself. This must imply that he accepts the possibility of an other-dimensional origin for the Greek words.

(B) the only fault he finds with the Greek is his belief that there was no up and down inflection of the dative in Koine Greek. The more usually held view is that that inflection remained through the first century AD. (Thus evidence that the words were not spoken later than the first century, when the majority opinion is that the up and down inflection changed to that of a stress.)

(C) He makes interesting suggestions amplifying my thoughts about the Holy Family.

Negatively he writes: "Granted that one believes in the integrity of the people involved (and I see no reason not to), I still think your phrase/ sentence is pretty cryptic, and I can't say positively if it's something a Greek speaker MIGHT have said in the first century. Still less can I be sure what it means. Mention my name if you like., but it'd warm heart to know you were going to say that I take a definite 'don't know' view of all your conclusions. "

But really in some cases we *do* know: The carnyx on the Roman coins does symbolise the Celts. We can accept the testimony of Davidson about Celtic Jews. Why else would a person quote a native Thracian word, unless he came from Thrace?

The northern endings do help confirm the Thracian provenance; it is known that there is an association of drunkenness with the Celts, and with the word Boro.

Dr McKechnies writes, "This is a very odd piece of Greek. I think some ~your views about it are rather speculative,".

'I also wonder if in an Essene community one would speak of an erstwhile ethnic affiliation in the way you later argue for. Essenes were Israelites, and distinguished themselves from the sons of -Japheth etc (See *The Wars of the sons of darkness and the sons of light*. Of course to us it makes sense to be both a Celt and a Jew, but I think the idea strikes as a little odd in the Essene connection..

"The three "diotis" look very modern Greekism to me, though the modern spelling is giati". All the vocabulary is odd. "

Paul agrees that the words are unlikely to have come from the conscious mind of Thomas..

He is agnostic as to whether "each word carries a burden of meaning that has its roots in a particular historical and cultural background". He has in fact read most of Part 2, I shall later list a number of ancient texts cited, and opinions of modern scholars, so that an overall opinion can be formed of them.

With regard to the heading JOSEPH, MARY, and the BROTHERS OF JESUS: Paul writes:

"You may be right, I think, in some of this. The flight into Egypt is important. ~ Many Jews lived in Egypt, most of them in Alexandria. [For refugees, Alexandria is a more likely destination than somewhere up country. Therefore Joseph, Mary and Jesus probably lived in Alexandria, though no one knows for how long and if they knew no Greek before, I bet they learned some there. That is why I distrust NT scholars who insist that Jesus can't have known Greek. In Alexandria, even synagogue seroices were in Greek. .Jesus and his parents, for my money, must have been at least functional Greek speaker. Mary was of a priestly family (Zechariah, Elizabeth) and Joseph was of the Davidic royal family.

"Jesus sent out his disciples "to teach" –therefore he was himself a teacher, and a teacher of teachers ie of high intellectual attainments in a society with a long and complex literary tradition. I'd say he came .from a literate, as well as observant, household. The recent book on this is Richard J. Baucham *Jesus and the relatives of Jesus in the early church*. See also most recently C.K Barrett *The historicity off/ Acts in the Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1999) 515.34"

Some other footnotes giving quotes on which the argument is based: -

11 Diodoros is shocked at the exorbitant price "Celts" of his day would pay for a jar or even a cup of wine

.12 Remember: Lenaika was one of four Dionysian festivals. The other three involved the use of fermented wine.

13 14 15 about language in Galatia 17 The Language of the Thracians, Ivan

Duridanov 18 Geography of Anatolia 21 Code for urban communities of Essenes. 22

Refs about married Essenes 24 Paul Johnson on the Essenes 26 Qumran Manual of

Disciples "Of postulants and novices" 28 Manual of Discipline about the Messianic

Communion 30 fitzmeyer on New Wine Festivals 31 Refs how one joins the Essenes

32 on the Novitiate.