The NAG HAMMADI CODICES *and their* ANCIENT READERS

—

Exploring Textual Materiality and Reading Practice

—

PAUL LINJAMAA

The Nag Hammadi Codices and their Ancient Readers

Since their discovery in 1945, the Nag Hammadi codices have generated questions and scholarly debate as to their date and function. Paul Linjamaa contributes to the discussion by offering insights into previously uncharted aspects pertinent to the materiality of the manuscripts. He explores the practical implementation of the texts in their ancient setting through analyses of codicological aspects, paratextual elements and scribal features. Linjamaa's research supports the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts had their origins in Pachomian monasticism. He shows how Pachomian monks used the texts for textual edification, spiritual development and pedagogical practices. He also demonstrates that the texts were used for perfecting scribal and editorial practice, and that they were used as protective artefacts containing sacred symbols in the continuous monastic warfare against evil spirits. Linjamaa's application of new material methods provides clues to the origins and use of ancient texts, and challenges preconceptions about ancient orthodoxy. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

PAUL LINJAMAA is Associate Professor at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University.

PAUL LINJAMAA
Lund University

The Nag Hammadi Codices and their Ancient Readers

Exploring Textual Materiality and Reading Practice

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgements

ix

in securing publishable resolutions and provenance for each photo.

First and foremost, I am indebted to my wonderful partner, Nathalie, for enduring my absent-mindedness after long and arduous writing sessions and for her unwavering love and support. To my children, Otto and Helmi: the joy (χαρά /ⲡⲣⲉⲱϥⲉ) you bless me with every day would not be denied by even the most ardent Stoic.

Note on Transcription and Translation

The list of symbols I use in the translation and transcription of Coptic texts follows the sigla from *The Coptic Gnostic Library* editions, under the general editorship of James Robinson.[1] These are as follows:

ⲁ̣ A dot placed under a letter in the transcription (as in the example here to the left under the Coptic letter *alpha,* ⲁ) indicates that the letter is visually uncertain, even though the context may make the reading certain. A dot on the line outside of brackets in the transcription indicates an uncertain letter from which some vestiges of ink remain.

[ ] Square brackets in the transcription indicate a lacuna in the MS where writing most probably at one time existed. When the text cannot be reconstructed but the number of missing letters can reasonably be estimated, that number is indicated by a corresponding number of dots; where the number of missing letters cannot be reasonably estimated, the space between the brackets is filled with three dashes. In the translation the square brackets are used only around words which have been substantially restored.

⟦ ⟧ Double square brackets indicate letters cancelled by the scribe.

{ } Braces indicate letters unnecessarily added by the scribe.

---

[1] The above list is a slightly emended version of the one appearing in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, ed. Harold Attridge (Leiden: Brill, 1985), XXVIII.

` ´   High strokes indicate that the letter so designated was
        secondarily written above the line by the scribe.
< >   Pointed brackets in the transcription indicate an editorial
        correction of a scribal omission. In the translation they
        indicate words which have been editorially emended.
( )   Parentheses in the transcription indicate scribal
        abbreviations which have been editorially explicated. In the
        translation they indicate material supplied by the translator
        for the sake of clarity.

xii

Abbreviations

BG	Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (or Berolinensis Gnosticus 8502)
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
PGM	*Papyri Graecae Magicae*
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*

Introduction

The Provenance Controversy

In the year 1945, near the town Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, a farmer found a collection of very old books as he was, purportedly, digging for fertiliser. By the end of the 1940s, the books had ended up on the Egyptian black market for ancient texts. When scholars finally got their hands on them, it was quickly discovered that the books were fourth-century papyrus codices. Unofficially named after the town near where they were discovered, the collection comprised twelve individual codices containing a total of fifty-two texts,[1] all written in the last of the ancient Egyptian languages: Coptic (see Fig. Int. 1). Most of the texts were Christian in nature, with a few philosophical and Hermetic tractates, and most were Coptic translations of earlier Greek versions; some had never been heard of before. Early Christian scholars had received a very welcome influx of sources from a period which had left few original manuscripts behind. But ever since the discovery, their background has caused debate. Many conflicting suggestions as to their provenance have been proposed over the years; however, there is still no broad consensus about what sort of fourth-century people had actually produced and owned the Nag Hammadi codices and how they had been used.

---

[1] At the end of the chapter the contents of each codex are presented. The number fifty-two should be viewed as an estimate, although probably the most commonly adduced figure for the number of texts the collection includes in total. Yet one can easily end up with a different sum, depending on the principles applied when distinguishing one individual text from another.

1

Figure Int. 1 The Nag Hammadi codices in the home of Maria Dattari, a private antiquities collector in Cairo, Egypt. On the left, leaves from Codex I, with page 50 on the top. Beneath on the right are leaves from Codex XII, with page 28 furthest to the right. The extant leaves of Codex XIII are in the centre beneath the bound codices, with page 50 on top. The cover between the two stacks is that of Codex XI. The stack of bound codices on the left includes, from top to bottom, Codices II, VII, VIII and III (from which the leaves had already been removed; the cover is padded with newspaper to provide the appropriate thickness for the photograph). The stack of bound codices on the right includes, from top to bottom, Codices V, IX, VI, IV and X. Absent are the cover and most of the leaves of Codex I, which were at the time in the possession of Albert Eid (description by Claremont Colleges Library, modified).

This photograph was reproduced with the caption 'Les manuscrits de Khénoboskion' between pages 14 and 15 in Jean Doresse, *L'Évangile selon Thomas ou les paroles de Jésus: Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypte* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959), and with the caption 'The manuscripts of Chenoboskion' facing page 238 in Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Leonard Johnston (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960 [1952]). Photo by Jean Doresse. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

2

This study approaches the background and ancient use of the Nag Hammadi texts from several understudied perspectives: namely, the manuscripts' paratextual, visual and material aspects. By studying how the makers and readers of the texts actually handled them, the reading aids and editorial features they used, and how they were put together and relate to each other, we can gain important clues about who the owners really were and how they were actually read. The scholars who first worked with them in order to facilitate transcriptions and translations of the manuscripts noted many of these features, sometimes offering explanations as to their use. These comments are, however, few and far between, and no studies have hitherto been devoted to analysing the texts' paratextual, visual and material aspects in light of the texts as a collection. Nag Hammadi scholarship has chiefly focused on the individual texts and seldom refers to their material features, something most likely partly due to the way modern editions of ancient texts are produced. In the laudable effort to present accessible translations and transcriptions, material features, such as scribal signs and visual effects, are often 'lost in transcription'. The aim of the present study is to trace the uncharted aspects of the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts and map the context which they reflect.[2]

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, they have been associated with various Christian heresies, chiefly with the somewhat elusive concept of 'Gnosticism'. By approaching previously understudied aspects of the materiality of early Christian texts that

---

[2] The terms 'Nag Hammadi codices', 'Nag Hammadi library/collection' and 'Nag Hammadi texts' are used interchangeably throughout this chapter. There are, however, important nuances to these terms and we shall have occasion to revisit the usage of them in later chapters. These have to do with the fact that the different texts within the codices – in almost all cases – had a *Sitz im Leben* before they became part of the collection associated with the name 'Nag Hammadi'. What I explore in this book is the context and textual setting pertaining to the texts within the codices and not their 'original' or previous background before they were copied into the fourth-century manuscripts we possess today.

have been viewed as containing questionable teachings, we stand to gain important insights into the formative period of early Christian history when the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy were slowly becoming established.

Some studies have problematised the assumption that early Christian manuscripts were generally copied by Christians, rather than professional scribes uninterested in what they copied.[3] This is a focal topic of scholarly disagreement over the Nag Hammadi texts. In this study their ancient background(s) is approached by looking at what their material and visual features can say about how they were read and by whom. Previous studies have explored some of these material features, such as the texts' codicology, cartonnage and colophons,[4] but the present study aims to fill in some of the gaps provided by previously uncharted aspects of their palaeography and codicology. These include paratextual elements and scribal features such as *diplai* (>) and *diple obelismene* signs (>—), *nomina sacra*, copying techniques, visual features including symbols, and material comparison of the texts. While previous studies of the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts have often focused on what these features can say about who owned the texts and when and where they were copied, this study will also approach the question of what the material features can tell us about *how* the

---

[3] The assumption is questioned by, for example, Alan Mugridge, *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016). For the argument that early Christian texts were mainly produced by Christians for their own use, see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[4] These studies will be discussed below. A pioneer in applying material research perspectives to the Nag Hammadi codices is Hugo Lundhaug, whose work has inspired and is closely related to my own. For example, see Hugo Lundhaug, 'Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. Dylan M. Burns and Matthew J. Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 107–143. Lundhaug himself credits Karen King and Stephen Emmel with being the first to advocate approaching the Nag Hammadi texts from the perspective of manuscript culture (Lundhaug, 'Material Philology', 109 n. 8).

4

texts were used and for what purpose. This includes exploring the everyday utility of the texts in light of their material features.

The Rifts in Current Scholarship

At the time of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, it was argued that they could have been related to the Egyptian monastic movement, which had its beginning, both chronologically and geographically,[5] in the area where the texts were found.[6] Developed by Pachomius the Great – often identified as the founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism – the movement would give rise to a handful of monasteries, datable to the same time as the approximate production of the Nag Hammadi texts, and within a day's walk of the general area of their discovery.[7] Thus, there is

---

[5] For a brief overview of the history of scholarship, see Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 4–7; for an updated and highly pedagogical overview of how the Nag Hammadi texts can be dated and contextualised, see Hugo Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts: A Multi-Methodological Approach Including New Radiocarbon Evidence', in *Texts in Context: Essays on Dating and Contextualising Christian Writings of the Second and Early Third Century*, ed. Jos Verheyden, Jens Schröter and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 117–142.

[6] There has recently been some debate concerning the validity of the find story. For an overview of the debate and a much-needed argument against the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts were Christian Books of the Dead, used as grave goods among Christians, see Paula Tutty, 'Books of the Dead or Books *with* the Dead?', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 287–326. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[7] For a recent overview of the evidence, see Christian Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices', in Bull, Christian. 'The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th Cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology*, ed. Paola Buzi (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020), 133–147. For a study of the geography of early Pachomian monasticism, see Louis Théophile Lefort, 'Les premiers monasteres Pachomiens: Exploration topographique', *Le Museon* 52: 379–407; and for a discussion of how Pachomian monasteries relate to the find site of the Nag Hammadi codices, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 22–55.

5

nothing strange about the fact that one of the first provenances suggested for the texts was that they were somehow connected with Pachomian monks. The Swedish Egyptologist Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, who was involved in the UNESCO project cataloguing the codices (led by James Robinson), suggested that the Nag Hammadi collection could have been used by monks to familiarise themselves with their theological opponents, that is, 'Gnostic' groups.[8] The texts constituted a reference library of heresy, he argued. Some scholars, including Clement Scholten, Michael Wallenstein and Frederik Wisse, among others, even suggested that the monks could have produced the texts, and not only that, they could have studied and drawn inspiration from them.[9] The monastic hypothesis has been promoted by many scholars over the years, a Pachomian setting being a frequently proposed scenario.[10] But other suggestions have also been made.

Another early view was that the Nag Hammadi texts, since they include considerable apocryphal material, had begun to lose their relevance and, after Athanasius' thirty-ninth festal letter was sent to Christians in Egypt banning apocryphal writings in 367, the texts

---

[8] Torgny Säve-Söderberg, 'Holy Scripture or Apologetic Documentation? The "Sitz im Leben" of the Nag Hammadi Library', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque du Centre d'Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23–25 octobre 1974)*, ed. J. E. Menard (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3–14.

[9] Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse (eds.), *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1 and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–11; Frederik Wisse, 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt', in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 431–440.

[10] John W. B. Barns, 'Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Preliminary Report', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 9–18; Charles W. Hedrick, 'Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the "Sitz im Leben" of the Nag Hammadi Library', *Novum Testamentum* 22:1 (1980): 78–96; Clemens Scholten, 'Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 31 (1988): 144–172. For a more detailed history of the scholarship on the Nag Hammadi codices, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 1.

6

were ultimately hidden away by their (possibly monastic) owners.[11] Whatever the relation between Athanasius' letter and the subsequent preservation of the Nag Hammadi texts, many have found it difficult to believe that monks owned them, much less read them for edification. Some have suggested instead that they belonged to one or a few wealthy, learned individuals or that a heretical 'Gnostic' group lay behind them.[12] Jean Doresse, the French archaeologist who was commissioned by the Coptic Museum in Cairo to investigate the discovery of the texts, made the suggestion that they must have belonged to religious fringe groups who treated them as their sacred text collection.[13] This view soon gained traction and has often been repeated since the texts were discovered.[14] The scholars supporting the view that they could not have belonged to proponents of the mainstream Christian Church are perhaps most clearly

---

[11] Armand Veilleux, 'Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 271–306. Athanasius indicates several texts by name which are to be viewed as apocrypha and thus banned, such as those attributed to Moses, Enoch and Isaiah. Alberto Camplani has argued against the notion that Athanasius referred to the texts found in the Nag Hammadi directly in 'In margine alla storia dei Meliziani', *Augustinianum* 30:2 (1990): 313–351. However, it is not a far stretch to imagine that other texts would also have been included in the ban, texts such as those in the Nag Hammadi collection also termed 'apocrypha'. See James E. Goehring, 'New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Pearson and Goehring, 236–257.

[12] This hypothesis has one central drawback: it does not explain how the texts ended up in Upper Egypt. Its proponents have suggested that these 'Gnostic' individuals or groups could at some point have visited the monasteries around the area of Nag Hammadi and brought their texts with them. For a survey of the early suggestions as to the background of the texts, see Wisse, 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt', 431–440.

[13] Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Leonard Johnston (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960 [1952]).

[14] It was, for example, repeated by Martin Krause, one of the early members of the UNESCO team commissioned to preserve and translate the texts. See Martin Krause, 'Der Erlassbrief des Theodore', in *Studies Presented to Hans Jacob Polotsky*, ed. Dwight W. Young (East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981), 220–238.

represented by Russian scholar Alexandr Khosroyev. He argued that most of the evidence, including codicological evidence, indicated a heretical urban intelligentsia behind the codices, chiefly due to the 'anti-biblical', 'esoteric' and philosophically laden material they contain.[15] The manuscripts were commercial products, Khosroyev argued, made by professional booksellers, commissioned by urban religious group(s) with syncretistic tendencies, and they would not have interested monks.[16] Khosroyev advanced these ideas in his book *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, which had wide impact, in which he claimed that the Nag Hammadi texts were 'non-canonical', 'bizarre'', 'philosophical', full of 'anti-biblical concepts' and therefore not attractive material for the monasteries. After Khosroyev, the 'Gnostic' hypothesis seemed to gain the upper hand. Several prominent scholars on early Christianity as well as specialists on Egyptian Christianity – like Stephen Emmel, Alastair Logan, Ewa Wipszycka and Nicola Denzey Lewis – have at times presented Khosroyev's argument as having 'effectively demolished the edifice of the "Pachomian monastic hypothesis"'.[17]

---

[15] Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Problem des Christentums in Ägypten währden der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995). Khosroyev's perspective has, over the years, gained the support of many, including Alastair Logan, in *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), and Ewa Wipszycka, 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist Point of View', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 30 (2000): 179–191.

[16] Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, 10–13. This is mostly drawn from his analysis of Codex VI where we find a scribal note. Khosroyev is not alone in his view of the Nag Hammadi codices as commercial products; this is also the conclusion drawn by Eva Cornelia Römer in 'Manichaeism and Gnosticism in the Papyri', in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. R. Bagnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 623–643; as well as Joseph Montserrat-Torrents, 'The Social and Cultural Setting of the Coptic Gnostic Library', in *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 464–481.

[17] The quote is from Stephen Emmel 's, 'The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions', in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 36. The sentiment

More recently, however, Khosroyev's hypothesis has received considerable critique, with the monastic-origin hypothesis being reformulated by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, who have criticised Khosroyev's thesis on several grounds and suggested that the codices were produced in monastic book-exchange networks and owned and read by monks.[18] They based their argument on, among other things, studies of the material aspects of the texts, and analysis of the cartonnage, scribal notes, colophons and content of the texts in light of monastic documentary material which, they argue, shows that monks did indeed read texts such as those found in the Nag Hammadi collection. Since Lundhaug and Jenott's book is a work which offers detailed analyses of topics that are of central importance for many of the arguments presented in this study, it is useful to introduce their work in greater detail and discuss how their arguments have been received in the wider scholarship on the Nag Hammadi codices. As my own study and its contributions are so clearly located on one side of the rift in scholarship, transparency is key if the arguments put forward here are to carry any weight.

The Monastic-Origin Hypothesis and the Contribution of the Present Study

The number of followers being gained by Khosroyev's work prompted Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott to reformulate the monastic-origin hypothesis.[19] In their study *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Lundhaug and Jenott present the

---

has been repeated by Logan, *The Gnostics*; Wipszycka, 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks'; Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to 'Gnosticism': Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8–9. Nevertheless, Emmel has of late been more inclined to support a monastic reading.

[18] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins.*

[19] Part of this section is based on my Swedish review of Lundhaug and Jenott's book, published in *Patristica Nordica Annuaria* 31 (2016): 143–147.

most detailed argument to date for the monastic origins of the library. Their book was structured with the overall aim of refuting Khosroyev's argument.[20] Almost half the study, the first four out of a total of ten chapters, is devoted to introducing Egyptian monasticism in the late fourth and early fifth centuries and refuting Khosroyev's arguments rejecting the monastic hypothesis.[21]

What makes Lundhaug and Jenott's study of particular relevance to this one is the fact that it explores previously unstudied material aspects of the texts, analysing the colophons and also fragments found in the codices' cartonnage identified as documentary material, such as correspondence between the monks – among them a letter from one Papnoute addressed to "my beloved Father

---

[20] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 3–4.

[21] Chapter 1 is a brief history of Nag Hammadi research, followed (in chapter 2) by discussion of the Christian monastic movement in Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries (based on documentary, literary and archaeological sources). In the two subsequent chapters, assumptions previously made about the Nag Hammadi texts are deconstructed. Chapter 3, dubbed 'Gnostics?', presents one hypothesis that there were Gnostic groups behind the texts, and another that the texts were owned by a Gnostic group within the incipient monastic system. Lundhaug and Jenott, however, show that there is not much basis for either hypothesis and suggest they have emerged in the wake of incorrect connotations of 'Gnosticism', which is a modern term associated with the ancient polemical term 'Gnostic' which was used to smear theological opponents. The latter refers to a loose 'world view' or mentality but is not a good analytical tool for addressing specific groups or movements, especially not some that can be convincingly linked to the Nag Hammadi codices. Chapter 4 shows the arguments that Khosroyev used for his hypothesis that the texts originated from a syncretistic Gnostic metropolitan environment, that they were owned by semi-intellectual elite groups and that they contain ideas contrasting with those found in monastic literature. Some of the claims that Lundhaug and Jenott explore are that the Nag Hammadi texts (1) contain contrasting material to what can be found in Christian monasteries; (2) are anti-biblical; (3) are philosophical and can only be understood by an intellectual elite; (4) may not have been read by Egyptian monks who were mostly uneducated or outright illiterate. Lundhaug and Jenott show that these assumptions, and many more, are either simply incorrect or very loosely based. They then move on to argue why the hypothesis of a monastic context for the production of the Nag Hammadi texts is in fact the most probable.

Pachome" (ⲙⲡⲁⲙⲉⲛⲣⲓⲧ ⲛ̄ⲓⲱⲧ ⲡⲁϩⲱⲙⲉ).[22] Lundhaug and Jenott show that Egyptian Christians continued to copy and read apocryphal material, despite Athanasius'decree forbidding the practice, mentioning the defence by theologians such as Priscillian and Ps.-Evodius that the reading of apocrypha was an exercise in the hermeneutics of biblical texts.[23] The monastic connection, they argue, is strengthened by looking at the colophons and terminology used in the texts. In Codex VII, for example, there are notes dedicated to what is termed the 'Fatherhood' (ⲧⲙ̄ⲛⲧⲉⲓⲱⲧ), a common Coptic term for 'abbot' also occurring in several other places in the Nag Hammadi library. Further codices refer to what can be regarded as monastic terms, such as 'brothers', 'the holy', 'spiritual', 'the perfect'.[24]

Referencing several letters written by abbots and monks, Lundhaug and Jenott show that book circles were active in Egyptian monasteries, reaching the conclusion that the Nag Hammadi texts were produced within the framework of something of the kind.[25] This is indicated by, for example, a colophon in Codex VI where a copyist apologises to the recipient for copying texts that the correspondent did not request. Comparing the writing techniques and codex design, Lundhaug and Jenott argue that

---

[22] Cartonnage fragment C6, Nag Hammadi Codex VII. For more, see John W. B. Barns, Gerald M. Browne and John C. Shelton (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 141; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 5. The cartonnage has been further studied by Paula Tutty in her 2019 dissertation in which she has argued, for example, that some letters found in one codex cartonnage may have been written by the scribe of another, indicating close ties between the production of the different codices. Paula Tutty, 'The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Contextualising a Fourth Century Monastic Community' (PhD diss., Faculty of Theology, Oslo, 2019).

[23] Hugo Lundhaug's current ERC-project, 'APOCHRYPHA: Storyworlds in Transition: Coptic Apocrypha in Changing Contexts in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods', promises to develop our understanding of the role played by apocryphal material in the development of Christianity.

[24] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapters 6–7.

[25] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 8.

those who copied the Nag Hammadi texts probably also copied Bible texts. They conclude that the Nag Hammadi texts would have fitted into various kinds of monastic groups that existed in Egypt during the 300s and 400s, and that the most likely context is Pachomian, although others have also made convincing arguments for the monastic settings of Melitian and 'Origenist' monasteries.[26]

To date, Lundhaug and Jenott's book contains by far the most detailed argument presented to support the suggestion that the Nag Hammadi codices were produced for and in a monastic environment, and many scholars have recently contributed to strengthening this perspective.[27] It is also, in my estimation, without doubt the most convincing hypothesis presented so far. The arguments undergirding their monastic-origin position will be made clear and developed throughout this book. However, their work, although convincing and far-reaching, has not gone unchallenged. Ewa Wipszycka is one of their most vocal opponents, arguing that the documentary evidence found inside the covers, as well as the colophons and scribal notes in the texts, do not provide a solid enough

---

[26] For the Melitian hypothesis, see James Goehring, 'The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More', in *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1999*, ed. Maurice F. Wiles and Edward Y. Yarold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 234–253. For the Origenist hypothesis, see Rowan Greer, 'The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus' View on the Valentinians Assessed', in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol I: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 146–175; Tito Orlandi, 'A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenoute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi', *Harvard Theological Review* 75:1 (1982): 85–95.

[27] These include those who have gathered at conferences hosted by Lundhaug's team and subsequently published papers in conference proceedings that contain findings on different aspects of the texts which support a monastic hypothesis, for example, René Falkenberg, Ulla Tervahauta, Michael A. Williams, Louis Painchaud, James A. Goehring, Blossom Stefaniw, Stephen Emmel, Dylan Burns, Christian Askeland and others. See the following anthologies, based on conference proceedings: Lundhaug and Jenott (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*; Hugo Lundhaug and Christian Bull (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023).

basis for making a monastic connection. Apocryphal texts were read by many people other than monks, Wipszycka writes, claiming that the context that makes most sense is one of a group of 'urban literati' who were explicitly absorbed in matters discussed in the Nag Hammadi texts, that is, 'Gnostic stuff'.[28] According to her, Lundhaug and Jenott are under the influence of a narrow trend within scholarship that favours a particular view of Egyptian Christianity in which 'Gnostics' are restricted to Sethians, and, since there is no evidence of Sethians in Egypt at this time, the Gnostic origin hypothesis may be erased. Even though Wipszycka's representation of Lundhaug and Jenott's methodological approach could be interpreted as ungenerous, it nevertheless lays bare one of the key obstacles that has haunted scholarship on the Nag Hammadi texts since it began: namely, the way the texts relate to the phenomenon of Gnosticism and the scholarly understandings of the nature of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in early Christianity. If the texts are indeed from a monastic setting, how would monks have used them?

Following Lundhaug and Jenott's book in 2015, many studies have further explored the Nag Hammadi texts' monastic connection. Some of these have been (or are about to be) published as the proceedings of a series of conferences organised by Professor Lundhaug and his team (of which Jenott was a part), exploring the monastic context (as well as its surrounding milieux) of the Nag Hammadi codices.[29] These have been important for developing the work presented in this book.

---

[28] However, as Bull points out, it is unclear where there would have been space large enough to house such a group of urban literati in the area where the texts were found (Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection', 135–140).

[29] Lundhaug and Jenott (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*; Lundhaug and Bull (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books*. Another collected volume includes several case studies of Nag Hammadi-related material, exploring, among other things, the material aspects of the texts as well as the monastic contexts (although not necessarily jointly), in Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

The Nag Hammadi codices are not the only seminal papyri find from the area. The Dishna Papers, also known as the Bodmer Papyri,[30] were discovered only seven years after the Nag Hammadi texts.[31] There is no consensus as to exactly which texts should be included in this particular 'collection', where they were found and which of them actually derived from other places around Upper Egypt and only later became associated with the collection by other means. There is, however, rather good evidence for concluding that a large part of the Dishna Papers can be traced to the area where the Nag Hammadi texts were also discovered.[32] The Pachomian provenance of this text collection has not been as controversial as the Nag Hammadi texts, most likely due to their content being more in line with what is generally conceived of as orthodoxy.[33] The

[30] Not all the texts in this find are kept in the Bodmer Library in Geneva; rather, they have been dispersed around the world (Oslo, Vatican, Barcelona and other places). Thus, it is more correct to use the term Dishna Papers for this text collection, which is also the term used here.

[31] Also worth mentioning are the seven Manichaean Medinet Madi codices, found in 1929. For an excellent overview of the codices' background, both ancient and modern, see James M. Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013). For similarities between the Nag Hammadi codices and these Manichaean texts, see Paul Van Lindt, 'The Religious Terminology in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Manichaean Literature', in *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions: Proceedings of the International Conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, September 19–24, 1995, on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery*, ed. Søren Giversen, Tage Petersen and Jørgen Podemann Sørensen (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2002), 191–198; and René Falkenberg, 'What Has Nag Hammadi to Do with Medinet Madi? The Case of Eugnostos and Manichaeism', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 261–286.

[32] For example, some of the codices can be traced to the area and period of the early fourth century through fragments of documentary papyri, like tax registers, found in them. P.Bodmer XXIII is one such example. See Hugo Lundhaug, 'The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices: The Remains of a Single Monastic Library?', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 329.

[33] The Pachomian origin of the Dishna Papers has been suggested by, only to name a few, James M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery's Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011),

14

Dishna Papers contain biblical texts and writings by both church and monastic Fathers, as well as classical texts. The Nag Hammadi texts, on the other hand, constitute a much more streamlined form: almost solely 'Gnostic' or 'demiurgical' texts.[34] Brent Nongbri has pointed out that several of the Nag Hammadi codices bear a striking material resemblance to some of the Dishna codices when it comes to format. Indeed, there are so many codicological parallels that Hugo Lundhaug has argued that the Nag Hammadi codices and Dishna Papers once belonged to one and the same monastic library.[35] This is a bold hypothesis, particularly since there are striking differences between the two collections, a matter which speaks against it.[36] The relation between the two collections is a question which goes beyond the scope of this study, but in the concluding chapter we have reason to revisit it in light of the presented findings. What is explored in the following chapters is the controversial question of the Nag Hammadi texts' Pachomian connection. Would orthodox monks really have read Gnostic and demiurgical texts? For what purpose? And in what way?

130–184; James E. Goehring, 'Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5:1 (1997): 78–80.

[34] This is Brent Nongbri's classification of the type of texts contained within the Nag Hammadi collection, a group of texts, he writes, that is 'remarkable for its overall uniformity' compared to other text collections from this period. Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 212.

[35] As Lundhaug has shown, these include the somewhat particular tall and narrow dimensions of the codices, the use of single rather than double columns and similar paratextual features and scribal practices. Lundhaug, 'The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices', 340–346.

[36] This is exemplified by the difference in language and genre. The Nag Hammadi codices contain the more uniform topical spread (mostly Gnostic texts) and uniform dialect of Coptic texts, while the Dishna Papers contain all sorts of Christian texts and are also much more varied in language, with Latin and Greek texts, bilingual codices and Coptic texts in a broader array of dialects. If these two collections really were from one and the same library, the Nag Hammadi texts would then reasonably have been a specific section of a more varied library.

Lundhaug and Jenott are not the only scholars who have promoted a Pachomian connection for the Nag Hammadi codices. A recent study worth mentioning is Christian Bull's exploration of the possibility of tracing the different codex groups within the Nag Hammadi collection to specific Pachomian monasteries.[37] Bull points out that in the area where the Nag Hammadi texts were found there is not much evidence for any established monastic groups, apart from Pachomian – for which evidence abounds. He argues that after the death of Pachomius in 346,[38] there are indications that a period of disarray in the leadership of the Pachomian monasteries followed, as testified by the Pachomian monk Apa Charour.[39] The Nag Hammadi texts could have been produced and used during this period, a time when Pachomian monasteries were fragmented. However, as pointed out by Lundhaug in several studies, the use of apocrypha was not uncommon in Pachomian monasteries (or other Egyptian monastic contexts, for that matter). A ban is not likely to have changed long-lasting structures overnight, as Theodore of Tabennese (c. 314–368), Pachomius' successor, had Athanasius' letter explicitly translated into Coptic and disseminated throughout the monasteries under his control in 367.[40] So, apart from what has been pointed out by Lundhaug, Jenott and those who have followed them – scholars who have

---

[37] Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection', 133–148. See Louis Painchaud, 'The Production and Destination of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 387–426.

[38] Some argue that the year of Pachomius' death was rather 347; see Christoph Joest, 'Erneute Erwägungen zur Chronologie Pachoms (287–347)', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 13 (2011): 157–181.

[39] Apa Charour writes that only one monk in a hundred stayed true to the archimandrite's rules. *Prophecy of Apa Charour*, in *Oeuvres de S. Pachome et de ses disciples*, ed. Louis Théophile Lefort, vol. I (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956), 100–104.

[40] Hugo Lundhaug, 'The Fluid Transmission of Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteriesi, in *Coptic Literature in Context*, ed. Buzi, 213–227; Hugo Lundhaug, 'The Dissemination of Religious Knowledge through Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries', in *The Use and Dissemination of Religious Knowledge in Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser and Diana V. Edelman (Sheffield: Equinox, 2021), 212–233.

argued that monks would have been interested in the theological themes discussed throughout the Nag Hammadi texts, such as rejection of the body, demonology and striving for salvation through spiritual development – what can be said specifically about how the texts were read and handled by monks? What are the arguments that support a Pachomian origin in particular? What kind of practical implementations can be discerned from the materiality of the texts? These are the guiding questions throughout the following study.

The contribution offered here pertains to the material aspects of a Christian text collection which has been seen as heterodox in nature, read within a Christian environment often associated with orthodoxy. I aim to provide the reader with new contextualisation regarding the activities of Pachomian monks, as well as new perspectives on how texts with long histories retained their significance in new contexts. The Nag Hammadi collection contains an array of different texts from a variety of religious and historical backgrounds, and I demonstrate how these texts could be engaged, brought together and reused for the purpose of developing the spiritual acumen of one and the same group of people: Pachomian monks from the latter half of the fourth century.

The reading and handling of texts played an important role in the negotiation of Christian identity. This has been made clear by many previous scholars.[41] The present study contributes to perceptions of the negotiation of early Christian identities by bringing the use of texts that have been deemed 'heterodox' into our understanding of the creation of orthodox identities, not only as texts used to define oneself against, but also as a source of inspiration. I demonstrate how a monastic context and particularly a Pachomian one – invoking key factors in the creation of a strong sense of group identity – would have been ideal for reading and handling

---

[41] This topic is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

texts that could be problematised due to heterodoxy, without risking the sense of one's own orthodoxy. The study develops elements of scribal practices that went into the production of the Nag Hammadi codices, the monastic uses of textual duplicates and how their editorial processes reflect changes taking place in the theological climate of fourth-century Pachomian monasteries. I show how a Pachomian monk could use a text with potentially objectionable content as a protective shield against demonic attack or as inspiration for developing interests in the power of secret languages and letter magic. In short, this book could be said to offer a brief look into the material history of texts that have been perceived as heretical, read in light of Pachomian textual practices.

Situating and Outlining the Study

It should be noted that neither the latter subject matter nor the monastic-origin hypothesis put forward by Lundhaug and Jenott lend themselves to discussion of the issue of the texts' hypothetical original context(s) before they became part of the Nag Hammadi codices. Several, if not most, of the now extant Nag Hammadi texts were once composed in contexts other than fourth- to fifth-century Upper Egypt. In most cases, we are unable to say in what way the manuscripts we possess today differ from these 'original' texts. Those to which we now have access are in most cases Coptic translations from Greek, first created by both Christian and non-Christian groups (like the Hermetic texts in Codex VI, for example) in several kinds of situations. I suspect that much of the continual disagreement among scholars regarding the nature of the Nag Hammadi texts stems from the inability to distinguish between these two perspectives: the texts' hypothetical 'original' context in their Greek *Vorlagen*, on the one hand, and their translation, production and use as they exist today, on the other. Lundhaug and Jenott have made an important point regarding the second of

18

these two perspectives: it is easier to discuss the texts we have than the ones we do not have. They go further, however, and argue that scholars' focus should primarily be on the Nag Hammadi texts as we have them today – and their contexts – rather than the hypothetical originals, which are often harder to access.[42] I am not in full agreement with this last point. The internal scholarly discourse regarding the best way to approach the Nag Hammadi texts will be discussed in the next chapter, which also situates them within the broad and growing scholarship on early Christian reading and scribal habits. The aim of Chapter 1 is to contextualise the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts from a theoretical and methodological point of view, to cast light on various paradigms and ideological frames that threaten to obscure studies of them. The term 'Gnosticism' as an analytic category is discussed, along with other ideological preconceptions that have of late determined understandings of the texts' background. In Chapter 2, the story of the find is revisited from post-colonial perspectives and the growing trend among scholars to utilise the ancient sources' modern history in studies of their ancient past. The Nag Hammadi find story has recently generated considerable scholarly discussion. This chapter examines what we actually can and cannot know about the discovery of the texts and problematises the recent cries of Orientalism, charges levelled at some of the early scholars.

Nag Hammadi scholars have not ignored the recent surge and new findings generated by the growing scholarship on early Christian book culture – on the contrary.[43] Still, there are material features of the Nag Hammadi texts that remain to be explored, efforts to which this study contributes with Chapters 3 to 6, which

---

[42] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*. This view has been reiterated recently by Hugo Lundhaug, 'An Illusion of Textual Stability', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*, ed. Lied and Lundhaug, 21; and Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts, 117–118.

[43] For example, see part IV: 'Scribes and Manuscripts', in *The Nag Hammadi Library and Late Antique Egypt,* ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 329–490; Nongbri, *God's Library*.

are devoted to understudied aspects of these features. Chapter 3 analyses some of the more peculiar elements of the codicology of Nag Hammadi Codex I. Here I argue that its production corresponds to monastic practices and that Codex I – a very early multi-quire codex – may have come about by accident due to the inexperience of a novice monastic scribe. Chapter 4 analyses the previously neglected marginal markings found in Codex I and VIII, and it is argued that a Pachomian monastic setting best explains their use, reflecting the study habits of a monk developing his spiritual maturity. Chapter 5 studies the many references to the alphabetical and magical features of letters and sounds within the Nag Hammadi texts, which, it is argued, would have fitted particularly well within a Pachomian monastic context, reflecting mystic practices going as far back as Pachomius himself. Chapter 6 explores the recurrence of *nomina sacra* and the sacred symbol of the cross, arguing that the cross in particular was an important symbol in monks' continuous war against demonic oppression and that the physical books themselves would have functioned as protective artefacts in the fight against demons. Chapter 7 widens the scope to approach those Nag Hammadi texts that have been preserved in more than one version. As recent studies have shown, following a text's many changes and variants is an important step in reaching a more complete picture of texts as 'living' things, as opposed to viewing ancient texts as more or less corrupted versions of idealised originals. In this chapter the doublets and triplets are read in light of monastic pedagogical methods, and it is argued that the texts reflect a community with a high level of textual practice that used the handling of texts as a response to theological challenges and with the aim of spiritual development.

   The argument put forward throughout this volume, as it shifts through the various perspectives relating to the material features of the texts, is that the Nag Hammadi codices in all likelihood belonged to a Pachomian monastery of the late fourth or early fifth century and that they were used in a number of different ways to further the

spiritual and intellectual growth of the monks of the community. Thus, the texts were read for the purposes of edification, spiritual development and pedagogical practice while also functioning as protective artefacts in the continuous monastic warfare against evil spirits. These are strong claims to make at the outset, but they are not made lightly; rather, they will be advocated subsequently and repeatedly, chapter by chapter. This study is meant to concretise and solidify a provenance formulated at the discovery of the manuscripts, one which has been emphatically supported by Lundhaug, Jenott and other scholars ever since. Through references to actual practical implementation of the texts within a monastic context, and particularly a Pachomian one, the present study has the ambition not only to contribute to the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts had their origin in Pachomian monasticism, but also to show what kind of Pachomian monks would have used them and in what way.

Overview of the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi codices

Codex I
1 *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*
2 *The Apocryphon of James*
3 *The Gospel of Truth*
4 *The Treatise on the Resurrection*
5 *The Tripartite Tractate*

Codex II
1 *The Apocryphon of John*
2 *The Gospel of Thomas*
3 *The Gospel of Philip*

Codex V
1 *Eugnostos the Blessed*
2 *The Apocalypse of Paul*
3 *The First Apocalypse of James*
4 *The Second Apocalypse of James*
5 *The Apocalypse of Adam*

Codex VI
1 *The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*
2 *Thunder – Perfect Mind*
3 *The Authoritative Teaching*
4 *The Concept of Our Great Power*

Codex IX
1 *Melchizedek*
2 *The Thought of Norea*
3 *The Testimony of Truth*

Codex X
1 *Marsanes*

Codex XI
1 *The Interpretation of Knowledge*
2 *A Valentinian Exposition*
2a On the Anointing
2b On Baptism A
2c On Baptism B

(*cont.*)

4 *The Hypostasis of the Rulers*

5 *On the Origin of the World*

6 *The Exegesis on the Soul*

7 *The Book of Thomas*

Codex III

1 *Apocryphon of John*

2 *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*

3 *Eugnostos the Blessed*

4 *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*

5 *The Dialogue of the Saviour*

Codex IV

1 *Apocryphon of John*

2 *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*

5 Plato's *Republic* (588a −589b)

6 *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*

7 *The Prayer of Thanksgiving*

8 *Asclepius* 21–9

Codex VII

1 *The Paraphrase of Shem*

2 *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*

3 *The Apocalypse of Peter*

4 *The Teachings of Silvanus*

5 *The Three Steles of Seth*

Codex VIII

1 *Zostrianos*

2 *The Letter of Peter to Philip*

2d On the Eucharist A

2e On the Eucharist B

3 *Allogenes*

4 *Hypsiphrone*

Codex XII

1 *Sentences of Sextus*

2 *The Gospel of Truth*

3 Fragments

Codex XIII (leaves found in the cover of Codex VII)

1 *The Trimorphic Protonoia*

2 *On the Origin of the World*

22

1 | Christian Book Culture, New Philology and Gnosticism

The last fifty years have seen a considerable boom in the study of ancient book culture and reading and scribal habits. This chapter situates the study as a whole within these scholarly developments and raises some critical questions about previous approaches to the Nag Hammadi codices in light of what is now known of antique religious materiality.

Religious Change in Antiquity: Christian and Gnostic Texts

One thing that separated Christians from other religious people in antiquity was their relationship to texts and the book, or more precisely the codex. Few religions active in the Mediterranean Basin in antiquity considered texts sacred. The Jews were an exception, a people whose attachment to the written word was already strong when a new Jewish faction took form around the preacher Jesus and his followers. This was enhanced when the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE and their connection to the sacred land concomitantly diminished. This dimension of antique religiosity, its association with text and place, has been the subject of considerable recent study, pioneered and championed by Jonathan Z. Smith who highlighted a shift occurring in religious life in late antiquity which is central to the new-found focus. Once place-bound – earlier cults were centred around sacrifice to gods and religious customs attached to home, village

and city (what Smith calls 'here' and 'there' religion[1]) – several new religions appeared in Hellenistic times that were detached from place-boundness, one of which developed into Christianity. Religion was slowly being transformed into something that followed people 'anywhere'. Although simplifying processes that are undoubtedly more complex, these very broad generalising schemes concerning the nature of antique religiosity are still worth noting as they provide context to the very specific relation between Christianity and texts.

The role played by the book in these religious changes has been highlighted in a number of recent studies.[2] As Christianity slowly took over, the Graeco-Roman as well as Jewish blood sacrifice was slowly replaced by an internal sacrifice attached to the written and spoken word, whether internalised or spoken out loud. Guy Stroumsa, among others, has emphasised the end of sacrifice in light of the new importance placed on the written word and in particular the Christian development of the codex.[3] This new, easily transportable medium fitted perfectly into the religious landscape that was established in late antiquity.[4] Texts not only were mobile, like Smith's 'anywhere' religion, but also spoke to the growing focus on internalising religion. The image of Socrates is an early and ideal candidate to represent the beginning of a new

---

[1] Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Here, There and Anywhere', in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 323–339.

[2] One of the earliest discussions of this is found in Guy Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009 [2005]); and one of the more recent books on this is edited by Eduard Iricinschi and Chrysi Kotsifou: *Coping with Religious Change in the Late-Antique Eastern Mediterranean* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

[3] Guy Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), chapter 2.

[4] This part of the present chapter is a development of the conclusions of an article published as: Paul Linjamaa, 'The Diminishing Importance of Fate and Divine Femininity during the High and Late Roman Empire', *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 57:1 (2021): 81–121.

24

preoccupation with what has been called 'the care of the self'. Wandering the streets of Athens, questioning every value and unreflective statement he encountered, Socrates is identified by many key minds in the Western history of ideas as beginning something new.[5] In the early nineteenth century, Hegel argued that Socrates (or perhaps rather the symbol of him) was the first to challenge the old view of self where one's worth was based on one's success and value as a citizen – that is, in the eyes of others.[6] Socrates introduced a new moral stance which stressed the inward gaze; self-improvement was fundamental for meaningfulness. In Plato's *Alcibiades*, Socrates is described as stating that one's first duty to both oneself and others, was to 'take care of oneself' (ἐπιμελεία ἑαυτοῦ/cura sui); such care was the only way to reach true happiness (εὐδαιμονία)[7] – a focus picked up and promoted by Christians. A task which had only occupied philosophers and religious specialists, it was universalised by Christianity, as observed by Michel Foucault[8]

---

[5] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, trans. E. S. Haldane, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. I: *Greek Philosophy to Plato* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1822–1830]).

[6] Worth mentioning is that we are discussing male morality. Women's worth was determined by their relationship to men. This distinction was seldom a topic of discussion in the nineteenth century.

[7] *Alcibiades* 128e–129a; 124a–b, 133c–134b. The term εὐδαιμονία was a technical one involving much more than the colloquial and somewhat commonplace English term 'happy'. For more, see David L. Norton, *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[8] In his unfinished work, *The History of Sexuality*, he discusses the changes that occurred in the view of the self and sexuality with the dawn of Christianity. The new Christian ideal, Foucault claimed, was to master the will completely, a task which only philosophers had previously had the inclination to undertake. But as was obvious by outward appearance, most people never got that far. In Foucault's analysis, a new morality was advanced by early Christian writers, one of engaging in constant self-regulation and self-scrutiny in order to ascertain and ensure one had not fallen victim to desire and sin. Thus, one was no longer only measured outwardly by others, but inwardly by oneself. The act of confession was the prime example of this, according to Foucault, an occasion to scrutinise and confess one's failures. Sexual desire was of

25

(via Nietzsche[9]) and, more recently, the great scholar of late antiquity, Peter Brown.[10] The latter's work on the late ancient world is perhaps the best and most influential example of the continued interest in the themes of the ancient changes of self, and much of Foucault's notions are echoed here.[11] Brown also observes the importance of the written word and the physical aspects of the codex to the religious changes taking place in late antiquity.[12] As mentioned above, in recent years there has been a proliferation of literature devoted to early Christian reading and

course of particular importance for Foucault's study, an impulse that could cause great distress since it was interpreted as a sign of other and graver failings. In this new morality promoted by Christianity, people were expected, according to Foucault, to 'lead a life not of this world' ('une vie qui n'est pas de ce monde') (*Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), 234).

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche maintained in his work *On the Genealogy of Morality* (trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969 [1887])), that the broader morality governing ancient societies was rather occupied with what could be called a 'master morality'. He claimed that Christians introduced a new ideal which suppressed the natural tendency towards dominance, instead, universalising an internalisation of moral perfection. But the result was not, in Nietzsche's eyes, greater happiness, but rather the birth of a 'slave morality' that subjugated humans.

[10] Michel Foucault, 'The Ethics of the Concern for the Self', in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1996 [1984]).

[11] See the following works by Peter Brown: *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Harper and Row, 1972); 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church', in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 427–443; *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1988); *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). See also Peter Brown, G. W. Bowersock and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999). In his recently published biography (*Journeys of the Mind: A Life in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023)), chapters 83–84, Brown discusses his relation to Foucault and other theoreticians.

[12] The book and the written word play central roles in Brown's studies of the continuation and transformation of classical to Christian *paideia* (e.g. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 71–78; Brown, *Body and Society*, 252ff; see also Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité,* 4).

book culture and, as we can see, the topic attaches itself to the broader religious transformations taking place in antiquity.

There are some more specific and authoritative paradigms regarding the nature of late antique religiosity which should also be mentioned here, as they have undoubtably influenced the reception of texts that have been defined as 'heretical', like the Nag Hammadi collection. Much of the twentieth century was influenced by existentialist perspectives popular at the time, reflected, for example, in the work of the classicist E. R. Dodds. Dodds argued that people in the high and late Roman period and all the way up to late antiquity were troubled by a pressing feeling of alienation, an anxiety caused by the fear of Fate and the sense of smallness triggered by a growing knowledge of the vastness of the universe. This subsided, Dodds argued, as Christianity began to spread, supplanting anxiety with feelings of awe for the infinite provided by the idea of a pending immortality.[13] Dodds' model was broadly accepted and supported by many prominent historians, including France Cumont, Arthur Darby Nock and André-Jean Festugiere.[14] Its popularity coincided with another view advanced by classicists in which the victory of Christianity and the subsequent downfall of Graeco-Roman philosophy brought with it a vulgarisation and decline in scientific, philosophical and religious curiosity.[15] Gnostics had their foot in both camps, which was seen as divisive, as they were neither purely Christian nor philosophers.[16] The

---

[13] E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[14] This is discussed in Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 184; and developed by myself in Linjamaa, 'The Diminishing Importance of Fate'.

[15] As Peter Brown has previously suggested, a theme recently developed by Nicola Denzey Lewis. Brown, *Religion and Society*; Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate.*

[16] One of the few who treated the Gnostics as worthy of serious study was Hans Jonas. He credited the antique existential crisis – which he traced to the influence of 'Eastern' dualism – with the birth of Gnosticism, which in his view was its culmination, a crisis

reading of the Nag Hammadi texts, a corpus to this day known as containing 'the Gnostic Gospels', has been influenced by these overarching paradigms.[17]

The portrayal of Christianity as representing a decline in antique culture was, unsurprisingly, countered by theologians. Showing little interest in Gnostic texts, influential theologians, such as Adolf von Harnack, presented Christianity as a phenomenon apart, not determined by its historical surroundings or its Jewish and Graeco-Roman framework. Christianity was actually not a religion at all, some Protestant apologetics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued; it was only when Jesus' original teachings had become part of a formalised (read, Catholic) structure that Christianity as a religion, comparable to other religions, took form.[18] The first time we encounter the term Gnosticism, it is used in this way, to critique Catholicism for importing unnecessary foreign elements into a once pure phenomenon.[19] Yet the essentialising nature of Protestant theologians' search for the uniqueness of Christian origins was matched by the equally problematic

Gnostics solved by rejecting the evil creator god, the Demiurge/Jehova. See Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vols. I–II (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1954).

[17] The popularity of the term, the 'Gnostic Gospels', was popularised by, among other sources, the work by Elaine Pagels who, in 1979, published a very popular book by that title, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books). For more, see Karen King, *What Is 'Gnosticism'?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2003); Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*; Linjamaa, 'The Diminishing Importance of Fate'.

[18] I have expanded on this previously, in my chapter 'Gnosticism as Inherently Syncretistic? Identity Constructions among Ancient Christians and Protestant Apologetes', in *Theological and Philosophical Responses to Syncretism: Beyond the Mirage of Pure Religion*, ed. Mika Vähäkangas and Patrik Fridlund (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 25–40. The inspiration for this perspective is Jonathan Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine: On Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 43–45; H. S. Versnell, 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38:2 (1991): 177–197.

[19] Henry More, An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches Together with a Brief *Discourse of Idolatry, with Application to the Church of Rome* (London: James Flesher, 1669).

28

approaches represented by Dodds' existentialist views of ancient religions' ineffectiveness in meeting the inborn human need for comfort. Paradigms concerning the nature of ancient religion have included the view that Gnostic texts were something less valuable, diluted and an offshoot of something pure.

Studies in Early Christian Book Culture

Many previous studies of early Christian materiality have pursued the intent of 'the' author of a text, aiming to get as close as possible to an 'unpolluted' original text. This has generated a new and recalibrated approach to ancient texts as naturally 'fluid', highlighting the problem of always looking for texts we no longer have in texts that we do. Yet the perspective currently spreading among scholars of antique materiality, sometimes termed 'New Philology' (discussed in more detail below), has not, in my opinion, attracted enough attention to discourses of orthodoxy and heresy in the formation of early Christian texts. As Chris Keith recently argued, and as we shall see below and further into this study, Christians spoke of sacred things in the language of books and written words, even if there was not a book or written word at hand.[20] The written word was not just a medium of effective and long-lasting communication, it became a metaphor, a religious way of thinking.[21] But where do texts that have been deemed heretical fit into all this? What role did books play in promoting a particular kind of Christianity? In light of the revolutionising changes that took place from the second century – when the invention of the codex intersects with the changing view of the self – the question of the impact of the introduction of the book on religious life and practice,

---

[20] Chris Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–12.
[21] R. A. Karter, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 78–90.

although noticed by many, still remains understudied. This is even more true when it comes to the topic of the book's role in constructions of orthodoxy.

Not everyone, including those high in the social ranks, in church structures and monasteries (all the way up to bishop and abbot), was literate.[22] Studies of the socioeconomics of Christian and Graeco-Roman education have made it clear that only a minority of people underwent any formal education in the Roman Empire during the imperial age. Illiteracy was the norm. In Edward Watts' estimation, only between one-third and one-tenth of the population in the high imperial period were literate to the level of being able to read and write basic documents.[23] Some estimate it as even lower.[24] Very few people completed the time-consuming and costly project of a specialised education that went beyond basic literacy. Those who received formal education of any sort would most likely have focused on mastering basic skills in reading and writing and not much more. Edward Watts argues that many of those who began such basic literacy training would not have finished and of those who did – as literacy is a skill that has to be developed and maintained continuously for a long time before becoming permanent – many would probably have forgotten much of what was learned as they continued their lives, which seldom necessitated reading and writing.[25] In short, anything beyond basic literacy was

---

[22] Christoph Markschies, 'What Ancient Christian Manuscripts Reveal about Reading (and about Non-Reading)', in *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures*, ed. Anna Krauß, Jonas Leipziger and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 203–205.

[23] See Edward Watts, 'Education: Speaking, Thinking, and Socializing', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 467–486.

[24] W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Harris estimates that at no point would literacy have exceeded 10–15 per cent. For a more optimistic reading, see Ann Hanson, 'Ancient Literacy', in *Literacy in the Roman Word*, ed. J. L. Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 159–198.

[25] Watts, 'Education', 469.

reserved for the elite spheres of society and, furthermore, was not centred on furthering a knowledge of ethics or spiritual pursuits but, rather, rhetoric and a career in public life. Wealthy literati and officials with administrative duties kept scribes, copyists and slaves, lectors educated for the purpose of handling texts.[26] Books were copied and disseminated through literary networks.[27] Christians were very much part of this culture. High-ranking people within ecclesiastical structures would be tasked with having copies made and disseminating texts and letters deemed beneficial for the congregations in a particular network.[28] The dawn of organised monasticism in fourth-century Egypt, however, brought new forms of concentrated literate and scribal milieux, where books and texts of all kinds were copied and produced, kept and disseminated, read and debated. It is largely thanks to these libraries and scribal milieux that a considerable number of early Christian texts have been preserved from antiquity.[29]

Nonetheless, although book production and reading belonged to the sphere of literate elites, the book was still useful for illiterate Christians. As Christoph Markschies has recently argued, textual communities were not necessarily reading communities; that is, people could rise to power without the ability to read (knowledge of Scripture was important, however), using books as symbols of knowledge or for practical gain – as protective amulets and signs of

---

[26] Roger Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[27] Raymond J. Starr, 'The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World', *Classical Quarterly* 37:1 (1987): 213–223; Felix Reichmann, 'The Book Trade at the Time of the Roman Empire', *Library Quarterly* 8:1 (1938): 40–76; A. F. Norman, 'The Book Trade in Fourth-Century Antioch', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 80 (1960): 122–126.

[28] Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*.

[29] J. W. Thompson, *Ancient Libraries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1940); Herman A. Peterson, 'The Genesis of Monastic Libraries', *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 45:3 (2010): 320–332. For a collection of essays which studies the continuation of monasticism with the classic *paideia* culture, see Lilian I. Larsen and Samuel Rubenson (eds.), *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical 'Paideia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

authority, for example.[30] What is more, as already mentioned, as Christianity grew and developed, it became clear that its language was very much built around the idea of the book, Gospel and letters. The book was a metaphor as much as a physical object, providing its owner protection and legitimacy as well as being an object at the centre of performed religion.

In 1 Corinthians 2:13–14 Paul makes a distinction between human knowledge and divine wisdom, 'words not taught by human wisdom' (οὐκ ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις).[31] The ability to communicate with the divine without words had been lost when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, and it was necessary to reinstate it. This was achieved through reading or hearing Scripture, divine wisdom in printed form.[32] Today, most scholars would agree that silent reading did occur in antiquity, but that the norm would have been to read aloud.[33] The persistent arguments claiming the impossibility of silent reading[34] are perhaps a legacy of form criticism, an influential scholarly perspective in Bible Studies that viewed the earliest Christians as uninterested in the written word. The first Christian texts have been portrayed as being of a low level of literacy compared to Graeco-Roman literature, a result of the humble beginnings of the Jesus movement. This introduced a dichotomy between artless Christian literature (Kleinliteratur) and advanced Graeco-Roman literature (Hochliteratur). But as

---

[30] Markschies, 'What Ancient Christian Manuscripts Reveal', 212.

[31] If nothing else is indicated, all the translations of Bible texts (including the Hebrew Bible) that are referenced in this book come from The New Revised Standard Version, ed. and trans. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[32] For a study of early Christian attitudes towards the spoken and heard word, see Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[33] A. K. Gavrilov, 'Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity', *Classical Quarterly* 47:1 (1997): 56–73; William A. Johnson, 'Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity', *The American Journal of Philology* 121:4 (2000): 593–627; Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscripts*, 18–23.

[34] Josef Balogh, '*Voces Paginarum*: Beiträge Zur Geschichte des lauten Lesens und Schreibens', *Philologus* 82 (1927): 84–109.

32

studies into Christian book culture advance, this division becomes ever more problematic, assuming and placing the early literate Christians in an unreasonable opposition to their cultural context.[35]

In a recent study, Chris Keith has expressed concern for what he argues is an overvaluation of the importance of the spoken word and oral tradition, leading to the view that texts were less important than the spoken word for early Christians.[36] And it is true that some contemporary scholars still treat early Christian scribal practice as unimportant for understanding the development of early Christianity.[37] Kim Haines-Eitzen and many others have shown the error of such analyses but, considering the recent surge in scholastic interest in material culture and the way scribal practices determine the transmission of early Christian texts – which are the main sources for our understanding of early Christian history – there is no immediate danger that materiality is being neglected or the scribe's contribution to early Christian history disregarded.[38]

---

[35] Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 16.

[36] Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscript*, 5–7. Keith acknowledges that some ancient people themselves portrayed the written word as less valuable, and favoured the spoken word. This has trickled down to inform the modern scholarly overemphasis of the spoken word. Considering the ease with which texts lend themselves to manipulation and outright forgery, a healthy dose of mistrust is to be expected, even from ancients who lacked our modern training in text criticism. The ancient literary style of writing in other people's names was widespread; consider the century-long debate concerning who *actually* wrote the Gospels. It was not considered an aberration to – in the name of a good cause – exaggerate or miscredit your opponents or boost the merits of your own arguments. This is common in the ancient heresiological genre, on both sides of what today is sometimes called proto-orthodoxy. Thus, if one were really interested in knowing what Jesus said or in getting details about some other historical event, perhaps it is not so strange that early Christians favoured the spoken word, that they wanted to look people in the eye and get the news from the horse's mouth. This being said, this does not mean that ancients did not see value in the written word.

[37] For example, Robin Lane Fox, 'Literacy and Power in Early Christianity', in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 131.

[38] Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*.

From one perspective, the primacy of the written word over the spoken word and 'performed' religion means that it has been anything but undervalued since the Reformation onward. The importance of the Christian canon has formed the way the phenomenon 'religion' itself has been conceptualised; not only has it determined our understanding of religions in cultures differing from our own, but it has also influenced the way we look at ancient culture in general; the latter must be viewed as just as exotic as, for example, cultures in the East, which generated considerable interest and excitement as they were discovered by scholars of religion.[39]

Nevertheless, it is highly likely that the very first Christians (many of whom had been Jews) did not produce texts. In light of this and the estimated statistics on ancient literacy, the first Christians (Jesus and his immediate followers) were probably illiterate or, as some scholars have suggested, perhaps just uninterested in recording anything in writing due to the conviction that the world would soon come to an end with Jesus' return.[40] As the first letters and Gospels were put to paper, the writers showed little awareness or interest in the finer points of rhetorical strategy popular among the literate elite of the time. How the particular literary features of the Gospels – and also, to some extent, the letters of Paul – related to their intellectual milieux is an ever-debated topic.[41] In any case, the lack of rhetorical 'finesse' in Scripture was

---

[39] As Gregory Schopen has argued of Buddhism, early religious scholars' presuppositions about what is important in religion (governed by their Protestant context) determined much of their studies as well as their results, highlighting the search and study of text while neglecting archaeological sources and religious practice. Gregory Schopen, 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism', *History of Religions* 31:1 (1991): 1–23.

[40] Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1971 [1934]), 1; see also Johan Nilsson, 'As a Fire beneath the Ashes: The Quest for Chinese Wisdom within Occultism, 1850–1949' (PhD diss., Lund University, 2020).

[41] Was it the new forms of *bios* writings? Or was the style of rhetoric a reflection that the intended audience was not the higher spheres of society? Answers to these questions have little consensus in scholarship.

34

addressed by later Christian writers, many of whom *did* belong to the literate elite. Some tried to turn the modest origins of Scripture into a strength, like Origen of Alexandria, who wrote in the third century that the 'pure' style of writing in the Bible was a positive quality in that it meant it lacked the manipulating tendencies of rhetoric and sophistry.[42] Other early Christians simply rejected the heritage of ancient *paideia* by categorising Graeco-Roman traditions as unsound or uninteresting.[43] Yet the dependence of early Christian authors on *paideia*, producing works that could be viewed as its continuation, has been the topic of many fine recent studies.[44] The early Christians singled themselves out in antique literacy not only because few other religious groups produced sacred texts as they did, but also because what they wrote (Gospels, for example) – and perhaps more importantly, to whom they wrote (*everyone*) – did not follow expected patterns. It is perhaps as a result of these circumstances that it is among Christians that the revolution in book culture – the introduction of the codex – would first take place.

Compared to the roll, the codex was more efficient, easier to carry, less fragile and cheaper. It was better in almost every way.[45] According to estimates produced by Roberts and Skeat, the codex accounted for only 1 per cent of books in the first century, 2 per cent in the second century, 17 in the third, 70 in the fourth and finally

---

[42] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.62.

[43] See, for example, Epiphanius *Panarion* I.3–8 for an overview of the errors of pagan learning. However, it is hard to imagine even the most ardent opponent of Graeco-Roman learning being unaffected by it, especially considering the heritage of the educational system as well as the fact that the system had been structured to suit the needs of the Roman ruling elites for centuries before Christianity emerged. For more on this, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion.*

[44] For example, Lilian and Rubenson (eds.), *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity*.

[45] It could be held in one hand, it was easier to open, close and reopen, it was more convenient to store, a greater number of words could be fitted on expensive papyrus/ parchment since one wrote on both sides of a codex leaf. A codex could hold much more text without becoming impractical.

89 per cent in the fifth.[46] As noted, it has been suggested that it was the unique nature of Christian literacy that facilitated the revolution in book making in the second to fifth centuries. Christian texts were not just read aloud from start to finish, they were studied, scrutinised and dissected in ways that made the roll obsolete and impractical. Harry Gamble has argued that it was the popularity of Paul's letters that made the need for a new method of keeping and handling texts acute.[47] Paul's writings were not attached to an oral tradition in the same way as the gospel texts, but were sent as letters. They gained authority quickly, and were copied, imitated and widely circulated in the Christian communities around the Mediterranean. They were most likely the first Christian texts to be kept in a collection,[48] while the first known prototypes of the Bible, like Marcion's, displayed Paul's letters at the fore.[49] They would, however, have been too voluminous to be kept in a single roll; moreover, they were not written in a narrative form meant to be read from beginning to end, as were the Gospels. A codex would have enabled readers to flip between Paul's letters at leisure, comparing the different content and more easily accessing the particular topic of interest. They were cause for study and discussion, and quickly gained almost universal recognition among Christians as

[46] Colin H. Roberts and Theodore C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 36–37. Nongbri has argued for an even higher percentage (*Gods Library*, 19–22).

[47] Other reasons have also been suggested. For example, Roberts postulated that it was an accident that the first Gospels were written in codex form but that the sacredness of the text was transferred to the codex medium, which is the reason why Christians favoured the codex to such an extent. There is not much, in my opinion, that supports such a stance. Colin H. Roberts, 'The Codex', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 40 (1954): 169–204.

[48] P46 is the earliest manuscript containing Paul's letters, dated to around the year 200. See Harry Y. Gamble, 'The Pauline Corpus and the Early Christian Book', in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 265–280.

[49] Dieter T. Roth, *The Text of Marcion's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

36

authoritative.[50] In Chapter 3 I extend our understanding of the early codex's development by looking more closely at one of the first multi-quire codices we possess: Codex I of the Nag Hammadi collection.

The work of Larry Hurtado and Roger Bagnall has done much over the last two decades to add further perspectives to early Christian book culture, chiefly through new socioeconomical and scribal approaches.[51] Hurtado drew attention to, among other things, the visual characters of Christian manuscripts: abbreviations, corrections, writing style, reading aids. Hurtado has argued convincingly that these aspects contain a great deal of information about who produced a text and how it was read. As recent studies have shown, there are indications even in rabbinic literature – the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud – that there were rules or guidelines when copying Scripture, parameters a scribe should follow relating to layout.[52]

Bagnall drew attention to everyday perspectives, to the economic and social resources that supported the production of different codices, which offer vital facts when seeking insights into the context of the people behind a particular text. Much of his work – as well as that of others like Gamble, Roberts and Haines-Eitzen – rests on the dynamic contribution made by Eric Turner, chiefly

---

[50] Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 58–66.

[51] Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). As Nongbri notes (*God's Library*, 12–13), Hurtado's work has the drawback that it divides early Christian literature into New Testament, Old Testament and Other Early Christian texts, a system that does not reflect the actual content of early Christian books, where one can find a mixture of these categories as well as non-Christian texts.

[52] For example, scribes were taught to start certain sentences on a new line, sentences like 'In the beginning . . .' (Gen 1:1) or 'How fair' (Num 24:5), and to take into account the aesthetic quality of certain letters or the use of spaces when planning the copying of a text. For more on these aspects, see Javier Del Barco, 'From Scroll to Codex: Dynamics of Text Layout Transformation in the Hebrew Bible', in *From Scrolls to Scrolling*, ed. Bradford A. Anderson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 91–118.

with his seminal volume *The Typology of the Early Codex*.[53] Turner did what had not been done before; he compared and systematised a large number of actual antique manuscripts and their material features, such as dimensions and manufacturing techniques.

Something that has changed considerably since Turner's days is the evaluation of the palaeographical features of ancient texts. Before radiocarbon dating – and in some cases after it – a text's age was regarded as determinable by identifying its writing style. The form of print as well as aesthetic ideals were at times standardised.[54] Turner identified three main groups (during 0–300 CE) separated by different features, such as the number of pen strokes when a scribe wrote a letter, the direction the text leaned and the width and length of letters. The accuracy of this technique has been problematised, most recently by Brent Nongbri, who responded to a general appeal made by scholars like Bagnall and Hurtado to scrutinise the paleology of ancient writings, and then levelled severe critique at the viability of palaeographical methodology.[55] The degree of uncertainty in this subjective method is very high, leaving palaeography virtually unsustainable as a basis from which to draw conclusions regarding a text's age – or any detailed provenance, for that matter.

Radiocarbon dating, a technique which, by identifying a papyrus' or ink's carbon offprint, gives an estimate spanning two dates, has also resulted in inexact dating of texts.[56] If a text is radiocarbon dated to 200–400, it is just as likely that the tested material derived from the year 200 as the year 400, and all the dates between. Owing to the tendency to find older texts more interesting ('older is better'

---

[53] Eric G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977). See also Eric G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987 [1971]).

[54] Ruth Barbour, *Greek Literary Hands AD 400–600* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); C. H. Roberts, *Greek Literary Hands 350 BC–AD 400* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); and Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*.

[55] Nongbri, *God's Library*, 56–72.

[56] Nongbri, *God's Library*, 72–80.

or, rather, 'older equals more "original"') there has been a trend in favouring the earliest date when presenting a find or, in an attempt to be unbiased, to give the intermediate date. Both these ways of rendering the results of radiocarbon dating are erroneous, since one cannot say where in the span a text originates. This, and the fact that one cannot be sure when a codex was made – whether the material used for a text actually comes from the same period as the manufacture of the book, or if it is older – makes the 'dating game', as Nongbri has called it, a very precarious business.[57]

After this short overview of the materiality of early Christian texts – which situates the following study of the Nag Hammadi codices in an ever-growing field of research – let us now scrutinise some specific methodological trends which have developed in relation to the Nag Hammadi texts.

Hypothetical Origins and New Philology

A recent trend in historical studies of antiquity is the so-called New Philological perspective.[58] As discussed briefly above, I subscribe to the approach that treats each ancient manuscript as the unique specimen it is. At the outset of any study on ancient texts one needs to detach oneself from modern preconceptions of what actually constitutes an author and a literary work. Contemporary views are much informed by the changes that took place in European book production with the invention of the printing

---

[57] See an excellent discussion of these issues in Nongbri, *God's Library*, 47–82.

[58] Also sometimes termed 'Material Philology'. A pioneering work for this new perspective was Stephen G. Nichols, 'The New Philology: Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum* 65:1 (1990): 1–10. For an overview of the development of the field, see Hugo Lundhaug and Liv Ingeborg Lied, 'Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 1–19; Lundhaug, 'Material Philology', 108–110.

39

press. No ancient manuscript is exactly like another. Each text had to be copied by hand, editorial changes and additions were common and the idea of an author being intimately tied to an 'original' was not self-evident at all. In fact, when copying a text in antiquity, if the situation called for it, transcribers did not shy away from changing, adding to or breaking away from a *Vorlage*. The ending of the Gospel of Mark, the attributions of the Gospels and the pseudo-Pauline letters are perhaps the most known examples of ancient views of what was allowed to be done with a literary work or what an 'author' really was.

New Philology is an important perspective that foregrounds the distinctions between modern and ancient views on the written word. It also calls for historical studies to be substantiated in the ancient material, that is, in actual manuscripts. One cannot, without serious caveats, draw conclusions about events in a certain period solely based on material that derives from a much later period, and studies of the earliest *Christianities* have to take this into consideration. Those texts we possess – whether the Nag Hammadi texts, the Pauline letters, the Gospels or almost any other early Christian writing – have been exposed to copying, re-copying, editing, translation and sometimes re-translation, often all of these. This is a methodological problem that constrains most historical studies of antiquity. Not only did ancient manuscripts undergo an editorial process which is often impossible to describe exactly, but the fluidity of ancient texts is not always clear from the texts that we do possess. Texts were produced for particular purposes, often to be read aloud (in liturgical situations, for example), or for study, reference and the like, which is why the shift signalled by *New* Philology focuses on the performance, reading and handling of texts, rather than the intention of an original author and the context of a hypothetical original version.

It is indisputable that many early studies devoted to the Nag Hammadi collection focused on ascertaining details about the texts' 'original' context, and not the Coptic versions that are actually

preserved. In a recent study of early Christian and Jewish texts (including the Nag Hammadi texts) from the perspective of New Philology, Hugo Lundhaug and Liv Ingeborg Lied observe, 'A perspective informed by New Philology has several consequences when applied to the study of Christian and Jewish texts from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Rather than speculating regarding hypothetical original texts and their contexts, the emphasis is on the production, use, and historical context of each individual copy.'[59] These are laudable objectives. Moreover, Lundhaug has stated that Nag Hammadi scholarship should 'focus primarily on the texts as we have them in the manuscripts, without trying to get back to an earlier form of the text'.[60] However, in this study the New Philology perspective is treated as one of many tools in the historian's toolbox, not as the only or principal way forward. It is true, if a textual source is not preserved from the period we wish to study or if we lack direct textual evidence – surely the case in studies of many antique phenomena – we face a difficult methodological problem. But this does not have to entail abandoning claims to that context.

A purist approach to New Philology would demolish any larger picture of history. Most history books would need to be rewritten or, rather, expunged.[61] Thus, I approach New Philology as *one* perspective that brings another important piece to a larger puzzle, one that makes the important point that we need to cease equating textual fluidity with textual corruption. Rather than viewing textual fluidity as a deviation from an original, the changes and alterations

---

[59] Lundhaug and Lied, 'Studying Snapshots', 7.

[60] Lundhaug, 'An Illusion of Textual Stability'.

[61] The manuscripts we have that are attributed to Plato and Aristotle are much more problematic than those that contain biblical books. The ancient manuscripts of Plato's writings are almost all from the common era, i.e., 300 years after Plato. T. W. Allen, *Codex Oxoniensis Clarkianus*, 2 vols. (Leiden: 1898–1899); John Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997); Aristotle's works are even more problematic, surviving mostly through medieval manuscript transmission.
Felix Grayeff, 'The Problem of the Genesis of Aristotle's Text', *Phronesis* 1:2 (1956): 105–122.

we observe in texts should be regarded as predictable and organic reactions to new contexts and uses. We should treat them as the norm rather than as anomalies.[62] In this study I demonstrate that recognising and using material aspects of ancient manuscripts *can* serve more than one master. Looking more closely at the material aspects of the Nag Hammadi texts offers clues as to their background *before* they took their present form, as well as – admittedly, perhaps chiefly – casting light on the context of their manufacture and use in fourth-century Egypt.

As recent studies have shown, following a text's many changes and variants is a vital part of attaining a more complete picture of texts as 'living' things, in contrast to the older paradigms wherein ancient texts are treated as more or less corrupt versions of idealised originals.[63] This perspective is of particular importance in Chapter 7 of this study, where I discuss those Nag Hammadi texts that have been preserved in more than one version. That being said, most of the texts in the Nag Hammadi collection – probably because they have been branded as heretical – do not offer an opportunity to approach the 'lived' perspective which has becomes so acclaimed among Bible scholars. In the case of the Nag Hammadi texts, we can very seldom – as Wasserman and Knust recently and so successfully achieved with regard to John 7:53–8:11 – compare a multitude of different versions, over many centuries, in order to track the changes in the living history of a text (not to mention a single *passage* of a specific text).[64] This study is devoted to those texts that did *not* end up as Scripture. So, how should we treat the neglected textual history of writings that have been branded

---

[62] Lundhaug, 'An Illusion of Textual Stability', 20. Lundhaug is influenced by, among others, John Bryant, 'Witness and Access: The Uses of the Fluid Text', *Textual Cultures* 2:1 (2007): 18–19.

[63] Discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

[64] Tommy Wasserman and Jennifer Knust, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

42

heretical? This is what the present study is dedicated to: the material history of texts that became irrelevant, or worse, banned or destroyed because of their content.

The Nag Hammadi Codices as the Heretics' Bible

The search for 'pure' origins goes far beyond the focus on texts. As we have seen, eighteenth-century Christian theologians were engaged with interpreting the earliest Christian writings in order to define once and for all the 'essence' of Christianity, what made it stand out in comparison to other ancient religions. Below, I briefly problematise this approach and argue that similar motives – which cannot be identified as anything other than sheer apologetics – have played a part in more recent and less convincing scholarship on the Nag Hammadi texts.

Many early studies of the texts were polluted by the negative connotations attached to the term Gnosticism. The problem goes all the way back to the Church Fathers' polemical portrayals of an imagined collective enemy identified as 'the Gnostics', a paradigm which has too often been applied uncritically.[65] Influential theologians like Adolf von Harnack have portrayed 'the Gnostics' as people who were prone to mythologising and distorting, lured in by syncretistic 'Hellenism';[66] however, after 1945, when the Nag Hammadi writings were discovered, the scholarship on Gnosticism began to change. Many of the texts in the collection actually fit some of the specific patterns that the Church Fathers rejected, but the

---

[65] Irenaeus of Lyon disputed those who claimed possession of a certain knowledge (*gnosis*) which Irenaeus viewed as a 'knowledge falsely so called' (probably citing 1 Tim 6:20–21). For a history of the use of the term, see King, *What Is Gnosticism?*

[66] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma I*, trans. Neil Buchman (New York: Dover Publishing, 1961 [1886–1889]); King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, 55–70; Linjamaa, 'Gnosticism as Inherently Syncretistic?'.

extent to which patristic polemics had influenced the definition of the category, producing stereotypes, also became clear, as demonstrated by Michael A. Williams.[67] Owing to Williams' work, and that of many others following in his footsteps, scholars examining the Nag Hammadi texts today have largely ceased using the term Gnosticism, arguing that it is just too laden with ambiguity and apologia to be applied in an effective and neutral way. I sympathise with Williams' view that we should simply relinquish the term as a category in early Christian studies, including studies of the Nag Hammadi texts;[68] not all agree, however. Alexandr Khosroyev, for example, has argued that the Nag Hammadi texts would not have interested 'mainstream' Christians because they were 'Gnostic', that is, too strange and 'syncretistic'.[69] Yet this forced dichotomy of Christian/Gnostic, pure/syncretistic does not reflect historical actuality,[70] leaving us still struggling with the influence of the old

---

[67] Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also Morton Smith, 'The History of the term Gnostikos', in *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 796–807.

[68] A recent trend among some scholars is to narrow down the use of the terms 'Gnostic' and 'Gnosticism' to refer to the Sethian material, beginning with those Irenaeus first called 'multitude of Gnostics' at the end of Book I of *Against Heresies* (chapters 29–31). See *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd edn, ed. Bentley Layton and David Brakke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021); David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). I simply use the term 'Sethian' when referring to this category to avoid confusion. But, as Rasimus has shown, the Sethian category is not unproblematic and most likely includes several different groups and myths. For example, the creation story of the Ophite traditions was most likely foundational for what we today call Sethianism. Nevertheless, I wonder if this category becomes clearer if we instead call it Gnostic, which brings with it many other preconceived notions.

[69] Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, 10–13.

[70] I have previously reasoned that the term 'syncretism' is a poor analytic concept in historical studies on religion (unless the category is clearly defined). See Linjamaa, 'Gnosticism as Inherently Syncretistic?'.

44

apologetic paradigms depicting Gnostics in generalising and often negative terms.[71]

On the other hand, scholars in their eagerness to approach the ancient material without the preconceptions attached to the term 'Gnosticism' have ignored or denied the existence of certain phenomena in their interpretations of the texts' background, leading to other problems. One example, which I have studied in detail in previous works, concerns Christian determinism,[72] when a number of Church Fathers accused their so-called Gnostic opponents of immoral behaviour resulting from their deterministic convictions. Michael Williams dismissed this as a polemical device that had been generalised and showed that many of the so-called Gnostic texts did not contain a deterministic world view at all. His critique of determinism as a polemical trope has since been interpreted as support for the notion that Christian determinism was an outright invention, that it never existed. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, for example, has stated that the discovery of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts has revealed 'for example, that determinism, in spite of the heresiologists, did not characterise Gnostic anthropology'.[73] But, do we really know that? Or is it just another generalisation, this time attached to rejection of the term Gnosticism? As I have shown, there were clear and vibrant representations of early Christian determinism from the second century, some of which found their way into the Nag

---

[71] For another recent example, see Panayotis Coutsoumpos, 'The Strong/Gnosis: Paul, and the Corinthian Community', in *Paul and Gnosis*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 195. Here the ethics of so-called 'Gnostics' (what is meant by that is not explained) are portrayed as prone to either renouncing the world or libertine behaviour.

[72] Paul Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate *(NHC I,5): A Study of Early Christian Determinism and Philosophy of Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[73] Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, 'A Way of Salvation: Becoming Like God in Nag Hammadi', *Numen* 60:1 (2013): 72–73. This has been repeated by Nicola Denzey Lewis in regard to the Valentinians. She writes that there is 'no substance to Irenaeus's claim' that Valentinians were determinists, but that 'it is merely a standard critique of an opponent's theological position applied, mutatis mutandis, to the Valentinians' (*Cosmology and Fate*, 27).

Hammadi codices.[74] We should, therefore, be careful not to reject certain phenomena completely merely because they have been attached to polemical discourses and, as such, have been erroneously represented.

If some scholars have approached the Nag Hammadi texts from the perspective of notions we find among nineteenth-century heresiologists and Christian theologians – people who regarded 'real' Christianity as a pure and unmitigated religious phenomenon separate from 'Gnosticism' – some contemporary scholars have supported a similar notion, while taking their departure in and 'siding with' Gnosticism. In the Nag Hammadi codices, such scholars have argued, we find the voices the Church managed to silence. Gnosticism is represented as a suppressed religion that once thrived but now lives on only at the fringes and among religious minorities, in mysticism and occult circles naturally drawn to the forbidden and dangerous. This view of Gnosticism, with its origins in nineteenth-century European esoteric milieux, was revitalised in academia in the wake of the Nag Hammadi discoveries.[75] The esoteric and occult milieux of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be viewed as apologetic forebears of Gnosticism in which the idea was widespread that Gnosticism represented what can be termed 'the ancient wisdom narrative'. This paradigm – identified and employed by, among others, Wouter Haanegreaaf[76] – has been part of Western esotericism since the Renaissance and involves the notion that a universal spirituality has always been present behind the scenes: a hidden tradition that has been conserved in esoteric circles in the face of conventionality. I have previously argued that

---

[74] Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, passim.

[75] Paul Linjamaa, 'The Reception of *Pistis Sophia* and Gnosticism: Uncovering the Link between Esoteric Milieus and Contemporary Academia', *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 22:1 (2022): 1–39.

[76] Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

46

this way of viewing Gnosticism, as part of a prevailing ancient wisdom tradition, is still current in academia.[77] Rather than being a simple polemic invention, Gnosticism has been treated, particularly since the seventies when the Nag Hammadi texts began appearing in translation, as a suppressed and progressive form of early Christianity which was marginalised by the mainstream patriarchal Church – a view of Gnosticism that is as ideologically driven as rejecting it as a form of vulgar Christianity. Yet it is a view that has been used to promote contemporary egalitarian and modern gender discourses by depicting ancient Gnostics as pioneers fighting for universal ideals only recently realised in our Western societies, such as gender equality, female leadership and progressive views of sex.[78]

This study does not take its departure from the Gnosticism–Christianity dichotomy – rejecting both the narrative of a pure and authentic Church under attack by syncretistic and bizarre heretics and that of an evil Church suppressing a progressive form of Christianity that, incidentally, upheld 'universal' ideals like those in our own liberal societies. In my mind neither paradigm has any convincing basis in firsthand sources and both are chiefly ideological constructions. Thus, in the following I will not treat Christian texts that were later branded heretical or Christian texts that were controversial on account of their theological positionings as anything less or other than Christian. In the next chapter we will return to some examples of how the ideological constructions surrounding the concept of Gnosticism is potentially misleading scholars of early Christianity and in particular those focused in the Nag Hammadi texts.

---

[77] Linjamaa, 'The Reception of *Pistis Sophia*'.

[78] With this 'counter-cultural' perspective of Gnosticism, one is liable to overlook those people, ancient as well as modern, who identified as Gnostics but who did not fit the counter-cultural mould, such as Clement of Alexandria in antiquity (a Church Father who considered himself a Gnostic) or Bricaud's *Église Gnostique Universelle*.

Conclusion

The chief implications of the above deliberations, which have a bearing on the following study, are threefold. Firstly, judging from studies in ancient literacy, the Nag Hammadi texts must be considered as having been produced by and for the direct use of a small educated societal minority, which does not, of course, exclude the possibility of their being part of a larger context to which an illiterate majority also had access. Secondly, this chapter has identified various obstructive paradigms and ideological frames that threaten to obscure study of the Nag Hammadi texts. I am convinced that the murky term 'Gnosticism', as an analytic category, does more harm than good in studies of antique religion – reasons for which have been give above – and thus it will not be used in this study. That being said, aspiring to impartiality, I strive neither to neglect actual differences and particularities attached to individual texts nor to disregard conclusions that could go beyond the texts' immediate context. Thus, I am not bound only to New Philology. Lastly, the fact that the texts contain extracanonical material which was banned in the second half of the fourth century does not mean that they could not have been read by orthodox Christians before and after the ban. But neither can their attachment to heresy simply be ignored. A study of the Nag Hammadi texts' history should be informed by negotiations over orthodoxy and the dynamics of Christian identity constructions.

As was made clear at the beginning of this chapter, the changes taking place in religion and the view of the self in antiquity were intimately tied to the developments in book culture. Thus, what follows not only casts light on the Nag Hammadi codices' specific context(s) but also contributes to the larger discourse pertaining to the development of religion and self in antiquity by scrutinising one of our most important and voluminous textual finds from the period. The next chapter lays the final foundation stone for the rest of the study by revisiting the story attached to the Nag Hammadi discovery.

2 | The Find Story and the Ethics of Postmodern Manuscript Archaeology

This chapter analyses the find story attached to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, a topic of much scholarly debate of late. Some of the early researchers engaged with the elucidation of the texts' discovery have been accused of Orientalism, which has ultimately begun to affect the way the texts' ancient background and use has been interpreted. In this chapter the find story is revisited, and it is argued that the accusations of earlier scholars' Orientalism are exaggerated; furthermore, this is a much less problematic aspect of Nag Hammadi scholarship than the contemporary romanticisation of Gnosticism.

Following the Evidence

Recently, a new and much welcomed perspective has developed within the field of early Christian materiality. Several large projects are currently focused on tracing the modern history of ancient manuscripts with the aim of investigating the question of how best to deal with those appearing on the black market without a clear archaeological provenance.[1] Brent Nongbri, one of the pioneers of this new perspective, highlights the importance of being aware of the

---

[1] Two Oslo-based projects are currently studying this question: *The Lying Pen of Scribes: Manuscript Forgeries, Digital Imaging, and Provenance Research* (a new RCN-funded project with the PI Liv Ingeborg Lied), and a project led by Brent Nongbri: *EthiCodex,* aiming to develop a new methodology and ethics for manuscript studies (this, too, is RCN-funded).

49

modern history of the manuscripts we study in order to avoid labouring under preconceived notions when pursuing their ancient contexts[2] – a precept I follow here.

Since very few ancient texts are discovered or exhumed by professional archaeologists, with most turning up on the black market in antiquities, it is worthwhile retracing the steps of a manuscript's discovery and trying to ascertain the details surrounding it; finding the discovery site can, understandably, provide clues to the historical background of a text. There are, however, several circumstances that face anyone who ventures to establish the facts surrounding an ancient text's modern discovery. Nongbri sums up the difficulties as follows:

> [There are] several reasons why the exact details of a discovery of ancient books can be very difficult to reconstruct after the fact: Finds of books can be divided almost immediately upon discovery and dispersed among those present. Books can be further subdivided by intermediaries. News of a discovery can quickly attract antiquities dealers from out of town who can purchase and further scatter parts of a find while at the same time mixing the materials from the new discovery with their existing inventories. The fear of confiscation by the government can lead to the suppression of accurate information and the production of false stories.[3]

Enormous efforts have been made to retrace the steps of the Nag Hammadi texts' discovery and how they ended up on Cairo's black market for ancient artefacts in 1945. Ultimately, although the texts' likely discovery site has been narrowed down to the general area adjacent to the southern Egyptian town that has given the text collection its modern name, we will probably never be sure of the exact circumstances in which they were found or even if all of the books that were discovered have yet been accounted for (see Fig. 2.1). Many different stories have been told by the people

---

[2] Nongbri, *God's Library*, throughout.
[3] Nongbri, *God's Library*, 90.

50
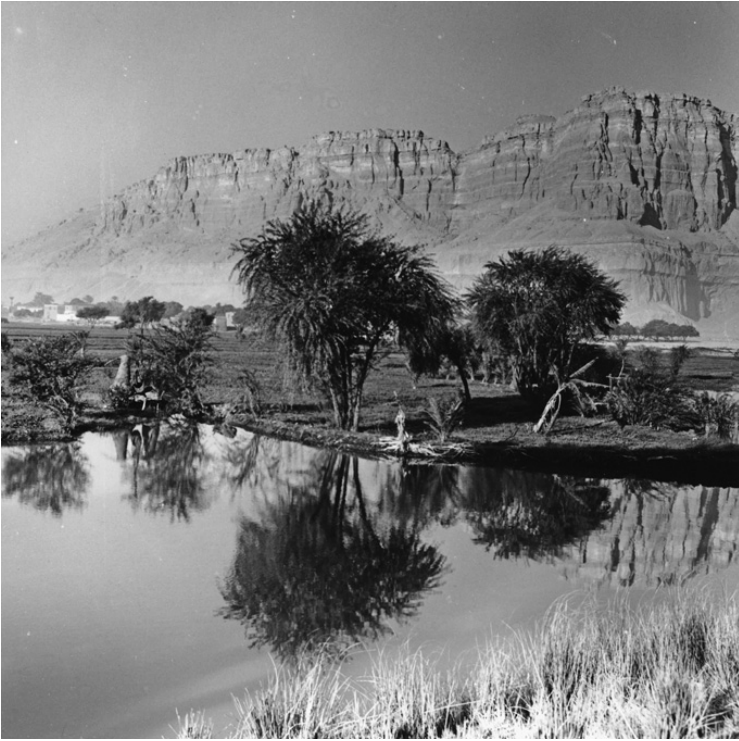
Figure 2.1 Scenic shot of desert lake oasis with Jabal al-Ṭarif cliff in background. Buildings can be seen against the backdrop of the mountains (description by Claremont Colleges Library). Photo by Douglas Kuylenstierna. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

supposedly involved in the discovery (see Fig. 2.2). Even the fellah at the centre of the story, Muhammad Ali al-Samman, has provided varying versions at different times: the codices were found when digging for *sabkha* (fertiliser), in a jar, next to a body, behind a rock, in a tomb, in a cave. Was Muhammad Ali al-Samman alone, or accompanied by fellow camel drivers? Exactly where was the discovery made? How many books were found and what happened to them after the discovery?

51
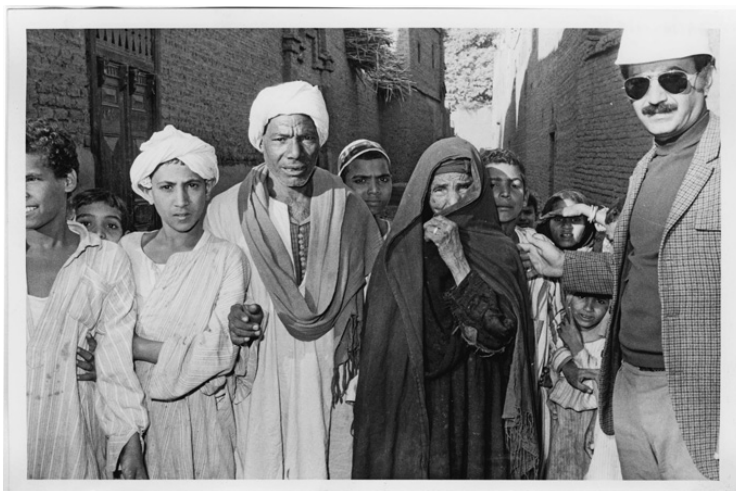
Figure 2.2 Muhammad Ali al-Samman and his mother. Unknown photographer. Image courtesy of Claremont Graduate University. Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, School of Religion.

The scholar first on scene to investigate the context of the finding was Jean Doresse, who travelled to Upper Egypt several times at the end of the 1940s and was told by his local guide that the texts were found hidden in a large earthenware jar by peasants digging for fertiliser. They were then sold to traders who took them onward to Cairo. Doresse had also been told that some of the texts, or parts of them, might have been destroyed by the peasants, who supposedly used them to kindle a fire. What is more, he learned that some of the protagonists had been involved in a revenge killing in close proximity to the time of the discovery.[4] Years later, in the 1970s, James Robinson – director of the international translation team that subsequently presented the first modern editions of the texts – visited the site in order to find out more. He made repeated efforts

---

[4] Jean Doresse, 'Sur les traces des papyrus gnostiques: Recherches à Chenoboskion', *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres* 36:5 (1950): 432–439.

52

to locate the find site, interview witnesses and backtrack the codices' steps to the black market, retrieving many details which Doresse had omitted or failed to uncover.

Robinson's efforts were fruitful as he found the person who was said to have made the discovery, Muhammad Ali al-Samman. In one of the first versions of the find story he published, Robinson tells us that al-Samman discovered a large jar while out digging for fertiliser.[5] Afraid that a jinni might be hiding inside it, he hesitated until, consumed by curiosity and the hope that it might contain gold, he finally broke it open, only to find old books. Disappointed, he took the books home and threw them in the courtyard, where his mother subsequently found them and used some of the papyrus to kindle a fire. He then forgot the books for a while because he was tangled up in a family feud, Robinson was told. Al-Samman's father had been murdered some time before and the alleged perpetrator, a man from a rival clan named Ahmed Isma'il, had disappeared, only to resurface around the time of the discovery. When al-Samman found out that his enemy was back, he took action and killed the man in revenge for his father's death and was placed in jail. Upon his release he returned home, found the books still in the courtyard where he had left them and subsequently sold them on.[6]

While some scholars have successfully deconstructed the reports conveyed by Muhammad Ali al-Samman, via Robinson, and included them in the scholarship about the text – strengthening parts of the story with new evidence while disregarding other less

---

[5] This is a recapitulation of the events as described in perhaps the earliest of Robinson's depictions, found in James M. Robinson and Bastiaan van Elderen, 'The First Season of the Nag Hammadi Excavation: 27 November–19 December 1975', *Newsletter (American Research Center in Egypt)* 14 (1976): 19–21.

[6] This version differs in some details from later versions. Mark Goodacre, 'How Reliable Is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35:4 (2013): 303–322.

credible aspects[7] – others have questioned the credibility and thoroughness of Robinson's reports of his ventures in Egypt, arguing that the find story should be altogether disregarded as evidence for the background of the texts.[8] It is true that Robinson's accounts of his many and long explorations in Egypt are not without fault. Details of the find story have varied over the years, without a clear statement of the reasons for the changes (even if they were justified).[9] Moreover, some scholars have recently accused Robinson of Orientalism, viewing his version of the find story – one that gained wide notoriety through Elaine Pagels' popular book *The Gnostic Gospels*, where it was retold – as a disturbing Western narrative full of prejudice. Mark Goodacre has presented the following analysis:[10]

---

[7] One excellent example of how scholars have been able corroborate aspects of the story by reference to archaeological evidence from the context is reflected in the work of James E. Goehring and Hugo Lundhaug. Initial tales of the discovery included reports of a bowl used to seal the jar in which the codices were found, now purportedly housed in the Schøyen collection (Oslo/London). This was in fact one way that earthen jars were sealed during late antiquity in the area in question, and bowls other than the one now housed in the Schøyen collection have been found in Pachomian monasteries. See James E. Goehring, 'An Early Roman Bowl from the Monastery of Pachomius at Pbow and the Milieu of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 357–371; Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts'.

[8] See Goodacre, 'How Reliable'; Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount, 'Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133:2 (2014): 399–419.

[9] In early versions of the find story, as told to Robinson and Doresse, the texts are found in a jar. In Pagels' retelling of Robinson's story, she gets the size of the jar wrong. This erroneous size of the jar is repeated by Pagels in interviews for TV shows about the texts, now even further from the size actually reported (Episode 1: 'Knowledge of the Heart', in *Gnostics.* By Border TV, for Channel 4 (UK), 1987). The fact that Pagels obscures (inadvertently, I am sure) information locals told Robinson and Doresse at the scene is used by Goodacre to exemplify the overall unreliableness of the story ('How Reliable', 304–305). It is, I would argue, somewhat unfair to discredit the accuracy of a scholar's work because other scholars fail to retell it correctly.

[10] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xiii.

It is a fantastic story, irresistible for introducing these amazing and important discoveries. The bloodthirsty, illiterate peasants happen upon an amazing find while out looking for fertilizer. They worry about genies but lust for gold, they have no inkling of the magnitude of their find, and their mother is as stupid as she is callous, burning valuable documents and then encouraging her sons to use the very mattocks that had broken open the earthenware jar now to murder a man. The narrative scarcely hides its moral, that important artefacts like this need to be wrested from the hands of those who cannot hope to understand them, and placed in the hands of responsible, Western academics.[11]

Goodacre is not alone in levelling criticism at Robinson. Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount also viewed Robinson's story as Orientalist, maintaining that the texts were not found near the slopes of Hamra Dun, outside the modern city of Nag Hammadi, as Robinson's initial reports conveyed. Instead, they suggest that the books were found in graves because they were actually 'books of the dead' meant to guide the soul of the deceased to heaven. This hypothesis has gained few supporters. The article in which this position is advanced takes its departure in debunking previous interpretations of the find story and harshly critiques Robinson's story and all those who have promoted it. We should be ashamed of ourselves, they write, even to consider that people could act in the manner Robinson suggests for Muhammad Ali al-Samman. They go on to add, 'The narrative is a fine one for classroom telling, but it works less and less effectively as we become more sensitised to our own Western prejudices and assumptions. Egyptian peasants do not fear jinni in bottles or rip out each other's hearts and eat them on the spot – and shame on us for believing, even for a moment, that they do.'[12] Denzey Lewis, Blount and Goodacre argue that the description of Muhammad Ali al-Samman in Robinson's version of

---

[11] Goodacre, 'How Reliable', 304–305.
[12] Denzey Lewis and Blount, 'Rethinking the Origins', 418.

the find story mirrors how prototypical Oriental 'Others' are often portrayed by Occidental colonialists: murderous, superstitious and greedy. The story attached to the texts' discovery only solidifies Western prejudices about the East as ignorant and immoral, unlike the civilised, rational and humane West.[13]

There are indeed aspects of Robinson's reports of the events that one should be careful about accepting without qualification. Goodacre criticises Robinson for not employing the interview techniques that one would expect of an anthropologist and being less than transparent about the discrepancies in the find story he was told on different occasions. What is more, as mentioned above, he has presented different versions of the story without being clear which he favours and why. As Nongbri notes, the critique could have been avoided if Robinson had been more straightforward about his own doubts as, he too had reservations as to the validity of the find story, given the various versions he had been told.[14] Nevertheless, it is my view that the accusations of Orientalism are ultimately unreasonable.[15]

I argue – and here I follow Nongbri and Burns[16] – that Robinson was painstakingly meticulous and critical in tracing the books' provenance. Muhammad Ali al-Samman was, for example, not able to identify the exact location where he found the texts, and changed his story at times about the details of the find, which is why

[13] Goodacre, 'How Reliable'; Denzey Lewis and Blount, 'Rethinking the Origins'.
[14] Brent Nongbri, 'Finding Early Christian Books at Nag Hammadi and Beyond', *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45 (2016): 13.
[15] As Dylan M. Burns has also argued in 'Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories', *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45 (2016): 5–11.
[16] Nongbri and Burns praise Robinson's efforts, without which we would have known much less about the context of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi and other codices (like the Manichaean codices of Medinet Madi and the Bodmer papyri). Both view the find story for what it is: a serious and meticulous attempt to discover the origins of the texts, given the difficult circumstances associated with their find. As Nongbri has argued in *God's Library*, a find story that is hard to confirm is to be expected given the circumstances that often surround ancient texts found in Egypt. Nongbri, 'Finding Early Christian Books'; Burns, 'Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories'.

Robinson conducted excavations at several sites. Despite these efforts, uncertainty about the precise location of the actual find site is not denied: 'the excavation produced no archaeological confirmation of the precise site of the discovery', Robinson states.[17] In a monumental two-volume work, Robinson retraces the steps he took and those taken by his predecessors, an invaluable resource for those of us interested in the texts' modern and ancient background.[18] Robinson's many years on the ground in Egypt should be applauded – few scholars of antiquity ever undertake such ventures – and I am unable to find any indications suggesting that he viewed and treated his Egyptian informants with anything but respect and recognition of their dignity. But intentions aside, is it still not Orientalism?

Goodacre's and Denzey Lewis and Blount's critiques of Robinson's findings are attempts to apply to Nag Hammadi scholarship the many valuable lessons post-colonial theory has taught us about the violent and intrusive effect Western dominance has had on the lives of the Other. It is undeniable that the high price ancient texts command on the black market – the result of Western demand – has led to the unfortunate situation we see in Egypt and other places around the world, where looting of such artefacts is much too common. This leads to grey areas in the find stories (which also record a crime), as well as the mishandling and sometimes destruction of invaluable historical objects. It is indeed difficult to know whether one should criminalise the buying of ancient artefacts that are not from sanctioned digs, a course of action which poses the risk that those that have been dug up in suspicious circumstances and consequently remain unsold will be forever lost, deposited on the back shelf of some black market dealer's shady inventory.

Pioneers in post-colonialism, like Edward Said, have contributed a great deal to our awareness of the way we reify the Other, and, like

---

[17] Robinson and van Elderen, 'The First Season', 21.

[18] James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story: From the Discovery to the Publication*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

most dynamic fields of research, even post-colonial perspectives have improved of late. For example, as pointed out by Richard King, the importance of indigenous peoples' portrayal of themselves to others must be recognised when discussing views of the 'East' in the 'West'. Let us take the category 'Hinduism' as an example. Said argued that this was an empty category forced upon a multitude of Indian religions by lazy Western scholars and British administrators in their efforts to assert control over what they did not understand. The efforts made by Indians themselves in adopting and implementing the category are ignored, missing the fact that many Indians could appreciate the benefits of having an umbrella term for the diverse religious practices on the subcontinent, which ultimately aided in the unification of its people against British dominance. It is not necessarily an expression of oppression if a people adopts categories and terminology that have been invented by outsiders. In fact, that is the way new categories are often conceived. Indeed, this is how the term 'Christian' was first constructed, coined by outsiders and only later adopted by Jesus-followers themselves.[19] As Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued: becoming aware of the gaze of others is the first step toward becoming aware of our own subjectivity.[20]

By ignoring the agency of the Other (yet again!), we risk ending up with a one-sided view of history.[21] I argue that some of this

---

[19] In Acts 11:26 we encounter the first reference to the term Christian, used by *outsiders* to designate Jesus-followers, and only later being taken up by group members themselves.

[20] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1943]), Part 3, chapter 1. This is no novel idea; Plato had already argued in *Alcibiades* that one only becomes truly self-aware when the subject dies, when we realise that we are *both* subject and object. Decarte's realisation *cogito ergo sum,* could be said to be based on a similar fundamental principle.

[21] The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argued that the ethical way to approach 'the Other' was by letting 'the Other' assert itself as exactly that, something else. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000 [1993]).

58

narrowness of vision is reflected in the critique Goodacre, Denzey Lewis and Blount have levelled at Robinson, as well as indirectly by those who have disseminated his version of the Nag Hammadi discovery uncritically (including myself!). The unreasonableness of their accusations becomes evident in light of a four-part drama documentary called *Gnostics*, aired in 1987 on Channel 4 (UK). The Border TV production, written by Tobias Churton,[22] offers the viewer basic information on so-called Gnostic literature, and the Nag Hammadi discovery is one of the central plots in Episode 1: 'Knowledge of the Heart'. A number of prominent scholars appear in the film, including Hans Jonas, Gilles Quispel, Elaine Pagels and James Robinson, and the viewer is invited to follow Gilles Quispel on an expedition to the village in Egypt near where the discovery of the codices was said to have been made. Quispel meets and thanks Muhammad Ali al-Samman himself for his efforts in bringing the texts to the world's attention. What follows is a short interview with Muhammad Ali al-Samman where he gets to tell the story, again; it is a word-for-word account of al-Samman's appearance in the documentary, as translated by the interpreter employed by Border TV productions:[23]

Muhammad Ali al-Samman:

> I was digging for sabkha, for fertiliser, with my pick axe, and carrying it back to the fields on the camel. Then I came across this big earthenware pot which was buried in the sand. I had a feeling that there might be something inside.

The interview breaks off and a conversation with Robinson is inserted to give additional information on Muhammad Ali al-Samman. Robinson says the following:

---

[22] Churton is currently a scholar at Exeter University specialising in Freemasonry and other esoteric currents.

[23] You can hear Muhammad Ali al-Samman's own voice in the documentary.
A colleague of mine, an Egyptian native speaker, can confirm that the translation is accurate. My thanks to Sameh Egyptson for his assistance in interpreting Muhammad Ali al-Samman's version.

59

He is from the al-Samman clan, which dominates many of the villages in that part. He was – is a peasant, illiterate, a Muslim. Worked as a camel driver for a middle-class Copt. And in his generation it was typical, the Copts were the white collars and the Muslims were the physical laborers.

The film cuts into Muhammad Ali al-Samman again and the story continues:

I came back later the same day and I smashed the pot open. I broke it open exactly where I had found it. I thought there might be an evil spirit inside, a jinni. I had never seen anything like it before. I smashed the pot on my own and inside I found these books, then I brought the others over to see. They said: 'We don't want anything to do with these books, they belong to the Christians, the Copts.' They said, 'It's nothing to do with us.'

Robinson is cut into the picture again and while the documentary films the courtyard and house of Muhammad Ali al-Samman, Robinson tells the story of how the books were brought back and some of them were burned. Again Muhammad Ali al-Samman is brought back to the scene and he is asked about this fact, and answers:

It was all just rubbish to us. Yes, my mother did burn some, in the bread oven.

After being presented with a publication containing his picture, Muhammad Ali al-Samman continues the story:

One of the people of the village of Hamre dun killed my father, so it was decided that I should kill his murderer, and revenge. I did kill him, and with my knife I cut out his heart and ate it. I was in jail because of the killing, and when I got out of jail I found that my mother had burned a lot of those old papers. Later on I sold one book, all the others had gone. I got eleven Egyptian pounds for it.

He is then asked by Quispel if he had any regrets about what happed when he found the books.

No, I don't care. I don't give a damn about them! It does not even enter my head to think about it.[24]

Here Muhammad Ali al-Samman recounts a version of the find story that includes many of the details that Goodacre, Denzey Lewis

---

[24] Excerpts from 25:55– 29:50 in Episode 1, 'Knowledge of the Heart', in *Gnostics*. By Border TV for Channel 4 (UK), 1987.

60

and Blount have presented as unbelievable inventions and exaggerations by Orientalist Western scholars. The ambition to avoid colonial prejudices can only really be fulfilled if we contextualise the object of study, letting the Other appear on its own terms – by applying a Geertzian 'thick description'[25] or through an alterity as suggested by Levinas[26] – rather than rejecting portrayals of foreign cultural practices as unbelievable or narrow-minded because they do not fit *our* view of moral or 'rational' behaviour.

Let us try to approach the find story from what we actually know of the cultural milieu with which we are dealing. Firstly, believing in jinn is – contrary to what Denzey Lewis and Blount seem to believe – widespread in rural Egypt and not a colonialist invention. Secondly, retaliating for perceived wrongdoings aimed at your family/clan is also quite understandable, a righteous act in shame–honour societies such as those in rural Egypt.[27] Nonetheless, there are aspects here that problematise the story of murder, but not for Orientalist reasons. There are no records of Muhammad Ali al-Samman's having been officially accused of murder or convicted of the crime. If he committed the murder, as he claims, in the eyes of the law he would have been sentenced to a minimum of twenty-five years in prison, and not released shortly after the event, as he also claims. But this does not mean it did not take place. Assuming Muhammad Ali al-Samman's clan and that of the murdered man followed the social patterns portrayed in anthropological studies of the area, there are scenarios which would have let al-Samman evade the

---

[25] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: Glencoe Free Press, 1960).

[26] Levinas argued for a new ethics which took its departure from viewing the Other as a teacher and our greatest resource for self-development. The Other should be allowed to appear on their own terms, not forced into a discourse with meanings alien to them. Levinas, *Entre Nous*, passim.

[27] Winifred S. Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000 [1927]), 183–200, 129–134; Hamed Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1954]), 67–86.

authorities.[28] If the two families resolved the issue among themselves through the law of custom (*'urf*), the authorities could have been left out of the arrangement. If possible, dealing with the authorities is generally avoided for a multitude of reasons, including corruption, draconian police treatment, the uncertainty of outcome and the time-consuming nature of the bureaucracy.[29] If a death or killing takes place, one can seek to resolve the issue by asking the victim's family for forgiveness or requesting the aid of a so-called reconciliation assembly. These complicated processes involve a number of mediators and arbitrators. However, if a solution had been reached through a reconciliation assembly, one would not expect the party asking for forgiveness to act as Muhammad Ali al-Samman does in the interview, proudly and without remorse – even describing the act itself (and possibly grossly exaggerating it). He would have been expected to show remorse or at least humility. Furthermore, if the conflict had been resolved, Muhammad Ali al-Samman would probably have avoided dwelling on something that would risk reawakening a reconciled conflict and would not, in detail and with exaggerated wording, have described the act which had been resolved/forgiven. With these factors in mind, one can surmise that the conflict between Muhammad Ali al-Samman and the rival family was ongoing when Guilles Quispel met Muhammad Ali al-Samman in 1986. And if this were the case, Muhammad Ali al-Samman would have felt honour bound to cause harm to the other family and its reputation at any given opportunity. Thus, we should treat any information he provides about the incident with marked scepticism. Nevertheless, it is not *Orientalism* to take him at his word, as killings

---

[28] Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village*, 42–67; Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*, 129–134.

[29] Sarah Ben Nefissa, 'The "Haqq el-Arab": Conflict Resolution and Distinctive Features of Legal Pluralism in Contemporary Egypt", in *Legal Pluralism in the Arab World*, ed. B. Dupret, M. Berger and L. al-Zwaini (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1999), 145–158; Barbara Drieskens, 'A Cairene Way of Reconciling', *Islamic Law and Society* 13:1 (2006): 99–122; H. C. K. Nielsen, 'Négotiation et écriture: A propos du droit coutumier en Haute-Egypte', *Egypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 155–165.

of the nature he describes (although the gruesome detail could well have been added to enhance his machismo) are anything but uncommon in family feuds.

Gnosticism and the Mystic East

While I am of the opinion that Goodacre's and Denzey Lewis and Blount's critique of Robinson's find story goes too far, there are some scholars who have gone even further. Maia Kotrosits, for example, writes that the find story connected to the Nag Hammadi texts 'represents and perpetuates the Orientalist epistemological tropes that have since been fixed onto the individual texts themselves'.[30] This is a bold statement and, if applied too generally, it is also problematic. Unfortunately, Kotrosits does not provide detailed discussion of the erroneous interpretations of the individual Nag Hammadi texts which she claims would be the result of Orientalism. And in my opinion there is little that supports the view that the find story has much to do with subjection of the texts themselves to Orientalising interpretations.[31] We cannot ignore decades of studies of the mechanisms behind constructions of orthodoxy vis-à-vis heterodoxy, nor what we know about the heresiological genre.[32] The early Christian authors who disqualified the forms of

---

[30] Maia Kotrosits, 'Romance and Danger at Nag Hammadi', *The Bible and Critical Theory* 8:1 (2012): 39.

[31] Kotrosits' argument is that the Nag Hammadi collection has been the 'romantic and dangerous "East" to the Bible's domesticated and rational "West"' ('Romance and Danger', 39). In my opinion, there is not much that indicates that contemporary scholars of early Christian history have juxtaposed the texts of the Canon, the Gospel of Mark for example, with one of the Nag Hammadi texts on the basis that the former is a representation of 'Western' rationality while the latter, due to its association with the Nag Hammadi find story, is 'Eastern' (i.e. less 'true' or 'pure').

[32] Burns has critiqued Kotrosits' arguments in 'Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories', 9–11.

Christianity represented in the Nag Hammadi texts – judgements which influenced modern perceptions of the Christian/Gnostic dichotomy that have informed theologians since the end of the seventeenth century – did not do so on Orientalist grounds. Anachronisms of this kind would be an unfortunate result of post-colonial theory being applied inaccurately.

Although we should avoid generalising about the mechanisms of Orientalism, Kotrosits has a point, nevertheless. There have indeed been aspects of romanticisation that have impacted on the Nag Hammadi texts, but I argue that this has to do with the texts being attached to the notion of Gnosticism, rather than the story of the texts' discovery. As Dylan Burns has argued, the Nag Hammadi texts have been interpreted as containing 'Eastern' wisdom, more similar to Buddhism or Hindu philosophy than contemporary Christianity.[33] From this perspective, then, interpretations of the texts have been coloured by Orientalist preconceptions. Burns also calls attention to the fact that one can find what he calls 'auto-Orientalising' tendencies in the texts themselves; that is, they appropriate images of Egypt or other Eastern contexts or traditions as places of spiritual knowledge that is of greater purity than the much younger Hellenic wisdom (*Zostrianos* being just one example of a text that legitimises its content by attaching it to the ancient Persian sage Zoroaster).

I would argue that the form of Eastern religion that the Nag Hammadi texts have been thought to represent, since they are understood to be representing 'Gnosticism', is not Eastern religion per se but, rather, contemporary views of Eastern religion invented to fit a Western context. Take Buddhism, for example. When exported to the West, Buddhism was packaged for

---

[33] For example, see Robert L. Segal (ed.), *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Philosophy and Contemporary Culture* (London: Open Court, 1999). This volume contains several pieces attaching Gnosticism (and Nag Hammadi texts) to the mystical and 'Eastern'.

a Western audience in the religious language of Christianity.[34] Furthermore, it was not just any Buddhism that was exported, it was an intellectual, elite version, one that put more emphasis on introspection, text reading and meditation than practice, belief in spirits and 'unreflective' ritual activity. If the Nag Hammadi texts have been exposed to Orientalist preconceptions that determine how they are read, it is in a form that I would call 'backdoor Orientalism'. Gnosticism and the Nag Hammadi texts have not been likened to Eastern religions so much as Westernised versions of Eastern religions, and they have not been represented as containing hidden wisdom because they were found in the East (Egypt), but because they have been associated with heresy, subversion and counter-culture. Ironically, the 'backdoor Orientalism' to which the Nag Hammadi collection has been subjected is attached to the very same mechanisms that produced critical theories such as post-colonialism. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices coincided with a religious awakening in the West, particularly in America, with Indian gurus touring the West and famous popstars and intellectuals visiting the East. In popular culture, the East was associated with an ancient form of wisdom that represented all the ideals that the beatnik generation and the subsequent Flower Power era stood for: free love, pacifism, spirituality, contemplation, introspection and the attainment of higher truths and knowledge, as well as gender equality.[35]

Thus, the Orientalism that has coloured modern conceptions of the Nag Hammadi texts has not much to do with the find story, as Kotrosits, Goodacre, Denzey Lewis and Blount would have it. There is something much more complex going on, which has to do with the texts' association with heresy and counter-culture. Owing to their often-misdirected association with the esoteric and subversive,

---

[34] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[35] Paul Oliver, *Hinduism and the 1960s: The Rise of a Counter-Culture* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

the texts have been interpreted in erroneous ways. The New Age generations were the intellectual heirs of the occult milieux and social movements taking form in Europe from the nineteenth century, while reception of the Askew codex in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exemplifies mechanisms similar to the biases applied to the Nag Hammadi texts. The Askew codex was received as the Gnostic Bible and – although it did not fit squarely with how the Church Fathers had described the 'Gnostic' – it was made to represent the anti-establishment ideas popular at the time of its discovery.[36]

There are, of course, points where Orientalist preconceptions intersect with counter-cultural ones; the fact that the East was considered mystical and dangerous is surely one of the reasons many famous occultists were drawn to China, India and the Middle East.[37] While modern interpretations of the texts are of less importance in this study than the Nag Hammadi codices' antique context – and what we can learn of it by engaging with the codices' material features – the post-colonial perspectives Burns regards as 'auto-Orientalisation' tendencies cannot be neglected in this regard.

Conclusion

The rest of this book is devoted to the material aspects of the Nag Hammadi texts. In light of this and the previous chapter, the methodological and theoretical perspectives that inform the study as a whole should, hopefully, have become more transparent. As we have seen, in their efforts to approach the Nag Hammadi texts without the preconceived notions attached to Western prejudices against the Eastern Other, some scholars have gone too far and

---

[36] Linjamaa, 'The Reception of *Pistis Sophia*'.
[37] Nilsson, 'As a Fire beneath the Ashes'.

rejected the find story altogether and, thus, been able to present alternative interpretations of the texts' ancient uses. The texts have certainly been romanticised and – by way of the concept Gnosticism – been attached to preconceived notions regarding the existence of a spiritual knowledge that has been passed down in an unbroken chain since antiquity. As such, the texts are still subjected to Orientalising interpretations, being portrayed by some as speculative and less genuine than 'pure Christianity' or 'pure philosophy', while others elevate them on the basis that they contain pure and unmitigated spiritual truths with which people of the West have lost touch. Thus, the reception of the Nag Hammadi texts follows well-known patterns familiar from the ways that Eastern religions have been received in the West since the nineteenth century.

3 | The Construction of Codex I: Scribal Errors as Clues to Context

On the basis that material aspects of texts offer insights into the identity of the people behind them, this chapter surveys the binding and copying style of Codex I, which stands out in the Nag Hammadi collection as the only multi-quire codex.[1] As argued below, much of the evidence to be drawn from its materiality points to its production within a monastic setting, the work of a monk inexperienced in copying texts or one who placed other principals before meticulous production of the codex. In this particular case, the scribe's disordered work and the difficulties he encountered while engaged in it were partly solved by turning the manuscript from a single into a multi-quire codex.

The Material Features of Codex I

Codex I consists of five texts: *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, *The Apocryphon of James*, *The Gospel of Truth*, *The Treatise on the*

---

[1] This chapter consists of rewritten sections of two previous studies. See Paul Linjamaa, 'Why Monks Read the Tripartite Tractate: A New Look at the Codicology of Nag Hammadi Codex I', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Christian Bull (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 223–253; Paul Linjamaa, 'Nag Hammadi Codex I as a Protective Artifact and an Accidental Multi-Quire Codex', in *The Scriptural Universe of Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Grypeou (Madrid and Salamanca: Editorial Sindéresis/Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 2021), 105–126.

68

Resurrection, and *The Tripartite Tractate*.[2] Evidence from the cartonnage of Codex VII, copied by the same scribal team, usually dates it to around the last half of the fourth century. Three letters have been found inside the cover of Codex VII, dated to the years 341, 346 and 348, leaving us with a *terminus post quem* of 348. The cover of Codex VII could, of course, have been made later than the cartonnage papyrus, but not before. As for the leather cover of Codex I, recent radiocarbon dating indicates that it likely predates Codex VII.[3] Thus, a date in the middle of the fourth century seems plausible for Codex I, considering the available evidence.

---

[2] It has been suggested by Jean-Daniel Dubois that the lack of titles in Codex I (except for *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* and *The Treatise on the Resurrection*) was intentional because the Valentinians who owned them wanted to disseminate their work but thought it better to remove the titles so as not to impede potential readers. Jean-Daniel Dubois, 'Les titres du codex I (Jung) de Nag Hammadi', in *La formation des canons scripturaires*, ed. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993), 219–235. However, the untitled Valentinian tractates are also compatible with a monastic setting, where texts would most likely have been deemed inappropriate reading material if connected to groups associated with those opposed by Irenaeus, Clement and Origen. However, we find the title 'apocryphon; in NHC II,1 (*The Apocryphon of John*), which could mean that the text was written and circulated before the command to get rid of apocryphal writings really took hold. The monastic context is in my opinion a less speculative suggestion than that of hypothesising a proselytising Valentinian group for which we have no evidence in fourth-century Egypt. *The Treatise on the Resurrection* might have been a letter at some point whose content was so fascinating that someone interested in the technicalities of resurrection added the title (ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) after the fact. The letter style of writing was, however, a distinctive genre and not all texts formed as letters were actually used as such. For more, see Gregory Given, 'Four Texts from Nag Hammadi amid the Textual and Generic Fluidity of the "Letter" in Late Antique Egypt', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 201–220.

[3] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 9–11; Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts'.

Codex I was put together by using three quires (see Fig. 3.1).[4] The first, by far the largest, consists of twenty-two sheets made from two rolls of papyrus; the second consists of eight sheets made from one roll and the third of six sheets, also made from a single roll. Thus, the first 86 pages together with the front flyleaf make up the first quire; pages 87–118 make up the second, and the third quire starts with page 119 and ends with 142. The last four pages of the codex are not preserved, which leaves open the possibility of a sixth text. As Stephen Emmel has pointed out, there are ink marks at the presumed end of *The Tripartite Tractate* indicating that something most likely followed it.[5]
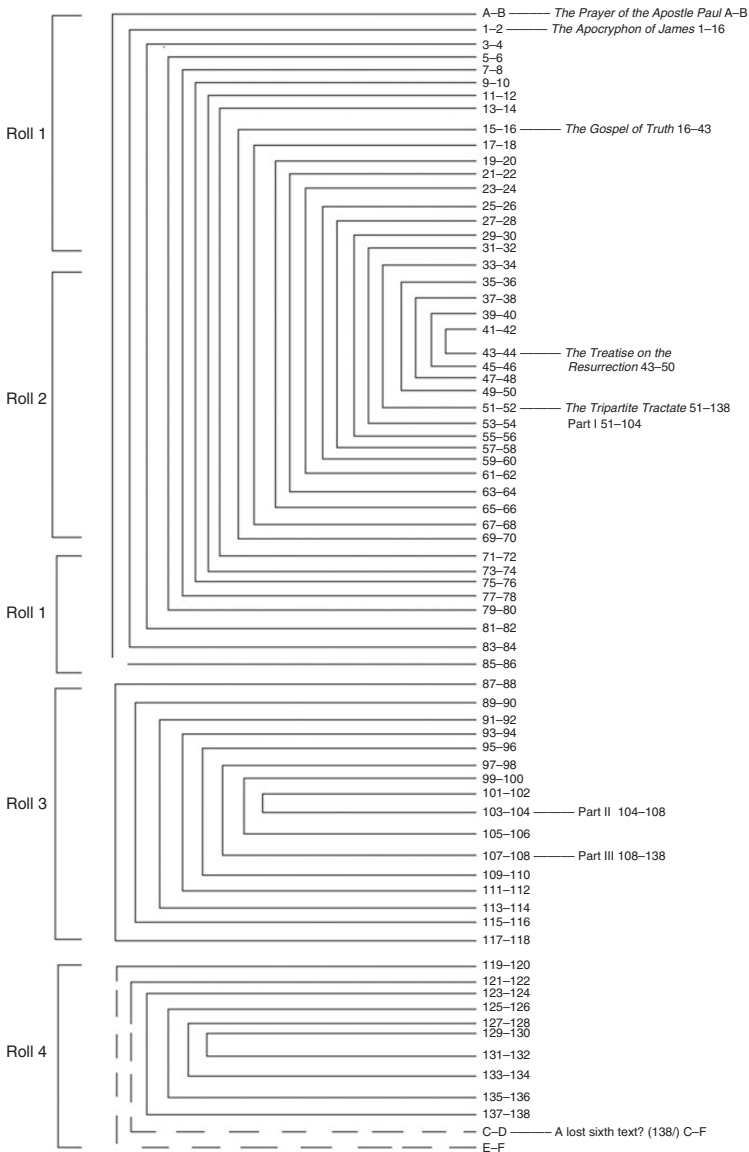
As noted, Codex I is the only multi-quire codex in the Nag Hammadi collection, but it does not follow regular multi-quire patterns.[6] It is unclear why the scribal team, or those who bound the codex, did not simply make one large quire, as is the case with the other Nag Hammadi codices, or one additional quire with fourteen sheets instead of two unusually small quires in the end. As has previously been suggested, these facts indicate that the construction of the codex was unplanned, and that the two last quires were impulsively prepared.[7] As it happens, this is not the only irregularity attached to the production of Codex I. In the two

---

[4] Emmel made an important observation about the flyleaf, A–B. *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul.* It had previously been thought to have been located at the very back of the codex and was thus numbered 143–144 by the initial editors, led by Rodolphe Kasser, and thought to form the beginning of a fourth quire (Rodolphe Kasser, *Tractatus Tripartitus, Pars I* (Bern: Fracke Verlag, 1973), 11–13). However, Emmel discovered that the horizontal fibres on the leaf matched those of the stump found glued to the inner margin of page 85. Leaves 85–86 and A–B thus formed an artificially constructed sheet. Emmel also found the same sort of erosion on *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* as on the first part of the codex, which indicates that this leaf was actually the opening page ('Announcement', *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 14 (1977): 56–57).

[5] Emmel, 'Announcement', 56.

[6] Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex*, chapter 5; James M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Introduction* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 39–40. Codex XII and XIII are too damaged to judge how many quires they contained.

[7] Kasser, *Tractatus Tripartitus*, 12 n. 4.

Roll 1

A–B ——— *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* A–B
1–2 ——— *The Apocryphon of James* 1–16
3–4
5–6
7–8
9–10
11–12
13–14
15–16 ——— *The Gospel of Truth* 16–43
17–18
19–20
21–22
23–24
25–26
27–28
29–30
31–32

Roll 2

33–34
35–36
37–38
39–40
41–42
43–44 ——— *The Treatise on the Resurrection* 43–50
45–46
47–48
49–50
51–52 ——— *The Tripartite Tractate* 51–138 Part I 51–104
53–54
55–56
57–58
59–60
61–62
63–64
65–66
67–68
69–70

Roll 1

71–72
73–74
75–76
77–78
79–80
81–82
83–84
85–86

Roll 3

87–88
89–90
91–92
93–94
95–96
97–98
99–100
101–102
103–104 ——— Part II 104–108
105–106
107–108 ——— Part III 108–138
109–110
111–112
113–114
115–116
117–118

Roll 4

119–120
121–122
123–124
125–126
127–128
129–130
131–132
133–134
135–136
137–138
C–D ——— A lost sixth text? (138/) C–F
E–F

Figure 3.1 The quire structure of Nag Hammadi Codex I, illustrated as described in Robinson, *Facsimile: Codex I,* vi–xxxi. Adapted from an image previously published in Paul Linjamaa, 'Nag Hammadi Codex I as a Protective Artifact and an Accidental Multi-Quire Codex', in *The Scriptural Universe of Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanuel Grypeou (Madrid and Salamanca: Editorial Sindéresis/Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 2021), 105–126.

rolls that made up the first quire, the *kollemata* on the left overlap those on the right. This is typical, since the roll from which the sheets were cut would most likely have been constructed so that a scribe, writing from left to right, could comfortably do the job without getting stuck on the joints.[8] In the two smaller quires the *kollemata* on the right overlap those on the left, suggesting that either the rolls used were rolled up from left to right (contrary to custom) or, and perhaps more likely, that the sheets were accidentally turned the 'wrong way' after being cut; maybe a period of time had elapsed between cutting and commencing the work on the codex.[9] Either way, this is another detail that makes the two last quires different from what one would expect.[10] As it happens, other irregularities found in the codex production can be attached to one of the scribes in particular.

The codex was copied by two scribes. Scribe A copied all the texts except *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, which is in the hand of a second scribe, the same who copied the first half of Codex XI. Contrary to Scribe B – whose hand is legible and regular – Scribe A has copied with significant variation in quality, as well as word and line count per page. As just one example, we can compare page 41 (*The Gospel of Truth*) with page 94 (*The Tripartite Tractate*), both copied by Scribe A. Page 41 has 35 lines, each with between 14 and 21 letters, just over 600 letters in total. Page 94 has 40 lines and each line has between 20 and 26 letters, a total of over 900 letters. This

---

[8] James M. Robinson, 'On the Codicology of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Les textes des Nag Hammadi (Colloque du Centre d´Historie des Religions, Strasbourg 23– 25 October 1974)*, ed. J.-É. Ménard and M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 15–31; Robinson, *Facsimile: Introduction*, 39–40.

[9] An experienced scribe would probably not buy a roll which had the joints unfavourably placed if there were other rolls available, at least if one were to produce a scroll. So, the producers of the rolls would most likely be careful not to roll the papyrus the wrong way so as not to lose business. Robinson, 'On the Codicology of the Nag Hammadi Codices'.

[10] For details on how a codex was usually constructed, see Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex,* chapter 4.
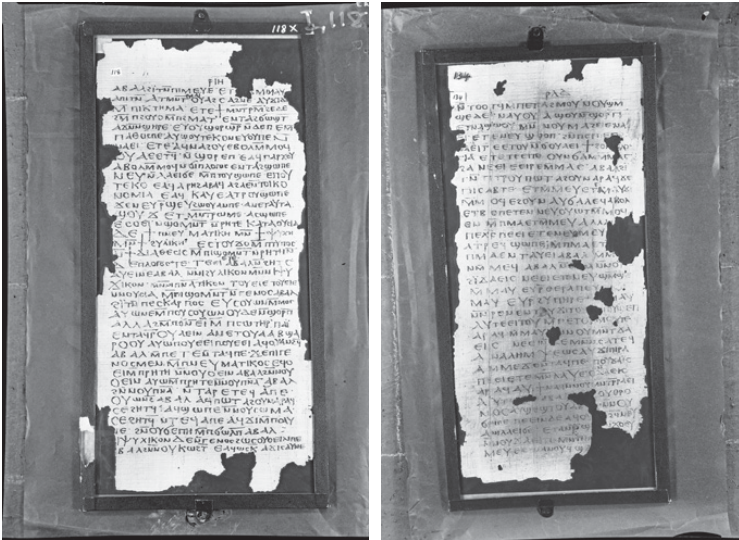
Figure 3.2 There is a word count difference of approximately 30% and line length difference of about 15% between the right page and the left page. Left page 118 in Quire II; right page 134 in Quire III. Notice the airy style on page 134, the end of Quire III. Photo by Jean Doresse. Images courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

means that Scribe A's word count fluctuates with a difference of up to 30 per cent (see Fig. 3.2 for another example).[11] Could there be an explanation for this, other than just viewing it as the work of a careless or novice scribe? A closer look at where in the codex we find the cluttered pages with a relatively high word count and where we find most of the pages with a low word count and an airy scribal style reveals a possible pattern. Many of the pages with a relatively low

---

[11] The difference in word count is sometimes due to poor papyrus quality (e.g., pages 9–10, 25–26, 27–28, 39–40, 101–102), which makes it difficult to utilise all the space. However, many pages have a low word count without there being any obvious papyrus corrosion (at least as far as one can tell from the facsimile editions), for example, pages 29 and 35, and most of the final pages of Quire III.

word count are at the very end of the codex, while the cluttered pages, often with a high word count, are mostly found in the second quire.[12] Especially cluttered (and with many mistakes[13]), compared with the other parts of the codex, are pages 113–118, the last pages of the second quire. From the second half of the third quire until the end of the codex (pages 130–137), the word count drops considerably to around 650 per page, from an average of around 800 up to 900 in the second quire.[14] Furthermore, there is a noticeable difference between the length of the lines in the first quire compared to the second. In the first quire, the lines average between 8 and 10.5 cm, while the lines in the second quire average between 10.5 and 12 cm, a difference of over 18 per cent (see Fig. 3.2).[15] In most parts of the third quire, the long lines have been kept, but in the last eight pages (those that are intact enough for us to see a whole line) there is a considerable drop in line length (to about 9.5–10.5 cm), as well as word count, resulting in larger letters and the appearance of an airier style.[16]

---

[12] There are also exceptions, with a more normal word count in Quire II: for example, leaves 99–100, 101–102, 103–104, 109–110. However, most of these papyrus leaves seem to have been of poor quality and have thus been difficult to write on.

[13] The scribe made emendations and added a letter or a word over the line in the following places: 114:13, 116:7, 116:29, 117:15, 117:25, 118:2, 118:19. In several places the scribe has mistakenly copied a word or letters twice: at 113:38, 115:3, 117:3, 117:12, 119:2.

[14] The first text, *The Apocryphon of James*, is also written with a relatively high word count, but these pages are in a clean and controlled hand compared to the work in Quire II. There are few scribal emendations or mistakes in *The Apocryphon of James*; as far as I can tell, there are only two in the whole text, at 13:20 and 14:22, where a letter has been added above the line.

[15] The lines in Quire I are usually between 8.5 and 10.5 cm, an average of 9.5cm. The lines in Quire II (counting from page 85) are considerably longer: 10.5–12 cm, an average of 11.25cm. This is a difference of 18.4 per cent. In the last eight pages in Quire III, the length drops off again, averaging between 9.5 and 10.5 cm. The measurements are made on the basis of the manuscripts as they appear in the facsimile editions, which are not exactly to scale; they are somewhat smaller than the actual manuscripts. However, the percentage result would be the same.

[16] A comparison of the margins could also have been fruitful, but unfortunately the outer and inner margins in Quires II and III are damaged to such a degree that a comparison is hard to make.

These observations give us further clues concerning the production of this somewhat awkward multi-quire codex. *The Tripartite Tractate* is divided by decorative markings into three separate parts, which raises some interesting points. James Robinson has suggested that only Part I (51–104) was originally meant to be included in the codex and that the second quire had to be added to finish this part.[17] The scribe then decided to include Part II (104–108) of *The Tripartite Tractate* in order not to waste papyrus and then continued with Part III (108–138), which required yet a third quire.[18] If this were the case, one would have expected to find the pages with cramped style, high word count and long lines in the first quire, or at least in the second half of it. Instead, these are found in the second quire, particularly towards the end. Thus, I would argue that Parts II and III of *The Tripartite Tractate* were most likely meant to be included from the beginning. Why else would the scribe have felt pressured for space after the second quire was added, which would have provided ample room for finishing Part I if that were all that was intended? If only Part I was the original plan, the scribe could simply have ended the second quire in an airy and relaxed style, which he used, instead, in the third quire.[19]

The airy scribal hand towards the end of the third quire indicates that *The Tripartite Tractate* was meant to be the last text of Codex I (Fig. 3.2). Yet it is still possible, even likely, that some ad hoc writing was inscribed on the last four pages, similar to the seemingly improvised inclusion of *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* which was placed in the front by adding a flyleaf (Fig. 3.1). Furthermore, as already noted, the ink marks following *The Tripartite Tractate*

---

[17] Robinson, *The Facsimile: Introduction*, 40; See also Kasser, *Tractatus Tripartitus*, 12 n. 4.

[18] Robinson, *The Facsimile: Introduction,* 40.

[19] This phenomenon of changes in the scribal style and word count during inscribing is not uncommon and, according to Turner, is sometimes due to the difficulty of calculating the space needed for copying a text (Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex*, 73–74). For statistics see Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex,* 86.

75

suggest a sixth text and, considering the drastic drop in word count in the third quire, it would indicate that the scribe miscalculated the number of leaves needed to finish the section. This left whole pages empty, allowing a sixth text to be inscribed, presumably one not considered the most urgent. There are a number of reasons why it would have been difficult to calculate the exact number of pages needed to copy *The Tripartite Tractate*. If the *Vorlage* of *The Tripartite Tractate*, a very long text, did not have the same dimensions as Codex I – if it were contained in a different medium such as a scroll or a smaller or larger codex, for example – it would have made the calculations harder.[20]

Approaching the Owners and Creators of the Codex

Palaeographic investigations have shown scribal overlap between Codices I, VII and XI (and there are other groupings as well, based on palaeographical similarity).[21] The sequence of the texts in Codex I also seems to have been of some importance. The pages of the fourth text, *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, are unpaginated and the bottom half of the last page is empty, indicating that Scribe A left these pages empty after copying the preceding texts, *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth*, and before proceeding to copy the last text of the codex, *The Tripartite Tractate*.[22] There must have been

---

[20] For discussion of the various dimensions of early codices, see Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex*, 14–22.

[21] Scribe B of Codex I copied one text in Codex I, *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, and the first half of Codex XI. The second scribe of Codex XI, who copied the second part of Codex XI, also inscribed the whole of Codex VII. For more, see Michael A. Williams, 'Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Collection(s) in the History of "Gnosticism(s)"', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier (Québec and Paris: Peeters, 1995), 11–20.

[22] It is most likely that *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* was added later on the flyleaf, which was probably also unpaginated; the tenth page of the codex is numbered nine, indicating that the first page was an unpaginated flyleaf.

a reason not to copy *The Tripartite Tractate* directly after *The Gospel of Truth* and a reason why *The Treatise on the Resurrection* should follow *The Gospel of Truth* and not *The Tripartite Tractate*. Some attempts have been made to read Codex I as a collection with a particular purpose, and most have viewed the placement and topic of *The Tripartite Tractate* as designed to give the preceding texts contextualisation, placing the 'message' of Codex I in a bigger picture.[23] However, no single view has received wide scholarly acceptance.[24] If we can get closer to answering the question of how

---

[23] The various suggestions as to the order of texts in Codex I seem to have in common the view that the placement and role of *The Tripartite Tractate* in the collection offers contextualisation (for what exactly, scholars disagree). It takes up more than half of the codex and seems to attempt a systematic theological overview, thus putting the previous texts in the codex in perspective in relation to a larger whole. However, these observations do not seem to answer the question of why *The Tripartite Tractate* was placed last. Among the Nag Hammadi codices (apart from Codex I), it is only Codex IX that has its longest text at the end (*The Testimony of Truth*). The longest text is more often placed at the beginning, especially if it is a systematic overview, from creation to salvation, as *The Tripartite Tractate* is often portrayed as being. For example, Codex III and Codex IV where *The Apocryphon of James* is the first and longest text, and Codex VII, *Paraphrase of Shem* and Codex VIII, *Zostrianos*. In the case of Codex II, we have three texts that are almost the same length: *The Apocryphon of James*, *The Gospel of Philip* and *The Origin of the World*, but as Williams argues, it makes sense to place the text that is most like an overview at the beginning (Williams, 'Interpreting', 20–32).

[24] Michael Williams reads Codex I as a collection like the New Testament, beginning with the words of Jesus and ending with commentary and elaboration. According to Williams, it makes sense to end the codex with an exposition on 'systematic theology', as he interprets *The Tripartite Tractate* to be. Previously in the codex we have read an introductory prayer (*The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*), a dialogue between Christ and the apostles (*The Apocryphon of James*), a homily (*The Gospel of Truth*) and an eschatological treatise (*The Treatise on the Resurrection*). Ending with *The Tripartite Tractate*, according to Williams, puts what has previously been discussed in Codex I into perspective. For this reason, Williams writes, *The Tripartite Tractate* would fit just as well in the beginning. However, then the likeness to the New Testament would disappear, as it contains no sayings of Jesus or much elaboration on Jesus' life (Williams, 'Interpreting', 14–15). Louis Painchaud and Michael Kaler have gone further to argue that the whole collection of the texts had a purpose connected to this scribal group. They suggest that Codices I, XI and VII (read in this order) introduce the reader to 'heterodox doctrine', which would have induced sympathy for a minority

the codex was produced, how it was read and by whom, it would give much-needed contextualisation for further investigation into the meaning and purpose of Codex I as a whole.

   As mentioned above, it has been suggested that the order of the texts in Codex I must have been important, since the scribe left eight pages blank after *The Gospel of Truth* instead of just copying *The Tripartite Tractate* directly after it and leaving *The Treatise on the Resurrection* for the end. Considering the uncertainty that seems to have surrounded the construction of Codex I as a whole, it might have been thought safer to leave eight pages empty in the first quire instead of copying the very long *The Tripartite Tractate* and risking running out of space. It has been assumed that the order was important, but it could just as well have been a question of priority, that the copying of *The Treatise on the Resurrection* took precedence over copying the whole of *The Tripartite Tractate.* Leaving eight pages empty, the scribe made certain that *The Treatise on the Resurrection* would fit. It is also possible that Codex I was copied on several different occasions, which could explain the fluctuation in style, word count and size, as well as the multiple quires. Some have suggested that the owners of the *Vorlagen* of the different texts in Codex I might have been travellers who passed by only occasionally,[25] or

---

Christian group calling themselves the 'lineage of the Father'. Codices I and XI portray a context of conflict between different Christians and prepare the reader for what comes in Codex VII: expositions on revelation. See Louis Painchaud and Michael Kaler, 'From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* to the *Three Steles of Seth*: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as Collection', *Vigiliae Christianae* 61:4 (2007): 445–469. Elaine Pagels and Lance Jenott have also presented a hypothesis on the purpose of Codex I as a whole, reading it as a curriculum for a fourth-century Christian seeking divine revelation, with the first two tractates inviting the reader to do so and the last three giving more detailed advice and information on how to find it. See Lance Jenott and Elaine Pagels, 'Antony's Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18:4 (2010): 557–589.

[25] Wolf-Peter Funk has suggested that the Nag Hammadi codices, or at least some of them, were copied and recopied by migrating people who tried to make the texts

perhaps Codex I was the result of a number of separate visits by the scribes to the place where the different *Vorlagen* were kept. After Scribe A finished copying texts 1–3 and 5, he could have given/sent the codex to Scribe B who had access to *The Treatise on the Resurrection.* There are multiple possible scenarios, and we will probably never get to the bottom of the precise circumstances behind the production of Codex I.

What conclusions can be drawn from the above findings, in regard to the context in which the Nag Hammadi codices were actually produced? The indications of carelessness by Scribe A, the fluctuating word count and page lines and the sometimes erratic style, do not seem to support the hypothesis that this was work done by a professional scribal team working on commission, as suggested by some,[26] because if the codex had been a commercial product, its cost would have depended on the quality of the material and the quality of the writing. Roger Bagnall categorises print quality along a range from calligraphy quality (the best) to documentary quality (the poorest).[27] The cost of a commercially produced book was dependent on the number of lines the scribe needed to copy, with a sum being agreed upon per copied line. Considering the line-length fluctuations of up to 18 per cent throughout the work done by Scribe A, who also produced a very mixed quality of

conform to their own dialects (Wolf-Peter Funk, 'The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier (Québec: Les Presses de Université Laval, 1995, 107–147). This is because the codices include a mixture of Coptic dialects. However, as Lundhaug and Jenott argue, the Pachomian monasteries could also have been a place where different peoples/dialects came together, and they present evidence that monks did in fact acquire new reading material from people passing through (Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins,* 216).

[26] As suggested by, for example, Römer, 'Manichaeism and Gnosticism in the Papyri', and Montserrat-Torrents, 'The Social and Cultural Setting of the Coptic Gnostic Library', 477–478.

[27] See Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, 56–58. He bases his estimate on the *Edict on Maximum Prices* by Diocletian, issued in 301.

writing, if Codex I had been a commercial product it would have been very difficult to calculate the price for such an asymmetrical work.[28] The observation that it was produced carelessly or with other intent than manufacturing a commercial product with the purpose of bringing in as much profit as possible fits better with the hypothesis that it was produced by the people who planned to use it.[29] As described in the introductory chapter, the latest suggestion about the texts' background – advanced by Lundhaug and Jenott – is that they were part of a monastic book exchange network. As Lundhaug and Jenott have demonstrated, some of the codices were copied at the request of monks who wished to read texts to which they did not have access in their own library. It was not unusual for texts to be copied and sent to friends at their request, or for texts to be lent out to be copied by those who borrowed them;[30] however, Codex I was most probably not a book produced at the request of

---

[28] Compare, for example, pages 111–118 (with cramped style and long lines) with 1–16 (where lines are shorter, straighter and written with a seemingly controlled hand).

[29] As Lundhaug and Jenott point out, the scenario that the codices were copied by a professional, 'non-religious', scribal team does not fit well with the scribal notes and colophons. In Codex II, the colophon asks the recipients, his 'brothers', to pray for him (the scribe), and in Codex VII the scribe, who calls himself 'the Son', asks for his 'Father's' blessing and in turn sends blessings to the 'Father' (Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 207). See also Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, 'Production, Distribution and Ownership of Books in the Monasteries of Upper Egypt: The Evidence of the Nag Hammadi Colophons', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical* Paideia, ed. Lillian I. Larsen and Samuel Rubenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 306–335.

[30] We know, for example, by way of the scribal note in Codex VI (page 65) that some codices were copied at the request of people who seem to have belonged to networks in which books were exchanged. These would have been similar to that which can be discerned in a letter from Jerome (ca. AD 375) to his friend Florentinus (Jerome, *Epistle* 5:2). Texts were sent between friends and acquaintances and requests could be made to copy particular texts which one did not possess but knew or hoped were part of the other party's library. For more on book exchange networks, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 197–206

outsiders. Let us now turn finally to the reasons why the context of a book exchange network is not reflected in Codex I and why the likeliest scenario is that of a monastic setting.

Inexperience or Carelessness in Copying Codex I

The many untoward features of the codicology of Codex I suggest that it was produced by a scribe who did not place the production of a legible text to the fore. Inexperience or simple carelessness would explain the fluctuation of style and quality, fluctuating word count and line length, as well as the awkward codex construction. Yet we know that the setting in which the Nag Hammadi codices were generated had the experience to produce legible and well-structured texts, as evidenced by most of the other codices. The ample examples of *homoioteleuton*[31] throughout the Nag Hammadi codices point to the fact that the scribes did not necessarily read the text, at least in a cognisant way, while copying; the main purpose was most likely to produce as close to a flawless product as possible. The scribe did not need to be cognisant of the content while copying, as Paul Saenger has argued. *Scriptura continua* was not a copying style that demanded a high level of comprehension by the scribe,[32] as text devoid of punctuation and spaces between words is easier to copy, although more demanding to read. Transposition and other common scribal errors in texts copied after the textual revolution introduced spaces, and punctuation does not appear as often in texts composed in *scriptura continua*.[33] Meanwhile, both reading

---

[31] The term means 'same ending' and refers to a particular scribal error that occurred when a scribe was copying a sentence or a number of words at a time into the new book being produced and accidentally omitted a section of text, picking up from an incorrect place in the original because the word which ended the previous sentence reappeared nearby.

[32] Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 49.

[33] Saenger, *Space between Words*, 48.

and copying *scriptura continua* was aided by introducing more spaces between each letter, rather than between words. Medieval manuscripts contain much less space between letters.[34] So, it is likely that most of the Nag Hammadi texts were chiefly copied by scribes who put their effort into manufacturing a text as close to flawless as possible.

Codex I is an exception. Scribe A did not place prime importance on the legibility of the texts, at least as far as *The Tripartite Tractate* is concerned, as indicated by the crowded pages in Quires II and III.[35] As it turns out, there are other indications in addition to the many errors in Codex I which indicate that it was not produced by a person focused on the copying task. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, there are scribal markings in the left margin of *The Tripartite Tractate* which highlight passages of interest. As these markings are parallel to the left margin, it appears that they can only have been made by the scribe himself while copying. A private person wealthy enough to produce a text of this magnitude would undoubtably have had a slave or professional scribe make the copy, expounding on the text only after its production. A monk, however, who was deemed spiritually mature enough, could have taken it upon himself to produce the text, even allowing himself the liberty to read, ponder and make notes in the text while copying. *The Tripartite Tractate* obviously piqued the interest of the scribe enough to distract him from meticulous copying to reflect on the text and insert notes. No other texts produced by the scribal team indicate that they were read and contemplated as they were copied, as Codex I seems to have been. In a monastic setting the production was left to those who wished to read and use the texts being copied, or their

---

[34] Saenger, *Space between Words*, 8–10.

[35] Although Scribe A, contrary to the more experienced copier of the fourth text, added reading aids in the form of punctuation and at times more generous spacing. See more in the next chapter.

immediate superiors. Copying a book which contained poten-
tially compromising material – like the extracanonical texts that
Codex I could be viewed as containing – was laden with dangers
to the spiritual integrity of the copyist.[36] However, as Palladius'
Lausiac History tells us, the 'perfect' monks who had reached
sufficient spiritual maturity to keep them on the right path were
permitted to read, write and copy whatever they saw fit.[37]

Thus, it seems that Codex I was produced by a scribe without
much scribal experience or one who did not see his main task as
being that of producing a highly legible text; alternatively, he was
carried away by what he read in *The Tripartite Tractate*. At the same
time, the scribe obviously possessed enough theological and philo-
sophical knowledge to be able to read and understand the text being
copied to the point of making notes in it, and held a position within
the scribal community which would allow him to read and com-
ment upon potentially compromising material. These possibilities,
therefore, suggest that this is a monk who was considered advanced
in spiritual pursuits but without much experience in codex produc-
tion who took it upon himself to copy a text of particular interest,
rather than delegating the task to more conscientious scribes in the
team, perhaps to protect their spiritual integrity.

Conclusion

The codicological facts surrounding the production of Codex I do
not support the view that it was a commercial product, although it is

---

[36] See, for example, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* wherein a monk is described as keeping
certain parts of an advanced text from a scribe because he lacks proper training. Trans.
Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian
Publications, 1984), 34. The Greek text on which Ward's translation is based is from
Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. LXV (Paris, 1865), 132.

[37] Palladius, *Lausiac History* I, 33. In *The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and
Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymous
and Others*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. (London, 1904), vol. I, 216.

hard to evaluate such an erratic work. If it were not a commercial product, nor one commissioned by a wealthy individual who kept scribes in his employment (which the notes in the margin in *The Tripartite Tractate* speak against), a monastic setting is the most convincing scenario in which texts with such intricate content might have been copied and commented upon at the same time. A monk without much scribal practice but with theological knowledge, who, rather than labouring mechanically, interacted with what was being copied, would explain the many unusual features of the final product. Meanwhile, it also safeguarded more experienced scribes without sufficient theological and philosophical training against being led astray.

All the Nag Hammadi codices except Codex I, produced by a scribe with little proficiency, followed the practice of codex production where the required number of sheets were measured and placed in a stack and folded in the middle. Thus, it is tempting to imagine that the advantages of using a multi-quire codex came to the knowledge of a group of experienced monastic scribes by way of sheer coincidence, by way of an inexperienced or neglectful monk (possibly due to distraction), who nevertheless managed to strike codicological gold. If it truly was distraction causing the inconsistencies, and not sheer inexperience or incompetence, what spiritual insights and theological topics could have been spellbinding enough to have caused the codicological neglect which we witness in Codex I? This is the topic of the next chapter.

84

4 | Notes Made by Monks: The Marginal Markings in Codex I and Codex VIII

This chapter deals with a curious scribal feature prominent in two Nag Hammadi codices: the appearance of *diple* and *coronis* signs in the margins of the texts, either alone or in a row. On the few occasions these signs have been noted and discussed by scholars engaged with the Nag Hammadi texts, they have been described, or perhaps rather explained away, as paragraph markers. As this chapter makes clear, however, there is not much supporting the interpretation that the small arrow-like signs in both the left and right margins appearing in some of the texts are paragraph markers. Rather, it is argued here that these signs in Codex I and Codex VIII were markers made by a reader or the scribe himself to highlight passages of particular importance. Furthermore, it is argued that the context in which the marked passages make the most sense is that of a Pachomian monastery in the late fourth or early fifth century.

Ancient Christian Scribal Practice and the Use of *Diplai*

Christians used a number of scribal signs meant to aid the legibility and study of a text: paragraph markers in the form of enlarged letters; initial lines protruding into the margin (called *ekthesis*); diaeresis markers, dots above vowels to indicate where one word ends and the next begins; as well as aspirations and breathing markers. Another scribal sign, or perhaps reading sign, with a more elusive function was the *paragraphi cum corone*, or simply *coronis*, written somewhat like the letter tau with a tilting base,

a parallel line with a diagonal vertical stroke drawn from its middle down to the left side. *Corone* were chiefly used as paragraph markers but could also highlight passages of particular importance. The *diple* sign, written like a pointed bracket or an arrow (>), has an even vaguer background. Greek scribes are said to have used the *diplai* markers for a number of reasons: in order to highlight passages in a text which contained quotations from another text, for example, or for marking out important passages with paratextual relevance.[1] This practice was adopted by Christian scribes to varying degrees, as scholars have noted previously.[2] In the earliest Christian manuscripts containing the New Testament writings, the *diplai* signs were used to mark out passages quoting the Hebrew Bible.[3] Charles E. Hill writes that he has not found any Christian texts from antiquity where this sign is used in any other way than to quote Scripture.[4] However, as we shall see, none of the passages highlighted in the Nag Hammadi texts by one or more *diple* signs being placed in the right or left margins are quotes – or not, at least, of any texts known to us today, Christian or otherwise. However, as noted, *diplai* were also applied for other purposes, although New Testament scholars have not expanded upon their Christian use. Eric Turner notes in his work on the codicology of Greek manuscripts that a *diple* was used to mark passages, words or phrases of particular importance, to indicate a parallel or reference or to mark out a passage which is further elaborated on in a commentary in the scribe's possession or one that is in the process of being made.[5]

---

[1] Eric G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1968]), 92–95, 112–124; Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, 17–18.

[2] Charles E. Hill, 'Irenaeus, the Scribes, and the Scriptures: Papyrological and Theological Observations from P.Oxy 3.405', in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 119–130.

[3] Charles E. Hill, '"The Truth above All Demonstration": Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine', in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 68–69.

[4] Hill, 'The Truth above All Demonstration', 68–69.

[5] Turner, *Greek Papyri*, 118.

Let us turn to the Nag Hammadi texts showcasing the *diplai* and *corone* signs.

Scribal Signs in the Nag Hammadi Codices

It has been estimated that twelve different scribes were involved in producing the Nag Hammadi codices, chiefly by identifying the particulars of the scribal hands.[6] Many, although far from all the texts contain scribal signs, including punctuation, diaeresis, *ekthesis*, spacing and enlarged letters, among others, that one would expect of ancient manuscripts from this age and context. Such signs were most likely meant to aid legibility, to ease the tracking of the text when reading it (most probably aloud). However, given the existence of some very cluttered pages as well as texts without any scribal markings at all (like *The Treatise on the Resurrection* in Codex I, discussed in the previous chapter), legibility was far from the first priority for all scribes. Facilitating the reading or performing of the texts in communal settings by a lector was, thus, most likely not their chief purpose. Rather, examination of the scribal signs found in the texts indicates a better fit with a scenario in which the texts were copied for private use: for study, contemplation, educational purposes and discussion.

The *corone* signs appear in Codices III, V and VIII. As René Falkenberg has pointed out in his study of the sequence of the texts in Codex III (from a codicological perspective), a *coronis* by itself does not give much information about its function.[7] Usually they

---

[6] James M. Robinson, 'The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honor of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 170–190; Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 242–243.

[7] See, René Falkenberg, 'The Making of a Secret Book of John: NHC III in Light of New Philology', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 105–109. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed this out to me.

are used as paragraph markers but to ascertain this one is dependent on the context, coupled with other paratextual features. Their use in the Nag Hammadi codices remains to be systematically studied. The *diplai* (>) and the *diple obelismene* (>—) have also received unreasonably little attention. Studying these signs carries great potential for aiding us in determining who actually read these texts and why.

Found in most of the Nag Hammadi codices, the majority of the *diple* signs are situated at the far-right edge of a line to make the margin straight or at the bottom of a page or a text, to complete the last line of a text/page. Thus, the *diple* sign was first and foremost used as a line filler and for marking off passages and ending pages. In these cases, the *diplai* are simply used for aesthetic purposes and for lucidity.[8] The *coronis*, or *paragraphi cum corone*, as its name indicates, is most often thought to be a paragraph marker. But closer study of the Nag Hammadi codices shows that the *coronis* is not used only as a paragraph marker, nor can the *diplai* be reduced to simple line fillers.

On some occasions, like in Codex VIII, we find *coronis* marks that cannot be paragraph markers, since they are found within a narrative. We also find *diple* signs in the margin of texts that do not seem to have the function of being a line filler, since the marks protrude into the margin (and thus serve the opposite purpose of a line filler).[9] These are found in Codex I. They, too, appear in the

---

[8] See 13:25 (here there is also a forward slash: /), 59:38, 66:40, 89:36, 90:13, 93:37, 97:39, 101:35.

[9] For example, in Codex I, *diplai* marks are used at the ending of *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth* and also used to mark off the three different subsections of *The Tripartite Tractate.* That the *diple* has other functions as well is apparent from 33:39, 40:1–2, 68:19, 75:32–34, 82:2–3, 82:10, 83:21, 84:11–13, 119:23–27. This has previously been noted in regard to Codex I, by Kasser (*Tractatus Tripartitus: Pars I*, 15), who also marks out 118:36 as including a *diple*, yet the left margin is not visible due to lacunae and at the right margin there is a colon, not a *diple* (Kasser, *Tractatus Tripartitus: Pars I*, 15). On page 32 the mark is used to indicate where to insert a line that the scribe failed to copy, which was then placed at the bottom of the page. In my opinion, the *diple* at 33:39 is more reminiscent of a *coronis*.

middle of a narrative and cannot have been used as paragraph markers. Kasser suggested that the *diplai* in Codex I could have been used to indicate quotes, as in other early Christian texts, for example quotes from Scripture, but the passages so marked are not from any known Scriptural text. The same is the case with the *coronis*, excluding its use as a quotation marker. Kasser also suggests that the markings in Codex I could indicate passages of particular importance. Let us study these cases in detail, first the *diplai* in Codex I and then compare them to the *corone* sign appearing in Codex VIII and see what the use of these signs can tell us about their readers and how they were read.

The Diplai *in Codex I*

The *diple* sign is used throughout Codex I and, as stated above, most are line fillers and markers to end a page/text. But in the following places, the sign is not a line filler, nor does it highlight when a text or page ends: 68:19, 75:32–34, 82:2–3, 82:10 83:21, 84:11–13, 119:23–27.[10] Three of these instances are pages where just a single *diple* has been placed next to the margin (68:19, 82:10 and 83:21). The single lines highlighted in this way do not form complete sentences, nor are they indicators of the beginning of something new in the narrative.

---

[10] We could include 82:10 and 40:1–2. At 82:10 the marking is placed between two lines, followed by a ⲍⲉ. This is most likely a paragraph marker. The sentence marked out at 40:1–2 makes poor sense on its own. The two lines read: ⲉⲛ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲙ̅ⲙⲓⲥⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲣⲙⲉⲥⲧⲟⲩ ϣⲁⲣⲡ̄. However, since the above *diple* is placed between lines 1 and 2, I take it here as a maker for the beginning of a new passage, which is also what seems to begin at the end of line 2. From the word ϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ onward, which is the beginning of a new sentence, the nature of "the Name" is being described in detail. On page 32 there is a mark used to indicate where to insert a line that the scribe failed to copy, but which was then placed at the bottom of the page. Finally, at the bottom of page 33 (33:39) in *The Gospel of Truth,* we find a marking below the line. This might be the only occasion where a *coronis* sign is used, which often signals a shift in focus or a new passage, but also part of a particularly important subject. Here it was perhaps meant to highlight the *paraenetic* sections that are concentrated on page 33. It might also be a way to highlight the importance of the following page, 34, which discusses the nature of the Father.

The lines before 68:19 tell us how the Aeons are expected to honour the Father with a certain sentence; then follows the *diple* line, 'It is the Father who is the All' (ⲡⲓⲱⲧ· ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ· ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥ ⲡⲉ· ⲙⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ̄) (68:18–19). This is too short to ascertain if it is a quote from another text or just a mark made by a reader to note the sentence, perhaps agreeing with what has just been read. We find the same thing in 83:21, which reads, 'glorious pre-existent one' ([ⲧ]ⲁⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ· ⲉⲧⲣ̄ ϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲟⲡ·). Both of these *diplai* occur in the middle of a narrative and highlight passages that underline the greatness of the highest Father, a noteworthy topic for a Christian reader. At 82:10, a *diple* is placed at the end of a passage but not as one would expect, to mark the place where something new starts, but rather to mark off a sentence that ends the previous passage. The *diple* is placed next to a line that is drawn inward from the left margin, marking out a sentence beginning and ending with ⲭⲉ, between which we read, 'All his prayer and remembering were numerous powers according to that limit. For there is nothing barren in his thought.'[11] It is hard to decipher a more detailed purpose behind marking out these single *diple* sentences. There are, however, four instances in *The Tripartite Tractate* where multiple *diplai* have been placed in a vertical row next to the margin, marking out longer passages (75:32–34, 82:2–3, 84:11–13 and 119:23–27) (see Fig. 4.1).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, two of these vertical rows of *diplai* (p. 119 and, even more clearly, on p. 84) must have been inserted by the scribe himself,[12] since they do not protrude into the left margin, as one would expect if they were added post-inscription

---

[11] 82:10–14: ⲭⲉ ⲡⲓⲥⲁⲡⲥⲡ̄ ⲧⲏⲣϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲓⲣ̄ ⟨ⲡ⟩ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ· ⲛⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ϩⲛ̄ϭⲟⲙ ⲉⲛⲁϣⲱⲟⲩ ⲕⲁ⟨ⲧⲁ⟩ ⲡⲓϩⲟⲣⲟⲥ ⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ⲭⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲗⲁⲩⲉ· ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲁⲥϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲩ[ⲉ]. Text and translation by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 242–243.

[12] This, of course, presupposes that these features were not simply copied from the original Greek manuscript. However, this seems highly unlikely. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*.
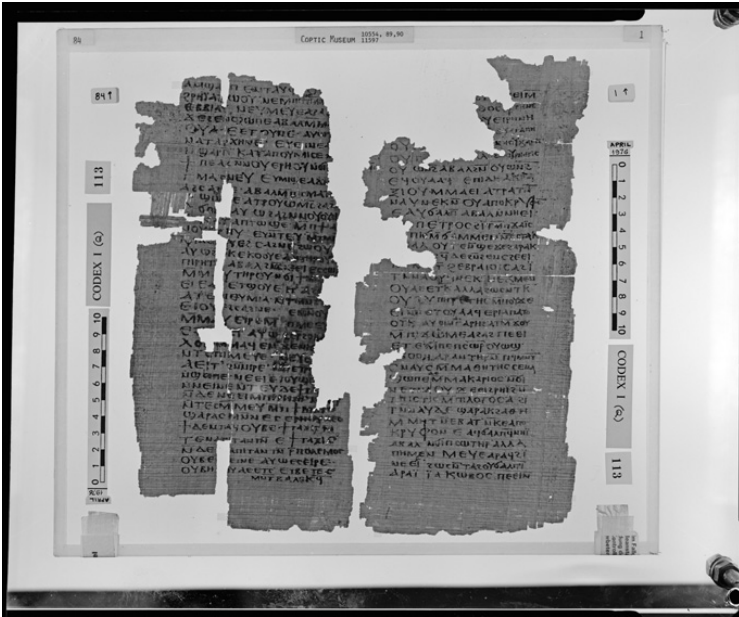
90

Figure 4.1 The top of page 84 and the bottom of 119 exhibit vertical *diplai* in line with the left margin, which indicates that they were made by the scribe or that the scribe intentionally indented the passage. Photo of page 84 by Basile Psiroukis. Photo of page 119 by Jean Doresse. Images courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

(see Fig. 4.1). On pages 75 and 82 the case is less certain. On page 75 the markings are on the right side of the margin, which is rare for this scribe, so it is possible that they were added by a later reader. In the case of page 82, lines 2 and 3, the *diplai* are placed next to the left of the text, as *ekthesis*.[13] The two lines do not extend as far to the left as the surrounding lines, suggesting that the *diplai* were added by the scribe when copying the text.

---

[13] This refers to a technique whereby the first line of a passage protrudes into the left margin, as a sort of reading aid.
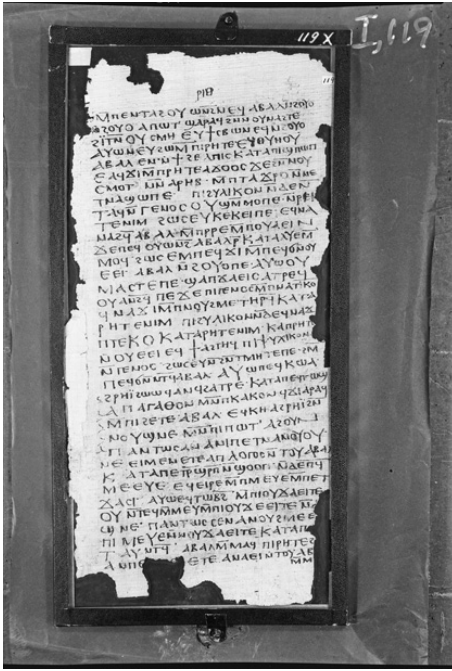
Figure 4.1 (cont.)

What is the meaning of these markings?[14] In the following section I examine these four instances where it is obvious that we are not dealing with paragraph markers (because there is more than one *diple* in the margin), quotes (they are from no known text) or line fillers (all except one are found in the left margin[15]).

---

[14] Thomassen writes that sometimes the *diplai* seem to point 'out a passage of special interest' or 'tend to be general and easily quotable dicta'. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on why these passages would be interesting or quotable, or what this could tell us about the readers and owners of this codex. Cf. Einar Thomassen, 'The Tripartite Tractate from Nag Hammadi' (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1982), 13 n. 3. This point seems to have been omitted in the published French version. See Einar Thomassen and Louis Painchaud, *Le traité tripartite: (NH I,5)* (Québec: Le Presses de l'Université Laval, 1989), 6.

[15] On page 75 the row of *diplai* is in the right margin, where one would expect line fillers, but these are somewhat awkwardly placed for line fillers (see image above).

Multiple Diplai *in* The Tripartite Tractate *(NHC I,5)*

At 75:32–34 we find three *diplai* in the right-hand margin marking the following passage:

He (the Logos) received a wise nature so as to inquire into the hidden order, since he was an offspring of wisdom.[16]	ⲁϥϫⲓ ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ ⲛⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲁⲧⲣⲉϥϩⲁⲧϩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲡⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉ· ⲉⲧⲑⲏⲡ ϩⲱⲥ ⲉⲩⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ ⲛⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲡⲉ

This sentence describes the nature of the Logos, and page 75 as a whole marks the entrance of the Logos, the main character of the narrative in *The Tripartite Tractate*.

Lines 82:2–3 have two *diplai* in the left margin, marking a passage on the return of the Logos after his fall from the harmony of the Pleroma. The marked-out sentence reads, 'It was a help, causing him to turn toward himself',[17] referring to the 'prayer of the blending' (ⲡⲓⲥⲁⲡⲥ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲧ), mentioned on the line before. 'Blending' (ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲧ) is a technical term used throughout *The Tripartite Tractate* to refer to rejoining the harmony of the Pleroma, Christ and the unity of the spiritual Church.[18] And, as we have seen,

---

[16] NHC I, 75:32–34. The last five letters are found on line 35. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 232.

[17] NHC I, 82:2–3: ⲛⲉⲟⲩⲃⲟⲏⲑⲓⲁ ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲩⲧⲥⲁϥ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲙⲓⲛ ⲙⲙ[ⲁϥ]. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 242. As in the case of 40:1–2, one of the two arrows on page 82 seems to be placed between the lines. This could thus be understood as an indication that the whole following passage is of particular import. However, this does not fit the narrative on page 82 at all, while at the same time the two lines together form a complete sentence with a crucial point being made. Thus, I rather think it is more likely that just the two sentences are being highlighted.

[18] Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, chapter 1. Another word used for this is ⲙⲟⲩϫⲕ, and these two terms are contrasted with ⲧⲱϩ and ⲧⲁϩⲧϩ ('mixing'), The words for mixing are used when the Logos gets 'unmixed' (ⲁⲧⲧⲱϩ) from his erroneous creation on account of the Saviour (90:17–18); when the Logos does not allow his superior powers to 'mix' (ⲧⲱϩ) with the inferior (97:25); when the righteous Hebrews transcend the influence of the 'mixed powers' (ⲛⲓϭⲟⲙ ⲉⲧⲉϩⲧⲁϩⲧ) and 'attained to the level of the unmixed ones' (ⲁⲧⲁϩⲧ ̄) (110:34); and to denote those

praying has previously been highlighted in the text as of particular importance (82:10). There is a third *diple* a few lines further down, between lines 9 and 10, marking off a whole paragraph that starts with the Logos turning towards himself. The passage as a whole reads:

The prayer of the blending was a help, causing him to turn towards himself and the Totality. A reason for him to remember the pre-existent ones is that he is remembered. This is the thought which calls out from afar, bringing him back.[19]	ⲛⲉⲣⲉⲡⲓⲥⲁⲡ̄ⲥ̄ ϭⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲧ [ⲡⲉ] ⲛⲉⲟⲩⲃⲟⲏⲑⲓⲁ ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲩⲧⲥⲁϥ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲓⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙ[ⲁϥ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ̄ ϫⲉ ⲛⲉⲟⲩⲗⲁⲉⲓϭⲉ ⲛⲉϥ ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲧⲣⲉϥⲣ̄ ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩ[ⲉ] ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲡⲉⲧⲣⲟⲩⲣ̄ ⲡⲉϥⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ· ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲧⲱϣ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲉ· ⲉϥⲧⲥⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϥ·

Again, prayer is discussed. Here we are told that the Logos turns towards himself, prays and then remembers his previous life with the Totality (the harmony with other Aeons), and the Totality in turn remembers him. These events contribute to the Logos' return to harmony.

Lines 84:11–13 have a *diple* beside the first letter in the left margin, and all three are in line with the text in the body, which indicates that they were written by the original scribe and were meant to be included in the text from the beginning. The sentences on these

---

humans and angels who will be lost and destroyed in the end, as they are mixed (ⲧϩⲧϩ/ⲧⲉϩⲧϩ) (120:21, 121:22). This mixed state is the original human reality and would have been permanent if it were not for the grace of the Saviour. This is contrasted to 'blending' (ⲧⲱⲧ/ⲙⲟⲩϫⲕ): when the elect blend with the Saviour (122:13–17); when the Logos is reintegrated (blends) with the Pleroma from which he had fallen away (122:25–27); as the blended harmony of the Aeons (68:27, 71:11); and as a description of the ultimate restoration (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) of the Church and the Pleroma (123:11–27, 133:6–7). These aspects are influenced by Stoic discussions of physics. For more, see Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, chapter 1.

[19] NHC I, 82:1–9. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 242.

94

lines comment on the emergence of the different beings created in the aftermath of the fall of the Logos. We read:

they were drawn down into forces and substances in accordance with the state of being in conflict (with) each other.[20]	ⲁⲧⲣⲟⲩⲱⲙⲥ̄ ⲋⲁ ⲋ̄ⲛ̄ⲃ̄ⲟⲙ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲋⲁ ⲋⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲩⲥⲓ[ⲁ] ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲧⲱϣⲉ· ⲙ̄ⲡ†· ⲁ[ⲭⲛ̄] ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩ·

Here we encounter an explanation of how the angelic orders above humanity emerged, later called those on the left and the right; they were drawn down after the fall of the Logos into certain natures and substances that resulted in a perpetual conflict within the angelic world.

The last section marked off is at 119:23–27, and here the *diplai* are found in the left margin. This passage discusses another important subject in *The Tripartite Tractate*: the psychic race. The pneumatics are described as those who react immediately to the appearance of the Saviour; these people are the natural leaders of the Church and described as the teachers (116:17–20). The role and identity of the psychics is uncertain. However, the lines marked off with *diplai* make things a bit clearer:

According to its (the psychic race) disposition for both good and evil, it receives the emanation that is established abruptly, and the complete escape to those who are good.[21]	ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲉϥⲧⲱϣ ⲁⲡⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲛ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲁⲕⲟⲛ ϥϫⲓ ⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲋⲉⲧⲉ· ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲉϥⲕⲏ· ⲁⲋⲣⲏ̈ⲓ ⲋ̄ⲛ̄ ⲟⲩϣⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲓⲡⲱⲧ· ⲁⲋⲟⲩⲛ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲱⲥ ⲁⲛ ⲁⲛⲛⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ·

[20] NHC I, 84:11–13. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 246. I emend the lacuna on line 13 with ⲁ[ⲭⲛ̄] instead of ⲁ[ⲋⲛ̄], as Attridge has it, thus following Thomassen and Painchaud, *Le traité tripartite*, x.

[21] NHC I, 119:23–27. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 308.

95

This is a crucial passage in the text. Here we learn that the psychic humans will receive a 'complete escape' but that they are drawn to both good and evil on account of the ephemeral nature of their situation. Later in *The Tripartite Tractate* we read that the psychics have to prove themselves by doing good works and acting as instructed by the pneumatics (131:22–34).

In conclusion, the passages marked off with more than one *diple* sign can be summed up in the following way:

75:32–34	Logos as offspring of Wisdom
82:2–3	Logos prays and is aided to turn towards himself
84:11–13	Angelic warfare
119:23–27	The psychics receive full salvation

Elucidating the Monastic Connection of the Diplai *Passages in Codex I*

All these topics, particularly those highlighting the need for prayer and the passage on page 84 commenting on angelic warfare,[22] would have spoken to ascetics involved in early Egyptian monasticism.[23] The passages also deal with details pertaining to Valentinian theology (e.g. those on the youngest Aeon and the psychic race), technicalities that are not spontaneously associated with monks. However, we know that several Church Fathers read Valentinian works and some wrote long treatises about and against them, including two of the most famous early Christian theologians, Origen and Clement, who were in turn read by monks.[24] It is

---

[22] For more on this topic in early Christianity, focusing on the monastic movement, see especially David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[23] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 78–89, 246–262.

[24] Clement's paraphrase of Valentinian theology is often counted among the most reliable (e.g. his recapitulation of a certain Theodotus). Origen read, wrote about and often agreed with Heracleon, one of the earliest theologians to have been influenced by Valentinus. Furthermore, we know that many monks read and admired Origen,

not unthinkable for monks to have shown interest in forms of Christian theology that Origen and Clement discussed at length and sometimes even upheld, texts that also coincided with what was classified as Origenist theology.[25] As many scholars have pointed out, *The Tripartite Tractate* corresponds with Origen's thought on several points: on the doctrine of *apokatastasis*; seeing the Will of the Father as the origin of creation; the pre-existence of souls before the body; a resurrection without the physical body.[26] But what could have spoken to a monastic reader in the parts highlighted with *diplai* (except the clear monastic topics of prayer and angelic warfare)?

which would eventually become controversial. They read Clement too. For the influence Clement had on Evagrius, for example, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, chapter 3. For the influence of Origen in early Egyptian monasticism, see Samuel Rubenson, 'Origen in the Egyptian Monastic Tradition of the Fourth Century', in *Origeniana Septima: Origen in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 319–337; Jon F. Dechow, 'The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies (with Appendix 2015)', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 11–51. For a work on the relation between Origen and Heracleon, see Carl Johan Berglund, *Origen's References to Heracleon: A Quotation-Analytical Study of the Earliest Known Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

[25] For examples on how *The Gospel of Philip* in Nag Hammadi Codex II reflects awareness of the Origenist controversy, see Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[26] For more on the Origenist tendencies in *The Tripartite Tractate*, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 242. One doctrine on which Clement, Athanasius (who wrote *The Life of Antony*), Evagrius and *The Tripartite Tractate* would agree is that bad *phantasia* (impressions) could affect humans and are the result of demons (in *The Tripartite Tractate* called 'mixed powers' or those comic powers from the 'left' side) (109:24–110:1, 110:22–111:23). For discussions of this doctrine in Clement, Evagrius, Shenoute and Athanasius, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 37–47; Alberto Camplani, 'Un episodio della ricezione del ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ in Egitto: Note di eresiologia Shenutiana', in *Il dono e la sua ombra: Ricerche sul di Origene: Atti del I Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su 'Origene e la Traditione Alessandrina'*, ed. F. Cocchini (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1997), 159–172.

The youngest Aeon is called Logos in *The Tripartite Tractate*, but in Valentinian theology the youngest Aeon is more often called Sophia, as in *The Interpretation of Knowledge* and *A Valentinian Exposition*, which were copied by the same scribe who copied *The Treatise on the Resurrection* in Codex I.[27] The passage marked off at 75:32–34 could have been read with special interest because here the Logos is an offspring of Wisdom (Sophia). The doctrine that the Logos, identified with the Wisdom of God, carries out creation according to the providence of God (as it is described in *The Tripartite Tractate*) would not have sounded strange to a reader familiar with John's prologue, and even less strange to one who had knowledge of the writings of Philo and Origen.[28] There are, of course, also points of departure. For example, Origen would likely have opposed *The Tripartite Tractate* at the same point where he opposed Heracleon, who made the distinction that the Logos created 'all things' (Joh 1:3) *outside* the Pleroma.[29] But there are clear

---

[27] *The Interpretation of Knowledge* is very damaged but most likely included a myth of the fallen Sophia, see Paul Linjamaa, 'The Female Figures and Fate in *The Interpretation of Knowledge*, NHC XI,I', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24:1 (2016): 29–54. *A Valentinian Exposition* is even more damaged, but from the little that remains, one can discern a Valentinian myth. See Elaine Pagels, 'A Valentinian Exposition: Introduction', in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C. H. Hedrick (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 89–105.

[28] For Origen, the Son was known as Wisdom in relation to the Father and Logos in relation to the World (*Peri Archon* I.2). For more on this, see, e.g., Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). The portrayal of Logos in the Gospel of John, as was well known, coincided with how Wisdom was portrayed in some Jewish literature (Genesis 1, Proverbs 8, Sirach 24). Philo already saw creation taking place as God acting out his providential Will through his Wisdom and Logos. See Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973).

[29] For Origen and Heracleon, see Berglund, *Origen's References to Heracleon.* Another obvious difference between Origen's view on Logos and that in *The Tripartite Tractate* is that Origen clearly associates Logos with the Son and Jesus, while in *The Tripartite Tractate* the Son as part of the godhead is differentiated from the Logos who is a lower Aeon.

98

similarities and points of comparison which in all likelihood would have intrigued Christian readers favouring Origen and the theological intricacies of these cosmological questions.[30] Furthermore, reading texts with which one does not fully agree is not necessarily less alluring, interesting or edifying than reading something which affirms one's opinions.

The passage marked off at 82:2–3 also deals with the Logos and describes how the youngest Aeon is returned to the fold from which he fell away by turning towards himself, praying and with the aid of remembrance. This is a part of the text where Valentinian theology coincides with what we know was of interest to early Christian monks in Egypt, perhaps in particular those reading Origen. At 82:2–3 we read of how introspection and prayer led to salvation, which is described as a 'blending'. The term *apokatastasis* is used in *The Tripartite Tractate* (123:19–27, 133:6–7) in the same way as it was presented by those whom we know supported the doctrine, such as Origen and Evagrius (as a return and integration into a whole).[31] Furthermore, the notion of the Logos' 'turning towards himself' (82:2–3) would have sounded very familiar to monks engaged in introspection in order to be afforded visions, and who employed mnemonic techniques for reciting Scripture when praying or warding off demons or unwanted emotions and cravings.[32] There was also a widespread idea among early Christians, especially in the early monastic world of Egypt, that earthly rituals corresponded

---

[30] Compare, for example, *The Tripartite Tractate* and Origen's *Peri Archon.* See Alberto Camplani, 'Momenti di interazione religiosa ad Alessandria e la nascita dell'élite egiziana cristiana', in *Origeniana octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition (Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 27–31 August 2001)*, vol. I, ed. L. Perrone (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 31–42, see note 15; Jean-Daniel Dubois, 'Le "Traité tripartite" (Nag Hammadi I, 5) est-il antérieur à Origène?', in *Origeniana octava*, vol. I, 303–316.

[31] See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[32] See, for example, Evagrius' *Antirrhetikos* where he lists Scriptural passages which should be memorised and which were useful against unwanted emotions.

with angelic rituals in heaven, that angels could aid humans and that humans could gain powerful support through introspection and the visualisation of heavenly domains.[33] Thus, monks reading about the Logos turning towards himself and experiencing communion with the heavenly beings above through prayer, remembrance and introspection would have found it familiar indeed.

The Origenist controversy at the turn of the fifth century coincided with the ban on not just Origen's writings but on other material which the victors of the ecclesiastical struggles considered potentially harmful, like apocryphal books.[34] However, these materials seem to have persisted in monasteries long after the ban had been imposed.[35] Why were monks not allowed to read apocryphal material and Origen? Some actually believed that apocryphal books were edifying if approached correctly,[36] but several authorities in the early monastic period expressed concern that not everybody could handle material that was considered speculative.[37] It was thought that those who did not possess the necessary knowledge and firmness of faith would be led astray by what they read.

The Tripartite Tractate's anthropology is structured around a hierarchy of different levels of knowledge.[38] The passage marked by *diplai* at 119:23–27 mentions the psychics. The version of Valentinian anthropology that envisioned three separate human 'races' (pneumatics, psychics and material) was well known to

---

[33] These themes are explored in great detail, partly with a focus on the monastic movement, in Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[34] For more on this see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 6.

[35] As suggested by Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 177.

[36] See Lundhaug and Jenott's discussion of Priscillian and Ps.-Evodios and the use of apocrypha in monasteries in *Monastic Origins*, chapter 6.

[37] For a work on this theme – that only certain people were thought to be able to handle advanced theological questions, and especially for Origen's thoughts on this – see Gunnar af Hällström, *Fides Simpliciorum according to Origen of Alexandria* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1984).

[38] Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, 159–184.

several Church Fathers and the distinction would not have sounded alien to someone familiar with Scripture and ancient physiology and theory of emotions.[39] What we encounter in *The Tripartite Tractate* is most likely an adaptation of Paul's comment on different kinds of Christians (1 Cor 2:6–16), which in turn drew on contemporary philosophy and anthropology. People were thought to comprise a material part, a psychic part animating the material and a pneumatic (sometimes referred to as noetic) part which gave life to the psyche (soul).[40] In 1 Corinthians (2:6–16) Paul makes a distinction between *pneumatic* Christians who had the ability to grasp spiritual wisdom and *psychic* Christians who did not understand this higher form of knowledge. This idea that some people have spiritual gifts and some do not is also found in *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (15:10–19.37), but in *The Tripartite Tractate* the distinction between pneumatics and psychics (and hylics) is framed as one between fixed human categories.[41] In *The*

---

[39] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 5:6; Clement, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 56:2; *Refutation of All Heresies* VI, 35:5–7. For a study on Valentinian anthropologic models and Church Fathers' reaction to them, see Ismo Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality Revisited* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), chapter 7.

[40] Philo seems to have married the ancient Greek model, where *nous* gave life and rationality to the soul, with the 'Judeo-Christian' version where this was attributed to the breath of God, *pneuma.* Philo held that the *pneuma* gave life to the *nous*, which in turn animated the soul that then organised and structured the body. See Geurt Hendrik van Koote, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[41] This could and should, in my opinion, be problematised. I argue that in practice there was flexibility between these groups, but in theory they were fixed. A psychic who proved to be a pneumatic, a person who rose to a position of leader, would most likely have been considered a pneumatic all along. With fixed categories it would have been easier to explain shifts in social dynamics; for example, a leader (a pneumatic person) who left the group could be explained as a person who was a hylic at the core, but that people had simply not been aware of it until his/her hylic nature made itself known. Thus, I would like to add a nuance to Buell's discussion of fluid categories in *The Tripartite Tractate.* Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 126–128.

Tripartite Tractate we read that the pneumatics 'are the apostles and evangelists, the disciples of the Saviour, and they are teachers of those who need teaching'.[42] The psychics are those who were 'instructed by voice' (ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲥⲙⲏ ⲉⲩϯⲥⲃⲱ)(119:3), while, according to the apostle Paul, spiritual teaching was to be distinguished from human wisdom (1 Cor 2:13–14). We are told in *The Tripartite Tractate* that the pneumatics are 'instructed in an invisible manner' (ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲛⲉⲩ ⲁⲣⲁⲥ ⲁϥⲧⲥⲉⲃⲁⲩ) by the Saviour directly (115:1–2).[43]

Many monks would undoubtedly have thought in similar ways. The idea that there are people with spiritual gifts and that there are degrees of knowledge was a common theme among monastic writers. Evagrius writes prolifically about the different stages of learning and degrees of knowledge, between outside knowledge which is reasoned with words and a higher form of knowledge which is revealed directly to the mind.[44] He cautions, therefore, that reading literature of a certain kind can be dangerous for the novice: 'It is not necessary for the knowledgeable to tell the young anything, nor to let them touch books of this sort, for they are not able to resist the falls that this

[42] NHC I, 116:17–20: ⲙⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ· ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲣⲙ̄ϯ ⲱ̄ⲙ ⲡⲟⲩϥⲉ· ⲛⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛ̄ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ· ⲛⲉ ϩⲛ̄ⲥⲁϩ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲉⲓ· ⲉⲧⲣ̄ ⲭⲣⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲥⲃⲟⲩ. My translation. Text by Attridge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 302.

[43] There is an interesting parallel between the *diplai* passages in *The Tripartite Tractate* and similar markings found in *The Gospel of Judas* in the Tchacos Codex. My gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who pointed this out to me. Page 46 of this codex also displays a row of *diplai* dealing with analogous topics, such as differences between races of humans and the fight against demons. Who owned and produced the Tchacos Codex is a debated topic, but there are many parallels between it and the Nag Hammadi codices. See Lance Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of 'The Betrayer's Gospel'* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[44] In *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, Evagrius differentiates between knowledge pertaining to the outside world which is connected to words, and the knowledge of the inside, which appears to the mind directly through the grace of God.

102

contemplation entails.'[45] Evagrius, like many other monks before and since him, emphasises that teaching and learning is directly related to spiritual warfare.[46] In *The Tripartite Tractate* the distinction between pneumatics and psychics also seems to be related to the topic of spiritual warfare.[47] We read that pneumatic people have come to this world 'that they might experience the evil things and might train themselves through them'.[48] The operative word here is ⲣ̄ⲅⲩⲙⲛⲁⲍⲉ (γυμνάζω) which is a word used in patristic sources for the *exercise* of Christian life,[49] especially higher spiritual life and moral perfection.[50] However, in a monastic context ⲣ̄ⲅⲩⲙⲛⲁⲍⲉ is also used to refer to *preparing* to withstand attacks by evil demons, as in *The Life of Antony*.[51] In *The Tripartite Tractate* 119:23–27, we read that even psychic people, those who are not made to fight evil, will receive full salvation, a concept that surely would have been a comfort to monks who did not have the stamina of a spiritual warrior like Antony, who spent time alone in the desert grappling with evil demons. This corresponds closely with what has been argued by Elaine Pagels and Lance Jenott, that there is a close

---

[45] *Kephalaia Gnostika* 25. The books to which Evagrius refers are unclear. The translation is by Dysinger, except that above I translate the word γνωστικοι as 'the knowledgeable', whereas Dysinger just transliterates the word to *gnostikoi*. I do this in order not to get entangled with discussions of the category 'Gnosticism'. www.ldy singer.com/Evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm

[46] See Evagrius, *Eight Spirits of Wickedness* and *Antirhetikos*.

[47] This is certainly also a theme in *The Interpretation of Knowledge*, see NHC XI, 6:30–32, 14:34–35, 20:14–23; but here the distinction between pneumatic and psychic people is not made, insofar as we can tell from those parts that are left of the text. Compare also Rom 8:38–39; 1 Cor 2:8, 15:25.

[48] NHC I, 126:33–34: ⲉⲩⲛⲁϫⲓ ϯⲡⲉ· ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲑⲁⲩⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲣ̄ⲅⲩⲙⲛⲁⲍⲉ· ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ϩⲣⲏ̈ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲟⲩ. Text and translation by Attridge, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 320–321.

[49] See γυμνάζω in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 324.

[50] Clement, *Stromata* VI, 10; VII, 7; Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV, 50.

[51] See the Coptic *Life of Antony* 88:2. That there are many resemblances between Codex I and Antony's letters has been established by Jenott and Pagels, 'Antony's Letters'.

correlation between Codex I and the Letters of Antony (where Antony is also engaged in battle with demons).[52]

These readings of the passages the scribe has highlighted in *The Tripartite Tractate* should suffice to demonstrate that they would have spoken to many monastic readers. The *diplai*-highlighted passages, discussing angelic warfare, the Logos and the psychics – which should be read as biblical interpretation and allegory (of Genesis 6, the Gospel of John and Paul's letters, for example) – would undoubtedly have interested monks. But what can all this say about the particular monks who used the Nag Hammadi texts? As it happens, the *diplai* and other scribal markings we find in Codex VIII lend themselves to this discussion.

The Scribal Signs in Codex VIII

Codex VIII comprises a single quire of a total of 74 leaves, with only two texts between the covers. Most of the content consists of the text entitled *Zostrianos*, the longest tractate in the Nag Hammadi collection, concluding with a short text, *The Letter of Peter to Philip*. Codex VIII is in a badly fragmented state. Most of the damage is to the bottom of its binding area, especially in the right margins of the lower left sides of the pages and the lower half of the left margins of the right-side pages. There are markings of two different kinds in the left margins throughout the codex: lateral strokes (–), most often between two lines, and a forked marking not unlike the shape of a *diple*. While the *diple* signs from Codex I are written like the tip of an arrow, the forks in Codex VIII are most likely *corone* signs made to highlight a passage of particular interest

---

[52] Jenott and Pagels, 'Antony's Letters'. It should be pointed out, however, that there is a discrepancy between the Antony in the *Life* and the one behind the letters. See, for example, Blossom Stefaniw, 'Of Sojourners and Soldiers: Demonic Violence in the Letters of Antony and the Life of Antony', in *Social Control in Late Antiquity: The Violence of Small Worlds*, ed. K. Cooper and J. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 232–255.

or importance to a reader/scribe. While the *diplai* in Codex I were placed vertically next to the left margin – some completely in line with the margin, indicating that they were made by the scribe himself to mark out a passage – the markings in Codex VIII are placed next to or between two lines, which does not help us identify whether they were penned by the scribe or a later reader. The ending of a marked-out passage is indicated with the use of either a lateral stroke in the margin or dicola inside the text.[53] Let us now turn to see what these highlighted passages contain and whether a reason can be discerned for why they were highlighted, beginning with the longest text: *Zostrianos.*

Zostrianos *(NHC VIII,1)*

From the outset we might consider the fact that the texts that were deemed interesting enough – or perhaps complicated enough – to warrant the reader's/scribe's making notes in the margin are the two longest and more complex in the Nag Hammadi collection. The first instance of scribal and/or reading aids/markings in Codex VIII appears on page 26. Between lines 18–19 a *coronis* sign is found in the left margin, and after the first word on line 19 we find a colon. The passage which precedes the colon highlighted by the *coronis* and colon is a section dealing with the structure of the highest realm and the role of the different characters responsible for its creation and organisation. The lateral stroke in the margin followed by the colon marks the beginning of a discussion about souls whose first

---

[53] Bentley Layton takes these to be paragraph markings which are 'coordinated with dicola written in the text'. See his 'Introduction to Codex VIII', in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. John H. Sieber (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 5. This interpretation is stated by Layton without much elaboration or suggestion of clear motivation. What is more, Layton does not seem to interpret all the markings as paragraph markers, mostly only the *coronis* sign. How he interprets the lateral strokes is unclear; nor does he discuss the *diplai* which also appear in the text's left margin (and thus cannot be line fillers).

sentence reads, 'Do not be amazed about the differences among souls' ([ε]ⲧⲃⲉ ⲧⲇⲓⲁⲫⲟⲣⲁ ⲇⲉ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲯⲩⲭⲏ [ⲙ]ⲡⲣⲣ).[54] The topic, as John Sieber mentions in the NHMS edition,[55] is an important theme in the text. What are the differences between souls, which souls are saved and which are not, and why? As we have seen, this topic was also highlighted in Codex I. The discussion of the differences in souls appears again in the next highlighted passage in the text.[56] In the left margin of page 30, between lines 9 and 10, we find a lateral stroke as on page 26, this time with a colon appearing five lines later.[57] The marked-out sentence begins, 'The son of Adam, Seth, comes to each of the souls as knowledge suitable for them.'[58]

Unfortunately, a *coronis* and two lateral strokes in the left margin (at 32:5–6, 36:16–17 and 40:5–6) are found in a badly fragmented section of the text which makes it hard to discern the content of these lines. However, the lateral line on page 32:5–6 is followed by a section mentioning the words 'every [. . .] of his soul' (ⲟⲛ [. . .] ⲛ[ⲓ]ⲙ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲧⲉϥⲯ[ⲩ]ⲭⲏ) (32:17–18). Page 36 mentions the divine beings Barbelo and Kalyptos shortly after a lateral stroke in the left

---

[54] If nothing else is indicated, the Coptic text of *Zostrianos* used here and throughout the book is the one edited by Layton in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, and the translation is also by Sieber from the same volume.

[55] John H. Sieber, 'Introduction to Zostrianos', in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 9.

[56] Possibly also at 27:11–15, but unfortunately the ink is unclear. The passage mentions Sophia's fall and the result of it: the creation of three different kinds of souls.

[57] Since the first word in the line below the marking is 'Adam', which is written with a superliner stroke, it appears at first glance that this is just an aesthetic detail where the scribe has protruded the superliner stroke into the margin. But a closer look makes it clear that the line marking out the colon on line 19 is placed above the stroke. What is more, the name Adam appears more than once as the first line in the left margin but never with a protruding superliner stroke in the margin: for example, further down on the same page.

[58] NHC VIII, 30:9–10: ⲥⲏⲑ ⲉϥⲛⲛⲏⲩ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲉ ⲧⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲧⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲉⲩ[ⲅ]ⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥⲡⲉ ⲉϥⲣⲱϣⲉ ⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ.

margin between lines 16 and 17. At 40:5–6 a line is found in the left margin, mentioning knowledge and Protophanes.

The next legible scribal markings are found on page 44. The first four lines are clearly marked out by a lateral stroke above the first line on the page and a *coronis* below line four, marking out the beginning of a new passage (see Fig. 4.2). The first word on line five is also included in this passage, as it is followed by a colon and a space. The passage reads as follows:
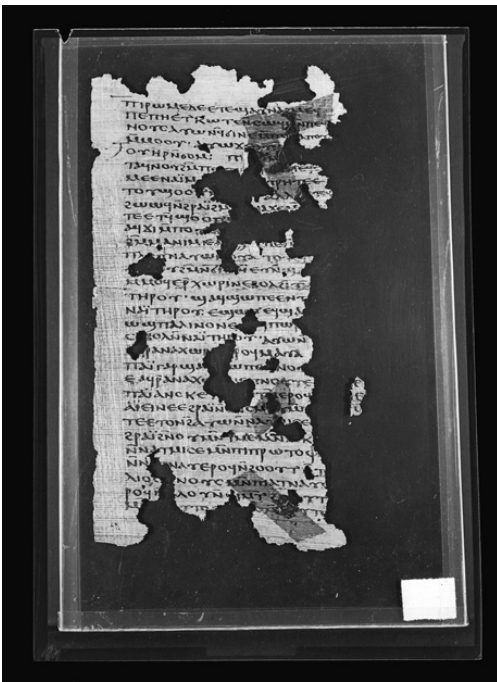
Figure 4.2 Page 44 in Codex VIII, illustrating a pronounced *coronis* in the left margin between lines 4 and 5, followed by a colon in line 5. At the top of the page, we find a lateral stroke which is used together with the *coronis* and colon to mark out a particular sentence. Photo by James M. Robinson. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

The person who can be saved	ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ϣⲁⲩⲛⲁⲙⲉϥ ⲡⲉ
is the one who seeks himself	ⲡⲏ ⲉⲧⲕⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲥⲱϥ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉϥⲛⲟⲩⲥ
and his mind and finds them	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛϥϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ ⲡⲟ[ⲩ]ⲁ ⲡⲟⲩⲁ
both. Oh, he has great	ⲙⲙⲟⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲛⲧ[ⲁ]ϥ
power![59]	ⲙ[ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ] ⲟⲩⲏⲣ ⲛ ϭⲟⲙ.

The *coronis* between lines 4 and 5 indicates that this is the beginning of a new section in the text. What follows gives details about the topic of the marked-out passage in which we learn that those who are saved have the possibility to pass through the obstacles and become united with God above.

On the next page, page 45, the first six lines are highlighted. As far as one can see, this is the only right-side page in Codex VIII where a *coronis* is placed in the left margin. There could well have been others, but due to the bad fragmentation that has generally been inflicted on the left margin on most of the right-side pages, we cannot determine how many. Above the first line on page 45, we find a *coronis* in the left margin and six lines later a colon has been placed between two words. The passage runs as follows:

And I said to the child of the child	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉϫⲁⲓ̈ ⲙ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩ
Ephesech who was with me:	ⲉⲧⲕⲏ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲓ̈ ⲛⲫⲏⲥⲛⲭ̄ ϫⲉⲩⲛ ϭⲟⲙ
'Can your Wisdom instruct me about	ⲛ ⲧⲉⲕⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲉ ⲧⲁⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲉ
the scattering of the people	ⲡⲓϫⲱⲱⲣⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ
who are saved and	[ⲉ]ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟ[ⲩ]ϩⲙ ⲙⲙⲟϥ· ⲁⲩⲱ ϫⲉ
who they are?'[60]	ⲛ[ⲓ]ⲙ ⲛ[ⲉ]

This passage seems to continue the theme of the differences among souls and details of who will and will not be saved. Following this is a passage wherein the divine character Ephesech explains why there is a multiplicity of forms in the world, saying that it is because substances turn inward towards themselves, become

---

59 NHC VIII, 44:1–5. Text by Layton, trans. Sieber, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 108–109.

60 NHC VIII, 45:1–6. Text by Layton, trans. Sieber, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 110–111.

separate and seek things that have no existence, instead of uniting and becoming one. This causes devolution and birth, and even though the substance is immortal it becomes trapped in the material body (45:11–46:15). This is why powers (ⲛⲁϭⲟⲙ) have been placed in the world to save the immortal substance that becomes trapped.

The next legible reading sign does not appear until twenty pages later on page 64, line 13. This marks the ending of a detailed passage describing how Zostrianos corresponds with different characters. It ends with an admonition to the author: 'Zostrianos, [learn] of the things about which you asked' (ⲍⲱⲥⲧⲣⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲥ[ⲱⲧⲙ] ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲕⲱⲧ[ⲉ ⲛ]ⲥⲱⲟⲩ).[61] After this follows the new passage discussing the immortal and undivided spirit. The following page is damaged and we cannot see where the marked-out passage ends.

On page 80, line 11, a lateral stroke has been placed in the left margin, followed by a colon seven lines later. If this were a paragraph marker, as some have claimed,[62] one would have expected the *coronis* to have been placed next to the line with the colon, making it clear that this began a new section, as in the example from page 64. It is more likely, however, that, again, we have a partial passage marked out for particular interest. The marked-out lines on page 80, which unfortunately are fragmented in the right margin, run as follows:

It existed . . .	ⲡⲏ ⲉⲛⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲁ[. . .]
the ever perfect one . . .	ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲡⲁⲛⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲛ[. . .]
that one, since . . .	ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲁⲩ· ϫⲉ ⲡⲏ ⲙⲉ[. . .]
pre-existent and . . .	ϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲁⲩⲱ [. . .]
rest upon all these, it . . .	ⲕⲏ ϩⲓϫⲛ ⲛⲁ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉϥ [. . .]
pre-existent being known	ϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲉⲩⲉⲓⲙ[ⲉ]
as three powered.[63]	ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲛ ϣⲙⲧϭⲟⲙ·

---

[61] NHC VIII, 64:13. Text by Layton, trans. Sieber, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 140–141.

[62] Layton, 'Introduction to Codex VIII', 5.

[63] NHC VIII, 80:12–18. Text by Layton, trans. Sieber, modified, *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 158–159.

Again, it is the all-powerful Spirit which existed before anything which is discussed in this marked-out passage, just as in the marked-out passage on page 64. Following this, the text turns to describing how the invisible Spirit has never been ignorant, that it is Barbelo who begets error and becomes ignorant.

Before summarising the topics in the above marked-out passages, let us briefly survey the second text in the codex where we also find the markings: *The Letter of Peter to Philip*.

The Letter of Peter to Philip *(NHC VIII,2)*

The last nine pages of Codex VIII contain *The Letter of Peter to Philip*, a section of the codex that is comparatively well preserved and legible. On the first page (132), a *diple* is found in the left margin at line 21, the only place where a *diple* is placed where we would have expected a *coronis*. It is faint but visible and marks out the following sentence: 'Preach in the salvation!' (ϣⲉ ⲟⲉⲓϣ ϩⲣⲁⲓ ϩⲙ ⲡⲓ[ⲟ]ⲓⲭ̄ⲓ) (132:21). The next line reads, 'which was promised us through our Lord Jesus Christ'.[64] This is a single line being highlighted and not a shorter passage, and suggestively, this is the reason the *diple* has been used instead of a *coronis*, which is placed between two lines and not next to a line.

On page 136 we find a shift in the narrative, which is marked with a *coronis* between lines 15 and 16. The last word of the previous line ends with a colon, indicating the beginning of a new passage. The previous passage has dealt with the Demiurge who, with the help of his minions, creates the visible world, while that marked by a *coronis* begins a new theme in the story, providing information about the Saviour who steps down into the body. This is a clear instance of a paragraph marker.

---

[64] 132:21–133:1: ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲙⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓ[ⲧ]ⲛ ⲡⲉⲛϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲡⲉⲭ[ⲥ̄]. Text and trans. Frederik Wisse, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 234–235.

On page 138 we find one clear lateral stroke in the left margin, without any colon in the text.[65] This could signal that it was added by someone other than the scribe or that the marking is used (by the scribe or a later reader) to highlight a sentence or section of particular interest. The previous passage describes demons attacking the 'inner man', and the reader is encouraged to fight evil powers by teaching in the world. This topic reconnects to the marked-out sentence on the first page of the text, where a *diple* highlights a call for the disciples to teach in the world. The marked-out sentences on page 138 deal with a related matter, namely, the worldly results of Jesus' recommendation: suffering of a different kind. The sentence reads, 'If he, our Lord, suffered, how much (must) we (suffer)?'[66] This quote paraphrases and connects with several key passages in Scripture (perhaps most obviously 1 Peter 2:21) and is one of the very few (if not the only) marked-out sentences that clearly does so. Keeping in mind that the prior passage called for the disciples to teach in the world (which echoes the admonition in the marked-out sentence on the first page of the text), it would seem that what we have here is a reaction to the consequences of *imitatio dei*.

The last page of the text (140) contains, at a quick glance, several markings in the margin; however, only one of them, between lines 14 and 15, is clearly a scribal or reading sign. This time it is hard to determine if it is a paragraph marker or something else. Line 15 does contain a colon marking out a new passage, yet it is not a *coronis* in the margin followed by colon, as on page 136, but a straight lateral line. It could have been added at a later time by someone other than the scribe or mean something other than a paragraph marker.

---

[65] A faint and shorter stroke appears in the left margin of line 4, page 138, but it is unclear whether this is a scribal or reading sign. There is not much to indicate that the text between the two marks on page 138 was meant to be highlighted as a whole section, since it deals with separate subjects, as do the individual lines marked out.

[66] 138:15–16: ⲉϣϫⲉ ⲛⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲉⲛϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲁⲗϫⲓ ⲙⲕⲁϩ ϫⲓⲉ ⲁⲟⲩⲏⲣ ϭⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲛ. Text and trans. Wisse, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 244–245.

It appears just before the final episode of the text and thus could be a sub-paragraph or meant to emphasise the words of Jesus which follow at the marked-out place: 'Peace to you [all] and everyone who believes in my name. And when you depart, joy be to you and grace and power. And be not afraid; behold, I am with you forever.'[67]

Summarising the Markings in Codex VIII

Are the many markings found in the margins of Codex VIII simply paragraph markers, as Layton, for example, has suggested?[68] As we have seen, there is much that would indicate that there is something entirely different going on. From a quick overview of the way the markers are employed (see Table 4.1), it becomes obvious that they are not used uniformly and, in fact, deal with a multitude of themes.

Zostrianos makes up most of the codex and this is without doubt one of the more complex narratives in the entire Nag Hammadi collection. It is a long and very detailed text, whose background many scholars have tried to elucidate. In 2013, Dylan Burns wrote the following about previous studies of *Zostrianos*:

> Research into *Zostrianos* has focused on its metaphysics and relationship to contemporary 'Pagan' thought, leading a vast majority of scholars to regard it as a 'Pagan' apocalypse, perhaps even designed to appeal to contemporary Greek philosophers. Yet an attentive reading of its frame narrative and routine investigation of its characters' backgrounds in Greco-Roman literature leads one to consider instead a milieu for *Zostrianos* that is deeply colored by

---

[67] 140:17–23: †ⲣⲏⲛⲏ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ [ⲧⲏⲣ]ⲧⲛ ⲙⲛ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲧⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲉⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ· ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲇⲉ ⲉϥⲉϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ ⲛϭⲓ ⲟⲩⲣⲁϣⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲟⲩϩⲙⲟⲧ ⲙⲛ ⲟⲩϭⲁⲙ· ⲙⲡⲣⲣ ϭⲁⲃϩⲏⲧ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲓⲥ ϩⲏⲧⲉ †ⲛⲉⲙⲛⲧⲛ ϣⲁ ⲉⲛⲉϩ. Text and trans. Wisse, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber, 248–251.

[68] Layton, 'Introduction to Codex VIII', 5.

Table 4.1 *Scribal markings in Codex VIII*

Page	Marking	Content of passage
26	*coronis* with colon on the same line	differences in souls
30	lateral line with colon five lines after	differences in souls
32	lateral line, no colon (damaged page)	the soul
36	lateral line, no colon (damaged page)	Barbelo
40	lateral line, no colon (damaged page)	knowledge and Protophanes
44	lateral line followed by *coronis* and colon four lines later	knowledge of oneself is salvation
45	*coronis* followed by a colon six lines later	diversity of people
64	*coronis* with a colon on the same line	immortal spirit
80	lateral line followed by a colon seven lines later	immortal spirit
132	*diple* parallel to line	admonition to preach
136	*coronis* with colon in same line	Saviour steps down into body
138	lateral line, no colon in text	admonition to accept suffering
140	lateral line with colon on same line	quote by Jesus

contemporary Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, even rejecting the authority of Hellenic tradition.[69]

Burns' study draws much-needed attention to the Christian influence in this text, while, as he writes, previous scholarly interest has chiefly focused on the text's relation to pagan philosophy.[70] Drawing attention to *Zostrianos*' similarities to Christian theologoumena also provides us with much-needed contextualisation for Codex VIII as a whole. Taking these factors into account, a Christian context which speaks readily to many of the marked-out passages discussed

[69] Dylan Burns, 'The Apocalypse of Zostrianos and Iolaos: A Platonic Reminiscence of the Heracleidae at NHC VIII,1.4', *Le Muséon* 126:1–2 (2013): 29–43. Quoted passage is from pages 29–30.

[70] For the platonic background of the text, see Alexander J. Mazur, *The Platonizing Sethian Background of Plotinus's Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

above is certainly the monastic one. To demonstrate this, in the following section I situate the passages discussed above in relation to the activities transpiring in Pachomius' monastery, as told to us by a certain bishop named Ammon.

The Letter of Ammon Read in Light of Codex I and Codex VIII

There are from the outset key aspects in the frame story of *Zostrianos* which bring to mind a monastic setting, or at least an ascetic one. The text is portrayed as the words of a disillusioned seeker of spiritual growth, Zostrianos, a person who sees himself as one of the elect placed on earth to teach others and to develop his spiritual knowledge. Yet he is so dissatisfied with his worldly context that he draws away into the desert: 'I became terribly upset and felt depressed about the small-mindedness that surrounded me. I dared to do something, and to deliver myself unto the beasts of the desert for a violent death.'[71] An intellectually curious Christian monk would undoubtably have found the text of interest, especially the many similarities which the frame narrative has with monasticism. The codex's second text preaches on what is presented as the duty of Christians to spread the word of God and accept the suffering bestowed by *imitatio dei*, along with numerous references to the struggle against evil spirits and the need to protect oneself against their onslaught by standing firm and speaking the truth. To take on the suffering of being a devout Christian, especially one who devotes his or her life to spiritual growth and spreading the word of God, is, as we know, a recurring theme in monastic literature.

---

[71] NHC VIII, 3:23–28: ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲉⲓ̈ⲙⲟⲕⲏ ⲛ̄ ϩⲏⲧ ⲉⲙⲁⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲉⲓⲟⲕⲙ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ϯⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲕⲟⲩⲉ[ⲓ] ⲛ̄ ϩⲏⲧ ⲉⲧⲕⲱⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ· ⲁⲉⲓⲣ ⲧⲟⲗⲙⲁ ⲉ ⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ ⲟⲩ[ⲗ]ⲁⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲁⲁⲧ ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲑⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲛ̄[ⲧ]ⲉ ⲧⲉⲣⲏⲙⲟⲥ· ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲩⲧⲁⲕⲟ ⲉϥⲛⲁϣⲧ. Trans. Burns, in 'The Apocalypse of Zostrianos', 30.

To illustrate how well the marked-out passages fit into the monastic world, particularly a Pachomian environment, let us familiarise ourselves with the opening passage of *The Letter of Ammon*. This text, it is stated, is written by a certain bishop named Ammon to a fellow bishop who had requested that Ammon tell him of his three years living as a Pachomian monk at the monastery at Pabau, at the time under the leadership of Pachomius' predecessor Theodore (314–368).[72] The letter starts with a reference to the imitation of one's betters: 'Since you admire Christ's holy servants, you have been eager to imitate their piety.'[73] In the first episode in the letter, as Ammon is introduced to the monastery, the monks are described as gathering around Theodore to ask him to address their 'faults before them all'. Theodore goes on to refer to Scripture, for instance, Hebrews 11:26 which speaks of Moses, who gladly takes on sufferings for the sake of Christ. Theodore states: 'But you, why do you bear the reproaches for Christ so grievously?' Psalms 40:2 is also quoted: 'He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.' He addresses the monks' fear of demons and quotes Ephesians 6:12: 'for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' This first passus in *The Letter of Ammon*, with its strong focus on bearing one's sufferings with a steady heart, fighting demons and over-coming one's bodily faults, ends with Theodore's saying, 'Guard against your secret [thoughts]', and paraphrasing Psalms 19:12–13: 'Pray, saying: "Cleanse me from my hidden [sins], and spare your servant from alien [ideas]"', to which he adds, 'For you have a mighty battle on either side.' The monks are advised to make

---

[72] James E. Goehring, *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986).

[73] *The Letter of Ammon* 1:3–4, see also 12. Trans. James Goehring, in *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, 159.

themselves firm of mind, to be aware of their weaknesses and know their limitations.[74] So far, *The Letter of Ammon* and Codex VIII both touch upon many of the same broader themes.

Next, *The Letter of Ammon* goes on to discuss the hardships that are to come, and to identify the different people who oppose them. Theodore explains that there is a dual threat: from 'our own race' and from pagans. He is asked who threatens them from their own race, to which he answers: the Arians. But he also instructs his listeners not to fear this because 'the persecution by the pagans will end, and then that which presses upon the church from [our own] race will cease'.[75] This fits the interest the scribe/reader of Codex VIII has highlighted on pages 26, 30 and 45 as well as the passages in *The Tripartite Tractate* mentioning the psychic race who will be saved in the end even though they are imperfect Christians. There are other passages in *The Letter of Ammon* which make it clear that there are differences between people. The Pachomian brothers who are weak in faith and fear the consequences of the coming turbulence are described as those who still live in the flesh, or 'those of the flesh' (σαρκικοί). However one chooses to interpret the letter, several kinds of difference are mentioned: those within the monastic hierarchy where the lower kinds are likened to the body, as well as with three peoples from a broader anthropological perspective: pagans, erroneous Christians and right practising Christians.

The topic at the centre of the Arian controversy is the theme of several of the passages marked out in *Zostrianos,* including that on page 64 of Codex VIII which makes it clear that the highest being is a three-powered one. Arians claimed, as is well known, that God and Jesus were not of the same substance, a stance rejected in the sentences marked out by a reader/copyist of *Zostrianos.*

---

[74] For example, see chapter 21 and the episode where a monk breaks the fast at night in his cell. Theodore tells the monks that one should be careful not to overextend oneself so as to fall prey to demons and sin.

[75] Trans. Goehring, in *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, 162.

116

It must be noted that *The Letter of Ammon* is written in a context of ecclesiastical struggle and that theological biases might have been embedded in the description of the monastic milieu of a Pachomian monastery.[76] However, as Hugo Lundhaug has argued, several texts in the Nag Hammadi collection show signs of having been rewritten in light of the new Post-Nicene theological milieu. For example, in *The Concept of Our Great Power* in Codex VI, a group of neo-Arians called Anomoneans are refuted explicitly by name (40:5–9).[77] The *diplai* in Codex I and *corone* in Codex VIII highlight passages that reflect general Pachomian practices (spiritual warfare) and theological issues from a Post-Nicene context. While the marginal markings made by the readers/owners of the texts do not reflect direct rewritings – which, as Lundhaug argues, is reflected in other parts of the Nag Hammadi collection (a question revisited in Chapter 7) – the marginal markings could be viewed as another example of the way Pachomian monks actually handled the texts in their Post-Nicene context: marking out passages of theological relevance and collecting insights that supported their theological inclinations and broad interests.[78] The difference in marked-out passages between *Zostrianos* and *The Letter of Peter to Philip* concerns theological versus social topics. The marked-out passages in *Zostrianos* deal with the nature of the godhead, the salvific nature of self-knowledge and the differences among the peoples on earth. *The Letter of Peter to Philip* contains marked-out passages and

---

[76] For more on the relation between the letter and the Arian controversy, see Goehring, *The Letter of Ammon*, 202ff.

[77] For more on this passage, see Hugo Lundhaug, 'Textual Fluidity and Post-Nicene Rewriting in the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? / Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have We Learned?*, ed. Eric Crégheur, Louis Painchaud and Tuomas Rasimus (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 50–52.

[78] Previous scholars have argued that Nag Hammadi texts reflect anti-Arian tendencies, for example Hugo Lundhaug regarding *The Gospel of Philip* (in *Images of Rebirth*, 377–394), and Roelof van den Broek regarding *The Teachings of Silvanus* (in 'The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus', *Vigiliae Christianae* 40:1 (1986) 1–23).

sentences dealing with social matters, such as an admonition to preach and not to fear suffering, which is likened to imitating Christ who stepped into the body and suffered for his teachings. In *The Tripartite Tractate* the marked-out passages highlight general ascetic practices, like engagement in spiritual warfare, but also reflect theological themes associated with Origenism, proclivities also resonating with the interests of Pachomian monks. The proposition that there is evidence of Origenism within both the Pachomian context and the Nag Hammadi codices (a topic revisited in the following chapters) has previously been argued by Lundhaug and Jenott, and recently reiterated by Christian Bull.[79]

Conclusion

The short sentences marked out with *diplai* and *corone* in the two codices that have been surveyed in this chapter do not deal with one and the same topic, nor should we expect that. The texts derive from different original contexts and cover a wide array of different subjects. But they all deal with topics that a Christian subject of burgeoning Egyptian monasticism would have found of interest. This is indicated by what we know from monastic sources about such interests, and there is a case to be made that a Pachomian context is a particularly good fit, as indicated by, for example, *The Letter of Ammon*. I would argue that we would not be hard pressed to imagine that Pachomian monks put in charge of copying the texts of Codex I and VIII made their marks due to their own and their fellow monks' interests. The fact that other Nag Hammadi texts, as we shall see later, were most likely rewritten in the light of the new theological situations arising in the middle of the fourth century supports this reading. As the marginal markings reflect the

---

[79] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 207–214; Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection'.

118

interests of Pachomian monks, they could be viewed as one way in which Pachomian monastic readers actually used the texts: as reference, inspiration and support in traversing the theologically debated topics of the latter part of the fourth century.

In the remaining chapters, as we continue to survey uncharted perspectives of the material aspects of the Nag Hammadi codices, the practical use of the texts within a monastic setting in Upper Egypt during the fourth to fifth centuries are further elaborated. With regard to the use of *diplai* and *corone* in monastic textual communities, there remains much to be done and the present discussion should be seen as only a preliminary and modest attempt to pave the way for further studies.[80]

---

[80] One interesting and most likely fruitful endeavour would be to situate the use of the Nag Hammadi *diplai* in relation to relevant archaeological evidence from the same time and area. For example, at Trimithis, approximately 700 kilometres west of Nag Hammadi, archaeological excavations discovered a school from the same period as the texts under discussion here. The site at Trimithis showcases an advanced classroom setting (of unclear religious origin) with Greek texts on the wall that exhibit the use of *diple* signs beside several lines. Their exact function is not clear, but some appear in the left margin, as in some of the cases in the Nag Hammadi texts. Thus, we should not exclude the possibility that the marginal markings appearing in the Nag Hammadi texts had pedagogical functions similar to those found in the classroom in Trimithis, which were used for educational purposes. The passages highlighted with *diplai* deal with topics we know were of great interest for Pachomian monks, and it is not impossible that these *diple* signs were used as teaching aids, marking out passages for exegesis and theological discussion. Raffaela Cribiore, Paola Davoli and D. M. Ratzan, 'A Teacher's Dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 21:1 (2008): 169–191.

5 | Vowel Constellations and Secret Language

This chapter deals with an aspect of the Nag Hammadi texts often portrayed as one of the reasons why they do not fit into a Christian context, namely, the many passages displaying different constellations of vowels. These have not been neglected in previous research but have mainly been treated separately, in light of the particular text and their specific context, as representing their 'pagan' origin. This chapter focuses on the question of why this phenomenon appears in an otherwise chiefly Christian text collection and how they would have been understood and used by those who owned, copied and read them. The vowel constellations are of particular interest for a study, such as this one, examining the material and visual features of the Nag Hammadi texts, although in an inverted sense. Magical vowel constellations often constitute a striking visual aspect of the ancient texts in which they are found – but not here. The vowels are not highlighted in the Nag Hammadi texts, as they are, for example, in many of the sources in *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM).[1] What can this *lack* of visuality indicate?

The chapter continues the hypothesis presented in the previous two chapters, introducing the magical evidence from the codices and suggesting that Christian monks would have been very interested in their magical vowel features. It begins by discussing the passages and texts that contain such features, with a brief description of their ancient Helleno-Egyptian context, situated mainly

---

[1] See also *The Books of Jeu*, passim, in *The Books of Jeu and The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. V. MacDermot (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

within the traditions associated with Hermes Trismegistus and the Sethians. This magical context is then read in light of the legacy of the apostle Paul and the Christian texts of the Nag Hammadi codices – particularly those belonging to the Valentinian traditions – concerning holy sounds and words. Christian texts are seldom brought into the discussion when magical vowel features are explored, since the latter have mainly been associated with the broader pagan context; it is as if Christianity was in some way disconnected from its intellectual and social milieu. Lastly, the discussion of the magical vowel traditions found in the Nag Hammadi codices places them in the context of Pachomian monasticism, exploring how these features would have been read by Christian monks who spent most of their time in the inhospitable and menacing Egyptian desert. The conclusion reached will show that the magical vowel features of the Nag Hammadi texts would not have been regarded as at all strange or heterodox by early Christian monastics but, rather, have been viewed as a ritual feature with many parallels in monastic practice.

An Overview of Magical Vowels in the Nag Hammadi Texts

Magical vowel constellations appear in several Nag Hammadi codices, namely, in the following Sethian texts: *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (otherwise known as *The Gospel of the Egyptians*) (Codex III,2 and IV,2); *Marsanes* (Codex X,1); *The Trimorphic Protennoia* (Codex XIII,1); and the Hermetic text *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (Codex VI,7). We also encounter vowels used in this way in the badly fragmented Sethian text, *Zostrianos*, in Codex VIII, but unfortunately, they were mostly present in the parts now lost.[2] These five texts all

---

[2] On page 118 line 18, we encounter three epsilons in a row in a part of the text where Barbelo praises the Great Invisible Spirit, and most likely in this part the other vowels are also mentioned as part of the hymn to God.

contain different renderings and/or repetitions of the Greek vowels ⲁ, ⲓ, ⲉ, ⲏ, ⲩ, ⲟ, ⲱ. Before discussing how these magical aspects fit the larger context of the Nag Hammadi collection's use and background, let us begin by familiarising ourselves with these individual passages and the contexts in which they appear.

The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (The Gospel of the Egyptians) *(NHC III,2/ NHC IV,2)*

This text is found in two versions, both are Coptic translations of what seems to be a Greek *Vorlage* but not necessarily the same Greek version, since there are some differences between the Coptic translations.[3] The text explains the origins and constellation of the heavenly world consisting of an unknowable God who generates the trinity, Father, Mother (Barbelo) and Son, each made up of an Ogdoad (a constellation of eight beings/entities). Apart from these figures, a being called the Doxomedon (Lord of glory) permeates the whole heavenly world. He is described as a great chamber within which sits a throne. This throne room is filled with a number of beings, among them Christ and the race of Seth. The text then describes the nature of the 'trice male child' Seth and his seed, why they occupy the cosmos and how they can be brought back to the heaven whence they derived. Hymns are sung and prayers are offered to the heavenly world and the great invisible spirit. The third part of the trinity, the Son, is made up of an Ogdoad consisting of himself and the seven vowels of the alphabet. In the first part of the text, we encounter a passage where the three beings of the trinity praise the great invisible spirit by reciting the vowels (see Fig. 5.1):

---

[3] For example, the version in Codex III has twice as many Greek words as that in Codex IV. Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse suggest, however, that both texts are copies of earlier Coptic translations which is indicated by missing lines and the repetition of certain words, producing homoioteleuton (e.g. in NHC III, 55:21 and in Codex IV, 52:17). *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2*, ed. Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 1–17.

122

Figure 5.1 Page 54 of *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* in Codex IV,2 (left) and the fuller version of the text in Codex III,2 page 44 (right). Photo by Basile Psiroukis. Images courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

NHC III: 44:1–44:13	NHC III: 44:1–44:13	NHC IV: 54:1–20
A hidden invisible/ ineffable mystery came forth: iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii ēēēēēēēē ēēēēēēēēēēēēēē ooooooooo oooooooooo yyyyyyyyyy yyyyyyyyy eeeeeeeeee eeeeeeeeee	ⲛⲁ[ϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲟⲩⲙⲩ] ⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲉϥϩⲏⲡ ⲛⲁⲧⲏ[ⲁⲩ ⲉ]ⲣ[ⲟϥ ⲁϥⲡⲣⲟ] ⲉⲗⲑⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· ⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓ[ⲓⲓ] ⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏ ⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏ[ⲏⲏ ⲟ] ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ ⲩⲩ[ⲩⲩⲩ] ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ ⲉⲉⲉⲉ	[ⲁϥⲡⲣ̅ϣ]ⲟⲣⲡ̅ ⲛ̅ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ [ⲛ̅ϭⲓ ⲟⲩ]ⲙⲩ[ⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟ]ⲛ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲧϣⲁ [ϫⲉ] ⲙ̅ⲙⲟ[ϥ · ⲓⲓⲓⲓ]ⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓ [ⲓⲓⲓⲓ] ⲏⲏⲏ[ⲏ] ⲏⲏ[ⲏ]ⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏⲏ[ⲏⲏⲏ] ⲏⲏ[ⲏⲏ]ⲏ ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ [ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ]ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ ⲩⲩⲩ[ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ]ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ [ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ]ⲩⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉ [ⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉ] ⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉ[ⲉⲉⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁ] ⲁⲁⲁⲁ[ⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁ ⲱ ⲱ]

aaaaaaaaaa
aaaaaaaaaa
ō ō ō ō ō ō ō ō ō ō ō
ō ō ō ō ō ō ō

ⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉⲉ
ⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁ[ⲁⲁⲁ]
ⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁⲁ ⲱ ⲱ
ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ [ⲱ ⲱ
ⲱ] ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ
ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ·ⲁⲩⲱ
[ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲉⲓ] ϩⲉ
ⲁⲧϣⲟⲙⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ϭⲟⲙ †
ⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲉⲡ[ⲛⲟϭ]
ⲛ̄ⲁϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄
ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲭⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡ[ⲉϥⲣⲁⲛ]
ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ
ⲛ̄ⲁⲕⲗⲏⲧⲟⲛ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ [ⲧⲉϥ]
ⲁⲣⲥⲉⲛⲓⲕⲏ ⲛ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲏ

ⲱ [ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ] ⲱ
ⲱ ⲱ ⲱ [ⲱ ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ·]
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄†ϩⲉ [†ϣⲟⲩⲧ]ⲉ
ⲛ̄ϭⲟⲙ ⲁⲩⲉⲓⲛ[ⲉⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩ]
ⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̄[ⲁⲧⲛⲁⲩ
ⲉⲣ]ⲟϥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲭ[ⲁϩⲙⲉϥ
ⲛ̄ⲁⲧ† ⲣⲁ]ⲛ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲡⲓ
[ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲙ̄]ⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ
ⲡ[ⲓⲱⲧ ⲁⲩⲱ †ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ]
ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛ[ⲟⲥ]

And in this way the three powers brought praise to the great, invisible and incorruptible unnameable one, the virginal spirit of the Father and the male virgin.[4]

The latter part of the text consists of an intricate process of creation wherein a number of light beings play different parts in the process of bringing back the seed of Seth, now occupying materiality. A crucial part of the salvation act is when Seth is sent down to earth by four light beings (typical of Sethian tractates[5]) and provides his seed with the power of baptism.[6] The text concludes with a hymnic portion. After the worthy people of Seth have undergone baptism and the ritual termed 'the five seals' to ensure that they 'will not taste death' (ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲩ ϫⲓ †ⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩ) (NHC IV, 78:9–10), they offer up to the heavens a hymn which is a briefer repetition of the above vowel recitations, a mirror of the heavenly praises of God.[7]

This text is at its core a Sethian tractate but also contains some Christian adaptations: for example, Christ who identified with Seth

---

[4] Text and trans. (syncretic) by Böhlig and Wisse, in *Nag Hammadi Codex III,2 and IV,2*, ed. Böhlig and Wisse, 66–71.

[5] Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 30–41.

[6] NHC III, 62:24–63:11; NHC IV, 74:9–74:24.

[7] NHC III, 66:8–22; NHC IV, 78:10–79:3.

in the Doxomedon; earthly Seth, who is Jesus; and John the Baptist who is identified with a heavenly being called Yoel. The vowel constellations represent a way for the mystagogue to establish a direct link with the heavenly world by joining the divine beings in heaven in their praise of God.

Marsanes (Codex X,1)

This lengthy, dense text is the only one in Codex X. The title *Marsanes* is found on the last page of the approximately 68-page-long text; of these, 54 pages are in a partial, poorly preserved state, leaving only about 27 per cent of the text legible. Thus, any analysis of the content must ultimately be viewed as tentative.[8] That being said, the first part of the text (1–10) and parts of the middle (25–42) are quite well preserved, which leaves us with a rough idea of what it contained. It is of Sethian origin and the genre is that of an apocalypse, with many Platonic points of reference.[9] The name 'Marsanes' refers to a legendary prophet who was taken to heaven and witnessed things that he then related to people worthy of receiving knowledge of the divine state.[10] The text reveals a variety of mysteries about the different levels of existence (material and immaterial), but one central aspect is to provide information about the descent of a saviour figure (Autogenes) and how people can attain ascension and escape through the different levels of existence. The material world is not rejected as evil or lost; rather, according to the text, it should be 'saved entirely' (5:24). The highest being is called the 'silent one' and 'the three powered one' and below him

---

[8] The text is written in a Lykopolitan dialect, the same as, for example, Codex I, a dialect which was never standardised and thus there are many variations in spelling. *Nag Hammadi Codices X and IX*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 209–227, 229.

[9] Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 48–76.

[10] According to Epiphanius, he knew of seven holy books kept by the so-called Gnostics, one of them with the title 'Marsianes' (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26:2–13).

there are scores of heavenly beings, all of whom deserve praise. In order for people to traverse the heavenly spheres, it is necessary to gain the knowledge of their constitution, which is found in relations between different letters and sounds that correspond to the structure of the heavenly world as well as to the form of the human soul. Thus, Marsanes spends considerable time expanding on these topics and their importance to gaining deliverance from material restrictions. Below I quote the long passage 25:21–32:5, from the middle of the text, which illustrates its deep immersion in ancient traditions that attached the mysteries of letters and sounds to metaphysical and soteriological matters. Figure 5.2 showcases manuscript page 31 of Codex X, which is part of this long quote.
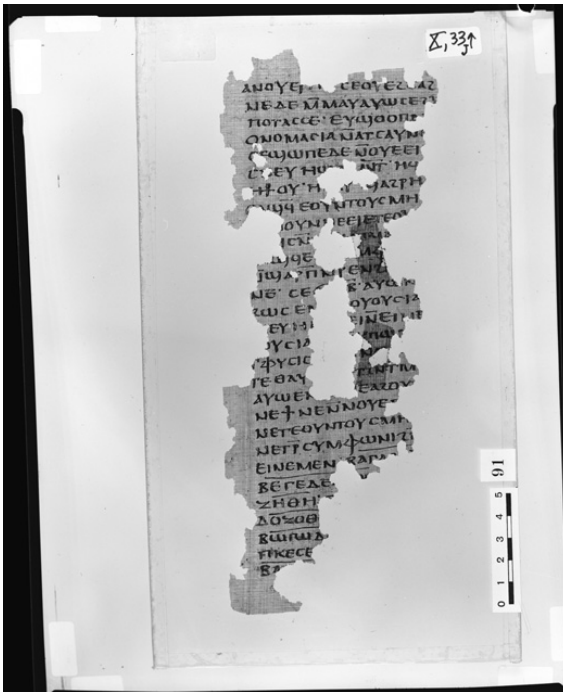
Figure 5.2 Page 31 of *Marsanes*, Codex X. Photo by Basile Psiroukis. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

The soul, on the other hand, has different shapes. The shape of the soul exists in this form, i.e. (the soul) that came into existence of its own accord. The shape is the second spherical part, while the first allows it, eéiou, the self-begotten soul, aeéiouó.

The second schema, eéiou, . . . by those having two sounds (diphthongs), the first being placed after them . . .

. . . (3 lines unrecoverable) . . . the light.

Control yourselves, receive the imperishable seed, bear fruit, and do not become attached to your possessions. But know that the oxytones exist among the vowels, and the diphthongs which are next to them. But the short are inferior, and the [. . .] are [. . .] by them. Those that [. . .], since they are intermediate [. . .]. The sounds of the semivowels are superior to the voiceless (consonants). And those that are double are superior to the semivowels, which do not change. But the aspirates are better than the inaspirates (of) the voiceless (consonants). And those that are intermediate will accept their

ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲟ[ⲩⲛⲧ]ⲉⲥ ϩⲱⲱⲥ ⲁⲛ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ⟨ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛ⟩ⲥⲭⲏⲙⲁ ⲉ⟨ⲩ⟩
ⲱ̄ⲃ̄ⲃ[ⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓ]ⲧ ⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲇⲉ [ϩⲙ̄ⲡⲓ]
ⲥ̣ⲙⲁⲧ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲥⲭ[ⲏⲙⲁ ⲛ̄]ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ
ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁϩ[ϣⲱ]ⲡⲉ ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲉⲧⲥ̄· ⲡ[ⲥⲭⲏ]
ⲙⲁ ⲇⲉ ⲟⲉ[ⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϩⲥⲛⲉⲩ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ
ⲛ̄ⲥⲫⲁⲓⲣ[ⲓⲕⲟⲛ] ⲉⲣⲉⲡϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲟⲩⲏϩ
ⲛ̄ⲥⲱ[ϥ] ⲉⲏⲓⲟⲩ̄· ⲛ̄ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ⲭⲡ[ⲟ]
ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲉⲧⲥ̄· ⲁⲉⲏⲓⲟⲩⲥ̄ [ⲡ]ⲙⲁϩⲥⲛⲉⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲥⲭⲏⲙⲁ· ⲉⲏⲓⲟⲩ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄
ⲛ̄[ⲁⲧⲥ]ⲙⲏ ⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡϣⲁⲣ[ⲡ̄ ⲉϥⲟ]ⲩⲏϩ
ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ [. . .]ⲟⲛ· ⲁⲩ[ⲱ ⲡ]ⲓ̣ϩ[..]ⲟ̣ⲩ
ⲡ[. . .]ⲉⲉⲓ[..]ⲧ̄ⲛ̄ⲛ̄[. . .]ⲟⲩ ϩⲛ̄ [. . .]ⲉ
ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ

ϣⲱ[ⲡ ⲁⲣ]ⲱⲧⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϫⲓ ⲙ̄[ⲡⲉⲥ]
ⲡⲉⲣⲙⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲧⲉⲕⲟ [ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ]ⲧ̄ⲛ̄ⲧ̄
ⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ· ⲁⲩⲱ [ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ]ⲧ̄ [ⲛ̄]ⲧ̄ⲙ̄ϣⲱⲡⲉ
ⲉⲣⲉ[ⲧ]ⲛ̄ⲏ̄ⲡ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲛ̄ [ⲁⲗ]ⲗⲁ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲉ ϫⲉ ⲛⲉⲧϫⲁⲥⲓ [ⲥⲉ]ϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲛ̄
ⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄[ⲧⲟⲩ] ⲥⲙⲏ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲛⲁ̣[ⲧⲥ]ⲙⲏ ⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ [ⲛ̄ⲛ̄]
ⲁϩⲣⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲉⲓ· ⲛ̄ⲃⲣⲁ[ⲭⲩ ⲇ]ⲉ ⲥⲉⲃⲁⲭϥ̄·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄[. . . .]ⲟⲟⲩ ⲥ̣ⲉ̣ϣⲟⲟⲡ [. . .].
ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟ̣[ⲩ]· ⲛⲉⲧ[. . .]ⲉ̣ ⲉⲩϩ̣ⲛ̄
ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ [. . . . . .].̣ⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ[ⲛ̄ϩⲙⲓⲫⲱⲛ]ⲟⲛ ⲥⲉϫⲁⲥⲓ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲉ
ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ· ⲛⲉⲧⲕⲏⲃ ⲇⲉ
ⲥⲉⲭ[ⲁ]ⲥⲓ ⲁⲛⲁ ⲧⲡⲉϣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ
ⲉⲙⲁⲩϣⲃ̄ⲃⲓⲉ· ⲛ̄ⲗⲁⲥⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲥⲉⲥⲁⲧⲡ̄
ⲁⲙ̄ⲯⲓⲗⲟⲛ ⲛ̣[ⲉ] ⲉⲓ ⲉⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ
ⲙ̣ⲙ̣[ⲉⲩ] ⲛⲉⲧϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲇⲉ
ⲛⲁϣ[ⲁⲡ] ⲡⲟⲩϭⲗⲁⲙⲗⲙ̄ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲛ̄[ϩ]

combination in which they are;
they are ignorant of the things that
are good. They (the vowels) are
combined with the intermediates,
which are less. Form by form,
<they constitute> the
nomenclature of the gods and the
angels, not because they are mixed
with each other according to every
form, but only (because) they have
a good function. It did not happen
that <their> will was revealed.

Do not keep on sinning, and do
not dare to make use of sin. But
I am speaking to you (sg.)
concerning the three [. . .] shapes
of the soul. The third shape of the
soul is [. . .] is a spherical one, put
after it, from the simple vowels:
eee, iii, ooo, uuu, óóó. The
diphthongs were as follows: ai, au,
ei, eu, Eu, ou, óu, oi, éi, ui, ói, auei,
euéu, oiou, ggg, ggg, ggg, aiau,
eieu, éu, oiou, óu, ggg, ggg, aueieu,
oiou, Eu, three times for a male
soul. The third shape is spherical.
The second shape, being put after
it, has two sounds. The male soul's
third shape (consists) of the simple
vowels: aaa, eee, ééé, iii, ooo, uuu,
óóó´, óóó, óóó. And this shape is
different from the first, but they

ⲧϥ· ⲥⲉⲟⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥⲁⲩⲏ[ⲉ ⲛ̄]
ⲛⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ· ⲥⲉ[ⲃ̄ⲗⲙ̄]ⲗⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲇⲉ
ⲁⲛⲉⲧϩ[ⲛ̄ ⲧⲙⲏ]ⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲁⲝⲃ̄· ⲕⲁⲧⲁ
ⲉⲓ[ⲛⲉ] ⟨ⲥⲉϣⲟⲟⲡ⟩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲙ⟨ⲁ⟩ⲥⲓⲁ
ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲛ̄[ⲟⲩ]ⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ·
ⲟ[ⲩⲭⲟ]ⲧⲓ ⲉⲩⲧⲉϩⲧⲱϩ
ⲁⲛⲟⲩⲉ[ⲣⲏⲩ] ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲥⲙⲁⲧ ⲛⲓⲙ·
ⲁⲗ[ⲗⲁ] ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲉⲟⲩⲏ[ⲧ]ⲉⲩ
[ⲙ̄]ⲙⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣⲅⲁⲥⲓⲁ [ⲉ]ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ·
ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲥϣⲱ[ⲡⲉ] ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲡⲟⲩ⟨ⲟⲩ⟩ϣⲉ
ϭⲱ[ⲗⲡ] ⲁⲃⲁⲗ·

ⲙⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲧⲉ ⲁⲣ̄ ⲛ̄[ⲁⲃⲓ] ⲛ̄ⲕⲣ̄ⲧⲟⲗⲙⲁ
ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲕ[ⲣ̄]ⲭⲣⲁⲥⲑⲁⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲁⲃ[ⲓ· †]
ⲭⲟⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲛⲉⲕ ⲉ[ⲧⲃⲉ ⲡϣⲁ]ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ
ⲛ̄ⲥ[ⲭⲏⲙⲁ] ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲯⲩ[ⲭⲏ·
ⲡⲙⲁϩϣⲁ]ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲛ̄[ⲥⲭⲏⲙⲁ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ] ϣⲟⲟⲡ [. . .]
ⲟⲩⲥⲫⲁⲓⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲏϩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱϥ·
ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ
ⲛ̄ϩⲁⲡⲗⲟⲩⲛ· ⲉⲉⲉ· ⲓⲓⲓ ⲟⲟⲟ ⲩⲩⲩ ⲱⲱⲱ
ⲛⲁ ⲧⲥⲙⲏ ⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ
ⲛ̄ϩ̄ⲛ̄ϩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ· ⲁⲓ ⲁⲩ· [ⲉ]ⲓ ⲉⲩ· ⲏⲩ· ⲟⲩ·
ⲱⲩ· ⲟⲓ ⲏⲓ· [ⲩ]ⲓ ⲱⲓ· ⲁⲩⲉⲓ· ⲉⲩⲏⲩ· ⲟⲓⲟⲩ
[ⲅⲅ]ⲅ· ⲅⲅⲅ· ⲅⲅⲅ· ⲁⲓⲁⲩ [ⲉⲓⲉⲩ]·
ⲏⲩ· ⲟⲓⲟⲩ· ⲱⲩ· ⲅⲅⲅ· [ⲅⲅⲅ]·
ⲁⲩⲉⲓⲉⲩ· ⲟⲓⲟⲩ· ⲏⲩ· [ⲛ̄]ⲥⲡ ϣⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ
ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ϩⲁⲩⲧ
ⲡⲙⲁϩϣⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲛ̄ⲥⲭⲏⲙⲁ
ⲟⲩⲥⲫⲁⲓⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ [ⲡⲉ] ⲡⲙⲁϩⲥⲛⲉⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲥⲭⲏ[ⲙ]ⲁ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲏϩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱϥ ⲟⲩⲛ̄[ⲧⲉ]
ϥ ⲥⲙⲏ ⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲉ· ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ [ⲛ̄]ϩⲁⲩⲧ
ⲡⲉⲥⲙⲁϩϣⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ [ⲛ̄]ⲥⲭⲏⲙⲁ· ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄

resemble each other, and they make some ordinary sounds of this sort: aeéoó. And from these (are made) the diphthongs.

So also the fourth and the fifth. With regard to them, they were not allowed to reveal the whole topic, but only those things that are apparent. You (pl.) were taught about them, that you should perceive them, in order that they, too, might all seek and find who they are, either by themselves alone [. . .], or by each other, or to reveal destinies that have been determined from the beginning, either with reference to themselves alone, or with reference to one another, just as they exist with each other in sound, whether partially or formally.

They are commanded to submit, for their part is generated and formal. (They are commanded) either by the long (vowels), or by those of dual time value, or by the short (vowels), which are small [. . .], or the oxytones, or the intermediates, or the barytones. And consonants exist with the vowels, and individually they are commanded and they submit.

ⲚⲈⲦⲈ ⲞⲨⲚ[ⲦⲞⲨ Ⲥ]ⲘⲎ ⲈⲦⲞⲈⲒ
ⲚⳈⲀⲠⲖⲞⲨⲚ [ⲀⲀ]Ⲁ· ⲈⲈⲈ· ⲎⲎⲎ· ⲓⲓⲓ· ⲞⲞⲞ·
[Ⲩ]ⲨⲨ· ⲰⲰⲰ· ⲰⲰⲰ· ⲰⲰⲰ [ⲀⲨⲰ]
ⲠⲈⲒⲤⲬⲎⲘⲀ ⳡⳠⳠ{ⲓ} [ⲈⲒⲀⲈⲒⲦ Ⲁ]
Ⲡ ϢⲀⲢⲠ· ⲤⲈ[ⲦⲚⲦⲀⲚ]⳦ Ⲇ Ⲉ ⲀⲚⲞⲨⲈ
[ⲢⲎⲨ ⲀⲨⲰ ⲤⲈ]ⲈⲒⲢⲈ ⲚⳈ Ⲛ [ⲤⲘⲎ
Ⲙ̄ⲠⲢⲞⲬ]ⲈⲒⲢⲞⲚ Ⲛ[ⲦⲈⲈⲒⳈⲈ· ⲀⲈⲚ]ⲞϢ·
ⲀⲨⲰ ⲀⲂⲀⲖ ⳈⲒⲦⲞⲞⲨⲦⲞⲨ Ⲛ̄ⲚⲀ ⲦⲤⲘⲎ
ⲤⲚⲦⲈ·

ⲦⲈⲈⲒⳈⲈ ⲀⲚ ⲠⲘⲀⳈⲨⲦⲀⲨ ⲀⲨⲰ
ⲠⲘⲀⳈ⳦ⲞⲨ· ⲈⲦⲂⲎⲦⲞⲨ Ⲙ̄ⲠⲞⲨⲔⲀⲀⲨ
Ⲁ ϬⲰⲖⲠ ⲀⲂⲀⲖ Ⲙ̄ⲠⲘⲀ ⲦⲎ[Ⲣϥ̄] ⲀⲖⲖⲀ
ⲘⲞⲚⲞⲚ ⲚⲈⲦⲞⲨⲀ[ⲚⳈ] ⲀⲂⲀⲖ
ⲀⳈⲞⲨⲦⲤⲈⲂⲈ ⲦⲎⲚ[Ⲉ] ⲀⲢⲀⲨ
ⲀⲦⲢⲈⲦⲚ̄Ⲣ̄ⲚⲞⲈⲒ [Ⲙ̄]ⲘⲀⲨ ⳉⲈⲔⲀⲤⲈ
ⳈⲰⲞⲨ Ⲉ[ⲨⲀ]ϢⲒⲚⲈ Ⲛ̄ⲤⲈⲂⲒⲚⲈ· ⳉⲈ
[ⲚⲒⲘ]ⲚⲈ ⲦⲎⲢⲞⲨ· Ⲏ ⲀⲂⲀⲖ [ⳈⲒⲦⲞ](ⲟ)
ⲦⲞⲨ ⲞⲨⲀⲈⲈⲦⲞⲨ ⲞⲨ[. . .]Ⲏ ⲀⲂⲀⲖ
ⳈⲒⲦⲚ̄ ⲚⲞⲨⲈⲢ[ⲎⲨ] Ⲏ ⲀⲞⲨⲰⲚⳈ ⲀⲂⲀⲖ
Ⲛ̄ⳈⲚ̄Ⲧ̣[Ⲁϣ] ⲈⲀⲨⲦⲀϢⲞⲨ ⳉⲒⲚ
Ⲛ̄ϢⲀⲢ[Ⲡ] Ⲏ ⲚⲘ̄Ⲙ̣ⲞⲨ ⲞⲨⲀⲈⲈⲦ[ⲞⲨ· Ⲏ]
ⲘⲚ̄ ⲚⲞⲨⲈⲢⲎⲨ· ⲞⲒⲞⲚ [ⲈⲨ]ϢⲞⲞⲠ ⲘⲚ̄
ⲚⲞⲨⲈⲢⲎ[Ⲩ ⳈⲚ̄]ⲞⲨⲤⲘⲎ· ⲈⲒⲦⲈ ⲔⲀⲦⲀ
Ⲙ̣[Ⲉ]ⲢⲞⲤ ⲈⲒⲦⲈ ⲔⲀⲦⲀ ⲈⲒⲚ̣[Ⲉ·

ⲤⲈ]ⲞⲨⲀⳈ ⲤⲀⳈⲚⲈ Ⲙ̄ⲘⲀⲨ
[Ⲁ]Ⲣ̄ⳈⲨⲠⲞⲦⲀⲤⲤⲈ Ⲏ ⲠⲞⲨ[ⲘⲈ]ⲢⲞⲤ
ϤⲞⲈⲒ Ⲛ̄ⳉⲠⲞ· ⲀⲨⲰ [ⲔⲀ]ⲦⲀ ⲈⲒⲚⲈ· Ⲏ
ⳈⲒⲦⲚ̄ [Ⲙ̄ⲘⲀ]ⲔⲢⲞⲚ· Ⲏ ⲀⲂ[ⲀⲖ
ⳈⲒⲦⲞⲞⲦⲞⲨ] Ⲛ̄ⲚⲀ ⲠⲬ[ⲢⲞⲚⲞⲤ ⲤⲚⲈⲨ·
Ⲏ] ⲀⲂⲀⲖ ⳈⲒⲦⲚ̄ [Ⲛ̄ⲂⲢⲀⲬⲨ Ⲉ]ⲦⲤⲀⲂⲔ̄·
Ⲡ[. . .] ⲚⲀ̣[. . .]Ⲏ ⲚⲈⲦⳉⲀⲤⲒ Ⲏ
ⲚⲈⲦⳈⲚ̄ⲦⲘⲎⲦⲈ Ⲏ ⲚⲈⲦϬⲀⳉⲂ̄ [Ⲁ]ⲨⲰ

They constitute the nomenclature of the angels. And the consonants are self-existent, and as they are changed, <they> submit to the hidden gods by means of beat and pitch and silence and impulse. They summon the semivowels, all of which submit to them with one accord, since it is only the unchanging double (consonants) that coexist with the semivowels.

But the aspirates and the inaspirates and the intermediates constitute the voiceless (consonants). Again [. . .] they are combined with each other, and they are separate from one another. They are commanded and they submit, and they constitute an ignorant nomenclature. And they become one or two or three or four or five or six, up to seven, having a simple sound, <together with> these which have two sounds, [. . .] the place of the seventeen consonants. Among the first names, some are less. And since these do not have being, either they are an aspect of being, or they divide the nature of the mind, which is masculine, (and) which is intermediate.

⟨ⲛ̄⟩ⲥⲧⲙⲫⲱⲛⲟⲛ ⲥⲉϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲉ
ⲟⲩⲛ[ⲧ]ⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲙⲉ[ⲣ]
ⲟⲥ ⲥⲉⲟⲩ[ⲁ]ϩ̣ ⲥⲁϩⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲩ [ⲁ]ⲩⲱ
ⲥⲉϩⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ· [ⲥ]ⲉϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄⟨ⲧ⟩
ⲟⲛⲟⲙⲁⲥⲓⲁ [ⲛ̄]ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ· ⲁⲩⲱ
[ⲛ̄ⲥ]ⲧⲙⲫⲱⲛⲟⲛ ⲥⲉϣⲟ[ⲟⲡ ϩ]ⲁⲣⲓ
ϩⲁⲣⲁⲩ ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲉⲧⲟⲩ [ⲁⲩ]ⲱ ⲉⲩϣⲃ̄ⲃ̄
{ⲓ}ⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ {ϥ̄ⲣ̄ [ϩⲩ]ⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ}
⟨ⲥⲉ⟩ⲣ̄ϩⲩ[ⲡ]ⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
[ⲉ]ⲑⲏⲡ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ̄ ⲛ̄[ⲛ̄ⲟ]
ⲩϣⲃⲁⲁⲃⲉ̣ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ[ⲙ]ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲁϩⲉⲓⲏⲧ·
ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ[ⲕ]ⲁⲣⲱϥ ⲙⲛ̄
ⲟⲩϩⲟⲣⲙⲏⲛ·[ⲥⲉⲣ̄]ⲕⲁⲗⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁ ⲧⲡⲉϣⲉ
ⲛ̄[ⲥⲙ]ⲏ· ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲥⲉⲣ̄ [ϩⲩⲡⲟ]
ⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩ[ⲥⲙ]ⲏ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ·
ⲟⲓⲟⲛ ⲙⲟ[ⲛⲟ]ⲛ ⲛⲉⲧⲕⲏⲃ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧϣⲓ[ⲃⲉ
ⲉⲩ]ϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲁ ⲧⲡⲉ[ϣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲙ]ⲏ·

ⲛ̄ⲗⲁⲥⲧ ⲇⲉ [ⲙⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲯⲓⲗ]ⲟⲛ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲉ
[ⲧϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲥⲉ]ϣⲟⲟⲡ [ⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲧⲉ
ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ]ⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ· ⲡⲁ[ⲗⲓⲛ . . . ⲥⲉ]
ϭⲁ̣ⲙ̣ⲗ̣ⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̣ [ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩ· ⲁⲩ]ⲱ
ⲥⲉⲡⲁⲣⲭ̄ⲁⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣⲏ̣[ⲩ] ⲥⲉⲟⲩⲉϩ
ⲥⲁϩⲛⲉ ϫⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲥⲉϩⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ· ⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲇⲉ
[ⲛ̄]ⲟⲛⲟⲙⲁⲥⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲥⲉϣⲱⲡⲉ
ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ ⲏ ⲥⲛⲉⲩ ⲏ ϣⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ· ⲏ
ϥ[ⲧⲁⲩ] ⲏ ϯⲟⲩ· ⲏ [ⲥ]ⲁⲩ ϣⲁϩⲣⲏⲓ̈
[ⲁ]ⲥⲁϣϥ̄ ⲉⲟⲩⲛⲧⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ [ⲛ̄][ϩⲁⲡ]
ⲗⲟⲩⲛ ⟨ⲙⲛ̄⟩ ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩ[ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲥⲙ]ⲏ
ⲥⲛ̄ⲧ[ⲉ] ⲛ̄· ⲡⲙⲁ [ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲛ̄ⲧ]ⲥⲁϣϥ̄ ⲉ
[ⲧⲣ̄ⲥⲩ]ⲙⲫ[ⲱⲛⲓ· ϩⲛ̄] ⲛ̄ϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲣⲉⲛ
ϩⲛ̄[ϩⲁⲉⲓ] ⲛⲉ· ⲥⲉϭ[ⲁⲝ]ⲃ̄· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄[ⲉⲉⲓ]

And you (sg.) put in those that resemble each other with the vowels and the consonants. Some are: bagadazatha, begedezethe, bEgEdEzEthE, bigidizithi, bogodozotho, buguduzuthu, bOgOdOzOthO. And the rest [. . .] babebEbibobubO. But the rest are different: abebEbibob, in order that you (sg.) might collect them, and be separated from the angels.[11]

ϩⲱⲥ ⲉⲙ[ⲛ̄]ⲧⲟⲩ ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ [ⲙ̄ⲙ]ⲉⲩ ⲏ
ⲉ[ⲩⲟ]ⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲉⲓⲛⲉ [ⲛ̄ⲧ]ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ [ⲏ]
ⲉⲩⲡⲱⲣ[ϫ̄ ⲁ]ⲧⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ [ⲙ̄]ⲡⲛⲟⲩϭ
[ⲧⲏ ⲉ]ⲧⲉ ⲑⲁⲩ[ⲧ ⲧⲉ] ⲉⲧϩⲛ̄
ⲧⲙ[ⲏⲧⲉ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲕⲉ[ⲓ]ⲛⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲛ
[ⲛ̄]ⲛⲉϯⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣ[ⲏⲩ ⲙⲛ̄]

ⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩ ⲥⲙⲏ [ⲙⲛ̄]
ⲛⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲥⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛⲓ ϩⲛ̄[ϩⲁ]ⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙⲉⲛ·
ⲃ̄ⲁ̄ⲅ̄ⲁ̄ⲗ̄[ⲁ̄]ⲍ̄[ⲁ̄ⲑ̄ⲁ̄] ⲃ̄ⲉ̄ⲅ̄ⲉ̄ⲗ̄ⲉ̄ⲍ̄[ⲉ̄]ⲑ̄ⲉ̄
[ⲃ̄ⲏ̄ⲅ̄ⲏ̄ⲗ̄ⲏ̄] ⲍ̄ⲏ̄ⲑ̄ⲏ̄· ⲃ̄[ⲓ̄ⲅ̄ⲓ̄ⲗ̄ⲓ̄ⲍ̄ⲓ̄ⲑ̄
ⲃ̄ⲟ̄ⲅ̄ⲟ̄] ⲗⲟ̄ⲍ̄ⲟ̄ⲑ̄ⲟ̄ [ⲃ̄ ⲩ̄ⲅ̄ⲩ̄ⲗ̄ⲩ̄ⲍ̄ⲩ̄ⲑ̄ⲩ̄]
ⲃ̄ⲱ̄ⲅ̄ⲱ̄ⲗ̄ⲱ̄[ⲍ̄ⲱ̄ⲑ̄ⲱ̄· ⲁⲩⲱ] ⲡⲕⲉⲥⲉ
[ⲉⲡⲉ]ⲃ̄ⲁ̄[ⲃ̄ⲉ̄ⲃ̄ⲏ̄ⲃ̄ⲓ̄ⲃ̄ⲟ̄ⲃ̄ⲩ̄ⲃ̄ⲱ̄·]
ⲡⲉⲕⲉⲥⲉⲉⲡⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲛ̄
ⲟⲩϣⲃ̄ⲃⲓⲉ· ⲃ̄ⲉ̄ⲃ̄ⲏ̄ⲃ̄ⲓ̄[ⲃ̄]ⲟ̄ⲃ̄ ϫⲉⲕⲁⲥⲉ
ⲉⲕⲛⲁⲥⲁⲩ[ϩ]ⲟⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲕⲡⲱⲣϫ̄ ⲁⲛ
[ⲁ]ⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ.

Just as there is a strict rank in the heavenly world, the letters of the alphabet and the different sounds humans emit when referencing them are arranged in a strictly hierarchical way. The secrets of the vowels contain the language of the gods and the angels. Thus, the world and the nature of the angels is understood to correspond to the letters of the alphabet and their sounds in different combinations. Some are single and individual, others are joined to one another, likened to vowels with one single tone and consonants that are made up of more than one sound. Information about the complex systems of vowels, consonants, tones and shapes is intermixed throughout the above passage with paraenetic sections calling for righteous behaviour and study, so that readers might gain insights into the

---

[11] NHC X, 25:21–32:5. Text and trans. Pearson, in *Nag Hammadi Codices X and IX*, ed. Pearson, 293–309.

secrets of how to separate themselves from the beings occupying the different levels on the way up towards heaven. As in the case of *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, the vowels seem to be used as a mind map of how humans are to relate to the divine, thereby gaining assistance in accessing salvation.

What is interesting to note in the passage above is the mention of the central role played by the number seven in relation to vowels and letters. This is a common trope in ancient letter speculation and vowel magic. In the writings of Philo of Alexandria, for example, we find many lengthy expositions on the secret and knowledge-giving merits of letters and numbers, in particular the number seven, the most powerful of numbers.[12] Philo was greatly inspired by predecessors such as Plato and the Pythagoreans who viewed numbers as carrying secret and divine information; numbers were associated with the higher realm, while at the same time they were things in themselves. Indeed, the cosmos was imbued with the structure of numbers.[13] There were seven vowels, seven musical tones and seven planets. Everything was clearly structured. Xenocrates, Eudorus and Plutarch's teacher Ammonius are also said to have been fond of numerology.[14] Tiberius' court philosopher, Trasullus, was devoted to Pythagoras and wrote a now lost work entitled *On the Seven Musical Tones*.[15] The secrets of music and language were intimately associated with the number seven. This view of the symbolic power of the Septuagint was also adopted by the Romans

---

[12] See especially Philo, *On the Creation. Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1929).

[13] Plato, *The Republic*, 531; John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 BC to 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 11; Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 31ff.

[14] Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 16–17, 29–30, 127–131, 184, 190; Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 320ff.

[15] Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 184ff.

and coincided with a renaissance of Pythagorean philosophy in Rome and Alexandria in the first century BCE and after the beginning of the common era. Clement tells us that Hermippus wrote a book entitled *On the Number Seven*,[16] and Marcus Varro also wrote a now lost work dedicated to the secrets of the number seven, called *Hebdomades*.[17] Porphyry tells of a certain Pythagorean Moderatus of Gades and his speculations on the nature of numbers: all numbers were plurals born of the Monad (one of what appear to be three primordial pairs in this system), which then return to the Monad. This was a clear formulation of an idea about birth and return, and the numbers were considered by many to have a redemptive power; by contemplating their nature, one could also redeem the *nous* stuck in the body like the unity that became the plural through emanations from the Monad.

The vowels and tones were seven in total, a fact which Origen also recognised. Along with Philo, he contended that God did not rest on the seventh day of creation, but that this day – through its connection to the power of the number seven – was a day for contemplation, reflection and spiritual activity. Like Philo, Origen argued that it was unthinkable that God rested on the seventh day;[18] rather, he was active in another way, in transcendent spiritual activity.[19] Thus, the seventh day was especially auspicious for contemplation and spiritual pursuits,[20] such as the explorations deliberated upon in the above passage from *Marsanes*.

The Trimorphic Protennoia *(NHC XIII,1)*

This text is found in what has been termed 'Codex XIII', eight leaves found in the cover binding of Codex VI. These sixteen pages consist

---

[16] Clement, *Stromata* VI, 16.
[17] Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* III, 10.
[18] According to Eusebius, *Preparations* 13:12.
[19] Origen, *Contra Celsus* VI, 61; *Peri Archon* II, 9:1
[20] Origen, *Commentary to the Gospel of Matthew* XII, 36.

of the text titled, *The Trimorphic Protennoia* (the three forms of the first thought), and the first page of *On the Origin of the World,* the opening of which is found on the last page of *The Trimorphic Protennoia.*[21] As with the two texts discussed hitherto, this is a Sethian tractate and, like *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, it shows some Christian influence. The text is divided into three separate parts, retelling three instances of descent by the saviour figure Protennoia (God's 'first thought'), identified with Barbelo. This is comparable with the ending of the longer version of *The Apocryphon of John*, which contains a hymn to Pronoia who descends three times (NHC II, 30:11–31:25). The three descents in *The Trimorphic Protennoia* are related to the sphere of sound and speech. In the first descent Protennoia is called the voice of the highest god who steps down in materiality to unveil the mysteries of God to the worthy. During the second descent Protennoia reveals yet another part of the mystery, this time as the speech of the highest God's voice. The final mysteries are revealed in the third descent, when Protennoia is described as the word of the speech of the highest God's voice. This frame highlights the importance placed on the nature and practice of vowel magic. The threefold descent of Protennoia first releases humans from sleep caused by the body, then Fate's grasp is lifted and, finally, the mystery called 'the five seals' is provided. A ritual called 'five seals', together with a baptism, is also mentioned in *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit,* and in *The Apocryphon of John.*[22] As in other Sethian tractates, the highest God is described as a great invisible spirit who takes the three forms of

[21] John D. Turner, 'Introduction to Codex XIII', in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C. W. Hedrick (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 360–369. *On the Origin of the World* is preserved in its entirety in Codex II.

[22] For a discussion of 'the five seals' ritual and a comparison between the three different Sethian texts in the Nag Hammadi collection that mention it, see Alastair Logan, 'The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 51:2 (1997): 188–206; see also Christian Bull, *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus: The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

134

a Father, Mother and Son. Protennoia is a manifestation of these three aspects.

The following quote from the first part of the text illustrates the place of magical vowel features in this text, and its ritualistic context, here read as part of the first descent undertaken by Protennoia:

Now the Voice that originated from my Thought exists as three permanences: the Father, the Mother, the Son. Existing perceptibly as Speech, it (Voice) has within it a Word endowed with every <glory>, and it has three masculinities, three powers, and three names. They exist in the manner of Three □□□ which are quadrangles, secretly within a silence of the Ineffable One.

ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡ̄ϩⲣⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲇⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁϥϣⲱⲡⲉ
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲁⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ
ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲙⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲛⲏ ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ
ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲟⲩⲥⲙⲏ ⲉⲥϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲛ̄
ⲟⲩⲁⲓⲥⲑⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ̄· ⲡⲁⲓ̈
ⲉⲧⲉⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̄⟦ⲟⲩⲉ⟧⟨ⲉ⟩ⲟⲟⲩ
ⲛⲓⲙ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ
ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲙⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ· ⲁⲩⲱ
ϣⲟⲙⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ϣⲟⲙⲧ
ⲛ̄ⲣⲁⲛ ⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲧⲉ
ⲙ̄ⲡϣⲁⲙⲧ □□□ ⲉⲩⲟ ⲛ̄ϥⲧⲟⲩ ⲕⲟⲟϩ
ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲡⲉⲧϩⲏⲡ ϩⲣⲁ[ⲓ̈ ϩ·]ⲛ̄
ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲕⲁⲣⲱⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲁⲧϣⲁϫⲉ
ⲙ̄ⲙ[ⲟϥ

It is he alone who came to be, that is, the Christ. And, as for me, I anointed him as the glory of the Invisible Spirit, with goodness. Now the Three, I established alone in eternal glory over the Aeons in the Living Water, that is, the glory that surrounds him who first came forth to the Light of those exalted Aeons, and it is in glorious Light that he firmly perseveres. And he stood in his own Light that

ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ ⲟ]ⲩⲁⲁⲧϥ ⲉⲧⲁϩϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ
ⲡⲁⲉⲓ [ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲭ̅ⲥ̅ ⲁⲩⲱ] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲓ̈ⲧⲁϩⲥϥ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲟⲟⲩ [ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅
ⲛⲁ]ⲧⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧ[ⲭ̅ⲥ̅
ⲡⲓϣⲟ]ⲙⲧ ϭⲉ ⲁⲉⲓⲧⲉϩⲟϥ ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄
ⲟⲩⲁ[ⲁⲧϥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄]ϣⲁⲉⲛⲉϩ
ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉϫ[ⲛ̄ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ϩ·ⲙ̄
ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩ] ⲉⲧⲟⲛϩ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ [ⲡⲉ
ⲡⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲕⲱⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟ]ϥ ⲡⲁⲓ̈
ⲉⲛⲧ [ⲁ]ϥⲣϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲓⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ

surrounds him, that is, the Eye of the Light that gloriously shines on me. He perpetuated the Father of all Aeons, who am I, the Thought of the Father, Protennoia, that is, Barbelo, the perfect Glory, and the immeasurable Invisible One who is hidden. I am the Image of the Invisible Spirit, and it is through me that the All took shape, and (I am) the Mother (as well as) the Light which she appointed as Virgin, she who is called 'Meirothea', the incomprehensible Womb, the unrestrainable and immeasurable Voice.

Then the Perfect Son revealed himself to his Aeons, who originated through him, and he revealed them and glorified them, and gave them thrones, and stood in the glory with which he glorified himself. They blessed the Perfect Son, the Christ, the only-begotten God. And they gave glory, saying, "He is! He is! The Son of God! The Son of God! It is he who is! The Aeon of Aeons, beholding the Aeons which he begot. For thou hast begotten by thine own desire! Therefore we glorify thee: ma mó ó ó ó eia ei on

ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲉⲧⲭⲟⲥⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄
ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲛ̄ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧⲁⲭ[ⲣ]ⲟ̣
ⲉϥⲙⲏⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁ̣[ϥ]ⲱϩⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲧ̄ϥ̄
ϩⲙ̄ ⲡϥⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲓⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟ[ϥ] ⲡⲁⲓ̈
ⲉⲧⲕⲱⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲃⲁⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡ
[ⲟⲩ]ⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄
ⲟⲩⲉⲟⲟ[ⲩ] ⲁϥ† ⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲛ̄⟨ⲛ⟩
ⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲉ [ⲁ̄]ⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ
ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲧ· ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲣⲱⲧⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ
ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ ⲃⲁⲣⲃⲏⲗⲱ ⲡⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲭ
[ⲏⲕ] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲁⲧⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ
ⲉϥϩⲏⲡ· ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲱ[ⲓⲧϥ] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲑⲓⲕⲱⲛ
ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟ[ϥ] ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲭⲓ ϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧ
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈
ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲕⲁⲁϥ ⲉϥⲟⲉⲓ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ
ⲧⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧ[ⲉ] ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ
ⲙ̄ⲉⲧⲣⲟ̄ⲑ̄ⲉ̄ⲁ̄ ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲉⲡⲟⲥ
ⲡϩⲣ[ⲟ]ⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲉⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲱⲓⲧϥ̄

ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲡⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲁϥⲟⲩⲟⲛϩϥ
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉϥ ⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲱⲱⲡⲉ
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ ⲁϥⲟⲩⲟⲛϩⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ
ⲁϥ† ⲛⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥ† ⲛⲁⲩ
ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛⲑⲣⲟⲛⲟⲥ ⲁϥⲱϩⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄ ϩⲙ̄
ⲡⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲁϥ† ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲁϥ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈
ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ ⲁⲩⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲁⲡⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲱⲏⲣⲉ
ⲡⲉⲭ̄ⲥ̄ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲱⲱⲡⲉ
ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲧϥ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲩ† ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲩⲭⲱ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ ϥⲱⲟⲟⲡ ϥⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲉ
ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ
ⲡⲉ[ⲧ]ⲱⲟⲟⲡ· ⲡⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ

ei! The Aeon of Aeons! The Aeon which he gave!"

Then, moreover, the God who was begotten gave them (the Aeons) a power of life on which they might rely, and he established them. The first Aeon he established over the first: Armédón, Nousanios, Armozel; the second he established over the second Aeon: Phaionios, Ainios, Oroiael; the third over the third Aeon: Mellephaneus, Loios, Daveithai; the fourth over the fourth: Mousanios, Amethes, Éléléth. Now those Aeons were begotten by the God who was begotten – the Christ – and these Aeons received as well as gave glory.[23]

εϥϭⲁϣⲧ ⲁⲛⲁ[ⲓ]ⲱⲛ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ
ⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲭⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲭⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲕ ⲛ̄ⲅⲁⲣ ⲁ[ⲕ]
ⲭⲡⲟ ϩ̄ⲙ ⲡⲉⲕⲟⲩⲱϣⲉ ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲧⲕ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ
ⲡⲁⲓ ⲧ [ⲛ̄] † ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲁⲕ· ⲙ̅ⲁ̅ ⲙ̅ⲱ̅ ⲱ̅ ⲱ̅
ⲱ̅ ⲉ̅ⲧ̅ⲁ̅ ⲉ̅ⲧ̅ ⲟ̅ⲛ̅ ⲉ̅ⲧ̅ ⲡ[ⲓⲁⲓ]ⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ
ⲛⲁ[ⲓⲱⲛ ⲡ]ⲁ̣ⲓⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥⲧⲁⲉⲓϥ

ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲛⲟ[ⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ]
ⲭⲡⲟϥ ⲁϥ† ⲛⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩϭⲟⲙ ⲛ̄[ⲱⲛϩ,
ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲩⲧⲁⲭ]ⲣⲟ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲁ[ϥ]ⲧⲉϩⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙ[ⲟⲟⲩ ϩ̄ⲙ ⲡⲟⲩⲙⲁ
ⲡ]ϣ̣[ⲟ]ⲣⲡ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲛ̄ⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲁϥⲧⲉϩⲟ[ϥ
ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲭ̄ⲙ ⲡϣⲟ]ⲣⲡ· ⲁ̅ⲣ̅ⲙ̅ⲏ̅ⲇ̅ⲱ̅ⲛ̅
ⲛ̅ⲟ̅ⲩ̅ⲥ̅ⲁ̣[ⲛⲟⲛ ⲁⲣⲙⲟⲍⲏⲗ ⲡⲙⲁϩ]
ⲥⲛⲁⲩ ⲁϥⲧⲉϩⲟϥ [ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲭ̄ⲙ
ⲡⲙⲁϩⲥⲛⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲁⲓⲱⲛ] ⲫ̅ⲁ̅ⲧⲟ̅ⲛ̅ⲟ̅ⲛ̅
ⲁ̅ⲓ̅ⲛ̅ⲧ̅ⲟ̅ⲛ̅ ⲟ̅ⲣ̅ⲟ̅ⲧ̅ⲁ̅ⲏ̅ⲗ̅ ⲡⲙⲁϩϣⲟⲙⲧ
ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲭ̄ⲙ ⲡⲙⲁϩϣⲟⲙⲧ ⲛ̄ⲁⲓⲱⲛ
ⲙ̅ⲉ̅ⲗ̅ⲗ̅ⲉ̅ⲫ̅ⲁ̅ⲛ̅ⲉ̅ⲁ̅· ⲗ̅ⲱ̅ⲓ̅ⲟ̅ⲛ̅ ⲇ̅ⲁ̅ⲩ̅ⲉ̅ⲓ̅ⲑ̅ⲁ̅ⲓ̅
ⲡⲙⲉϩϥⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲭ̄ⲙ
ⲡⲙⲉϩϥⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲙ̅ⲟ̅ⲩ̅ⲥ̅ⲁ̅ⲛ̅ⲟ̅ⲛ̅ ⲁⲙⲉⲑⲏ
ⲛ̅ ⲏ̅ⲗ̅ⲏ̅ⲗ̅ⲏ̅ⲑ̅ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲃⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲭⲡⲟⲟⲩ
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲭⲡⲟϥ ⲡⲉⲭ̅ⲥ̅ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲇⲉ ⲁⲩ† ⲛⲁⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲩ† ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ϩⲱⲟⲩ.

This passage has clear Christian traces as major parts of it centre around the powers of a heavenly Christ figure. First, Protennoia establishes her position as a manifestation of the highest god in the world, the invisible spirit. Then we get some background information concerning the structure of the heavens, a sort of protology. The heavens are populated by a score of aeonic beings created by

---

23 NHC XIII, 37:20–39:8. Text and trans. Turner, in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. Hedrick, 407–411.

Christ, who then reveals himself to them. They in turn give praise to Christ as a representative of the highest God in heaven, and there follows a passage describing the order among the Aeons in the heavens. The magical vowel features of this text are placed in the context of the aeons praising Christ, and just as in *Marsanes* and *The Great Indivisible Spirit*, the vowels seem to be associated with the structure of the heavens and provide humans with an opportunity to take part in the exchange being conducted in heaven. For this to be made possible, one must first distinguish between human words and sound in the cosmos, and the language attached to God; the text makes this clear by linking the different levels of sound to the downward evolution ultimately resulting in the material existence of humans. For humans to reach God, their languages must be made into a voice and the divine voice must be made into words. A similar passage alluding to these views on the relation between letters, sounds and words is found in the poetic tractate, *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, in Codex VI.[24]

A curious material feature in *The Trimorphic Protennoia* which has gone unnoticed – probably due to its being left out of transcribed modern editions – concerns the three squares that appear at the beginning of the text (see Fig. 5.3). The scribe has drawn three quadrangles in association with the discussion of the three parts of the highest God and the tripartite distinction between divine sounds, a voice audible to humans and words which make it understandable. These quadrangles reside, we read above, 'secretly within a silence of the Ineffable One'. The three squares, given that the ineffability of God is mentioned in connection to them, could refer to the mathematical proof that there was an inborn

[24] NHC VI, 20:26–35 reads: 'Hear me, you hearers; and learn of my words, you who know me. I am the hearing that is attainable to everything; I am the speech that cannot be grasped. I am the name of the sound, and the sound of the name. I am the sign of the letter.' Text and trans. George W. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,1: With Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, ed. Douglas M. Parrott (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 251.
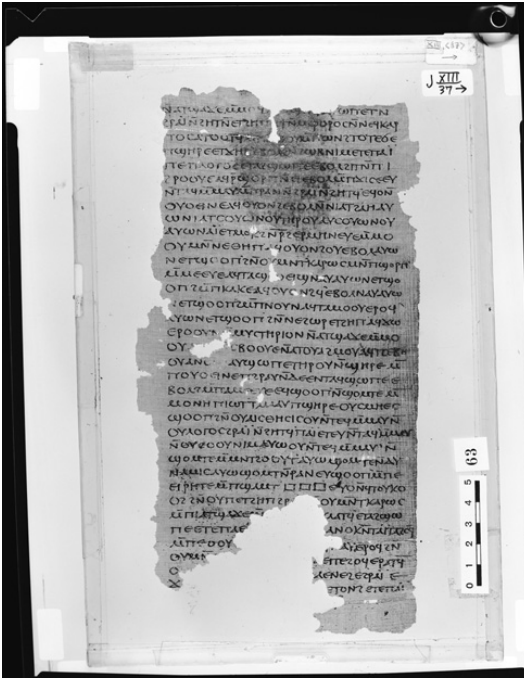
Figure 5.3 Page 37 of *The Trimorphic Protennoia*, Codex XIII. Photo by Basile Psiroukis. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

transcendence, infinity if you will, built into the structure of the cosmic system. Three squares can be placed edgewise to each other to symbolise a right-sided triangle (see Fig. 5.4). With the aid of the Pythagorean theorem regarding the nature of right-sided triangles,[25] one could effectively illustrate the existence of irrational numbers: numbers that cannot be expressed as the ratio of two whole numbers (an example is π). Irrational numbers contain an aspect of infinity, since in their decimal form, they consisted

---

[25] The longest side of a right-sided triangle, squared, is always equal to the sum of the two shorter sides squared.

139
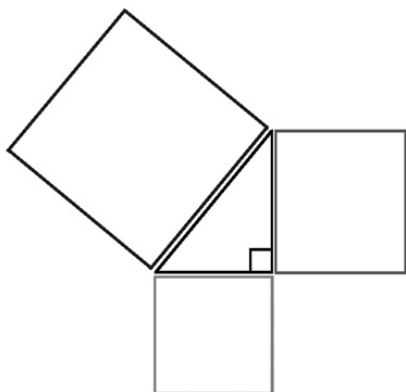
Figure 5.4 Right-sided triangle surrounded by three squares. Image by author.

of an infinite number of decimals (1/3 for example is 0.333 . . .). This, Plato tells us, had been demonstrated by Theodorus of Cyrene (465–398 BCE).[26]

The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth *(NHC VI,6)*

This text is without title but has been termed 'the discourse on the eighth and ninth' since the major topic of the text is the nature of, and road towards the eighth (Ogdoad) and ninth (Ennead) levels of existence, representing the highest heavens. This text belongs to the tradition associated with the mythical prophet Hermes Trismegistus. It is one of three Hermetic texts in the Nag Hammadi collection, the other two being *Prayer of Thanksgiving* and the fragment of Asclepius, all contained within Codex VI.

The text begins as a dialogue between a teacher and his pupil. Three pages into the text the narrative changes to a hymn to, and a dialogue with the highest God in the heavenly world. *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is mainly made up of an outline of how initiates first enter the eighth sphere by recognising their

---

[26] Plato, *Theaetetus* 147D.

140

unity with the all-encompassing mind (*nous*), and then the ninth sphere by becoming one with the mind of the All (God). Then follows the singing of hymns of praise to God, and finally the pupil is told how to preserve and pass on the knowledge contained in the work. In the following two passages, the first is a prayer directed to God for granting the salvific vision needed to traverse the spheres:

He created everything. He who is self-contained cares for everything. He is perfect, the invisible God to whom one speaks in silence – his image is moved when it is directed, and it governs – the one mighty power, who is exalted above majesty, who is better than the honored (ones), Zoxathazo a óó éé óóó ééé óóó ó éé óóóóóó oooooo óóóóóó yyyyyy óóóóóóóóóóóóóó. Zazazoth Lord, grant us a wisdom from your power that reaches us, so that we may describe to ourselves the vision of the eighth and the ninth.[27]

ⲁϥⲥⲱⲛⲧ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲁ ⲛⲓⲙ· ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥ
ⲟⲩⲁⲁϥ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ̄· ⲉϥ ϥⲓϩⲁ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ
ⲛⲓⲙ· ⲉϥⲙⲉϩ· ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲥ
ⲉⲧⲟⲩϣⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ϩ̄ⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲱϥ·
ⲥⲉⲕⲓⲙ ⲉⲧⲉϥ{ϩⲓ}ⲕⲱⲛ ⲉⲩⲣ̄ⲇⲓⲟⲓⲕⲉⲓ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲥ{ⲉ}ⲣ̄ⲇⲓⲟⲓⲕⲉⲓ ⲡⲭⲱⲣⲉ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ⲡⲉⲧϫⲟⲥⲉⲁ
ⲧⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲟϭ ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲟⲧ̄ⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲟ̂
ⲍ̄ⲱ̄ⲝ̄ⲁ̄ⲑ̄ⲁ̄ⲍ̄ⲱ ⲁ̄ ⲱⲱ ⲉⲉ ⲱⲱⲱ ⲏⲏⲏ
ⲱⲱⲱ ⲱ ⲏⲏ ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ
ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ ⲩ̄ⲩ̄ⲩ̄ⲩ̄ⲩ̄
ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ
ⲍ̄ⲱ̄ⲝ̄ⲁ̄ⲍ̄ⲱ̄ⲑ̄ ⲡϫⲟⲓ̈ⲥ ⲙⲁⲧ̄ ⲛⲁⲛ
ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩ̄ⲛ̄ ⲧⲉⲕⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ
ⲉⲧⲡⲏϩ ϣⲁⲣⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲛϫⲱ ⲛⲁⲛ
ⲛ̄ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲑⲟⲩⲇⲟⲁⲥ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲑⲉⲛⲛⲁⲥ·

The second passage containing vowels appears five pages later, in a hymn sung in praise to God for receiving salvation:

After these things, I give thanks by singing a hymn to you. 'For I have received life from you,

ⲱ̂ ⲡϩⲙⲟⲧ [ⲙ̄]ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲁ ⲛⲁⲓ̈· ϯϣⲡ̄
ϩⲙⲟⲧ [ⲉⲉⲓ]ⲣ̄ϩⲩⲙⲛⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ·
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓϫ[ⲓ] ⲡⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲕ̄·

---

[27] VI, 56:8–26. Text and trans. James Brashler, Peter A. Dirkse and Douglas M. Parrott, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,1*, ed. Parrott, 355–357.

141

when you made me wise. I praise you. I call your name that is hidden within me: a óó éé óóó ééé óóó ó éé óóóóóó oooooo óóóóóó yyyyyy óóóóóóóóóóóóóó you are the one who exists with the spirit. I sing a hymn to you reverently.' O my son, write this book for the temple at Diospolis in hieroglyphic characters, entitling it 'The Eighth Reveals the Ninth'.[28]

ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲣⲉⲕⲁⲁⲧ ⲛ̅ⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ· ϯⲥⲙⲟⲩ
ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ϯⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲕⲣⲁⲛ ⲉⲧϩⲏⲡ
ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ ⲁ̅ ⲱ ⲉⲉ ⲱ ⲏⲏⲏ ⲱⲱⲱ
ⲓ̅ ⲓ̅ ⲓ̅ ⲱⲱⲱ ⲟⲟⲟⲟⲟ ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ
ⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ
ⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ
ⲡⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲙⲛ̅ ⲡ̅ⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅ ϯϩⲣⲩⲙⲛⲓ
ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̅ⲧ ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲱ
ⲡⲁϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲡⲉⲓ̈ⲭⲱⲙ ⲉⲥⲁϩϥ̅ ⲁⲡⲉⲣⲡⲉ
ⲛ̅ⲇⲓⲟⲥⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ· ϩⲛ̅ ϩⲉⲛⲥϩⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁϩ
ⲡⲣⲁⲛ ϣ̅ⲉⲕⲣⲟⲛⲟⲙⲁⲍⲉ ⲉⲟⲩⲗⲟⲁⲥ
ⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̅ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̅ⲑⲉⲛⲛⲁⲥ·
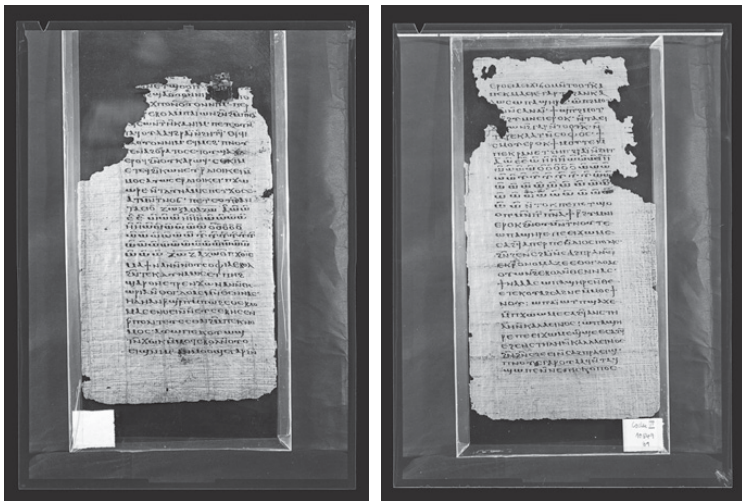
Figure 5.5 Pages 56 and 61 of *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, Codex VI. Photo by James M. Robinson. Images courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

---

[28] VI, 61:3–22. Text and trans. by Brashler et al., in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,1*, ed. Parrott, 366–369.

Here the two instances of vowel recitation occur in different contexts, as a prayer and as a hymn of thanksgiving. In *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, the vowels do not sync with the structures of the heavens, as in the Sethian tractates. This is not surprising considering that materiality has a different standing in this Hermetic text, which echoes a Stoic notion that materiality is all there is (granted, in both much finer and rougher constellations). Here the vowels are associated with the hidden structure of the cosmos and the seven spheres which make up the cosmos, as well as with the seven planets and the archons guarding them. This is the underlying law of all existence, ultimately a manifestation of the highest divine principle. By tapping into this structure, the initiate shows awareness of the hidden knowledge required to be let through the spheres and to open up communication with the God above and assure personal ascent after death. The text ends with the initiate promising to preserve and safeguard the knowledge of the Hermetic tradition and pass it on. References are made to an Egyptian context – hieroglyphs, Egyptian gods and temples are mentioned – revealing either a common antique appropriation of Egyptian culture due to its being imbued with mystic knowledge or, as Bull has argued, an actual Egyptian priestly context for the text.[29]

Contextualising Magical Vowel Features

Previous studies have bestowed ample attention on the individual Sethian and Hermetic contexts of these magical vowel passages, both of which are based on Graeco-Egyptian traditions much older than the texts themselves.[30] I shall not here attempt to give

---

[29] The latter is the argument put forward in Bull, *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus*.

[30] John D. Turner, 'From Baptismal Vision to Mystical Union with the One: The Case of the Sethian Gnostics', in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, ed. A. D. DeConick, G. Shaw and J. D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 411–431;

143

a complete conceptual background of what went into the art of vowel magic, merely mentioning the main ideas needed to facilitate the following discussion on their place within the Nag Hammadi collection as a whole, as well as within a monastic setting.

Any discussion of vowel magic should take its departure from ancient views concerning the close intermingling of physics, medicine and theory of mind, that is, the way cognition and emotions were thought to work. As Hans Dieter Betz writes, the practice of magic was closely linked to local and everyday use. People referenced magical words and formulas, and experts touted knowledge of them, for very practical reasons: to improve life here and now, to solve the problems everyone faces in terms of love, health, finances and politics.[31] In the PGM we have many examples of this, where spells consisting of holy names and constellations of vowels are used for everything from improving one's memory[32] or vision,[33] to love spells,[34] enticing dreams[35] and attracting a particular person to one's side.[36] The art of vowel magic, also clearly represented in the PGM, had a second more transcendent function in that it was a way to establish communication with the gods for spiritual edification.[37] This is what we find in the Nag Hammadi texts.

Ian Gardner, 'The Sethian Context to a Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power (= P. Macquarie I)', in *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. T. Derda, A. Łajtar and J. Urbanik (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2016), 755–766; Malcolm Choat, 'Gnostic Elements in Ancient Magical Papyri', in *The Gnostic World*, ed. G. W. Trompf, G. B. Mikkelsen and J. Johnston (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 217–224; Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God*, passim; Bull, *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus*, 331–368.

[31] *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, vol. I: *Texts*, ed. and trans. Hans Dieter Betz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xliv–xlviii.

[32] PGM III, 467–478.

[33] PGM IV, 930–1114.

[34] PGM XXXVI, 361–371.

[35] PGM XII, 107–21.

[36] PGM CVIII, 1–12.

[37] See, for example, PGM XIII, 343–646.

144

Vowels are used as means to give praise to and facilitate the soul's contact and ultimate unity with the divine. The term 'magic' should not confuse us when discussing vowel magic, and we should at the outset rid ourselves of any pejorative connotations attached to the practice as 'proper' religion's degenerate sidekick. The practice of seeking knowledge and indeed power in the art of sounds, letters and numbers – in both the more practical and the theological aspects of vowel magic – was firmly established in a systematic and an ancient scientific approach to the world. But the Nag Hammadi codices consist mostly of Christian texts, produced and owned by Christians. As I have mentioned, and as becomes clear from the images provided here of the texts, the vowel constellations are not highlighted as one might expect if they were used in a ritual setting. So, how and why would the Christian owners of the Nag Hammadi texts read these representations of ancient vowel magic? Before tackling these questions, it is worthwhile surveying Christian views of holy words, letters and sounds, which are addressed in the .

Christian Use of 'Pagan' Techniques of Holy Letters and Sounds

Paul refers to an ability to speak a special language which directly communicates with God. These are 'unintelligible sounds' (στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις), gifts of the spirit which put humans in contact with God (Rom 8:26). In 1 Corinthians, Paul distinguishes between the speech of men and angels (1 Cor 13–15), and claims that the speech of the spirit is only grasped by God: 'no one understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit' (οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀκούει, πνεύματι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια) (1 Cor 14:2). Further on in the same letter, Paul differentiates between ordinary human wisdom and spiritual teaching, which is 'not taught by human wisdom but

145

taught by the Spirit' (οὐκ ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις ἀλλ᾽ ἐν διδακτοῖς πνεύματος) (1 Cor 2:13–14).

The study of glossolalia in the Bible is a vast field of research. Paul's references to the gift of spiritual speech in association with the situation in Corinth is often read in parallel with the references to speaking in tongues mentioned in Mark 16:17, where Jesus tells the apostles that those who believe in him will speak in new tongues; and Acts 2:6, 10:46 and 19:6, where people who have received the Holy Spirit speak in tongues, a language foreign people of diverse origins could all understand. This spontaneous ability to communicate with foreign people through a holy or angelic language can be viewed as an aspect of wider antique phenomena involving holy words, letters and speech. However, glossolalia was far from a Christian invention. *The Testament of Job*, a first-century apocryphon of the story of Job, describes Job's daughter as speaking in angelic language. The Greeks viewed the language of the gods as alien to humans; thus, if spoken, it would sound like gibberish to human ears, as was the case with the Pythia, the oracle at Delphi, who needed trained priests to interpret her speech as she was possessed by Apollo. Speaking in tongues or while possessed by the gods was an ability assigned to sages and holy figures or one that was spontaneously granted to a few holy people. It was associated with the eighth sphere of the cosmic realm and, as such, it could be viewed as the ultimate objective of those who explored vowel magic pertaining to the structure of the cosmos and its origin in the work of the gods. In the Hermetic text *Poimandres,* the beings in the eighth sphere sing praises to the gods in a language that belongs only to them.[38]

The Christian phenomenon of glossolalia was surely informed and made more credible through its association with the wider context of letters and sounds, intimately intertwined with the

---

[38] *Poimandres* 26. Trans. Walter Scott, in *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924–1936), 129.

structure of the cosmos and its divine governance. Nevertheless, scholars of the Bible and early Christianity have undoubtedly been hesitant to read early Christian expressions of glossolalia in the context of ancient magical vowel features. In his study of the intricacies of the Corinthian conflict and the legacy of Paul, Dale Martin writes in connection with a discussion of the social meaning of glossolalia that 'one might include here, though I do not, the function of "nonsense" terms (at least to outsiders if not to insiders) in Gnostic literature and magical papyri'.[39] Martin argues that divine or angelic speech was a high-status marker for those who possessed it. His choice to exclude magical vowel features and their ritual aspect is strange, particularly considering that gaining divine speech through exploring vowels would serve to strengthen his hypothesis that glossolalia had high social status and was an ability chiefly showcased among people in leadership roles. Attaining a mastery of divine speech through vowel exploration would only have been possible among those deeply initiated or who had undergone serious study and practice of the rituals and the complexities undergirding them. Yet Martin is far from alone in excluding the relevance of magical vowel features from studies of early Christian glossolalia; indeed, he represents one of the more balanced dismissals.[40] My point here is not to argue that vowel magic is relevant to discuss in every early Christian setting where holy sounds and words are mentioned, only that the phenomenon should not be automatically disregarded as by definition something un-Christian. Rather, magical vowel features should be approached as an aspect of the broader religious scene involving speculations

---

[39] Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 267 n. 8.

[40] Andrews, E. 'Gift of Tongues', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. K. R. Crim and G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), vol. IV, 671–672; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Eddie Ensley, *Sounds of Wonder: Speaking in Tongues in the Catholic Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

147

about the secrets contained in letters and sounds, which would also have been relevant for and utilised by Christians. To illustrate its relevance for interpreting Christian texts, let us take some examples from those found in the Nag Hammadi library, as some of those in the Valentinian tradition, for example, are well suited to be read in light of references to the power of sounds and letters as gateways to higher truths.[41]

In *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI,1), for example, some people are portrayed as having access to free-flowing prophetic speech.[42] This causes strife within the congregation represented in the text, as others became jealous. The congregants asked 'Why does he speak while I do not?'[43] To this the text

---

[41] The Nag Hammadi codices contain several Christian texts that can be said to belong to the theological heritage associated with Valentinus. These are, conservatively counted, *The Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,2), *The Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5), *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI,1), *The Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3) and *A Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2). The Valentinian texts found within the Nag Hammadi codices represent the largest collection of Valentinian texts extant from antiquity.

[42] That *The Interpretation of Knowledge* is informed by Paul is accepted by most scholars. Elaine Pagels has studied the text in detail in light of Pauline perspectives in 'Introduction to *The Interpretation of Knowledge*', in *Nag Hammadi Codices X, XI, XII*, ed. Hedrick, 21–30; see also Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of The Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1975); Elaine Pagels, 'Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*', in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1988), 187–206. Here she argues, among other things, that the images of the feminine in 'Gnostic texts' are not mere reinterpretations of Genesis but also strongly influenced by Pauline writings.

[43] NHC XI, 16:34–35: ⲉⲩ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ ⲙ̅ⲙⲉⲛ ϣⲉϫⲉ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲛ̅ⲇⲉ ⲛ̅ϯϣⲉϫⲉ ⲉⲛ. *The Interpretation of Knowledge* is badly fragmented, especially the first half of the text. My translation here is a modified version of John D. Turner and Elaine Pagels' transcription and translation in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. Hedrick, 65–66. I have also consulted Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Die Auslegung der Erkenntnis (Nag-Hammadi-Codex XI,1)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996); and especially Wolf-Peter Funk, Louis Painchaud and Einar Thomassen, *L'interprétation de la gnose: NH XI, 1* (Quebec: Peeters, 2010); and Einar Thomassen's English translation, 'The Interpretation of Knowledge', in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 651–662.

responds, 'You also possess that which exists among your brothers, that which flows forth as gifts. But if someone is making progress in (studying) the Word, do not be hindered by this.'[44] 'For what he says is yours, and the contemplation of the Word, and that which speaks it, is of the same power.'[45] The cosmos is ruled, we read, by a structure that can be transcended through the Word. Beyond the low cosmic 'harmony' (ⲑⲁⲣⲙⲟⲛⲓⲁ) exists an aeonic 'symphony' (ⲧⲥⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛⲓⲁ) (18:22–27).[46] These moral exhortations addressing a congregation in conflict are all found in the second half of *The Interpretation of Knowledge.* But it is in the first part, consisting of a mythological backdrop,[47] where we find the keys unlocking the mechanisms of the aural references in *The Interpretation of Knowledge*, explaining how the cosmic oppressive *harmony* is thought to have related to the aeonic *symphony*. People are described as clothed in a 'garment of condemnation' (ⲱⲧⲏⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲕⲁⲧⲁⲇⲓⲕⲏ) or 'flesh of condemnation' (ⲥⲁⲣⳅ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲇⲓⲕⲏ). These 'clothes' are contrasted with how the Father clothes the Son: with the Aeon, the 'living rational elements' (ⲅ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲧⲟ[ⲓⳙ]ⲉⲓⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲉⲩⲁⲁⲛⳅ).[48] Here the word 'elements' (στοιχεῖα) is used

---

[44] NHC XI, 16:28–33: ⲟⲩⲛⲧⲉⲥ ⲛⲏ ⲟⲩⲛ[ⲧ]ⲉⲕⲥ ⳅⲱⲱⲕ· ⲧⲉⲉⲓ ⟨ⲉⲧⲉ⟩ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲛ̄ⳅⲏⲧ⟨ⲥ̄⟩ ⲉⲣⲉⲛⲉⲉⲓⲁⲡⲟⳅⲣⲟⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⳅⲙⲁⲧ ⲱⲟ[ⲟ]ⲡ ⲅ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲕⲥⲛⲏⲩ· ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲟⲩⲉ[ⲉⲓ]ⲡⲣⲟⲕⲟⲡⲧⲉ ⲅ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⳙⲓ ⳙⲣⲁⲡ ⲅ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ.

[45] NHC XI, 16:35–38: ⲛ̄ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⳁⲱⲉⲭⲉ ⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲭⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϥ ⲟⲩⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲛⲟⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲉⲭⲉ ⳁⲃⲁⲙ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲧⲉ.

[46] The original Coptic/Greek words illustrate the structural similarities between an oppressive structure (cosmic harmony) and a heavenly one (aeonic symphony) and at the same time highlight the aural connotations.

[47] First, we read of prehistoric times and strife (NHC XI, 3–7), of the Soul's downward journey (NHC XI, 8–10) and the nature of the cosmos (NHC XI, 11–13).

[48] This might be influenced by Romans 13:13–14, which also addresses a congregation where jealousy seems to have been an issue and mentions a garment of Christ that should be put on instead of concentrating on one's fleshly form. Rom 13:13–14: 'let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.'

for the Aeon in which the Son is clothed.[49] This term is often used to refer to the building blocks of the cosmos and the human body, the four elements.[50] In *The Interpretation of Knowledge* humans 'were made slaves' (14:34–35) and will stay thus as long as they are stuck in the 'garment of condemnation' and in the body, and will continue to be attacked by evil powers (6:30–32).[51] What separates the elements of the body and the elements of the Aeons are the qualifying words 'living' and 'rational' (11:36–37). The elements that make up the flesh are irrational (without Logos, without form), what Philo

[49] In *The Apocryphon of John*, it is Fate/the counterfeit spirit that binds the human to fire, earth, water and air (NHC II, 28:13–32, BG 55). For Paul, humans were slaves to the elements, lower powers and archons before Christ came (Rom 8:38–39; Gal 4:3–9; 1 Cor 15–24. Exactly how 'the elements of the cosmos' and the different powers and angels are to be understood in Paul's epistles is debated. For an overview and one interpretation, see Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology*, chapter 3. For pseudo-Pauline sources see, for example, Eph 2:3 and Col 2:8–20). In Galatians 4:3–5 Paul writes that 'while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental principles (τὰ στοιχεῖα) of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.' As we have seen, in 1 Corinthians, the speech of those who have accepted Christ and the holy spirit may possess divine qualities. Something similar is expressed in *The Interpretation of Knowledge* and in all likelihood the Pauline letters are a great influence.

[50] As in *Excerpts from Theodotus* 81. In *The Apocryphon of John*, the 'tomb of the body' is made from 'earth and water and fire and air' (BG 55:4–6), and it is this in 'which they clothed the man as a fetter of matter' (BG 55:10–13). Plato mainly refers to the four γένη, and the word element (στοιχεῖον) is used for building blocks that are not visible. Further, he maintained that the division into basic elements was pre-Socratic, deriving from Empedocles (Plato, *Timaeus* 48B). Aristotle's famous categorisation of the cosmos includes the four elements, each characterised by a bodily feature such as hot, cold, dry, wet (*On Generation and Corruption* 328b26–329b25). In the *Orphic Hymns* 5:4 and in Ovid's *Metamophoses* 236–256, the word στοιχεῖα is also used for these four elements. Philo accused pagans of worshipping these στοιχεῖα (*On Abraham* 68–88).

[51] Thomassen, in *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Meyer, 656. The same metaphor is found in Valentinus' fragment 2, where we are also told to purify our hearts from these lower beings, just as in *The Interpretation of Knowledge* 20:14–23. However, the relation between the fragments of Valentinus and later Valentinianism is a debated topic. See Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

called 'lifeless elements',[52] which makes them subject to Fate and other lower powers.[53] This is only one example of how a Christian text employs precisely the same structures and theoretical ideas that undergirded the magical vowel features found in the Sethian and Hermetic texts discussed above. There are, however, even clearer statements in other Valentinian Nag Hammadi texts.

In *The Gospel of Truth*, for example, the aural and letter imagery is more prominent. At the outset we read that Error is the reason for the cosmic creation. But those who are predestined to salvation, those who are mentioned in 'the book of the living', may escape. That which is written in this book 'are letters of truth which only those speak who know them' (23:8–10). These people are likened to sheep who have fallen into a pit but who have access to a certain voice, which is designed to call out to the Father: 'the Father is the sign in their voice' (ⲡⲓⲙⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ ⲡⲟⲩϩⲣⲁⲩ ⲡⲉ· ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ) (32:17). Tjitze Baarda has suggested that this sign correlates to the sound made by a sheep – in Greek βῆ – whose numerical value if cried out twice would equal the number one hundred, which is mentioned in the sentence before (the sign of the Father), the sign of

---

[52] Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 3–4.

[53] Plato connected the Moirai and Ananke to cosmic motions and the turning of time, describing the Moirai sisters' work, especially Clotho's spinning of her wheel, and connecting it to the movement of the seven circles, the turning of the cosmos and of time. Plato also mentions the spindle of Necessity (Ananke) in this passage, 'on which all the revolutions turn' (*Republic* X, 616–617). A goddess associated with weaving in Egyptian mythology was the sister of Isis, Nephtys, particularly with regard to the linen grave clothes in which the dead were wrapped (Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 171). Zeno called Fate 'a moving power' (δύναμις κινητική) (SVF 1, 175; 1, 176.) For Hermetic writings, see *Corpus Hermeticum* 12, where we read that all humans are subjected to Fate. For details on Hermetic Fate, see Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology*, chapter 5. For Sethian texts see, for example, *On the Origin of the World* 123.12–18, where Fate is portrayed as a co-worker with the archons and works to enslave the human in the cosmos, a cosmos that 'wandered astray (ⲣⲡⲗⲁⲛⲁⲥⲑⲉ) throughout all time'. Pheme Perkins called Fate in this text 'like a natural law'. See Pheme Perkins, 'On the Origin of the World (CG II, 5): A Gnostic Physics', *Vigiliae Christianae* 34:1 (1980): 41.

perfection.[54] This is a creative reading indeed, but it nevertheless underscores the esoteric nature of the references used in the text. Just as in *The Interpretation of Knowledge* the structure of the world is juxtaposed with the heavens using aural references.

In several Valentinian tractates the 'Name' of the Father is associated with the Son.[55] In *The Gospel of Truth* this Name is connected to a certain *voice* (cⲙⲏ). The passages on pages 20–21 of *The Gospel of Truth* describe how the saved humans receive teaching and are given a Name and knowledge about themselves and their origin. These humans are contrasted with the humans who 'have no Name, have no voice' (ⲙ̄[ⲙ]ⲉ[ⲩ] ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲉⲛ ⲙⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲙⲏ) (NHC I, 22:1–2). In one passage Jesus speaks to humans in the form of a voice of light: 'he spoke new things, speaking about what is in the heart of the Father, bringing forth the flawless speech, for light had spoken through his mouth and his voice'.[56] One last passage must be mentioned, here, one that might pertain directly to the art, or at least to the context, of vowel magic. In the first part of the text, we read how the Father reveals himself to the Aeons directly under him in heaven by introducing them to the content of the book of life:

This is the knowledge of the living book, which he revealed to the Aeons at the end as his letters, revealing how they are not vowels nor are they consonants, so that	ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲓⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲭⲱⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲛ̄ϩ ⲉⲛⲧⲁϥ ⲟⲩⲁⲛϩϥ̄· ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲁⲧⲑⲁⲏ ⲛ̄ⲛⲓϩϩⲉ̣[ⲉⲓ ⲛⲧⲟ]ⲟⲧϥ̄ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲁⲛϩ̄ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲉⲓⲱ[ⲉ]ϫⲉ ⲉϩⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲛ ⲛⲉ·

---

[54] (b(2)+h(8)=10 and 10x10 is 100. Tjitze Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 140–141.

[55] The Father's name is the Son. This is reminiscent of Valentinus' fragment 2 in which the act of *parrhesia* is the manifestation of the Son, as well as fragment 1 where *parrhesia* is associated with the Name of the Father.

[56] NHC I, 31:9–15: ⲉϥϣⲉϫⲉ ⲁⲛ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲃ̄ⲃ̄ⲣ̄ⲣⲉ· ϫⲓⲛ ⲉϥϣⲉϫⲉ ⲁⲡⲉⲧϩⲛ̄ ⲫⲏⲧ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲧ· ⲉⲁϥⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲙ̄ⲡϣⲉϫⲉ ⲛⲁⲧϣⲧⲁ· ⲉⲁϥϣⲉϫⲉ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲣⲱϥ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ ⲟⲩⲁϩⲛ̄ ϯⲥⲙⲏ. Text and trans. Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 100–101.

one might read them and think of something foolish, but (rather that) they are letters of the truth, which they alone speak who know them. Each letter is a complete <thought>, like a complete book, since they are letters written by the Unity, the Father having written them for the Aeons, in order that by means of his letters they should know the Father.[57]

ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ϩⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ ⲟⲩⲇⲉ ϩⲛ̄ⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ ⲉⲛ̣ ⲛⲉ·
ⲉⲩϣⲁⲁⲧ· ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩϩⲣⲁⲩ ϣⲓⲛⲁ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ ⲁϣⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ϥⲙⲉⲩⲉ
ⲁⲩⲡⲉⲧϣⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧ· ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ϩⲛ̄ⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ
ⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲏⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲉⲩϣⲉϫⲉ
ⲉⲩⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲉⲧⲟⲩ
ⲉⲟⲩⲙⲉ(ⲉⲩⲉ) ⲉϥϫⲏⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ
ⲡ̄ⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲏ̄ⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩϫⲱⲱⲙⲉ·
ⲉϥϫⲏⲕ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲉϩⲛ̄ⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ ⲛⲉ
ⲁⲩⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲥ·
ⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ ⲉⲁϩⲁⲡⲓⲱⲧ· ⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ
⟨ⲛ̄⟩ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ϣⲓⲛⲁ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲥϩⲉⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ· ⲉⲩⲁⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛ
ⲡⲓⲱⲧ·

Throughout *The Gospel of Truth*, great emphasis is placed on the need to manifest one's salvation through one's voice, and references to letters and numbers seem to be used in much the same way as in the above Sethian and Hermetic material: to make transcendence more concrete through aural cues.

In *The Tripartite Tractate* we also encounter a certain *voice* (ⲥⲙⲏ) which enables the recipient to come into contact with the Aeons as well as his/her own particular salvific status. Just as in *The Gospel of Truth*, the Aeons are at first unaware of the Father and are thus in disarray. They are granted knowledge of the Father not from reading letters, as in *The Gospel of Truth*, but from a voice (ⲥⲙⲏ), which enabled them to know the Father and the place and nature whence they came. Thus illuminated, we read that the Aeons 'need no voice and spirit, mind and word'[58] in their present state. In the cosmos,

---

[57] NHC I, 22:38–23:19. Text and trans. Attridge and MacRae, slightly modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 90–91.

[58] NHC I, 64:9–10: ϫⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲭⲣⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ ϩ[ⲓ ⲡ]ⲛ̄(ⲉⲩⲙ)ⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅ[ⲟ]ⲥ. Text and trans. Attridge and Elaine Pagels, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 212–213.

however, things are very different. Humans are divided into three categories: pneumatics, psychics and material humans. All three live in ignorance before the coming of the Saviour but at his appearance on earth pneumatic people immediately recognise their status as saved individuals. Their task is to spread the word to psychic people who possess the potential for salvation. The material people stand outside; these are people who speak 'like Greeks' (ⲡⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ) (110:25), while the wise among them speak 'arrogantly and (in an) illusory way concerning the things which they thought of as wisdom'.[59] The material people are hindered by the archons who rule the cosmos and, therefore, are restricted to knowledge pertaining to the 'visible elements' (ⲛⲓⲥⲟⲓⲭⲓⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲛϩ̄) (109:22–23). However, through their prophets, the psychics – a category in which Jews are included – have historically been able to speak about things pertaining to a higher level, although unaware of it, since they are guided by angels at a higher level than those only dealing with the visible elements of the cosmos (111:23–113:30). Once the Saviour appears, the pneumatics are awakened and able to instruct the psychics, while the material people are beyond redemption.[60] The psychics are, thus, instructed aurally by fellow Christians,[61] but the pneumatics are also depicted as receiving teaching, 'instructed in an invisible manner' (ϩⲛⲛ ⲟⲩ[ⲙ]ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲛⲉⲩ ⲁⲣⲁⲥ· ⲁϥⲧⲥⲉⲃⲁⲩ ⲁⲣⲁϥ) (115:1–2) by the Saviour himself. This resembles 1 Corinthians, in which Paul differentiates between ordinary human wisdom and pneumatic teaching, which is without words (1 Cor 2:13–14); *The Tripartite Tractate* seems to have expanded upon this. After one has received instruction, one enters a state of the Aeons where there is

---

[59] NHC I, 109:33–35: ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧϫⲁⲥⲓϩⲏⲧ· ⲙⲛ̄ⲛ ⲟⲩⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ ϩⲁ ⲡⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ· ⲁⲣⲁⲩ ⲙⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲙ̄ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ. Text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 290–291.

[60] For the deterministic implications of this, see Linjamaa, *The Ethics of The Tripartite Tractate*.

[61] 'Through "a voice" or "vocally"' (ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲥⲙⲏ) (NHC I, 119:3).

'no need of voice' (ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲭⲣⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲏ) (124:19–20). This is likened to gaining 'form' (ⲙⲟⲣⲫⲏ).[62] Several Christian authors portrayed paradise as a place where written and spoken words were not needed, where one was in intuitive contact with God's mind.[63] Nevertheless, reinstating the lost image of God commenced with words, through oral instruction and study.

Carrol Harrison has argued that many early Christian authors made a distinction between inward hearing and outward hearing.[64] In order to be able to hear the word of God within oneself – to be able to believe, pray and ultimately act in accordance with the will of God – one first needed to receive oral instruction and be baptised.[65] This context fits the Valentinian material in the Nag Hammadi codices. For example, in *The Tripartite Tractate* the psychics receive baptism and instruction from the pneumatics and have to assent to the trinity and then trust in 'what has been said to them' (ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲁⲩϫⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲛⲉⲩⲟⲩ) (128:1); they are thus termed those of 'the Calling' (ⲡⲧⲱϩⲙⲉ), also echoing Pauline language.[66] They need to

---

[62] Gaining 'form' is equal to becoming untangled from the cosmic predicament which befell the humanity at creation. Further into the text we read that 'the first human was a mixed formation, and a mixed creation, and a deposit of those of the left and those of the right, and a pneumatic rationality' (ϫⲉ ⲡϣⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ· ⲟⲩⲡⲗⲁⲥⲙⲁ ⲡⲉ ⲉϥⲧⲏϩ· ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲧⲥⲉⲛⲟ ⲡⲉ ⲉϥⲧⲏϩ ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩ ⲁϩⲣⲏⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ· ⲛ̄ⲇⲉ ⲛⲓⲃϭⲟⲩⲣ ⲡⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲉ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲡⲛ(ⲉⲩⲙ)ⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟ̄ⲥ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ) (NHC I, 106:18–22). Text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 284–285. For more on the concept 'form', see Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, chapter 5.

[63] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV, 4.2; Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 48; For references to Ambrose, Augustine, Clement, and for a broader discussion, see Harrison, *The Art of Listening*, chapter 3.

[64] Harrison, *The Art of Listening*, 61–83.

[65] To this can be added that some Christians seem to have gone further than others in developing theories and rituals based on the relation between sound and voice in the cosmos vis-à-vis the heavens. One example is Markosian vocal magic, which seems to have been a very intricate system based on similar concepts, whereby one's mind could be cultivated by harnessing the relationship between heavenly sounds and earthly echoes (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 13–17).

[66] 1 Cor 1:9, 7:15–24; Gal 1:6–15, 5:8, 13; 1 Thes 2:12, 4:7, 5:24; 2 Thes 1:11, 2:14; Col 3:15; Eph 4:4; Rom 8:30, 9:24–26.

be provided with words and oral instruction, which, once received, elevate them above cosmic words: the psychics 'will receive the vision more and more by nature and not only by a little word, so as to believe, only through a voice, that this is the way it is, that the restoration to that which used to be is a unity'.[67] It is the Logos who structures the heavenly world, where the pneumatics will be granted eternal repose. The Demiurge creates the cosmos but is guided by the Logos, which enables the Logos to step down to earth in order to awaken the pneumatic people (100:31–35). For this purpose, again from *The Tripartite Tractate*, he uses 'spiritual words' (ⲛ̄ϩⲛ̄ϣⲉ ϫⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ(ⲉⲩⲙ)ⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟⲛ) (101:15–16). As Einar Thomassen has observed, the way these spiritual words, and the voice the pneumatics' possess which gives them access to the structures of heaven, remind us of how the words of the world and the heavens are differentiated in *The Gospel of Philip*, another Nag Hammadi text often attributed to the Valentinian tradition.

The Gospel of Philip also contains references to Colossians 4:6 which makes a distinction between speech 'seasoned with salt' (ἅλατι ἠρτυμένος) and more colloquial and mundane speech: 'The apostles said to the disciples, "May our entire offering obtain salt". They called [Sophia] "salt". Without it, no offering [is] acceptable. But Sophia is barren, [without] child. For this reason, she is called "a trace of salt".'[68] Here, wisdom is likened to the ingredient elevating mundane speech. Thus, when one addressed God, it was not

---

[67] NHC I, 133:1–7: ⲥⲉⲛⲁϫⲓ ⲡⲛⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲣ· ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲩⲟ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲩⲟ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ ϩⲛⲛ ⲟⲩϣⲉϫⲉ ϣⲏⲙ ⲟⲩⲗⲉⲉⲧⲅ̄ ⲉⲛ ⲁⲧⲣⲟⲩⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲗⲉⲉⲧⲅ̄ ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲛ ⲟⲩⲥⲙⲏ ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲉⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲣⲏⲧⲉ ⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲇⲉ †ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲡⲉⲧⲉⲛⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ. Text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 328–329.

[68] NHC II, 59:27–33: ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲛⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲙⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ϫⲉ ⲧ̄ⲛ̄ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲫⲟⲣⲁ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ̄ ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲥϫⲡⲟ [ⲛ̄]ⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩϩⲙⲟⲩⲛⲉⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ [ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓ]ⲁ ϫⲉ ϩⲙⲟⲩ ⲁϫⲛⲧ̄ⲥ̄ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲫ[ⲟⲣⲁ ϣ]ⲱⲡⲉ ⲉϥϣⲏⲡ ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲇⲉ ⲟⲩⲥⲧⲉⲓⲣ[ⲁ ⲧⲉ ⲁϫⲛ̄] ϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲇⲓⲁ ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲟ ⲉⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟ[ⲥ ϫⲉ ⲡⲕⲉ]ⲥⲉⲡⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ϩⲙⲟⲩ. Text and trans. Wesley W. Isenberg, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7*, vol. I, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1989), 158–159.

enough to use everyday speech, it had to be an enlightened, illuminated and full of wisdom (salt) to be effective.

In conclusion, there are several magical vowel aspects that would have been well received in Christian texts, of which the Valentinian material is a good example. Several Valentinian texts, like *A Valentinian Exposition* (Codex XI,2), *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (Codex XI,1) and others, highlight a concept that is apparent in some of the Sethian and Hermetic material as well: silence as associated with God.[69] This is not at odds with the notion that aurality was effective, as the structure on earth containing sounds that can be heard with human ears was by definition something other or lesser than the reality in heaven. What should be clear by now is the similarity in intellectual context between those ideas that form the backdrop of the practice of vowel recitation and Valentinian ideas concerning the use of spiritual speech. In both Sethian and Hermetic literature, the enlightened person speaks in a silent and secret way to God, a speech that glorifies the Father of silence and results in transcending the cosmic restrictions, giving access to the heavens in which beings live whose existence centres around giving praise to the Father. Speech in the world is aural by definition, which is why God and the spiritual speech attached to him is repeatedly described as silent. In *Marsanes* and *The Trimorphic Protennoia* the highest being is called the 'silent one'. In *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, we read that 'He is perfect, the invisible God to whom one speaks in silence.'[70] The angels sing to God in silence, just as the mystagogue is advised to do. Again, from *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*: 'I am silent, O my Father. I want to sing a hymn to you

---

[69] See also NHC I, *The Tripartite Tractate* 55:35–38, 57:1–8; NHC I, *The Gospel of Truth* 36:39–37:13; NHC XI, *Valentinian Exposition* 22:27, 23:22.

[70] NHC VI, 56:9–12: ⲉϥϥⲓ ϩⲁ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ· ⲉϥⲙⲉϩ· ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲁϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲟⲩϣⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲱϥ. Text and trans. Brashler et al., in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,* ed. Parrott, 354–355.

while I am silent.'[71] This silent speech is associated with the vowels.

However, the Valentinian material is not the only Christian context in which vowel magic would have been received with understanding, and, dare I say, enthusiasm.

Divine Speech and Holy Words in a Monastic Context

What does monastic literature have to say regarding holy words, powerful vowels spoken in silence and the possibility to intermingle with beings of the heavens by transcending the structure of materiality? Would monks have found the Hermetic, Sethian and Valentinian reflections on these aspects 'nonsense' (as Martin puts it)? Indeed, as will become evident shortly, monastic sources are full of references to a secret language and creative approaches toward the alphabet.

In the burgeoning monastic context, spiritual knowledge was seen as separate from the educational undertakings and schooling belonging to worldly affairs.[72] As recent scholarship has indicated, references like these have led early scholars to view monastic learning as different from classical *paideia*.[73] Yet the scholarship has also highlighted the continuation of classical ideals and practices of *paideia* within the monasteries, and rather view references to

---

[71] NHC VI, 58:24–26: ⲧⲕⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓⲧ ⲱ̄ ⲡⲗⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲧⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲉⲣ̄ⲅⲩⲙⲛⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲉⲉⲓⲕⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓⲧ. Text and trans. Brashler et al., in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI*, ed. Parrott, 360–361.

[72] *Arsenius 5–6*; *Mark the Disciple of Abba Silvanus 10*. Trans. Benedicta Ward, in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, rev. edn (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984). The reference to worldly knowledge and monastic ideals in Arsenius is discussed by Lilian Larsen, '"On Learning a New Alphabet": The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander', in *Studia Patristica 55: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 59–77.

[73] Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*. Trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956).

158

spiritual knowledge and the ideal of being uneducated in worldly affairs as constructed architypes enabling monastic practices to be made exclusive.[74] As I wish to indicate here, not only were monastic approaches to study and learning were a continuation of the ideals and curricula attached to classical *paideia* (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7), but they also provided a language which separated monastic practice from the affairs of the outside world. Here, the references to secret languages and other forms of alphabet manipulation are central, echoing the endeavour to master a different kind of communication directed at God and the angels.

The most striking example of the belief in the mystical powers of letters comes from a Pachomian context. In the sixth letter in the collection of the *Letters of Pachomius* (preserved only in Latin), the founder of the Pachomian movement himself addresses the monastic Father Sourous and his housemate John, and states the following:

> I want you to understand the characters that you wrote to me and that I wrote to you in answer, and how important it is to know all the elements of the spiritual alphabet. Write ν above η and θ; write ζ above χ, μ, λ and ι, when you have finished reading these characters. I wrote to you so that you might understand the mysteries of the characters. Do not write ν above χ, θ and μι; but rather write ζ above χ, and ν above η and θ. As soon as I received the characters you wrote, I wrote back and to mysterious [words] I also answered in sacred [words]. I noticed indeed that the characters of your letter were η and θ; therefore I also understood the meaning and the words in the same manner, so I could be even with your understanding, lest you suffer some loss from us. Therefore I wrote to you ϛφυμ, lest perhaps someone might say that my name is not written ϛφυμ. And

---

[74] Rafaela Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Larsen and Rubenson (eds.), *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity*.

do not say: we can write χη, for you said indeed that it is written this way. Now, therefore, ϛφθμλουυσυυλιλ. Behold, I wrote to you also χ, complete and perfect all around. You write χ and φ, so that you can write ϛ and μ. Behold, θ is written before them. Let it be enough for you to take κ and τ, in case you are to go forth. We have written to you μι because of your labor, so that you might be able show every solicitude before you depart. We have indeed the same care as you have and we did not write κ and τ. I wrote to you μ. Therefore, when you see κ and τ written, write ζ in answer; when you see ϛ and φ, write ν; when you see η and θ, write μ; when you see λιλ write χ; when you see υουυ, write χ. Therefore, now, do not write κρ in these days, because we found δ written. As for us, we wrote ϛφ. Take care of α. This is indeed what is written in these days; and be attentive to Ꙣ and †, which are Egyptian characters called *bei* and *thei*. We found ꙅ and † written, which are Egyptian characters called *hore* and *thei*. Therefore take care of ηι and write α, because I gave it to you for ηι; write also ϛ because it is written τ and δ so that you be able to come to us. Be careful not to forget to write ψ above κ, because it is written first, then, and ρ is written before it; and least you say that θ is written and a part of χ. Therefore, the whole thing is written β, lest you say γ is written. In every letter that I wrote to you there is something about your residing as well as rising above the shadow of the exterior world, which is outside the wall. The smell of your wisdom has reached us and has compelled us to write you these things. As for you, as wise men, understand what I wrote to you and prove yourselves to be such as my word has directed.[75]

---

[75] *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3 vols., trans. Armand Veilleux (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), vol. III, 67–68. I follow Veilleux in all except his translation of 'In omni epistula quam scripsi uobis de uestra sessione continetur, et de resurrectione et umbra atenmuralis, quae est extra murum', which he renders as 'In every letter that I wrote to you there is something about your sitting and rising above the shade of exterior wall, which is outside the wall.' Latin from Amand Boon, *Pachomiana Latina* (Brussels: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1932), 92–95. For a discussion of the authenticity and dating of the letters, see Hans Quecke, *Die Briefe Pachoms* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974), 96–108.

Pachomius' letter is very cryptic.[76] Christoph Joest has studied these aspects of Pachomius' letters and tried to solve what he suggests is a cipher. He shows rather convincingly that Pachomius employed a code language in much of his letter correspondence, one where whole key words or nominal phrases were contracted to single letters:[77] for example, θ could be code for God (θεός) or Dead (θάνατος), α could refer to beginning or redemption (ἀρχή) and so on. It would have been hard to decipher the letters without access to a list of which letters refer to which words or phrases. Joel Kalvesmaki has questioned some points of Joest's suggested solution: for example, that all the letters used the same code, which does not seem to make sense across the board of Pachomius' letters, or that the Coptic letters which Pachomius also used are not part of his overall schema but rather used when Greek does not give the answer.[78] Lundhaug and Jenott have previously noted these and other mentions of Pachomian proclivities towards secretive script, and read them in tandem with codes found in the Nag Hammadi codices.[79] It would undoubtably be interesting to apply these codes in a more systematic way to the cases of cryptic writing in the Nag Hammadi texts. While previous scholars have been preoccupied with cracking Pachomius' cipher, there is more to Pachomius' use of code language that

---

[76] For an overview of the use of secret language in Pachomius' writings and early monasticism, see Quecke, *Die Briefe Pachoms*, 18–40. He does not introduce the Nag Hammadi texts into his discussion.

[77] Christoph Joest, 'Die Pachomanische Geheimschrift im Spiegel der Hieronymus-übersetzung', *Le Muséon* 112:1–2 (1999): 21–46.

[78] Joel Kalvesmaki, 'Pachomius and the Mystery of the Letters', in *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, ed. Blake Leyerle and Robin Darling Young (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 11–28. Joest defends his hypothesis and answers Kalvesmaki in Christoph Joest, 'Prinzipien der Entschlüsselung von Pachoms, "Geheimschrift"', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 24 (2022): 181–201.

[79] For example, in Codex VII and Codex VIII Lundhaug and Jenott point out that one can find cryptograms, like the ΙΧΘΥΣ code, also common in the monastic milieux. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 194–197.

goes beyond merely ciphering texts to keep them from being read by outsiders.

I would like to bring the vowel constellations into the discussion, to add a nuance to what Pachomius is doing apart from being cautious in his correspondence. Some words are not just neutral signifiers, but 'sacred' and 'mysterious'. These characters are written, as Pachomius says, in the 'elements of the spiritual alphabet' (*spiritalis alfabeti elementa*), enabling the reader to gain information regarding 'residing as well as rising above the shadow of the exterior world' (*continetur, et de resurrectione et umbra atenmurali*). In the Greek *Life of Pachomius*, we read that Pachomius wrote in a 'secret language' (γλῶσσα κρύπτη),[80] a spiritual language which pertained to 'the governance of souls' (99), writing, we are told, 'the names of the characters from α to ω' (99).[81] This was knowledge not meant for all, because not everyone had what it took to understand it. This fits well into the context of the Latin Letter 6 quoted above, but also echoes the same deterministic language we have encountered in *The Tripartite Tractate*. As Armand Veilleux has stated, 'The use of series of vowels and nonsense syllables is not rare either in the gnostic documents discovered in 1946 at Nag Hammadi, near the great basilica of St Pachomius at Phbow, and there could be some similarity or affinity between the two.'[82]

The Pachomian monastery seems to have been organised in accordance with a system based on letters of the Greek alphabet. In *The Life of Pachomius*, we read that an angel visited Pachomius and commanded him to designate each monk with a letter from α to τ. The angel also commanded the monks to recite passages from The Book of Psalms and to sing antiphons

---

[80] *The Greek Life of Pachomius* 99. François Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932).

[81] *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. I, 366.

[82] *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. III, 5.

(Greek ἀντίφωνον, ἀντί 'opposite' and φωνή 'voice'), short chants sung as a refrain. In *The History of Macarius the Alexandrian*, we read that Macarius used to chant twenty-four antiphons, repeatedly.[83] This was a way to harmonise with the heavenly sounds which transcended the limitations of the body. It aided the monks in times of doubt, fear and crisis, a silent joining with the holy sounds and beings in heaven.[84]

There are other indicators in monastic literature suggesting an interest in sacred words and sounds. The metaphor in Colossians 4:6 of speech seasoned with salt, which we encountered in *The Gospel of Philip*, is often used in the Pachomian literature.[85] The conviction that the most divine and spiritual words were spoken in silence – which we encounter in the Valentinian, Sethian and Hermetic texts – was a common monastic ideal. In Palladius' *Lausiac History* we read of an episode of a novice monk asking an elder about the abilities of reclusive monks:

> The brethren said, 'Why is it that certain of the Fathers were called "men who transferred themselves from one place to another", since they were recluses, and never departed from their cells?' The old man said, 'Because after much silent contemplation, and unceasing prayer, and watching of the mind, they were worthy to depart from the earth in their minds, and to ascend unto heaven to Christ the King. And they did not do this on occasions only, but continually, for whensoever they wished, or whensoever they sang the Psalms, or prayed, or meditated upon God, straightway their mind was exalted to heaven, and stood before our Lord.'[86]

---

[83] Palladius, *Lausiac History* 17. In *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. I, 170.

[84] Palladius, *Lausiac History* 2, 4. In *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. I, 439, 443.

[85] *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. I, 26–27; vol. III, 8, 17.

[86] Palladius, *Lausiac History, Questions of the Brethren* 17, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. II, 1012.

Silent speaking and recitation gave monks 'the power to pray without ceasing',[87] a practice mentioned and revered through-out the monastic world.[88] Palladius records another sage monk who tells his pupils that 'When thou prayest say with a hidden voice unto God: "Lord, how am I to acquire Thee?"'[89]

The power of letters and spiritual words lived on in the Egyptian monastic context for a long time. In a Coptic text dated to AD 985, ascribed to John Chrysostom, we still find traces of the importance placed on the power of vowels and letters. The text was produced (commissioned?) by a man named Michael and presented to the monastery of Saint Mercurius in the mountains of the city Tbo in order to get Pachomius and John Chrysostom to pray on Michael's behalf. It has been given the title *An Encomium on John the Baptist by John Chrysostom* and retells events that occurred after John the Baptist's death, how Jesus honours him and performs wonders in his memory. In the text, we read that John the Baptist's name is a 'medicine and remedy which heals sicknesses of every kind'.[90] His father, we are told, was made mute by his conception, but at his birth he was asked what to call the newborn:

> he made a sign with his hand whereby he asked for a writing tablet, and he wrote these three letters which are wonder-worthy, namely

---

[87] Palladius, *Lausiac History, Questions of the Brethren* 22, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. II, 1017.

[88] One monk asks a senior Father, 'Who is truly the man of "ascetic excellence"?', in response to which he is told 'He who at all times crieth out that he is a sinner, and asketh mercy from the Lord, whose speech beareth the sense of discretion, whose feelings bear the excellence of works, who though silent yet speaketh, and who though speaking yet holdeth his peace.' *Questions of the Brethren* 90, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. II, 1016.

[89] Palladius, *On the Ascetic Life*, 419, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. II, 946.

[90] John Chrysostom, *An Encomium on John the Baptist by John Chrysostom*, 2a trans E. A. Wallis Budge, in *Coptic Apocrypha*, ed. Budge (London, 1913), 336.

iota, and omega, and alpha. And whilst he was writing his mouth opened suddenly, and his tongue was set free, and he spake, and he gained strength, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'John is his name.'[91]

These letters form the first three words of John's name as well as the powerful divine name IAO, popular throughout Egypt.[92]

Let us conclude the proceeding explorations concerning the interest in magical vowel features encountered in the Nag Hammadi codices and how they fit into a monastic context.

Conclusion

Previous scholars have pointed out that aspects of the non-Christian texts in the Nag Hammadi library, like the Hermetic ones, would have resonated well within Pachomian monasticism.[93] One example of theologoumena found in plenitude in the non-Christian material in the Nag Hammadi library that would certainly have resonated in a Pachomian context regards the use of magical letters and words. This chapter has tried to address the question of how the material and contextual features of the many references to magical vowels and words in the Nag Hammadi codices would have been familiar in a Christian context, more specifically,

---

[91] John Chrysostom, *An Encomium on John the Baptist*, 2a, 336.

[92] In a related Coptic apocryphon, *The Book of the Resurrection by Bartholomew the Apostle*, the name Iao is written in red ink, together with the name Jesus and the words spoken by God. Trans. Budge, in *Coptic Apocrypha*, xv.

[93] Christian Bull argues that there are aspects of the story of a demon punishing disobedient souls found in the last text of Codex VI, called *The Perfect Discourse,* that bears resemblances to both Hermetic and monastic versions of a similar character. Christian Bull, 'The Great Demon of the Air and the Punishment of Souls: *The Perfect Discourse* (NHC VI, 8) and Hermetic and Monastic Demonologies', in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? / Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have We Learned?*, ed. Eric Crégheur, Louis Painchaud and Tuomas Rasimus (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 105–120.

a monastic one. Examining the vowel constellations in the Nag Hammadi codices from a material and visual perspective would indicate that they were chiefly used for reference, rather than as actual ritual manuals by the monastic owners of the texts, because they are not highlighted in any manner that would suggest the latter. They do not stand out in the document; they are not marked in any way whatsoever that would enable easier access or legibility in a ritual context (as in PGM). Rather, the vowel constellations appear along with the rest of the narrative, without use of margins or spaces. So, for what purposes were they read?

As Armand Veilleux writes, 'The use of series of vowels and nonsense syllables is not rare either in the gnostic documents discovered in 1946 at Nag Hammadi, near the great basilica of St Pachomius at Phbow, and there could be some similarity or affinity between the two.'[94] Fredrik Wisse wrote in 1979 that the monks would have found these texts of great interest due to these precise features, and Lundhaug and Jenott have also pointed out the great interest Pachomian monks showed in 'cryptograms', codes, secret language and holy symbols.[95] I agree. The above discussion contributes to explicating this further. A Pachomian monk, at least if the legacy of Pachomius is a point of reference, would not have found these aspects of the Nag Hammadi texts alien. On the contrary, both operate with the same broader intellectual world view of Egyptian Hellenism, where the cosmos was seen as interlinked with the spiritual world. Transcending the 'shadow of the exterior world', as Pachomius writes, was a principal aim for the monastic, as well as for the mystagogue initiated in a Hermetic, Sethian or Valentinian setting – and the

---

[94] *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. III, 5.
[95] Fredrik Wisse, 'Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism I: Cryptography', *Enchoria* 9 (1979): 103; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 194–197.

166

alphabet was utilised and made to represent the same ritual backdrop: human words and sounds could be used to transcend the earthly structure of elements and bring one's spirit into the company of a heavenly choir, lauding God in an eternal symphony of silence.

167

6 | The Sacred Symbols in the Nag Hammadi Codices: Books as Weapons in Demonic War

The people who owned the Nag Hammadi texts were Christian.[1] That is beyond any doubt. We can debate how one best defines what constitutes a Christian in the fourth and fifth centuries, but there is no question that the owners and makers of the codices here studied viewed themselves first and foremost as Christians. There are several indications of this. Apart from the fact that many texts deal with the question of the salvific power of Christ, scribal markings throughout the texts and the covers, along with other material aspects, reflect the Christian identity of the owners.[2] The codices are full of *nomina sacra* and the colophons inscribed on many codices and flyleaves leave no doubt of the Christian provenance of the codices. But can something be said regarding how the texts were used from these aspects of visual identity?[3]

As has been elucidated in the previous chapter, the letters of the alphabet carried great potential; however, the power imbued in letters and words was not only applied in pursuit of spiritual development. In Roman antiquity, magical words, symbols and spells were often inscribed on an amulet or charm and used as powerful tools that were beneficial for humans in many practical ways. Almost any object would suffice: a piece of bone, wood or

---

[1] This chapter is partly based on a previous article of mine, 'Nag Hammadi Codex I as a Protective Artifact and an Accidental Multi-Quire Codex'.

[2] This has also been pointed out by others; see, for example, Jenott and Pagels, 'Antony's Letters', 560–562.

[3] For the use of *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts as signs of the scribes' religious affiliation, see Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, chapter 3.

metal or, preferably, something made for writing such as papyrus or parchment, which could easily be folded up and carried upon one's person, or buried at the location where the protection (or curse) was desired to take effect.[4] Amulets were carried for all sorts of reasons, for healing and protection from sickness, to increase one's chances in the pursuit of love or business and, for those engaged with spiritual matters, as weapons or armour in the war against evil spirits. Christians were no different from pagans in their reliance on amulets and powerful charms when the situation called for it.[5] As Harry Gamble has noted, quoting John Chrysostom, Christians used books in which the word of God was inscribed as protective artefacts:[6] 'the devil will not dare approach a house where a Gospel-book is lying'.[7] In this chapter, we shall survey the occurrences of powerful signs, words and formulae appearing on and in the Nag Hammadi codices and discuss what these material features can tell us about how they were used.

The *Nomina Sacra* in the Nag Hammadi Codices: Artefacts, Scribes and Contexts

A *nomen sacrum* is an abbreviated form of a holy word or name, and the type of words being shortened indicated that this was not only for the purpose of saving space. *Nomina sacra* were holy names

---

[4] For an overview of amulets and magical papyri from Egypt and in Coptic from the time the Nag Hammadi codices were produced, see Marvin Meyer, Richard Smith and Neal Kelsey (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[5] David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Theodore de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[6] Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 237–241.

[7] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 32. Trans. Harry Gamble, in Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 238.

169

and words imbued with power.[8] This feature of ancient writing was predominantly a Christian practice – to such an extent, as Larry Hurtado notes, that its use in a manuscript is usually taken as an indication of the Christian identity of the scribe/owner/text.[9] *Nomina sacra* occur in all the Nag Hammadi codices, but not all the texts. The words that are abbreviated are chiefly Greek holy words and names (infrequently, as with the name Jerusalem, with Jewish provenance). I will not give a full list of the numerous instances of the occurrence of *nomina sacra* in the Nag Hammadi texts, only note the patterns. One feature that strikes one immediately is that Coptic words are not converted to *nomina sacra*, not even in cases like ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ, which in other Coptic manuscripts of similar provenance is abbreviated.[10] Codex I is a good representative of which Greek words are usually abbreviated, often (but not always), with a superliner stroke over the abbreviation:

The Prayer of the Apostle Paul
ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ⲭ̅ⲥ̅ = Jesus Christ (A:13)
ⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅ = spirit (A:23)

The Apocryphon of James
ⲥ̅ⲱ̅ⲣ̅ = Saviour (1:23, 2:17, 2:40, 16:25)
ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅ = Jesus (2:23)
ⲥ̅ⲧ̅ⲣ̅ⲟ̅ⲥ̅ = cross (5:37, 6:4, 6:5–6)
ⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅ = spirit (5:22, 12:2, 14:34, 15:25)
ⲧ̅ⲏ̅ⲗ̅ⲙ̅ = Jerusalem (16:9)

---

[8] Ludwig Traube, *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kurzung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967 [1907]); Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 95–134.

[9] Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 96.

[10] This has been noted previously by Terry Miosi in a paper delivered at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies: 'Nomina Sacra and the Nag Hammadi Library'. See, for example, *The Gospel of Mary* 10:11–12 and *Acts of Peter* 131:13, and in BG the word is abbreviated at several places (for example 90:15).

The Gospel of Truth

Ī̄H̄C̄ X̄P̄C̄ = Jesus Christ (18:16)

Ī̄H̄C̄ = Jesus (20:11, 20:24, 24:8)

C̄T̄P̄ŌC̄ = cross (20:27)

Π̄Π̄Ā = spirit (24:11, 26:36, 30:17, 31:18, 34:11, 42:33, 43:17)

X̄C̄ = Christ (36:14)

The Treatise on the Resurrection

Ī̄C̄ and IHC = Jesus (48:19, 50:1)

The Tripartite Tractate

Ī̄H̄C̄ = Jesus (117:12)

X̄C̄, X̄P̄C̄ and X̄P̄H̄C̄ = Christ (87:9, 132: 18, 132:28, 134:13, 136:1)

Ī̄H̄C̄ X̄P̄C̄ = Jesus Christ (117:15)

Π̄Π̄Ā = spirit (58:35, 63:36, 64:9, 66:27, 72:2, 72:18, 73:2, 101:4, 101:7, 101:16, 103:15, 103:18, 106:6, 106:22, 107:28, 118:21, 118:31–32, 119:16, 122:31, 127:32, 128:8, 138:24).

The most common *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts of Greek provenance, Θεὸς and Κύριος, do not occur in the Nag Hammadi codices. This is most likely because the translators opted to replace these words (and likely many others) with the Coptic equivalents ⲚⲞⲨⲦⲈ and ⲬⲞⲈⲒⲤ, and, as we mentioned above, the team of scribes behind the Nag Hammadi texts did not abbreviate Coptic words into *nomina sacra*. This is a strong indicator that the texts were copied within the same scribal milieux wherein certain practices concerning the use of *nomina sacra* were prevalent. The most frequent *nomen sacrum* in the Nag Hammadi texts is without a doubt ⲠⲚⲀ, for the word πνεῦμα. What is curious about this fact is that Hurtado categorises πνεῦμα among those words that are less likely to be abbreviated in early Christian manuscripts.[11] The pattern that emerges for the use of *nomina sacra* indicates that the scribal team as a collective were tied to specific writing or copying practices; however, other facts

[11] Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 134.

regarding the use of sacred symbols in the Nag Hammadi codices reveal that scribes also applied their own signatures to the texts.

The Power of the Cross in Codex I

The symbol of the cross was imbued with great power among many early Christians, and it seems to have a particular function in Nag Hammadi Codex I. At the end of the flyleaf, page B, we find the title *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* followed by 'In peace' (see Fig. 6.1). Below this are scribal decorations, two Latin Crosses, one (most likely two) *cruces ansatae* and the words o ☥ ⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ, that is, the Greek nominative singular article, a *Christogram* representing the word χρ(ιⲥⲧⲟⲥ) and the word ἅγιος, forming the words 'Christ is Holy':

Figure 6.1 The flyleaf of Codex I, page B. Photo by Basile Psiroukis. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

172

προσεγχη πα[γλογ]   Prayer of Paul

αποστολογ   The Apostle

εν ειρηνη   In peace

We also find several *staurograms* – at least four are visible in the facsimile of Codex I[12] – as well as *cruces ansatae* (e.g. at the end of Part I of *The Tripartite Tractate*, at 104:3).[13] Hurtado has argued that the *staurogram* was most likely a sign of the importance attributed to the crucifixion, but not all the texts in Codex I assign such importance to it.[14] The longest text, *The Tripartite Tractate*, does not even mention the crucifixion. Thus, the text's content cannot have been the only reason for the importance placed on the cross in Codex I; rather, it is more likely that the use reflects a specific scribe's preferences and practices.

Closer examination of the facsimile of Codex I also reveals a curious use of one of the Coptic letters, the one which is written as the Latin cross, *ti* (✝), which seems to have been enlarged, making it stand out when one observes the pages of the text

---

[12] According to Francis A. Williams, who translated and transcribed *The Apocryphon of James* for the Coptic Gnostic Library project, on page 5, line 17, there is a *rho* superimposed on a *tau*, symbolizing the word *cross* (which together with ειρε becomes crucifixion). See *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 34. However, this line is fragmented in the facsimile edition and neither the word, the *nomina sacra*, nor the *staurogram* are clearly visible. See Robinson, *The Facsimile: Codex I*, 9.

[13] My gratitude to René Falkenberg for calling my attention to this.

[14] Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, chapter 4. In NHC I, the *staurogram* occurs where we find the *nomen sacrum* ϲτροϲ, for the Greek σταυρός, 'cross'. Three of the instances appear in *The Apocryphon of James* 5:35–6:7, which reads: πχλειϲ ⲙ̄πωρατεγο αραν ⲙ̄ⲡϲⲧ(αγ)ροϲ ⲙⲛ̄ πⲙογ ⲛεει ϲαρ ϲεογⲏογ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲕ. ⲙⲁϥο[ⲣⲱ]ⲱ̄ⲃ̄ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ πχλειϲ παϫεϥ ϫε ϩⲁⲙⲏⲛ ✝ϫογ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϲ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̄ ϫε ⲙⲛ̄ ⲗⲁⲁγε ⲛⲁογϫεει ειⲙⲏⲧⲓ ⲛ̄ϲεⲡⲓϲⲧ[εγε] ⲁⲡⲁϲⲧ(αγ)ροϲ ⲛεⲛⲧⲁ[ϩ]ⲡⲓϲⲧεγε [ϲⲁ]ⲣ ⲁⲡⲁϲⲧ(αγ)ροϲ· ⲧⲱογ ⲧε ⲧⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧερο ⲙ̄ⲡⲡⲛογⲧε. 'Lord, do not speak to us about the cross and death, for they are far from you. The Lord answered and said: Verily I say to you, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross. For those who believes in my cross, theirs is the kingdom of God.' Text and trans. Francis A. Williams, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 36–37.
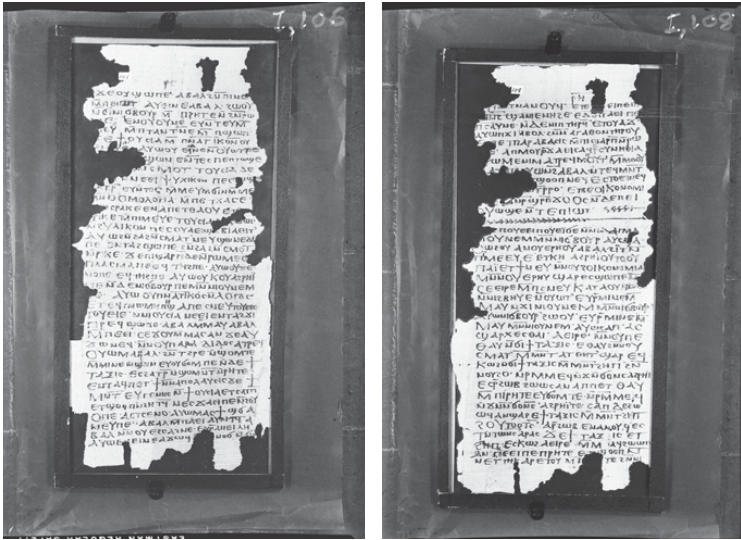
Figure 6.2 Two examples of pages from Codex I with enlarged ti (†). Pages 106 (left) and 108 (right). Photo by Jean Doresse. Images courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

from afar (see Fig. 6.2). These three pages are just a few examples where *ti* (†) is presented in this manner.[15] (For more examples, see Fig. 3.2.)

The contents of the pages do not give us many clues, unfortunately. Most of them do not discuss the cross, or even mention it. There does not seem to be a pattern in the topic being discussed in the pages where *ti* (†) is enlarged. So why would a scribe, other than for a purely decorative reason or inexperience, enlarge the letter *ti* (†) in this manner? I suggest that it has to do with the similarity that this letter has to the symbol which would become the very sign of Christians around the world: the cross.

[15] See, for example, pages A, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 22–23, 25, 26, 31, 35, 53, 56, 57, 59, 64, 68, 72, 75, 83, 84, 86–89, 92, 106, 107, 111, 116, 118, 123.

174

We know that in Greek, the letter *tau* (τ) was associated with the cross among Christians.[16] In the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the rescue of Lot and his crowd of 318 people (Gen 14:14) is explained by reference to gematria. We are told that the number 318 corresponds to the Greek letters *tau*, *eta*, *iota*, referring to Jesus on the cross. The *tau* represented the cross and *iota* + *eta* represented Jesus.[17] Justin Martyr also associated the letter *tau* with the cross, as did Tertullian.[18] The reason for this, of course, was that the letter *tau* looked like a cross. The Coptic letter *ti,* in comparison to the Greek *tau* which lacks the vertical line above the horizontal line of the letter, is also reminiscent of the form of the cross, if not more so than the Greek *tau.*

The cross was not solely used to indicate the Christian identity of an artefact or individual, it was also thought to have protective attributes[19] and was used in the battle against demons, as Athanasius' version of *The Life of Antony* states:

> (Antony) rose and saw a monster resembling a man as far as the thighs, but having legs and feet like an ass. Antony simply made the Sign of the Cross and said: 'I am Christ's servant. If you are on a mission against me, here I am.' But the monster with its demons fled so fast that its speed caused it to fall and die. And the death of

[16] Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 147–148. See Gunnar Samuelsson's, *Crucifixion in Antiquity: An Inquiry into the Background and Significance of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), which argues that the concept of a crucifixion in antiquity did not necessarily entail a person hanging with their arms outstretched, since the word σταυρός was also used for pole or stake. Any wooden pole could be used for crucifixion. This could suggest that the idea of the letter tau representing the crucifixion might have more to do with the way the word for crucifixion came to be abbreviated, with a tau (often in the middle), rather than a historical event. My gratitude to Joel Kuhlin for introducing this position to me.

[17] *Epistle of Barnabas* 9:7.

[18] Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 55, 60; Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem* 3:22.

[19] Larry Hurtado, 'The Staurogram in Early Christian Manuscripts: The Earliest Visual Reference to the Crucified Jesus?', in *New Testament Manuscripts*, ed. T. Kraus (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 207–226; Roy D. Kotansky, 'The Magic "Crucifixion Gem" in the British Museum', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (2017), 631–659.

the monster stood for the fall of the demons: they were making every effort to drive him back from the desert, and they could not.[20]

The desert was the place of demons, and they particularly sought to attack the monks encroaching upon their domain. Several early Christian authors describe how the sign of the cross was effective against demonic attack, as well as in healing ailments of various kind.[21] Examining the content of Codex I leaves no doubt that considerable interest and focus is placed on the influence that demons and spiritual powers had over human life. Indeed, the opening text of the whole codex, *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, is a long invocation to the protective power of Jesus:

. . . your light, give me your mercy! My Redeemer, redeem me, for I am yours; the one who has come forth from you. You are my mind; bring me forth! You are my treasure house; open for me! You are my fullness; take me to you! You are (my) repose; give me the perfect thing that cannot be grasped! I invoke you, the one who is and who pre-existed in the name which is exalted above every name, through Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, the King of the ages; give

[ⲡⲉⲕⲟⲩ]ⲗⲁⲉⲓⲛ ⲙⲁ† ⲛⲏⲓ ⲙⲡⲉⲕ[ⲛⲁⲉ ⲡⲁ ⲣⲉϥⲥ]ⲱⲧⲉ ⲥⲱⲧ[ⲉ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲉⲓ ϫⲉ [ⲁⲛⲁⲕ] ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲕ ⲡ[ⲉⲛⲧ]ⲁϩ̄ⲉ̈ⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· [ϩ]ⲓ̣ⲧ̣ⲟ̣[ⲟⲧⲕ] ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕ ⲡ[ⲉ ⲡⲁⲛ] ⲟⲩⲥ ⲙⲁⲭⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲗⲁⲉϩⲟ ⲟⲩⲏ[ⲛ] ⲛ̄ⲏ̣ⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕ [ⲡ]ⲉ ⲡⲁⲡⲗⲏⲣⲱⲙⲁ ϣⲁⲡⲧ̄ ⲁⲣⲁⲕ ⲛ̄[ⲧⲁⲕ] ⲡⲉ ⲧ⟨ⲁ⟩ⲁⲛⲁⲡⲁⲩⲥⲓⲥ ⲙⲁ† ⲛⲏⲉⲓ ⲙ̄[ⲡⲧ]ⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲛ ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩϣ ⲉⲙⲁϩ [ⲧⲉ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϥ †ⲧⲱⲃ̣ϩ̄ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲕ ⲡⲉⲧϣⲟ[ⲟⲡ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧϣⲣ̄ⲡ̄ ϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲣⲉⲛ [ⲉⲧϫ]ⲁⲥⲓ ⲁⲣⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲛ ⲓⲏ(ⲥⲟⲩ)ⲥ ⲡⲉⲭ (ⲣⲓⲥⲧⲟ)ⲥ [ⲡϫⲁⲉⲓ]ⲥ· ⲛ̄ⲛⲓϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲟ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ [ⲙⲁ†] ⲛ̄ⲏ̈ⲓ ⲛⲛⲉⲕ†·

---

[20] Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony*, 53. Ed. G. I. M. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine* (Paris: Cerf, 1994); trans. Robert T. Meyer, *St Athanasius, The Life of Saint Anthony*, Ancient Christian Writers 10 (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950), 65.

[21] Tertullian, *De Corona* 3; Cyprian, *Testimonies* 11:21–22; Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 4:27.

me your gifts, of which you do not
repent, through the Son of Man,
the Spirit, the Paraclete of truth.
Give me authority when I ask you;
give healing for my body when
I ask you through the Evangelist,
and redeem my eternal light soul
and my spirit. And the First-born
of the Pleroma of grace – reveal
him to my mind!

Grant me what no angel eye has
seen and no archon ear (has) heard,
and what has not entered into the
human heart which came to be
angelic and (modelled) after the
image of the psychic God when it
was formed in the beginning, since
I have faith and hope. And place
upon me your beloved, elect, and
blessed greatness, the First-born,
the First-begotten, and the
wonderful mystery of your house;
for yours is the power and the glory
and the praise and the greatness for
ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Paul (the) Apostle.

In Peace.

Christ is holy.[22]

ⲉⲧⲉⲙⲁⲕⲣ̄ ϩⲧⲏⲕ [ⲁⲣⲁⲟⲩ] ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲛ̄
ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ [ⲡⲉⲡⲛⲉ]ⲩⲙⲁ
ⲡⲡⲁⲣⲁⲕⲗⲏⲧⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ [ⲧⲙⲉ ⲙ]ⲁ[]ϯ ⲛⲛⲉⲓ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲕⲝⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ [ⲉⲉⲓ]ⲣ̄ ⲁⲓⲧⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲕ·
ⲙⲁϯ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩ [ⲧⲁⲗ]ϭⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲥⲱⲙⲁ·
ϩⲱⲥ ⲉⲉⲓⲣ ⲁⲓⲧⲓ [ⲙⲙⲁ]ⲕ·
ϩⲓ̈ⲧⲛ̄ ⲡⲉⲩⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲓⲥⲧⲏⲥ [ⲛⲥ]ⲱⲧⲉ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲯⲩⲭⲏ· ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ [ϣⲁ ⲉ]ⲛⲏϩⲉ
ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲁⲡⲛ(ⲉⲩⲙ)ⲁ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲡϣ[ⲣⲡ] [ⲙⲙ]ⲓⲥⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲡⲗⲏⲣⲱⲙⲁ·
ⲛ̄ⲧⲭⲁⲣⲓ[ⲥ] [ϭⲁⲗ]ⲡϥ ⲁⲡⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ·

ⲉⲣⲓ ⲭⲁⲣⲓⲍⲉ ⲛ̄[ⲧⲁⲕ] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲃⲉⲗ
ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ [ⲛⲉ]ⲩ ⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲙ̄(ⲡⲉ)ⲙⲉϣϫⲉ [ⲛⲁ]ⲣⲭⲱⲛ
ⲥⲁⲧⲙⲉϥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲙ̄[ⲡ]ϥ̄{ⲉⲓ}
ⲁϩⲣⲏⲓ ϩⲙ̄ ⲫⲏⲧ· ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲯⲩ ⲭⲓⲕⲟⲥ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲣⲟⲩⲡⲗⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϥ ϫⲓⲛ ⲛ̄ϣⲁⲣⲡ
ϩⲱⲥ ⲉⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲏⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ
ⲛ̄ⲑⲉⲗⲡⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱϩ ⲁⲧⲟⲟⲧ·
ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲕⲙⲉⲅⲉ ⲑⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲁⲡⲏⲧⲟⲥ
ⲛ̄ⲉⲕⲗⲉ ⲕⲧⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲉⲩⲗⲟⲅⲏⲧⲟⲥ ⲡϣⲣⲡ̄
ⲙ̄ⲙⲓⲥⲉ ⲡϣⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲅⲉⲛⲟⲥ· ⲙⲛ
ⲡⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ [ⲛ̄ϣⲡⲏ] ⲣⲉ· ⲙ̄[ⲡ]
ⲉⲕⲛⲉⲓ ⲁ[ⲃⲁⲗ ϫⲉ] ⲡⲱⲕ [ⲡ]ⲉ
ⲡⲉⲙⲁϩⲧ[ⲉ] ⲁ[ⲩⲱ] ⲡⲉⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲧⲉⲕϫⲟⲙ[ⲟ] ⲗⲟⲅⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲙⲛ̄
ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲛ[ⲁ]ϭ ϣⲁ ⲉⲛⲏϩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲉⲛⲏϩⲉ

[ϩⲁⲙⲏⲛ] ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲉⲩⲭⲏ ⲡⲁ[ⲩⲗⲟⲩ]
ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲩ

ⲉⲛ ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ

ⲟ ⳨(ⲓⲥⲧⲟⲥ) ⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ.

As we have seen above, this short text ends with a colophon, inscribed on the back of the flyleaf, clearly indicating the power this scribe attributed to the sign of the cross.[23]

Not only do the flyleaf and the enlarged *ti* throughout the codex reveal the power assigned to the cross. Several texts in Codex I are also occupied with possession by demons and the struggle against lower material powers; some even mention the importance of the cross in this struggle.[24] In *The Apocryphon of James* we read the following:

'... remember my cross and my death, and you will live.' But I (James) answered and said to him: 'Lord, do not mention to us the cross and death, for they are far from you.' The Lord answered and said: 'Verily, I say unto you, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross. But those who have believed in my cross, theirs is the kingdom of God.'[25]

ⲁⲣⲓ ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲁⲩⲣⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲡⲁⲙⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲱⲛϩ̄,
ⲁϩⲓⲟⲩⲱϣⲃ̄ ⲛ̄ⲇⲉ ⲡⲁϫⲏ̈ ⲛⲉϥ ϫⲉ
ⲡϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲣ· ⲁⲧⲉⲩⲟ ⲁⲣⲁⲛ
ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲧ(ⲁⲩ)ⲣⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲙⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲅⲁⲣ
ⲥⲉⲟⲩⲏⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲕ ⲁϥ[ⲟⲩⲱ]ϣⲃ̄ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ
ⲡϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲁϫⲉϥ ϫⲉ ϩⲁⲙⲏⲛ †ϫⲟⲩ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲥ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̄ ϫⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲗⲁⲁⲩⲉ
ⲛⲁⲟⲩϫⲉⲉⲓ ⲉⲓⲙⲏⲧⲓ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲡⲓⲥ̣ⲧ[ⲉⲩⲉ]
ⲁⲡⲁⲥⲧ(ⲁⲩ)ⲣⲟⲥ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁ[ϩ]ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩ̣ⲉ̣
[ⲅⲁ]ⲣ ⲁⲡⲁⲥⲧ(ⲁⲩ)ⲣⲟⲥ· ⲧⲱⲟⲩ ⲧⲉ
ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ.

---

[23] For the use of *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts as signs of the scribes' religious affiliation, see Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, chapter 3.

[24] NHC I, *The Apocryphon of James* 4:31–5:35. See also NHC I, *The Gospel of Truth* 19:27–21:25, 31:13–35; NHC I *The Tripartite Tractate* 120:29–121:14.

[25] NHC I, 5:34–6:7: Trans. Mueller, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 36–37.

178

In the following text, *The Gospel of Truth*, there is an episode where Jesus steps down to earth as a living book in which all the names to be saved are written. As he descends, he is captured and nailed to a cross. This act, the nailing of the book/Jesus on the cross, announces the publication of the book of life to one and all.[26] Those people who hear and understand the message of the book on the cross are saved. Jesus is also described as having power over the evils of the world, able to disperse any sickness and make the torture of life on earth cease.[27]

The following text, *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, is the only text copied by Scribe B and does not include enlarged uses of the letter *ti*, nor does it devote attention to the cross or how to protect oneself from demonic attack. *The Treatise on the Resurrection* is, rather, one long defence of the theological position that it is the soul that rises in the resurrection, not the body.

The last and by far the longest of the texts in Codex I, *The Tripartite Tractate*, is largely occupied with explaining exactly how the cosmos is constructed and why different people react in different ways to the message of Jesus. We are told that before the Saviour's appearance there is no real knowledge; the different cosmic powers hold domination over humans as well as the earth. As Jesus appears on earth, some people gain true knowledge right away (about the nature of Jesus and the heavenly powers), some must be convinced, while others never get the message due to their material nature.[28] Jesus is then killed by the lower powers of the cosmos, but this has no effect on the salvation of humans.[29] The

---

[26] NHC I, 19:27–21:25.

[27] NHC I, 31:13–35.

[28] For a study of this text from the perspective of anthropology and ethics, see Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate.

[29] NHC I, 120:29–121:14.

Saviour gives humans the power to withstand evil demons and the destructive emotions with which they are associated.[30] Even though the cross is not discussed in detail in *The Tripartite Tractate*, the letter *ti* appears enlarged at many places within the text, in the same manner as it does in the other texts inscribed by Scribe A, and it is clear that it is only through the salvific message of Jesus that the destructive powers of the cosmos can be combatted.

I am not arguing that all who read Codex I used it as a talisman but suggesting, rather, that there were those (Scribe A being one such individual) who would recognise both the *ti* and the crosses inscribed on the flyleaf as protective symbols of the cross, which was thought to be effective against demonic attack, destructive emotions and sickness. The cross was effective through its reference to the salvific message of the death of Jesus. I also suggest that the curious use of the letter *ti*, particularly in *The Tripartite Tractate*, could have been a way to deal with the lack of references to the crucifixion in the text. Scribe A was obviously greatly invested in the sign of the cross and, thus, scattered the text with references to it.

Let us now turn to the question of the sort of context that would have called for the use of a charm made for combatting evil spirits, and what the power of the book would have given its carrier.

Resisting Desert Demons with the Cross as a Sign of Firmness

One feature that set the monks belonging to the emerging coenobitic monasticism of fourth-century Egypt apart from other Christians was their choice of garments and dress. Dressing in

---

[30] Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, chapter 2.

a uniform way created a sense of community.[31] Here follows section 81 of Pachomius' rules:

> This is their equipment (*armatura*): two linen tunics (*lebitonarium*) plus the one already worn, a long scarf (*sabanum*) for the neck and shoulders, a small skin (*pellicula*) hanging from the shoulder, shoes (*gallicula*), two cowls (*cucullus*), a belt (*zona*) and a staff (*bacillus*). If you find anything more than this, you shall take it away without contradiction.[32]

The cowls, or hoods, were at times ornamented with crosses.[33] Some monks wore a scapular which, according to an apothegm from the anonymous *Apophthegma Patrum*, signified the cross: 'The elders used to say: "The cowl is the symbol of innocence, the scapular of the cross, the girdle of courage. Let us then live in accordance with our habit, doing everything with diligence, lest we appear to be wearing an inappropriate habit."'[34]

What did the cross do for the monks? The cross was a powerful tool in the fight against demons.[35] Again, from the anonymous collection of *Apophthegmata Patrum*: 'The athlete boxes in contests; the monk, contending using reasoning, stretches out his hands to heaven in the shape of the cross, calling on God.'[36] And: 'So does he who seeks Christ the Lord-and-master, keeping the cross in mind

---

[31] Ingvild S. Gilhus, *Clothes and Monasticism in Ancient Christian Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[32] Trans. Gilhus, in Gilhus, *Clothes and Monasticism*, 50–51.

[33] Agnieszka Muc, 'Some Remarks on the Egyptian Monastic Dress in the Context of Literary Sources and Funerary Finds', *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 13 (2009): 183–188.

[34] *Apophthegmata Patrum* (anonymous collection), 55. Trans. John Wortley, in Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Selected Edition and Complete English Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 50–51.

[35] *Apophthegmata Patrum* (anonymous collection) 12.

[36] *Apophthegmata Patrum* (anonymous collection) 143. Trans. Wortley, slightly modified, in Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings*, 99. Worthley does not translate the word *logismoi*, which I here render as 'reasoning'.

without wavering, overcome every offence he encounters until he reaches the crucified one.'[37]

As David Brakke and other scholars have discussed in detail in recent years, one chief monastic occupation and concern was that of resisting demonic influence. It is no secret that the Nag Hammadi codices are bursting with material devoted to the perpetual combat between humans and demons. As has been discussed above, one way to resist demonic attack was to carry signs of God to fill oneself with the protective power of Christ. But what did the monks imagine were the practical benefits of carrying and making these signs against the demons?

The monk who is successful in fighting the demonic powers is described as having mastered his passions, leaving him firm, restful and immovable. Firmness in both speech and demeanour represented transcendence. The opposite was chaos, change and unruliness. This was the domain of demons. The Greek term σάλος/σαλεχύω (*tossing* or *rolling*) is often used in the Septuagint to describe chaos and a shaking earth, the demeanour of the unjust and the enemies of God in his presence.[38] It was also the word used by the Greeks to describe the unpredictable and terrible sea. The contrast is ἀσάλευτος, firmness and immovability. It is this concept that the monk portrayed as an ideal, thus carrying with him the ideals associated with the philosophers of old.[39] As Michael

---

[37] *Apophthegmata Patrum* (anonymous collection), 203. Translation John Wortley, in Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings*, 145.

[38] 1 Chr 16:30; Job 9:6; Ps 33:8, 46:6, 112:6; Prv 3:26.

[39] Other central terms and opposing concepts are κίνησις/στάσις change/firm and χρόνος/αἰών time/eternity, all used to depict the transcendent vis-à-vis the nature of life in the cosmos. Plato's distinction between *being* and *becoming* was what separated the nature of the transcendent world of ideas from the cosmic existence, subjected to time, materiality and perpetual change: a life in motion. Plato described the soul as being caused to *move about* by corporal fetters (*Phaedo* 79C). Great philosophers were portrayed as immovable and unaffected by the motions of cosmic life. Socrates was known for being able to stand for a whole day in deep and seemingly distant contemplation (Plato, *Symposium* 174A–B, 220C–D). We have similar stories of Pythagoras; during a voyage to Egypt, Pythagoras sat completely still for two days and

Williams has shown, St Antony is often attached to this ideal of immovability, facing demons with an immovable (ἀσάλευτον) mind.[40] An extreme example of this theme is seen in the practice of stylite ascetics: holy men living a life of literal immovability on high pillars in their quest to get closer to God.

As ample studies have shown,[41] these themes are firmly rooted in the Nag Hammadi texts. This is most clearly demonstrated by Michael A. Williams, who investigates the mention of ⲧⲅⲉⲛⲉⲁ ⲉⲧⲉⲙⲙⲁⲥⲕⲓⲙ ('the immovable race')[42] in Sethian texts in particular detail, connecting it to broader, late ancient philosophical and religious motifs of stability (ἵστημι) and unshakeability (ἀσάλευτος).[43] But as Williams himself makes clear, the ideal of stability is not restricted to the Sethian Nag Hammadi tractates. The use of the term ⲙ̄ⲧⲟⲛ (rest) in the Valentinian Nag Hammadi texts is another example. The cross gave the monk firmness of mind, the very reason monks were the prime target for demonic attack. As we read in *The Letter of Peter to Philip* from Codex VIII:

three nights, not moving, eating or drinking the whole way. Pythagoras was also depicted as master of bodily impulses: he never got drunk and he avoided laughter, both typical signs of losing control and surrendering to one's passions (Porphyry, *Vita Pythagoras* 11–16; Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Eminent Philosophers* 8:19–20).

[40] Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 30–31.

[41] Jan Helderman, *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); Jan Helderman, 'Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?', in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, ed. M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 26–46.

[42] This race/generation is mentioned and connected to the recipients of *The Apocryphon of John* in NHC II, 2:20, 2:24; 25:23; 29:10; 31:31–32 and in BG 22:15–16, 65:2–3, 73:9–10, 75:20–76:1.

[43] Williams concludes in this study that the designation 'the immovable race' appearing in several Sethian works is not to be understood as a self-designation used by the race of Seth, nor should one think of a race of humans predetermined to be saved. Rather the term 'immovable race/generation' draws on a long religious and philosophical tradition using similar terminology to designate those who have reached a certain level of self-mastery and knowledge, likened in Sethianism with being awakened to one's true self (Williams, *The Immovable Race*, chapter 7).

I gave him authority in order that he might enter into the inheritance of his Fatherhood . . . When you strip yourselves of what is corrupted, then you will become illuminators in the midst of mortal humans. And this (is the reason) that you will fight against the powers, because they do not have rest like you, since they do not wish that you be saved.[44]	ⲁⲓ̈ϯ ⲛⲁϥ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲝⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ϫⲉ· ⲉϥⲉⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉ ϯⲕⲗⲏⲣⲟⲛⲟⲙⲓⲁ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲱⲧ· . . . ⲉϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲕⲁⲕ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲕⲁϩⲏⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲧⲁⲕⲏⲟⲩⲧ· ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛⲫⲱⲥⲧⲏⲣ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲩⲙⲟⲟⲩⲧ ⲡⲏ ⲗⲉ̣ ̣[ⲉ] ϫⲉ ⲛ̣ⲧⲱⲧⲛ ⲉⲧⲛⲁϯ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲓϭⲟⲙ ϫⲉ ⲛ̄[ⲧ]ⲟⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲛⲟⲩⲙ̄ⲧⲟⲛ ⲕⲁ[ⲧⲁ] ⲧ̣ⲉⲧⲛϩⲉ· ⲉⲡⲓⲇⲏ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲁⲛ [ϩ]ⲓ̣ⲛ̣ⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩϩⲙ.

The term 'Fatherhood' (ⲧⲉϥⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲱⲧ) we encounter here is one attached to the monasticism of Egypt, as Lundhaug and Jenott have shown.[45] This passage encapsulates many elements which would have spoken to the preoccupation of monks:[46] for example, apart from referencing the authority of the abbot, it calls on the monk to be an example to others, and reminds him that the activity of demons must be addressed because they work tirelessly to distract and entice the monk to do evil.

The Ontology of Sacred Symbols: How a Book Becomes a Weapon in Spiritual Warfare

How should we imagine the use of books for protection to have been undertaken? To help us conceptualise the power of sacred

---

[44] NHC VIII, 136:26–137:13. Text and trans. Frederik Wisse, slightly modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codices VIII*, ed. Sieber, 242–243.

[45] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 173–189.

[46] The fight against demons was, as David Brakke has shown, a central preoccupation in early Christian monasticism. See Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.

184

symbols, we have a lot to gain by bringing in perspectives from ritual theory, as well as the sociology and anthropology of religion. As has been long recognised in these fields, material objects used in ritual and religious contexts cannot solely be approached as passive carriers of cultural meaning as, in such settings, objects otherwise viewed as inanimate become imbued with agency with performative qualities.[47] This is achieved not through the 'beliefs' of any individual, but through the cultural ontology of a collective. The sacred and protective symbols contained in the codices were scattered throughout the texts themselves, texts that relate a worldview corresponding to the broader early Christian monastic one wherein demons possessed real agency. The codices were kept and carried around by the monks in this environment, one in which the lurking presence of demons was always a reality. The protective power of the codex corresponded to the sacred words and symbols disseminated throughout its texts, protecting the monk when reading about topics featuring evil demons in central roles – just as the codex itself protected the monk as he/she walked through life, where a demon could appear at any time. Thus, both the sacred symbols and the codices as material objects played important performative roles as they were read and carried within the monastic milieu which produced them.

---

[47] There has been much research into this subject within the field of the anthropology of religion: for example, Anne-Christine Hornborg, 'Objects as Subjects: Agency, and Performativity in Rituals', in *The Relational Dynamics of Enchantment and Sacralization*, ed. Måns Broo, Tuija Hovi, Peik Ingman and Terhi Utriainen (Bristol, CT: Equinox), 27–44. For pioneering works on the way agency and the performance of objects can be viewed differently depending on the social and cultural context, see the study by Nurit Bird-David, '"Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology* 40 (1999): 67–79; Irving A. Hallowell, 'Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View', in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. S. Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 19–52.

Conclusion

First and foremost, the colophon, scribal signs and *nomina sacra* indicate that the scribes of the Nag Hammadi codices saw themselves as Christian. That is no longer a controversial issue for most scholars. The structure of *nomina sacra* in the Nag Hammadi library indicates that the people behind the texts were most likely part of the same scribal network, and that we are not dealing with codices produced in separate scribal contexts and only brought together at a later time. The above also shows that the sign of the cross was particularly important for Scribe A of Codex I, which indicates that there was plenty of room for individual preferences in the way one inscribed and adorned the texts, preferences that most likely were guided by the monk's engagement in spiritual warfare. The context where the Nag Hammadi codices were produced encompassed belief and practice in the protective power of the symbol of the cross. Even if a monastic context is not the only one in fourth- to fifth-century Roman Egypt where the power of the cross was held in high esteem, the preoccupation with spiritual combat in monastic environments – a topic reflected throughout the texts – makes a strong argument for the fact that these texts were used by monks as protective artefacts. The cross gave the monk firmness in the chaotic company of demons, whose presence was only amplified by the cold and empty desert.

186

7 | Textual Fluidity and Multiple Versions in Monastic Textual Practice

In the past, scholars have viewed the existence of duplicate versions of a text in an archaeological find as a sign that it was not originally a single library, or even owned by the same people.[1] Why would you keep two copies of the same text, especially considering the expensive and time-consuming process involved in producing texts in antiquity? This chapter offers new readings of the existence of multiple versions of the 'same' texts in the Nag Hammadi collection and offers suggestions as to why it would have been useful to keep them in the same library.

Initial Reflections on 'Textual Fluidity'

The growing scholarly focus on 'textual fluidity' has brought many valuable insights and nuances to the study of how texts were read, understood and copied in antiquity.[2] The point of this methodological perspective is, in part, to problematise concepts regarding what constituted a text and the processes that contributed to the production of texts at the time. Today we regard a text as 'finished' when it leaves the author's hand and is published, printed and disseminated. It becomes fixed; an original has come to existence which even the author him/herself cannot disregard. If changes are made to the original, they are motivated, noted and problematised.

---

[1] Painchaud and Kaler, 'From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*', 445–469, see esp. note 1.
[2] Lied and Lundhaug (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*.

If the original is copied or reproduced erroneously, or without permission, it is viewed as a breach of copyright. These features of texts and the way we view them and their originators are consequences of technical advancements in printing.[3] The facility to reproduce identical copies of a text on a large scale was not present in antiquity, a fact we must keep in mind when studying ancient textual culture.

These reflections are not to be taken as suggesting that the concepts 'author' or 'original' did not exist in antiquity in regard to texts. The fact that skilled copyists were held in high regard as professionals who could copy a text in a legible way with a minimum of errors indicates that the ancients did entertain these ideas.[4] The extreme care and investment Titus Atticus, a friend of Cicero, put into developing his famous book production business is a prime example of this. Atticus was known for producing exact and high-quality copies for his patrons but, as Wilson and Reynolds have shown by way of scrutinising the correspondence between Titus Atticus and Cicero, changes and additions to existing editions were made with great ease.[5] The textual world was much more 'fluid' in antiquity, something particularly apparent in certain genres. Much of the Judeo-Christian canon, for example, was produced by invoking the authority of people who most likely did not write the texts themselves, but whose religious authority was summoned by attaching their name to a text.[6] This must have made it much easier to emend, add and make changes to a text, at least before it reached anything near canonical status. Another contextual difference between ancient and modern textual culture concerns

[3] Bart Ehrman and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bart Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011).

[4] L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23–24.

[5] Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 24.

[6] Ehrman, *Forged*, 28–51.

188

production. If a text gained a high standing in antiquity, and remained so for a long time, it was naturally copied more frequently and thus it was also increasingly likely for changes in nuance to creep in during the reproduction process. This fact has been discussed by Bart Ehrman in terms of the apostle Paul's epistles and can be applied to almost any popular text from antiquity that was copied generation after generation. Noticing variances in different versions most likely led to even more emendations being made. Social change and local differences led to the need to reinterpret and re-evaluate, and the writing of new versions and additions.

It was not unheard of for a new or a previously unknown version of a text ascribed to a famous person to appear long after their death, but even in antiquity people were aware of the existence of forgeries of famous authors. Thus, when we encounter texts that are ascribed to well-known people in the Nag Hammadi collection – for example, *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* in Codex I, *The Apocalypse of Paul* in Codex V or a version Plato's *Republic* 588A–589B in Codex VI – we should not immediately interpret this to mean that these were actually considered to be written by their famous namesakes. Rather, it is more likely that invoking the legacy of their presumed authors reflects attempts to interpret influential ideas and give them new meanings.[7]

With these initial observations, we turn to the Nag Hammadi duplicates. Right at the outset we can establish that the kind of texts we possess in more than one copy are not texts attached to authors with great historical standing, like Paul or Plato, with long traditions of being copied (a possible exception is *The Apocryphon of John*).

---

[7] On the specific case of Plato's fragments read in a monastic context, see Christian H. Bull, 'An Origenistic Reading of Plato in Nag Hammadi Codex VI', in *Studia Patristica LXXV*: vol. I: *Studia Patristica – Platonism and the Fathers – Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 31–40.

The Nag Hammadi Duplicates and the 'Sub-groups' of the Codices

The Nag Hammadi collection contains five texts that appear in more than one version. *The Gospel of Truth* is preserved in two copies, in Codices I and XII (the latter in a very damaged state). *On the Origin of the World* is preserved in its entirety in Codex II, but the opening part of the text is also preserved on the last page of the so-called thirteenth codex, tucked into the binding of Codex VII. *The Apocryphon of John* appears in three codices: Codex II, Codex III and Codex IV, in one short and two long versions. We have two different copies of *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, in Codices III and IV, and, finally, two versions of *Eugnostos the Blessed*, in Codices III and V.

As noted in previous chapters, scholars have made it clear that the Nag Hammadi codices belong to different scribal sub-groups, based on evaluations of scribal hands and codicological aspects such as cover construction:

Codicological evidence (Robinson[8])	Scribal hand (Williams[9])
Group 1: Codices IV, V and VIII	Group A: Codices I, VII and XI
Group 2: Codices II, VI, IX and X	Group B: Codices IV–VI, VIII and IX
Group 3: Codices I, VII and XI	Group C: Codices II and XIII

It is noticeable that the copies found in the collection are all part of different sub-groups except for one: *On the Origin of the World.* This text is found in Codex II and also in a group of texts (usually termed Codex XIII) tucked into the cover of Codex VII.[10] Thus, since the

---

[8] Robinson, 'The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices'.

[9] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 242–243.

[10] Williams has recently retracted the assessment that Codex II and XIII are from the same scribal team. See, Michael A. Williams and David Coblentz, 'A Reexamination of the Articulation Marks in the Nag Hammadi Codices II and XIII', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 427–456. However, Funk and Emmel have argued for this

190

texts of Codex XIII, according to estimates by Williams and others, were copied by the same people behind Codex II, and since Codex XIII was tucked into Codex VII, there were likely contacts between the scribal teams that produced Codices I, VII and XI and those who worked on Codex II, sub-groups that are recurrent in scholarship and taken as evidence that the Nag Hammadi texts should not be viewed as *one* collection. The existence of copies within the collection has also been used to argue in favour of this conclusion.

It has been presumed that one would not have made copies of texts that one already possessed. The fact that the Nag Hammadi collection contains several duplicates and one triplicate has encouraged scholars to conclude that even though the other material features of the texts – such as handwriting, production techniques and material – indicate a common origin, the duplicates suggest the opposite: that the codices were not utilised in the same context but placed as orders, copied and then disseminated.[11] There are indeed indications that this was the case in some instances, such as the scribal note in Codex VI between *The Prayer of Thanksgiving* and the last text, *Asclepius.* As Lundhaug and Jenott have argued convincingly, this codex was likely produced at the behest of a fellow monastic and the scribe who copied it was hesitant to copy a certain text (which one is unclear), suspecting that it was already in the possession of the monk placing the order.[12] This is what the scribe

---

connection from other points of view: see, for example, Funk's linguistic analysis in 'The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codices'; Stephen Emmel, 'The Nag Hammadi Codices Editing Project: A Final Report', *ARCE Newsletter* 104 (1978): 10–32. This is further discussed in Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 207–210. For an overview of the debate regarding the number of scribal teams and different subgroups of codices, see Lundhaug, 'Material Philology', 112–123.

[11] The clearest and most persuasive argument for this perspective is presented by Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, where they argue for the texts being part of what they call book exchange networks (as noted in previous chapters). For a suggestion on which particular Pachomian monasteries were the source of the codices, see Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection'.

[12] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 197–206.

wrote in between two texts in Codex VI, as a message to his fellow monk:

I have copied this one text of his. Indeed, very many of his (texts) have come to me. I have not copied them, thinking that they may (already) have come to you. For truly I hesitate to copy these ones for you since they may (already) have come to you, and the matter may burden you. For the texts of that one which have come to me are numerous.[13]

ⲡⲓⲟⲩⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲁⲉⲓⲥⲁ̣ϩ̣ϥ̅ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁϥ ⲁ̣ϩⲁ̣ϩ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲧⲟⲛⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁϥⲉ̄ⲓ ⲉⲧⲟⲟⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲉⲓ̈ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ϫⲉⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲕⲁⲓⲅⲁⲣ ϯⲗⲓⲥⲧⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲓ̈ⲥϩⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̅ ϫⲉⲙⲉⲱ̣ⲁⲕ ⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡϩⲱⲃ ⲣ̅ϩ̄ⲓⲥⲉ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̄· ⲉⲡⲓ ⲛⲁⲱ̣ⲟⲩ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛ̅ϭⲓⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲟⲟⲧ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡ̣ⲏ̣

Yet, while making unnecessary copies might have been avoided, this does not mean that there were no practical and pedagogical benefits to having copies within a single library or that their existence indicates that the codices in which they are found could not have belonged to the same people. As will be argued here, there were in fact several practical and pedagogical reasons – other than book exchange networks – for making and keeping multiple versions in the same library. This suggests that, rather than identical duplicates being ordered of a text, they were rewritten, edited and copied for many reasons, and use could be made of the fact that a library at times contained several versions of a text. I explore some of these reasons below and place them in a monastic pedagogical context to show that copies were produced as a result of common monastic textual practices. We should not routinely presume that a text collection containing more than one copy of a text indicates that the texts were not the products and possessions of one and the same group of readers/writers/manuscript manufacturers.

---

[13] NHC VI 65:8–14. Text by Douglas M. Parrott, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,1*, ed. Parrott, 392. Trans. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 197.

Previous efforts have been made to interpret the fluidity of the Nag Hammadi texts, mainly by Hugo Lundhaug.[14] He has argued that several texts extant in the Nag Hammadi codices bear witness to forms of rewriting and editing that reflect the specific theological context in which they were copied, regardless of their deriving from earlier times – that is, a fourth-century Post-Nicene context.[15] These reflections inform the following examination of the copies found in the collection. What other reasons could there have been to make copies of a text – or rather making a new version with emendations and rewritings – apart from the need to fine-tune and update its theological relevance to match its immediate context? Before exploring this question, we should start by familiarising ourselves with textual practices in the specific context from which the Nag Hammadi texts derive: fourth-century Egyptian monasticism.

The Monastery as Training Ground for Textual Education

Monasteries were viewed for a long time as centres detached from the classical education system in antiquity.[16] Monks were thought to be engaged in a completely different kind of schooling from that valued in the outside world, with the spiritual pursuits of the ascetic separated from classical *paideia* of the city. The recent decades of scholarship into early Christian monasticism have radically

---

[14] Lundhaug, 'Textual Fluidity'; Lundhaug, 'The Fluid Transmission of Apocrypha'; Lundhaug and Lied, 'Studying Snapshots'.

[15] For a discussion of *The Gospel of Philip* (NHC II) from this context, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*; but more recently Lundhaug, 'Textual Fluidity', in which he gives examples from *The Concept of Our Great Power* (NHC VI); *The Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I); and *Melchizedek* (NHC IX), texts where he argues one can find specific references to fourth-century theological debates. The most notable and obvious example is perhaps found in *The Concept of Our Great Power* which rejects the Anomoeans, a neo-Arian phalanx of the mid fourth century.

[16] Marrou, *A History of Education*.

changed this view, highlighting instead the continuation of classical *paideia* in the monasteries and effectively demolishing the dichotomy between city and desert, in terms of not only education, but also finances, social interactions and politics.[17] Henrik Johnsén, among others, has studied these relations in detail, pointing out some examples of the similarities in educational ideals and motifs found in monasteries and philosophy schools. These include withdrawal from the outside world, the idealisation of being uneducated in formal learning, engaging the mind and combatting passions, and forming one's inner person by repeating memorised passages.[18]

Thus, the monasteries that were founded in the Egyptian desert kept close ties with the 'outside' world in many respects. One way this was done was by providing a training ground for the teaching of lay people's children. Caroline Schroeder has shown that parents could send their children to the monks to be taught reading and writing, skills beneficial if one aimed to lead an exemplary Christian life.[19] Not all children sent to monasteries for education remained there, however, while others came as adults for that very purpose. Novice monks lacking the right educational background deemed necessary to undertake an ascetic life successfully were put through a strict pedagogical regimen,[20] which was the case not only in Egypt,

---

[17] Pierre Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*; Larsen and Rubenson (eds.), *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity*.

[18] Henrik Rydell Johnsén, 'Renunciation, Reorientation and Guidance: Patterns in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy', *Studia Patristica 55:3: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011*, ed. M. Vinzent and S. Rubenson (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 76–94; see also Henrik Rydell Johnsén, 'The Virtue of Being Uneducated: Attitudes toward Classical *Paideia* in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lilian Larsen and Rubenson, 219–235.

[19] Caroline T. Schroeder, *Children and Family in Late Antique Egyptian Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 127–144.

[20] Schroeder, *Children and Family*, 127–144.

but also in Cappadocia, Palestine and Antioch.[21] The curriculum began with learning the alphabet, then basic reading and writing. Reading exercises then followed. The most appropriate texts on which to practice were those from the Scriptures, chiefly Psalms, where one could find all the important maxims of life, not only to be studied but memorised, forwards and backwards.

The stories of monastic fathers were also part of the basic curriculum, as well as memorising lists of names of apostles and other patriarchs. Texts that threatened to challenge faith in God or introduce unsanctioned doctrines or narratives were considered unsuitable for novices, since their minds and convictions were not firm enough to keep from being led astray.[22] One part of basic training was to copy a text in order to improve one's penmanship.[23] As Lillian Larsen has shown, the sayings of the desert fathers and Scripture were employed much as Homer and other classical writings were utilised in classical education systems; the texts were copied, memorised, restructed and studied to learn grammar and rhetoric, as well as training in argumentation techniques.[24] The first stage of more advanced learning would involve reading gnomic sentences, listening to others read them and then paraphrasing and reformulating them in order to accentuate their different moral points. Maxims were also reformulated to fit an alphabetical order.[25] The end goal was always moral edification and strengthening the character and mind. Some, however, went further and engaged in more spiritually challenging tasks, such as, for

---

[21] Caesarea: Basil, *Regulae fusius tractate* 15; Cappadocia: Jerome, *Letter* 107; Antioch: John Chrysostom, *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life* III, 11–18. These are discussed in Larsen, '"On Learning a New Alphabet"'.

[22] Basil writes that 'myths' are unsuitable for novices. Basil, *Regulae fusius tractate* 15.

[23] Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 179.

[24] Lilian I. Larsen, 'Monastic Paideia: Textual Fluidity in the Classroom', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*, ed. Lied and Lundhaug, 146–177; Lilian I. Larsen, '"Excavating the Excavations" of Early Monastic Education', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity*, ed. Larsen and Rubenson, 101–124.

[25] Larsen, '"On Learning a New Alphabet"', 69–74.

example, exploring the mystic and secret meaning behind the language of God and the angels (see Chapter 5). But not all were made for advanced study; in fact, some were quite unsuited to a monastic life. As Shenoute states with regard to some of his monastic recruits, even the 'thought of God' could not prevent certain people from behaving wickedly.[26]

For those who had what it took to pass through the elementary education offered to – or rather demanded of – the monks, more rigorous textual work was to be expected. The Greek alphabetical collection of *Apophthegmata Patrum* retains the following saying attributed to Abba Abraham:

> Abba Abraham told of a man of Scetis who was a scribe and did not eat bread. A brother came to beg him to copy a book. The old man whose spirit was engaged in contemplation, wrote, omitting some phrases and with no punctuation. The brother, taking the book and wishing to punctuate it, noticed that words were missing. So he said to the old man, 'Abba, there are some phrases missing.' The old man said to him, 'Go, and practise (ποίησον) first that which is written, then come back and I will write the rest.'[27]

This is an extraordinary exchange. Here, we not only encounter some of the above discussed textual practices in monasteries – such as copying and editing practices – we are also given a glimpse of the more advanced pedagogical dimensions attached to them. The young monk is not a novice, but a scribe. Abba Abraham produces a copy of a text for him (without punctuation!), having excluded some material. It appears that Abba Abraham did not deem the scribe advanced enough and encouraged him to study more in

---

[26] From Shenoute's *On Monastic Vows*. See Janet Timbie, 'The Education of Shenoute and Other Cenobitic Leaders: Inside and Outside the Monastery', in *Education and Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Gemeinhardt, L. van Hoof and P. van Nuffelen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), 34–46.

[27] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Ward, 34. The Greek text on which Ward's translation is based is from J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae*, vol. LXV (Paris, 1865), 132.

order to get access to the rest. Benedicta Ward, who has translated the above passage, renders the word ποίησον in the last sentence 'practice'. The verb here is ποιέω (in the aorist imperative) meaning 'create', 'produce' or, indeed, 'practice'. But when the object is a noun like τά γεγραμμένα (that which is written), it includes the meaning 'write' or 'solve', that is, to copy or understand what it is one reads/copies. Here we are allowed a rare glimpse of early monastic book production practices and the pedagogical processes attached to it.

According to Palladius' *Lausiac History*, the Pachomian rules stated that all monks were to undertake tasks having to do with reading and rehearsing Scripture, one of the rules of life a great angel gave Pachomius and that he used to set up his monastery. After implementing the rules Pachomius returned to the angel and complained that the task was too lenient, the number of verses and repetitions demanded by the monks were too few. To this, the angel answered, 'The sections of the Psalter which I have appointed [are indeed few], so that even the monks who are small may be able to fulfil the canons, and may not be distressed thereby. For unto the perfect no law whatsoever is laid down, because their mind is at all seasons occupied with God.'[28]

This passage is an indication of the pedagogical ideal at play in the Pachomian monastery. Everyone, even those at the very lowest level, was expected to study and rehearse the Scriptures. As mentioned in previous chapters, the monks in Pachomius' monasteries were divided into twenty-four classes, each designated with a letter of the Greek alphabet and tasked with a certain profession in the service of the monastery. There were cooks, blacksmiths, weavers, bakers, farmers and also – as Lundhaug and Jenott have pointed out previously[29] – those tasked with caring for and producing books, copyists.[30] Regardless of the profession they 'all learned the

---

[28] Palladius, *Lausiac History* I, 33, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. I, 216.

[29] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 27–28.

[30] Palladius, *Lausiac History* I, 32.

Scriptures by heart'.[31] Of the illiterate monk we read that 'even if he does not want to, he shall be compelled to read'.[32] But those on a higher level, 'the perfect' – a common term for advanced ascetics with high standing – were free to study more broadly. Pachomius is also said to have allowed books to be borrowed for a week at a time: 'if they seek a book to read, let them have it; and at the end of the week they shall put it back in its place for those who succeed them in the service'.[33] During the day books were held openly in a bookshelf, and at night they were taken down and locked in a case.[34] If a monk borrowed a book and brought it back to his dwelling, it was to be kept closed when not being read by tying fast the strings of the cover.[35]

It is clear from this brief sketch of monastic ideals concerning reading and writing that books and literacy were held in high regard in the burgeoning Egyptian coenobitism. The pedagogical practices in Pachomian monasteries were strict, as their rules indicate; however, for more advanced monks there do not seem to have been rules governing what could and could not be read. If a monk wanted a book, no one should stop him from reading it. And, as the angel told Pachomius about the advanced monks' reading and memorisation, 'no law whatsoever is laid down, because their mind is at all seasons occupied with God'.

Let us now turn to the question of the use of copies of one and the same text, with particular focus on the Nag Hammadi collection. What use would monks have to keep more than one version of these texts in their monastery?

---

[31] Palladius, *Lausiac History* I, 32:12.
[32] *Precepts of Our Father Pachomius* 139, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. II, 166.
[33] *Precepts of Our Father Pachomius* 25, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. II, 149.
[34] *Precepts of Our Father Pachomius* 101.
[35] *Precepts of Our Father Pachomius* 100.

The Nag Hammadi Texts in Light of Monastic Educational Practices

Practising Copying and Translation

The last text in the lost Codex XIII is *On the Origin of the World*, of which only the first ten lines remain; luckily, however, it is preserved in its entirety in Codex II. A third version has been found in the Coptic Manuscript collection of the British Library, although in a very fragmented state. The British Museum version, just like the Codex XIII version, was found tucked into the cover of another codex and has been identified as coinciding chronologically with the Nag Hammadi texts.[36] While the British Museum version differs slightly in dialect from the Nag Hammadi versions, they are in most other respects identical copies. It is interesting to note insofar as the ten lines of the Codex XIII version are concerned, that they differ from the full version in only the following two instances: ⲧⲅ̅ⲏ/ⲧⲉⲅ̅ⲏ (NHC XIII 50:3/ NHC II 97:26) and ⲛ̅ⲇⲉ/ⲇⲉ (NHC XIII 50:3/NHC II 97:27); the remainder is identical, letter for letter.[37] We cannot know why Codex XIII (and the British Museum version) was tucked into the cover of another codex. However, Michael Williams and Lance Jenott have argued convincingly that we should not presuppose that texts found inside the cover of a codex were discarded material chosen at random simply to act as stiffening material.[38] It is too much of a coincidence that a randomly chosen discarded text – *The*

---

[36] Walter. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1905), 251–252 (no. 522); Christian Oeyen, 'Fragmente einer subachmimischen Version der gnostischen "Schrift ohne Titel"', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 125–144.

[37] Curiously, Layton has opted to render the last letter (which is virtually unreadable in the facsimile edition of NHC XIII) as ⲡ, while the version in Codex II has a ⲧ.

[38] Michael A. Williams and Lance Jenott, 'Inside the Covers of the Codex VI', in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 1025–1052.

199

Trimorphic Protennoia – has so much in common with the overall topics of the texts between the covers.[39]

The same, however, is not as clear with *On the Origin of the World*, since what remains of this text is only the brief extract that happened to fit on the last page of *The Trimorphic Protennoia*. But *On the Origin of the World* was a well-known text and circulated in more than one copy between the fourth and fifth centuries. Another text we know for a fact was widely popular, for an even longer period of time – a text that Irenaeus had already refuted in *Against Heresies* in the second century and one that is also found in several copies of the Nag Hammadi collection – is *The Apocryphon of John*.

The Apocryphon of John is the only text that occurs three times in the Nag Hammadi collection. We have one short version of the text preserved in Codex III and two longer versions in Codex II and Codex IV.[40] As Layton observes, the chief difference – apart from the fact that the two long versions contain much material which is

---

[39] Williams and Jenott argue that *The Trimorphic Protennoia* is a good fit with the overall theme of exploring the nature of the 'Great Power' mentioned throughout the different texts in Codex VI. They note the fact that it was placed in the front cover of the codex and works well as an introduction to the different topics discussed in the texts in between the covers: the role of the Demiurge, as well as the nature of oracular utterances and prophecy which is dealt with in *The Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* as well as *The Perfect Discourse*. See Williams and Jenott, 'Inside the Covers of the Codex VI', 1025–1052.

[40] A detailed synoptic transcription and translation of all three versions, as well as the fourth version of the text found in the Berlin Codex (Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502), can be found in Waldstein and Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*. For the argument that *The Apocryphon of John* – especially the parts containing material similar to the Enoch tradition on the myth of the watchers – would have appealed to monastic readers, see Cristian Bull, 'Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in *The Apocryphon of John* and Its Monastic Manuscript-Context', in *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, ed. Ulla Tervahauta, Ivan Miroshnikov, Outi Lehtipuu and Ismo Dunderberg (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 75–107.

200

not part of the shorter version – is in phrasing and vocabulary, as the short one appears in a very different Coptic translation from the one found in the other two. For reasons having to do with translation techniques and phraseology, it would undoubtedly have been of interest for monks to study the texts. The two longer versions also show variance in Coptic dialect. The version in Codex IV is in standard Sahidic, whereas that in Codex II shows signs of Subachmimicisms.[41]

The most obvious difference between the two longer versions and the shorter version is that the former contains long excerpts from other works; for example, there is a hymn to Providence (NHC II, 30:11–31:25; NHC IV, 46:23–49:6) as well as an extract from a text called *The Book of Zoroaster* (NHC II, 15:27–19:10; NHC IV, 24:20–29:18), made up of long lists of the names of angels, Adam's body parts, and the way these two interrelate. These passages, particularly the excerpt from *The Book of Zoroaster*, could have been good material for copying exercises, as we know monks used different kinds of word lists when practising writing.[42] The monks might have kept several versions of *On the Origin of the World* for a similar reason: to use when practising copying techniques and translating.

The detailed differences between the texts could also have been studied as examples of how to formulate a sentence in different ways to achieve diverse rhetorical effects; those in the two long versions are of particular importance, since they follow each other almost verbatim. The differences are, nevertheless, there for anyone to see who could place the two texts next to each other. If someone were engaged in training in rhetoric and found rhetorical practice was improved by formulating the same words in different constellations of sentences, as we know monks did, the benefits of studying

---

[41] Mainly in the way the alfa is changed to epsilon as well as the adding of an epsilon to the end of words which end with double consonant (Waldstein and Wisse (eds.), *The Apocryphon of John*, 5).
[42] Larsen, 'Monastic Paideia', 161.

the two long versions of *The Apocryphon of John* next to each other would be obvious. Let us take one example. The passage in question is at the very end of the text where Jesus takes leave of John and returns to heaven.

NHC II, 31:32–32:10	NHC III, 39:22–40:11	NHC IV, 49:13–28
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥ† ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲛⲁϥ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲥⲱⲣ̄ ⲝⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲉϥⲛⲁⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ϥⲕⲁⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲭⲁϥ ⲛⲁϥ ⲭⲉ ϥⲥϩⲟⲩⲟⲣⲧ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲧⲛⲁ† ⲛⲁⲓ ϩⲁ ⲟⲩⲗⲱⲣⲟⲛ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩϩⲛⲉ ⲟⲩⲱⲙ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩⲥⲱ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩϣⲧⲏⲛ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲕⲉϩⲱⲃ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲙⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲁⲩⲧⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲁϥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲁϥⲣ̄ ⲁⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲙ̄ⲧⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥⲉⲓ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉϥϣⲃⲣ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲁϥⲧⲉⲟⲩⲟ ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲡⲥⲱⲣ̄ ⳉⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲁϥ	ⲕⲁⲓ ⲅⲁⲣ [ⲁⲓ† ⲛⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ] ⲉⲥϩⲁⲓⲥⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉ ⲕⲁⲁⲩ [ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲁ] ⲥⲫⲁⲗⲓⲁ· ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⳉⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲓ ⳉⲉ [ϥⲥϩⲟⲩ]ⲟⲣ̄ⲧ· ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ· ⲉⲧⲛⲁ ⲧⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲗⲱⲣⲟⲛ ⲏ̂ ⲉⲧ[ⲃⲉ ϩⲉⲛϣⲧⲏⲛ ⲏ̂] ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ϩⲉⲛϭⲓ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ̣ [ϩⲉⲛϭⲓⲛ̄] ⲟⲩⲱⲙ· ⲏ̂ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩϩ̄ⲃⲥⲱ ⲏ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ̣ ⲕⲉϩⲱⲃ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲉⲓⲙⲓⲛⲉ· ⲁϥ† ⲉⲧⲟⲟ[ⲧϥ] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲉⲓⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ[ⲩ]ⲛⲟⲩ ⲁϥⲣ̄ ⲁⲫⲁⲛⲧⲟⲥ ⲉⲣⲟϥ· [ⲁϥⲁϩⲉ] ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉϥϣⲃ̄ⲣ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏ[ⲥ ⲁϥ]ⲣ̄ⲁⲣⳉⲉⲥⲑⲁⲓ ⲉϣⲁⳉⲉ ⲛ̄ⲙⲙⲁⲩ [ϩⲁ ⲛ̄]ϣⲁⳉⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲡⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ ⳉⲟⲟⲩ ⲉ[ⲣⲟϥ]	[ⲁⲩⲱ] ⲁϥ† ⲛ[ⲁ]ⲓ ⲛⲁϥ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ ⳉ[ⲉⲕⲁ] ⲁⲥ ⲉϥⲛⲁⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ϥⲕⲁ[ⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄] ⲟⲩⲧⲁⲭⲣⲟ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⳉⲁϥ ⲛⲁϥ [ⳉⲉ ϥ]ⲥϩⲟⲩⲟⲣⲧ̄ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ [ⲉⲧⲛⲁ† ⲛⲁⲓ] ϩⲁ ⲟⲩⲗⲱⲣⲟⲛ ⲏ̂ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ[ϩⲛⲉ ⲟⲩ]ⲱⲙ· ⲏ̂ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩⲥⲱ· ⲏ̂ ⲉ̣[ⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ] ϣⲧⲏⲛ ⲏ̂ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲕⲉϩⲱⲃ [ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓ]ⲙ̣[ⲓⲛⲉ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲁⲩⲧⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲁϥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ [ⲙⲩ]ⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩ [ⲁϥⲣ̄] ⲁⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲙ̄ⲧ̣[ⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥⲉⲓ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉϥϣ̄ⲃⲣ̄ ⲙⲁⲑ[ⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲁϥⳉⲱ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲡⲥ̄ⲱ̄[ⲣ̄ ⳉⲟ]ⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ
ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲡⲉⲭ̄ⲣ̄ⲥ̄ ϩⲁⲙⲏⲛ ⲕ̄ⲁ̄ⲧ̄ⲁ̄ ⲓ̄ⲱ̄ϩ̄ⲁ̄ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲏ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ ⲁ̄ⲡ̄ⲟ̄ⲕ̄ⲣ̄ⲩ̄ⲫ̄ⲟ̄ⲛ̄	ⲡⲁⲡⲟⲕⲣⲩⲫⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ ⲓ̄ⲱ̄ϩⲁⲛⲛⲏ[ⲥ]	ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲡⲉⲭ̄ⲥ̄ ϩⲁⲙⲏ[ⲛ] ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲓ̈ⲱ[ⲏ]ⲛ̣ ⲛ̄ ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲣⲩⲫⲟⲛ

And the Saviour presented these things to him that he might write them down and keep them secure. And he said to him: 'Cursed be everyone who will exchange these things for a gift, whether for food or drink, or for clothing or other such thing.' And these things were presented to him in a mystery. And finally he disappeared. And he went to his fellow disciples and gave the news to them concerning what the Saviour had told him.

Jesus Christ, Amen. The Apocryphon according to John[43]

For indeed, [I have presented these things to you] to write them down and to keep them [in] safety. Then he said to me: '[Cursed] be everyone who will exchange these things for a gift, whether of silver or gold, food or drink, for clothing or any such thing.' He entrusted this mystery to him. And immediately he disappeared from him. [He stood] before his fellow disciples and began to speak with them [about the] things which the Saviour had told him.

The Apocryphon of John

And the Saviour presented these things to him that he might write them down and keep them secure. And he said to him: 'Cursed be everyone who will exchange these things for a gift, whether for food or drink, or for clothing or other such thing.' And these things were presented to him in a mystery. And immediately he disappeared from him. And he went to his fellow disciples and told them what the Saviour had told him.

Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Apocryphon according to John

The versions in Codices II and IV are virtually identical, throughout the two manuscripts as well as here. There are, however, minor

---

[43] Texts and trans. Waldstein and Wisse, in Waldstein and Wisse (eds.), *The Apocryphon of John*, 174–177.

differences, as expressed in the passage related here. The name John is abbreviated in the title of Codex IV, but kept in full in Codex II (Codex III has a different order and wording altogether) and the last two lines differ somewhat. While the version in Codex II retells the last disappearance of Jesus with the sentence: 'finally he disappeared' (ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲁϥⲣ̄ ⲁⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ), Codex IV has 'immediately he disappeared' (ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩ [ⲁϥⲣ̄]ⲁⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ). In the next sentence, Codex II writes that John 'gave news' (ⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲱ) to the other disciples regarding Jesus' message, whereas Codex IV simply has the verb ⲭⲱ (speak/tell/relate).[44] These minor differences might seem insignificant when placed in relation to the version in Codex III, which not only differs in expression (ϣⲁϫⲉ in this instance) but both includes details not contained in Codices II and IV and leaves out other details that are. If placed next to each other they could have been excellent school texts for practicing copying and nuances in translation and phrasing.

We know that *The Apocryphon of John* was read by monks, even in the sixth century. This is indicated by the fourth version of *The Apocryphon of John* found as the second text in Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (or Berolinensis Gnosticus, usually abbreviated BG). The cover of BG was inscribed with the words, ⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣ ⲁⲣⲛ ⲁⲃⲃⲁ, 'Zacharias, Archpresbyter, Abbot', and the cover contains a letter of introduction written by one monk on behalf of another.[45] The version in BG seems to be virtually identical to the version in Codex III, although one difference that can be observed concerns

---

[44] What is more, as Waldstein and Wisse also notice, Codex IV has the wrong object marker ⲉⲣⲟϥ after the verb ⲭⲱ, it must have been ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ as in Codex III (which has the verb ϣⲁϫⲉ) since the disciples who receive the speech are in the plural.

[45] Kurt Treu, 'P. Berl. 8502: Christliches Empfehlungsschreiben aus dem Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex P.8502', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 28 (1982): 53–54; Myriam Krutzsch and Günther Poethke, 'Der Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex Berolinensis 8502', in *Festschrift zum 150 jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums*, ed. G. Poethke, U. Luft, and S. Wenig (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), 315–322.

the way Greek loanwords have been treated. The Codex III version has kept more of these in the original while the BG version has a Coptic equivalent more often.[46] There is an even more striking example in two versions of *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, both preserved in the Nag Hammadi codices, that take different approaches to Greek loanwords.

The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit is found in both Codex III and Codex IV. As Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse observe in the Coptic Gnostic edition of the texts, the version in Codex III contains twice the number of Greek loanwords, whereas the version in Codex IV has, rather, ventured to render a Greek word with a Coptic equivalent.[47] What is striking is the frequency with which a Greek word appears in one place and then later in the text a Coptic equivalent is placed in its stead, or vice versa.[48] It is almost as if the scribe copying or translating these texts has compared his own translations/copies with other existing translations and made changes to introduce variation. The Greek original is retained while at the same time providing the reader with a Coptic explanation of the word's meaning later in the text – or the opposite: a Coptic word or phrase is attached to its Greek *Vorlage* later in the text, in a sense revealing the translation policy, perhaps pedagogically motivated. Monks engaged in translating and experimenting with translation would undoubtably benefit greatly from having more than one Coptic translation of a text being copied.

---

[46] Where BG has kept the Greek οὐδέ (neither/nor), the version in NHC III has opted for a simple negation in Coptic (compare, for example, BG 24:9–11 to NHC III, 5:5–7).

[47] *Nag Hammadi Codex III,2 and IV,2*, ed. Böhlig and Wisse, 12–14. For example, NHC IV, 52:1 has ϣⲟⲣⲡ︥ⲛ︦ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲉ the Coptic, whereas NHC III has kept the original πρόγνωσις (42:10); or προελθεῖν in NHC III, 44:2–3 compared to ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ in NHC IV, 54:3.

[48] See, for example, the use of προελθεῖν which appears interchangeably with the Coptic equivalent ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ in the Codex III version. At the following places we find ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ: 41:11–17, 49:15, 51:15, 52:6, 57:9, 62:13, 65:2. However, προελθεῖν is used to vary the phrasing in the following places (or vice versa): 41:7–13, 42:6–19, 43:8, 44:2–14, 49:13, 52:19, 53:2, 54:14–18, 55:1, 68:19.

The Gospel of Truth *(NHC I,3 and XII,2): Reformulating Texts in Light of New Theological Trends*

The Gospel of Truth is preserved in its entirety as the second tractate in Codex I. Previous scholars have viewed the text as the work of the famous Valentinus, while Irenaeus mentions that the Valentinians used a text they called 'the Gospel of Truth', but he does not state that the text was written by Valentinus.[49] However, in *Refutation of All Heresies* (the author of which is unclear)[50], we read that Valentinus had 'a Gospel of his own'.[51] The authorship of *The Gospel of Truth* will probably never be more than a hypothesis, but in all likelihood this text, too, like the other Nag Hammadi copies, was a very popular work.[52] The style and content of *The Gospel of Truth* is also enticing, mixing mythological exhortations with ethical and soteriological admonitions. It preaches the saving attributes of the knowledge of the Father of truth, given to us by his Name, the Son Jesus (NHC I, 38:6–32). Knowledge abolishes the reign of terror and forgetfulness represented by the character Error (ⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ).[53] Knowledge enables reintegration into the Father, and the rest (ⲙ̄ⲧⲁⲛ) that that entails.[54] The text contains long exhortations on the differences between those who know (the children of light whom Jesus comes to save) and the

---

[49] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 11:9.

[50] *Refutation of All Heresies*, trans. David Litwa (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), xxxii–xl.

[51] *Refutation of All Heresies* 4.

[52] For the arguments claiming that the text is Valentinian, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 146–165. Thomassen categorises this text as what he calls an 'Eastern' Valentinianism. For a relevant critique of the division into East versus West doctrine, see Joel Kalvesmaki, 'Italian versus Eastern Valentinianism?', *Vigiliae Christianae* 62:1 (2008): 79–89.

[53] Geoffrey Smith has argued that this character is a version of Sofia, influenced by Ben Sira 24 and John's Prologue. See Geoffrey Smith, 'Constructing a Christian Universe: Mythological Exegesis of Ben Sira 24 and John's Prologue in the *Gospel of Truth*', in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Jenott and S. Kattan Gribetz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013): 64–84.

[54] NHC I, *The Gospel of Truth* 18:10–11, 24:30–32, 40:30–33.

206

material ones who do not recognise Jesus' divinity and are strangers to his message (NHC I, 30:32–31:14).

Previous scholars have observed the close similarities between Origen's theology and the *Gospel of Truth*.[55] Several other Nag Hammadi texts also reflect Origenisms, most likely due to the fact that they originated in similar contexts to those in which Origen was active.[56] We know that anti-Origenist trends began to intensify at the end of the fourth century, beginning with the appeals of Epiphanius and Jerome. Origen was banned at a council in Alexandria in 401, when Theophilus, threatened by riots, turned on Origen after having been a long-term supporter. Shortly after, monks associated with Evagrius Ponticus, who had died only two years before Origen was banned, were denounced as heretics. But Origen still enjoyed a large readership, and prominent names, including Rufinus and John Chrysostom, supported his legacy. To say the least, Origen and the theology associated with him were controversial topics within Eastern Christianity.[57]

So, why would Pachomian monks read texts smacking of Origen? As recent scholars have argued, Samuel Rubenson among them, Origen was instrumental in the development of early Christian

---

[55] Geoffrey Smith, 'Anti-Origenist Redaction in the Fragments of the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC XII,2): Theological Controversy and the Transmission of Early Christian Literature', *Harvard Theological Review* 110:1 (2017) 46–74.

[56] Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*. See also the evidence suggesting that the theology reflected in *The Tripartite Tractate* directly relates to the doctrine of free will that Origen rejects in his *Peri Archon*. See Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, 146–156. For more on the relation to Origen's theology and NHC I, see Jenott and Pagels, 'Antony's Letters'.

[57] Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Samuel Runbenson, 'Antony and Ammonas, Conflicting or Common Tradition in Early Egyptian Monasticism?', in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T. B. Sailors and A. Toepel (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2011), 185–202.

monasticism in Egypt.[58] The Alexandrian exegetical tradition which Origen had a part in developing – along with figures such as Clement of Alexandria – applied classical *paideia* and attributed it to Christian texts and practices. As we have seen above, the ideals of classical *paideia* continued in Egyptian monasticism, and this was in line with traditions Origen had instigated. However, many of Origen's doctrinal takes became controversial, and stories describing the life of Pachomius suggest that he vehemently rejected Origen. But was this really the case?[59] Pachomius' monasteries were already established when the first Origenist controversy began, while Pachomius had passed away a generation earlier, in 348. The sayings of the great monastic fathers (including Pachomius) were chiefly written during and after the controversy, so it should not surprise us that anti-Origenist passages have crept into works that were foundational for the monastic movement. It is understandable that the authors of the *Vitas* would have jumped at the opportunity to place a patriarch of high standing on their side in the theological debates of their own time.

What is more, it is well known that the *Vita* genre borders on legend, and at times the tactics used to discredit one's theological adversaries are even humorous. One story preserved in the *Ascetica* has Pachomius welcoming a group of Origenist anchorites into his monastery and, as he greets them, he is taken aback by their foul stench. Pachomius is puzzled by the fact that the strangers, whose appearance is tidy, emit such a filthy odour. As they leave Pachomius retires and meditates on the reason for the smell. He

---

[58] Samuel Rubenson, 'Origen in the Egyptian Monastic Tradition of the Fourth Century', in *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 319–337; Samuel Rubenson, 'Why Did the Origenist Controversy Begin? Re-thinking the Standard Narratives', *Modern Theology* 38:2 (2022): 318–337.

[59] For example, Palladius, *The Monks of Tabenna* VII (in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. I, 447–448). Ammonius and Abba Benjamin were, on the contrary, said to have read Origen with great interest (Palladius, *Lausiac History* I, 11–12, in *The Book of Paradise*, trans. Budge, vol. I, 154–155).

receives a vision and is told by an angel that the vulgar smell comes from their souls, which have been sullied by erroneous theological convictions associated with Origen. Pachomius hurries to catch up with his departing guests and tells them to throw Origen's texts in the river if they value their eternal souls.[60] This is a fabulous heresiological story, but it is not only the creative way that Pachomius handles his theological opponents that leaves us wondering about the accuracy of its attribution to Pachomius. James Goehring has argued on the basis of Armand Veilleux's analysis that the *Ascetica* originated from an anti-Origenist setting in Lower Egypt.[61] What is more, the Coptic *Vita* tradition associated with Pachomius does not include anti-Origenist sentiments such as those which fill the *Ascetica* and the Greek *Vita* tradition, also originating from Lower Egypt.[62]

Whatever the famous archimandrite may actually have thought of Origen, it is not at all strange that, fifty years later, some monks in the monasteries founded by Pachomius questioned aspects of Origen's theology. Geoffrey Smith has hypothesised that the version of *The Gospel of Truth* in Codex XII was rewritten to rid it of possible accusations of Origenist theological positioning in the version in Codex I. The Codex XII version is shorter (and in Sahidic dialect), and more to the point, the Codex I version (in Subachmimic) contains fuller descriptions and additional elaborations. Furthermore, as Smith argues, the version in Codex XII has been shortened for a very specific reason: to fit a new anti-Origenist climate. In one passage referring to the coming of the Saviour, for example, the Codex XII version has removed

---

[60] *Ascetica* 7; *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. II, 28–29.
[61] James E. Goehring, 'Producing Pachomius: The Role of Lower Egypt in the Creation, Reception, and Adaptation of the Pachomian Vita Tradition', in *Wisdom on the Move: Late Antique Traditions in Multicultural Conversation*, ed. S. Ashbrook Harvey, T. Arentzen, H. Rydell Johnsén and A. Westergren (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 35–53; *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Veilleux, vol. I, 317.
[62] Goehring, 'Producing Pachomius', 46–47.

a reference to some people being unable to see the 'likeness' (ⲉⲓⲛⲉ) of the Saviour.[63] This has been done because of the word's association with the debate concerning 'likenesses and images' involving Origen.[64] Anti-Origenists rejected the idea that humans had lost the image of God at the fall of Adam, which Origen claimed. In another example offered by Smith of a passage that has been shortened in Codex XII to rid it of Origenist-sounding theology, Codex I has the Son emanating from the Father (37:7–18) – creating a hierarchy within the Godhead, which anti-Origenists refuted – while Codex XII tones down the hierarchy between Father and Son (60:18–28).[65]

Smith's suggestions are thought-provoking and convincing. They clearly indicate that the owners of the codices were willing to redact, rework and change texts to suit the needs of new theological climates. But what, if Smith's analysis is correct, would the monks have done with the longer 'Origenist version' of *The Gospel of Truth* after having rewritten it to suit theological changes in the milieu? The codices were found together, so they were not simply discarded. What of the other texts in the collection that also included Origenist-sounding language? The fact is that monks kept and read texts for a number of reasons, not only to agree with the tractates of the theologically likeminded. Edification could be attained in many ways. One reason theologically challenging texts would have been of use, again, was for pedagogical purposes and for the value they still contained.

We know, for example, that gnomic sentences appealed to monks, and these are a marked characteristic of *The Gospel of Truth*, which has short gnomic sentences scattered throughout the narrative, along with quotes from Scripture mixed with unidentified allusions and allegories. Most of the gnomic sentences concern

---

[63] NHC I, 30:34–31:6; NHC XII, 53:26–29.
[64] Smith, 'Anti-Origenist Redaction', 58–61.
[65] Smith, 'Anti-Origenist Redaction', 62–65.

the nature of salvation and the path toward it. The treasure of true salvation is described as a 'will which has not yet been opened, for the fortune of the deceased master of the house is hidden',[66] or as like 'having become intoxicated, (then) turned from one's drunkenness and having found oneself, and restored what is one's own'.[67] Salvation also inevitably entails the loss of some who are not able to attain it. However, one should not grieve, because, 'like people who have moved from a neighbourhood, if they have some dishes around which are not good, they usually break them. Nevertheless, the householder does not suffer a loss, but rejoices, for in the place of these defective dishes there are those which are completely perfect.'[68] When salvation finally comes, it is like 'a great disturbance occurring (among the dishes), for some are emptied, others filled: some are mended, others were removed; some were purified, still others were broken'.[69] Once saved, the following section of *The Gospel of Truth* implores readers to stay on the right path in a series of striking imperatives: 'Do not return to eat that which you have vomited, that which you have expelled. Do not be moth-eaten. Do not be worm-eaten, for you have already shaken

---

[66] NHC I, 20:15–17: ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲇⲓⲁⲑⲏⲕⲏ ⲉⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲧⲟⲩⲏⲛ ⲁⲣⲁⲥ ⲉⲥⲅⲏⲡ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ϯⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲡ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲓ· ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲅⲙⲟⲩ. Text and trans. Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 86–87.

[67] NHC I, 22:16–20: ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ· ⲉⲁϥϯϩⲉ ⲁϥⲛⲁⲅⲉ̄ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲉϥϯϩⲉ ⲉⲁϥⲛⲁⲅⲉ̄ ⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲉⲧϥ̄· ⲁϥⲧⲉϩⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲩϥ ⲁⲣⲉⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲉ· Text and trans. Attridge and MacRae, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 90–91.

[68] NHC I, 25:25–35: ⲛ̄ⲑⲁⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲁⲩⲡⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲛⲙⲁ ⲉⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥ· ⲛ̄ϩⲣⲏⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ· ⲉⲛ ⲛⲉⲩⲁⲩⲟⲩⲁⲃⲟⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙⲁϥϯ ⲁⲥⲓ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲛⲉⲡ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲓ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ϣⲁϥⲣⲉϣⲉ· ϫⲉ ⲛ̄ϩⲣⲏⲓ̈ ⲅⲁⲣ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲙⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥ ⲉⲑⲁⲩ· ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲏϩ ⲛⲉⲧⲉϣⲁⲩϫⲁⲕⲟⲩ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ. My translation. Translation inspired by and text based on what is provided by Attridge and MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 94–95.

[69] NHC I, 26:8–15: ⲟⲩⲛⲁϭ ⲛ̄ϣⲧⲁⲣⲧⲣ̄ ⲁϥϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ϩⲣⲏⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ϩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩϣⲟⲩⲟⲩ ϩⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲩⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲙⲁϩⲟⲩ ϫⲉⲥ ϩⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲩⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲥϩⲛ ⲧⲟⲩ· ϩⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲩⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲡⲁⲛⲟⲩ ϩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩⲃⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲕⲁⲩⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲡⲱϣⲉ ⲙⲁⲉⲓⲧ. My translation, inspired by and based on the text by Attridge and MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 94–95.

it off. Do not be a dwelling place for the devil, for you have already destroyed him.'[70]

There is a plethora of other gnomic statements that give the narrative a very poetic and enigmatic flavour.[71] Unfortunately, most of them are only preserved in the long version in Codex I. A few, however, remain in the fragmented version in Codex XII: for example, the following one, likening saved people to jars filled with ointment:

NHC I, 36:17–26

The ointment is the mercy of the Father, who will have mercy on them. For those whom he has anointed are those who are perfect. For the filled vessels are those which are usually used for ointment. But when an anointing is finished, the vessel is usually empty, and the cause of its deficiency is the consumption of its ointment.

ⲡⲓⲧⲱϩⲥ̄ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲛⲁⲉ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲧ· ⲉⲧⲉϥⲛⲁⲛⲁⲉ ⲛⲉⲩ· ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲧⲁϩⲥⲟⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩϫⲱⲕ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲛ̄ⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲉⲧⲙⲏϩ, ⲛⲉⲧⲉϣⲁⲟⲩⲧⲁϩⲥⲟⲩ· ⲡⲥⲁⲡ ⲇⲉ· ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲧⲱϩⲥ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ· ⲛⲁⲃⲱⲗ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ϣⲁϥϣⲟⲩⲟ· ⲟⲩⲉϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲗⲁⲉⲓϭⲉ ⲁⲧⲣⲉϥⲣ̄ ϣⲧⲁ ⲡⲉ ⲡϩⲱⲃ ⲉⲧⲉ {ⲙ̄}ⲡⲉϥⲧⲱϩⲥ̄· ⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ

NHC XII, 59:21–30

[For the ointment is] the mercy of the Father. Therefore, [he will] have mercy on them. They received the [ointment,] i.e. they

ⲡ[ⲓⲧⲱϩⲥ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ] ⲡⲛⲁⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲓ[ⲱⲧ ϥⲛⲁⲛ]ⲁ̣ϩ ⲟ̣ϩ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲁⲩϫⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡ[ⲓⲧⲱϩ ⲥ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲉ]ⲓ̣ ⲡⲉ ⲁⲩϫ[ⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ ⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥ] ⲅⲁⲣ ⲉⲧⲙ[ⲏϩ, ϫⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓ ⲧⲱϩⲥ ϩⲟ]ⲧⲁ̣ ⲛ ⲅⲁⲣ

---

[70] NHC I, 33:14–21: ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲥⲱⲧⲉ ⲁⲣⲁⲩ ⲁⲟⲩⲁⲙⲟⲩ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲣ̄ ϫⲁⲗⲉⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲣ̄ ϥⲛⲧ ϫⲉ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱ ⲉⲣⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩϩⲉ· ⲙⲙⲁϥ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲣⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲇⲓⲁⲃⲟⲗⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱ ⲉⲣⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲥϥ̄ ⲙⲙⲁϥ. Text and trans. Attridge and MacRae, modified, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 94–95.

[71] See, for example, the long passages likening the human state with a dream (beginning at 28:32); or the likeness of God's peoples with the sweet smell emitting from the perfume of God (beginning at 33:33).

212

became perfect. For full [vessels receive ointment.] For if ointment [is dispersed from a vessel, it becomes] empty. The cause [that brought about the lack] is the dispersion [of the ointment].[72]

ⲉϥ[ϣⲁⲛⲃⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ]ⲡⲓⲧⲱϩⲥ̣ [ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲥⲕⲉⲩⲟⲥⲉϣⲟⲩⲉ]ⲓ̣ⲧ· ⲧⲗⲟⲉⲓϭⲉ̣ [ⲉⲧⲣⲉϥⲣ̄ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲭⲣⲉ]ⲓ̣ⲁ ⲡⲃⲱⲗ ⲉ[ⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲧⲱϩⲥ].

This is a very cryptic passage and the meaning is somewhat unclear. The ambiguous implication of the gnomic sentence about the different vessels is preserved in the rewritten short version (which in this passage is not much shorter at all). It appears that the Codex XII version has tried to make it clear that the people become perfect by the power of the salvation of God (here represented by the metaphor of being anointed). In Codex I it seems as if God chooses to anoint those who are destined for salvation, that is, 'the perfect'. This could be, yet again, an instance where the monks who rewrote the text chose to shift *The Gospel of Truth* away from theologically questionable views. The discussion of the nature of human free will very much hinged upon people's ability to deserve salvation, rather than being born with it. A deterministic view of the world can be detected in several texts in Codex I, chiefly in *The Tripartite Tractate*, but also in the long version of *The Gospel of Truth*.[73]

---

[72] The reconstruction of the Codex XII here presented, as well as its translation, is by Geoffrey Smith, in Smith, 'Anti-Origenist Redaction', 71–72. Text and trans. of NHC I, 36:17–26 also from Smith's article but follow closely that of Attridge and MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, ed. Attridge, 96–97.

[73] See Linjamaa, *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate, 150–151, passim; Jörgen Magnusson, 'The Gospel of Truth as the Gospel of the Saved Saviors', *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 6:1 (2021): 31–48. For another comparison between the fragments and the full version in Codex I, see the discussion regarding, for example, the word *Pleroma* (fullness) in Katrine Brix, 'Two Witnesses, One Valentinian Gospel? The Gospel of Truth in Nag Hammadi Codices I and XII', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*, ed. Lied and Lundhaug, 126–145.

Free will in these texts meant just what *The Gospel of Truth* in Codex I indicates, that one is a jar full of ointment destined for salvation. This controversial opinion is mitigated and made less clear in the version in Codex XII, although we know from the above discussion on monastic views of higher education that some were of the opinion that not all had the ability to attain perfection; the shape of their very disposition made them unable to keep from manifesting a deceitful nature. This time, however, the longer version does not reflect Origenism, because Origen was one of the first and most opinionated advocates of the doctrine of free will, which *The Gospel of Truth* questions in the above passage. It seems, thus, that the editing of *The Gospel of Truth*, the production of a shorter and more concise version of the text, could have been motivated by a number of changes in the theological climate, not only anti-Origenism.

These aspects of the copies reflect the well-established fact that monks did not only read texts for edification, but copied them, rewrote them and rephrased enigmatic sentences to practice the art of textual manoeuvrings, to fine-tune their moral compasses and meet new theological challenges.

Eugnostos the Blessed *(NHC III,3 and V,1): Practising Editorial Work*

Perhaps the most noteworthy text appearing in more than one copy in the Nag Hammadi collection is that of *Eugnostos the Blessed*, which appears in two versions, one in Codex III and the other in Codex V. But that is not all. It also makes up the main part of another text, *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, in Codex IV, reworked by the addition of a new framing narrative. Thus, one could claim that *Eugnostos the Blessed* has been preserved in more than three copies in the Nag Hammadi collection. *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* is also found in a version in BG, which we know – as discussed above – was used in a monastic milieu.

214

Previous studies on *Eugnostos the Blessed* have assumed, since it does not mention Jesus, that it is a so-called Gnostic text. The editorial work that went into fitting *Eugnostos the Blessed* into *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* has thus been viewed as reflecting an attempt to 'Christianise' an otherwise non-Christian text.[74] It is not at all unreasonable to suppose that *Eugnostos the Blessed* retained such popularity (indicated by the two copies of the text) that it triggered the production of a new text, a long version of *Eugnostos the Blessed* that better suited a changing readership. But to state that this is because the owners wished to 'Christianise' the text is to simplify the matter somewhat. As Douglas Parrott, the editor of the text for the Coptic Gnostic series, has noted, there seems to be a symbiosis between these three texts, with the two versions of *Eugnostos the Blessed* anticipating that included in the extended version of *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*.[75] If we put aside discussion of the relation between Gnosticism and Christianity – a discourse that has dictated much of the scholarship on the relation between these texts – and simply view the texts in an Egyptian monastic setting, it becomes more understandable that *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* was a reworked version of *Eugnostos the Blessed*, a way for the readers of the latter to add what they thought it lacked. *Eugnostos the Blessed* strikes a chord with several key Egyptian religious tenets of the Ptolemaian period, as Parrott notices, such as the depiction of the original first creation by a single being, creating for himself four pairs or powers making up an Ogdoad.[76] Adding Christ to this Egyptian system would have served to mitigate the tensions between a long Egyptian tradition on the way out and the new religion (in comparison)

---

[74] These inquiries beg the question what actually makes a text Christian? The Book of Psalms, Genesis and many other texts that certainly do not mention Jesus are not viewed as texts that would question the readers' Christian identity. We should be careful not to employ too rigid categories as to what makes a text Christian or non-Christian.

[75] *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1*, ed. Douglas W. Parrott (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 4.

[76] *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1*, ed. Parrott, 11.

on the rise. For a new and growing social phenomenon like Egyptian coenobitism, it would undoubtably have been helpful to learn how Christianity could be squared with Egyptian religious tenets. Highlighting a long and pristine Egyptian culture is a key feature in many of the other Nag Hammadi texts, such as the two Hermetic texts as well as Sethian material.

There are other striking features of *Eugnostos the Blessed*. Louis Painchaud has argued convincingly that the text retains several key likenesses to another text in the Nag Hammadi collection: *On the Origin of the World*.[77] Painchaud not only points out similarities in mythological characters appearing in both treatises, as well as their functions,[78] but also notes parallels in lexical and compositional aspects.[79] He suggests that *On the Origin of the World* was meant to be read first to 'alienate' the reader from the creator God of Genesis and introduce a higher being, which is then portrayed in *Eugnostos the Blessed*. The accuracy of Painchaud's hypothesis aside – an interesting suggestion worth further thought and study – the conclusions reached concerning the relation between the two texts support the argument advanced here, that there would have been ample reason for keeping these codices in the same library, even though Codices II and XIII (containing *On the Origin of the World*) and Codices III and V (containing *Eugnostos the Blessed* and, we might add, *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*) are usually identified

---

[77] Louis Painchaud, 'The Literal Contacts between the Writing without Title *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5 and XIII,2) and *Eugnostos the Blessed* (CG III, 3 and V, 1)', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 1114:1 (1995): 81–101.

[78] Painchaud, 'The Literal Contacts', 83–87.

[79] Both texts, Painchaud argues, are organised following a rhetorical pattern, extant since Aristotle, which divides a composition into four main sections: I Exordium (exordium, προοίμιον); II Narration (narratio, διήγησις); III Proof (probatio, demonstratio, πίστις, ἀπόδειξις); IV Peroration (peroratio, ἐπίλογος). These four sections also contain lexical similarities which make it likely that the two texts were not merely following a standard rhetorical principle, but actually originated from the same textual milieu (Painchaud, 'The Literal Contacts', 83–87).

216

as belonging to different sub-groups, as with most of the copies. Adding to this the intricate relation between *Eugnostos the Blessed* and *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* (NHC IV), we are more than justified in drawing the conclusion that the texts derived from very dynamic and lively textual milieux, where editorial and codicological processes were important tools for keeping the texts relevant.

Eugnostos the Blessed also contains several editorial differences that would have made the versions interesting to read side by side. As Parrott has noted, both versions of *Eugnostos the Blessed* follow each other closely, but *Eugnostos the Blessed* in Codex V contains at least fourteen occasions where it has fuller descriptions compared to the version in Codex III.[80] In some places, details are also left out. For example, at the beginning of the text, both versions state that previous interpreters have reached erroneous conclusions regarding the governance of the world and that these come in three forms: some state that the world is governed by itself, some claim it is by providence and still others by fate. The Codex V version lacks the explanation that these are 'philosophers' (ⲛⲉⲫⲓⲗⲟⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ) (NHC III, 70:15), a note that also appears in *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* (NHC III, 92:20–21). The Codex V version also excludes some apophatic language at the outset pertaining to God. These are minor differences that are found throughout the texts, where the version in Codex III can be said generally to follow *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* more closely than that in Codex V. However, the Codex V version contains some longer passages left out of both *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* and *Eugnostos the Blessed* in Codex III. This is exemplified by a passage that expands upon the relationship between the highest God and the creatures under him:

---

[80] *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1*, ed. Parrott, 17.

NHC III, 83:2–10

From the consenting of those
I have just mentioned, thoughts
appeared in the aeons that exist.
From thoughts, reflections; from
reflections, considerations; from
considerations, rationalities;
from rationalities, wills; from
wills, words.[81]

ⲉⲃ[ⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄ ⲧⲉ]ⲩⲥⲩⲛⲫⲱⲛⲏ ⲉⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲣ
ϣⲣ̄ⲡ ⲛ̄ⲝⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲱⲛⲅ ⲅⲛ̄ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ
ⲉⲧⲕⲏ ⲉⲅⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲛ̄ⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ· ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄ ⟨ⲛ̄⟩
ⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲛⲉⲛⲟⲩⲙⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛⲉⲛⲟⲩⲙⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲛⲉⲫⲣⲟⲛⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛⲉⲫⲣⲟⲛⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲓⲥⲙⲟⲥ· ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲓⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛⲉⲑⲉⲗⲏⲥⲓⲥ· ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛⲉⲑⲉⲗⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ·

NHC V, 11:6–20

Now from the consent of those
who have just been mentioned,
thoughts appeared in aeons that
were mentioned earlier. And
from thoughts, thinkings; and
from thinkings, teachings; and
from teachings, counsels; and
from counsels, wills, and from
wills, words. Now, they have
other names. Thoughts are called
'gods'; thinkings, 'lords',
teachings are 'angels'; counsels
are 'angels', wills are 'words'.[82]

ⲇⲉ ⲅⲙ̄ ⲡⲓϯⲙⲉ[ⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ]
ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲣ̄ϣⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲝⲟⲟⲩ [ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲱⲛⲅ̄]
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲅⲉⲛⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ [ⲅⲛ̄ ⲅⲉⲛⲉⲱⲛ]
ⲉⲁⲩⲣ̄ ϣⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲝⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟ[ⲗ ⲇⲉ ⲅⲛ̄]
ⲛⲓⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ· ⲉ[ⲃⲟⲗ ⲇⲉ ⲅⲛ̄]
ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲛⲓⲥⲃⲟⲟⲩⲉ· ⲉⲃ[ⲟⲗ ⲇⲉ ⲅⲛ̄]
ⲛⲓⲥⲃⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲛⲓϣⲟⲝⲛⲉ· ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲇⲉ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛⲓϣⲟⲝⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲟⲩⲱϣ· ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲇⲉ ⲅⲛ̄
ⲛⲓⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲓϣⲁⲝⲉ· ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲇⲉ
ⲛ̄ⲅⲉⲛⲕⲉⲣⲁⲛ· ⲛⲓⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲇⲉ
ϣⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲝⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ·
ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲝⲉ ⲛⲓ[ⲝⲟ]ⲉⲓⲥ· ⲛⲓⲥⲃⲱ ⲛⲉ
ⲛⲓⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ· ⲛⲓϣⲟⲝⲛⲉ ⲛⲉ
ⲛⲓⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ· ⲛⲓⲟⲩ[ⲱϣ ⲛ̄]ⲉ ⲛⲓϣⲁⲝⲉ·

These passages explain the cognitive processes attached to each
step of the creation of the aeon of the Father. *The Wisdom of Jesus
Christ* does not include this passage, and the elaboration which
Codex V offers at the end of the passage is not included in the
version in Codex III. Apart from differences in vocabulary, the
version from V attaches the cognitive hierarchy – 'thought-

---

81 Text and trans. Parrott, in *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1*, ed. Parrott, 120.
82 Text and trans. Parrott, in *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1*, ed. Parrott, 120–122.

thinking-teaching-counsel-will-word' – to a hierarchy containing the agents 'gods-lords-angels-words'. Directly following these passages, *Eugnostos the Blessed* contains a numerical expansion of creation. We read that there are twelve powers – six male and six female – who reveal another 72 powers, who in turn reveal 5 powers each, making up a total of 360 powers, a collective attached to the concept 'will'. The 360 powers are attached to the 360 days of the year, divided into twelve months, and an uncountable number of angels, moments and hours. *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* has left out these elaborations and instead added passages with much less detailed information concerning the nature of the structure of the heavens and its relation to the cosmos.[83] These are aspects of *Eugnostos the Blessed* which would have spoken to an Egyptian audience, according to Parrott, which *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* presents in a more acceptable Christian rendition.

Placing the different versions next to each other would have enabled many interesting differences to surface. A context in which it would have made sense to copy, edit and preserve several different versions of the same text in the way we here see is that of an early Egyptian monastic community, containing individuals with many different relations to the Egyptian context in which they existed, on different levels pertaining to spiritual maturity.

Conclusion

At the end of the fourth century, Pachomian monasteries housed several hundred monks at each site, with numerous sites in the vicinity of what today is the modern town of Nag Hammadi. As we

---

[83] A few pages are missing from the Nag Hammadi version of *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, so we have to rely on the version preserved in BG to see how *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ* replaced the numerical passages in *Eugnostos the Blessed*.

have seen, Pachomian monasteries had the practice of leaving books out for monks to borrow. The most obvious benefit of keeping more than one copy of a text in a library is that it can be read by more than one person at one time. Considering that a number of the monks must have been proficient, since reading ability was obligatory, it is not unfathomable that more than one monk in a vast monastic association such as the Pachomian one would have been interested in reading these texts at a time. We know that several of them were popular in fourth-century Egypt, particularity those extant in copies, all of which (except *The Gospel of Truth*) are also found elsewhere in other Coptic or Greek manuscripts. Considering that monks in all likelihood spoke to each other about what they read (at least to those belonging to the same Pachomian letter-group), interest would have spread, leading to copies, redactions and new editions with additions and modifications. In short, it would have been handy to keep more than one copy, especially of particularly popular texts.

The fact that these copies are chiefly found in different scribal sub-groups could be an indication that they were produced within different Pachomian monasteries in close proximity to each other, as Christian Bull, for example, has recently suggested.[84] If we presume that the texts were produced and used in one or several of the monasteries in the area in which they were found, a monk could within a day's walk visit any of other handful of Pachomian monasteries situated between the monastery in Thbew in the west and Tabennis in the east (what is today Nag Hammadi is located in between these sites).[85] Thus, we should presume that books were borrowed and exchanged between monasteries of the same federation, especially those close to each other.[86]

---

[84] Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection'.

[85] For a study of the geography of early Pachomian monasticism, see Lefort, 'Les premiers monasteres Pachomiens'.

[86] For more, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, passim.

As we have seen, however, there is a multitude of other benefits to keeping copies that have to do with the pedagogical ideals and practices attached to the textual culture of Egyptian monasticism. We have seen that the texts would have been suitable for comparison, for copying and translation practice, studying maxims and gnomic sentences, and were most likely redacted in light of challenges met by new theological trends. Since most of the texts dealt with above contain material that went beyond universally accepted texts like Psalms and the sayings of the desert fathers that the monks were told to memorise, they would most likely have been overseen by more advanced monks. As indicated by the story of Abba Abraham, as well as Pachomius' rule concerning 'the perfect', spiritually developed monks would have been allowed to study these texts even if some would have been classified as potentially dangerous. As suggested by another of the Pachomian rules, we are told that those monks who were gatekeepers of their monasteries' texts should not deny a monk who came asking to read one. However, the hierarchy within the Pachomian monastery was strict and included many levels (possibly up to twenty-four), and more inexperienced readers would have been supported by their elders. These deliberations endorse previous suggestions made by Lundhaug and Jenott that the Nag Hammadi texts would most likely have belonged to a more spiritually developed class of Pachomian monks.[87]

The above considerations are just a small sample of the multitude of interrelations and editorial shifts found among the different Nag Hammadi texts. I have argued that the Pachomian monastic context would fit the many types of textual usage suggested by comparisons of the different copies in the collection. They would have served the monks well in

---

[87] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 180–183.

developing their skills in textual editing and general knowledge of the religious world within which they served.

For our purposes, it is especially interesting to note that among the Nag Hammadi texts we find an extract from a work which in other manuscripts has been identified as belonging to St Antony. It is also found inserted into *The Teachings of Silvanus* in Codex VII.[88] In this extract from the tradition of St Antony, readers are told to remain critical at all times, not to trust vain praise and to guard their secrets. What better way to end this survey of the textual practices that can be attached to the Nag Hammadi copies? Thus, by way of Nag Hammadi Codex VII, here is some advice from St Antony:

> Do not give your sentence using wicked words, for any wicked person harms his heart. For only a foolish person goes willingly to his destruction, while a wise person knows his way. A foolish man does not guard against speaking mystery. A wise man does not throw every word about, but he will evaluate those who listen. Do not throw around words in the presence of those whom you do not know. Keep a multitude of friends, but not counsellors. First, put your counsellor to the test, for do not pay respect to anyone who is persuasive.[89]

Antony's words are echoed in both the Pachomian pedagogical ideal and the advice one would have expected to be directed to

---

[88] This has been shown by Wolf-Peter Funk, 'Ein doppelt überliefertes Stück spätägyptischer Weisheit', *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 103 (1976): 8–21.

[89] NHC VII, *The Teaching of Silvanus* 97:3–22: ⲙ̅ⲡ̅ⲣ̅† ⲛⲟⲩϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲓⲁ ϩ̅ⲛ̅ ⲧⲉⲕⲅ̅ⲛⲱⲙⲏ· ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲟⲥ ⲉϥ̅ⲣ̅ⲃⲗⲁⲡⲧⲉⲓ ⲙ̅ⲡⲉϥϩⲏⲧ· ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛ̅ⲁⲑⲏⲧ ϣⲁϥⲃⲱⲕ ⲟⲩⲁⲁϥ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲡⲉϥϣⲟⲣ̅ϣ̅ⲣ̅ ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̅ⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ ϥⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉϥϩ̅ⲓⲏ· ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̅ⲁⲑⲏⲧ ⲙⲁϥϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ⲉϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ· ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̅ⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ ⲙⲁϥⲛⲉϫ ϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ϥⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̅ⲣⲉϥϥⲉⲱⲣⲓ ⲛ̅ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲱⲧ̅ⲙ̅· ⲙ̅ⲡ̅ⲣ̅ⲛⲉϫ ϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲕϩ̅ⲛ̅ ⲉϩⲟ̅ⲩ̅ ⲉⲛⲉⲧⲕ̅ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲛ· ⲕⲁ ⲟⲩⲙⲏⲏϣⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛ̅ϣⲃⲏⲣ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛ̅ⲣ̅ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ϣⲟϫⲛⲉ ⲁⲛ· ⲁⲣⲓⲇⲟⲅⲓⲙⲁⲍⲉ ⲛ̅ϣⲟⲣ̅ⲡ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲕⲣ̅ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ϣⲟϫⲛⲉ· ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉϣⲁϥⲕⲱⲣ̅ϣ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡ̅ⲣ̅ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲟϥ· My trans., text by Birger A. Pearson, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Pearson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 310, 312.

222

a monk about to undertake the reading of a vast array of texts and ideas such as those presented in the Nag Hammadi collection.[90]

---

[90] The word used for here for 'counsellor' (ϣoϫne) is the same as that associated with the angels described in the cognitive and divine hierarchy in *Eugnostos the Blessed* (Codex V). This is also the word used throughout the Nag Hammadi texts in association with the Demiurge's archons 'taking council' (ϣoϫne) with one another in order to concoct a plan to fool humans. For two examples, see *The Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 19:19–21; 20:23–34); *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II, 89:3; 92:4–9). It was at times hard to distinguish between demons and angels, or a friendly person whose shape a demon had taken to fool you. This is a common theme in monastic literature. In light of this, Antony's advice is particularly relevant for the monks who venture to read texts that threaten to lead them astray.

Conclusion: The Nag Hammadi Codices from a 'Textual Community' Perspective

It is now time to put the different material aspects of the Nag Hammadi texts into a wider context and draw broader conclusions from the explorations above. How are we to understand the many different applications which the material aspects of the texts reflect? To address this question, this concluding chapter gathers the findings of the previous chapters to present a thicker description of a possible social context for daily practices involving the Nag Hammadi texts. In line with anthropological theories about the importance of pedagogy and ritual for identity formation, it will be argued that the texts could have served several roles within a 'community of practice'.

Previous studies have often focused on the individual histories and hypothetical origins of the many different texts before they were translated, copied and placed in a codex in the collection. Since they differ from one another in form, content and origin, many scholars have found it difficult to imagine that they could have been read for spiritual edification within a single community, particularly an orthodox one. But what if we envisage the Nag Hammadi texts within a framework of a community of practice wherein a large number of people depend on each other and work towards common spiritual trajectories, a group with different roles but common goals? One perspective which could cast light on the function of such a disparate collection as this comes from viewing texts as a vital element of 'textual communities'.[1] Texts were,

---

[1] Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Jane Heath, 'Textual Communities: Brian Stock's Concept and

without question, at the heart of early Christian communities; leaders administered the education, interpretations and social regulation of a community by referencing texts. They were not just carriers of information and knowledge, but social tools in the work of authority, identity-making and socialisation. But what was the role of texts that did not become Scripture, or those that some within the community viewed as containing potentially heretical or damaging content? It is this question which the following summary of the previous chapters addresses.

In Chapter 1, I discussed various obstructive paradigms and ideological set-ups that have threatened to obscure study of the Nag Hammadi texts. As many previous scholars have made clear, the term 'Gnosticism' and its attachment to the collection has had a detrimental impact on their study and views of their application and origin. Association with the term has led to pejorative and misleading conclusions, as they have been approached as strange and speculative, representing something other than Christianity. However, on the basis of actual content, it must be concluded that the Nag Hammadi collection comprises mostly Christian texts, while those that are non-Christian were considered relevant by the Christian owners.

Chapter 2 discussed how reception of the collection has been affected by Western prejudices of the Eastern 'Other'. The texts have been romanticised and – again, by way of the concept 'Gnosticism' – attached to preconceived notions regarding the existence of an a priori ancient wisdom narrative. As such, the texts have been subjected to Orientalising interpretations, being portrayed as speculative and contaminated (compared to 'pure Christianity' or 'pure philosophy'). At the other extreme – and equally influenced by Orientalising tendencies – the texts have been celebrated by scholars and contemporary spiritual seekers as

Recent Scholarship on Antiquity', in *Scriptural Interpretation and the Interface between Education and Religion*, ed. F. Wilk (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 5–35.

containing pure and unmitigated spiritual truths with which the 'West' has lost touch. Thus, the reception of the Nag Hammadi texts follows well-known patterns of responses to 'Eastern' religions in the 'West' since the nineteenth century. However, some attempts to approach the texts without preconceived notions regarding the nature of the 'Eastern Other' have spilled over into assessment of the find story attached to the discovery of the texts, which has come under unwarranted critique of late. Some scholars have gone so far as to reject aspects of the find story as Orientalising fiction, including those that tie the texts to the vicinity of early monasticism, which are being questioned on weak grounds and disregarded as a result of overzealous employment of postcolonial theory.

The existence of extracanonical material in a text collection – some of which could have been banned as heretical – does not mean that it could not have been used by people considering themselves representatives of mainstream Christianity. Even though the association with Gnosticism has influenced the portrayal of the history of these texts in erroneous ways, the texts' relation to heresy cannot simply be ignored. Chapters 3 to 7 revealed that those material aspects that were explored all support the hypothesis that the texts were part of a monastic context, most likely a Pachomian one. A study of the texts' history should be informed by negotiations over orthodoxy and the dynamics of Christian identity construction. Throughout history Christians have considered it important to take action against texts considered to contain erroneous views. The need to reject an opponent's thought is especially acute if the views of intra-Christian opponents are similar enough for an outsider to confuse their positions and texts with one's own;[2] texts play important roles in negotiating and strengthening group identity. However, we should not be surprised that it is in the monastic context – one that contributes key factors to creating a strong sense of group identity – that texts could be read which were written

[2] Linjamaa, 'Gnosticism as Inherently Syncretistic?'.

226

by *others*, without risking the authenticity of the reader's group identity. At the same time, the Nag Hammadi texts would most likely not have been mandatory reading for their monastic owners, and probably not even part of most Pachomian monks' reading lists. Reading and studying them, therefore, would have gone some way towards strengthening the feeling of one's individuality within a context where so many aspects of what creates individuality were regulated by the monastic rules.

Yet books and texts also played important roles in the broader context in terms of the changes that took place in the religious landscape of late antiquity, partly reflected in the way books were used for new purposes. As Chapter 1 made clear, taking a broader perspective on early Christian scribal and reading practices indicates that the Nag Hammadi collection must have been produced by and for the direct use of a small educated societal minority, people who were not only literate but also educated and involved in detailed theological deliberations restricted to an intellectual elite. Chapter 3 narrowed this broader reflection by pointing out several untoward features in Nag Hammadi Codex I which indicated that it was produced with elements of impulsiveness and carelessness and which rules out its being a commercial product; it was, rather, copied by and for the direct use of the reader him/herself. The scribal context which makes most sense is that of a monastic one in which a monk without much scribal experience, or one who did not prioritise the assembly of a carefully copied codex, produced the codex while at the same time interacting with what was being copied. These findings support the arguments made by Lundhaug and Jenott[3] that the most viable context which fits these external material features is that of a monastery consisting of readers with eclectic and diverse interests.

In Chapter 4, some of the aspects of the texts that the scribes of Codex I and Codex VIII found of particular interest were elucidated

---

[3] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*.

through an analysis of the scribal markings made in the margin of the texts as they were copied. The short sentences marked out with *diple* and *coronis* signs in the two codices do not deal with one and the same topic, nor should we expect that; but they all deal with topics that a Christian participant in the burgeoning Egyptian monasticism of the time would have found of interest. A Pachomian context is a particularly good fit, as indicated by comparing the topics prominent among Pachomian monks in *The Letter of Ammon*, which contains the themes that are highlighted in the two Nag Hammadi codices with markings in the margins. The marked-out passages deal with the nature of the godhead, the salvific nature of self-knowledge, the differences existing among the peoples on earth, calls to spread the word of God without fear in the world and, lastly, the role some take on by *imitatio Christi*: suffering in an ephemeral body for the sake of teachings about eternal truths.

In Chapter 5, the Pachomian connection was strengthened through an overview of the magical vowel features of the Nag Hammadi texts. Examining the vowel constellations from a material and visual perspective would indicate that they were chiefly used for reference by those who produced and owned them, as they are not highlighted in a manner facilitating access or legibility in a ritual context (as in PGM), which would have suggested that the monks used them as ritual manuals. Pachomius sought to transcend the 'shadow of the exterior world' and used magical letters both in his private spiritual explorations and in the way in which he organised his monasteries. Thus, monks belonging to the monasteries founded in the tradition of Pachomius would undoubtably have found text carrying vowel magical features of great interest.

Exploration of how the Nag Hammadi texts were used concretely by their monastic owners is continued in Chapter 6 by examining the occurrence of sacred symbols in them. The structured way the *nomina sacra* were employed in the Nag Hammadi library indicates

228

that the monks behind the texts were part of the same scribal network; thus, the texts were not produced in separate scribal contexts, only to be brought together at a later time. Even if the codices were not copied in the same monastery, their scribes were most likely in close contact with each other. This is indicated by the fact that the scribes/translators follow similar scribal practices in their use of *nomina sacra*, refraining from abbreviating specific words like God which are usually shortened in Coptic translations from other scribal contexts.

Some of the monks who copied the texts, most notably Scribe A from Codex I, placed considerable stock in the power of the sign of the cross. Coupled with the preoccupation with spiritual combat that is reflected throughout the texts, the sign of the cross makes a strong argument for the claim that these texts were used by monks as protective artefacts. The cross provided the monks with protection, a sense of firmness in the chaotic company of demons whose presence was amplified in the cold and empty desert.

In the last analytic chapter, Chapter 7, a final practical implementation of these eclectic texts was explored from the perspective of monastic pedagogic practices, a setting in which we know texts played key roles. This was done by analysing the appearance of duplicates and triplicates in the collection. There were several pedagogical purposes for producing and keeping duplicates in a monastic library, the most obvious benefit being that they can be read by more than one person at a time. Considering the size of Pachomian monasteries – especially the concentration of them around the area of the find site, each housing several hundred monks at a time – and considering that reading was obligatory for Pachomian monks, it is not unreasonable to imagine that more than one copy of a text was produced to meet a growing demand for a particularly popular work. Most of the texts kept in several copies by these monks were clearly in demand during the fourth century; all of them (except *The Gospel of Truth*) have also been discovered elsewhere, in other Coptic or Greek manuscripts. Given that monks

in all likelihood spoke to each other about what they read (at least to those belonging to the same Pachomian letter group), interest would have spread, leading to copies, redactions and new editions with additions and modifications. In short, it would have been handy to keep more than one copy, especially of particularly popular texts.

The appearance of multiple versions in the collection has been used as the basis for arguing that the texts were not produced in the same context. However, as we saw in Chapter 7, there were a multitude of benefits in keeping copies that went beyond merely allowing more than one person to read a particular text at a time, benefits having to do with the pedagogical ideals and practices attached to the textual culture of Pachomian monasticism. We have seen that the texts would have been suitable for comparison, for copying and translation practice, and for studying maxims and gnomic sentences; redactions were probably the response to the challenges of new theological trends.

As discussed in the introduction, the arguments claiming a Pachomian provenance for the Nag Hammadi texts have been put forward most recently and convincingly by Lundhaug and Jenott, and Bull.[4] Lundhaug and Jenott also argued convincingly that it may be possible to prove that Pachomian monasteries contained a much richer textual array than merely Scripture, most notably apocryphal writings, a category in which the Nag Hammadi texts would most likely have been included. The present study supports their conclusions and has aimed at concretising their findings and offering suggestions as to *how* the texts would have been used. Life in a Pachomian monastery was strictly regulated. Rules meant to help the monks stay on the right path were implemented, and texts played a central part in the carefully structured life. Scripture was to be studied, memorised and

---

[4] Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 234–262; Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection'; Lundhaug, 'Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices'.

contemplated daily. Some monks were tasked with caring for the texts and producing new ones – that is, copying, translating and editing them – but all were called on to study and reflect, even those who did not read well enough to take on advanced tractates and navigate between complex philosophical and theological arguments. Everyone could memorise some passages and reflect on them. But those more intellectually inclined spent more time exploring spiritual pursuits by way of reading texts. It is in this context that the Nag Hammadi collection becomes relevant as theological material meant to be studied, to inspire and to help the monks develop their spiritual acumen. According to the rules of Pachomius himself, 'the perfect', spiritually developed monks, were allowed to study broadly and widely, which in all likelihood would have meant perusing texts such as those of the collection. One monk should not deny another who sought to develop himself spiritually through reading and study. This probably did not mean that there were no regulations. Spiritual guides could help guide less experienced readers. Some texts would have been emended and redacted, and new texts were produced – inspired by previous popular narratives – to meet the needs of new situations, such as changes in theological inclination or demographical transformations within the monasteries. Furthermore, texts were carried as protective artefacts in spiritual warfare against demons, and studied for esoteric and mystical content dealing with the hidden meaning behind sacred words, names and letter combinations. As such, the texts resonated with the hidden structures underlying and surpassing the material realm, a world that the monastic context regularly studied, interpreted and transcended.

In light of the findings of this study, it is not unrealistic to suggest that the Nag Hammadi texts were a very particular part of a much broader library, a section of texts reserved for the spiritual elite. As has been argued by Lundhaug, it is not at all unlikely that the Nag Hammadi codices and the Dishna Papers belonged to the same

group of Pachomian monks.[5] As such, the Nag Hammadi texts would also have been accessible to only the spiritually mature. The broader part of the library, containing biblical texts, the writings of church and monastic fathers, and classical texts – all of which are found in the Dishna Papers – would have been accessed by a broader array of monks, while the Nag Hammadi texts, which, to a large extent, present a more uniform selection of topics – such as dealing with 'demiurgical' matters and the struggle against demons and hazardous spiritual ventures – were meant for those whose spiritual status had reached a maturity that could handle more perilous subjects. That the texts were read and produced by a smaller group within a much larger collective could explain the fact that the Nag Hammadi codices are much more uniform in terms of language, dialect and topic than the Dishna Papers.

This study has explored material aspects of a collection of heterodox texts within a Christian context often associated with orthodoxy. It has provided new contextualisation for the activities of Pachomian monks, as well as new perspectives on how texts with long histories retained their significance in new contexts. As such, this brief look into a 'material history of heresy' has demonstrated some ways in which popular texts and narratives could endure in new environments. The Nag Hammadi collection contains a variety of texts from different religious and historical backgrounds that were retained, brought together and reused for the purpose of developing the spiritual acumen of one and the same group of people. The texts' content must have resonated better with the creative and intellectual approach that certainly characterised the

---

[5] Lundhaug, 'The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices'. Some scribal practices studies also support, for example, the specific usage of *nomina sacra*. As we saw concerning the Nag Hammadi codices, the Coptic word for 'God' or 'Lord' ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ does not seem to be abbreviated as might be expected; see, for example, the Coptic version of Exodus preserved in the Dishna Papers (Codex XII, 11–15). Systematic comparisons still need to be made in order to draw any further conclusions about the relation between the scribal signs used in the Nag Hammadi texts and Dishna Papers.

Pachomian monasteries, as the approach outweighed the restrictions that other Christian communities might have placed on reading and using texts of this kind: communities which did not provide their members with a firm enough sense of communal identity to allow them to explore texts that might threaten the coherence of the group or the legitimacy of its leaders.

Bibliography

Ancient sources are listed by order of author. When author is unknown, the source is listed by order of title or modern name of the collection to which it belongs.

Ancient Authors and Texts

Apophthegmata Patrum (alphabetical collection). Ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae*, vol. LXV. Paris, 1865. Trans. Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection.* Rev. edn with a foreword by Ward. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984.

Apophthegmata Patrum (anonymous collection). Trans. John Wortley, in *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Selected Edition and Complete English Translation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Aristotle. *On Generation and Corruption.* Trans. Frans De Haas and Jaap Mansfeld, in *Aristotle: On Generation and Corruption I Book 1: Symposium Aristotelicum.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Athanasius. *Coptic Life of Antony.* Ed. G. Garitte, in *S. Antonii Vitaw: Versio Sahidica.* Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1949. Trans. Tim Vivian, in *The Coptic Life of Antony.* San Francisco and London: International Scholars Publications, 1995.

Athanasius. *Festal Letters.* Partial trans. David Brakke, in *Athanasius and Asceticism.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Antony.* Ed. G. I. M. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine.* Paris: Cerf, 1994. Trans. Robert T. Meyer, *St Athanasius, The Life of Saint Anthony*, Ancient Christian Writers 10. Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950.

Athanasius. *Syriac Life of Antony*. Trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, in *The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymous and Others*, vol. I. London, 1904, 1–40.

Basil. *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English (A Revised Critical Edition)*. Ed. and trans. Anna M. Silvas. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013.

Bible: The New Revised Standard Version. Ed. and trans. Bruce M. Metzger et al. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymous and Others. Trans. E. A. Wallis Budge. 2 vols. London, 1904.

The Book of the Resurrection by Bartholomew the Apostle. Trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, in *Coptic Apocrypha*. London, 1913.

The Books of Jeu. Ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. V. MacDermot, in *The Books of Jeu and The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*. Leiden: Brill, 1978.

Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata*. Ed. L. Früchtel et al., in *Clemens Alexandrinus. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*, vols. 15 and 52. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960, 1970. Trans. William Wilson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951 [1885].

Corpus Hermeticum. Trans. Brian P. Copenhaver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Cyprian. *Testimonies*. Trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

Epiphanius. *Panarion*. Trans. Frank Williams, in *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book 1, Sects 1–46*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Epistle of Barnabas. Trans. James A. Kleist. New York: Paulist Press, 1948.

Evagrius. *Antirrhetikos*. Trans. David Brakke, in *Talking Back*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009.

Evagrius. *Eight Spirits of Wickedness*. Trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Evagrius. *Kephalaia Gnostika*. Trans. Ilaria L. E. Ramelli. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013.

Excerpta ex Theodoto. Ed. and trans. Robert Pierce Casey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934.

The Greek Life of Pachomius. Ed. François Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932.

The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells, vol. I: *Texts*. Ed. and trans. Hans Dieter Betz. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Irenaeus of Lyon. *Against Heresies*. Ed. W. Wigan Harvey, 2 vols. Rochester: St. Irenaeus Press, 2013. Trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.

Jerome. *Letters*. Trans. Charles Christopher Mierow. New York: Paulist Press, 1963.

John Chrysostom. *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life*. Trans. David G. Hunter. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.

John Chrysostom. *An Encomium on John the Baptist by John Chrysostom*. Trans. E. A Wallis Budge, in *Coptic Apocrypha*, ed. Budge. London, 1913.

John Chrysostom. *Homilies on John*. Trans. Charles Marriott, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIV, ed. Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889.

Justin. *First and Second Apology*. Trans. Leslie William Barnard. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Lactantius. *The Divine Institutes*. Trans. William Fletcher, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

The Letter of Ammon. Trans. J. E. Goehring, in *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986.

Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices. Ed. Harold Attridge. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7. Ed. Bentley Layton, vol. I. Leiden and New York: Brill, 1989.

Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1. Ed. Douglas M. Parrott. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2. Ed. Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse. Leiden: Brill, 1975.

Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI,1: With Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4. Ed. Douglas M. Parrott. Leiden: Brill, 1979.

Nag Hammadi Codex VII. Ed. Birger A. Pearson. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Nag Hammadi Codex VIII. Ed. John H. Sieber. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Nag Hammadi Codices X and IX. Ed. Birger A. Pearson. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII. Ed. C. W. Hedrick. Leiden: Brill, 1990.

Origen. *Against Celsus*. Ed. Marcel Borret, 4 vols. Paris: Cerf, 1967–1969. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Origen. *Peri Archon*. Ed. and trans. J. Behr, in *Origen: On First Principles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Orphic Hymns. Ed. Gottfried Hermann. Leipzig: Fritsch, 1805. Trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis. Chicago: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Ed. and trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916.

Pachomian Koinonia. Trans. Armand Veilleux, 3 vols. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982.

Palladius. *Lausiac History*. Trans. from Syriac by E. A. Wallis Budge, in *The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert*, ed. Budge, vol. I. London, 1904.

Poimandres. Trans. Walter Scott, in *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, ed. Scott. Oxford: Clarendon, 1924–1936.

Philo. *On Abraham*. Ed. and trans. F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.

Philo. *On the Contemplative Life*. Ed. and trans. Joan E. Taylor and David M. Hay. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Philo. *On the Creation: Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*. Trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library. London: Harvard University Press 1929.

Plato. *Alchibiades*. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library 201. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.

Plato. *Laws*. Ed. and trans. R. G. Bury, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Plato. *The Republic*. Ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library 166. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.

Plato. *Theaetetus*. Ed. and trans. Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921.

Plato. *Timaeus*. Ed. and trans. R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929.

Prophecy of Apa Charour. Ed. Louis Théophile Lefort, *Oeuvres de S. Pachome et de ses disciples*, vol. I. Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956.

Refutation of All Heresies. Trans. David Litwa. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016.

Shenoute. *On Monastic Vows*. Ed. and trans. Janet Timbie, in 'The Education of Shenoute and Other Cenobitic Leaders: Inside and Outside the Monastery', in *Education and Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Gemeinhardt, L. van Hoof and P. van Nuffelen. Farnham: Ashgate, 2016, 34–46.

Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta. Ed. Hans von Arnim, 3 vols. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1903–1905, vol. IV, ed. Maximilian Adler. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1924. Trans. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Tertullian. *Adversus Marcionem*. Ed. and trans. Ernest Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Tertullian. *De Corona*. Trans. E. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.

The Tripartite Tractate. Ed. and trans. Harold W. Attridge and Elaine Pagels, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introduction, Text, Translation, Indices*, ed. Harold W. Attridge. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

Vita Prima. Ed. Francisci Halkin, in *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae.* Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932. Trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis, in *The Life of Pachomius: Vita Prima Graeca*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975.

Zostrianos. Ed. Bentley Layton, trans. John H. Sieber, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Secondary Literature

Allen, T. W. *Codex Oxoniensis Clarkianus*, 2 vols. Leiden, 1898–1899.

Ammar, Hamed. *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village*. London: Routledge, 2002 [1954].

Andrews, E. 'Gift of Tongues', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. K. R. Crim and G. A. Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, vol. IV, 67172.

Aune, David E. *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Baarda, Tjitze. *Essays on the Diatessaron*. Leuven: Peeters, 1994.

Bagnall, Roger. *Early Christian Books in Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Bagnall, Roger. *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Balogh, Josef. '*Voces Paginarum*: Beiträge Zur Geschichte des lauten Lesens und Schreibens', *Philologus* 82 (1927): 84–109.

Barbour, Ruth. *Greek Literary Hands AD 400–600*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Barns, John W. B. 'Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Preliminary Report', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause. Leiden: Brill, 1975, 9–18.

Barns, John W. B., Gerald M. Browne and John C. Shelton (eds.). *The Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

Ben Nefissa, Sarah. 'The "Haqq el-Arab": Conflict Resolution and Distinctive Features of Legal Pluralism in Contemporary Egypt', in *Legal Pluralism in the Arab World*, ed. B. Dupret, M. Berger and L. al-Zwaini. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1999, 145–158.

Berglund, Carl Johan. *Origen's References to Heracleon: A Quotation-Analytical Study of the Earliest Known Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020.

Blackman, Winifred S. *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000 [1927].

Brakke, David. *Athanasius and Asceticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Brakke, David. *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Brakke, David. *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Brix, Katrine. 'Two Witnesses, One Valentinian Gospel? The Gospel of Truth in Nag Hammadi Codices I and XII', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 126–145.

van den Broek, Roelof. 'The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus', *Vigiliae Christianae* 40:1 (1986): 1–23.

Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1988.

Brown, Peter. *Journeys of the Mind: A Life in History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Brown, Peter. 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church', in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff. New York: Crossroad, 1985, 427–443.

Brown, Peter. *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Brown, Peter. *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*. London: Harper and Row, 1972.

Brown, Peter, G. W. Bowersock and Oleg Grabar (eds.). *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

de Bruyn, Theodore. *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Bryant, John. 'Witness and Access: The Uses of the Fluid Text', *Textual Cultures* 2:1 (2007): 16–42.

Buell, Denise Kimber. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Bull, Christian. 'The Great Demon of the Air and the Punishment of Souls: *The Perfect Discourse* (NHC VI,8) and Hermetic and Monsatic Demonologies', in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? / Nag*

Hammadi at 70: What Have We Learned? ed. Eric Crégheur, Louis Painchaud and Tuomas Rasimus. Leuven: Peeters, 2019, 105–120.

Bull, Christian. 'An Origenistic Reading of Plato in Nag Hammadi Codex VI', in *Studia Patristica LXXV*, vol. I: *Studia Patristica – Platonism and the Fathers – Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Markus Vinzent. Leuven: Peeters, 2017, 31–40.

Bull, Christian. 'The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th Cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology*, ed. Paola Buzi. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020, 133–147.

Bull, Christian. *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus: The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Bull, Christian. 'Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in the *Apocryphon of John* and Its Monastic Manuscript-Context', in *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, ed. Ulla Tervahauta, Ivan Miroshnikov, Outi Lehtipuu and Ismo Dunderberg. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 75–107.

Burkert, Walter. *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burns, Dylan M. *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

Burns, Dylan M. 'The Apocalypse of Zostrianos and Iolaos: A Platonic Reminiscence of the Heracleidae at NHC VIII,1.4', *Le Muséon* 126:1–2 (2013): 29–43.

Burns, Dylan M. 'Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories', *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45:1 (2016): 5–11.

Camplani, Alberto. 'In margine alla storia dei Meliziani', *Augustinianum* 30:2 (1990): 313–351.

Camplani, Alberto. 'Un episodio della ricezione del ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ in Egitto: Note di eresiologia Shenutiana', in *Il dono e la sua ombra: Ricerche sul di Origene: Atti del I Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su 'Origene e la Traditione Alessandrina'*, ed. F. Cocchini. Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1997, 159–172.

Camplani, Alberto. 'Momenti di interazione religiosa ad Alessandria e la nascita dell'élite egiziana cristiana', in *Origeniana octava: Origen and the*

Alexandrian Tradition (Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 27–31 August 2001), vol. I, ed. L. Perrone. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003, 31–42.

Choat, Malcolm. 'Gnostic Elements in Ancient Magical Papyri', in *The Gnostic World*, ed. G. W. Trompf, G. B. Mikkelsen and J. Johnston. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019, 217–224.

Clark, Elizabeth. *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Cooper, John (ed.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Coutsoumpos, Panayotis. 'The Strong/Gnosis: Paul, and the Corinthian Community', in *Paul and Gnosis*, ed. S. Porter and D. Yoon. Leiden: Brill, 2016, 188–208.

Cribiore, Raffaella. *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Cribiore, Raffaella, Paola Davoli and D. M. Ratzan. 'A Teacher's Dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 21:1 (2008): 169–191.

Crum, Walter. E. *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*. London: British Museum, 1905.

Dechow, Jon F. 'The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies (with Appendix 2015)', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 11–51.

Del Barco, Javier. 'From Scroll to Codex: Dynamics of Text Layout Transformation in the Hebrew Bible', in *From Scrolls to Scrolling*, ed. B. A. Anderson. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, 91–118.

Denzey Lewis, Nicola. *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Denzey Lewis, Nicola. *Introduction to 'Gnosticism': Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Denzey Lewis, Nicola and Justine Ariel Blount. 'Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133:2 (2014): 399–419.

Dibelius, Martin. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1971 [1934].

Dillon, John. *The Middle Platonists: 80 BC to 220*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Dodds, E. R. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Doresse, Jean. *L'Évangile selon Thomas ou les paroles de Jésus: Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypte.* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959.

Doresse, Jean. *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Leonard Johnston. London: Hollis & Carter, 1960 [1952].

Doresse, Jean. 'Sur les traces des papyrus gnostiques: Recherches à Chenoboskion', *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres*, 36:5 (1950): 432–439.

Drieskens, Barbara. 'A Cairene Way of Reconciling', *Islamic Law and Society* 13:1 (2006): 99–122.

Dubois, Jean-Daniel. 'Les titres du codex I (Jung) de Nag Hammadi', in *La formation des canons scripturaires*, ed. Michel Tardieu. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993, 219–235.

Dubois, Jean-Daniel. 'Le "Traité tripartite" (Nag Hammadi I, 5) est-il antérieur à Origène?' in *Origeniana octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition (Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 27–31 August 2001)*, vol. I, ed. L. Perrone. Leuven: Peeters, 2003, 303–316.

Dunderberg, Ismo. *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Dunderberg, Ismo. *Gnostic Morality Revisited*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015.

Ehrman, Bart. *Forged: Writing in the Name of God: Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011.

Ehrman, Bart and Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Emmel, Stephen. 'Announcement', *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 14 (1977): 56–57.

Emmel, Stephen. 'The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions', in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey,

Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, 33–49.

Emmel, Stephen. 'Exploring the Pathway that leads from Paul to Gnosticism: What is the Genre of The Interpretation of Knowledge [NHC XI, 1]?', in *Die Weisheit: Ursprünge und Rezeption*, ed. M. Fassnacht et al. Münster: Aschendorff, 2003, 257–762.

Emmel, Stephen. 'The Nag Hammadi Codices Editing Project: A Final Report', *ARCE Newsletter* 104 (1978): 10–32.

Ensley, Eddie. *Sounds of Wonder: Speaking in Tongues in the Catholic Tradition*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.

Falkenberg, René. 'The Making of a Secret Book of John: NHC III in Light of New Philology', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 105–109.

Falkenberg, René. 'What Has Nag Hammadi to Do with Medinet Madi? The Case of Eugnostos and Manichaeism', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 261–286.

Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.

Foucault, Michel. 'The Ethics of the Concern for the Self', in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1996 [1984].

Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros. Paris: Gallimard, 2018.

Funk, Wolf-Peter. 'Ein doppelt überliefertes Stück spätägyptischer Weisheit', *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 103 (1976): 8–21.

Funk, Wolf-Peter. 'The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codicies', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995), 107–147.

Funk, Wolf-Peter, Louis Painchaud and Einar Thomassen, *L'interprétation de la gnose: NH XI, 1*. Québec: Peeters, 2010.

Gamble, Harry Y. 'The Pauline Corpus and the Early Christian Book', in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990, 265–280.

Gamble, Harry Y. *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Gardner, Ian. 'The Sethian Context to a Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power (= P. Macquarie I)', in *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. T. Derda, A. Łajtar and J. Urbanik. Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2016, 755–766.

Gavrilov, A. K. 'Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity', *Classical Quarterly* 47:1 (1997): 56–73.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Religion of Java*. Chicago: Glencoe Free Press, 1960.

Gilhus, Ingvild S. *Clothes and Monasticism in Ancient Christian Egypt*. London: Routledge, 2021.

Given, Gregory. 'Four Texts from Nag Hammadi amid the Textual and Generic Fluidity of the 'Letter' in Late Antique Egypt', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 201–220.

Goehring, James E. 'An Early Roman Bowl from the Monastery of Pachomius at Pbow and the Milieu of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poiries. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006, 357–371.

Goehring, James E. *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986.

Goehring, James E. 'New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 236–257.

Goehring, James E. 'Producing Pachomius: The Role of Lower Egypt in the Creation, Reception, and Adaptation of the Pachomian Vita Tradition', in *Wisdom on the Move: Late Antique Traditions in Multicultural Conversation*, ed. S. Ashbrook Harvey, T. Arentzen, H. Rydell Johnsén and A. Westergren. Leiden: Brill, 2020, 35–53.

Goehring, James E. 'The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More', in *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1999*, ed. Maurice F. Wiles and Edward Y. Yarold. Leuven: Peeters, 2001, 234–253.

Goodacre, Mark. 'How Reliable Is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35:4 (2013): 303–322.

Grayeff, Felix. 'The Problem of the Genesis of Aristotle's Text', *Phronesis* 1:2 (1956): 105–122.

Greer, Rowan. 'The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus' View on the Valentinians Assessed', in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol I: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton. Leiden: Brill, 1980, 146–175.

Haines-Eitzen, Kim. *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Hallowell, Irving A. 'Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View', in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. S. Diamond. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 19–52.

Hanegraaff, Wouter. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Hanson, Ann. 'Ancient Literacy', in *Literacy in the Roman Word*, ed. J. L. Humphrey. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991, 159–198.

von Harnack, Adolf. *History of Dogma I*, trans. Neil Buchman. New York: Dover Publishing, 1961 [1886–1889].

Harris, William. *Ancient Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Harrison, Carol. *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

af Hällström, Gunnar. *Fides Simpliciorum according to Origen of Alexandria*. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1984.

Heath, Jane. 'Textual Communities: Brian Stock's Concept and Recent Scholarship on Antiquity', in *Scriptural Interpretation and the Interface between Education and Religion*, ed. F. Wilk. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 5–35.

Hedrick, Charles W. 'Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the "Sitz im Leben" of the Nag Hammadi Library', *Novum Testamentum* 22:1 (1980): 78–96.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1: *Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E. S. Haldane. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1822–1830].

Helderman, Jan. *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis*. Leiden: Brill, 1984.

Helderman, Jan. 'Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?', in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, ed. M. Krause. Leiden: Brill 1981, 26–46.

Hill, Charles E. 'Irenaeus, the Scribes, and the Scriptures: Papyrological and Theological Observations from P.Oxy 3.405', in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. S. Parvis and P. Foster. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012, 119–130.

Hill, Charles E. '"The Truth above All Demonstration": Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine', in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016, 43–88.

Hornborg, Anne-Christine. 'Objects as Subjects: Agency, and Performativity in Rituals', in *The Relational Dynamics of Enchantment and Sacralization*, ed. Måns Broo, Tuija Hovi, Peik Ingman and Terhi Utriainen. Bristol, CT: Equinox, 27–44.

Hurtado, Larry. *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.

Hurtado, Larry. 'The Staurogram in Early Christian Manuscripts: The Earliest Visual Reference to the Crucified Jesus?', in *New Testament Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas Kraus. Leiden: Brill, 2008, 207–226.

Iricinschi, Eduard and Chrysi Kotsifou (eds.). *Coping with Religious Change in the Late-Antique Eastern Mediterranean*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.

Jenott, Lance. *The Gospel of Judas: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of 'The Betrayer's Gospel'* . Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.

Jenott, Lance and Elaine Pagels. 'Antony's Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18:4 (2010): 557–589.

Joest, Christoph. 'Die Pachomanische Geheimschrift im Spiegel der Hieronymus-übersetzung', *Le Muséon* 112:1–2 (1999): 21–46.

Joest, Christoph. 'Erneute Erwägungen zur Chronologie Pachoms (287–347)', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 13 (2011): 157–181.

Joest, Christoph. 'Prinzipien der Entschlüsselung von Pachoms, "Geheimschrift"', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 24 (2022): 181–201.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.

247

Johnson, William A. 'Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity', *The American Journal of Philology* 121:4 (2000): 593–627.

Jonas, Hans. *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vols. I–II. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1954.

Kalvesmaki, Joel. 'Italian versus Eastern Valentinianism?', *Vigiliae Christianae* 62:1 (2008): 79–89.

Kalvesmaki, Joel. 'Pachomius and the Mystery of the Letters', in *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, ed. Blake Leyerle and Robin Darling Young. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, 11–28.

Kasser, Rodolphe. *Tractatus Tripartitus, Pars I–III*. Bern: Fracke Verlag, 1973.

Karter, R. A. *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Keith, Chris. *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Khosroyev, Alexandr. *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Problem des Christentums in Ägypten währden der ersten Jahrhunderte*. Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995.

King, Karen. *What Is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2003.

Kingsley, Peter. *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

van Koote, Geurt Hendrik. *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

Kotansky, Roy D. 'The Magic "Crucifixion Gem" in the British Museum', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57:3 (2017): 631–659.

Kotrosits, Maia. 'Romance and Danger at Nag Hammadi', *The Bible and Critical Theory* 8:1 (2012): 39–52.

Krause, Martin. 'Der Erlassbrief des Theodore', in *Studies Presented to Hans Jacob Polotsky*, ed. Dwight W. Young. East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981, 220–38.

Krutzsch, Myriam and Günther Poethke, 'Der Einband des kopitsch-gnostischen Kodex Berolinensis 8502', in *Festschrift zum 150 jährigen*

Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums, ed. G. Poethke, U. Luft and S. Wenig. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974, 315–322.

Lampe, G. W. H. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Lane Fox, Robin. 'Literacy and Power in Early Christianity', in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 126–148.

Larsen, Lilian I. '"Excavating the Excavations" of Early Monastic Education', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical Paideia*, ed. Lilian I. Larsen and Samuel Rubenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 101–124.

Larsen, Lilian I. '"On Learning a New Alphabet": The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander', in *Studia Patristica 55: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent. Leuven: Peeters, 2013, 59–77.

Larsen, Lilian I. 'Monastic Paideia: Textual Fluidity in the Classroom', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 146–177.

Larsen, Lilian I. and Samuel Rubenson (eds.). *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical 'Paideia'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Layton, Bentley. *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd edn. Ed. Bentley Layton and David Brakke. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

Layton, Bentley. 'Introduction to Codex VIII', in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. J. H. Sieber. Leiden: Brill, 1991, 3–5.

Lefort, Louis Théophile. 'Les premiers monasteres Pachomiens: Exploration topographique', *Le Museon* 52 (1939): 379–407.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*. Trans. Barbara Harshav and Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000 [1993].

Lied, Liv Ingeborg and Hugo Lundhaug (eds.). *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'The Diminishing Importance of Fate and Divine Femininity during the High and Late Roman Empire', *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 57:1 (2021): 81–121.

Linjamaa, Paul. *The Ethics of* The Tripartite Tractate *(NHC I,5): A Study of Early Christian Determinism and Philosophy of Ethics*. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'The Female Figures and Fate in *The Interpretation of Knowledge*, NHC XI,I', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24:1 (2016): 29–54.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'Gnosticism as Inherently Syncretistic? Identity Constructions among Ancient Christians and Protestant Apologetes', in *Theological and Philosophical Responses to Syncretism: Beyond the Mirage of Pure Religion*, ed. Mika Vähäkangas and Patrik Fridlund. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 25–40.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'Nag Hammadi Codex I as a Protective Artifact and an Accidental Multi-Quire Codex', in *The Scriptural Universe of Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanuel Grypeou. Madrid and Salamanca: Editorial Sindéresis/Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 2021, 105–126.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'The Reception of *Pistis Sophia* and Gnosticism: Uncovering the Link Between Esoteric Milieus and Contemporary Academia', *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 22:1 (2022): 1–39.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'Review: H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*', *Patristica Nordica Annuaria* 31 (2016): 143–147.

Linjamaa, Paul. 'Why Monks Read the Tripartite Tractate: A New Look at the Codicology of Nag Hammadi Codex I', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Christian Bull. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023, 223–253.

Logan, Alastair. *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult*. London: T&T Clark, 2006.

Logan, Alastair. 'The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 51:2 (1997): 188–206.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts: A Multi-Methodological Approach Including New Radiocarbon Evidence', in *Texts in Context: Essays on Dating and Contextualising Christian Writings of the Second and Early Third*

Century, ed. Jos Verheyden, Jens Schröter and Tobias Nicklas. Leuven: Peeters, 2021, 117–142.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices: The Remains of a Single Monastic Library?', in *The Nag Hammadi Library and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 329–386.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'The Dissemination of Religious Knowledge through Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries', in *The Use and Dissemination of Religious Knowledge in Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser and Diana V. Edelman. Sheffield: Equinox, 2021, 212–233.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'The Fluid Transmission of Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries', in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th Cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology*, ed. Paola Buzi. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020, 213–227.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'An Illusion of Textual Stability', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 20–54.

Lundhaug, Hugo. *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and the Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. Dylan M. Burns and Matthew J. Goff. Leiden: Brill, 2022, 107–143.

Lundhaug, Hugo. 'Textual Fluidity and Post-Nicene Rewriting in the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? / Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have We Learned?*, ed. Eric Crégheur, Louis Painchaud and Tuomas Rasimus. Leuven: Peeters, 2019, 47–67.

Lundhaug, Hugo and Christian Bull (eds.). *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023.

Lundhaug, Hugo and Lance Jenott. *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015.

Lundhaug, Hugo and Lance Jenott (eds.). *The Nag Hammadi Library and Late Antique Egypt*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Lundhaug, Hugo and Lance Jenott. 'Production, Distribution and Ownership of Books in the Monasteries of Upper Egypt: The Evidence

of the Nag Hammadi Colophons', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical* Paideia, ed. Lillian I. Larsen and Samuel Rubenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 306–335.

Lundhaug, Hugo and Liv Ingeborg Lied. 'Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Lied and Lundhaug. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 1–19.

Mack, Burton. *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973.

McMahan, David L. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008

Magnusson, Jörgen. 'The Gospel of Truth as the Gospel of the Saved Saviors: Gnosis from Daily Life to Cosmic Enlightenment', *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 6:1 (2021): 31–48.

Markschies, Christoph. *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992.

Markschies, Christoph. 'What Ancient Christian Manuscripts Reveal about Reading (and about Non-Reading)', in *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures*, ed. A. Krauß, J. Leipziger and F. Schücking-Jungblut. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, 197–216.

Marrou, Henri Irénée. *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956.

Martin, Dale. *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Marvin Meyer, Richard Smith and Neal Kelsey (eds.). *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Mazur, Alexander J. *The Platonizing Sethian Background of Plotinus's Mysticism*, rev. edn, ed. Dylan M. Burns, Kevin Corrigan, Ivan Miroshnikov, Tuomas Rasimus and John D. Turner. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Meyer, Marvin (ed.). *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.

Miosi, Terry. '*Nomina Sacra* and the Nag Hammadi Library', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies, Toronto, Canada, May 2013.

Montserrat-Torrents, Joseph. 'The Social and Cultural Setting of the Coptic Gnostic Library', in *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E. A. Livingstone. Leuven: Peeters, 1995, 464–481.

More, Henry. *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches Together with a Brief Discourse of Idolatry, with Application to the Church of Rome*. London: James Flesher, 1669.

Muc, Agnieszka. 'Some Remarks on the Egyptian Monastic Dress in the Context of Literary Sources and Funerary Finds', *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 13 (2009): 183–188.

Muehlberger, Ellen. *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Mugridge, Alan. *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

Nichols, Stephen G. 'The New Philology: Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum* 65:1 (1990): 1–10.

Nielsen, H. C. K. 'Négotiation et écriture: A propos du droit coutumier en Haute-Egypte', *Egypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 155–165.

Nilsson, Johan. 'As a Fire beneath the Ashes: The Quest for Chinese Wisdom within Occultism, 1850–1949'. PhD diss., Lund University, 2020.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969 [1887].

Nongbri, Brent. 'Finding Early Christian Books at Nag Hammadi and Beyond', *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45 (2016): 11–19.

Nongbri, Brent. *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

Norman, A. F. 'The Book Trade in Fourth-Century Antioch', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 80 (1960): 122–126.

Norton, David L. *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Nurit Bird-David. '"Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology* 40 (1999): 67–79.

Oeyen, Christian. 'Fragmente einer subachmimischen Version der gnostischen "Schrift ohne Titel"', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause. Leiden: Brill, 1975, 125–144.

Oliver, Paul. *Hinduism and the 1960s: The Rise of a Counter-Culture*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Orlandi, Tito. 'A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenoute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi', *Harvard Theological Review* 75:1 (1982): 85–95.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of The Pauline Letters*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1975.

Pagels, Elaine. 'Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*', in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen King. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1988, 187–206.

Pagels, Elaine. 'A Valentinian Exposition: Introduction', in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C. H. Hedrick. Leiden: Brill, 1990, 89–105.

Painchaud, Louis. 'The Literal Contacts between the Writing without Title *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5 and XIII,2) and *Eugnostos the Blessed* (CG III,3 and V,1)', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 1114:1 (1995): 81–101.

Painchaud, Louis. 'The Production and Destination of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Painchaud, Louis and Michael Kaler. 'From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* to the *Three Steles of Seth*: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as Collection', *Vigiliae Christianae* 61:4 (2007): 445–469.

Pearson, Birger A. *Ancient Gnosticism: Tradition and Literature*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.

Peterson, Herman A. 'The Genesis of Monastic Libraries', *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 45:3 (2010): 320–332.

Perkins, Pheme. 'On the Origin of the World (CG II, 5): A Gnostic Physics', *Vigiliae Christianae* 34:1 (1980): 36–46.

Pinch, Geraldine. *Egyptian Mythology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Plisch, Uwe-Karsten. *Die Auslegung der Erkenntnis (Nag-Hammadi-Codex XI,1)*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996.

Quecke, Hans. *Die Briefe Pachoms*. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974.

Ramelli, Ilaria L. E. *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Rasimus, Tuomas. *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Reichmann, Felix. 'The Book Trade at the Time of the Roman Empire', *Library Quarterly* 8:1 (1938): 40–76.

Reynolds, L. D. and N. G. Wilson. *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Roberts, Colin H. 'The Codex', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 40 (1954): 169–204.

Roberts, Colin H. *Greek Literary Hands 350 BC–AD 400*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

Roberts, Colin H. and Theodore C. Skeat. *The Birth of the Codex*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Robinson, James M. 'The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honor of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause. Leiden: Brill, 1975, 170–190.

Robinson, James M. *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.

Robinson, James M. *The Nag Hammadi Story: From the Discovery to the Publication*, 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Robinson, James M. 'On the Codicology of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Les textes des Nag Hammadi (Colloque du Centre d'Historie des Religions, Strasbourg 23–25 October 1974)*, ed J.-É. Ménard and M. Krause. Leiden: Brill, 1975, 15–31.

Robinson, James M. (ed.). *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Introduction, Cartonage, Codex I–XIII*. Leiden: Brill, 1972–1984.

Robinson, James M. and Bastiaan van Elderen. 'The First Season of the Nag Hammadi Excavation: 27 November–19 December 1975', *Newsletter (American Research Center in Egypt)* 14 (1976): 19–21.

Roig Lanzillotta, Lautaro. 'A Way of Salvation: Becoming Like God in Nag Hammadi', *Numen* 60 (2013): 71–102.

Römer, Eva Cornelia. 'Manichaeism and Gnosticism in the Papyri', in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. R. Bagnall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 623–643.

Roth, Dieter T. *The Text of Marcion's Gospel*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Rousseau, Pierre. *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Rubenson, Samuel. 'Antony and Ammonas, Conflicting or Common Tradition in Early Egyptian Monasticism?', in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T. B. Sailors and A. Toepel. Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2011, 185–202.

Rubenson, Samuel. 'Origen in the Egyptian Monastic Tradition of the Fourth Century', in *Origeniana Septima: Origen in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*. ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg. Leuven: Peeters, 1999, 319–337.

Rubenson, Samuel. 'Why Did the Origenist Controversy Begin? Re-thinking the Standard Narratives', *Modern Theology* 38:2 (2022): 318–337.

Rydell Johnsén, Henrik. 'Renunciation, Reorientation and Guidance: Patterns in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy', *Studia Patristica 55:3: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011*, ed. M. Vinzent and S. Rubenson. Leuven: Peeters, 2013, 76–94.

Rydell Johnsén, Henrik. 'The Virtue of Being Uneducated: Attitudes toward Classical *Paideia* in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy', in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical Paideia*, ed. L. Larsen and S. Rubenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 219–235.

Saenger, Paul. *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Samuelsson, Gunnar. *Crucifixion in Antiquity: An Inquiry into the Background and Significance of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Sarah Richmond. London: Routledge, 2003 [1943].

Schenke, Hans-Martin. 'Zum sogenannten Tractatus Tripartitus des Codex Jung', *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 105 (1978): 133–141.

Schenke, Hans-Martin. *Das Philippus-Evagelium: Nag-Hammadi Codex II, 3*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984.

Schopen, Gregory. 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism', *History of Religions* 31:1 (1991): 1–23.

Scholten, Clemens. 'Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 31 (1988): 144–172.

Schroeder, Caroline T. *Children and Family in Late Antique Egyptian Monasticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Segal, Robert L. (ed.). *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Philosophy and Contemporary Culture*. London: Open Court, 1999.

Sieber, John H. 'Introduction to Zostrianos', in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. Sieber. Leiden: Brill, 1991, 7–28.

Smith, Geoffrey. 'Anti-Origenist Redaction in the Fragments of the Gospel of Truth (NHC XII,2): Theological Controversy and the Transmission of Early Christian Literature', *Harvard Theological Review* 110:1 (2017): 46–74.

Smith, Geoffrey. 'Constructing a Christian Universe: Mythological Exegesis of Ben Sira 24 and John's Prologue in the *Gospel of Truth*', in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Jenott and S. Kattan Gribetz. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, 64–84.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Drudgery Divine: On Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 'Here, There and Anywhere', in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, 323–339.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Smith, Morton. 'The History of the term Gnostikos', in *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton. Leiden: Brill, 1981, 796–807.

Snyder, H. Gregory. 'The Discovery and Interpretation of the Flavia Sophe Inscription: New Results', *Vigiliae Christianae* 68:1 (2014): 1–59.

Starr, Raymond J. 'The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World', *Classical Quarterly* 37:1 (1987): 213–223.

Stefaniw, Blossom. 'Of Sojourners and Soldiers: Demonic Violence in the Letters of Antony and the Life of Antony', in *Social Control in Late*

Antiquity: The Violence of Small Worlds, ed. K. Cooper and J. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 232–255.

Stock, Brian. *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Stroumsa, Guy. *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity*. Trans. Susan Emanuel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009 [2005].

Stroumsa, Guy. *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Säve-Söderberg, Torgny. 'Holy Scripture or Apologetic Documentation? The "Sitz im Leben" of the Nag Hammadi Library', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque du Centre d'Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23–25 octobre 1974)*, ed. J. E. Menard. Leiden: Brill, 1975, 3–14.

Thompson, J. W. *Ancient Libraries*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1940.

Thomassen, Einar. 'The Interpretation of Knowledge', in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer. New York: HarperOne, 2007, 651–662.

Thomassen, Einar. *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* . Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Thomassen, Einar. 'The Tripartite Tractate from Nag Hammadi'. PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1982.

Thomassen, Einar and Louis Painchaud. *Le traité tripartite: (NH I,5)*. Québec: Le Presses de l'Université Laval, 1989.

Till, Walter. *Das Evangelium Nach Philippos*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963.

Tite, Philip. 'An Exploration of Valentinian Paraenesis: Rethinking Gnostic Ethics in the 'Interpretation of Knowledge' [NHC XI,1]', *Harvard Theological Review* 97:3 (2004): 275–304.

Traube, Ludwig. *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kurzung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967 [1907].

Treu, Kurt. 'P. Berl. 8502: Christiliches Empfehlungsschhriben aus dem Einband des kopitsch-gnostischen Kodex P.8502', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 28 (1982): 53–54.

Turner, Eric G. *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, 2nd edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987 [1971].

Turner, Eric G. *Greek Papyri: An Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1968].

Turner, Eric G. *The Typology of the Early Codex*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977.

Turner, John D. 'From Baptismal Vision to Mystical Union with the One: The Case of the Sethian Gnostics', in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, ed. A. D. DeConick, G. Shaw and J. D. Turner. Leiden: Brill, 2013, 411–431.

Turner, John D. 'Introduction to Codex XIII', in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C. W. Hedrick. Leiden: Brill, 1990, 360–369.

Tutty, Paula. 'Books of the Dead or Books *with* the Dead?', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 287–326.

Tutty, Paula. 'The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Contextualising a Fourth Century Monastic Community'. PhD diss., Faculty of Theology, Oslo, 2019.

Tzamalikos, Panayiotis. *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Van Lindt, Paul. 'The Religious Terminology in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Manichaean Literature', in *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions: Proceedings of the International Conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, September 19–24, 1995, on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery*, ed. Søren Giversen, Tage Petersen and Jørgen Podemann Sørensen. Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2002, 191–198.

Veilleux, Armand. 'Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 271–306.

Versnell, H. S. 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38:2 (1991): 177–197.

Waldstein, Michael and Frederik Wisse (eds.). *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1 and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.

Wasserman, Tommy and Jennifer Knust. *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Watts, Edward. 'Education: Speaking, Thinking, and Socializing', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Fitzgerald Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 467–486.

Weiss, Herold. *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.

Williams, Michael A. *The Immovable Race: Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

Williams, Michael A. 'Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Collection(s) in the History of "Gnosticism(s)"', in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier. Québec and Paris: Peeters, 1995, 3–50.

Williams, Michael A. *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Williams, Michael A. and David Coblentz. 'A Reexamination of the Articulation Marks in the Nag Hammadi Codices II and XIII', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 427–456.

Williams, Michael A. and Lance Jenott. 'Inside the Covers of the Codex VI', in *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006, 1025–1052.

Wipszycka, Ewa. 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist Point of View', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 30 (2000): 179–191.

Wisse, Frederik. 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt', in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978, 431–440.

Wisse, Fredrik. 'Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism I: Cryptography', *Enchoria* 9 (1979): 101–120.

Index