

The Guard at the Tomb

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SUMMARY

Matthew's story of the guard at the tomb of Jesus is widely regarded as an apologetic legend. Although some of the reasons given in support of this judgement are not weighty, two are more serious: (1) the story is found only in Matthew, and (2) the story presupposes that Jesus predicted his resurrection and that only the Jewish leaders understood those predictions. But the absence of the story from the other gospels may be due to their lack of interest in Jewish-Christian polemics. There are no good reasons to deny that Jesus predicted his resurrection, in which case the second objection becomes basically an argument from silence. On the positive side, the historicity of the story is supported by two considerations: (1) as an apologetic, the story is not a fail-safe answer to the charge of body-snatching, and (2) a reconstruction of the history of tradition lying behind Jewish-Christian polemic makes the fictitiousness of the guard unlikely.

THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

Of the canonical gospels, only Matthew relates the intriguing story of the setting of a guard at the tomb of Jesus (Mt. 27. 62-66; 28. 4, 11-15). The story serves an apologetic purpose: the refutation of the allegation that the disciples had themselves stolen Jesus' body and thus faked his resurrection. Behind the story as Matthew tells it seems to lie a tradition history of Jewish and Christian polemic, a developing pattern of assertion and counter-assertion: [1]

Christian: 'The Lord is risen!'

Jew: 'No, his disciples stole away his body.'

Christian: 'The guard at the tomb would have prevented any such theft.'

Jew: 'No, his disciples stole away his body while the guard slept.'

Christian: 'The chief priests bribed the guard to say this.'

Though Matthew alone of the four evangelists mentions the guard at the tomb (John mentions a guard in connection with Jesus' arrest; cf. Mk. 14. 44), the gospel of Peter also relates the story of the guard at the tomb, and its account may well be independent of Matthew, since the verbal similarities are practically nil. [2]

According to Matthew's version, on Saturday, that is, on the Sabbath, which Matthew strangely circumnavigates by calling it the day after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees ask Pilate for a guard to secure the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and thus 'fulfilling' Jesus' prediction of rising on the third day. Pilate says, 'You have a guard; make it as

secure as you can.' It is not clear if this means that Pilate gave them a Roman guard or told them to use their own temple guard. The Gospel of Peter uses a Roman guard, but this is probably read into the tradition and may be designed to emphasize the strength of the guard. If one might mention a psychological consideration, Pilate would probably be by this point so disgusted with the Jews that he might well rebuff them; but legends know no psychological limits. If Pilate rebuffed the Jews, then one wonders why this part of the story be told at all; but if the Jews really did go to Pilate, then perhaps this detail was remembered. If Pilate gave them a guard it is strange that Matthew does not make this explicit, like the Gospel of Peter, as this would strengthen his apologetic. The fact that the guards return to the chief priests is evidence that a Jewish guard is intended; contrast the Gospel of Peter, where the Roman guard report to Pilate the events at the tomb. The mention of the governor in v. 14 might indicate a Roman guard, but then it would not be clear how the Jews could do anything to keep them out of trouble. The fact that Roman guards could be executed for sleeping on watch and taking a bribe would further point to a Jewish guard. In the Gospel of Peter the bribe and the sleeping story are eliminated; Pilate simply commands the Roman guard to keep silent. If one gives the story the benefit of a doubt, one would assume that the guard is Jewish; but if one is convinced the story is a worthless legend then nothing could prevent one from taking the guard as Roman. So the guard is set and the sepulcher sealed. It has been said that Matthew omits the anointing motif because of the guard and the sealing, [3] but this holds no weight, for the women were clearly ignorant of such actions taken on the Sabbath. Rather it could be that Matthew is following different traditions here, since v. 15 makes it evident that there is a tradition history behind Matthew's story. [4] Before the women arrive, an angel of the Lord rolls back the stone, and the guard are paralyzed with fear. It is not said that the guard see the resurrection or even that this is the moment of the resurrection. [5] After the women leave, some of the guard go to the Jewish authorities, who bribe them to say that the disciples stole the body. "This story has been spread among the Jews until this day," adds Matthew.

Matthew's account has been nearly universally rejected as an apologetic legend by the critics. The reasons for this judgment, however, are of very unequal worth. For example, the fact that the story is an apologetic answering the allegation that the disciples stole the body does not therefore mean that it is unhistorical. The best way to answer such a charge would not be by inventing fictions, but by narrating the true story of what happened. Similarly, it counts for nothing to press the theological objection against the story, as is often done, that it overshoots the remaining witness of the New Testament that Jesus only appeared to his own, but remained hidden to his

enemies. [6] Some theologians are appalled at the thought that pagan guards might see the 'Risen Christ'. [7] But the account says nothing about any appearance of Jesus to the guards at all. On the contrary, the angel expressly says, 'He is not here; for he has risen'; but the tomb is opened presumably that the women might come and 'see the place where he lay' (Mt. 28. 6). And in any case, the New Testament witness is that Jesus did appear to sceptics, unbelievers and even enemies (Thomas, James and Paul). The idea that only the eye of faith could see the risen Jesus is foreign to the gospels and to Paul, for they all agree on the physical nature of the resurrection appearances. [8] It is sometimes urged that the chief priests and Pharisees would not go to Pilate on the Sabbath day. But such an inference is not very weighty, since it is not said that they went *en masse*, but merely met there, [9] and it is not said that they entered the praetorium (cf. Jn. 18. 28). In any case, the objection underestimates the hypocrisy of men who, at least according to the gospel portrait, could bind others with heavy burdens, but they themselves not lift a finger to help. Nor is it very compelling to object to the story because it contains inherent absurdities, for example, that the guards would not know it was the disciples because they were asleep or that a Roman guard would never agree to spread a story for which they could be executed. [10] The first assumes that the Jews could not have fabricated a stupid cover-up story; really this story was as good as any other. At any rate the inference that it was disciples of Jesus was not so far-fetched, for who else would steal the body? The second absurdity assumes the guard was Roman, for which the positive evidence is slim. And even if the guard were Roman, perhaps the Jews' promise to 'satisfy the governor' meant telling him the truth about the guards' loyal service, if they would agree to lie to the people.

Rather the more serious difficulties with the story are two: (1) it is not related in the pre-Markan passion story nor in the other gospels, and (2) it presupposes not only that Jesus predicted his resurrection in three days, but also that the Jews understood this clearly while the disciples remained in ignorance. With regard to the first, it is exceedingly odd that the other gospels know nothing of so major an event as the placing of a guard around the tomb. This suggests that the account is a late legend reflecting years of Jewish/Christian polemic. The designation of Jesus as an impostor is in fact an earmark of Jewish polemic against Christianity (Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 108; *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Levi) 16. 3). But perhaps this polemical interest supplies the very reason why this event, even if historical, was not included in the pre-Markan passion story. For the pre-Markan passion story arose in the life of the *Urgemeinde* before the *Auseinandersetzung* with Judaism and thus antedates the Jewish/Christian polemics. Since the

guard played virtually no role in the events of the discovery of the empty tomb -- indeed the Matthean account does not exclude that the guard had already left before the women arrived --, the pre-Markan passion story may simply omit them. If the slander that the disciples stole the body was restricted to certain quarters ('the story has been spread among Jews [*para Ioudaiois*] to this day'), then it cannot be ruled out that Luke or John might not have these traditions. And the evangelists often inexplicably omit what seem to be major incidents that must have been known to them (for example, Luke's great omission of Mk. 6. 45 - 8. 26) so that it is dangerous to use omission as a test for historicity.

As for the second objection, we must be careful not to exclude *a priori* the possibility that Jesus did predict his resurrection, since ruling this out in advance would be to return to eighteenth century theological rationalism's presupposition against the supernatural. And if philosophical presuppositions cannot exclude Jesus' prediction, neither can theological, for example, that this represents a sort of 'triumphalism' that minimizes the extent of Jesus' sacrifice, since he knew he would rise again. Theological conceptions of what is 'appropriate' to Jesus' person and work cannot dictate to history what must have happened; rather theological conceptions may simply have to be changed in the light of history, whether this appeals to our religious sensibilities or not. The only grounds for accepting or rejecting Jesus' predictions as historical must be empirical.

What, then, are the empirical grounds for thinking that Jesus did not predict his resurrection? It is sometimes asserted that Jesus' prediction of his resurrection is incompatible with the despair and hopelessness of the disciples. But this fails to reckon with the clear statements of the gospels that the disciples could not understand how a dying and rising Messiah could be possible (Mk. 8. 32; 9. 10). The concept was utterly foreign to them and made no sense with their conceptions of the triumphant King of Israel, though, Mark emphasizes, Jesus told them *plainly* that he was to suffer, be killed, and rise (Mk. 8. 32). It is interesting that when Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again, her response is, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day' (Jn. 11. 24). The disciples may have had no expectation that Jesus' prophesied resurrection would be otherwise; in fact this is implied by their question concerning the eschatological coming of Elijah prior to the resurrection (Mk. 9. 10-11). [11] So the fact that the disciples failed to grasp the significance of the predictions is actually quite plausible and cannot be urged against their historicity. It may be asserted that the language of the predictions is *ex ecclesia* and that therefore they are written back into the life of Jesus. But, in fact, there are no words in the predictions that Jesus himself could not have employed. The use of 'the third day' could have meant only a short

time. [12] But even if this detail was added from the kerygma, that does not imply that Jesus could not have predicted his resurrection. In the same way, the speech of the Jews to Pilate is Matthew's construction, and the third day motif may reflect the kerygmatic formulation in I Cor. 15. 4. In fact the Jews may have asked for a guard to be posted for an indeterminate period of time or the duration of the feast. That the predictions of the resurrection have taken on kerygmatic coloring does not prove that they were not made.

Perhaps the most serious difficulty with the guard story, however, is that if the disciples did not grasp the import of the resurrection predictions, then the Jews, who had much less contact with Jesus, would not have grasped them either. This is, however, essentially an argument from silence, since Matthew does not tell us how the Jews learned of Jesus' prediction. It assumes that we have recorded in the gospels all instances on which Jesus spoke of his resurrection or that if this prediction was conveyed to the Jews surreptitiously we must know about it. It is possible that the actions of the Jews were not motivated by any knowledge of resurrection prophecies at all, but were simply an afterthought to prevent any possible trouble that could be caused at the tomb by the disciples during the feast. Taken together these considerations have a cumulative weight, however, and in themselves would probably cause one to be sceptical about the historicity of the guard story.

But there are other considerations that count positively in its favor. For example, if the story is an apologetic fiction designed to preclude the theft of the body by the disciples, then the story is not entirely successful, for there is an obvious time period during which the disciples could have stolen the body undetected, namely between six o'clock Friday night and sometime Saturday morning. Because the tomb is already empty when the angel opens it, it is possible that it was already empty when the guards sealed the stone. Matthew fails to say that the sepulcher was opened and checked before it was sealed, so that it is possible that the disciples had removed the body and replaced the stone Friday night after Joseph's departure. Of course we would regard such a ruse as historically absurd, but the point is that if the guard is a Christian invention aimed at refuting the Jewish allegation that the scheming disciples had stolen the body, then the writer has not done a very good job. For the way an apologetic legend handles this story, see the Gospel of Peter: the scribes, Pharisees, and elders go on *Friday* to Pilate, who gives them a *Roman* guard; together the soldiers, the scribes, and the elders proceed to the sepulcher, and *they* all roll the great stone across the entrance of the tomb (no mention of Joseph of Arimathea whatsoever!), seal it seven times, and keep watch. On Sunday morning *Jesus himself* is seen coming out of the tomb with the

two angels, and the witnesses include not only the soldiers and the elders, but also a crowd from Jerusalem and the countryside who had come to see the sepulcher! This is a fail-safe apologetic: the Romans and the Jews are the ones responsible for the entombment of Jesus on the same day of his death, they remain there without interruption, and when the tomb is opened, it is not empty, but Jesus comes out before the eyes of a multitude of witnesses. By contrast in Matthew's story the guard is something of an afterthought; the fact that they were not thought of and posted until the next day could reflect the fact that only Friday night did the Jews learn that Joseph had, contrary to expectation, placed the body in a tomb, rather than allowing it to be discarded in a common grave. This could have motivated their unusual visit to Pilate the next day.

But perhaps the strongest consideration in favor of the historicity of the guard is the history of polemic presupposed in this story. The Jewish slander that the disciples stole the body was probably the reaction to the Christian proclamation that Jesus was risen. [13] This Jewish allegation is also mentioned in Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 108. To counter this charge the Christians would need only point out that the guard at the tomb would have prevented such a theft and that they were immobilized with fear when the angel appeared. At this stage of the controversy there is no need to mention the bribing of the guard. This arises only when the Jewish polemic answers that the guard had fallen asleep, thus allowing the disciples to steal the body. The sleeping of the guard could only have been a Jewish development, as it would serve no purpose to the Christian polemic. The Christian answer was that the Jews bribed the guard to say this, and this is where the controversy stood at Matthew's time of writing. But if this is a probable reconstruction of the history of the polemic, then it is very difficult to believe the guard is unhistorical. [14] In the first place it is unlikely that the Christians would invent a fiction like the guard, which everyone, especially their Jewish opponents, would realize never existed. Lies are the most feeble sort of apologetic there could be. Since the Jewish/ Christian controversy no doubt originated in Jerusalem, then it is hard to understand how Christians could have tried to refute their opponents' charge with a falsification which would have been plainly untrue, since there were no guards about who claimed to have been stationed at the tomb. But secondly, it is even more improbable that confronted with this palpable lie, the Jews would, instead of exposing and denouncing it as such, proceed to create another lie, even stupider, that the guard had fallen asleep while the disciples broke into the tomb and absconded with the body. If the existence of the guard were false, then the Jewish polemic would never have taken the course that it did. Rather the controversy would have stopped right there with the renunciation that any such guard had ever

been set by the Jews. It would never have come to the point that the Christians had to invent a third lie, that the Jews had bribed the fictional guard. So although there are reasons to doubt the existence of the guard at the tomb, there are also weighty considerations in its favor. It seems best to leave it an open question. Ironically, the value of Matthew's story for the evidence for the resurrection has nothing to do with the guard at all or with his intention of refuting the allegation that the disciples had stolen the body. The conspiracy theory has been universally rejected on moral and psychological grounds, so that the guard story as such is really quite superfluous. Guard or no guard, no critic today believes that the disciples could have robbed the tomb and faked the resurrection. Rather the real value of Matthew's story is the incidental -- and for that reason all the more reliable -- information that Jewish polemic never denied that the tomb was empty, but instead tried to explain it away. Thus the early opponents of the Christians themselves bear witness to the fact of the empty tomb. [15]

Footnotes:

[1]

Cf. Paul Rohrbach, *Die Berichte über die Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898), p. 79.

[2]

So B. A. Johnson, 'The Empty Tomb in the Gospel of Peter Related to Mt. 28.1-7' (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1966), p. 17. This does not commit one to Johnson's view that this was an appearance tradition.

[3]

Kirsopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1907; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 61; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Mathäus*, 3rd ed., THKNT I (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972), p. 568; Josef Blinzler, 'Die Grablegung Jesu in historischer Sicht', in *Resurrexit*, ed. Edouard Dhanis (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), p. 82.

[4]

Evidence of pre-Matthean tradition is also found in the many words which are *hapax legomena* for the New Testament: *epaurion*, *paraskeue*, *planos/plane*, *koustodia*, *asphalizo*, *sphragizo*; also the expression 'chief priests and Pharisees' (cf. 21. 45) is unusual for Matthew and never appears in

Mark or Luke, but is common in John (7. 32, 45; 9. 47, 57; 18. 3). For discussion see I. Broer, *Die Urgemeinde und das Grab Jesu*, SANT 31 (München: Kösel Verlag, 1972), pp., 69-78; F. Neiryneck, 'Les femmes au tombeau: Etude de la rédaction mathéenne', *NTS* 15 (1968-9): pp. 168-90. On the independence of Matthew from Mark see E. Ruckstuhl and J. Pfammatter, *Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (Lucerne and München: Rex, 1968).

[5]

Contrast the Gospel of Peter 8.35- 42:

'now in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers, two by two in every watch, were keeping guard, there rang out a loud voice in heaven, and they saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw nigh to the sepulcher. The stone which had been laid against the entrance to the sepulcher started of itself to roll and gave way to the side, and the sepulcher was opened, and both the young men entered in. When now those soldiers saw this, they awakened the centurion and the elders - for they also were there to assist at the watch. And whilst they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulcher, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying "Thou hast preached to them that sleep?", and from the cross there was heard the answer, "Yea".'

and the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3. 16:

'Gabriel, the Angel of the Holy Spirit, and Michael, the chief of the holy Angels, on the third day will open the sepulcher: and the Beloved sitting on their shoulders will come forth.'

[6]

Grundmann, *Matthäus*, p. 565; John E. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel-Tradition*, CTM A5 (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag. 1975), p. 117.

[7]

Thus, Grass says that besides the particularities, the guard story is unbelievable because heathen guards would see the resurrection. (Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 4th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970], p. 25.) Von Campenhausen also states the story implies pagan guards would be witnesses of the resurrection and we cannot agree that this should be. (Hans Freiheirr von Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 3rd rev.

ed., SHAW [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1966], p. 29.) Similarly O'Collins makes the astounding assertion that had Annas and Caiaphas been with the disciples when Jesus appeared, they would not have seen anything. (Gerald O'Collins, *The Easter Jesus* [London: Carlton, Longman & Todd, 1973], p. 59.) This, despite what Grass repeatedly describes as the 'massive realism' of the gospels! Cf. Koch, *Auferstehung*, pp. 59-60, 204, who is scandalized by the objectivity of the gospel appearances, which he vainly attempts to construe in wholly subjective categories.

[8]

On the agreement between Paul and the gospels on the nature of the resurrection body, see Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 159-83; Ronald J. Sider, 'The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in I Corinthians XV.35-54', *NTS* 21 (1975): pp. 428-39; Alexander Sand, *Der Begriff 'Fleisch' in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, BU 2 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1967), pp. 152-3; Jean Héring, *La première épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, 2nd ed., CNT 7 (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959), pp. 146-8; H. Clavier, 'Brèves remarques sur la notion de *soma pneumatikon*,' in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and W. Daube (Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 342-62; Wilhelm Michaelis, *Die Erscheinungen der Auferstandenen* (Basel: Heinrich Majer, 1944), p. 96.

[9]

See Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 4th ed., ed. W. Schmauch, KEKNT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 400.

[10]

Lake, *Evidence*, p. 178; Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1970), p. 46; Grundmann, *Mätthaus*, p. 571. Orr thinks that the guard's accepting the bribe is not so far-fetched, since their fleeing was already a breach of duty. (James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), p. 160.) Von Campenhausen brings forth other absurdities, such as the fact that the guard reported to Jews and that Christians, despite the guards' lie, know everything. (Von Campenhausen, 'Ablauf', p. 29). But the former is evidence the guard was Jewish; the latter should not surprise us, since secret conspiracies almost always come to light. In any case the Jews' conversation with Pilate is probably an imaginative Christian re-construction of what they inferred took place, which would explain the third day motif and kerygmatic language employed. Perry regards the placement of a Jewish guard at the tomb by the

Jews, without knowledge of Jesus' prediction, as historically defensible. (Michael Perry, *The Easter Enigma*, with an Introduction by Austin Farrer London: Faber & Faber, 1959], pp. 98-9.)

[\[11\]](#)

Though the doctrine of resurrection is attested in the Old Testament and flowered in the intertestamental period, the Jewish conception of resurrection was always of a general and eschatological resurrection. Nowhere do we find any notion of the resurrection of an isolated individual or of a resurrection before the end of the world. (See remarks of Ulrich Wilckens, *Auferstehung*, TT 4 [Stuttgart and Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1970], p. 31; Joachim Jeremias, 'Die älteste Schicht der Osterüberlieferung', in *Resurrexit*, p. 194.) Hence, the disciples' misunderstanding has a historical ring.

[\[12\]](#)

Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961; London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 59- 72; O'Collins, *Easter*, p. 12. Even if one agrees with Lehmann that the third day motif is a theological expression, drawn from the LXX and later elaborated in Rabbinic exegesis, meaning the day of God's deliverance, victory, and taking control (Karl Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift*, QD 38 [Freiburg: Herder, 1968], pp. 262-90), there is no reason that if the early church could have used this expression, Jesus himself could not also have used it in the same sense in predicting his resurrection. Hooke also reminds us that all of Jesus' eschatological sayings presuppose his resurrection, as do his statements at the Last Supper. (S. H. Hooke, *The Resurrection of Christ as History and Experience* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967], p. 30; cf. Michael Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* [London: Centenary Press, 1945], pp. 38-9.)

[\[13\]](#)

The proclamation may have been in the words repeated twice in Mt. 27. 64; 28. 7: 'He has risen from the dead.' Contrary to Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, p. 23, this could evoke the response that the disciples stole the body, if the empty tomb were also a historical fact. The Jewish response need not presuppose the Christians were using the empty tomb itself as an apologetic argument.

[\[14\]](#)

The argument presupposes either that the underlying tradition is pre-Matthean or that the gospel itself was written prior to AD 70, for after that time the people in a position to know the truth would

have been killed or dispersed. That the tradition is pre-Matthean is clear: (1) The Jewish polemic behind the story most probably came out of Jerusalem itself in response to the apostolic proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. (2) A reconstruction of the history of the polemic shows that Matthew inherited the controversy about the guard. That he did not invent the guard *de novo* to counteract a simple Jewish theft charge is evident from the additional elements of the guards' sleeping and the bribe. (3) The narrative itself contains non-Matthean characteristics, as pointed out in note 5. That the Gospel of Peter knows a non-Matthean tradition of the guard story also indicates that the story did not originate with Matthew. Since the controversy thus ante-dates the destruction of Jerusalem, it is very difficult to construe it as a heated exchange over an imaginary entity. This conclusion is only strengthened if Matthew itself was written before AD 70, as argued, for example, by Bo Reicke, 'Synoptic Prophecies on the Destruction of Jerusalem', in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ed. D. E. Aune (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 121-34; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), pp. 19-26, 86-117.

[\[15\]](#)

Mahoney objects that the Jews argued as they did only because it would have been 'colorless' to say the tomb was unknown or lost. (Robert Mahoney, *Two Disciples at the Tomb*, TW 6 [Bern: Herbert Lang, 1974], p. 100.) But here Grass is right: if the grave were unknown or lost, then the preachers of the resurrection would have been met by the reaction of Acts 2. 13: 'They are filled with new wine.' I seriously doubt whether being 'colorless' was regarded by the Jewish hierarchy as such an awful thing that they preferred inventing the empty tomb for the Christians. And if the burial place of Jesus was known, as is probable (Blinzler, 'Grablegung', pp. 94-6, 101-2), the reaction of the Jews becomes even more problematical: for instead of pointing to the tomb of Jesus or exhibiting his corpse, they entangled themselves in a hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain away the absence of his body. The fact that the enemies of Christianity felt obligated to explain away the empty tomb shows not only that the tomb was known (confirmation of the burial story), but also that it was *empty*.