

The tenants in the vineyard (GThom 65/Mark 12:1-12): A realistic and social-scientific reading

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Abstract

Kloppenborg's reading of the parable of the tenants (Mk 12:1-12/GThom 65) can be regarded as the first thoroughgoing realistic interpretation of the Tenants. By using extensive literary evidence on viticulture from 300 BCE to 300 CE, Kloppenborg argues that GThom 65 most probably comes closest to the original form of the parable, calling into question important values of first-century Mediterranean culture. Following a summary of Kloppenborg's reading of the parable of the tenants, the second part of the article focuses on a social-scientific reading of GThom 65 through the lens of patronage and clientism and that of honor and shame. Finally, the conclusions reached by the social-scientific reading are compared with Kloppenborg's realistic reading thereof.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In his most recent work, *The tenants in the vineyard: Ideology, economics, and agrarian conflict in Jewish Palestine*, John Kloppenborg argues that the version of the parable of the tenants in the vineyard in GThom 65 most probably belongs to the rhetoric of the earliest layer of the Jesus tradition. Reading the parable against the background of viticulture in inter alia first-century Palestine, Kloppenborg comes to the conclusion that GThom 65 falls in the category of those parables of Jesus in which wealthy persons (with ascribed status and honor) find themselves "unexpectedly in circumstances that challenge their values or the values of the hearers of the parables" (Kloppenborg 2006:352) are depicted. After a summary of Kloppenborg's understanding and his own realistic reading of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the

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Tenants, the version of the Tenants in GThom 65 is analyzed from a social-scientific point of view, using the social-scientific models on patronage and clientism and honor and shame. In the final part of the article, the conclusions reached by the abovementioned two readings are compared.

2. THE WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE OF THE TENANTS IN THE VINEYARD

2.1 Mark 12:1-12: Product of first generation Christians (allegory), Markan, or authentic and realistic story of Jesus?

2.1.1 The Tenants as allegory created by first generation Christians

Adolf Jülicher (*Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*; 1888-1899), in reaction to the dominant allegorical interpretation of the parables since the patristic period, defined the parables of Jesus not as allegories, but as realistic narratives (i.e., directly intelligible illustrations). Since the parable of the tenants, according to Jülicher, resisted a realistic reading at every turn, it cannot be regarded as an authentic parable of Jesus: "its message is completely wedded to a second level narrative of the conflict between Jesus and the priestly elite" (Kloppenborg 2006:54), serving Christological ends and seeking a justification for the death of Jesus (Kloppenborg 2006:54-55). Kümmel (1950), Carlson (1975) and Blank (1974) came to the same conclusion: the specifically Christian beliefs encoded in the parable are only intelligible when the Tenants parable is seen as an allegorical post-Easter product about the death of Jesus and its consequences (Kloppenborg 2006:58). Building on especially the work of Kümmel, Steck (1967) identified the Hellenistic/Gentile Christians as creators of the Tenants: the tenants of the parable stand for Israel as a whole, and should be understood as an instance of Deuteronomistic theology (Kloppenborg 2006:59). The recent work of Mell (1993) in principle draws the same conclusion: Mark 12:1-11 is from its beginning an allegory, rather than it being a non-allegorical story that was secondarily allegorized, and which cannot be traced back to Jesus (Kloppenborg 2006:61, 65).

2.1.2 The Tenants as a Markan creation

Several scholars attempted to make out a case for the authenticity of Mark 12:1-11, by bracketing possible later insertions in the Tenants. Hubaut (1976), for example, thought it possible to recover an authentic parable from Mark by bracketing much of the detail earlier critics had found problematic (esp Is 5:2, 5). This "authentic" parable, however, remains an allegory that serves as a prophetic warning that the vineyard will be given to others (Kloppenborg

2006:75). Klauck (1978) and Weder (1978) also tried to rehabilitate the parable of the tenants in Mark by deleting the allusion to Isaiah 5:1-7^{LXX}. Klauck, drawing on Hengel's (1978) analysis of the social and economic conditions in Palestine, also concluded that the parable of the tenants in Mark is no less realistic than Jesus' other parables. Both Klauck and Weder, however, insisted that the (rehabilitated) parable could only be interpreted by recognizing the metaphorical significance of specific elements in the parable. From this point of view, both Klauck and Weder came to the same conclusion: the parable of the tenants in Mark represents Jesus' death as a climatic event in the history of God's relation to Israel (see Kloppenborg 2006:78).

While Hubaut, Klauck and Weder tried to distinguish between the original parable on the one hand and pre-Markan and Markan insertions on the other, Snodgrass (1983) avoided such distinctions and included virtually all of Mark 12:1b-11 in the original parable, assuming that Mark 12:1a-12 reflects the original setting of the Tenants (Kloppenborg 2006:80). Snodgrass therefore not only pleads for the inclusion of both the Isaian allusions and Psalm 117:23-23 (Mk 12:10-11), but also concludes that the parable of the tenants in Mark should be seen as a realistic story of Jesus. Thus, the parable is both realistic and allegorical at the same time and serves as a judgment of Israel's leaders (Kloppenborg 2006:81).

2.1.3 The Tenants as an authentic and realistic story of Jesus

Kloppenborg (2006:67-70) opines that four considerations have to be taken into account when dismissing a realistic reading of the parable of the tenants in favor of an allegorical reading as the only possible reading. Firstly, what is lacking from the judgment that the Tenants is an allegory, is the fact that no serious consideration is given to the version of the Tenants in GThom 65.² Should GThom 65, however, be considered, the possibility to read the Tenants (i.e., without the allusion to Is 5:1-7) as a nonallegorical story that is intelligible, arises (Kloppenborg 2006:68). Secondly, the claim that the Tenants lacks verisimilitude is only defensible insofar as it applies to the account in Mark (and par). Again, when GThom 65 is taken into account all the details of the parable of the tenants are open to a realistic reading (Kloppenborg 2006:68). In the third instance, the implication of the view of the Tenants as an allegory is that the entire (pre-)Markan version of the parable of the tenants had been designed with a (Hellenistic) Christian message in mind. Referring to the work of Pedersen (1965), Kloppenborg argues that not all of

² Neither Jülicher nor Kümmel knew about the existence of Thomas at the time of their work while Steck dismisses Thomas with a single footnote and Blank and Mell simply ignored GThom 65 (see Kloppenborg 2006:68).

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Mark 12:1-12 (e.g., the vineyard as metaphor) is coherent with this supposition. A literary analysis of Mark 12:1-9 suggests that the story was not originally composed as a vehicle for Christian theology, but has been secondarily coded in such a way that it interferes with the original narrative logic of the parable. Finally, Kloppenborg (2006:70) makes the point that those features of Mark's story that are often viewed as problematic, are absent in GThom 65 (i.e., Mark's scenario of a *new* vineyard being planted, that the killing of the son will lead to the *inheritance* of the vineyard and the owners' use of *self-help*; see Kloppenborg 2006:281-284). Thomas thus lacks precisely those features that open up the possibility to read the Markan version of the Tenants as a coded allegory. The verdict of Jülicher and his successors therefore is only appropriate for the story as it appears in Mark – when these theological assertions are seen as not native to the narrative, the possibility to understand the Tenants in the Synoptic Gospels as an originally realistic narrative that was secondarily allegorized, opens up.

Kloppenborg (2006:103-105) is also of the opinion that efforts to preserve the Tenants in its Markan form for the historical Jesus (Snodgrass) encounter substantial difficulties, even when those details most critics find problematic are eliminated from the parable. Hubaut, Weder and Klauck's interpretation of the Tenants, for example, is informed exactly by what they eliminate – despite eliminating the Isaiah intertext, it “remains an allegory of salvation history and one that features Jesus' death as the climatic moment ... of God's relationship with Israel” (Kloppenborg 2006:78, 103). Adding to the irony is the fact that these critics reconstruct an original parable that is almost identical to GThom 65 in which the owner is not God, the slaves not (the) prophets, the vineyard not the covenant and the son not Jesus. This suggests that for these scholars the Isaian intertext remains the dominant interpretative key in understanding the Tenants.

Kloppenborg (2006:105) therefore is of the opinion that the difference between a realistic and an unrealistic (allegorical) reading of the Tenants depends on the presence or absence of the Isaian intertext. Almost all of those who advocate a realistic reading of the parable thus begin by omitting the allusion to Isaiah 5:2-5 from the parable (Kloppenborg 2006:108). However, once freed from its Isaian “baggage”, the parable is open to a variety of interpretive possibilities. In terms of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a realistic reading of the Tenants, Kloppenborg (2006:109-148) identifies three approaches: scholars who treat it as a story about a (patient) vineyard owner, scholars who see the tenants as the protagonist in the story and scholars who concentrate on both, that is, the (elite) landowner and the (desperate) tenants.

2.1.3.1 The Tenants as a realistic story about an owner

Dodd (1961), for example, sees the parable of the Tenants in Mark 12:1-12 as a reflection of the revolutionary ferment that had prevailed in Palestine since the time of Judas the Galilean in 6 CE: agrarian discontent, tensions between foreign absentee landlords and Zealot-inspired tenants are the tell tale of the parable. With this as point of departure, Dodd still reads the parable through the double lens of Isaiah 5:1-17 and Mark 12:12: the tenants are the rulers of Israel who refused their landlord (God) his due and will therefore be punished (Kloppenborg 2006:109). In his attempt to avoid allegorization, Dodd thus reverted to allegory (Kloppenborg 2006:110).

Cadoux (1930) and Smith (1937) also advocated a realistic reading of the Tenants. Cadoux, preferring the Lucan version of the parable, opined that the parable did not intend a claim to Messiahship, but rather challenged the attitudes and behavior of Jesus' opponents in that they tried to kill Jesus to preserve their own authority. Smith, as Cadoux, was troubled by the self-referential nature of Mark's version of the Tenants and saw agrarian social unrest in the Galilee as the social situation presupposed by the parable. Thus understood, the parable (which he delimited to Mark 12:1-5, 9a) emphasizes the escalating violence done to the owner's envoys which probably implied a threat of judgment (Mark 12:9a). This reading, according to Kloppenborg (2006:111), thus again "offered a reading of salvation history in allegorical dress".

Jeremias (1955), in following Dodd, also suggested that the parable of the Tenants should be understood against the fact that, in the time of Jesus, most of Galilee was parceled out to foreign landlords in the form of *latifundia*. The landlord of the vineyard thus is a foreigner who lives abroad. As such, the parable reflects the background of the revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants towards foreign landlords. Jeremias further suggests that the son's appearance made the tenants believe the landlord was dead, and – by killing the heir – they tried to appropriate the vineyard on the grounds of an existing law according to which the estate of an interstate proselyte could be appropriated by a claimant who was already occupying it (the law of adverse possession or *usucaptio*). From this reading of the parable Jeremias, especially on the grounds of "the others" in Mark 12:9, concludes that the point of the the parable is about justifying the offer of the gospel to the poor.³ In a certain sense Jeremias therefore also reverts to allegory.

³ Kloppenborg (2006:112-113) rightly asserts that Jeremias, in taking Mark 12:12 as the original audience of the parable, proposes that the parable is directed at the (Sadducean) priestly rulers. Yet, the law of adverse possession as key to the actions of the tenants is only a footnote to Mishnaic law, and there is no reason to believe that this law was in force two centuries prior to the codification of the Mishnah. Moreover, Kloppenborg (2006:113) argues that it is very difficult to identify "the others" in Mark 12:9 as the poor, since they are not at all described. Kloppenborg (2006:113) also questions Jeremias' translation of the verb ἀποδημήσειν as "going abroad", thus referring to a foreign landlord. The verb simply means to depart, a meaning also supported by papyrological usage.

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Derrett (1963) and Hengel (1968) offer other realistic readings of the Tenants. Derretts' contribution lies in his identification of the importance of the choice of a vineyard (as opposed to a wheat field or a vegetable patch) as the focus of the parable. Viticulture was a speculative undertaking that required a substantial capital investment with an ever-present possibility of failure. Moreover, it normally takes four years for newly planted vineyards to come into full production. As such, it was normal for a capitalist to plant a vineyard, let it to expert vinedressers and depart until it matured. The tenants in the parable, according to Derrett, were cultivators who, in contrast to waged labor, were paid a fixed percentage of the harvest. During the first four years the owner paid wages to the tenants and the tenants supported their income by living off vegetables that were planted among the vines. Normally the owner also reimbursed tenants for expenses associated with the preparation of the vineyard.

With this scenario as realistic background of the parable, Derrett argues that an outstanding payment from the owner to the tenants for capital expenditure in preparing the vineyard for production was the reason for the hostile reception the first servant received. Derrett further assumes that the visits by the second and third slaves occurred in successive years. Derrett uses the principle of adverse possession, that is, an assertion of possession through undisputed usufruct for three years in order to explain the tenants' actions with respect to the son. By killing the son, the tenants believed they could claim possession of the vineyard. Kloppenborg (2006:116) opines that this reading of Derrett, especially in terms of what we know of standard viticultural procedures and the principle of adverse possession, is without foundation. Moreover, Derrett's notion that three years had lapsed between the sending of the first slave and that of the son, as well as his import that the owner did not pay any wages, lacks textual support. In short: Derrett's savvy tenants (Kloppenborg 2006:114) do not fit the normal tenant from what is known from viticulture.

Hengel's most important contribution to the understanding of the Tenants was to show that its scenario of a revolt of tenants could be documented in papyrus (the Zenon papyri) from Palestine (Kloppenborg 2006:119, 121). According to Hengel, the point of the parable is polemical, anticipating Jesus' death and warning of its consequences – a threat of God's judgment (Kloppenborg 2006:118, 120). However, the parable's strong focus on the owner should warn against any Christological over-interpretation. Kloppenborg (2006:120-121) makes the following observation with regard to Hengel's reading of the parable: Hengel's interpretation depends on the supposition "that the owner's destructive intervention at the end of the parable would be the natural and inevitable conclusion of the story". However, when GThom 65 is taken into consideration the question arises whether the final

action (self-help; see Kloppenborg 2006:335-349) could indeed be regarded as the original force of the parable.

2.1.3.2 The Tenants as a realistic story about tenants in a vineyard

Via (1967), Newell & Newell (1972) and Crossan (1971) read the story of the Tenants through the lens of the tenants being the protagonists. Concentrating on the actions of the tenants, Via opines that the parable emphasizes the depravity of their actions and their blindness to the consequences thereof. However, although concentrating on the actions of the tenants, Via takes for granted the normativity of the values represented by the owner against whom the violence is directed and who has to defend his interests. His existential reading of the Tenants thus legitimizes the values of the landed gentry by making them the norms which can be enforced, as well as internal of “natural” norms that serve to define authentic human experience (see Kloppenborg 2006:125).

Newell & Newell read the Tenants as a story in which Jesus sympathized with the goal of recovering ancestral lands taken over by foreigners: the owner symbolizes foreign domination and the expropriation of land that once belonged to the people of Israel (Kloppenborg 2006:125). As a story addressed to a peasant audience sympathetic to the cause of the Zealots, Jesus does not attack the goals of the tenants, only their methods. What is at stake is whether resorting to violence is wise, given the untouchable power of the foreign occupiers (Kloppenborg 2006:126). Kloppenborg (2006:126) rightly asserts that the most problematic aspect of the Newells’ reading of the parable is their belief that Galilee was a Zealot stronghold as early as the 20s or 30s, an assumption that is seriously contested by Horsley & Hanson who indicated that it was more or less during the Jewish War in 66 CE only that the Zealots became a definable political force in Palestine (see also Van Eck 1995).

Kloppenborg (2006:127) describes Crossan’s treatment of the tenants’ role in the parable as follows: “While Via treats the tenants as benighted and while the Newells considered them imprudent, Crossan argues that they function as *positive* though roguish examples for emulation” (emphasis in the original). Crossan’s interpretation of the actions of the tenants is based on his reconstruction of the original parable, especially the notions of “respect”, “heir” and “inheritance”. When this is seen as part of the original parable, Jesus is telling a disedifying and immoral story, a parable in which tenants are anti-heroes whose decisive action in a situation of crisis leads to unexpected gain (Kloppenborg 2006:128).

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Kloppenborg's main point of critique against the above three readings of the parable is that they take for granted certain values that are not part of the values of the early Jesus tradition. Via takes as normative the values of the owner which in fact stand in direct contrast with the values of the historical Jesus-tradition and the Newells' reading does not take into account texts like Q 12:58-59 (quick settlement with one's creditor) and Q 6:29//Mat 5:41 (cooperation rather than resistance in the face of *corvée*). The taking of a life for the sake of acquiring land (Crossan) is another case in point: the Jesus-tradition offers no evidence that Jesus condoned such actions (Kloppenborg 2006:129).

2.1.3.3 The Tenants as a realistic story about an owner and tenants

Malina & Rohrbaugh (1992, 2003) Hester (1992), Herzog (1994) and Schottroff's (1996) reading of the Tenants have three features in common (see Kloppenborg 2006:139): each treats the owner unsympathetically, understands the actions of the tenants sympathetically and takes as the ideological narrative point of view the values and actions of the owner. Malina & Rohrbaugh (1992, 2003), reading the parable from a social scientific perspective, were the first to view the owner as the villain rather than the hero in the story. According to them, the historical Jesus told the parable as a warning to landowners who were expropriating and exporting the produce of the land (Kloppenborg 2006:131). Hester's (1992) reading of the Tenants builds on three assumptions. First, the key characters of the Tenants, the landowner (probably an aristocrat) and the tenants (representing those who have lost their patrimonial land due to the growing of large estates through debt), evoke the contrast between the two socio-economic groups in conflict over the possession of land. Secondly, ownership of land is seen not merely as a matter of economy, but as one of identity. Losing land meant losing one's Israelite identity which normally led to one becoming a day laborer or a beggar. Thirdly, the parable focuses on the motif of inheritance, the question of true heirship of the land. From this point of view, Hester opines that at the heart of the parable is a conflict over the basic values of Israelite identity, peasant attachment of the land and the imperative of subsistence, all of which was being threatened by elite expropriation and control of lands. Contra Crossan, the tenants were not rogues, but rather people contesting an elite ideology of land control.

Herzog (1994), like Hester, reads the parable against the background of a revolt by peasant farmers, whose subsistence is endangered by the expropriation of land by the foreign elite, trying to reassert their claim to land by virtue of the belief that the land was God's inheritance and as such

belonged to Israel. Herzog, (more clearly than other; see Kloppenborg 2006:133) also emphasizes the significance of the planting of a vineyard (and the ramifications thereof for peasant farmers) and the fact that large-scale viticulture was a costly and speculative enterprise, oriented towards exportation, rather than local consumption. He further opines that the owner in Mark's parable belongs to the local elite of Galilee or Judea (and is not a foreigner), and (in following Derrett) that the sending of the slaves was spaced at one year intervals. However, he differs from Derrett by interpreting the motive of the tenants' action not as adverse possession, but as the eruption of violence in protest to the conversion of their farmland into a vineyard (turning smallholders into tenants), a move that threatens their (and others') subsistence. From this, the point of the parable, is clear, according to Herzog: the parable serves as a warning to tenants that the use of violence in order to reassert their honorable status as heirs of God's land is futile and destined to failure – a reading of the parable, according to Kloppenborg (2006:135), that “refuses, or is unable, to provide an answer to the problem that it raises”.

According to Schottroff (1996), as a final example of a realistic reading of the parable, the point of the Tenants is to paint (in a realistic fashion) the picture of conflict in Jewish Palestine and tenants (suffering from social dislocation) seizing an opportunity to usurp land by means of self-help as a way out of economic misery (Kloppenborg 2006:138). In short: the parable should be understood as a critique of the elite and their exploitation and expropriation of peasants and land.⁴

2.1.3.4 One parable, many confusing interpretations

From the above it is clear that similar reconstructions of the original parable arrive at dramatically different readings of the Tenants. Moreover, it is clear that the interpretation of the parable hinges on several decisions (Kloppenborg 2006:142). Kloppenborg (2006:142-148) identifies the following four (interrelated) pivotal issues that ultimately influence the interpretation of the Tenants:

- The uncovering of the “original form” of the parable: Do Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 117:22-23 form part of the original form of the parable? Where should one start – with Mark, Luke or Matthew?

⁴ The positive aspect Schottroff's interpretation is that she indicates that, from an emic point of view, many facts are stated in the parable that are not that self-evident for the modern reader: vineyard owners tended to come from the middling rich, absenteeism was a normal pattern of elite exploitation of the land, indebtedness was systemic and violence and conflict were the norm rather than the exception (see Kloppenborg 2006:140).

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- GThom 65: Is Mark 12:1-12, for example, dependent on GThom 65, or independent thereof?
- The owner – a negative or positive figure: If, for example the Isaian intertext is seen as part of the original architecture, is the owner a negative or positive figure?
- Verisimilitude: Is the basic scenario of Mark, for example, that of an owner who plants a vineyard and then expects rent, plausible? Moreover, is the ending of the parable in Mark 12:9 possible if the parable is read as a realistic story in relation to the question of verisimilitude?

3. THE TENANTS AS REALISTIC PARABLE OF JESUS: GTHOM 65 AND VERISIMILITUDE

As indicated above, Kloppenborg is of the opinion that perhaps *the* key problem in the interpretation of the parable of the Tenants is whether Isaiah 5:1-7 forms part of the original parable or of a later addition⁵. After comparing Isaiah 5:1-7 in its MT- and LXX-version, as well as Mark 12:1-9 with both versions, Kloppenborg (2006:166, 172) comes to the following conclusions: according to the LXX the vineyard is transformed from existing agricultural land, whereas in the MT, it is created from virgin soil. In the MT the failure of the vineyard is the result of the failure of the vine (initial planting going wrong), in the LXX the failure of the vineyard is the result of infiltration by weeds and thorns and thus points to the neglect of the vinedressers. For the MT the vineyard is Israel and Judea, the LXX, however, distinguishes between the vineyard and its caretakers. Finally, the LXX introduces terminology (such as φραγμός, νεόφυτος and γέρσος) that reflects distinctive Egyptian viticultural practices. In comparing Mark 12:1-9 with the two versions of Isaiah (the MT and LXX), Mark agrees with the LXX, but never with the MT against the LXX. From this *Literarkritische* analysis Kloppenborg draws two conclusions: the allusion to Isaiah 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9 is Septuagintal, and, if the supposition that Jesus mainly spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew is adopted, it seems doubtful that the original parable made an explicit allusion to Isaiah 5 (if the parable is authentic; see Kloppenborg 2006:172).

A second question of importance Kloppenborg addresses, concerns the interpretations given to the Tenants by Mark and in the Gospel of Thomas. In this regard the following issues are important: Do Mark and Thomas

⁵ If the Isaian intertext is part of the original fabric of the parable, it is inevitable but to read the parable as an allegory: the owner is God, the vineyard is Israel and the fruit is some form of behaviour or response God expects from Israel. Only when the Isaian intertext is not seen as part of the original parable, the parable can be read as realistic fiction. In the words of Kloppenborg (2006:149): "The stakes are high."

represent two independent versions of the parable, or is Thomas' version of the parable dependent on Mark's version (or a re-performance of Mark, or Matthew's or Luke's redaction of the Markan version)? The suggestion of Davies, namely that Mark depends on Thomasine redaction, also has to be considered in this instance. Three features stand out in Mark's version of the Tenants: firstly, it is not difficult to discern the intimate connection between the parable and Mark's plot (Kloppenborg 2006:219-220; see also Van Eck & Van Aarde 1989:778-800). Mark's framing of the Tenants by Mark 12:1a, 6a, 7c and 12 integrates the parable into his plot, highlighting the hostility of Jesus' opponents which started in Mark 3:6 and which is ever-present in the narrative (cf e g, Mark 7:1-5; 8:11-13; 12:13-17; 12:18-27; 12:35-37). Of special importance is Mark 12:6a (ἀγαπητος), a Markan addition to the original parable that integrates the parable into Mark's Christology (cf e g Mark 1:1, 1:9-11; 8:31-32; 9:7; 9:31; 10:33-34; 15:39). The second distinguishing feature of the parable is Mark's close relationship to texts of the Tanak (Is 5:2, 5; Gen 37:20, 24). The third distinguishing feature of Mark's version of the parable is the allusion to the Deuteronomistic pattern of God's repeated sending of the prophets to Israel and their repeated and violent rejection (Mark 12:5b), the only trace of the Deuteronomistic schema in Mark. The Tenants in Mark is thus not only closely linked to Mark's plot and theology, but also contains features that are neither typical of Mark's other parables, nor of parables in general (Kloppenborg 2006:223-241).

Turning to GThom 65, Kloppenborg (2006:242-248) concurs with Patterson (contra Schrage, Meier & Tuckett) that at least some of Thomas' tradition is independent of the Synoptics (see also Van Eck 1997:623-649). That some of Thomas' sayings might be independent of the Synoptics does, however, not mean that all of Thomas' sayings are earlier than those of the Synoptics or that they are authentic sayings of Jesus. Thomas, like the Synoptics, has his own redactional interventions. Each saying in Thomas must therefore be studied on its own.⁶

How then, does Kloppenborg read GThom 65? First of all, Kloppenborg (2006:257-271) compellingly argues that Thomas' version of the Tenants is independent of Synoptics' version thereof.⁷ Moreover, the Thomas version of the Tenants, especially those elements common to Mark, "serves as a good approximation of the earliest form of the story ..." (Kloppenborg 2006:272).

⁶ As a working hypothesis Kloppenborg (2006:248) takes the following as cue: "[T]he *Gos. Thom.* is the product of a complex process of composition, which allows for the possibility of a complex relationship to the Synoptic gospels".

⁷ For Kloppenborg's translation of GThom 65 (from the fourth-century Coptic version), see Kloppenborg (2006:249).

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This, of course, has to result in the conclusion that the “original parable” lacks any reference to Isaiah 5, does not necessarily identify the owner as God and does not have any reference to the killing of the tenants (Kloppenborg 2006:251).

Who then, according to Kloppenborg, is the owner of the vineyard? In following Dehandschutter, Patterson and Sevrin, Kloppenborg (2006:257) restores the lacuna in the Coptic text with “usurer” or “creditor” (and not as “good man”, see Guillaumont & Layton, Valantasis and Schoedel, in Kloppenborg 2006:250-253). Kloppenborg’s choice is *inter alia* informed by his reading of GThom 65 (and 66) in its Thomasine context. GThom 65 is part of a triad of parables in Thomas, consisting of GThom 63-65. GThom 63 is a parable about a rich man’s decision to invest in agriculture and his desire to achieve a secure life. His premature death, however, lampoons the confidence he placed in his investments. In the second parable, GThom 64’s version of the Banquet (Q14:16-24), the interest of Thomas lies in its potential as a critique against commerce: commercial activities are an impediment to accepting a divine intervention⁸ (see Kloppenborg 2006:251). The context of GThom 63-64 thus strongly suggests “usurer” rather than “good man”.

Fundamental to the interpretation of the parable, referred to above, is the question of verisimilitude. Can the “original parable” be treated as realistic in terms of the social, economic and legal situation in Jewish Palestine? By using a selection of fifty eight papyri that illustrates various features of ancient viticulture (see Appendix I; Index to Appendix I; Kloppenborg 2006:355-583),⁹ Kloppenborg argues that the parable’s reference to large-scale landholding and tenancy,¹⁰ absenteeism,¹¹ conflict,¹² and the sending of a son¹³ (four

⁸ GThom 64 not only changes the excuses in Q 14:16-24 to recovering debt from merchants, buying a house, arranging a wedding banquet and buying an estate, but also ends the parable with a reference to buyers and merchants who would not enter the places of my father (Kloppenborg 2006:251).

⁹ Kloppenborg’s book on the tenants in the vineyard, to my knowledge, is thus far the most extensive interpretation of Mark 12:1-12/GThom 65. His application of texts relevant to ancient viticulture (dating from 300 BCE tot 400 CE), moreover, makes his analysis of the parable on the Tenants monumental and will serve as a standard reference on the Tenants for many years to come.

¹⁰ Literary and archeological evidence (beginning in the First Temple period and continuing through the Hellenistic and Roman periods) indicates a general tendency towards the creation of large estates. Free smallholders farming with grain, olives and grapes aimed at local consumption were displaced by larger estates concentrating on monoculture dedicated to the production of export crops. The effect of this tendency on the structure and nature of labor, especially in the case of viticulture that was the most labor-intensive of ancient agricultural pursuits, was severe. It created and exploited a class of underemployed non-slave laborers, forced smallholders off their productive land to marginal land and drew on the labor inputs from underemployed non-slave labor and smallholders during certain key periods (e.g., cropping). Viticulture needed substantial capitalization, was uncertain and risky (a vineyard took 4-5 years to come into full production), and was usually associated with wealth and the

assumptions shared by Thomas and Mark) indeed reflects a realistic picture of economic, social and legal aspects of the Mediterranean World during the early Roman period and, in particular, that of viticultural practices in Jewish Palestine.

The wealth of the landowner is completely in keeping with Mediterranean economic patterns during the early Roman period;

wealthy. Textual evidence indicates that vineyard owners normally came from the population sector just below the class of the civic and political elite (the upper class cavalry, soldiers, officers and administrators). Although risky and uncertain, viticulture was highly profitable, part of which had to do with the increasing demand for wine, especially during the early imperial period. Finally, the tenants of vineyards were normally either villagers working the property of an absentee landlord or smallholders who could not live off their own land and had to assume a tenancy in order to support their families.. Tenants of vineyards were mostly skilled vinedressers (Kloppenborg 2006:284-309).

¹¹ Absenteeism went hand in hand with the shift from freehold polycropping or small-scale viticulture to larger-scale viticulture, thus from peasant farmers to wealthier entrepreneurs. The latter class of landowners despised hand labor, had neither the inclination nor the expertise to work their land and therefore turned to either slave-run estates or tenancies to skilled vinedressers. Given the nature of viticulture, it was the rule rather than the exception for an owner not to be present on his property (Kloppenborg 2006:314-316).

¹² Conflict was part of ancient viticulture, more so than in other agricultural sectors, since the stakes were high. Literature evidence indicates that several factors, some peculiar to viticulture, accounted for this conflict: the level of rent, poor harvests, rental structures typical of viticulture (in terms of which the tenant normally retained one-third of the harvest), the substantial cost of occasional labor, cost of repairs to iron tools and vineyard equipment, caring for traction animals, fertilizer, guards and cartage all led to chronic indebtedness and tenants hovering at the brink of subsistence. Potential for conflict was especially high during harvest time, because the interests of landlords and tenants with regard to the crop sometimes clashed. The owner, for example, driven by the high profitability of viticulture and export demands for quality wine, might have an interest to harvest the grapes early in order to maximize the quality of the wine, while the tenants' interest was to harvest the grapes later in order to secure a larger volume of wine, although of lesser quality. It was therefore in the landlord's interest to be present during harvest time, while it was in the tenants' interest not to have the landlord or his agents present. From the landlord's point of view harvest time was when tenants concealed some of the harvest. From the tenants' perspective it was a time when thieves could pilfer the crop, or it could be seized outright by the landowner (in the case of indebted tenants), or they could be prevented from entering the vineyard by neighbors or enemies of the landowner (wanting to seize the vineyard with a chance to appropriate the revenue of the harvest). A landowner who was present during the harvest could also underestimate the crop, thereby curtailing the tenants' revenue in terms of crop sharing. The structures of leasing in principle made way for conflicting interests: owners wishing to maximize their profit and maintaining stable production with minimum expense and tenants requiring a stable income, protection for the crop and freedom from various forms of interference (Kloppenborg 2006:316-322).

¹³ Literature evidence indicates that conflict between landlords and tenants was normally handled by means of correspondence or by agents, since landlords tried to avoid direct intervention. In cases of a protracted dispute and when tenants ignored the owner's deputies, the strategy was to send representatives of a higher social status. The sending of a son, from a landlord's point of view, was seen as a social trump card, a form of social power, the owner's appeal to the differences in social status between the tenants and the owner (see Kloppenborg 2006:322-325).

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absenteeism seems to have been the norm rather the exception when it came to viticulture; conflicts between tenants and landlords was usual and, in the case of viticulture, fuelled by the high stakes for both landlord and tenants; and conflict resolution typically involved a graduated scale in which forms of social power were applied.

(Kloppenborg 2006:325-326)

However, three details in Mark (not featuring in Thomas), namely the planting of a new vineyard,¹⁴ the committing of murder with a view to inheritance¹⁵ and the principle of self-help¹⁶, are not susceptible to a realistic reading of the Tenants.

Based on these conclusions (i e, that the earliest form of the story is that of GThom 65 with the owner an usurer, and a ring of verisimilitude in terms of large-scale landholding and tenancy, absenteeism, conflict and the

¹⁴ Newly planted vines produced practically nothing in the first two years and only a small crop in the third and fourth year. Tenants cultivating a newly planted vineyard were therefore not expected to pay rent, the produce of the vineyard was not taxed and the tenants were paid wages by the landowner. Leases of viticultural labor attest wages paid by the landowner, a token amount of wine in exchange for labor, and the leasing of a portion of the property to the tenants on which barley and wheat were cultivated. In terms of the latter, a combination of fixed cash and a crop share rent on the produce was paid by the tenants. Known leases also indicate that tenants regularly incurred major expenses (e g, occasional labor costs) in looking after a developing vineyard, while the landlord was supplied presses, water wheels, vine supports and shared in the expenses related to fertilizing and irrigation. Failure by the landlord to advance payments to laborers and other expenses not only led to conflict, but sometimes resulted in tenants abandoning their work allowing the vineyard to become weed infested.. The scenario of Mark (the planting of a new vineyard requiring rent) thus does not fit in with what can be deduced from available viticultural leases. Isaiah 5 (a newly planted vineyard which, contrary to expectation, fails to produce quality grapes) and GThom 65 (a producing vineyard whose tenants refuse to pay rent), on the other hand, do fit the scenario that can be inferred from documented viticultural practices (see Kloppenborg 2006:326-330).

¹⁵ Literary evidence indicates that “ownership was not merely an abstract legal principle, but involved having the force required to maintain possession and to repel hostile claims” (Kloppenborg 2006:333). Also, the principle of adverse possession was not available to tenants. Had it been, no owner of a (newly planted) vineyard could have afforded to lease out property for fear of it passing from his ownership. Hence, Mark’s version of the parable with tenants believing that they would inherit the vineyard by killing the heir, is plainly unrealistic (Kloppenborg 2006:334). More realistic would have been tenants deciding to repel or kill the son, “claiming that in doing so they were maintaining *their* possession”. This scenario is imagined in GThom 65: the tenants repel the agents and kill the son.

¹⁶ A survey of literary evidence on repossession and self-help indicates that the expelling of tenants (in the case of default) and re-letting was permitted, but not the application of lethal force: Roman, Greek, Egyptian, biblical and post-biblical laws sought to curtail such action. Mark 12:9 makes three assumptions that can in no way be judged as realistic: it takes as self evident that the owner would move against the tenants in order to dislodge them, that he would be successful and that the use of self-help by the owner was normal and justified. Greek, Roman and Jewish law indeed allowed a certain degree of self-help, but was unlikely to permit an owner to act as Mark’s owner did (Kloppenborg 2006:341).

sending of a son) Kloppenborg formulates the meaning of the Tenants as follows:

[T]he Tenants ... is a piece of realistic fiction which functioned first to invoke certain “normal” aspects of life in Jewish Palestine ... – the middling rich and their pursuit of wealth, the prevalence of absenteeism, and ubiquitous resorts to status displays –, and then to challenge the values underlying these “normalcies” by means of the clever turn of its narrative.

(Kloppenborg 2006:349)

The earliest version of the Tenants (GThom 65) belongs to the rhetoric of the earliest Jesus movement and perhaps to the discourse of the historical Jesus (Kloppenborg 2006:352). In nuce the Tenants challenges first-century values of wealth and the wealthy, ownership, inheritance and status. The twist in the parable is that all “self-evident” or “ordinary/normal” expedencies such as the connection between status and social power, the privileges of ownership and the normalcy of status displays are unsuccessful and ineffective.

4. A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING OF GTHOM 65

4.1 GThom 65 through the lens of patronage and clientism

Patronage and clientism as social-scientific model has been documented extensively (see Blok 1969:365-378; Eisenstadt & Roniger 1980, 1984; Malina 1981, 1988a:2-32; Saller 1982; Elliott 1987:39-48, 1996:144-56; Moxnes 1991:241-268; Van Eck 1995:169-175; Joubert 2001:17-25; Osiek 2005:347-370). As a social-scientific model patronage is used to understand and explain a range of apparent different social relationships, such as owner-slave or landlord-tenant (see Blok 1969:366).

Patron client relations are social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power. The basic structure of the relationship is an exchange of different and very unequal resources. A patron has social, economic and political resources that are needed by a client. In return, a client can give expression of loyalty and honor that are useful for the patron.

(Moxnes 1991:242)

Among the characteristics of patron-client relationships the following are of interest for a reading of GThom 65:

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- the simultaneous exchange of different types of resources;
- a strong element of solidarity linked to obligations;
- a binding and long-range relationship; and
- a strong element of inequality and difference in status (see Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984:48-49).

When these characteristics are applied to the parable of the Tenants in GThom 65, it is clear that the parable has all the makings of a patron-client relationship. In terms of *a strong element of inequality and difference in power and status*, the following can be noted: The landowner's wealth and status is implied by the description usurer,¹⁷ a designation that places the owner above the class of day laborers, vinedressers and smallholders. He is part of a class that owns productive and large-scale land¹⁸ and has sufficient capital to make loans and agricultural investments. Viticulture in the first century, associated with wealth and the wealthy (Kloppenborg 2006:295), required substantial capitalization with regard to outlay for vine supports, the construction of fences, water wheels, a press and storage rooms, catch basins, storage tanks and the excavation of a treading floor. The purchase of iron tools, draught animals and fertilizer, as well as the construction of a stone-built field tower (which was essential for inter alia the storage of tools and also served as sleeping quarters for workers during the vintage season), also required substantial capital.

Another feature of viticulture that made it the sole domain of the wealthy was that a vineyard normally took four to five years to come into full production. During the first five years the owner had to pay his tenants wages, bearing in mind that for the first two or three years his vineyard did not produce a usable harvest, while during years four to five it was not fully productive yet. Also, labor costs (wages) were extensive. Viticulture was the most labor-intensive of agricultural pursuits, requiring three times as many workers as olive cultivation and four times as many as cereal and vegetable crops (Kloppenborg 2006:287-288). To these should be added seasonal day laborers during times of brushwood clearing, weeding and the burning of weeds, hoeing and pruning. During harvest time even more laborers were needed for picking and treading. A vineyard owner also had to pay taxes, the level of which was

¹⁷ Usurers belonged to the social class of merchants and entrepreneurs situated just below the old aristocracy (civic and political elite; see Kloppenborg 2006:299, 303).

¹⁸ With regard to land, wealth and the elite, Carter (2006:3; in following Lenski & Lenski 1987) makes the following comment: "The Roman Empire was ... an agrarian empire. Its wealth and power was based in land. The elite did not rule by democratic elections. In part they ruled by hereditary control of the empire's primary resources of land and labor. They owned its land and consumed some 65% of its production".

higher than that of grain fields or vegetable gardens. Clearly only the wealthy could afford to engage in medium- or large-scale viticulture. The fact that the owner in GThom 65 also owns (multiple) slaves, reinforces this conclusion.

The tenants in GThom 65, on the other hand, are most probably smallholders producing the Mediterranean triad of grain, grapes and olives for subsistence (see Kloppenborg 2006:284). Some of the tenants might have had vineyards of their own, most probably on more marginal land. However, since most smallholders could not live off their own land, they assumed tenancy to support their families. It is also possible that the tenants in GThom 65 were landless, having lost their land through debt, usucaption or occupation by a more powerful party (Kloppenborg 2006:39; see also Horsley 2003:93-95; Herzog 2005:43-56; Carter 2006:8-14).

A strong element of inequality and difference in power and status is therefore apparent from GThom 65: the landowner, coming from a high social status, is a usurer and is wealthy. The tenants, on the other hand, are poor, living at subsistence level. Moreover, if landless, they have no social status at all.

As far as the characteristic of a *simultaneous exchange of different types of (unequal) resources*, is concerned the notion of a patron-client relationship is also evident in GThom 65. The benefits of tenancy for the owner lie first and foremost in the elite's contempt for productive and manual labor (Carter 2006:9; Van Aarde 2007:8). As an absentee landlord, no productive or manual labor, was required from his part, what was required at most was indirect supervision. By leasing his vineyard to skilled vinedressers (a skill the owner most probably did not possess), the landlord could have as much as one-half to two-thirds of the crop. If the rent was paid in cropshare, he was also reasonably assured of a constant income. Skilled vinedressers as tenants therefore had much to offer in terms of the resources the owner required for successful viticulture. Moreover, when tenants were in arrears with regard to the payment of rent, their indebtedness created a situation of social obligation which landlords could exploit to their advantage.

On the other hand, the tenant as lessee, also benefited in various ways. Not able to provide for his family off his own smallholding, tenancy provided a means to avoid subsistence living. Tenancy also had the potential of access to the landlord's network of contacts and influence, protection from other creditors, access to the official elite that controlled resources such as irrigation, draught animals, woodlots and reed beds for vine-stakes or fertilizer, and access to other inputs required, such as loans (see Kloppenborg 2006:307).

Finally, in terms of a *binding and long-range relationship*, GThom 65:1 explicitly states that the usurer rented his vineyard to farmers. From this it can

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reasonably be deducted that a lease of tenancy existed between owner and farmers. When the different types of leases as they relate to tenancy are taken into consideration, it is clear that GThom 65 assumes a binding and long-range relationship between owner and tenant, including a strong element of solidarity linked to obligations – thus also expressing the makings of a patron-client relationship. Kloppenborg (2006:292-294) identifies three kinds of tenancy leases referred to in available literary sources on leases of tenancy: a fixed amount of rent (produce or money) used for cereal crops or orchards, a fixed amount of money (rental of houses or movables), and crop share leases. The latter was common in viticulture, the rent being calculated as a percentage of the harvest. The crop share lease not only afforded the tenant slightly better protection in the event of a disastrous harvest, but also created a solidarity linked to obligations (and reward): the better and bigger the crop, the bigger the (one-third) share. Another element that comes into play in GThom 65 is that the owner of a producing vineyard most probably would have looked at a long-term lease, thereby ensuring a steady relationship with his tenants, as well as a consistent and quality crop. In terms of the characteristic of patron-client relationships as a binding and long-range relationship, GThom 65 therefore also has the makings of patronage and clientism.

The relationship between usurer and tenants in GThom 65 thus clearly presents itself as a patron-client relationship. The simultaneous exchange of different types of resources; a strong element of solidarity linked to obligations; a binding and long-range relationship; and a strong element of inequality and difference in status all are present in the parable. As a product of a high-context society (see Malina 2002:5), wherein “people have been socialized into widely shared ways of perceiving and acting” (Malina 1991:20), few things are spelled out because a high-context society believes few things have to be spelled out. Because of this the fact that GThom 65 assumes a patron-client relationship, is “mystified” (Malina 1991:20¹⁹). However, when the parable is “demystified” by means of the above social-scientific model of patronage and clientism, the reader becomes aware of the intensity of the inequality and difference in social status and power between usurer and tenant, the conflict potential embedded in this relationship, as well as honor, the pivotal value in the first-century Mediterranean world, that are at stake.

¹⁹ “High context societies produce sketchy and impressionistic documents, leaving much to the reader’s or hearer’s imagination and common knowledge. Since people living in these societies believe that few things have to be spelled out, few things in fact are spelled out [T]he typical communication problem in high context societies is not giving people enough information, thus ‘mystifying’ them” (Malina 2001; my emphasis).

4.2 Honor and shame in GThom 65

In the first-century Mediterranean world patron client relations were closely linked with the pivotal value of honor²⁰ (Moxnes 1991:244). Malina & Neyrey (1991a:25-46) describe the salient features of honor and shame as follows: Honor is the positive value of a person in his own eyes, as well as the positive appreciation of that person in the eyes of others (i. e., claim and acknowledgement). Honor is thus linked to “saving face” and “respect” (see also Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:213; Neyrey 2004:261) and indicates a person’s social standing and status.²¹ Honor can either be ascribed or acquired. Ascribed honor is obtained/inherited passively through kinship or endowment by notable persons of power (e. g. client king, procurator or aristocrat). Acquired honor, on the other hand, is the “socially recognized claim to worth that a person obtains by achievements” (Malina & Neyrey 1991a:28). Honor, as limited goods in the first-century Mediterranean world,²² was acquired in particular by means of the social interaction of challenge and riposte.

Challenge and riposte, as social interaction within the context of honor, has at least three (four) phases (Malina & Neyrey 1991a:29-30):

- a challenge in terms of some action (word or deed or both) on the part of the challenger;
- a perception of the action by the challenger by the challenged and the public as a challenge of honor; and
- a reaction of the challenged; and
- the evaluation of the reaction of the challenged by the public.

²⁰ For a description of the social-scientific model of honor and shame (and more specific aspects thereof), see inter alia Bechtel (1991:47-76), Douglas (1977), Malina (1978, 1979:62-76, 1981, 1986, 1988b; 1996), Malina & Neyrey (1991, 1996), Malina & Rohrbaugh (1992), Moxnes (1988, 1995, 1996), Neyrey (1998, 2004), Pitt-Rivers (1977:1-17) and Van Eck (1995:165-169).

²¹ In the first-century Mediterranean world family and citizenship determined a person’s status, that is, whether someone belonged to the upper class or not. Moreover, wealth did not automatically mean status. Status, however, could accumulate wealth and power. Thus status and power were more important than wealth. Wealth and power were unequally distributed and mostly in the hands of the elite, and social classes were organized in strict hierarchical order (see inter alia Van Aarde 2007:8). Because of this strict hierarchical order, honor and status was a limited good.

²² In the first-century Mediterranean world things of value were available on limited scale (see Malina 1978:162-167), especially honor as pivotal value of this world. Since the elite only made up a small percentage of first-century Mediterranean society, few people had the privilege of status, either being born into nobility or having acquired honor. Therefore, honor was a *limited good*. People therefore fiercely competed with one another for honor (as limited goods), giving expression to the first-century Mediterranean world as an agonistic (strongly competitive) society.

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In short, four elements are important as far as a challenge-riposte exchange is concerned: claim, challenge, riposte and public verdict (see Malina & Neyrey 1991a:30).

In reading the story of the tenants in GThom 65 from the perspective of the above social-scientific model of honor and shame (and the social interaction of challenge-riposte), at least three assumptions need to be made. *Firstly*, the vineyard owner's honor (and status) most probably is both ascribed and acquired. Ascribed honor, as was indicated above, happens passively through kinship or endowment by notable persons of power. Papyri used by Kloppenborg (2006:297-303) confirm that many landowners acquired large portions of land by virtue of kinship or endowment by notable persons of power, for example Apollonios (administrator of Ptolemy II Philadelphos), Eirēnē (a Macedonian resident who received an estate as a beneficiary gift) and Aurelia Apollonides (an Alexandrian councilor named Gaus). Fiensy (1991:21-60), focusing on large estates in Palestine in the Herodian period, also indicates that Herod and his retainers (soldiers, administrators and officers), as well as various individuals belonging to the Jewish aristocracy (including members of influential priestly families) owned large portions of land in Judea and Galilee. Both Kloppenborg and Fiensy's description of landowners of large estates thus exemplifies the fact that the Roman Empire's elite ruled by *hereditary* control of the empire's primary resources of land (Carter 2006:3), as well as through benefaction and endowment, placing these landowners in the higher levels of social status and honor in society. In terms of acquired status, the acquisition of land not only led to wealth, but also to the possibility of further land acquisition, which in turn led to the possibility of more patron-client relationships. Thus, by acquiring more (and more) land, more (and more) clients became indebted to the landowner, receiving accumulating expressions of loyalty and honor. To this can be added the stereotyped way in which first-century personality was perceived: individuals from a certain kingship group (e. g. Herodian), region (e. g., Alexandria) or craft/trade (Roman soldier, Roman appointees or leading city men like councilors or administrators) received an automatic and specific honor rating (see Malina & Neyrey 2006b:85-90). It can therefore be concluded that the owner of the tenants indeed was an honorable man, which honor had to be protected. The sending of his son (GThom 65:6) as status marker (Kloppenborg 2006:322-326), underlines this social standing.

Secondly, if it is assumed that a crop-share lease is operational in GThom 65, specific obligations between lessor (landowner) and lessee (tenant) although not spelled out, are implied. The honorable person was someone who fulfilled his obligations (doing the expected), thus protecting his

honor. In GThom 65 the landowner was, for example, had as obligation the construction of fences, water wheels, a press and storage rooms, the excavation of a treading floor, catch basins and storage tanks, as well as the purchase of iron tools, draught animals and fertilizer. The tenants, on the other hand, were responsible for looking after the vineyard, irrigation and had to pay a percentage of the crop, agreed upon. Non-fulfillment of these obligations meant “losing face”, that is, putting one’s honor at risk. In the case of the non-fulfillment of their obligations honor was thus also at stake for the tenants in the parable.

In the *third place*, there is no public as integral part of the story to perceive the actions of the tenants as a challenge to the honor of the owner and to evaluate the owner’s reaction in terms of saving face or not, in the Tenants in GThom 65 per se. However, being a parable that was most probably told to an audience by the historical Jesus (or was later retold to a different audience), the hearers of the parable should be seen as the “evaluating public” of the social interaction of challenge and riposte in GThom 65.²³

With these three assumptions as point of departure, a social-scientific reading of GThom 65 from the perspective of honor and shame (and the social interaction of challenge-riposte) can be undertaken from two vantage points:²⁴ either the owner is regarded as the protagonist in the story and is the one whose honor is being challenged, or the tenants are regarded as the protagonist in the story (and therefore the party being challenged in terms of honor). These two readings will now be undertaken.

4.2.1 GThom 65: An owner’s honor at stake

By owning a vineyard and leasing it to farmers, the landowner puts his honor at stake in two ways: if his enterprise of acquiring and capacitating a vineyard turns out to be a failure in the end, he would lose face within his peer group (e. g., the elite).²⁵ Secondly, by leasing his vineyard to farmers, a patron-client relationship comes into existence, at the risk of the farmers becoming disloyal

²³ I read the remark of Kloppenborg that the parable also challenges the hearer’s values (on wealth, status and honor; see Kloppenborg 2006:352) as support for the assumption that the hearers of the parable could be seen as the “evaluating public” of the social interaction of challenge and riposte in GThom 65.

²⁴ According to Malina & Neyrey (1991a:26) all groups are concerned about their honor. What constitutes honor might also vary from situation to situation (Malina & Neyrey 1991a:27). In GThom 65, therefore, it is not only the landowner who has to defend his honor, but the tenants as well, especially when it comes to a patron-client relationship where a difference in status and power open up the possibility of exploiting behavior by the patron.

²⁵ See Kloppenborg (2006:297), quoting Nicholas Purcell: “[Viticulture is] an extremely uncertain and risky, almost marginal agricultural activity”.

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by not honoring their part of the rental agreement. The latter possibility comes to the fore when the owner sends a slave to collect his percentage of the crop (GThom 65:2). The slave is grabbed, beaten and is almost killed, whereafter he returned to the owner telling him what had happened (GThom 65:3). The owner perceived this action of the farmers as a challenge to his honor, since “the agent of a person is like the person himself” (see Kloppenborg 2006:323). The hearers of the parable (“public”) would also have perceived the action of the farmers as a challenge to the owner’s honor. Moreover, the messenger-slave, who was beaten and was almost killed, would have perceived the action of the farmers as a challenge to his master’s honor.

How then did the owner react to this challenge to his honor? First and foremost he tried to save face with his messenger-slave (and most probably his other subordinates) by saying that had the farmers known that the slave he sent was indeed his slave, they would have reacted in a different manner (GThom 65:4). By so doing, his honor with his slave (and the other subordinates) was most probably restored. In an attempt to regain his honor with his tenants, his riposte to their challenge was to send a second slave, most probably one whom the tenants knew well (GThom 65:5). Since his honor was now at stake in the eyes of many beholders (his subordinates and the public/hearers), it can be assumed that the second slave was meticulously selected to ensure that this time there would be no misunderstanding, – should that indeed have been the case when the first slave had arrived at his vineyard.

However, the owner’s riposte is answered by a second challenge by the farmers. What happened to the first slave became the fate of the second (GThom 65:5). Although not narrated, it can be assumed that the second slave also reported to the owner what had happened to him, just as the first slave had done. The owner’s honor was now really at stake. Not only did the farmers again challenge his collection of the crop, but he had also lost face in the eyes of his slave (and his other subordinates) – especially after his initial interpretation that the farmers had acted in the way they did, because they had not recognized the first slave as his legal representative. He had reached a point where his honor was in dire straits as he had lost honor with the hearers of the parable too.

The owner, realizing what was at stake, then decided to pull out all the stops. His riposte to the second challenge was to send his son (GThom 65:6). Why his son? Kloppenborg’s realistic reading of the Tenants assists in answering this question. In those cases where tenants (or farmers) ignored the owner’s deputies (slaves), the normal strategy was to send agents of

increasing social status (Kloppenborg 2006:324).²⁶ In a sense, this had already happened when the second slave was sent, that is, a slave whom the other people (including the farmers) knew belonged to him. However, since his first riposte did not work, the owner now decided to play his social trump card: by sending his son, the owner appealed to the difference between his social status and that of the farmers. Since it was customary for persons from a specific class to dress and spoke in a manner that exhibited social status and power, the owner's decision to send his son was obvious: personal presence and personal power were now at play. The owner's remark before sending his son, namely that he not only acknowledged that his honor was at stake, but also that he had already lost some honor as no respect was shown towards the two slaves, is significant.

When the son arrived at his father's farm to collect the crop, the story takes an unexpected turn. What happened was exactly what the owner had not anticipated: the farmers killed his son (GThom 65:7). From an honor and shame point of view, the story thus has an ironic turn: exactly that which the owner thought would solve his problem (a display of his social status), led to his demise and the loss of status. By pulling out all the stops, he lost everything – his vineyard, his status (land being one of the principle markers of status), his honor in the eyes of his subordinates, the hearers of the parable and also his son (therefore, also his ability to reproduce his name).

4.2.2 GThom 65: The tenants' honor at stake

As indicated above, one of the characteristics of patron-client relationships is a strong element of solidarity linked to obligations. If a crop share lease is assumed in GThom 65, a realistic reading of the parable in terms of viticulture brings the following obligations of the tenants and the owner (in honoring the lease/relationship) to the fore (see Kloppenborg 2006:560): the tenants, most probably skilled vinedressers, had to look after the vineyard, ensuring, as far as possible, a successful crop. The tenant, for example, also had to pay for guards, cartage, fertilizer and the maintenance of iron tools, press and water wheel. The owner, on the other hand, had to fulfill certain obligations to honor his lease contract with his tenants: the owner carried the cost of irrigation and a water wheel, reeds, vine shoots, stakes, taxes and a reservoir. He also had to pay wages to the tenants while a vineyard was not fully developed yet (sometimes a token amount of wine was given in exchange for labor).

²⁶ In cases where tenants ignored the landlord's deputies, the normal strategy was to send agents (slaves in GThom 65) of increasing status (see Kloppenborg 2006:324-326). The strategy of sending representatives with increasing social status is well attested in papyri dating from 300 BCE to 300 CE (see for example *PCairZen* I 59015, *PCairZen* I 59018 and *POxy* III 645; see Kloppenborg 2006:323-326).

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Failure by the landlord to pay wages or to advance payments for laborers and other expenses meant, from the tenants' point of view, that the owner was not honoring his part of the contract and that they were being exploited by someone with power. Tenants also felt exploited when landowners underestimated the crop (thus curtailing their revenue in terms of crop sharing), or tried to maximize their profit and maintaining stable production with a minimum input of expenses. All these possible scenarios, especially in those cases where the tenants – from their side – had fulfilled all their obligations, meant conflict. As far as the tenants were concerned, their honor was challenged and they had to retaliate (riposte).

When the owner sent his first slave to collect his (part of) the crop (GThom 65:3), it can be assumed that one of the above scenarios was at play as far as reaction from the tenants was concerned. Since the owner did not keep his part of the deal, the sending of his slave was perceived as a challenge to their honor. The riposte was to grab the slave and to almost beat him to death. As such, the “public” (hearers of the parable) most probably would have believed that the tenants' honor was restored – at least for the time being. The owner, on the other hand, lost honor: his display of status was to no avail. When the owner challenged their honor for a second time (GThom 65:5), the tenants' riposte was more or less the same: the second slave got beaten too. From the hearer's point of view, the tenants' honor was again defended, while the owner's honor was on the wane. Then the owner sent his son, confronting the tenants with his status and power. For the tenants this required more extreme measures: they grabbed the son and killed him. And then, from a challenge-riposte point of view, the story ends. No evaluation by the public (hearers of the parable) of the way in which the challenged reacted, is given.

What happened to the farmers? Can it be deduced that they won this three-part social game of challenge-riposte? Did they gain ownership of the vineyard by killing the son? Was their violent reaction successful in terms of protecting their honor? The story does not provide any answers – it seems though as if their violence was to no avail. They might have gained a vineyard, but was it achieved in an honorable way?

4.2.3 Summary: The honor of the owner and that of the tenants in GThom 65

The owner, when challenged to defend his honor for a third time, pulled out all the stops and gained nothing. In fact he lost rather than gained anything as he lost his son. The tenants, on the other hand, when challenged for the last time by the owner when he sent his son, also pulled out all the stops, but they too

did not gain anything All they did was to kill an owner's son. In short: a display of status and resorting to violence reaped no gains.

More specifically – and maybe the most important aspect of GThom 65 in terms of honor and status – is that the story of the Tenants in GThom 65 does not play the “normal challenge-riposte game”. There is no evaluation of the challenged's reaction by the public (as the third stage of the social interaction) and nobody's honor is vindicated.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: HONOR/STATUS AND VIOLENCE

The above reading of GThom 65 through the lens of the social-scientific model of patronage and clientism, identifies the Tenants in GThom 65 as a patron-client relationship, thus making the reader aware of the intensity of the inequality and difference in social status and the power between usurer and tenant, the potential conflict embedded in this relationship, as well as honor, the pivotal value in the first-century Mediterranean world, that are at stake in the story.

Kloppenborg's realistic reading of the Tenants (GThom 65) resulted in the following: GThom 65 most probably belongs to the rhetoric of the earliest Jesus movement and perhaps to the discourse of the historical Jesus. The Tenants in GThom 65 challenges first-century values of wealth and the wealthy, ownership, inheritance and status. The twist in the story is that all “self-evident” or “ordinary/normal” expedencies such as the connection between status and social power, the privileges of ownership and the normalcy of status displays are unsuccessful and ineffective (Kloppenborg 2006:350-352).

The above social-scientific reading of GThom 65 from the perspective of honor and shame (and the social game of challenge-riposte) confirms Kloppenborg's reading. The Tenants in GThom 65 (as a patron-client relationship), does not play the honor-shame or challenge-riposte game, at least not to the end. Both parties loose, no honor is gained or successfully defended, ascribed honor is futile and is not respected and status brings no advantage. Borrowing the words of Kloppenborg, the surprise of the parable is that all these normalcies and pivotal values of first-century Palestine society lead to nothing – that honor and status have not been challenged, nor has riposte taken place. This is also the case in Q 14:16-24 and GThom 64 where

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status and honor as pivotal values in first-century Palestine are questioned.²⁷ It can therefore indeed be asked whether GThom 65 cannot be identified with the discourse of the historical Jesus.

Finally, GThom 65 implies that the use of violence leads to nothing. In the story the tenants beat two slaves and kill the owners' son. The result of these violent acts, however, is neither the legal obtaining of the vineyard nor the protection of their honor – by obtaining the vineyard in an illegal way (if they indeed managed to do so!) they most probably lost the very honor they wanted to protect. Jesus, in GThom 65, thus not only challenges status as the protection of honor, but violence too. Resorting to status does not necessarily lead to honor, and similarly the use of violence does not achieve honor either. On the contrary, what brings honor, is to answer violence with mildness (Q 6:29). This constitutes the shock and surprise of Thomas' parable: the owner, by refraining from violence,²⁸ is indeed the honorable man! As such, Jesus

²⁷ A social-scientific reading of GThom 64 from the perspective of honor and shame and the social interaction of challenge and riposte results in more or less the same result as is in the case of GThom 65. In GThom 64 someone who was striving for status among his peers invited people to a banquet with the specific aim of displaying his status. The invited guests (four), however, challenged the host's honor and status by declining his invitation. It can be deducted from all four's excuses that their own honor (and wealth) too were at stake – as is the case with the host of the banquet who most probably was also wealthy. – In the case of the first guest (GThom 64:3), merchants owed him money and he had to give them instructions with regard to payment. Non-payment by merchants would have constituted a challenge to his honor. The second guest (GThom 64:5) had to go and buy a house, most probably in the city. The ability to buy a house signified wealth and was also a means of acquiring honor. The third guest's (GThom 64:7) honor was at stake insofar as he (like the host in GThom 64) had to arrange a banquet that would display the status of the groom and his father. The fourth guest (GThom 64:9) could as well have been the usurer in GThom 65: he had to go and collect rent from tenants, securing their loyalty as clients. Non-payment, as is the case in GThom 65, would have been interpreted as a challenge to his status and honor. In short, competing with his guest's own interest for honor and status, the host's strive for honor and status came to nothing. The host's riposte in order to (re)gain honor, however, also came to nothing: his slave was then sent out to those of lesser or no honor (those in the streets). What happens then? As in the case of GThom 65 nothing happens, as the parable gives no account of any guests attending the host's dinner. No reaction from the new invitees is described, nor is there any mention of the host regaining honor. Therefore, as is the case with GThom 65, the "moral" of the parable is the same: striving for wealth, status and honor – as pivotal values in the first-century Mediterranean world – leads to nothing. Q 14:16-24 differs from GThom 64 in the sense that another round of invitations was sent out, because after the first set of invitations, there was still place at the dinner table. From this, it can be deducted that some of the invited guests did attend (a scenario not narrated in GThom 64). What follows after the second invitation, however, is similar to the ending of GThom 64. Of course it can be argued that, since some guests accepted the invitation and began to fill the house, the host was indeed honored (thus acquiring honor). However, by inviting expendables from society, he would have lost face with his peers (those invited in the first instance, but who had excused themselves). In this sense the gist of GThom 64 and Q 14:16-24 is the same: the host's honor (and status) has no value.

²⁸ Kloppenborg (2007:3) will differ from this interpretation. In following Lintott (1968:30; see Kloppenborg 2007:3), Kloppenborg is of the opinion that possession normally was a function "of the ability to take, hold, and exploit land. Possession involved force". According to Lintott (1968) the possession of land, by using force, was seen by the aristocracy as a right. Moreover, "possession which were originally acquired by force will therefore in the end have to be defended by force" (Lintott 1968:30). Following from this understanding of possession and force, Kloppenborg (2007:3) opines that the owner of the vineyard in GThom 65 apparently did not possess the force that would have enabled him to recover his land, otherwise he would have done so. The twist of GThom 65, however, is – in line with Q 6:29 – that the owner refrains from using violence (whether or not he possessed the necessary force). In other words, honor is gained by acting in precisely the opposite way than what was regarded as "normal". In GThom 65 status and honor are not retained or gained by status or violence – the honorable person is the one who refrains from using violence (Q 6:29).

told a parable with a twist: the use of status to protect honor leads to nothing – refraining from the use of violence, on the other hand, leads to honor.

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