


Judas' Proskynesis

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ABSTRACT: The present article starts from an observation that Mark (14:43–46) and Matthew (26:47–50) use two different, though cognate words for Judas' kiss (φιλεῖν and καταφιλεῖν). Καταφιλεῖν is omitted from Luke's passion narrative (Luke 22:44–48), while Judas' kiss as such is absent from John (18:2–8a). A closer look is offered at the verb καταφιλεῖν in Classical contexts, where it may be synonymous with προσκυνεῖν ('to perform a ritual prostration'). It is suggested that what Judas actually performed at Gethsemane was technically *proskynesis*. Judas' gesture, perhaps imitated by some of his armed accomplices, was rendered as an unwilling act of reverence to Jesus by some of Judas' companions in John. It is further argued that the Gethsemane *proskynesis* was orchestrated in collusion with the temple elites that needed firm evidence of Jesus' revolutionary activity to obtain the Roman governor's consent to put Jesus to death (they previously had tried to entrap him in the taxation discourse). As a Roman military unit was present at the arrest of Jesus, Pilate had now several Roman witnesses of the royal style of Jesus, and was forced to act together with the temple elite. This reconstruction speaks for complementarity of the passion narratives in spite of differing highlights of the four evangelists.

KEYWORDS: Judas' kiss, *proskynesis* (ritual prostration), Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:43–52; Matt 26:47–56; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–11), Jesus' Roman trial (Mark 15:2–20a; Matt 27:11–31a; Luke 23:2–25; John 18:28b–19:16a)

Judas' treacherous kiss at Gethsemane is the most recognisable scene of the arrest of Jesus. The very sense of that gesture is fiercely debated, and even its historicity is often questioned. Certainly it was a very special kiss. What follows is an attempt to show that, technically, Judas' kiss was not just a kiss. It is possible that a kiss was not a normal greeting gesture between Jesus and his followers and therefore was a surprise to other disciples.¹ Yet, this kiss was pivotal in the intrigue plotted by the chief priests and the scribes to eliminate Jesus. The deceitful nature of the action planned against Jesus is implied by ἐν δόλῳ in Mark 14:1–2 and δόλῳ in Matt 26:4.² The kiss is described or at least alluded to in

1 A. Cane, *The Place of Judas Iscariot in Christology* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005) 43, notes that "nowhere else in the Gospels are Jesus and his disciples recorded as exchanging a kiss." Still, the spread of the kiss as a symbol of peace in the early Christian communities may undermine that conclusion, see: W. Klassen, "The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament: An Example of Social Boundary Lines," *NTS* 39 (1993) 122–135; E. Sutcliffe, "Kiss – Christianity," *EBR* XV, 362–364.

2 The exact nature of this deceit is not sufficiently explained – certainly the noun δόλος could have referred to Judas' treason introduced by the two first evangelists later (Matt 26:14–16; Mark 14:10–11) as well as to

the synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:49 and Mark 14:45 contain the kiss; Luke 22:47 refers to Judas' failed attempt at kissing Jesus), while it is absent from John's account of Jesus' arrest (John 18:2–8a). The author of this article believes that the differences between the accounts of the synoptics and John are not hopelessly irreconcilable, but reflect different perspectives of the evangelists.³ As a consequence, each of them emphasises a different element of the entire scene. Put together, the evangelists' versions can help in understanding what had really happened at Gethsemane that night, and what was the actual place of Judas' kiss in the above-mentioned plot against Jesus.

1. Verbs for Judas' kiss in the Synoptics

According to Mark 14:44 and Matt 26:48, the kiss was a previously agreed sign for identifying Jesus (the same idea is implied by Jesus' question in Luke 22:48 asked after Judas kissed him). Both Mark and Matthew use two different verbs for the planning of the kiss, and the act of kissing itself (φιλεῖν and καταφιλεῖν, respectively). Καταφιλεῖν, though obviously stemming from φιλεῖν (meaning generally: 'to love' or 'to show love,' and hence: 'to kiss') has a slightly different connotation. One has suggested that the compound implied intensification of a kissing, whether externally perceived⁴ or emotional.⁵ It has been also noted that the prefix κατα- may well refer to "a kiss 'down' on a lower part of the body, as on the hand or feet, rather than on the face" (based on Luke 7:38, for which see the next paragraph), but as this thesis has not been supported by a sufficient number of analogies,⁶ it does not prevail today.⁷ In most interpretations, a difference between

the attempt to entrap Jesus through verbal provocations as the tribute controversy in Mark 12:13–17; Matt 22:15–22; Luke 20:20–26 (for the last-mentioned, see below n. 20). It should be understood that the temple leaders needed a deceit to catch and execute Jesus, most likely since the right to condemn anyone to death was reserved to the Roman governor (for this, see below n. 21).

3 As will be clear from the reconstruction below, it is not necessary here to take position on the composition and time of the individual Gospels, as well as on their relation to the genres of history or biography.

4 C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Mark* (CGTC 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1959) 437: "The compound perhaps indicates a prolonged kissing designed to give all the ochlos- a chance to see which person is to be seized and to be ready to seize him at once"; or W.F. Albright – C.S. Mann, *Matthew. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 26; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1971) 329: "The verb is a compound form of the one used in the previous verse [...], and it is possible that it indicates a repeated or emphatic action." It has been proposed, too, that a prolonged kiss was to leave "no room for error," see: C.S. Mann, *Mark. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday 1986) 596.

5 F.W. Belcher, "A Comment on Mark xiv.45," *ExpTim* 64 (1952–1953) 240, makes Judas repenting his treason already during the kissing and hence trying to show his love in the intensified kiss.

6 R.H. Gundry, *Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993) 859. Although Robert H. Gundry admits that Judas' kiss may have been a sign of reverence ("Judas' feigning humility"), he still does not connect it with the formal *proskynesis*.

7 See: M. Lamas, "Kiss of Judas," *EBR* XV, 364–365.

φιλεῖν of the initial plan and καταφιλεῖν of the very act is understood as an attempt to make the narrative smoother.⁸

Luke utilising only the verb φιλεῖν for Judas' kiss departs from the usage of the other Synoptics. Still, it must be stressed that he knows and utilises καταφιλεῖν in his Gospel (Luke 7:38 and 45 on a sinful woman kissing and anointing Jesus' feet; Luke 15:20 on father embracing and kissing the Prodigal Son) and in Acts (20:37 on Paul's farewell in Ephesus). In the story of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman, Luke contrasts both of the analysed words with the sinner's kiss to be understood as an "act of devotion described hyperbolically."⁹ The juxtaposition of a standard kiss (φιλημα) with an engaged one (καταφιλεῖν) shows that Luke was well aware of possible overtones of the latter, and his decision not to follow the usage of Mark (and Matthew) in the Passion narrative resulted from a conscious reflection and exposes his vision of the scene of the arrest. Luke simply believed that Judas' attempted gesture looked like but a kiss of greeting on the cheek.

His vision of this scene may be explained by the remaining two occurrences of καταφιλεῖν in his works, both kisses (of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:20 and of Paul leaving Ephesus in Acts 20:37) are preceded by embracing the neck – a visualisation of both scenes would demand that at least the kissing person is in an upright position. Still, the episode of the sinful woman proves that Luke was perfectly aware of another possible overtone of καταφιλεῖν and its derivative καταφιλημα as *kissing downwards*. Perhaps Luke's omission of καταφιλεῖν from his depiction of the arrest may be ascribed to a generally weaker stress on the issue of Jesus' kingship in the Lucan passion narrative – of note, his treatment of the post-trial mockery royal homages to Jesus in 23:11 and 23:36–37 cannot compare to the detailed, still varying descriptions in Mark and Matthew.¹⁰ It is also possible that Luke's relatively good understanding of subtleties of Classical Greek barred him from using καταφιλεῖν as he thought that in this place it could have indecent connotations.¹¹

⁸ E.g. comments by Lamas, "Kiss of Judas" (see the previous note); G. Stählin, "φιλέω, καταφιλέω, φιλημα, φίλος, φίλη, φίλια," *TDNT* IX, 140–141; R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday 1994) I, 253–254.

⁹ φιλημα μοι οὐκ ἔδωκας· αὐτὴ δὲ ἀφ' ἧς εἰσῆλθον οὐ διέλιπεν καταφιλοῦσά μου τοὺς πόδας. – "You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet." For the opposition between *no kiss* from the Pharisee and the sinner's devotion, see: C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (TPINTC; London: SCM Press – Philadelphia, MA: Trinity Press 1990) 363–364.

¹⁰ The accounts of mock tributes in Mark and Matthew, though slightly divergent, comprise a number of elements corresponding with actual homages to the royals; Luke omits most of them, and distorts others (e.g. he has a "splendid robe" put on Jesus instead of a purple one of the other evangelists, including John). Cf. below n. 26.

¹¹ Such facets of καταφιλεῖν are evident from examples presented below, see n. 13.

2. καταφίλημα as a Sign of Reverence Outside the Gospels

In the Septuagint, καταφιλεῖν recurs 20 times, usually with an indication of the object of action, and being translation of the Hebrew verb נָשַׁק *nāšaq* ('to kiss').¹² Both the verb καταφιλεῖν and the noun καταφίλημα are commonly used for kissing hands or feet in Classical authors. The most important dictionary of Classical Greek (*LSJ*, s.v. καταφιλέω) offers the meaning 'to kiss, caress' as the main one. It also refers to 'an amorous kiss' (with Lucian, *Amores* 13 cited as the only reference). What is special in such 'an amorous kiss' may be deduced from a wider group of connotations implied by the prefix κατα-, especially ones suggesting an action directed *downwards* and *throughout*. The latter meaning is well attested in scholia and lexis to Classical authors, where καταφίληματα serve as an explanation of καταγλωττίσματα ('tongue kisses').¹³

The other facet of κατα- suggesting an action directed downwards would bring καταφιλεῖν close to προσκύνειν, i.e. to an act of prostration in a ritual or political context (literally also meaning: 'kissing towards').¹⁴ This meaning of καταφιλεῖν is registered neither in *LSJ* nor in Franco Montanari's *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Still, it is attested in a valuable ancient lexicon by Apollonius the Sophist, roughly contemporary to

¹² Gen 31:28; 32:1; 45:15; Exod 4:27; 1 Kgs 20:41; 2 Kgs 14:33; 15:5; 19:40; 20:9; 20:14; 3 Kgs 2:19; 19:20; Ruth 1:9; 1:14; Ezra 4:47; Eccl 29:5; Tob 7:6; 10:13; 3 Macc 5:49; Ps 84:11. At the same time, προσκυνεῖν is a usual Septuagint translation of the Hebrew הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה *hištah'wāh* ('to bow down'), except for 3 Kgs (LXX) 2:19 where King Solomon bowed down to Bathseba prior to sitting down on his throne (with κατεφίλησεν used in the Septuagint version). It should be noted that this is a very formal occasion in which Solomon's royal status is solemnly stressed by adding royal title to his name, see: S. Devries, *1 Kings*, 2 ed. (WBC 12; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2015) 37–38.

¹³ Thus, καταγλωττίσματα (literally: downwards-oriented actions with tongue) are explained as τὰ ἐρωτικά καὶ περιεργὰ φύλήματα ("sexual and throughout kisses" – I. Cunningham [ed.], *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*. II.2. *Kappa – Omicron* [Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2020] s.v. καταγλωττίζειν), as καταφύληματα (scholia anonyma recentiora in Aristophanes, *Nub.* 51 [ed. J.W.J. Koster]) or as εἶδος αἰσχροῦ φύληματος ("a kind of disgraceful kiss" – scholia vetera in Aristophanes, *Nub.* 51 [ed. D. Holwerda]). Cf. also: F.W. Sturz, *Etymologicum Graecae linguae Gudianum et alia grammaticorum scripta e codicibus manuscriptis nunc primum edita* (Leipzig: Weigel 1818) s.v. Καταγλωττίζει, περιεργῶς καταφιλεῖ and Lex.Seg. s.v. καταγλωττίσματα: τὰ περιεργὰ φύλήματα (ed. L. Bachmann). Clearly, in the Greek-speaking world there was a widespread understanding of καταφίλημα as a particularly carnal kiss employing tongue during the act.

¹⁴ Of the immense literature on *proskynesis*, see esp.: E. Badian, "The Deification of Alexander the Great," *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson* (ed. H.J. Dell) (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies 1981) 48–52, 64–65; M.L. Bowen, "They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him: Prokynesis before Jesus in Its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013) 63–89; C. Materese, "Proskynēsis and the Gesture of the Kiss at Alexanders Court: The Creation of a new Élite," *Palamedes* 8 (2013) 75–86 and H. Bowden, "On Kissing and Making Up: Court Protocol and Historiography in Alexander the Great's Experiment with Proskynesis," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56 (2013) 55–77. Cases of *proskynesis* before Jesus mentioned in New Testament are now analysed Gospel by Gospel in R.M. Lozano, *The Proskynesis of Jesus in the New Testament. A Study on the Significance of Jesus as an Object of "Proskuneo" in the New Testament Writings* (London – New York: Clark 2019).

the composition of the Gospels.¹⁵ Along with the translation of *ἡῖσταν* (*hištah^awā^b*) in Septuagint's 3 Kgs 2:19 (see above n. 12), the oldest attestation of the direct synonymy of the two words is a report of the negotiations held at Carthage before the battle of Zama in 202 BC in Polybius, who is one of the most important Greek historians of the Hellenistic age.¹⁶ There are more examples of juxtaposing *καταφιλεῖν* and *προσκυνεῖν* in Greek authors ranging from the Classical period well to the Roman Imperial era, yet in most of them, the two terms seem to be near-synonymous and complementary rather than identical.¹⁷ A possible relation of near-synonymy between those two notions (or similarity of two ways of prostration) was visible to the Christian circles of the 2nd century AD, too.¹⁸

In the Septuagint (where, as stated above, the use of *καταφιλεῖν* is very generic except for 1 Kgs 2:19) one may indicate an example where it refers to the closing element of the *proskynesis* ritual: the reciprocation of the kiss by the adored ruler or official.¹⁹

15 Apollonius Sophista, *Lex.hom.* 65,20 (ed. I. Bekker): <ἔκυσεν> κατεφίλησεν τῷ στόματι· ἀφ' οὗ καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸ προσκυνῆσαι λέγομεν – “(he) kissed: (he) kissed with mouth, hence we say ‘to have made an act of prostration.’”

16 Polybius, *Historiae* 15.1: The Roman envoys boldly reminded to the Carthaginians that: πρῶτον μὲν ἀναμνησκόντες ὡς οἱ παρ' ἐκείνων πρεσβευταί, παραγεννηθέντες εἰς Τύνητα πρὸς σφᾶς καὶ παρελθόντες εἰς τὸ συνέδριον, οὐ μόνον τοὺς θεοὺς ἀσπάζαντο καὶ τὴν γῆν προσκυνήσαιεν, καθάπερ ἔστιν ἔθος τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ καὶ πεσόντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἀγεννῶς τοὺς πόδας καταφίλοισιν τῶν ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ, κτλ. – “Their ambassadors who had come to the Roman camp at Tunes, on being admitted to the council of officers, had not been content with appealing to the gods and **prostrating** to the Earth, as other people do, but had thrown themselves upon the Earth, and in abject humiliation **had kissed** the feet of the assembled officers etc.” (LCL 159). Perhaps a picture of King Prusias of Bithynia kissing down the walls of the Senate House at Rome and offering *proskynesis* to the Roman senators in Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 20.69.1 may be taken from Polybius who thus would have employed the same wordplay more than once (otherwise, the Punic War episode cited above is the only proven Polybian use of the word), see: A. Mauersberger, *Polybios-Lexikon*, 2 ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2006) I.3, 1364.

17 Greek observers (erroneously) thought that the Persians differentiated between showing respect to gods and royals, see: Xenophon, *Cyr.* 7.5.32: Γαδάτας δὲ καὶ Γωβρύας ἦγον· καὶ θεοὺς μὲν πρῶτον προσεκύνουν, ὅτι τετιμωρημένοι ἦσαν τὸν ἀνόσιον βασιλέα, ἔπειτα δὲ Κύρου κατεφίλουν καὶ χεῖρας καὶ πόδας, πολλὰ δακρύοντες ἅμα χαρᾷ [καὶ εὐφραίνόμενοι]. – “Gadatas and Gobryas came up and first of all they did homage to the gods, seeing that they had avenged themselves upon the wicked king, and then they kissed Cyrus's hands and his feet with many tears of joy” (LCL 52). A more complex, triple gradation of greeting (a prostration, an excessive kiss and barely a kiss) in the Persian context may be found in Ps.-Plutarch, *Alexandrian Proverbs* (*Plutarchi de proverbii Alexandrinorum libellus ineditus* [eds. O. Crusius] [Tübingen: Fues 1887]), fr. 10: Πέρσαι [...] τοὺς βασιλεῖς ἑαυτῶν ὡς θεοὺς προσκυνοῦσι, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἴσοι ἀλλήλους καταφιλοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ ταπεινότεροι τῶν παρειῶν τῶν μείζονων μόνον θιγγάνουσι. – “The Persians [...] worship their kings as gods, while kiss equals of their own excessively and those of lower status barely touch cheeks of their superiors.”

18 *Acta Iohannis* 7.10 (eds. E. Junod – J.-D. Kaestli): Καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης πρὸς αὐτὸν εἶπεν· Δίκαιον τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πρώτῳ προσκυνεῖν, καὶ οὕτως τὸ στόμα τοῦ βασιλέως καταφιλεῖν· γέγραπται γάρ ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς βίβλοις· Καρδία βασιλέως ἐν χειρὶ θεοῦ. – “And John told him ‘It is just to revere the hand of the God first, and likewise to kiss the mouth of the king – it is thus written in the Sacred Books: The king's heart is in the hand of the God.’”

19 2 Sam 15:5: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἐγγίξει ἀνδρα τοῦ προσκυνήσαι αὐτῷ (Absalom) καὶ ἐξέτεινεν τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπελαμβάνετο αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν – “Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him” (NIV). It is worth mentioning that in this passage, the act of *proskynesis* is preceded by the verb ἐγγίξεν (‘to approach, come nearer’) – exactly as Judas' attempt at kissing Jesus in Luke 22:47. Matt 26:49 and Mark 14:45 both use nearly synonymous προσέρχεσθαι for Judas' movement prior to the kiss.

3. Judas' καταφίλημα in the Context of Political Charges Against Jesus

The above-mentioned examples of synonymity, near-synonymity or interchangeability of καταφιλεῖν and προσκυνεῖν in both Greek and Christian settings have inspired the present author to consider whether Judas' kiss could possibly be a *proskynesis*-like act of adoration involving kneeling and kissing one of lower parts of Jesus' body (a hand or feet). As will be argued below, more premises can be adduced in favour of this theory.

1. Since Judas was to give a sign for the armed group sent to arrest and escort Jesus, this sign should be characteristic and visible to the gathered witnesses. A hug and a kiss on the cheek might have been noticeable, but an act of *proskynesis* (involving a genuflection or a bowing and a kiss on the hands or the feet) would last longer and would be much easier to notice.

On the one hand, it could be meant to facilitate an unmistakable identification of Jesus in darkness. On the other hand, we should realise that in Jerusalem numerous people were at the same time hostile to Jesus and able to recognise him. Judas was not the only one to confirm his identity. Therefore, one could venture to say that Judas' sign was meant to have a different sense (not an identifying sign or not simply that). Perhaps it was meant to mark the re-launch of "Operation Jesus" rather than to identify Jesus in front of the armed escort.

2. Judas' kiss is absent from the Johannine account. Here, it is Jesus who reveals his identity (*I am* – ἐγώ εἰμι of John 18:5) and actively offers himself to the soldiers and armed temple attendants (John 18:4–8a) – this is no surprise in the Gospel preoccupied with Jesus' kingship more than the Synoptics. During the arrest scene according to John, Judas was standing with the arresting party (John 18:5). Still, the first attempt to approach Jesus after he had confessed his identity ended up in the crowds' falling to the ground (John 18:5–6: ὡς οὖν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀπήλθον εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ ἔπεσαν χαμαί – "When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground" [NIV]). This scene was included in John to show that even the unwilling and hostile Jewish crowd felt induced to bow before Jesus using the very name for God for himself. It has been also proposed that the arrest's depiction in John may be an ironic response to Jesus himself falling to the ground in Mark 14:35 during the prayer directly prior to the arrest.²⁰ The latter suggestion seems somewhat far-fetched since Jesus had been kneeling voluntarily and in a situation of prayer. Rather, it can be put forward that in the Johannine account Judas' kneeling down (deducible – as argued in the present article – from Mark and Matthew) was shared by his armed companions (or at least by some of them). What for John is a sudden act of respect towards Jesus by his enemies, appears to have been another element of a pre-arranged monarchical provocation intended to pour scorn on Jesus in the eyes of the Romans.

²⁰ For Old Testament analogies to the falling to the ground, and possible polemics with the Synoptics in John, see: Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 261–262.

If one accepts that Judas' kiss and bow were elements of an orchestrated public *proskynesis* (and that perhaps some of Judas' companions repeated his bow), it will be easier to understand how the Judean accusers pushed the Roman prefect of Judea to act without delay. Rumours of Messianic (and *eo ipso* monarchical) self-allusions in Jesus' teaching and in attitudes of his disciples towards him were widespread in Judea and contributed the rise of both his popularity and the temple elites' anxiety about Jesus' possible actions. It is clear that they observed Jesus' activity with apprehension and feared that especially his public entrance to Jerusalem might undermine their leadership for a time. So, the Judean leaders decided to eliminate Jesus for good. It is likely that they were not authorised to condemn to death anyone,²¹ so they had to convince the governor to put Jesus to death. In order to persuade Pilate to join hands with them in what hitherto appeared to the Romans as a purely Jewish religious conflict, they needed to find proofs of a serious crime. They decided to build up a story of Jesus plotting against the existing order and declaring himself the king of Jews. However, they had no convincing evidence, at least in the eyes of the Roman governor. Untrustworthy and randomly chosen witnesses repeating gossips about Messianic self-declaration of Jesus and the disciples' extravagant reverence to him would have not been sufficient to prompt Pilate to act. Thus, as they needed more unequivocal substantiation of their charges against Jesus to be presented to the Romans, they decided to fabricate proofs of a royal usurpation by Jesus. Judas' bow and kiss, almost an ideal *proskynesis*, perhaps imitated by some of his Jewish companions that night (registered and taken as a sign of reverence to Jesus' divine power in John 18:6) were to corroborate a charge of rebellion brought against Jesus to Pilate. Perhaps the Judean leaders knew it would be not easy to convince the governor through Jewish witnesses, so asked him to send a Roman unit nominally to support the temple police in case of rioting.²² In actual fact, the Roman escort

21 The only author writing about that restriction of the *synhedrion's* right to impose death penalty sentences is John 18:31. Accuracy of this remark is highly debated. There are examples of executions of the Christians at Jewish hands that may be understood as examples of lynch-law or undue usurpations of power. (Stephanus in Acts 7; James "the Lord's brother" in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200; a dissolute priestly daughter in Sanh. 7:2 (Str-B I, 1026); see: R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HThKNT IV.3; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 1975) III, 280. As a matter of fact, the Roman norm was to preserve *ius gladii* for the Roman provincial authorities, and this was also a case of unruly Judea, in which all crimes involving harder punishment were reserved for the governor, see: A.N. Sherwin-White, "The Trial of Christ," *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (Theological Collections 6; London: SPCK 1965) 99. For accuracy of the Johannine account of the trial in spite of its deviations from the generally acceptable synoptic accounts, see also A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon 1963) 46–47; cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29A; New York: Doubleday 1970) 848–849. F. Millar, "Reflections on the Trials of Jesus," *A Tribute to Geza Vermes. Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History* (eds. P.R. Davies – R.T. White) (JSOTSup 100; Sheffield: JSOT Press 1990) 355–381, argues for a strictly ritual and temporary explanation of Jews' self-imposed inability to condemn Jesus to death during the festival of Passover in John 18:31 (an argument too fragile in light of handing Jesus over to be executed by Jewish authorities in John 19:16a).

22 The presence of Roman soldiers during the arrest of Jesus is another debated issue. As such it is attested in the Johannine account only. In John 18:3, Judas takes to Gethsemane a twofold military unit combined of the *σπείρα* (commonly used in Greek texts for Latin *cohort* or *manipulus*) on the one hand, and "the policemen (*ὑπηρέται*) from the chief priest and the Pharisees" on the other. John 18:12 demonstrates that the Roman

was needed by the Jewish elite as a collective witness of Jesus' royal pretences attested to by his acceptance of Judas' *proskynesis*. It is generally agreed that the evangelists' versions of the trial of Jesus are all marked by Pilate's skepticism towards the charge. Perhaps the evangelists tried to show that he was aware of the ploy of the Jewish elite and tried to distance himself from interfering in what he thought was yet another Jewish conflict about spiritual matters. Still, once he had given the chief priests and the scribes the Roman unit to support the temple police, he was caught in their intrigue. Thus he found himself forced to comply with their demand to put Jesus to death: the Jewish anti-Jesus conspirators agreed to build up a complex political accusation (best visible in Luke 22:3)²³ which Pilate could have seen as overstated. Still, he could not ignore the fact that now many Roman witnesses (perhaps hyperbolically equated with *cohors* or *manipulus* in John²⁴) saw the performance by Judas and perhaps by some of ὑπηρέται that looked like a regular *proskynesis*. Thus, he felt himself forced to desist from rejecting the Jewish accusation against Jesus, especially under threats of reporting the case to Rome. Perhaps this is why he decided to express his dissatisfaction with the result of the trial and lack of confidence in the accusation brought by the Jerusalem elite in the ironically formulated trilingual notice (τίτλος) he ordered to nail on the cross (John 19:19–20). On the other hand, Pilate's Roman soldiers performed a mock coronation and royal proclamation of Jesus (Matt 27: 27–31 and Mark 15:16–20 with putting a purple robe and a thorn crown on him). The soldiers very likely reflected the atmosphere of those days in Jerusalem, perhaps in a less critical way than their superior.²⁵ During the coronation, soldiers “were spitting on him and made kneeling and prostration

unit was present at the arrest saying that ἡ οὖν σπείρα καὶ ὁ χιλιάρχος καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέται τῶν Ἰουδαίων συνέλαβον τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἔδησαν αὐτὸν (“Thereupon the cohort and the tribune and the attendants of the Jews took Jesus and bound him” – translated by Raymond E. Brown [*The Death of the Messiah*, 398]). The argument that σπείρα may refer here to Jewish soldiers does not seem to be a compelling one – for this possibility, see esp.: J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus* (Westminster MA: Newton Press 1959) 64–70, accepted e.g. in C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2003) 1078–1079. Indeed, in the Septuagint and in Flavius Josephus, σπείρα might refer to non-Roman soldiers and it was sometimes necessary to identify Roman units with ethnic descriptions (as in *Jewish War* 2.224; 5.244); but here, in John, σπείρα is clearly different from the ὑπηρέται sent directly by Jewish authorities.

- 23 This tripartite accusation in Luke is expanded from the Markan tradition that only implicitly refers to the nature of the Jewish elites' charge against Jesus. Although the text of 23:2 is clearly an authorial elaboration by Luke, full of typically Lukan utterances, it does agree with the ancient Jewish tradition about Jesus, so see: G. Schneider, “The Political Charge Against Jesus (Luke 23: 2),” *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (eds. E. Bammel – C.F.D. Moule) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984) 403–414 (esp. 409–412 on Lukan words of the passage; and 414 on conformity with the Jewish tradition). The second element of the Jewish elites' charge against Jesus, the one about tribute to the emperor, alludes to a trap prepared for Jesus by his Jewish adversaries in Luke 20:20–26 (and in Mark 12:13–17; Matt 22:15–22, although two first evangelists' passion narratives do not come back to that talk about taxes due to the Romans), see: J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT 3; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1997) 800. The “tribute” trap as such was a failure, and the temple elites needed more substantiation of their charge against Jesus. It is with Judas' *proskynesis*, they first could revive the taxation element of their complaints against Jesus.

24 Cf. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 248–249.

25 J.D.G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK 2010) 9; Lozano, *The Proskynesis of Jesus in the New Testament*, 37, n. 12.

before him" (Mark 15:18–19: καὶ ἐνέπτυν αὐτῷ, καὶ τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ). While Mark was careful to link kneeling with mock *proskynesis*, Matt 27:29 introduces kneeling without a reference to formal prostration. Matthew was more aware of the role of the reed as a false sceptre in mocking Jesus,²⁶ but generally failed to notice all subtleties of the Roman soldiers' performance. Both Mark and Matthew put stress on spitting, which may have been a reverse of kissing as a part of *proskynesis*.²⁷

Conclusions

Given all above, understanding that Judas' kiss was a very special type of kiss, actually the most important and best-visible part of the *proskynesis* performed by Judas in front of Jesus, must strengthen one's belief in historicity of the entire Gethsemane episode and in complementarity of the passion narratives, including the trial's depictions and the temple elite's intrigue, even if the individual evangelists decided to highlight different moments or elements of the arrest and trial of Jesus.

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²⁶ For Matt 27:29, a reed put in Jesus' hands as a mock scepter, see: R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007) 1060–1062.

²⁷ W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1974) 560.

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