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Judas, Thaddeus, Addai: possible connections with the vicissitudes of the Edessan and Constantinopolitan Mandyllion and any research perspectives

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Abstract—The *Mandyllion* or image of Edessa, first mentioned in the 6th century, was a depiction of Christ's face, described by some texts as a painting and by others as a miraculous imprint on a cloth. It is reasonable to believe that this mysterious cloth was the Shroud which is today kept in Turin, folded in such a way as to show only the face.

The protagonist of the events related to the Edessan image is Thaddeus-Addai, who is at times defined as “apostle” and at other times simply as disciple. The identification of Thaddeus-Addai with the apostle Judas Thaddeus or one of the 70 (or 72) disciples remains an issue which deserves further studies; however, considering the research already conducted, a possible relation between the numerous literary witnesses and the figure of Judas Thaddeus is not to be ruled out.

Keywords—*Judas, Thaddeus, Addai, Mandyllion, Edessa, Shroud.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Mandyllion* or image of Edessa was a depiction of Christ's face, described by some texts as a painting and by others as a miraculous imprint on a cloth. It was first mentioned in the 6th century and represented, in the collective unconscious, the icon par excellence. Then, in the 10th century, it was moved to Constantinople. After the sack of the byzantine capital by the Franco-Venetian crusaders in 1204, its traces, in the West, were lost in Rome or Paris [1].

In 1978 English historian Ian Wilson stated that the *Mandyllion* could actually be the Holy Shroud, folded in such a way as to show only the face [2]. His hypothesis, supported by numerous traces, was accepted by other scholars in the following years [3]. Objections were also raised [4] which, however, were not free of criticism [5]. The authors of the present work deem Wilson's theory as valid and are therefore interested in the vicissitudes of the *Mandyllion*, which can shed light upon the first centuries of the Holy Shroud's history. The cloth, which is kept in Turin today, certainly wrapped the bloody corpse of a man who had been subjected to torture. Medical and legal examinations highlighted several elements consistent with the account of Jesus' Passion narrated in the Canonical Gospels [6]. At the same time, the compared examination of all historical and scientific findings could help reach a very high degree of likelihood as to the Jesus described in the Gospel being the man wrapped in the Shroud, thus supporting the theory whereby it can be considered a relic [7].

II. THE CITY OF EDESSA

Edessa, modern-day Şanlıurfa, a city located in South-eastern Turkey, was a city-state which, according to some sources, was converted to Christianity as early as in the 2nd century [8]. According to some traditions, the beginning of Christianity occurred through the conversion of King Abgar V, who was miraculously healed after seeing the Face of Christ on a cloth brought to him by Addai (Thaddeus) [9].

Syriac and Hebrew scholar Sabino Chialà indicates a text of 13th century Syriac writer Gregory Bar-Hebraeus, commonly known as Bar Hebraeus. The latter hypothesizes that a Syriac version of the Old Testament was written “in the days of Addai the apostle and of King Abgar of Edessa, when the New Testament, the *Peshitta*, was similarly translated” [10].

All the vicissitudes related to the conversion of King Abgar are reported differently by various sources and have led to several uncertainties both in the identification of the various protagonists, particularly the disciple of Jesus, and the nature of the image itself.

It appears clear that later on Edessa became a missionary centre from which Christianity spread i.a. to Persia and Armenia. The Armenian Church believes it is the heir of the “Chair of Thaddeus”: ancient traditions have it, in fact, that faith was preached in Armenia by two disciples of Jesus, namely Thaddeus - reference is made to Addai of the Syrians - and Bartholomew, and that the language of the first missionaries was Syriac [11].

III. DISCIPLE/APOSTLE THADDEUS/ADDAI

The protagonist of the events related to the Edessan image is Thaddeus, who is at times defined as “apostle” and at other times simply as disciple, being part of the group of 72 missionaries sent out by Jesus according to Luke's account (Lk 10,1-24). The study of this character is the object of this research, which is aimed at promoting his possible identification and suggesting a few paths of investigation in order to reconstruct plausible connections with the vicissitudes of the Edessan and Constantinopolitan *Mandyllion*.

Bearing in mind the purpose of this work, a few fundamental texts have been taken into account and examined. The main ones are listed below.

IV. THE FOUR CANONICAL GOSPELS MENTIONING JUDAS THADDEUS

Gospel of Matthew

10,3 The twelve do not include Judas, but Thaddeus (he was evidently the same character).

13,55 Judas the brother of the Lord.

Gospel of Mark

3,19 The twelve do not include Judas, but Thaddeus (he was evidently the same character).

6,3 Judas the brother of the Lord.

Gospel of Luke

6,16 Judas, one of the twelve, son of James.

Gospel of John

14,22 At the Last Supper, Judas, not the Iscariot, asks Jesus a question.

Furthermore, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appoints seventy-two more disciples and sends them on a mission, and it is told that they returned rejoicing (chapt. 10,1-17).

V. FURTHER REFERENCES FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Acts of the Apostles

1,13 Judas son of James is in the group of the apostles.

Moreover, the following is reported in Galatians 3,1: "O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" [12], which is a correct translation from the Latin: "O insensati Galatae, quis vos fascinavit, ante quorum oculos Iesus Christus descriptus est crucifixus?" [13]. In this pericope, Paul seems to refer to something which has been shown to the Galatians - the reference to an actual vision is explicit. However, no mention is made to an apparition or an ecstatic vision, but rather to a depiction (a representation or a description or a drawing) of the crucified Christ.

Letter of Jude

At the beginning, the author introduces himself as Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

VI. APOCRYPHAL TEXTS

The *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus* (dating back to around the 7th century), which is probably of Coptic-Egyptian origin, was renamed *Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* by E.A. Wallis Budge, since this apostle often intervenes in the first person. He speaks to Thaddeus in these words: "Do not let this book come into the hand of any man who is an unbeliever or a heretic. Behold, this is the seventh time that I have commanded you, O my son Thaddaeus, concerning these mysteries" [14].

In the *Acts of Andrew*, according to the Vatican code gr. 807 of the 9th-10th century, the apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, meet to decide on the destinations of each of them so as to begin the missionary work; Lebbeus and Thaddeus were assigned Beronice [15]. Thaddeus reaches the Edesseans' city, where he had stayed with Abgar, the Toparch of this place; "he had previously taken to him, with letters written by

God, the form (image) of the theandric resemblance to Christ, (a form) not made by man's hand, but immaterially created in matter" [16].

In the *Armenian Acts of Bartholomew*, which were traced back to the 5th-6th century, it is told that apostle Bartholomew met in Armenia with Thaddeus, who was already preaching in that region [17].

The *Apostolic memories of Abdias*, considered by those who published them to date back to the 6th-7th century, report in book IX that Thomas sent Thaddeus, one of the seventy disciples, to King Abgar, who was from the city of *Edeliena* [18].

The *Account of John the Theologian on the dormition of the holy Theotokos*, which is believed to date back to the 6th century, states that Thaddeus (along with Andrew, Philip, Luke and Simon Cananeus) was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit to be present on the "day of her departure and ascension to the heavens" [19].

Two letters of the correspondence exchanged between Abgar and Jesus [20] were kept in Edessa, and Jesus is said to have promised to the king that he would send him one of his disciples to heal him. Following the Saviour's ascension, the promise was kept, when Thomas sent Thaddeus to Edessa [21].

In the *Acts of Thaddeus, one of the apostles*, a Greek text dating back to the 3rd-4th century, the protagonist of the narrative is Thaddeus or Addeus, initially presented as one of the 70 or 72 apostles of Jesus [22]. According to theologian André-Marie Dubarle, the Acts of Thaddeus date back to the 6th century [23]. In Moraldi's work on the apocryphal writings, we read that a Jew from Edessa called Lebbeus, who had gone to Jerusalem, was baptized by John the Baptist with the name of Thaddeus and was later chosen by Jesus to be part of the group of the twelve apostles. After the resurrection, Thaddeus returned to Abgar, who had himself baptised. The king had already been healed by the cloth brought to him by Ananias, upon which the face of Jesus was imprinted and by the virtues of which the king was healed from his disease [24]. Von Dobschütz also reports that it was Abgar's messenger who took the miraculous icon to the king: therefore, the icon is believed to have healed the king even before Thaddeus returned to Edessa [25].

Latin and Greek scholar Mark Guscin translated Abgar's instructions to Ananias as follows: "Abgar told Ananias to record Christ's exact appearance, what he looked like, his stature, his hair and everything in detail". In the 9th-10th century manuscript Vindobonensis bybl. Caesar. Hist. gr. 45 (olim 14), he highlights the variation at the end of the paragraph, where we read "his whole body". Furthermore, the scholar emphasizes the use of the words τετραδιπλον and σινδών in describing the cloth which Jesus miraculously imprinted with the image of His face [26]. According to Dubarle, the word *tetradiplon* (folded four times) is a neologism used to describe the peculiarity of the object which, when opened, showed the whole image of Jesus' body [27].

The *Doctrine of Addeus the apostle*, or *Doctrina of Addai the apostle*, is the Syriac version of the *Acts of Thaddeus*, reported by a few 5th-6th century manuscripts. This text says that apostle Judas Thomas sent Addeus, one of the 72 disciples [28] or Addai the apostle [29] to Edessa. Philologist Ilaria Ramelli believes it dates from the 4th-5th century [30]. Historian Alain Desreumaux, specialised in Syriac and Aramaic, lists a series of versions of the *Doctrine of Addai*: Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Slavic [31]. According to the same French author, this work is a composition elaborated from an old Syriac legend. The author, who unlike other apocryphal authors names himself “Laboubna son of Sennac son of Abshadar”, states he filed his text with the royal archives of Edessa. Desreumaux believes that Laboubna included, in his writing, many descriptions and various documents circulating at the time of the final version [32]. This collection also includes the *Didascalia Addai* [33]. Finally, the French author assumes that the *Doctrine of Addai* realises a fusion of two figures: Jude Thaddeus, who evangelized Syria according to an apocryphal tradition, and Addai, who announced the Gospel in Edessa and Mesopotamia according to a local tradition [34].

The text named *Apostolic Memories of Abdias*, dating back to the 6th-7th century and whose manuscripts are in Latin, contains, in book VI [35], the history of the missions of apostles Simon Cananeus and Judas (Thaddeus) in the Persian empire, where they would die [36]. The text is attributed to Abdias, the first bishop of Babylon.

VII. ECCLESIASTICAL WRITERS

Clement of Alexandria (3th century)

Historian Daniel Scavone points out that use of the name Thaddeus, referred to the evangelizer of Edessa, is chronologically older than Addai: in fact, Clement of Alexandria, in a Latin fragment of *Hypotyposes* (a comment of the Scriptures, of which only fragments are left) reports that the body of Thaddeus (not Addai) was buried in the royal cemetery of the Edessa citadel (*birta*) [37].

Epiphanius of Salamis (4th century)

In his *Panarion adversus omnes haereses*, mentions Thaddeus as one of the eight apostles listed in the Gospel of the Ebionites [38].

Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century)

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, he mentions Judas Thaddeus, indicating that he was the groom at the wedding at Cana [39]. In the first book, Eusebius recounts [40] that Abgar, King of Edessa in the age of Christ, was ill. When he learnt of Jesus of Nazareth working miracles, he sent him a letter, asking him to come to the Court of Edessa. Jesus declined the invitation, but Thaddeus presented himself in Edessa with the reply letter from Jesus. Eusebius reports that a description in Syriac language was added to Jesus’ reply letter stating that Thaddeus was one of the 70 disciples and that he was sent to Judas also called Thomas. The king saw a great vision appearing on Thaddeus’ face and prostrated himself before him. The apostle

placed his hands on Abgar and healed him. The king believed in Jesus and ordered all the city’s inhabitants to gather and listen to Thaddeus’ preaching. According to Hans Belting, the fact that Eusebius writes about the relationship between Jesus and the Edessan king in the 4th century means that a much more ancient narrative existed. Its core was the historic conversion of Abgar IX (179-214) to Christianity, while tradition has it that he was a contemporary of Christ with whom he maintained an epistolary correspondence [41].

An interesting source is the *Narratio de Imagine Edessena* [42], attributed to **Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus**, who was Emperor of Constantinople from 912 to 959. The account reports the most widespread tradition on the origin of the Edessan image: the exchange of letters between Abgar and Jesus, a painter’s attempt to reproduce on canvas the features of the preaching Master, the miraculous imprinting of an image on the cloth with which Jesus wipes his wet face. In His reply letter to Abgar, Jesus promises him that after returning to the Father, He will send one of His disciples, named Thaddeus, who will cure his disease and give him the eternal life and peace [43]. The *Narratio* also reports another version of the facts, whereby the image gets imprinted when Jesus wipes His face after sweating blood in the Gethsemane. Jesus gives the cloth to Thomas and tells him to send it to Abgar through Thaddeus, after His ascension to Heaven. The text also explains what King Abgar’s vision consisted in: Thaddeus “placed the likeness on his own forehead and went in thus to Abgar. The king saw him coming from afar and seemed to see a light shining out of his face, too bright to look at, sent forth by the likeness that was covering him” [44].

Germanus I of Constantinople (715-730)

Germanus I, Patriarch of Constantinople (mentioned by chronicler **George the Monk** in the 9th century), stated: “There is an image of Christ in the city of Edessa, it is not made by the hands of man and is working amazing wonders. The Lord Himself, after imprinting his own image on a *soudarion*, sent to Abgar, Toparch of the Edessenians’ city, by the intermediary Thaddeus the Apostle, the image which maintains his human physiognomy and healed Abgar’s illness” [45].

George Syncellus (9th century)

George Syncellus held the office of secretary of Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, from 784 to 806. Following the latter’s death, he wrote in *Extract of Chronography* that the arrival of Thaddeus in Edessa and the healing of King Abgar occurred in 36 AD. “Thomas and Judas, in accordance with a divine oracle, sent Thaddeus to Edessa to evangelize it. He brightened all inhabitants with his words and deeds. The whole city still venerates him; people also venerate the Lord’s physiognomy not made by the hands of man” [46].

Letter of the three patriarchs (836)

A synodal letter written in 836 to Emperor Theophilus by the Eastern Patriarchs Christopher of Alexandria, Jacob of Antioch and Basil of Jerusalem, reads: “The Saviour himself imprinted His holy form on a *soudarion*, sent it to a certain

Abgar, Toparch of the great city of Edessa, through Thaddeus, the Apostle endowed with divine language; he wiped the divine sweat of his face and left all his distinguishing traits on the cloth” [47].

Leo the Deacon (10th century)

In his *History* of the Byzantine empire he writes that Thaddeus, who was in the vicinity of Emesa (modern Homs, Syria), “had spent the night in a factory outside the city, and had hidden the cloth with the image among the bricks. The latter shone with a blinding light all through the night. Early in the morning Thaddeus set off again with his holy cloth. However, the brick which had been in contact with the cloth miraculously showed a print of the icon” [48].

Agapio de Manbig (Agapius of Menbidj) (10th century)

In his *Universal History*, he reports that “Thomas the apostle, one of the 70”, turns up before Abgar and heals him. Then he adds that “following the death of Thomas the apostle on 14th May, (the apostles) sent Addai, silk maker, in his place” [49]. Interestingly, Thomas is first referred to in the Arabic text as “Thomadai” [50].

Michael the Syrian (12th century)

In his *Chronicle*, he affirms that the apostles send Thaddeus to Edessa. Dubarle remarks that the double name Judas Thomas is found in several apocryphal books related to Thomas. Judas son of James in the Gospel of Luke is the Thaddeus mentioned by evangelists Matthew and Mark, to whom the name of Judas Thomas is given. The French author states that in the texts related to the Abgar legend, Judas Thomas is Thomas the apostle, who is believed to have been martyred in India, and whose remains are said to have been taken back to Edessa [51].

VIII. LITURGICAL TEXTS

The Anaphora of apostles Addai and Mari

It is considered the anaphora par excellence of the whole Chaldaic and Malabar East. It has always been used both by the Chaldean and Malabar churches united with Rome and by the Orthodox Chaldean (or Nestorian) Church. Tradition has it that Addai (Thaddeus) and Mari were disciples and companions of Thomas in evangelizing the East [52].

In 2001 the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith recognised the validity of the Eucharist celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari by the Assyrian Church of the East. To celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the event, the Pontifical Oriental Institute promoted, in collaboration with the Pontifical Gregorian University, an International Conference on the Anaphora from a liturgical point of view, without analyzing in depth the historical considerations on the two evangelizers, considered as the authors of the anaphora itself [53].

Matins Canon by Germanus II (13th century)

This canon was written by Germanus II, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 1222 to 1240. In it, in addition to reminding of Thaddeus’ mission in Edessa, he describes the arrival of the sacred cloth at the shrine of the Blessed Virgin of the Pharos in Constantinople from Edessa, thus showing he knew it was the Image of the Passion of Christ [54].

IX. OTHER LITERARY WITNESSES

Didascalia Addai

It is a Syriac text, the name of which was given by J.M. Saugey, the discoverer of the only known manuscript scroll, who proposed this title so as to avoid any confusion with the *Doctrine of Addai*, because of the original title: *Extracts from the Book of the Doctrine of Apostle Addai who evangelized and instructed Edesseans and All Those from the Region of Mesopotamia*. The term “didascalia” was used in resemblance with the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. In fact, it is a legal and ecclesiastical text dealing with the rules and laws corresponding to the preaching of the apostles and their doctrine [55].

A part of the *Didascalia Addai* is present in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and is put under the authority of Addai, who appears to have the important role of announcing the Messiah in the regions of Syria [56], among which the city of Edessa, which is called Urhoi in the *Didascalia Addai*: “9. Urhoi (Edessa), and all the countries round about it which were on all sides of it, and Zoba (Nisibis), and Bet Arabaye (Arabia), and all the north, and the regions round about it, and the south, and all the regions on the borders of Bet Nahrain (Mesopotamia), received the apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Addaeus the apostle, one of the seventy-two apostles, who himself made disciples there, and built a church there, and was priest and ministered there in his office of Guide which he held there. 10. The whole of Persia, of the Assyrians, and of the Armenians, and of the Medians, and of the countries round about Babylon, the Bet Huzaye (Huzites) and the Gilan (Gelae), as far as the borders of the Indians, and as far as the land of Gog and Magog, and moreover all the countries on all sides, received the apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Aggaeus, a maker of silks, the disciple of Addaeus the apostle” [57].

References to Thaddeus in Armenian historical facts

Armenian historian Marylin Eordegian cites a 17th century Armenian manuscript which states that “St. Thaddeus carried to Armenia the spear covered with the godly blood and the thorny crown of Joseph of Arimathea, his right hand, the perfume bottle of the nobleman and the Virgin’s picture” [58].

Riccardo Pane, theologian and scholar of the Armenian Church, states that the apocryphal and hagiographic tradition of the first evangelization of Armenia is linked with the apostolic age, in particular with the preaching of apostles Jude Thaddeus and Bartholomew. He also mentions P’awstos Buzand, a 5th century Armenian historiographer, who affirms (History III 14) that Aštišat, in the region of Tarōn, includes the mother of all churches in Armenia, namely, the apostolic

seat of Thaddeus. The same historiographer (History III 1) generically reports a written tradition on the apostolic origin of the Armenian Church, the mission and martyrdom of Thaddeus by King Sanatruk.

Theologian Pane states that different apocryphal traditions related to the figure of Thaddeus the apostle have come to us and mentions the *Martyrdom of Thaddeus*, which recounts the preaching of the apostle in the Armenian district of Artaz, modern northern Iran, where he is thought to have been killed. The theologian also reports that there is another source, the *Discovery of the Thaddeus' Relics*, reporting that the saint's relics were found in the same place, at the time of Governor Vahan Mamikonean, at the end of the 5th century.

“From a canonic point of view - states Pane - the importance of this tradition is clear: the continuous presence of the apostle's relics in Armenia guarantees the apostolic authority of the Armenian Church. The *Martyrdom of Thaddeus* also recounts Thaddeus' previous preaching in Edessa in the court of King Abgar, confirming indirectly the connection of the first evangelization in Armenia with the Syriac environment. Finally, the *Martyrdom of Thaddeus* itself shows it knows the *Doctrine of Addai*, attributed to Labubna, whose Syriac original was translated into Armenian at the beginning of the 5th century. It narrates the conversion of King Abgar and the foundation of the Church of Edessa by the delegate of Christ, named Addai. The identification of Addai with Thaddeus is undeniable and appears to be explicitly confirmed by the report of Eusebius of Caesarea, who attributes Abgar's conversion to Thaddeus. It may be interesting to note that the Armenian translation of the *Doctrine of Addai* is different from the Syriac original: in the Syriac source, the saint dies in Edessa, while in the Armenian version he departs it for Armenia. This tradition flows into Moses of Chorene, who recounts Thaddeus' preaching in Edessa, the conversion of King Abgar, Thaddeus' move to Armenia and his martyrdom under the kingdom of Sanatruk, who was related to Abgar. The process of harmonization between the traditions connected with the evangelization of Syria and the Armenian traditions culminates in the news, provided again by Moses of Chorene, of the birth of Gregory the Illuminator in the aforementioned area of Artaz, the place of Thaddeus' martyrdom, where the apostle's relics were kept” [59].

X. ANALYSIS OF THE ICON KEPT IN SAINT CATHERINE'S MONASTERY ON MOUNT SINAI



Figure 1. Left: 10th century Icon, St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. Right: Reconstruction of the Sinai triptych (H. Belting)

The cloister of the St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai houses a 10th century icon from Constantinople, which was presumably made on commission by the emperor. Originally, the two parts of this icon were supposed to be two doors of a reclosable triptych. The central part could include a *Mandylion* like that of San Silvestro in Capite (in Rome) or of St Bartholomew of the Armenians (in Genoa). Both are painted on canvas and fixed to a wooden panel with the same format, compatible with the missing central part of the triptych [60]. The hypothesis appears plausible, also because the Sinai icon is assembled on a framework which keeps together the two wings: this is clear from the fact that there is a clean cut in the middle, which is not due to a time accident.

The upper part of the diptych, on the left, shows the depiction of a saint, identifiable as Thaddeus. However, it is likely that this saint is not one of the 72 disciples, but exactly the apostle Judas Thaddeus, as identified in Greek books. The Western and Eastern traditions diverge substantially on this point. In the upper right side, King Abgar is represented with the facial features of Emperor Constantine VII, who in 944 moved the relic to Constantinople [61].

The images of St Judas Thaddeus are very late in the West, and the saint is always represented carrying a medal depicting Jesus' face. In Early Christianity and in the Middle Ages, the apostle Judas is only represented in the apostolic college, with no reference to the *Mandylion* (mosaics in Monreale, el Bawit in Egypt, etc.).

The saint depicted on the left has a face similar to that of the character who, on the right, hands over the *Mandylion* to King Abgar. This similarity does not prove that they are the same person, since byzantine painters used to employ patterns to reproduce the human face and, as always, painters tend to make self-portraits; this, therefore, would explain the similarity of the two and also the similarities of the saints depicted in the lower part.

What is interesting, though, is the "juxtaposition": Judas Thaddeus, in fact, is on the same level as Abgar and sits on a similar chair, to highlight the equal dignity and a certain continuity of the pictorial text, as if to say that there is a sort of connection between the saint and the handover of the

Mandylyon to Abgar, due to the knowledge of texts and oral traditions which related the two characters. The pictorial analysis of the icon tends to justify these hypotheses.

XI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research has been to reconstruct, through the main available sources and considering the studies already conducted by a few scholars who dealt with the matter, any connections of the vicissitudes of the Edessen and Constantinopolitan *Mandylyon* with the character Thaddeus-Addai. The identification of Thaddeus-Addai with the apostle Judas Thaddeus or one of the 70 (or 72) disciples remains an issue which deserves further studies; however, considering the research already conducted, a possible relation between the numerous literary witnesses and the figure of Judas Thaddeus is not to be ruled out. It is advisable to carry out further investigations into these paths of research which, in our view, appear really promising.

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