

Die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums

Herausgegeben von
JENS SCHRÖTER
und KONRAD SCHWARZ

*Studien und Texte zu
Antike und Christentum*

106

Mohr Siebeck

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106



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des frühen Christentums

Herausgegeben von

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Das Buch wurde von eplene in Böblingen gesetzt, von Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen auf alterungsbeständiges Werkdruckpapier gedruckt und von der Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren gebunden.

Vorwort

Die vorliegende Publikation geht auf eine Konferenz zurück, die vom 7. bis 10. Oktober 2015 unter dem Titel „Die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums“ an der Theologischen Fakultät der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin durchgeführt wurde. Anlass war der 70. Jahrestag der Entdeckung der 13 Codices, die im Jahr 1945 nahe der oberägyptischen Stadt Nag Hammadi gefunden wurden. Die Forschung an diesen Schriften hat an der Berliner Fakultät eine lange und vielfach bewährte Tradition. Es lag deshalb nahe, dieses Ereignis mit einer Tagung an der Berliner Fakultät zu würdigen.

Zahlreiche renommierte Forscherinnen und Forscher auf dem Gebiet der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften haben die Einladung zur Mitwirkung ohne Zögern angenommen. Sie haben Vorträge zu zuvor vereinbarten Themen bzw. Schriften gehalten, sich an den angeregten und anregenden Diskussionen beteiligt und ihre Beiträge für den vorliegenden Tagungsband zur Verfügung gestellt. Dafür sei allen Beteiligten herzlich gedankt.

Die Konferenz wurde vom Lehrstuhl für Exegese und Theologie des Neuen Testaments sowie die neutestamentlichen Apokryphen organisiert und verantwortet. An erster Stelle ist deshalb den Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern des Lehrstuhls zu danken. Insbesondere genannt seien Konrad Schwarz, Dr. Christine Jacobi, Friederike Bäumer und Marika Elena David. Antje Meier hat in gewohnt zuverlässiger Weise die finanzielle Abwicklung der Tagung in ihren Händen gehabt. Clarissa Paul hat die sorgfältige Erstellung des Manuskripts, insbesondere der Register, durchgeführt.

Der traditionsreiche Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften ist mit dem Lehrstuhl verbunden. Für die Organisation der jährlich stattfindenden Studientage, die Betreuung der Internetseite sowie weitere Fragen inhaltlicher und administrativer Art zeichnet in erster Linie Konrad Schwarz verantwortlich. Er hat auch die genannte Tagung von den allerersten Anfängen an ideell, konzeptionell und organisatorisch mitgestaltet. Ihm gebührt deshalb ein besonderer Dank.

Es war eine besondere Freude, dass Hans-Gebhard Bethge, der viele Jahre an der Sektion Theologie, später dann an der Theologischen Fakultät der Humboldt-Universität, Neues Testament gelehrt hat, bei der gesamten Tagung anwesend sein konnte. Hans Bethge ist seit der Gründung des Berliner Arbeits-

kreises dessen Mitglied und hat nach dem Tod von Hans-Martin Schenke im Jahr 2002 dessen spirituelle und organisatorische Leitung übernommen. Unter seiner Ägide ist die Übersetzung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften ins Deutsche zu Ende geführt worden (zwei Bände, erschienen 2001 und 2003, die Studienausgabe liegt mittlerweile in 3. Auflage vor).

Seit Hans Bethge im Jahr 2008 in den Ruhestand getreten ist, bietet er mit großem Engagement und nicht nachlassender Begeisterung Koptischkurse an der Theologischen Fakultät an. Damit setzt er eine langjährige Berliner Tradition fort, aus der zahlreiche Dissertationen, Aufsätze und andere wissenschaftliche Arbeiten hervorgegangen sind. Als das eingangs genannte Jubiläum der Auffindung der Nag-Hammadi-Codices nahte, war er es, der die Initiative zu einem Oberseminar ergriff, das im Wintersemester 2014/15 an der Theologischen Fakultät durchgeführt wurde. Dabei nahm auch die inhaltliche Gestaltung der Tagung konkrete Formen an. Der Tagungsband sei Hans-Gebhard Bethge aus diesen und vielen anderen Gründen in Verbundenheit und Dankbarkeit gewidmet.

Die Durchführung der Konferenz sowie die Erstellung dieses Tagungsbandes wurden ermöglicht durch die großzügige finanzielle Unterstützung der Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung und der Alexander-von-Humboldt-Stiftung. Ein Dank ist auch an den Herausgeber der Reihe „Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum“, Kollegen Christoph Marksches, abzustatten. Er hat nicht nur häufig an dem genannten Oberseminar teilgenommen und an der Tagung mitgewirkt, sondern auch der Aufnahme des Tagungsbandes in die von ihm verantwortete Reihe umstandslos und ohne Zögern zugestimmt. Die gute Kooperation im Bereich der Erforschung der antiken christlichen Apokryphen hat sich bei dieser Gelegenheit einmal mehr bewährt.

Schließlich ist dem Verlag Mohr Siebeck, insbesondere seinem Cheflektor Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, zu danken. Wie bei allen Buchpublikationen zuvor, war es auch dieses Mal wieder eine Freude, sich auf die immer zuverlässige, freundliche und professionelle Kooperation seitens des Verlages verlassen zu können.

Berlin, September 2017

Jens Schröter

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Einleitung

Jens Schröter

Zum Thema des Bandes

„Die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums“ – unter diesem Titel wird im vorliegenden Band eine Perspektive entwickelt, die in der Forschung an diesen Schriften bislang eher im Hintergrund stand. Bei der Beschäftigung mit den Codices, die 1945 in der Nähe des oberägyptischen Ortes Nag Hammadi entdeckt wurden, standen zu meist andere Fragen im Zentrum. So wurde etwa intensiv diskutiert, in welchem Verhältnis die hier versammelten Texte zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments stehen; wie sich etliche von ihnen der antiken Gnosis und deren jeweiligen Ausprägungen zuordnen lassen – und wie sie das bis dahin bekannte Bild „der Gnosis“ verändern –; wie die Zusammenstellung der mitunter sehr disparaten Schriften in den einzelnen Codices zu erklären ist; welche Beziehung zwischen den hier versammelten Schriften und verwandten Texten – etwa im Papyrus Berolinensis Gnosticus oder im Codex Tchacos – besteht usw. Erörtert wurde auch, zu welchem Zweck die Nag-Hammadi-Codices zusammengestellt und in welcher Weise sie verwendet wurden.¹

Diese Diskurse, die zu wichtigen Einsichten im Blick auf die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften und ihren Ort innerhalb der antiken Religionsgeschichte geführt haben, sollen hier um eine Perspektive ergänzt werden, die ihren Ausgangspunkt bei dem Befund nimmt, dass in diesen Codices Schriften sehr unterschiedlicher Herkunft und literarischer Provenienz versammelt sind. Die Erforschung der literarischen Produktion des frühen Christentums, ihrer Beziehungen zu anderen Literaturbereichen – vornehmlich der jüdischen und der paganen griechisch-römischen Literatur – sowie der darin erkennbar werdenden theologischen bzw. philosophischen Denkmodelle und sozialen Formierungen wird dadurch in maßgeblicher Weise erweitert. In den Nag-Hammadi-Codices finden sich mythologische Traktate wie z. B. die Hypostase der Archonten oder die eigent-

¹ Diese Frage wurde in neuerer Zeit wieder aufgenommen und zu der These verdichtet, die Codices entstammten monastischen Kreisen des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts: H. Lundhaug/L. Jeannot, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 97), Tübingen 2015.

lich titellose, als „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ bezeichnete Schrift; Apokalypsen, etwa diejenigen des Paulus, Petrus und Adam; liturgische Texte, etwa Gebete und Tauf liturgien; Texte, die sich selbst als „Evangelium“ bezeichnen, wie das Thomas- und das Philippusevangelium, sowie „Das heilige Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes“, das im Kolophon zu NHC III,2 „Ägyptisches Evangelium“ genannt wird; schließlich philosophische bzw. theologische Traktate wie etwa der „Tractatus Tripartitus“, die „Valentinianische Abhandlung“, Zostrianus oder Marsanes. Zu nennen sind des Weiteren eine Schrift, die von einer Begegnung Jesu mit den Aposteln berichtet – Die Taten des Petrus und der zwölf Apostel –; Sentenzensammlungen – die Lehren des Silvanus und die Sextussprüche – sowie eine Passage aus Platos Politeia, die sich mit der Beschaffenheit der menschlichen Seele befasst.

Dieser Überblick zeigt bereits, dass sich die in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices versammelten Texte in vielfältiger Weise in die frühchristlichen sowie in die antiken philosophischen und mythologischen Diskurse einordnen. In diesen Texten werden Motive platonischer Theologie und biblische Vorstellungen über die Erschaffung der Welt und die Entstehung des Menschen rezipiert; es werden Überlieferungen aus bereits existierenden Evangelien aufgenommen und zu neuen Darstellungen von Wirken und Lehre Jesu verarbeitet; apokalyptische Traditionen werden mit philosophischen Vorstellungen verbunden usw. Die literarischen Gattungen der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften spiegeln dies entsprechend wider. Philosophische Abhandlungen können Verbindungen mit Apokalypsen eingehen (Apokryphon des Johannes; Zostrianus), Evangelien können in Form einer weisheitlichen Spruchsammlung begegnen (Evangelium nach Thomas), Schriften können den Anspruch eines Evangeliums erheben, auch ohne diesen Titel zu tragen (Sophia Jesu Christi), Gebete können sich mit theologischen Darlegungen verbinden (Gebet des Apostels Paulus; Evangelium nach Philippus; Ägyptisches Evangelium). Ein an literarischen Gattungen orientierter Zugang eröffnet deshalb den Blick darauf, wie in diesen Schriften christliche, jüdische und pagane philosophische Überlieferungen und Vorstellungen in eigener Weise miteinander verbunden werden. Jüdische und christliche Gattungen wie Apokalypsen und Evangelien werden dabei in neuer Form realisiert, zudem treten weitere literarische Formen in den Blick, wie etwa theologische, philosophische oder mythologische Abhandlungen, liturgische Texte und Sentenzen- oder Spruchsammlungen.

Eine zweite Ausgangsbeobachtung besagt, dass die in diesen Codices versammelten Texte auf verschiedenen Wegen überliefert wurden und in unterschiedlichen koptischen Dialekten vorliegen. Viele der Nag-Hammadi-Texte sind vermutlich Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen, in etlichen Fällen lässt sich dies sogar sicher nachweisen. Die entsprechenden Texte wurden demnach bereits zu früheren Zeitpunkten abgefasst und verwendet, etwa in valentinianischen Gemeinden oder anderen frühchristlichen Gruppen bzw. Lehrkontexten.

Etliche der in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices versammelten Schriften sind auch anderweitig bezeugt. Das trifft (neben Platos *Politeia*) auf die Sextussprüche zu, die ursprünglich auf Griechisch verfasst und dann in verschiedene Sprachen übersetzt wurden, u. a. ins Syrische und ins Lateinische.² Der Traktat „Asklepios“ ist ein Auszug aus einer griechischen Schrift, die vollständig in einer lateinischen Übersetzung erhalten ist und u. a. bei Lactantius und Stobaios erwähnt wird. Über Plotin heißt es in der von Porphyrius verfassten *Vita*, dass er die Traktate *Zostrianus* und *Allogenes* (natürlich auf Griechisch) studiert habe. Das Apokryphon des Johannes weist enge Verbindungen zu einer bei Irenaeus begegnenden Zusammenfassung eines gnostischen Systems auf. Vom Evangelium nach Thomas existieren griechische Papyri aus Oxyrhynchus vom Ende des 2. bzw. vom Anfang des 3. Jahrhunderts, die es nahelegen, dass eine solche Schrift auch vor ihrer Übersetzung ins Koptische und der Zusammenstellung mit anderen Schriften in frühchristlichen Gemeinden gelesen wurde.³ Des Weiteren lassen Bemerkungen bei frühchristlichen Theologen wie Irenaeus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origenes oder Lactantius erkennen, dass sie um die Existenz von Schriften wussten, die christliche Theologie im Horizont mythologischer, religionsphilosophischer oder hermetischer Vorstellungen interpretierten.

Das Schrifttum der Nag-Hammadi-Codices ist demnach in vielfältiger Weise in Diskurse über Verständnis und Darstellung der christlichen Botschaft seit dem 2. Jahrhundert eingebunden, in die es pagane philosophische und mythologische Vorstellungen, eigene Auslegungen biblischer Texte, apokalyptische Traditionen sowie selbständige Deutungen des Wirkens Jesu einbringt. Die Beiträge des vorliegenden Bandes machen dies durch die Konzentration auf die Schriftengruppen des Nag-Hammadi-Corpus deutlich, deren Verbindungen zu Schriften jüdischer, christlicher und pagan-philosophischer Provenienz dabei in den Blick treten.

Die Betrachtung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften im Spektrum der frühchristlichen Literatur ergibt sich demnach daraus, dass diese Texte – sowohl die christlichen als auch die nicht-christlichen – in einem christlichen Milieu entstanden sind bzw. in einem solchen rezipiert wurden. Die Begriffe „frühchristlich“ bzw. „frühes Christentum“ sind dabei weiter gefasst als der vor allem in der neutestamentlichen Forschung verwendete Begriff „Urchristentum“, der sich in der Regel auf den Zeitraum bis etwa zur Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts bezieht.⁴ Sie

² Vgl. W. Eisele (Hg.), *Die Sextussprüche und ihre Verwandten* (SAPERE 26), Tübingen 2015.

³ Vgl. A.-M. Luijendijk, *Reading the Gospel of Thomas in the Third Century. Three Oxyrhynchus Papyri and Origen's Homilies*, in: C. Clivaz/J. Zumstein (Hg.), *Reading the New Testament Papyri in Context/Lire les Papyrus du Nouveau Testament dans leur contexte* (BETL 142), Leuven 2011, 241–267. Ein analoger Befund liegt bei dem Maria- sowie dem Petrus-evangelium vor, die nicht in Nag Hammadi bezeugt sind.

⁴ Vgl. dazu in neuerer Zeit D.-A. Koch, *Geschichte des Urchristentums*, Göttingen 2014. U. Schnelle wählt für diesen Zeitabschnitt dagegen (wie vor ihm bereits F. Vouga) die Bezeich-

beanspruchen gleichwohl nicht, den gesamten Bereich des antiken Christentums zu erfassen, der über den hier in den Blick genommenen Zeitraum hinausreicht.⁵ Der im angelsächsischen Bereich als „early Christianity“ eingebürgerte und auch in der deutschsprachigen Forschung seit längerem verwendete Begriff soll vielmehr zum Ausdruck bringen, dass die „formative Periode“ des Christentums nicht nur deren Ursprungszeit (also etwa die ersten 100 Jahre) umfasst, in der die Schriften des Neuen Testaments (aber natürlich nicht nur diese) entstanden sind, sondern darüber hinausreicht.⁶ Als „frühes Christentum“ soll diejenige Phase bezeichnet werden, in der das Christentum seine wesentlichen Überzeugungen, Institutionen und Sozialformen ausprägte und sich in verschiedene Strömungen ausdifferenzierte, die in je eigener Weise an jüdische und pagane philosophische, ethische und mythologische Vorstellungen und Motive anknüpften. Nicht zuletzt soll auf diese Weise die wenig produktive – und inzwischen als überholt erwiesene – Distinktion von „neutestamentlicher Wissenschaft“ und „Patristik“ aufgegeben werden, deren Fragwürdigkeit schon ein flüchtiger Blick auf Entstehungszeit und Überlieferungsprozesse der entsprechenden Schriften, aber auch auf die Herausbildung von Ritualen und Sozialstrukturen – und natürlich nicht zuletzt auf die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons – zeigt. Die genannte Unterscheidung erweist sich demnach als Rückprojektion späterer Entwicklungen in die Frühzeit des Christentums und nicht zuletzt als anachronistische Abgrenzung einer „urchristlichen“, „apostolischen“ oder „neutestamentlichen“ von einer darauf folgenden „patristischen“ oder „frühkirchlichen“ Phase. Demgegenüber werden bereits seit geraumer Zeit die vielfältigen Verflechtungen zwischen sozialen, religiösen und institutionellen Entwicklungen der ersten Jahrhunderte des Christentums in den Blick genommen, die sich im Schrifttum des entsprechenden Zeitraums widerspiegeln. Sie treten noch einmal deutlicher hervor, wenn man darauf achtet, dass etliche dieser Schriften – sowohl ins Neue Testament gelangte als auch nicht-kanonische – eine längere Überlieferungsgeschichte durchlaufen haben und in verschiedenen Kontexten verwendet wurden. Die Bezeichnung „frühes Christentum“ lenkt deshalb den Blick auf die komplexe Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte der ersten Jahrhunderte des Christentums,

nung „frühes Christentum“. Vgl. U. Schnelle, *Die ersten 100 Jahre des Christentums 30–130 n.Chr. Die Entstehungsgeschichte einer Weltreligion*, Göttingen 2015. Ein Überblick über die neuere Diskussion findet sich in: J. Schröter, *Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Erforschung des frühen Christentums*, in: *ThRev* 112 (2016), 91–110.

⁵ Vgl. dazu C. Marksches, *Das antike Christentum. Frömmigkeit, Lebensformen, Institutionen*, München ³2016.

⁶ In diesem Sinn wurde auch für die seit 2010 erscheinende Zeitschrift der Titel „Early Christianity“ gewählt, um deutlich zu machen, dass der als „frühes Christentum“ bezeichnete Zeitabschnitt weiter gefasst ist als der üblicherweise mit „Urchristentum“ benannte. Vgl. auch F. Winkelmann, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, München ⁵2013, sowie C. K. Rothschild/J. Schröter (Hg.), *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era (WUNT 301)*, Tübingen 2013.

die nicht zuletzt in die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der damit einhergehenden Unterscheidung „kanonischer“ von „nicht-kanonischen“ Schriften mündete, in der sich die Ausdifferenzierung des Christentums in verschiedene Gruppierungen auf eigene Weise spiegelt.

Mit der Orientierung an literarischen Gattungen wird im vorliegenden Band ein Zugang aufgenommen und weitergeführt, den bereits Philipp Vielhauer seiner 1975 erschienenen „Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur“⁷ zugrunde gelegt hatte. In Anknüpfung an Martin Dibelius und dessen „Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur“ bestimmte Vielhauer die Aufgabe einer Beschäftigung mit der auch von ihm als „urchristlich“ bezeichneten Literatur dahingehend, neben den Schriften des Neuen Testaments auch diejenigen Schriften zu behandeln, die sich von der patristischen Literatur abgrenzen lassen und damit einen Prozess zu beschreiben, der durch die Kanonbildung zu einem gewissen Abschluss gekommen ist. Eine strikte Abgrenzung „christlicher Urliteratur“ (ein Terminus, den bekanntlich Franz Overbeck geprägt hatte) bzw. „urchristlicher Literatur“ von „patristischer Literatur“ wird man dabei aus heutiger Sicht allerdings nicht fortschreiben wollen. Vielmehr haben die Forschungen zur Literatur der ersten Jahrhunderte des Christentums ein breites Spektrum von Texten vor Augen geführt, das sich in vielfältiger Weise in die religiöse und philosophische Literatur der entsprechenden Zeit einordnet. Eine Grenze zwischen „christlicher Urliteratur“ und „patristischer Literatur“ – bzw. zwischen „Klein-“ und „Hochliteratur“, wie sie in der älteren Formgeschichte (Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Dibelius) postuliert worden war – lässt sich weder in zeitlicher noch in sachlicher Hinsicht durchhalten. Dessen ungeachtet ist das Programm von Dibelius und Vielhauer darin wegweisend, dass es Literaturformen (also Gattungen) als Grundlage der Darstellung wählt und den Bereich der zu behandelnden Literatur über das Neue Testament hinaus auf diejenigen Schriften ausdehnt, die in der Neuzeit zu den Sammlungen der „Apostolischen Väter“ und der „Apokryphen“ zusammengestellt wurden. Der Vorzug dieser Perspektive ist, dass sie nicht spätere Unterscheidungen und Kategorisierungen in die Anfänge des Christentums zurückprojiziert, sondern die Literatur der ersten Jahrhunderte des Christentums nach ihren Gattungen ordnet. Eine solche Sicht ist nicht zuletzt anschlussfähig für eine Sozial- und Institutionengeschichte, insofern Gattungen immer auch eine pragmatische Dimension besitzen, also über die Intentionen von Texten Auskunft geben und sich auf diese Weise in eine Geschichte des frühen Christentums einordnen.

Vielhauer orientierte sich dabei – wie auch Wilhelm Schneemelcher bei den „Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen“ – an den Gattungen der Schriften des Neuen Testaments – Evangelien, Briefe, Apostelgeschichten, Apokalypsen – und ord-

⁷ P. Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur. Einleitung in das Neue Testament, die Apokryphen und die Apostolischen Väter*, Berlin/New York 1975.

nete diesen weitere Schriften zu, darunter auch einige Nag-Hammadi-Texte: das Evangelium nach Thomas, die „Epistula Jacobi apocrypha“ und das Buch des Thomas. Zusätzlich findet sich bei Vielhauer eine Kategorie „Gemeindeordnungen und Kultisches“, in der die Didache, der Zweite Clemensbrief, das sogenannte „Evangelium Veritatis“ und die Oden Salomos behandelt werden.⁸ Im Blick auf die Einbeziehung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in eine Literaturgeschichte bemerkt Vielhauer ausdrücklich, die Hauptschwierigkeit bestehe in der damals (1975) noch unvollständigen Fundedition. Diese Situation hat sich mehr als 40 Jahre später grundlegend geändert. Neben den Nag-Hammadi-Texten, die inzwischen in Faksimile-Edition, kritischen Ausgaben und Übersetzungen in diverse moderne Sprachen vorliegen, wurden auch Texte wie die Evangelien nach Maria und des Judas, das Petrusevangelium und die Apokalypse des Petrus, Fragmente wie Papyrus Egerton 2, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224 oder P. Vindob. G 2325 (das sogenannte Fayûm-Fragment) sowie zahlreiche weitere nicht-kanonische Texte ediert, übersetzt und kommentiert. Die Ausgaben und Übersetzungen dieser Texte sowie die Diskussion über ihren Ort innerhalb des frühen Christentums haben zu einer wesentlich differenzierteren Sicht auf die christliche Literatur der ersten Jahrhunderte geführt. Der von Vielhauer beschrittene und von Helmut Köster im Blick auf die Evangelien fortgesetzte⁹ Weg, die ins Neue Testament gelangten Schriften gemeinsam mit nicht-kanonischen Texten innerhalb einer Literaturgeschichte zu behandeln, erweist sich dabei auch im Blick auf die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften als produktiv.

Bei einem solchen Zugang zeigt sich sehr schnell, dass das literarische Spektrum der frühchristlichen Literatur weder auf die Gattungen des Neuen Testaments noch auf die darin erkennbar werdenden Sozialgestalten des entstehenden Christentums beschränkt ist, sondern weit darüber hinausreicht. Die Orientierung an den Gattungen des Neuen Testaments bei Vielhauer und Schneemelcher ist deshalb kritisch zu hinterfragen.¹⁰ In frühchristlichen Gemeinden zirkulierte seit der 2. Hälfte des 2. Jahrhunderts eine Vielfalt an Texten, die im Umfeld der später neutestamentlich gewordenen Schriften entstanden, ohne dass diese dabei stets den literarischen und inhaltlichen Maßstab bilden

⁸ Eine ähnliche Rubrik „Stimmen der Kirche“ hatte es auch in der von Edgar Hennecke besorgten zweiten Auflage der „Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen“ von 1924 gegeben. Dies zeigt, dass sich die Gruppen der „Apokryphen“ und der „Apostolischen Väter“ nicht trennscharf voneinander unterscheiden und von anderen frühchristlichen Schriften abgrenzen lassen.

⁹ H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels. Their History and Development*, London/Philadelphia 1990.

¹⁰ Vgl. F. Bovon, Art. Apokryphen III. Neues Testament, RGG⁴ 1 (1998), 602f. In der neuen Ausgabe der Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, deren erster Teil 2012 erschienen ist, wurde der Titel deshalb gegenüber den von Hennecke und Schneemelcher verantworteten Auflagen zu „Antike christliche Apokryphen“ verändert: C. Marksches/J. Schröter (Hg.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen. Band 1: Evangelien und Verwandtes* (in zwei Teilbänden), Tübingen 2012.

würden, an dem sich die nicht kanonisch gewordenen Texte orientiert hätten. Das Verhältnis zwischen neutestamentlich gewordenen und nicht-kanonischen Schriften erweist sich deshalb als differenzierter und ist von Fall zu Fall zu bestimmen.

In frühchristlichen Gemeinden wurden demzufolge neben kanonisch werdenden Texten offensichtlich auch solche gelesen, in denen philosophische und mythologische Motive und Vorstellungen zur Interpretation des Christuseschehens herangezogen wurden. Es ist deshalb von vielfältigen literarischen, theologischen und sozialen Kontexten auszugehen, in denen das Neue Testament als die für die Mehrheitskirche verbindliche Schriftensammlung entstand. Die frühchristlichen Schriften bewegten sich dabei in einem literarischen Spektrum, das Berührungen mit nicht-christlichen philosophischen und ethischen, aber natürlich auch mit jüdischen Texten aufweist. Wenn in diesem Band nach der Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in die Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums gefragt wird, versteht sich dieser Zugang innerhalb solcher Kontexte.

Literarische Gattungen sind dabei als – antike oder moderne – Abstraktionen verstanden, die dazu dienen, Texte hinsichtlich ihrer literarischen Gestalt bzw. ihres inhaltlichen Anspruchs zu klassifizieren. In den Nag-Hammadi-Codices finden sich Texte, die bereits existierende Gattungen aufnehmen und sie auf eigene Weise fortschreiben – so etwa bei den Apokalypsen und den Evangelien –, oder aber Literaturformen verwenden, die innerhalb der frühchristlichen Literatur zum ersten Mal begegnen – so insbesondere die mythologischen, philosophischen und theologischen Traktate. Etliche der Nag-Hammadi-Texte greifen demnach ältere Schriften auf, interpretieren sie neu oder treten zu ihnen in Konkurrenz. Zudem interpretieren zahlreiche dieser Texte die christliche – und damit in gewisser Weise auch die jüdische – Sicht auf die Welt, den Menschen und die Erlösung in neuer Weise. Die Intention dieser Darstellungen kann darin gesehen werden, Alternativen oder vertiefende Auslegungen zu bieten, die für den Gebrauch in Gemeinschaften – etwa in valentinianischen Gemeinden – oder auch für einzelne christliche Leser gedacht sind. Die Selbstbezeichnungen der Texte sind dabei – was in den Beiträgen dieses Bandes verschiedentlich deutlich wird – mitunter irreführend, wenn sie strikt gattungstheoretisch aufgefasst werden. So ist etwa das Evangelium nach Philippus besser als Sammlung von Reflexionen über die Bedeutung Jesu Christi, die Sakramente und die Erlösung zu charakterisieren, das „Evangelium Veritatis“ besitzt gar keinen Titel und ist seinem literarischen Charakter nach eher als Meditation zu bezeichnen, die beiden Apokalypsen des Jakobus lassen sich eher als Dialogevangelium bzw. als Offenbarungsrede charakterisieren. Die Titel der Schriften bringen deshalb mitunter vor allem den Anspruch zum Ausdruck, den eine Schrift als „Evangelium“ oder „Apokalypse“ für sich reklamiert, wogegen sie sich mit den gängigen Definitionen der betreffenden Gattungen kaum in Übereinstimmung bringen lassen.

Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte eröffnen demnach nicht zuletzt einen Einblick in das breit gefächerte Spektrum christlicher Gemeinden, Gruppen und Individuen, das über das in den neutestamentlichen Texten und solchen, die zu den „Apostolischen Vätern“ gerechnet werden, hinausreicht. Die intendierten Adressaten der Nag-Hammadi-Texte können als an der philosophischen Vertiefung der christlichen Botschaft interessierte Gemeinden bzw. einzelne Leser beschrieben werden, die sich im Umfeld der entstehenden Mehrheitskirche bewegen. Insofern eröffnet eine an Gattungen orientierte Sicht auf diese Schriften, wie viele Beiträge dieses Bandes zeigen, nicht zuletzt auch eine soziologische Perspektive auf das frühe Christentum.

Zu den einzelnen Beiträgen

Christoph Marksches stellt in seinem Eröffnungsbeitrag Rückfragen an das Thema der Tagung, die sich auf die Bezeichnung „frühes Christentum“, die Orientierung an Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte sowie auf die Interpretation der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften aus einer solchen Perspektive beziehen. Dabei plädiert er u. a. dafür, literatur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Fragestellungen bei der Interpretation der Texte nicht voneinander zu isolieren. Ob sich der Vorschlag, die Nag-Hammadi-Texte aufgrund der Fundumstände und der Datierung der Codices als in monastischen Kontexten des 4. bzw. 5. Jahrhunderts entstandene Schriften aufzufassen, bewähren wird oder diese Texte in eine umfassendere Perspektive auf die Entwicklung des Christentums seit dem 2. Jahrhundert einzustellen sind – die zur Verwendung in monastischen Kontexten natürlich nicht in Konkurrenz steht –, wie es bislang zumeist vorausgesetzt und auch in den Beiträgen dieses Bandes vertreten wird, wird weiter zu diskutieren sein.

John Turner befasst sich in seinem Beitrag, der auf einen öffentlichen Abendvortrag bei der genannten Tagung zurückgeht, mit der Transformation philosophischer literarischer Gattungen in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices. Die entsprechenden Texte liegen in Form religiös-philosophischer Briefe, Offenbarungsdialoge sowie Offenbarungsreden vor. Sie sind auf die Entstehung der Welt und die Stellung des Menschen in der Welt gerichtet. Dabei orientieren sie sich sowohl an Dialogen Platos – vorzugsweise dem *Timaios* – als auch an der Schöpfungserzählung der Genesis, die sie auf eigene Weise interpretieren. Des Weiteren lassen sich Verbindungen zu Plotin herstellen, der häufig als der erste gilt, der ein System von Emanationen, basierend auf einem Dualismus von dem einen Gott und einem nachgeordneten Prinzip, aus dem die Emanationen hervorgehen, entwickelt habe. Turner weist jedoch darauf hin, dass diese Vorstellung in zahlreichen gnostischen Theogonien des 2. Jahrhunderts bezeugt ist, die zeitlich vor Plotin anzusetzen sind. Plotin könnte deshalb seinerseits solche gnostischen Systeme voraussetzen, wofür das Apokryphon des Johannes als Bei-

spiel dienen kann. Insbesondere die „sethianischen“ Texte aus Nag Hammadi – wie etwa Zostrianus, Allogenes, Marsanes und Die drei Stelen des Seth – zeigen ein Interesse an derartigen kosmologischen und ontogenetischen Vorstellungen, die sich auch mit jüdischen apokalyptischen Vorstellungen berühren. Diese Texte entwickeln dabei ein metaphysisches System, das sich auch mit Himmelsreisen und Offenbarungen verbinden kann, wie etwa bei Allogenes. Einige „sethianische“ Traktate – Allogenes, Zostrianus, Marsanes sowie das Apokryphon des Johannes – lassen sich auf unmittelbare Lektüre platonischer Dialoge zurückführen, wie Turner anhand von Vergleichen einschlägiger Passagen zeigt.

Die folgenden Beiträge, die auf die Key Notes und Short Papers der Tagung zurückgehen, sind an den Schriftengruppen des Nag-Hammadi-Corpus orientiert. Sie stellen die in diesen Texten entwickelten philosophischen, religiösen und liturgischen Vorstellungen vor und beleuchten zugleich die spezifische Weise, in der die entsprechenden literarischen Gattungen in den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften realisiert werden.

Gregor Wurst stellt in seinem Beitrag zu den Apokalypsen heraus, dass sich die Zuweisung von Schriften zu dieser Gruppe nicht an deren Titel, also an der Selbstbezeichnung der betreffenden Schriften als „Apokalypse“, orientieren kann.¹¹ Vielmehr sei zu fragen, inwieweit Apokalypsen aus der älteren jüdisch-christlichen Tradition in veränderter Form unter den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften auftauchen. Dazu könnten z. B. Traktate wie Noëma oder „Asklepios“ gehören, wogegen die beiden unter dem Namen des Jakobus überlieferten „Apokalypsen“ unter literarischen Gesichtspunkten nicht zu dieser Gattung zu rechnen sind. Drei der fünf in Nag Hammadi unter dem Namen „Apokalypse“ bezeugten Schriften finden sich in Codex V, der deshalb auch gelegentlich als „Apokalypsen-Codex“ bezeichnet wurde. Die drei von Wurst näher besprochenen Apokalypsen – diejenigen des Paulus, Adam und Petrus (letztere aus Codex VII) – gehen nach allgemeiner Annahme auf griechische Originale zurück, was bei der Apokalypse des Petrus nicht zuletzt durch den griechischen Genitiv ἀποκαλλυτικῆς πέτρου im Titel des koptischen Manuskripts unterstützt wird. Wurst kommt nach einem Durchgang durch diese Schriften zu dem Ergebnis, dass sie nicht nur wegen des Titels, sondern auch aufgrund ihrer Gattungsmerkmale – Wurst folgt hier der Definition von John Collins – als „Apokalypsen“ zu bezeichnen seien. Im Falle von Noëma sei dagegen Zurückhaltung bei der Zuweisung zur Gattung „Apokalypse“ geboten.

¹¹ Die Frage nach einer literarischen Gattung „Apokalypse“ wird seit längerem diskutiert. Die vielzitierte Definition von J. J. Collins stellt dabei häufig den Bezugspunkt dar. Sie begegnet zuerst in: J. J. Collins, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, in: *Semeia* 14, Missoula 1979. Dass es eine entsprechende Literaturform gab, die im Judentum entstanden ist und dann im Christentum in verschiedener Weise fortgeschrieben wurde, erscheint als eine durchaus plausible Annahme. Die Apokalypsen aus Nag Hammadi stellen noch einmal eine eigene Realisierung dieser Gattung dar.

Der Teil zu den Apokalypsen wird durch die Beiträge von Jaan Lahe zur Apokalypse des Adam, die als nicht-christliches gnostisches Werk mit alttestamentlichem und jüdischem Hintergrund beurteilt wird, und Dylan Burns zur Apokalypse des Paulus, die er als einen nach-valentinianischen Text beurteilt, vervollständigt.

Nicola Denzey Lewis befasst sich mit den mythologischen Abhandlungen in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices: dem Apokryphon des Johannes, der Hypostase der Archonten sowie der titellosen Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“. Die drei Traktate teilen die Orientierung an einer platonischen Kosmologie, die zugleich als ätiologischer Kontext zur Erklärung der Situation der gefallenen Menschheit und des Weges zur Erlösung fungiert. Irenaeus setzt diese Form mythologischer Welterklärung bereits voraus und kritisiert sie auf mitunter satirische Weise. Es sei deshalb davon auszugehen, dass im 2. Jahrhundert mythologisch und kosmologisch ausgerichtete Traktate als Bestandteil der literarischen Produktion des Christentums auftauchen und zu anderen Erklärungsmodellen in Konkurrenz treten. Der Beitrag widmet sich sodann den Wurzeln des Begriffs „Mythos“ bzw. „mythisch“, die im 18. Jahrhundert liegen. Die Bedeutung des Begriffs in der Religions- und Geistesgeschichte lasse sich nicht unmittelbar mit den genannten Nag-Hammadi-Traktaten verbinden. Zudem bestehe die Gefahr eines „mirror reading“, das aus derartigen Texten unmittelbar auf dazugehörige Trägergruppen schließt. Die genannten Nag-Hammadi-Traktate ließen sich am besten als Versuche interpretieren, Widersprüche in den Schöpfungserzählungen der Genesis dadurch aufzuklären, dass sie diese mit Prinzipien der Vernunft sowie physikalischen und biologischen Kenntnissen des 2. Jahrhunderts interpretieren und auf diese Weise Erklärungen der Welt und des Menschen liefern. Sie dürften deshalb ihrem Selbstverständnis nach nicht als „mythisch“ im Sinne irrationaler oder erfundener Geschichten aufgefasst werden.

Die Beiträge von Ursula Ulrike Kaiser und Karen King befassen sich eingehender mit der Hypostase der Archonten bzw. dem Apokryphon des Johannes, um an diesen Texten die Verwendung mythologischer Motive, die sowohl aus jüdischer und christlicher Literatur als auch aus platonischer Philosophie stammen, zu exemplifizieren. Der letztgenannte Beitrag stellt dabei einen überaus instruktiven Vergleich des Apokryphon des Johannes mit der Offenbarung des Johannes an.

Der Beitrag von Hugo Lundhaug ist liturgischen Texten aus Nag Hammadi am Beispiel der Gebete gewidmet. Lundhaug zeigt anhand diverser Beispiele aus verschiedenen Schriften, dass in den Nag-Hammadi-Texten ein breites Spektrum von Gebeten begegnet: persönliche und liturgische Gebete, stille und hörbare Gebete sowie Hinweise auf verschiedene Gebetspraktiken. Daraus ließen sich allerdings keine unmittelbaren Rückschlüsse auf die tatsächliche Verwendung der hier begegnenden Gebete ziehen. Allerdings liefere der monastische Kontext der

Nag-Hammadi-Codices Hinweise auf Gebetspraktiken, die sich möglicherweise auch auf die Gebete in den Codices beziehen ließen.

Das Thema der liturgischen Texte wird in dem Beitrag von Antti Marjanen mit einer Untersuchung der Taufe im sogenannten „Evangelium der Ägypter“ ausgeweitet. Anders als in einigen anderen sethianischen Texten, in denen die Taufe als symbolischer Ausdruck einer himmlischen Aufstiegserfahrung betrachtet werde, sei die Taufe in dieser Schrift als ein irdischer und unwiederholbarer Erlösungsakt anzusehen, durch den ein Getaufte zugleich in eine religiöse Gruppe eingeweiht werde.

Simon Gathercole befasst sich mit den Evangelien in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices. Die behandelten Schriften – die Evangelien nach Thomas und Philippus, das sogenannte Ägypter-Evangelium sowie das „Evangelium Veritatis“ – weisen ein breites literarisches Spektrum auf, das durch den Begriff „Evangelium“ nur notdürftig zusammengehalten wird. Der Durchgang durch die genannten Schriften zeigt, dass sich der Titel „Evangelium“ nur unter der Voraussetzung sinnvoll auf sie anwenden lässt, dass er als Charakterisierung ihres Inhalts aufgefasst wird. Die Schriften würden dementsprechend mit der Verwendung dieser Bezeichnung den Anspruch erheben, heilsnotwendiges Wissen über die Person Jesu und seine Lehre zu vermitteln. Dementsprechend ließen sich die genannten Evangelien aus Nag Hammadi unter literarischen Gesichtspunkten auch anderen Gattungen zuweisen – das Ägypter-Evangelium etwa den Apokalypsen. Die Bezeichnung „Evangelium“ habe zudem den rhetorischen Effekt, die betreffende Schrift zu bereits existierenden Evangelien in Beziehung zu setzen. Die bereits für das 2. Jahrhundert bezeugten Evangelien nach Thomas, nach Maria und des Judas stellen bestimmte Figuren in den Mittelpunkt, die in Konkurrenz zu Petrus oder anderen Autoritäten aus dem Umfeld Jesu treten. Gleiches lässt sich für das Ägypter-Evangelium feststellen, das an seinem Ende Seth als Verfasser nennt. Im Evangelium nach Philippus und im „Evangelium Veritatis“ scheint dagegen keine unmittelbare Konkurrenz zu anderen Evangelien intendiert zu sein. Eine Analyse der „Evangelien“ aus Nag Hammadi führt deshalb zu dem Resultat, diese Bezeichnung nicht ausschließlich auf der Grundlage der neutestamentlichen Evangelien zu definieren. Ein solcher Zugang zeigt zudem, dass derartige Bezeichnungen nicht notwendig an der literarischen Form, sondern auch an dem Inhalt der jeweiligen Schrift bzw. dem Anspruch, der sich mit einer solchen Bezeichnung verbindet, orientiert sein können.

Der Teil zu den Evangelien wird durch einen instruktiven Überblick über die Erforschung des Evangeliums nach Thomas von Paul-Hubert Poirier ergänzt. Die Komposition der Schrift sei im 2. Jahrhundert anzusetzen, als Originalsprache sei Griechisch anzunehmen, als „gnostisch“ lasse sich die Schrift bei einem entsprechend weit gefassten Begriff von „Gnosis“ durchaus bezeichnen. Weitere Beiträge dieses Teils stammen von Katrine Brix, die sich mit dem „Evangelium Veritatis“ befasst, sowie von Judith Hartenstein zur Sophia Jesu Christi – einem

Text, der sich selbst nicht als „Evangelium“ bezeichnet, aber aufgrund seines literarischen Charakters als „dialogisches Evangelium“ bezeichnet werden kann. Der Begriff „Evangelium“ begegnet innerhalb der Schrift selbst zweimal, einmal davon als Bezeichnung der Botschaft, die verkündigt werden soll. Die Schrift versteht sich demnach durchaus als inhaltliche Darlegung des Evangeliums. Möglicherweise wird der Begriff deshalb nicht als Titel verwendet, weil er zur Zeit der Abfassung der Schrift, die früher anzusetzen sei als beim Evangelium nach Maria und des Judas, noch nicht gebräuchlich war. Der Beitrag zeigt des Weiteren Beziehungen der SJC zu den Theklaakten und damit zur Paulustradition sowie zum Matthäusevangelium auf. Schließlich wird die Verarbeitung von Eugnostos in der SJC behandelt. Die Sophia Jesu Christi erweist sich als ein „Evangelium“ eigener Art, das auf eine Strömung im Christentum verweisen könnte, in der gnostisch-mythologische Vorstellungen mit Jesus- und Paulustraditionen verbunden wurden.

Der letzte Teil des Bandes ist den theologischen und philosophischen Abhandlungen aus Nag Hammadi gewidmet. In seinem einführenden Beitrag geht Einar Thomassen zunächst auf die verschiedenen literarischen Formen ein, in denen „Traktate“ unter den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften begegnen. Sie können in Briefe eingebettet sein, wie etwa im „Brief an Rheginus“ oder in Eugnostos, der in SJC durch einen Dialog Jesu mit seinen Jüngerinnen und Jüngern gerahmt wurde. Vergleichbar damit ist das Verhältnis von Irenaeus, Haer. I,29, zum Apokryphon des Johannes. Die Hypostase der Archonten und „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ scheinen dagegen die Form von Traktaten bewahrt zu haben, obwohl auch hier Verbindungen zu anderen Gattungen (Brief, Apokalypse) bestehen. Thomassen führt sodann aus, dass die Verbindung von mythologischer Erzählung und theoretischem Argument in einigen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften keineswegs singular ist. Sie begegnet in analoger Weise auch bei den Stoikern, Plutarch, Philo und den Neuplatonikern, die Mythen von Homer, den Ägyptern, aus der Genesis und von den Chaldäern bzw. Orphikern mit philosophischen Gedanken verbunden haben. Anders als in diesen Entwürfen, die Mythen mit Hilfe philosophischer Theorien interpretierten, verhalte es sich in den gnostischen Traktaten allerdings gerade umgekehrt: Hier kommentiere der Mythos die Theorie, werde also als die der philosophischen Darlegung überlegene Erklärungsform betrachtet. Thomassen führt dies anhand der valentinianischen Texte „Tractatus Tripartitus“ und „Valentinianische Abhandlung“, die sich neupythagoreischer Physik bedienen, genauer aus. Eine zweite Quelle des valentinianischen Mythos ist das Leiden des Erlösers in der Welt, die er bei seinem Tod – als Trennung seiner geistigen Natur von seinem körperlichen Leib – verlassen habe. Die älteste Fassung dieses Mythos ist bei Irenaeus und in den Excerpta ex Theodoto bezeugt, diese Fassung sei auch in den valentinianischen Traktaten bewahrt worden. Diese Traktate hätten als Grundlage für den Unterricht in valentinianischen Gemeinschaften (die keine „Schulen“ gewesen seien) gedient und seien

von Lehrern in Schulkontexten vermittelt worden. Thomassen geht sodann verschiedene valentinianische und sethianische Texte durch. Er schließt mit dem Fazit, dass die Gnostiker die ersten gewesen seien, die systematische Abhandlungen über Einzelthemen und über die Wirklichkeit als ganze verfasst hätten. Dabei hätten sie sich älterer Werke, wie etwa der im Apokryphon des Johannes verarbeiteten Abhandlung, bedient und ihrerseits Origenes' *Peri archôn* inspiriert. Die Gnostiker hätten in ihren Abhandlungen jüdisch-apokalyptische, griechisch-philosophische und biblische Vorstellungen in einer Weise verarbeitet, bei der die Erzählung die Oberhand über die theoretische Erklärung behalten habe.

Uwe-Karsten Plisch befasst sich in seinem Beitrag zu diesem Teil des Bandes mit Zostrianus und dem Gebet des Seth, das in *Zostr.*, *Allog* und *StelSeth* belegt ist. Dazu kommt ein griechisches Zeugnis auf einem Berliner Papyrusblatt (P. Berol. 17207), das bislang nur wenig Aufmerksamkeit gefunden hat. Mit diesem Papyrus liegt ein griechisches, originalsprachliches Zeugnis eines sethianischen Textes vor, das traditionsgeschichtlich älter sein dürfte als die koptischen Textzeugen.

Die Beiträge des Bandes, die eine Vielzahl der im Nag-Hammadi-Corpus begegnenden Schriften behandeln, führen eindrücklich vor Augen, wie diese Schriften die Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums in mannigfacher Weise bereichern. Sie machen zugleich deutlich, dass sich die literarische Produktion des frühen Christentums seit dem 2. Jahrhundert in eine Vielfalt literarischer Gattungen ausdifferenziert, die zum Teil deutlich über diejenigen der im Neuen Testament anzutreffenden Schriften hinausgehen, zum Teil eigenständige Rezeptionen bereits im Christentum verwendeter Gattungen darstellen. Die Interpretation der christlichen Botschaft von der Erlösung des Menschen und des Weges dorthin wird durch diese Schriften in einen breiten Horizont gestellt, der die Entstehung der Welt und des Menschen in eigener Weise einbezieht und sich dazu verschiedenartiger Traditionen bedient. Die Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in die Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums erweist sich deshalb, das machen die Beiträge dieses Bandes in eindrücklicher Weise deutlich, als ein anregender und produktiver Zugang zu diesem Corpus.

Offene Fragen zur historischen und literaturgeschichtlichen Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften

Christoph Marksches

Abstract

This present paper deals with three crucial problems of contemporary research regarding the Nag Hammadi Texts: (1) The problem of chronology: The very early dating of the texts as well as the simply presupposed Greek originals for the Coptic findings have been sharply criticized in recent years. Because, in the first fifty years of the study of the Nag Hammadi texts, some of the most influential researchers were by profession New Testament scholars, they, obviously, tended to date the Nag Hammadi texts as close as possible to the composition of the texts, which were later included in the canonical New Testament. (2) Because of this highly problematic early dating of the texts of Nag Hammadi, the literary analysis, especially with respect to the genre, was concentrated mostly on genres related to the New Testament (such as gospels, acts or apocalypses). Thus, the late antique transformation of genres during the imperial era was mostly overlooked. Accordingly, a new quite interesting field for future research opens up in this context. (3) In the last decades, research on the Nag Hammadi texts often followed a traditional paradigm of history of ideas research, especially in Germany. Accordingly, the debate was not only coined by the battle between a research approach based on the History of Religions and a more traditional denominational Church History approach, but also by the alleged insurmountability between History of Ideas, Literary-Criticism, and Sociology-based approaches. The combination of mentioned approaches would, however, enable us to overcome the classical mousetraps of binary options. All these suggestions for future research are explained with the help of examples, and especially with the Gospel of Truth.

Vermutlich war es der Titel der Konferenz, der mich dazu provoziert hat, an ihrem Beginn offene Fragen zu formulieren und über solche offenen Fragen anlässlich ihrer Eröffnung einen Vortrag zu halten: „Die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums“ lautete der

Titel der Konferenz und schon dieser Titel verbirgt ja eine offene Frage (oder, wie wir gleich sehen werden, ein Bündel offener Fragen): Was ist eigentlich, chronologisch betrachtet, „frühes Christentum“? Über welchen Zeitraum reden wir? Mindestens drei Antworten scheinen mir möglich, die ich zu Beginn meines Vortrages kurz vorstellen möchte, weil sie bestens in das Bündel offener Fragen einführen, das ich hier präsentieren möchte. Darauf wird ein zweiter längerer Abschnitt zur Frage folgen, welche offenen Fragen wir in den Blick nehmen, wenn wir die literaturwissenschaftliche Frage nach den Genres einzelner Nag-Hammadi-Schriften stellen, und schließlich ein abschließender dritter, relativ kurzer Abschnitt zu offenen Problemen, die sich unter dem Stichwort „Theologiegeschichte“ aus dem Tagungstitel zusammenfassen lassen. Nun aber zunächst zu drei Bedeutungen des Begriffs „frühchristlich“ und ihren Implikationen.

I. Nag-Hammadi-Texte als frühchristliche Schriften?

Wenn man unter dem Stichwort „frühes Christentum“ *erstens* das versteht, was in der deutschen Forschung auch „Urchristentum“ genannt wird oder jedenfalls früher genannt wurde, also die Jahre nach dem Tode Jesu von Nazareth bis 120/130 (so die an einen terminologischen Vorschlag des Neutestamentlers François Vouga angelehnte Definition der Deutschen Bibelgesellschaft im Internet),¹ dann geht es in unserer Tagung um die Kontextualisierung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in einen relativ kleinen Abschnitt von rund hundert Jahren der Geschichte einer religiösen Bewegung, über deren prekären religionswissenschaftlichen Status man trefflich diskutieren kann – ich erwähne nur den pointierten Buchtitel „The ways that never parted“.² Wenn man diesen Buchtitel und den darin begründeten Protest gegen das seinerseits schon revisionistische Modell „The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism“ ernst nimmt, müsste man übrigens auch gleich noch die offene Frage markieren, warum eigentlich nicht auch nach den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften in der Litera-

¹ K.-M. Bull, *Bibelkunde des Neuen Testaments*, online unter <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/bibelkunde/themenkapitel-nt/geschichte-des-urchristentums/> (letzter Zugriff am 22.08.2016) verweist auf F. Vouga, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, Tübingen/Basel 1994. – Der dem Anlass geschuldete etwas kolloquialere Stil des öffentlichen Vortrags zu Beginn des Berliner Kolloquiums wurde für den Druck beibehalten, aber um die notwendigen Fußnoten ergänzt. Für ihre Hilfe bei der Drucklegung danke ich meiner Assistentin Sarah-Magdalena Kingreen, für allerlei anregende Gespräche zum Thema in den letzten Jahren Nicola Denzey Lewis und Hugo Lundhaug.

² J. D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London 1991; J. Lieu, *The Parting of the Ways. Theological Construct or Historical Reality?*, in: *JSNT* 17 (1995), 101–119 sowie A. Y. Reed/A. H. Becker, *Traditional Models and New Directions*, in: dies. (Hg.), *The Ways that never parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 95)*, Tübingen 2003, 1–34.

tur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Judentums gefragt wurde. Denn es ist ja, wie gesagt, nicht ganz ohne Probleme, für diese nach Vouga und anderen als „frühes Christentum“ bezeichneten hundert Jahre eine Entität namens „Christentum“ zu postulieren oder gar zu konstruieren. Wenn man angesichts solcher prekärer Umstände dennoch bei der Engführung auf die Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen *Christentums* bleiben will, dann geht es bei einer so verstandenen Kontextualisierung in das Jahrhundert bis 130 n.Chr. vor allem um Schriften des deutlich nach diesem Datum kanonisch gewordenen Neuen Testaments und vielleicht um ein paar Schriften aus der Gruppe der sogenannten Apostolischen Väter. Wenn ich recht sehe, hat genau in diesem Sinne noch einmal vor wenigen Jahren Hans-Friedrich Weiß, emeritierter (und im Juni 2016 verstorbener) Neutestamentler in Rostock, eine Kontextualisierung einzelner Texte von Nag Hammadi versucht – übrigens unter dem Titel „Frühes Christentum und Gnosis“; natürlich wäre auch Vouga selbst zu nennen.³ Weiß auf einer Tagung in Berlin zu erwähnen, liegt schon deswegen nahe, weil er zum berühmten hiesigen koptisch-gnostischen Arbeitskreis gehörte, der sich in dieser Stadt versammelt.⁴ Er deutet in seiner erwähnten Monographie einige (natürlich nicht alle) Schriften von Nag Hammadi als „Rezeption des Neuen Testaments“. Mit dem Stichwort „Rezeption“ belegt Weiß solche Schriften, die kanonisch gewordene Schriften des Neuen Testaments *auslegen*. Freilich legen sie nach Weiß in einer besonderen Weise aus, nämlich nach einer – wie er sagt – „gnostischen Grundidee“⁵, und sind also zuerst in diesem Kontext zu interpretieren. Ob man auf diese Weise den Kontext dieser Schriften „in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des [...] Christentums“ ausreichend bestimmt hat, hängt nicht zuletzt an der notorisch schwierigen präzisen Datierung sowohl von kanonisch gewordenen neutestamentlichen als auch von in Nag Hammadi überlieferten Schriften. Etwas pointiert gesagt: Je früher man einzelne Schriften aus Nag Hammadi datiert, desto weniger Schriften aus Gruppen, die sich auf Jesus von Nazareth beriefen, kommen für eine solche Kontextualisierung neben den kanonisch gewordenen Schriften des Neuen Testaments in Frage. Leider findet sich zu dieser notorisch schwierigen Frage der Datierung bei Weiß fast nichts, so dass seine (im Kern sehr klassische, nämlich Irenaeus von Lyon reprimierende) These, gnostische Schriftauslegung (oder eben: Schriftrezeption) erfolge nach einer eigenen „Grundidee“ (ὑπόθεσις)⁶ und sei Applikation einer vorgängigen

³ H.-F. Weiß, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis. Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT I/225), Tübingen 2008.

⁴ H.-G. Bethge, Hans-Martin Schenke – Lehrer, Forscher, Freund, in: ders./S. Emmel/K. L. King u. a. (Hg.), *For the Children, Perfect Instruction. Studies in Honor of Hans-Martin Schenke on the Occasion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften's Thirtieth Year* (NHMS 54), Leiden/Boston 2002, 13–25, hier 19–21.

⁵ Weiß, *Frühes Christentum* (s. Anm. 3), 499–508.

⁶ Weiß, *Frühes Christentum* (s. Anm. 3), 494.

gnostischen Mythologie auf einen quasi als statische Entität essentialistisch konzipierten biblischen Text mit eindeutigem Sinn, eine deutliche *petitio principii* darstellt, in der klassische antike christliche Häresiologie ein wenig rezeptionsästhetisch aufgehübscht wird. In Wahrheit zeigt doch grade auch die angeblich so „biblische Theologie“ des Irenaeus,⁷ aus der Weiß diese Sichtweise auf gnostische Exegese bezieht und auf die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften anwendet, dass weder in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi noch bei Irenaeus kanonisch gewordene Texte des Neuen Testaments en bloc in ihren ursprünglichen Bedeutungsdimensionen übernommen und mit klarem Bewusstsein für einen intendierten Literalsinn ausgelegt werden. Vielmehr wird nach bestimmten Regeln und unter Integration bestimmter anderer Zusammenhänge eine Transformation von ursprünglichem Sinn vorgenommen, in deren Verlauf der Sinn des Ursprungstextes neu konstruiert wird – mir scheint dieses durch den Berliner Kulturwissenschaftler Hartmut Böhme und andere entwickelte Modell einer Transformation die Verhältnisse besser zu beschreiben als das klassische Paradigma der Rezeption.⁸ Wenn man die Bedeutung des Begriffs „frühes Christentum“ auf die ersten hundert Jahre bis 130 limitiert, droht allerdings eine solche Engführung auf eine Rezeptionsgeschichte ganz bestimmter kanonisch gewordener Schriften der christlichen Bibel, insbesondere des Neuen Testaments. Allerdings bleiben zwei alternative Deutungsmöglichkeiten der Begrifflichkeit „frühes Christentum“ übrig, denen wir uns jetzt zuwenden:

Wenn man unter dem Stichwort „frühes Christentum“ dagegen *zweitens*, wie beispielsweise der im Jahre 2006 verstorbene Althistoriker Richard Klein, die ersten dreihundert Jahre nach dem Tode Jesu (bis zur sogenannten „konstantinischen Wende“ oder, wie Klein formuliert, die Jahrhunderte „bis zum Ende der Verfolgungen“ der Mehrheitskirche im *Imperium*) versteht,⁹ dann kommt man mit dem Begriff ziemlich nahe an den *terminus a quo*, den der berühmte Kartonage-Papyrus 65 aus dem Einband von Codex VII für die Bindung durch die Erwähnung der beiden Konsulen Flavius Philippus und Flavius Salia gibt, das Jahr 348 n.Chr. Auch hier schließen sich sofort weitere Fragen an, die auch die Problematik dieses Verständnisses der Begriffe „frühes Christentum“ als Wechselbegriff für die ersten drei Jahrhunderte des antiken Christentums schnell deutlich machen. Ich denke beispielsweise an die ganz schlichte Frage, auf welchem religiösen Hintergrund eigentlich der Autor des genannten Briefs in der Kartonage von Codex VII, ein gewisser Aurelius Melas, eigentlich seinen

⁷ Eine neue Sicht auf die Theologie des Irenaeus und ihre biblische Fundamentierung bei: L. Ayres, *Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians. Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins*, in: *J ECS* 23 (2015), 153–187.

⁸ H. Böhme u. a. (Hg.), *Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels*, München 2011.

⁹ R. Klein/P. Guyot (Hg.), *Das frühe Christentum bis zum Ende der Verfolgungen. Eine Dokumentation*, 2 Bde., Darmstadt 1993 und 1995 (als Sonderausgabe bereits 1977).

Schwur τὴν θεῖαν καὶ οὐράνιον τύχην τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν αἰώνιων Αὐγούστων, „beim göttlichen und himmlischen Glück unserer Herren, der ewigen *Augusti*“ abgibt¹⁰ und ob man daraus etwas für die wesentlich umfassendere, notorische Frage nach dem Zusammenhang der Codices mit monastischen Einrichtungen der Fundgegend lernen kann. Der 1991 verstorbene Berliner Papyrologe Kurt Treu hat in einer Rezension der Edition der Kartonage-Papyri feinsinnig bemerkt, dass dem extremen Optimismus des über der Ausgabe 1974 verstorbenen Oxforder Ägyptologen und Papyrologen John W. Barns (übrigens einer der britischen Geheimagenten, die in Bletchley Park deutsche militärische Signalcodes entschlüsselten),¹¹ nachweisen zu können, dass die Papyri aus der unmittelbaren Umgebung des Mönchsvaters Pachomius stammten, gleichsam spiegelbildlich der extreme Skeptizismus von John C. Shelton, bis zu seinem Tod 1992 Papyrologe in Trier, korrespondiert, der die bunte Mischung der Kartonage-Papyri von Codex VII mit einem zufälligen Arrangement eines Müllhaufens erklärte und deswegen jedwede Auswertung ablehnte.¹² Shelton übernahm die nach dem Tod von Barns verwaiste Edition der Kartonage-Papyri und sah sich durch die pointierte Sichtweise seines Vorgängers zu seinem ebenso pointierten Skeptizismus herausgefordert. Treu dagegen votierte in der ihm eigenen Vorsicht mit seiner erwähnten Rezension eher in Richtung von Barns, bezweifelte, dass „tatsächlich jemals Makulatur von der Mülldeponie zurückgeholt worden ist, um zu Kartonage verarbeitet zu werden“, und verwies auf den Ausdruck Χηνοβωσχίτης, „Einwohner von Chenoboskia“ in einem Brief aus der Kartonage von Codex XI.¹³ Einer der angeblich vom Müllhaufen stammenden Texte aus der Kartonage von Codex VII, Brief 67, enthält zudem die explizite Erwähnung eines Klosters (τὸ μονάχιον) sowie die abschließende Grußformel τοὺς παρὰ σοὶ ἀδελφοὺς ἐγὼ καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάνπολλα προσαγορεύομεν „Die Brüder, die bei dir sind, grüßen mich und die mit mir befindlichen Brüder oftmals“.¹⁴ Um die Frage zu klären, ob diese Grußformel, die nun wirklich eindeutig auf monastische Kontexte weist, zum Schwur beim Glück der beiden Kaiser Constans und Constantius passt oder ob die bei Origenes und Tertullianus belegte christliche Polemik gegen solche Schwüre als Götzendienst das eher

¹⁰ J. W. B. Barns/G. M. Browne/J. C. Shelton (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers* (NHC 16), Leiden 1981, 57–58.

¹¹ C. Morris, *Navy Ultra's Poor Relations*, in: F. H. Hinsley/A. Stripp (Hg.), *Codebreakers. The Inside Story of Bletchley Park*, Oxford 1993, 231–245, hier 236.

¹² So der letzte Satz seiner Einleitung: Barns/Browne/Shelton (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Codices* (s. Anm. 10), 11.

¹³ Brief 153 aus Codex XI: Barns/Browne/Shelton (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Codices* (s. Anm. 10), 105; Brief 67 aus Codex VII: aaO., 61. – Zur Rezension von Kurt Treu vgl. ders., *Christliche Papyri IX*, in: *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 29 (1983), 107–110, hier 109.

¹⁴ Dazu jetzt ausführlich: H. Lundhaug/L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 97), Tübingen 2015; N. Denzey Lewis/J. Ariel Blount, *Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in: *JBL* 133 (2014), 397–417.

ausschließen dürfte, kann man die kontextbezogenen Recherchen schlecht in der Mitte des vierten Jahrhunderts abbrechen – gegen eine solche Abgrenzung der Identifikation von Kontexten der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften sprechen allein schon die kumulativen Verteilungsfunktionen für die Datierung von anderen, eindeutig in dasselbe Jahr wie den erwähnten Kartonage-Papyrus von Codex VII oder benachbarte Jahre datierten Papyri, die ebenfalls als Bindematerial verwendet worden sind; schon der schlichte Wahrscheinlichkeitswert spricht dafür, die Bindung des Codex selbst deutlich nach der Jahrhundertmitte anzusetzen. Gleiches gilt natürlich erst recht, wenn man den immer dichteren Argumenten von Hugo Lundhaug, Lance Jenott und anderen Mitgliedern ihrer Osloer Forschungsgruppe folgen, und wie sie auch inhaltliche Argumente für eine Ansetzung der Texte im frühen fünften oder späten vierten Jahrhundert beibringen will; Stephen Emmel hat ebenfalls vor einiger Zeit in einem Sammelband zum christlichen Mönchtum in Oberägypten festgehalten, dass die Frage, ob die Kartonage-Papyri zeigen, dass die Bibliothek mit einem pachomianischen Kloster zu verbinden ist, als offen bezeichnet werden muss.¹⁵ Mithin führt auch das zweite Verständnis des Begriffs „frühes Christentum“, das sich ausschließlich auf die ersten drei Jahrhunderte bezieht, auf bestimmte Einseitigkeiten im Blick auf die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften, die man vermeiden sollte: Es ist mindestens eine offene Frage, ob die jetzige Fassung dieser Texte nicht doch an das Ende des vierten oder den Anfang des fünften gehört. Es gibt zwar insbesondere in der kontinentaleuropäischen Tradition der biblischen Exegese die Tendenz, an der Stelle von faktisch überlieferten literarischen Endgestalten kanonisch gewordener Texte hypothetisch rekonstruierte Frühformen in den Blick zu nehmen, beispielsweise in der Urkundenhypothese Quellenschriften unserer heutigen Form des Pentateuch oder eine aus kanonisch gewordenen Evangelien im Wortlaut rekonstruierte Spruchquelle namens Q – und entsprechend sind die Texte von Nag Hammadi in den ersten fünfzig Jahren ihrer Erforschung gern nicht auf der Basis ihrer handschriftlich überlieferten Endgestalt, sondern aufgrund einer hypothetischen griechischen Vorlage analysiert worden, die man in der Regel beliebig früh datierte. Ich habe auf dem Kolloquium in Québec im Frühsommer 2015 am Beispiel des sogenannten „Evangelium Veritatis“ aus dem anfänglich „Codex Jung“ genannten ersten Codex¹⁶ zu zeigen versucht, auf wie schwachen

¹⁵ S. Emmel, *The 'Coptic Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi' and the Faw Qibli Excavations*, in: G. Gabra/H. N. Takla (Hg.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*. Band 2: *Nag Hammadi-Esna*, Kairo 2010, 41.

¹⁶ M. Malinine/H.-C. Puech/G. Quispel (Hg.), *Evangelium Veritatis. Codex Jung f. VIII^v–XVI^v (p. 16–32)/f. XIX^r–XXII^r (p. 37–43)* (Studien aus dem C. G. Jung-Institut 6), Zürich 1956; dies./W. Till (Hg.), *Evangelium Veritatis (Supplementum). Codex Jung f. XVII^r–f. XVIII^v (p. 33–36)* (Studien aus dem C. G. Jung-Institut 6), Zürich/Stuttgart 1961. – Der hier knapp zusammengefasste Vortrag unter dem Titel „Gospel of Truth – Some New Insights on the History of Valentinianism on the Basis of a new Analysis of Genre, Context and Content“ wird in den

Füßen eine solche Frühdatierung einer postulierten griechischen Vorlage steht, und will diese Argumentation hier nur sehr knapp wiederholen.

Neben die in allen ihren Stufen eher unwahrscheinliche Behauptung, dass der Text aufgrund seiner Anfangsworte „Das Evangelium der Wahrheit bedeutet Freude für die, denen es vom Vater der Wahrheit gnädig gewährt worden ist, ihn zu erkennen“¹⁷ die Subscriptio „das Evangelium der Wahrheit“ trug und sich Irenaeus auf eine so betitelte Schrift bezog, muss eine sechs Jahre nach Erscheinen der Erstausgabe von Jacques Ménard veröffentlichte griechische Rückübersetzung des Textes als Beleg dafür herhalten, dass es sich um einen Text des zweiten Jahrhunderts handelt. Ménard stellte diese Rückübersetzung ausdrücklich in die Tradition derjenigen griechischen Rückübersetzungen aus dem Syrischen, die Eduard Schwartz und Wilhelm Frankenberg in den ersten Jahrzehnten des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts für Texte des Athanasius, Pseudo-Clemens und Evagrius Ponticus angefertigt hatten.¹⁸ Freilich gab es bei diesen spätantiken Texten nie den Hauch eines Zweifels darüber, dass ein griechisches Original existiert hatte; zudem liegt für alle drei Textkomplexe eine größere Anzahl von griechischen Originaltexten (im Falle der pseudo-clementinischen Homilien immerhin in einer Bearbeitung der Originaltexte) vor, die Frankenberg und Schwartz bei ihren griechischen Retroversionen eine Annäherung an das verlorene Original möglich machten. Ich habe umgekehrt in Québec deutlich zu machen versucht, dass jene griechische Rückübersetzung von Ménard aufgrund der (im Vergleich zu originalgriechischen Texten der hohen Kaiserzeit) barbarischen Sprachgestalt klar zeigt, dass es sich um keinen originalgriechischen Text handeln kann, der der heutigen koptischen Version im ersten Codex zugrunde liegt – ähnlich hatten schon, wenn auch im Detail sehr unterschiedlich – Gerhard Fecht und Peter Nagel argumentiert.¹⁹

Akten der Konferenz „Seventy years after the Nag Hammadi findings: What have we learned?“ (Québec, 29.–31. Mai 2015) in der Reihe BCNH voraussichtlich 2017 publiziert werden.

¹⁷ πεγαγγελιον πτηνε ουτεληλ πε πνεει πταρξι πιρματ αβαλ εττοοτq̄ πιπωτ πτε τμηε. „Evangelium Veritatis“, p. 16,31–34.

¹⁸ J. É. Ménard, *L'Évangile de Vérité. Rétroversion Grecque et commentaire*, Paris 1962. – Ausführlichere, auch bibliographische Nachweise für die übrigen hier genannten Retroversionen im in Anm. 16 genannten Beitrag.

¹⁹ G. Fecht, Der erste ‚Teil‘ des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis (S. 16,31–22,20). I: Kapitel⁴ 1, Str. I–III; II: Kapitel⁴ 1, Str. IV – Kapitel⁴ 2, Str. VII; III: Kapitel⁴ 2, Str. VIII – Kapitel⁴ 3, Str. IX, in: *Orientalia* 30 (1961), 371–390; 31 (1962), 85–119 sowie 32 (1963), 298–335. P. Nagel, Die Herkunft des Evangelium Veritatis in sprachlicher Sicht, in: *OLZ* 61 (1966), 5–14; ders., *Codex apocryphus gnosticus Novi Testamenti*. Band 1: Evangelien und Apostelgeschichten aus den Schriften von Nag Hammadi und verwandten Kodizes. Koptisch und deutsch (WUNT I/326), Tübingen 2014, 33–36. Vgl. aber die kritischen Einwände bei A. Böhlig, Zur Ursprache des Evangelium Veritatis, in: *Le Muséon* 79 (1966), 317–333 = ders., *Gnosis und Synkretismus. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte* 2. Teil (WUNT I/48), Tübingen 1989, 373–394.

Wenn ich an dieser Stelle wenigstens knapp einmal verallgemeinern darf: Ebenso wie die rezeptionsästhetisch verbrämte Erneuerung des klassischen häresiologischen Paradigmas bei Hans-Friedrich Weiß bereits auf grundlegende methodologische Bedenken stoßen muss, so ist die – vor einem fachexegetischen, kontinentaleuropäischen Hintergrund leicht erklärliche wie gut verständliche – Fixierung der Nag-Hammadi-Forschung auf die nur in einigen wenigen Fällen eindeutig nachgewiesene griechische Vorlage und damit die programmatische Abwendung vom erhaltenen und überlieferten koptischen Text eine problematische *petitio principii*. Sie setzt beispielsweise die nicht unproblematische Annahme voraus, dass eine hypothetisch rekonstruierte frühere Vorlage in bestimmter Hinsicht wertvoller ist als das spätere materielle Substrat der Textüberlieferung – die jüngste Entwicklung der altertumswissenschaftlichen Editionen hat sich programmatisch von dieser Leitannahme abgewendet.

Aber es bleibt noch eine *dritte* Möglichkeit, den im Titel unserer Tagung genannten Begriff der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums zu verstehen. Er beschreibt dann die *gesamte* Geschichte des antiken Christentums von einem wo auch immer zu setzenden Anfang als selbstständige Religionsgemeinschaft bis zu einem wo auch immer zu setzenden Ende der Antike (ein Problem, auf das wir hier nicht eingehen müssen).²⁰ Repräsentativ für dieses dritte Verständnis ist das kleine, aber gehaltvolle Büchlein „Geschichte des frühen Christentums“ des in Berlin aufgewachsenen Kirchenhistorikers und Byzantinisten Friedhelm Winkelmann. Mit einem solchen Verständnis der Begrifflichkeit könnte man sogar noch die erwähnten neuesten Spätdatierungen der koptischen Fassungen ins frühe fünfte Jahrhundert als „frühchristlich“ bezeichnen und würde damit den gesamten Zeitraum in den Blick nehmen, der von irgendwem für die Entstehungszeit des Materials vorgeschlagen wird. Aber ist ein so weit gefasster Begriff „frühes Christentum“ überhaupt sinnvoll?

Man könnte aus unseren bisherigen Ausführungen einen Schluss ziehen, den vor kurzem Dietrich-Alex Koch in seiner pointiert wieder „Geschichte des Urchristentums“ überschriebenen Monographie gezogen hat, die die Geschichte bis zum Jahr 150 n.Chr. beschreibt: Koch formuliert dort, dass der Begriff „Frühes Christentum“ in seiner zeitlichen Offenheit so unbestimmt“ verwendet würde, „dass er als Beschreibungsbegriff für die Anfangsphase kaum geeignet ist.“²¹ Man könnte natürlich auch umgekehrt formulieren, dass jener Begriff „frühes Christentum“ vorzüglich geeignet (und damit auch für eine Titelformulierung eines Kongresses bestens geeignet) ist, weil sich an ihm so gut demonstrieren

²⁰ K. Flasch, Philosophie und Epochenbewusstsein, in: D. Simon (Hg.), Zeithorizonte in der Wissenschaft. 7. Symposium der Deutschen Akademien der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 31. Oktober–1. November 2002), Berlin/New York 2004, 1–20; vgl. dazu C. Markschies, Wissen in der Zeit – Drei kurze Erwägungen zu Fortschritten, Rückschritten und Stagnationen in der Wissenschaft, in: Simon (Hg.), a. a. O., 59–74.

²¹ D. A. Koch, Geschichte des Urchristentums, Göttingen 2014, 24.

lässt, wie offen im Kern die Datierung vieler Schriften aus dem Textfund von Nag Hammadi ist, natürlich insbesondere im Blick auf ihre postulierten griechischen Vorfassungen, aber eben auch, wie immer deutlicher wird, im Blick auf ihre koptischen erhaltenen Textfassungen. Die für den Geschmack eines Kirchenhistorikers eher aus dem Handgelenk vorgenommenen Datierungen vieler hypothetisch postulierter griechischer Vorfassungen erhaltener koptischer Texte („wohl im zweiten Jahrhundert entstanden“) entspricht der Art, in der insbesondere die kanonisch gewordenen Evangelien gelegentlich datiert werden; mein Tübinger neutestamentlicher Lehrer Martin Hengel hat schon vor vielen Jahren seine Studierenden gern auf die eher schlichte Basis solcher Datierungen hingewiesen. Ohne Zweifel zeigt sich an dieser Stelle auch eine Differenz zwischen den Fächerkulturen, aus denen diejenigen Forscherinnen und Forscher stammten und stammen, die sich an der Erforschung der Schriften aus Nag Hammadi beteiligen: Es kann eigentlich niemanden verwundern, wenn diejenigen Kolleginnen und Kollegen, die aus dem Fachgebiet Neues Testament stammen, Texte eher in die zeitliche Nähe der für ihr Fach konstitutiven Schriften rücken möchten, umgekehrt aber auch niemanden überraschen, wenn Kirchenhistoriker Schriften, die eindeutig aus dem spätantiken Ägypten stammen, zunächst einmal in diese geografischen, kulturellen, religiösen und sozialen Kontexte zu repatriieren versuchen. Ohnehin muss aus religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive die ganze Frage nach dem Kontext der Schriften von Nag Hammadi „in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums“ als theologische Engführung erscheinen; schließlich verschwimmen die Grenzen zwischen paganer, jüdischer und christlicher Religion im spätantiken Ägypten umso stärker, je mehr sich der Fokus der Betrachtung von der religion as prescribed (in den Werken christlicher Bischöfe und Mönche) zur religion as practiced verschiebt.²²

II. Die literaturwissenschaftliche Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Texte

Nach diesen Bemerkungen zu zwei Begriffen aus dem Titel unseres Symposiums, die uns bereits auf ein Bündel offener Fragen und ungeklärter Probleme beim Textfund von Nag Hammadi gebracht haben, möchte ich mich nun ein wenig detaillierter mit dem spezifischen Zugriff beschäftigen, den die Veranstalter der Tagung auf die Materie vorgeschlagen haben, und zu einem zweiten Hauptabschnitt dieses Vortrags kommen. Im Exposé heißt es: „Die geplante Tagung möchte die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften nunmehr (sc. nach einer vornehmlich auf deren religionsgeschichtliche Einordnung konzentrierten Epoche der Forschungsgeschichte) im Kontext der antiken christlichen Literatur in den Blick

²² M. Vinzent, Das „heidnische“ Ägypten im 5. Jahrhundert, in: J. van Oort/D. Wyrwa (Hg.), *Heiden und Christen* (SPA 5), Löwen 1998, 32–65, hier 34–41.

nehmen und sich damit auf ein bislang nur ansatzweise bearbeitetes Feld begeben“. Wenn man nach Ansätzen fragt, die Schriften von Nag Hammadi im Kontext der antiken christlichen Literatur in den Blick zu nehmen, und nach Gründen, warum diese Einordnung bislang nur ansatzweise erfolgte, dann hilft wieder ein Verweis auf die Fächerkulturen derjenigen Personen, die an der philologischen Ersterschließung wie Erstkommentierung des Materials beteiligt waren, sowie auf die Implikationen dieser disziplinären Beheimatungen.

Als ich vor vielen Jahren an meiner Dissertation arbeitete, erschien zusätzlich zu der von James Robinson herausgegebenen Gesamtübersetzung „The Nag Hammadi Library“, die der Verlag als „the definitive new translation of the Gnostic scriptures“ bewarb,²³ im Jahre 1987 eine neue Übersetzung des großen Koptologen Bentley Layton. Layton macht in seinem Vorwort explizit, was man als deutscher Leser am Titel übersehen kann: „The Gnostic Scriptures“ ist eben nicht nur ein neutraler Titel wie beispielsweise „Nag Hammadi Deutsch“. Layton schreibt in seinem Vorwort: „The works in this collection are heretical – a heretical counterpart of the holy scripture of Christianity and Judaism.“²⁴ Mithin hat der englische Titel „The Gnostic Scriptures“ zwei Implikationen, man kann ihn als „die gnostischen Schriften“ übersetzen, aber eben auch als „die gnostische Bibel“. Ganz explizit macht diese Bedeutung eine philologisch höchst zweifelhafte deutsche Rückübersetzung aus dem Englischen, die Gerd Lüdemann und Martina Janßen 1997 unter dem Titel „Bibel der Häretiker. Die gnostischen Schriften aus Nag Hammadi“ vorgelegt haben. Mir geht es bei der Analyse nun nicht um die meines Erachtens hoch problematischen historischen und religionssoziologischen Implikate dieser Titel, nämlich um die Hypothese, es habe sich bei den hier präsentierten Schriften um kanonisierte oder kanonische Grundagentexte gehandelt, die in irgendeiner Weise den kanonisch gewordenen Schriften Alten und Neuen Testaments vergleichbar gewesen sein sollten – über diese Implikationen müsste man einmal im Vergleich zu ähnlichen Tendenzen der Rubrizierung im Blick auf das sogenannte apokryph gewordene Material sprechen. Mir geht es hier vielmehr um die Folgen, die diese Sicht auf die Schriften von Nag Hammadi für ihre Einordnung im Kontext der antiken christlichen Literatur als Literatur gezeigt hat. Meine These ist, dass auch hier der Vergleich mit dem apokryph gewordenen Material hilft. Dafür ein charakteristisches Beispiel: Die von Jens Schröter und mir gemeinsam erneut herausgegebene Sammlung des Materials in deutscher Übersetzung, die auf den niedersächsischen Landpfarrer Edgar Hennecke und den in Berlin aufgewachsenen Patristiker

²³ J. M. Robinson (Hg.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Translated and Introduced by Members of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, California/Leiden/New York u. a. ⁴1996.

²⁴ B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, London 1987, Preface XI. – Das Werk von Lüdemann/Janßen hat knapp besprochen: H.-G. Bethge, Rez. Lüdemann/Janßen, in: *ThLZ* 124 (1999), 138–141.

Wilhelm Schneemelcher zurückgeht, ordnet diese Literatur nach Gattungen, wie sie im kanonisch gewordenen Neuen Testament belegt sind: Evangelien, Apostelgeschichten, Briefe und Apokalypsen. Wilhelm Schneemelcher hat, als er mir vor vielen Jahren dieses Werk zur Fortsetzung übergab, jene Präsentationsform auch noch einmal explizit als die besondere Pointe der deutschen Apokryphenforschung des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts bezeichnet, die er gern in der neuen Auflage bewahrt haben wollte.²⁵ Jens Schröter und ich selbst sind dieser Bitte des Vorgängers trotz erheblicher Bedenken gegen die ursprünglichen Gründe dieser Rubrizierung wie auch ihre seinerzeitige konkrete Durchführung im vor einiger Zeit erschienenen ersten Band des Werkes gefolgt und werden das auch noch in den folgenden Bänden der siebenten Auflage tun. Freilich sind auf diese Weise viele Probleme und offene Fragen präsent, die gegenwärtig die literaturwissenschaftliche Beschreibung von nicht kanonisch gewordenen Texten des antiken Christentums charakterisieren. Um diese Probleme und Fragen darzustellen, muss ich kurz ausholen:

In einem Standardwerk meiner Disziplin, dem in erster Auflage 1998 vorgelegten „Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur“, herausgegeben von dem Göttinger Latinisten Siegmund Döpp und dem verstorbenen Bochumer Patristiker Wilhelm Geerlings (1941–2008),²⁶ halten die beiden Herausgeber in ihrem Vorwort ebenso knapp wie bestimmt fest, dass für „den Übergang zu einer literaturwissenschaftlichen und gattungsgeschichtlichen Darstellung der christlichen Literatur die Vorarbeiten“ fehlen. Diese Einschätzung ist – von Ausnahmen einmal abgesehen – durchaus zutreffend; es existiert überhaupt ein einziges einschlägiges Werk aus dem letzten Jahrhundert: Im Jahre 1911 veröffentlichte der in Erlangen lehrende und in Greifswald ausgebildete Kirchenhistoriker *Hermann Jordan* (1878–1922)²⁷ im Verlag „Quelle & Meyer“ seine „Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur“. Bereits im Vorwort macht der damals noch als außerordentlicher Professor lehrende Autor Jordan deutlich, dass er – im Unterschied zur „Patrologie“ Gerhard Rauschens, auf die sich das erwähnte Lexikon von Döpp und Geerlings zurückführt –, keine Quellenkunde vorlegen wollte, „sondern eine Geschichte der Literatur selbst“.²⁸ Das Inhaltsverzeichnis dokumentiert, was das Vorwort sagt: „Schon der äußere Aufbau des Buches

²⁵ Dazu knapp C. Marksches, Vorwort, in: ders./J. Schröter in Verbindung mit A. Heiser (Hg.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, 7. Auflage der von Edgar Hennecke begründeten und von Wilhelm Schneemelcher fortgeführten Sammlung der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen. Band 1/Teilband 1: Evangelien und Verwandtes, Tübingen 2012, V–VII.

²⁶ Unter der Überschrift „Geschichte eines Lehrbuches. Stammbaum“ bibliographiert in: S. Döpp/W. Geerlings (Hg.), *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, Freiburg³2002, IX.

²⁷ Zum Autor: C. Weise/M. Wolfes, Art. Jordan, Hermann Arnold Siegfried, *BBKL* 18 (2001), 764–772.

²⁸ H. Jordan, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Leipzig 1911, V.

zeigt, daß ich zu diesem Zwecke neue Wege gehen mußte“.²⁹ Es gliedert nämlich nach Gattungen (sie werden als „Formen“ bezeichnet) und eröffnet daher zwei sehr unterschiedlich umfangreiche Hauptabschnitte: „die Prosa“ (383 Seiten) und „die Poesie“ (43 Seiten). Unter ersterer Rubrik kommen zu stehen: „Erzählungen und Geschichtsbücher“, „Briefe“, „Apokalypsen“, „Reden und Predigten“, „die Apologie“, „der Dialog“, „die Streitschrift“, „Abhandlungen“, „die Formen der Literatur der kirchlichen Ordnungen“, „die Formen hermeneutischer und kritischer Literatur“ sowie „die Übersetzungs- und Überlieferungsliteratur“, „Sentenz“ und „Inschriften“. Die Poesie gliedert sich in „das religiöse und kirchliche Lied“ sowie „die anderen Dichtungsformen“. Der früher in Heidelberg lehrende Neutestamentler Klaus Berger hat in der einzigen ausführlicheren Würdigung des Buches von Jordan, die mir bekannt ist, relativ schroff bemerkt, dass die „Durchführung des auf den ersten Blick großartigen Programms [...] dann freilich etwas ‚lahm‘“ daherkomme, „da die Formen selbst nur sehr selten präzise beschrieben werden; statt dessen wird eine Mischung aus inhaltlichen, dogmengeschichtlichen, Echtheitsfragen und Beurteilung des Stils betreffenden Angaben geliefert.“³⁰ Vielleicht kann man auch so formulieren: Jordan organisiert eine klassische Einleitung in die altchristliche Literatur nach Gattungen um und stellt allenfalls in der Einleitung zu den Gattungen ein paar einleitende Bemerkungen zusammen. Man könnte jetzt an einzelnen Beispielen zeigen, dass die Gattungen bei Jordan kaum auf die entsprechenden Diskussionen in der antiken Rhetorik und Literaturwissenschaft bezogen sind; entsprechend hat Jordan sein vielleicht literaturwissenschaftlich am besten ausgewiesener Fachkollege, Harnacks Gießener Schüler *Gustav Krüger* (1862–1940), in einer Rezension auch vorgeworfen, „Verlegenheitsgattungen“ zu konstruieren, in denen nicht Zusammengehöriges zusammengefasst worden sei.³¹ Döpp und Geerlings behaupten – meiner Ansicht nach zutreffend – in ihrem Standardwerk, dass sich diese Situation vom Anfang des zwanzigsten am Anfang des einundzwanzigsten Jahrhunderts nicht wesentlich geändert hat, obwohl natürlich insbesondere für die pagane Literatur inzwischen außerordentlich viele einschlägige Studien vorliegen und beispielsweise Ergebnisse der Erforschung antiker Romane und Novellen durchaus auf antike christliche Texte wie die apokryph gewordenen Apostelakten angewendet worden sind. Döpp und Geerlings nehmen zwar „neben den prosopographischen Artikeln auch solche zu Fragen der literarischen Gattungen, Schulen und Sprachen“ auf,³² aber sie thematisieren praktisch nirgendwo die Frage, welche Konsequenzen aus den formgeschichtlichen Beobachtungen (beispielsweise zum Wandel der Formen und Gattungen)

²⁹ Jordan, *Geschichte* (s. Anm. 28), V.

³⁰ K. Berger, *Einführung in die Formgeschichte*, Tübingen 1987, 56–59, hier 56f.

³¹ G. Krüger, *Rez. Jordan, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Leipzig 1911, in: *ThLZ* 37 (1912), 171–173.

³² Döpp/Geerlings, *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur* (s. Anm. 26), VII.

zu ziehen sind, oder die Frage, wie die christlichen Autoren und Autorinnen die paganen Formen und Gattungen transformiert haben. Manches, was man erwartet, fehlt entsprechend ganz, beispielsweise ein Stichwort „Apokalypse“. Eine Theorie literarischer Gattungen lag bei der Abfassung der Artikel und der Konzeption des Lexikons offenbar nicht zugrunde, erst recht keine – mit dem Berliner Literaturwissenschaftler Klaus Hempfer gesprochen – literaturwissenschaftliche „Supertheorie“, die beispielsweise auf der Basis der Systemtheorie Luhmanns den Zusammenhang von Literatur und Gesellschaft reflektiert.³³

Durch diesen Befund erklärt sich aber meines Erachtens eine wichtige weitere offene Frage im Blick auf die Nag-Hammadi-Schriften: Der im voraufgehenden Abschnitt thematisierten programmatischen Frühdatierung von Schriften, die in spätantiker koptischer Fassung im Fund von Nag Hammadi überliefert sind, korrespondiert (wenn überhaupt die Frage der literarischen Gattung reflektiert wird) nur allzu oft eine faktisch ausschließliche Orientierung an neutestamentlichen Literaturgattungen – zunächst einmal auch aus dem schlichten und einfachen Grund, dass in dieser akademischen Disziplin die Erforschung der literarischen Gattungen bei weitem fortgeschrittener ist und auch die (um erneut Hempfer zu zitieren) „Supertheorien“ aus der Literaturwissenschaft je und je einbezieht. Damit fehlt aber das methodische Instrumentarium, um die Differenzen zwischen bestimmten Gattungen, die die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft identifiziert und diskutiert, und den literarischen Befunden in Schriften aus Nag Hammadi zu identifizieren.³⁴

Ich habe diesen Zusammenhang in meinem bereits erwähnten Referat in Québec für das „Evangelium Veritatis“ zu explizieren versucht und will an dieser Stelle wieder nur kurz auf meine dortigen Ausführungen verweisen: Die drei Erstherausgeber des „Evangelium Veritatis“ charakterisieren das Genre dieses Textes als „une méditation, une ‚élévation‘ sur l’Évangile, une sorte de commentaire enthousiaste, d’effusion spirituelle“³⁵ – identifizierten das Werk also nicht präzise mit einer bestimmten Gattung, für die es auch andere Belege aus der antiken Literatur oder gar eine Rubrizierung in der antiken Literatur gibt. Johannes Leipoldt stimmte dieser Charakterisierung zu und schlug vor, in dem

³³ S. Hartung (Hg.), K. W. Hempfer, Grundlagen der Textinterpretation (Text und Kontext. Romanische Literaturen und allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft. Sonderband), Stuttgart 2002; K. W. Hempfer, Gattungstheorie. Information und Synthese (Information und Synthese 1), München 1973.

³⁴ Zu den – etwas abgekürzt formuliert – Gattungsmischungen und Gattungskreuzungen vgl. G. Greatrex/H. Elton (Hg.), *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, Farnham/Burlington, VT 2015 sowie T. Fuhrer, *Hypertexts and Auxiliary Texts: New Genres in Late Antiquity*, in: T. D. Papanghelis/S. J. Harrison/S. Frangoulidis (Hg.), *Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature. Encounters, Interfaces and Transformations (Trends in Classics. Supplementary Volumes 20)*, Berlin/Boston 2013, 79–93 und J. R. Stenger (Hg.), *The Library of the Other Antiquity/Spätantike Konzeptionen von Literatur (BKAW 2. Reihe NF)*, Heidelberg 2015.

³⁵ Malinine/Puech/Quispel (Hg.), *Evangelium Veritatis. Codex Jung f. VIII^v–XVI^v (p. 16–32)/f. XIX^r–XXII^r (p. 37–43) (s. Anm. 16), XV.*

Text daher „eine erbauliche Betrachtung *über* das ‚Evangelium der Wahrheit‘“ zu sehen, nicht aber das von Irenaeus erwähnte Veritatis Evangelium.³⁶ Auch wenn solche Charakterisierungen sehr im Unverbindlichen bleiben, implizieren sie doch bereits, was Peter Nagel jüngst explizit so formulierte: Es sei zu konstatieren, „dass es gattungsgeschichtlich und formgeschichtlich weder nach den Merkmalen der kanonischen Evangelien noch nach den Merkmalen apokrypher oder gnostischer Evangelien (Spruchevangelium, narratives Evangelium oder Dialogevangelium) dem literarischen Genre ‚Evangelium‘ zugeordnet werden kann.“³⁷ Nagel bleibt also an dieser Stelle ausschließlich am negativen Befund orientiert, dass der Text keiner im kanonisch gewordenen Neuen Testament bezeugten Gattung zugeordnet werden kann; er kommt offenbar gar nicht auf die Idee, sich in der übrigen antiken, jüdischen, christlichen und paganen Literatur umzusehen. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist der von den Erstherausgebern eingeführte Begriff „Meditation“ eine wenig präzise Verlegenheitslösung und ich bin nicht restlos glücklich damit, dass ich ihn im Zusammenhang mit der Neuausgabe der von Edgar Hennecke begründeten und von Wilhelm Schneemelcher fortgeführten deutschen Übersetzung der antiken christlichen Apokryphen durch den Terminus „Evangelienmeditationen“ erneut aufgegriffen habe, worunter ich einen Oberbegriff für verschiedene antike Gattungen verstehe. Denn meine eigene Definition von Evangelienmeditation im genannten Werk ist in Wahrheit gar keine literaturwissenschaftliche, sondern eine inhaltliche Beschreibung:

„Meditation“ ist hier schlicht im Sinne des lateinischen Begriffs *meditatio* gemeint: *Nachdenken* über das Evangelium im Sinne eines Nachdenkens über das Kerygma, die Botschaft von Jesus als dem Christus Gottes, in Form eines Traktates, aber dann auch als (homiletisches) *Einüben* in diese Botschaft in Form einer Predigt und schließlich *Vorstudium* zur Heilsbotschaft in Form vertiefender Offenbarungen (aus gnostischer und natürlich nicht aus mehrheitskirchlicher Feder).³⁸

Mit anderen Worten: Wenn man das „Evangelium Veritatis“ in diesem Sinne als „Evangelienmeditation“ anspricht, dann besteht trotzdem die Notwendigkeit, präzise eine antike Gattung anzugeben, der dieser Text zuzurechnen ist. Auch an dieser Stelle besteht (wie im Blick auf eine angebliche griechische Vorlage) eine überraschende Einigkeit in der Sekundärliteratur: Früh ist schon von einer „Homilie“ die Rede, wenn über den koptischen Text gesprochen wird, beispielsweise im Vorwort zur erwähnten griechischen Rückübersetzung von Jacques E. Ménard.³⁹

³⁶ J. Leipoldt, Das „Evangelium der Wahrheit“, in: ThLZ 82 (1957), 826–834, hier 831.

³⁷ Nagel, *Codex apocryphus gnosticus Novi Testamenti* (s. Anm. 19), 30–31.

³⁸ C. Markschies, B. VII. Evangelienmeditationen, in: ders./J. Schröter, *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*. Band 1/Teilband 2: *Evangelien und Verwandtes*, Tübingen 2012, 1239–1241, hier 1239.

³⁹ Ménard, *L'Évangile de Vérité* (s. Anm. 18), 26.

Aber handelt es sich beim „Evangelium Veritatis“ wirklich um eine Homilie? Wir besitzen aus dem zweiten Jahrhundert praktisch kaum Homilien – wenn man von denjenigen Fragmenten des stadtrömischen Theologen Valentinus absieht, die Clemens von Alexandrien einer Homilie zuweist, der gänzlich anders gearteten Passah-Homilie des Melito von Sardes und den später Philo von Alexandrien zugewiesenen, nur armenisch überlieferten hellenistisch-jüdischen Predigten, die Folker Siegert übersetzt und kommentiert hat.⁴⁰ Für das dritte Jahrhundert ist die Überlieferungslage natürlich ungleich besser; allein aus der Feder des Origenes liegen allerlei Homilien in griechischer Originalfassung wie in gekürzter lateinischer Übersetzung vor.⁴¹ Wenn man Origenes *pars pro toto* nehmen darf, müsste man sagen, dass jedenfalls die mehrheitskirchliche christliche Homilie des dritten Jahrhunderts durch Schriftzitate und einen kommentierenden Stil geprägt war – und damit wäre eine deutliche Differenz zu dem als „Evangelium Veritatis“ bezeichneten Text aus Nag Hammadi markiert. Es bliebe ja nur der Ausweg, wenn es sich denn um eine Homilie nach den Gattungsmerkmalen der mehrheitschristlichen Homilien des dritten Jahrhunderts handeln sollte, zu postulieren, dass hier ein valentinianisches „Evangelium Veritatis“ ausgelegt wurde, das uns leider verloren gegangen ist und wir daher die „Schriftzitate“ nicht mehr zu identifizieren vermögen. Kann man sich aber wirklich vorstellen, dass sich in den uns erhaltenen zwei Versionen des koptischen Textes aus dem Fund von Nag Hammadi bislang unerkannte Zitate eines verlorenen valentinianischen „Veritatis Evangelium“ verbergen, unerkannt einfach deswegen, weil wir den zugrundeliegenden Text so wenig in den Händen haben, wie ihn mutmaßlich Irenaeus nicht in den Händen hatte? Freilich wäre, wenn wir so fragen, der Befund, der sich bei einer Analyse der Homilien des Origenes ergibt, und sich an einigen wenigen anderen Texten aus dem dritten Jahrhundert bestätigen lässt, *pars pro toto* genommen – ein nicht unproblematisches Verfahren. Unser Wissen über das Genre der Homilie ist allein aufgrund der Menge erhaltener Texte doch recht begrenzt.

Setzen wir also noch einmal anders an, um einer Bestimmung der Gattung des „Evangelium Veritatis“ näher zu kommen. Der unvergessene Carsten Colpe hat in seiner posthum publizierten „Einleitung in die Schriften aus Nag Hammadi“, die auf seinen Beiträgen im „Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum“ aufbaut,

⁴⁰ F. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten: Ps.-Philon, „Über Jona“, „Über Jona“ (Fragment) und „Über Simson“*. Band 1: Übersetzung aus dem Armenischen und sprachliche Erläuterungen (WUNT I/20), Tübingen 1980; ders., *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten*. Band 2: Kommentar nebst Beobachtungen zur hellenistischen Vorgeschichte der Bibelhermeneutik (WUNT I/61), Tübingen 1992 sowie *Pseudo-Philon, Prédications synagogales*. Traduction, notes et commentaire par F. Siegert et J. de Roulet, avec la collaboration de J.-J. Aubert et N. Cochand (SC 435), Paris 1999.

⁴¹ M. Sachot, *Art. Homilie*, RAC 16 (1994), 148–175; E. Mühlberg, *„Predigt in der Alten Kirche“*. Rückblick und Ausblick, in: ders./J. van Oort (Hg.), *Predigt in der Alten Kirche*, Kampen 1994, 123–128.

diese Beiträge aber bearbeitet und ergänzt, das Genre jenes Textes aus Nag Hammadi zwar als „priesterlich-homiletische Meditation“ bestimmt, allerdings dafür votiert, „eine streng ägyptologisch fundierte, aber den Text als koptischen in seiner Eigenart belassende Analyse seines Aufbaus“ durchzuführen.⁴² Von einer Homilie bleibt in dieser Analyse allerdings nicht mehr viel übrig; es handelt sich eigentlich (auch wenn Colpe das nicht sagt) beim „Evangelium Veritatis“ um einen Traktat, der Elemente direkten Selbstreferates seines Autors und direkter Anrede an die Hörer- bzw. Leserschaft enthält. Solche lehrende, an einen Traktat erinnernde Argumentation kann sich natürlich in unterschiedlichsten Gattungen, sowohl in einem Brief wie in einem Lehrvortrag, finden, selbstverständlich auch in einer Homilie – da jeder originale Titel fehlt, dazu liturgische Eröffnung und Schluss, wie wir sie in einer Homilie erwarten dürften, aber auch briefliche Anreden und Grüße (wie schon Martin Schenke 1959 feststellte),⁴³ müssen wir meines Erachtens eingestehen, dass wir die ursprüngliche Gattung bzw. das ursprüngliche Genre des Textes nicht bestimmen können. Möglich ist einstweilen vor allem die Beschreibung von Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden zu anderen Gattungen und Genres, die wir schon besser kennen.⁴⁴

Insbesondere wenn wir den koptischen Textfund von Nag Hammadi im spätantiken Christentum Ägyptens kontextualisieren wollen und nicht immer weiter über nur hypothetisch postulierbare Texte des zweiten und frühen dritten Jahrhunderts handeln wollen, bleibt nur der mühsame Weg, die bisher fehlende Literaturgeschichte der antiken christlichen Literatur nach ihren Gattungen wenigstens partiell zuvor zu erarbeiten, um nicht immer nur mit Gattungen der im Neuen Testament kanonisch gewordenen Literatur zu hantieren. Wieder dürfte es zentral sein, auch an dieser Stelle das klassische rezeptionsästhetische Paradigma, das gern unter der berühmten Programmformel „Antike und Christentum“ daher kam,⁴⁵ entschlossen zu überwinden und nach Transformationen antiker Gattungen wie Formen in der antiken christlichen Literatur der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit zu fragen.

⁴² C. Colpe, Einleitung in die Schriften aus Nag Hammadi (JThF 16), Münster 2011, 108.

⁴³ H.-M. Schenke, Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis, Göttingen 1959, 10.

⁴⁴ Vgl. dazu H. W. Attridge, The Gospel of Truth as an Exoteric Text, in: C. W. Hedrick/R. Hodgson (Hg.), Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism & Early Christianity, Peabody, MA 1986 = Eugene, OR 2005, 239–255 und einstweilen C. Markschies, Esoterisches Wissen im Platonismus und in der christlichen Gnosis, in: K. Geus/M. Geller (Hg.), Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Pre-Print 454: TOPOI – Dahlem Seminar for the History of Ancient Sciences II, Esoteric Knowledge in Antiquity, Berlin 2014, 107–119 (eine ausführlichere Publikation ist in Vorbereitung).

⁴⁵ C. Markschies, Antiquity and Christianity or: The Unavoidability of False Questions, in: D. Brakke/A.-C. Jacobsen/J. Ulrich (Hg.), Beyond Reception. Mutual Influences between Antique Religion, Judaism, and Early Christianity (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 1), Frankfurt/Main 2006, 17–34.

III. Die theologiegeschichtliche Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Texte

Ich hatte einen dritten Abschnitt zu offenen Fragen der theologiegeschichtlichen Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Texte versprochen. Nicht nur aus Raumgründen möchte ich ihn äußerst knapp halten, mehr als Nachbemerkung anlegen denn als eigentlich ausgeführten dritten Abschnitt. Dabei wäre eine ausführliche Diskussion der Zusammenhänge durchaus spannend. Denn die Tradition dogmen- und theologiegeschichtlicher Forschung insbesondere, aber keineswegs nur in Europa folgte über lange Jahrzehnte einem klassischen geistes- und ideengeschichtlichen Paradigma. Sie folgte diesem Paradigma stellenweise auch dann noch, als es längst in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften überwunden war und beispielsweise durch neue Ansätze einer Ideengeschichte ergänzt bzw. abgelöst war.⁴⁶ Das galt natürlich auch für die Erforschung des Phänomens, das wir nach wie vor als „Gnosis“ bezeichnen, und entsprechend für die Texte aus Nag Hammadi.

Den „garstigen, breiten Graben“ zwischen einem geistes- und ideengeschichtlichen Zugriff auf die Materie einerseits und einem eher sozial- oder literaturgeschichtlichen Zugang haben in den letzten Jahren allerdings vor allem amerikanische Kolleginnen und Kollegen ganz selbstverständlich überbrückt; ich nenne hier David Brakke, Karen King und Dylan M. Burns.⁴⁷ Diesen Weg gilt es entschlossen weiter zu beschreiten. Dabei müssen insbesondere die bereits beschriebenen literaturwissenschaftlichen Fragestellungen und die sozialwissenschaftliche Auswertung der Quellen ineinander greifen, weil wir zwar ohne Mühe festhalten können, dass bestimmte Personen in bestimmten Texten von ihren Gegnern als Gruppe portraitiert werden, aber die schlichte Frage, wieviel literarische Stilisierung hier im Spiel ist, schwer zu beantworten bleibt. Immer schon gab es Skeptiker einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Auswertung der Quellen und mir scheint, dass ihre Einwände noch nicht genügend ernst genommen worden sind.⁴⁸ Mir geht es dabei nicht um radikalen Skeptizismus, sondern lediglich um die notwendige methodologische Umsicht. Bringt man solche methodisch kontrollierte Skepsis in Anschlag, sind durchaus bestimmte Aussagen auf der Basis der Quellen möglich. Vor einiger Zeit habe ich einmal nachzuweisen versucht, dass eine der vielen gnostischen Gruppen, die Epiphanius von Salamis

⁴⁶ Zur Einführung: M. Mulsow/A. Mahler (Hg.), *Die Cambridge School der politischen Ideengeschichte (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 1925)*, Berlin 2010 bzw. P. Sarasin (Hg.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 1639)*, Frankfurt/Main 2003.

⁴⁷ D. Brakke, *The Gnostics. Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*, Cambridge, MA/London 2010, 27f. (mit bedenkenswerten Einwänden gegen eine rein typologische Definition von „Gnosis“); K. King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, Cambridge, MA/London 2003; für Burns vgl. unten Anm. 55.

⁴⁸ Vgl. nur C. Scholten, *Gibt es Quellen zur Sozialgeschichte der Valentinianer Roms?*, in: *ZNW* 79 (1988), 244–261.

konstruiert, nach seiner eigenen Darstellung aus höchstens zwei, wahrscheinlich einer einzigen Person besteht, die exakt dem gleichen monastischen Milieu in Palaestina angehören wie der später zum Bischof von Salamis aufgestiegene monastische Autor des häresiologischen Konstruktes selbst.⁴⁹ Die sozialwissenschaftliche Auswertung einer stark häresiologisch durchkonstruierten Häresiographie eines streitbaren Bischofs wird anderen Kriterien folgen müssen als die Auswertung eines Briefes oder einer Homilie.

Ebenso wie eine theologische- und sozialgeschichtliche Auswertung Hand in Hand gehen müssen, muss immer auch der literaturwissenschaftliche Blick bei jeder Form von Geistes- und Ideengeschichte der „Gnosis“ berücksichtigt werden. Vor jeder Auswertung „gnostischer Texte“ aus Nag Hammadi muss beispielsweise die Frage nach dem literaturwissenschaftlichen und theologischen Zusammenhang von (philosophischem oder philosophierenden Kunst-)„Mythos“ und „System“ gestellt werden.⁵⁰ Dabei stammt der von uns so selbstverständlich verwendete System-Begriff („das valentinianische System“ versus „das sethianische System“) bekanntlich aus der frühen Neuzeit; niemand in der Antike hätte die knappen doxographischen Zusammenstellungen der Prinzipientheorie einer philosophischen Richtung als deren $\sigma\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\mu\alpha$ bezeichnet.⁵¹ Für bestimmte valentinianische Texte mag die aus der platonischen Philosophie vertraute Grundstruktur zutreffen, dass in diesen Texten greifbarer (philosophierender Kunst-)Mythos in Wahrheit nur eine Form der mehr oder weniger exoterischen Interpretation einer esoterischen Prinzipientheorie darstellt, die uns verloren ist, aber zur angemessenen Interpretation des Kunst-Mythos rekonstruiert werden muss. Aber diese „platonische Struktur“ der Präsentation von Prinzipientheorie, Kosmologie und Anthropologie trifft sicher nicht für jeden Text zu, den wir der „Gnosis“ zuweisen, und sicher auch nicht für die meisten Nag-Hammadi-Texte. Es gibt, um es einmal sehr thetisch zu formulieren, zunächst einmal ein literarisches Eigengewicht der Erzählung im (Kunst-)Mythos, der nicht durch das im Hintergrund liegende System reguliert und begrenzt wird. Sodann aber zeigt sich in den Texten doch wohl auch eine Form mythologischer Arabeske, deren

⁴⁹ C. Markschies, Einheit und Vielfalt des Christentums in Palästina – drei Fallbeispiele, in: A. Jördens/H. A. Gärtner/H. Görgemanns u. a. (Hg.), *Quaerite faciem eius semper*. Studien zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum. Dankesgabe für Albrecht Dihle zum 85. Geburtstag aus dem Heidelberger „Kirchenväterkolloquium“ (Studien zur Kirchengeschichte 8), Hamburg 2008, 180–202, hier 181–185 („die Archontiker bei Hebron“).

⁵⁰ Ein Versuch: C. Markschies, Welche Funktion hat der Mythos in gnostischen Systemen? Oder: ein gescheiterter Denkversuch zum Thema „Heil und Geschichte“, in: J. Frey/S. Krauter/H. Lichtenberger (Hg.), *Heil und Geschichte. Die Geschichtsbezogenheit des Heils und das Problem der Heilsgeschichte in der biblischen Tradition und in der theologischen Deutung* (WUNT I/248), Tübingen 2009, 513–534.

⁵¹ Details bei C. Strub, Art. System und System-Kritik in der Neuzeit, HWP 10 (1998), 824–856.

Sinn nicht die Explikation von etwas anderem, aller Explikation vom Prinzip her Transzendenten ist, sondern die für sich steht.

Wir haben in den letzten Jahren natürlich auch gelernt, eine zentrale Versuchung von allem an System orientierten Denken zu vermeiden und jeden individuellen Text als eine mehr oder weniger perfekte oder eben deformierte Realisierungsgestalt eines diesen Realisierungsgestalten übergeordneten Systems zu begreifen: Es gibt neben aller Berechtigung, antike Texte zu Gruppen zu ordnen (beispielsweise von „valentinianischen“ oder „sethianischen“ Texten) eine unhintergehbare Vielfalt „gnostischer“ Texte, die nicht an bestimmten, in neuzeitlicher Forschung rekonstruierten „Normalversionen“ bestimmter Typen von Gnosis gemessen und beurteilt werden darf. Gerade weil auch schon in der antiken Philosophie die Individualität eines einzelnen Philosophen ihren unhintergehbaren Eigenwert besaß und man beispielsweise überrascht feststellt, an wie vielen Stellen der in Herculaneum prächtig in einer Villa residierende „epikuräische“ Philosoph Philodem dem Bild widerspricht, das wir als „Epikureismus“ von unseren Lehrern wie Lehrbüchern vermittelt bekommen haben,⁵² darf man „Gnosis“ an dieser Stelle nicht mit einer ganz anderen Elle messen. Diese in den letzten Jahrzehnten Konsens gewordene Einsicht mag ein Grund dafür sein, dass die in der zweiten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts noch so heftig debattierte Frage, ob und in welcher Form das antike Christentum und die Geschichte seiner Theologie zur Kontextualisierung der Texte von Nag Hammadi heranzuziehen ist, glücklicherweise ihre Brisanz verloren hat. Im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert war die Frage nach der religionsgeschichtlichen Ableitung dessen, was man trotz aller Einwände immer noch „Gnosis“ nennt, ein überaus heftig umstrittenes Feld. Ist „Gnosis“ an und für sich ein vorchristliches, außerchristliches oder genuin christliches Phänomen, lauteten die gängigen Alternativen, über die erregt debattiert wurde. Schulen bekämpften sich erbittert, um Macht und Einfluss auf Publikationsreihen wie Finanzmittel wurde leidenschaftlich gestritten. Dabei standen natürlich auch wissenschaftspolitische Debatten um das Verhältnis von Theologie und Religionswissenschaft im Hintergrund, gelegentlich auch innertheologische Auseinandersetzungen – es ist vermutlich noch zu früh, eine Geschichte dieser inzwischen vergangenen Schlachten zu schreiben, aber es würde sich lohnen, diese paradigmatischen Konflikte noch einmal zu historisieren und in dieser Form nüchtern zu analysieren. Wer heute vor allem mehrheitschristliche Texte für diese Kontextualisierung heranzieht und dann erst weitere jüdische wie pagane, steht nicht mehr im Verdacht, an die Stelle der methodischen wie sachlichen Weite einer Religionswissenschaft

⁵² M. Gigante, *Philodemus in Italy. The Books from Herculaneum* (= *Filodemo in Italia*, Neapel 1990, transl. by D. Obbink), Ann Arbor 1995; M. Erler, §25. *Philodemus aus Gadara*, in: H. Flashar (Hg.), *Die Philosophie der Antike. Band 4: Die hellenistische Philosophie* (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, begründet von Friedrich Ueberweg, völlig neu bearb. Ausgabe), Basel 1994, 289–362.

wieder die beschränkte Perspektive antiker christlicher Häresiologen setzen zu wollen – schlicht und einfach schon deswegen, weil die grundlegende Pluralität des antiken Christentums (vergangene Generationen sprachen vom „Synkretismus“ des antiken Christentums⁵³) viel deutlicher im Blick ist und die einstige Fixierung auf den Dual von Orthodoxie und Häresie längst der Erkenntnis multipler Orthodoxien gewichen ist.⁵⁴ Zwei stabile Entitäten namens „Christentum“ und „Gnosis“ mag niemand mehr vergleichen, selbst die nicht, die Vorbehalte gegen eine vollkommene Verflüssigung der einst klaren Grenzziehungen zwischen solchen Ordnungsbegriffen haben. Vermutlich ist es aber nun hohe Zeit, auch andere schlichte Duale, mit denen wir in den Forschungstraditionen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts die Texte von Nag Hammadi beschrieben haben – ich erwähne den in Yale quasi kanonisierten Dual von Valentinianismus und Sethianismus⁵⁵ oder den schon in der Antike modellierten Dual von östlichem versus westlichem Valentinianismus –, einer entschlossenen Überprüfung zu unterziehen.⁵⁶ Dylan M. Burns hat das beispielsweise getan, indem er die sogenannten platonisierenden sethianischen Texte aus Nag Hammadi (Zostrianus, Allogenes, Marsanes und Die drei Stelen des Seth) als transformierte Apokalypsen jüdisch-christlicher Tradition interpretierte, aber auch auf Analogien zwischen „Sethianismus“ und „Manichäismus“ aufmerksam machte. Auch auf diesem Weg wäre entschlossen voranzuschreiten.

Wenn wir radikal mit der Einsicht ernst machen, dass wir in den spätantiken koptischen Fassungen mehr oder weniger transformierte kaiserzeitliche Vorlagen und vielleicht auch reine Neuproduktionen vor uns haben, dann darf uns nicht wundern, dass Architekturen zur Modellierung einer sogenannten Gnosis für das zweite Jahrhundert für das vierte oder fünfte Jahrhundert nur mäßig passen, wenn sie denn überhaupt für die frühe Kaiserzeit passen. Wenn wir

⁵³ C. Marksches, Art. Synkretismus V. Kirchengeschichtlich, TRE 32 (2001), 538–552.

⁵⁴ Zum theologiepolitischen Standort des klassischen Orthodoxie-Häresie-Duals vgl. C. Marksches, Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen. Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie, Tübingen 2007, 339–369.

⁵⁵ Vgl. einerseits H.-M. Schenke, The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism, in: B. Layton (Hg.), The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale. Vol. 2: Sethian Gnosticism (SHR 41/2), Leiden 1981, 588–616 = in: G. Schenke Robinson/G. Schenke/U.-K. Plisch (Hg.), Der Same Seths. Hans-Martin Schenkes Kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuem Testament (NHMS 78), Leiden/Boston 2012, 501–528 und andererseits F. Wisse, Stalking Those Elusive Sethians, in: Layton (Hg.), The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, 563–576. Wichtige Argumente zur Fortführung der Diskussion jetzt bei D. Burns, Apocalypse of the Alien God. Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism, Philadelphia 2014.

⁵⁶ C. Marksches, Valentinianische Gnosis in Alexandrien und Ägypten, in: L. Perrone (Hg.), Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrine Tradition. Origene e la tradizione Alessandrina. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27–31 August 2001. Band 1 (BETHL 164), Löwen 2004, 331–346. – Selbstverständlich meint das Stichwort „Laboratorium“ nicht, dass ohne jeden Blick auf bestimmte Standards vollkommen frei experimentiert wurde (so funktioniert ja höchstens Dr. Frankensteins Labor).

das zweite Jahrhundert, wie ich es vor einiger Zeit vorgeschlagen habe, als das „Laboratorium der christlichen Theologiegeschichte“ bezeichnen,⁵⁷ als eine in hohem Maße innovative und experimentierfreudige Zeit, dann sollte uns nicht wundern, wie plural und vielfältig sich schon von Anfang an das präsentiert, was wir als Gnosis systematisieren, wie bunt und vielfältig literarische Genres und geistesgeschichtliche Ideen transformiert wurden. Mir ist durchaus bewusst, dass diese letzten Bemerkungen mehr ein Programm, denn seine Ausführung waren⁵⁸ – aber alle hier formulierten Sätze wollten ja nur am Beginn einer Tagung Fragen stellen, auf offene Fragen und Probleme aufmerksam machen und so Anregungen für künftige Forschung geben.

⁵⁷ Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen* (s. Anm. 54), 373–383.

⁵⁸ Von daher sind in näherer Zukunft auch Ergänzungen zu meinem eigenen Versuch notwendig, „Gnosis“ mit Hilfe einer inhaltlich konkretisierten Typologie zu definieren: C. Marksches, *Die Gnosis* (C. H. Beck Wissen in der Beck'schen Reihe 2173), München ³2010, 25 f.; ich hoffe, darauf demnächst etwas ausführlicher zurückkommen zu können.

The Reception and Transformation of Philosophical Literary Genres in the Nag Hammadi Writings

John D. Turner

Abstract

Dieser Essay untersucht die verschiedenen literarischen Gattungen, die in philosophischen Schriften, die den Autoren der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften zur Verfügung standen, verwendet wurden. Darüber hinaus wird der Frage nachgegangen, welche literarischen Gattungen der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften den philosophischen Gattungen sowie dem philosophischen Kontext ihrer Entstehungszeit entsprachen. Der Essay zeigt schließlich an vier Beispielen, wie die platonischen Dialoge in einigen dieser Schriften angeeignet wurden.

In order to address the issue of the reception and transformation of philosophical literary genres in the Nag Hammadi writings, one must determine: first, what literary genres of philosophical texts were available to the authors of the Nag Hammadi writings? Second, which literary genres in these writings might correspond to those philosophical genres. And third, what was the philosophical environment in which the Nag Hammadi writings were produced?

After Sulla's siege on Athens in 87–86 BCE, the institutional history of the historical schools of Greek philosophy – the Platonic Academy, the Lyceum of the Peripatetics, the Porch of the Stoics, and the Garden of the Epicureans – came to an end, along with their nearly unbroken oral tradition and succession of scholars descending from their founders. They would only be formally reestablished for a short time by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 176 CE. During this period, that of the imperial age, the Platonic and other philosophical schools were spread throughout the towns and cities of the Mediterranean basin. Since philosophical teaching could no longer be carried out easily by oral transmission from master to disciple, philosophy gradually assumed the form of commentary on the authoritative texts descending from their respective founders. While almost all of these schools as distinctive institutions were in decline, the major exception was the Platonic school, which in the first century BCE had turned away from Academic skepticism toward a renewed interest in Plato's

metaphysics, no doubt encouraged by its recent merger with Alexandrian Neopythagorean arithmological metaphysics. By the mid-second century CE, when many of the Nag Hammadi treatises were composed, Epicureanism was fading away, and Stoic and Aristotelian thought had largely been absorbed into the Platonic movement.¹ Accordingly, of greatest significance for the interaction between Gnosticism and Greek philosophy, was the so-called Middle Platonic philosophy of the first two centuries CE, followed in the third and fourth by the Neoplatonic movement inaugurated by Plotinus.

I. Plato's Teaching as Religious Revelation

The Platonism of the first three centuries CE was a peculiar mixture of religious zeal and classical reservation that submitted to the authority of a self-imposed tradition, that of the Plato they knew. Much like Gnostic religious discourse, Greek philosophy was founded on the exegesis of authoritative texts.² Reflection no longer bore directly on problems themselves but on problems as they were dealt with by Aristotle and by Plato. But unlike Gnostic thinkers, the reluctance of philosophers to stray from the authoritative tradition tended to inhibit novelty; only details, not major reevaluations, were discussed.

¹ See H. Dörrie, "Die Erneuerung des Platonismus im ersten Jahrhundert vor Christus", in *Le Néoplatonisme: Colloques internationaux du Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique, Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969* (ed. by M. Schul and P. Hadot; Paris 1971) 17-28. In "Le renouveau du platonisme à l'époque de Cicéron", *Revue de Philosophie et de Théologie* 8 (1974) 13-29, Dörrie has stressed the centrality of the *Timaeus* in the revival of metaphysical Platonism in the first century BCE. It offered to people like Cicero and his contemporaries a cosmology that explained, indeed revealed, the supreme cause of the world as a divine and paternal figure who had made it as good as possible a copy of his own divine thoughts, unlike the dry moralism and rather immanentist and mechanical cosmology of the Stoics, not to mention the tough-minded non-theistic atomism and ascetic moralism of the Epicureans. In time, this Platonist Bible, as well as its imitations, was read by everyone who was able. In distinction to the eternal world cycles of Stoicism and the traditional Greek dogma of the eternity of the universe at home in the other philosophical schools, the *Timaeus*, when read literally, revealed, like the Jewish Bible, a once-for-all act of creation by a divine craftsman according to a definite plan and whose providence insured its continued existence. In the second century CE, the *Chaldaean Oracles* expressed Plato's metaphysics - especially of the *Timaeus* - in oracular hexameters as a direct revelation from the divine Plato to the son of Julian the Theurgist in response to the questions prompted by his father (Psellus, "The Golden Chain", *Opuscula* 46.42-51 [Duffy]). By presenting the teaching of Plato as responses that are given by a god, the author of the *Oracles* was able to attribute a divine authority to both their Platonic doctrine and the theurgical rites prescribed by the gods. Eusebius says that the Platonist "Atticus holds that Plato was sent by the gods to reveal philosophy in its entirety:" Plato, in fact, "first and better than all others brought together in a unified form the limbs of philosophy... and he showed it as a body and a living being complete in every part." (Atticus, frg. 1 des Places = Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 11.2.4-5).

² P. Hadot, "Théologie, exégèse, révélation, écriture, dans la philosophie grecque", in *Les règles de l'interprétation* (ed. by M. Tardieu; Paris 1987) 13-34.

Throughout the early imperial period, the attitude towards authoritative texts gradually gained a spiritual dimension. Most schools of philosophical thought agreed that the ultimate aim of a human being was to enhance one's inner divine element and thereby become like god.³ Centrally important texts come to be considered sacred and their study a religious act.⁴ There also developed a growing sense that the texts authored by the founders of the traditional philosophical schools contained the fullest expression of a wisdom that their authors, Plato and Pythagoras in particular, had inherited from even more ancient worthies and peoples, not only Greeks but also oriental peoples – Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians – who were believed to be closer to the gods, yielding what amounts to ancient revelations.⁵ It was precisely this interest in ancient wisdom that increasingly attracted not only Platonists, but also less academic thinkers, including Jews, Christians, Hermetics and of course the Gnostics.

Nearly all scholars have called attention to the influence of Platonic doctrine upon various Nag Hammadi treatises, which raises the question of the manner in which philosophical literature was received and transformed in the Nag Hammadi writings.⁶ In a nutshell, my response would be, it was received as revelation,

³ Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a–b; *Timaeus* 90b–d; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae phil.* 3.78; Alcinoüs, *Didaskalikos* 28; Plotinus, *Enneades* I. 2 [19], 5–6; Aristotle, *Ethica nichomachea* X. 7–8; Seneca, *Epistulae* 92.3; Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoecum* 135. It is possible that Eudorus of Alexandria was the first to popularize assimilation to God as the standard Middle Platonic goal of life (H. Tarrant, “Middle Platonism and the Seventh Epistle”, *Phron.* 28 (1983) 75–103, here 88).

⁴ H. D. Saffrey, “Quelques aspects de la spiritualité des philosophes néoplatoniciens de Jamblique à Proclus et Damascius”, *RSPTh* 68 (1987) 169–182. Repr. in H. D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris 1990) 213–226.

⁵ In short, a Platonic Orientalism according to which a very ancient spiritual wisdom transmitted by Platonism originated not in Greece but derived from some Oriental source, most typically Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, and Moses. Thus Plato's philosophy was said to be derived from Pythagoras, who in turn drew upon Orpheus; in the second century Numenius could even call Plato an “Atticizing Moses” (frg. 1a–c and 8 des Places); cf. also Origen, *Against Celsus* 1. 14. 16; 6.80. Indeed, not a few of Plato's genuinely “philosophical” dialogues, such as the *Republic*, *Symposium* and even the *Laws* contain the imagery and language of the ancient Eleusinian mysteries, oracular cults, and civic religious festivals, suggesting that philosophy is not only the love and thirst for deductive analytical or inductive empirical wisdom, but also for divine wisdom of the sort revealed by the ancient oracles of Delphi, Claros, and Didyma, or by the Muses to inspired poets like Hesiod, Orpheus, and Parmenides. See M. Baltes, “Der Platonismus und die Weisheit der Barbaren”, in *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon* (ed. by J. J. Cleary; Aldershot 1999) 115–138.

⁶ As L. R. Lanzillotta puts it: “in Late Antiquity, a period in which Platonism had already become a kind of intellectual koine that extended its dominion far beyond the specific sphere of philosophical schools [...], the Platonic approach to reality was ubiquitous and had reached a much wider public than was originally intended. For example, the soul-body distinction and the view of the later as a garment for the former, the opposition of the spiritual and the material and the higher valuation of the intangible, the notion of an inner being that is different from an external material one, the distinction between the heavenly and earthly realms, and many other elements appear everywhere: sometimes they are incorporated into the world-view of other philosophical schools and at other times they appear in literary works or are integrated

not only by Gnostics, but by many Platonists as well. And in the Nag Hammadi writings, Platonic teaching in its various genres was transformed pseudepigraphical revelations. As in Jewish apocalyptic, Nag Hammadi texts often ascribe their teaching to certain angelic envoys from the heavenly realm including, in the case of explicitly Christian revelations, the figure of the resurrected Jesus. The origin of their Platonic content was ascribed, not to the divine Plato, but to even more ancient worthies like Adam, Seth, Shem, Zostrianos, and Hermes Trismegistus, who had revealed them to Plato, and – like Jesus – had themselves recently reappeared in contemporary times.

This in turn raises the question of the kind of Platonic literature that was known to or used by Nag Hammadi authors: did they know Platonic philosophy by hearsay, by secondary summaries of it, or did they read Plato's dialogues themselves? What were the main genres of Platonic philosophical literature that circulated in the Roman imperial period when most of the Nag Hammadi treatises were composed, and which genres of the Nag Hammadi writings more or less clearly seem to be influenced by established philosophical literary genres? And finally, what were the dynamics of the transformative interaction between philosophical metaphysics and Gnostic mythology reflected in the Nag Hammadi writings?

1. *The Platonic Dialogues as Primary Sources*

Abundant evidence shows that among the Platonists of the imperial age, the best known Platonic texts were the *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*. The attempt to assemble a corpus of Plato's dialogues, which had probably begun within decades of his death under Xenocrates, third head of the Academy, was by the time of the emperor Tiberius in full swing. Scholars collected and arranged the dialogues into collections, 15 of them into trilogies by Aristophanes of Byzantium, and later 36 of them into tetralogies by Thrasyllus and Dercyllides. These canonical dialogues were further classified in terms of proper reading order⁷ or philosophical purpose.⁸

into more or less popular religious texts of the period." ("Platonism and the Expository Treatise on the Soul (NHC II,6)", in *Gods, Daimones, Rituals, Myths and History of Religions in Plutarch's Works. Studies Devoted to Professor Frederick E. Brenk by the International Plutarch Society* (ed. by L. Van der Stockt et al.; Logan and Malaga 2010) 345–362, here 346).

⁷ In the second century CE, Albinus (*Eisagogē* 4–5) proposed the sequence *First Alcibiades*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*; in the fourth century, Iamblichus established a two-phase curriculum for Platonic studies based on a canonical selection of Platonic dialogues. Beginning with *Alcibiades*, whose theme is self-knowledge, and progressing through the ethical dialogues *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* as well as the logical ones *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus*, the first phase reached its summit in the so-called physical dialogues *Sophist* and *Politicus* and the dialogues *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*. In the second phase, the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* were read, which were seen as the summit and epitome of Platonic physics and the doctrine of intelligible being.

⁸ E. g., for doctrinal instruction (ὀφηγητικοί) or to encourage further seeking (ζητητικοί).

Although extended philosophical treatises were popular in his time, Plato eschewed them in favor of dialogues, since the method of ancient philosophical instruction was fundamentally oral in character, conducted by a teacher or master with the intent of transforming his disciples.⁹ Although a dialogue is generally taken to be an exchange between two or more interlocutors often in the form of questions and responses, some of Plato's dialogues present extended monological discourses,¹⁰ often quite lengthy and not always by Socrates,¹¹ such as occur in the *Apologia*, *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Crito*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

2. Secondary Sources of Platonic Doctrine

In addition to the dialogues, independent secondary doxographies or summaries of Plato's thought were produced in the form of manuals of various sorts.¹² Some

As in the anonymous *Commentary on the Theaetetus* (P. Berol. inv. 9782) 50 [transl. G. Boys-Stones], which held that the Platonic method of teaching is a process of soliciting from within an internal revelation rather than the passing on of doctrines from teacher to pupil; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae phil.* 3.49–62; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 6.3.1–3; Albinus, *Eisagogē* 3.7, Apuleius, *De dogma Platonis* 1.5.191. Some interpreters held that he concealed his own thought, as in Plato, *Letters* II.312d; cf. Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 370e10–371a.

⁹ *Letters* VII 341cd: "There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on [philosophy], for it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light (cf. 344b7), as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself;" hence the dialogues' presumably incomplete or aporetic character: *Republic* VI, 504a–506a; *Statesman* 284d; *Theaetetus* 149–151; *Timaeus* 48b–c, 53d. See P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (ed. by A. Davidson; trans. M. Chase; Oxford 1995) esp. 62–64, 86, 104–105. Interestingly, Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae phil.* 3.48 names two predecessors of Plato in dialogical composition: Zeno the Eleatic and (*apud* Aristotle, *Poetics*, frg. 72 Rose: σοκρατικοὶ διάλογοι or λόγοι?) Alexamenos of Styra or Teos.

¹⁰ Thus in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus-Critias*, *Laws* (the latter three almost approaching expository monologues rather than dialogues) only one speaker, not necessarily Socrates, dominates the conversation.

¹¹ Socrates makes no appearance at all in the *Laws*, and in others such as the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Timaeus*, where his role is small and peripheral, while in the *Timaeus-Critias* some other figure dominates the conversation with a lengthy monologue of his own.

¹² Despite the availability of Plato's dialogues, some devotees of Plato may have been so far removed from the source of a living tradition that it was necessary to rely upon digests, summaries and doxographies of the ancient Platonic doctrine, perhaps as reminders of prior oral instruction; see J. Dillon, *Alcinous. The Handbook of Platonism. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by John Dillon* (Oxford 1993) xiv. Dillon (*Alcinous* xxvii–xxviii) argues that scholastic systematization of Plato's thought goes back at least to Xenocrates and was pursued with vigor in the first century BCE with Antiochus of Ascalon, Eudorus and Arius Didymus, Augustus' court philosopher. Festugière attributed the philosophical eclecticism and religious dogmatism of Cicero's time to the diffusion and consequent vulgarization of culture which led to the wide use of introductory manuals and the exclusive use of doxographies in place of the direct study of original philosophical writings (A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste II: Le Dieu cosmique* [EtB; Paris 1949] 341–362). Such manuals include instructional, hortatory, or refutatory exposition (*didaskalikos* or *protreptikos* or *elengtikos logos*), anthologies, florilegia

philosophers, such as Plutarch and Numenius, packaged Plato's doctrines in interlocutory dialogues, but also in the more impersonal form of questions and answers (*eratapokriseis*) to exegetical problems, which did not employ Plato's original maieutic technique of conversational statement, counterstatement and clarification by which new knowledge was brought to birth. The aim was rather to establish correct dogma. Other scholars like Alcinous, Albinus and Apuleius composed systematic summaries or handbooks of Platonic doctrine, each in different ways, since there was no unanimity as to what that doctrine was. It is also uncertain to what degree these secondary sources were directly dependent on Plato's dialogues. Rather than deriving Plato's doctrines directly from particular dialogues, some handbooks appear to have relied on an already long history of formalized distillations of Plato's philosophy, stitched together from passages in various dialogues that were perceived to address certain topics such as dialectic, logic, physics, practical ethics, and theology or first principles.¹³

II. The Gnostics and their Revelatory Literature

One might define a Gnostic as a type of religious person who claims to possess and teach Gnosis, aspects of which afford a direct insight into the nature of ultimate reality and its divine ground as well as the means of the self-realization of one's own essential divine affinity, accessible only to a community initiated into its secrets. Aspects of this knowledge were contingent upon transgressive hermeneutics and metaphysical speculations radically different from those widely accepted as traditional. Gnostics often employed the same authoritative texts, myths, philosophies, and even rituals sanctioned by tradition. But they viewed the world, humans, and God in non-standard, even subversive terms that challenged more traditional understandings by drawing upon the hidden implications of various well-known but underdeveloped late antique philosophical and religious traditions, often independently of commonly accepted philosophical and religious boundaries.¹⁴ Their tendency toward the apparent transgression of the more

of quotations, introductions (*eisagōgai*), summaries (*epitomai*), lecture notes (*hypomnēmata*), free discussions or conversations (*diatribai*), demonstrations (*epideixai*), eristic disputations (*antilogiai*), treatises (*suggrammata*) – sometimes in epistolary form where the author's *persona* is present – and of course exegetical commentaries on problematic passages from the dialogues.

¹³ Dillon, *Alcinous* (see n. 12), xxix. For Plato theology was stories about the gods who cause only the good (*Resp.* II 379ac), for Aristotle (*Metaphysics* Γ 1–3) it is the study of first principles, things that are eternal, not subject to change, and independent of matter, i. e., the study of being *qua* being.

¹⁴ See A. DeConick, "Crafting Gnosis: Gnostic Spirituality in the Ancient New Age", in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World. Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* (ed. by K. Corrigan and T. Rasmus; NHMS 82; Leiden and Boston 2013) 285–305 and "Gnostic Spirituality at the Crossroads of Christianity: Transgressing Boundaries and Creating Or-

traditional interpretations of both the biblical and Platonic corpora provoked the Church fathers and even Plotinus and his disciples, to accuse them of heresy or sectarianism, excessive discontent with the perceived defects and inequalities in the sub-intelligible world, an arrogant claim to extraordinary contemplative abilities available only to the initiated elect, and the violation of the accepted norms of philosophical discourse and reasoned argument in favor of divine revelations.

For their part, Gnostic authors latched upon Platonic, Neopythagorean, and even Stoic metaphysical doctrines as virtual revelations because they furnished a precise, respected philosophical vocabulary for constructing propositions about the divine. Yet in the often disputatious context of organized philosophical circles, such as the later seminars of Plotinus, to assert such propositions could threaten to upset established patterns of social authority – especially when these were appropriated by self-taught men who had not been socialized into an ethos subordinating individual advantage to “the common good” as defined by the formally educated. This ethos stipulated gentlemanly tranquility and social privilege as the fundamental requirements for attaining true elevated knowledge and the competence to discourse on issues concerning ultimate reality. Since contemplation of the higher order through human reason alone was regarded as a fundamentally impossible proposition, a natural strategy would be to resort to the revelatory agency of angelic mediators as an essential means of securing and authenticating knowledge of the divine world

These revelations, delivered by an often pseudonymous but authoritative revealer/teacher, concerned matters that also occupied contemporary philosophical discourse: 1) the true nature of ultimate reality including the nature of divinity and the invisible realms beyond the created cosmos; 2) the origin of the physical cosmos as a defective copy of the transcendent realms and the means by which the mundane human could transcend it; and 3) the nature, origin, and plight of the human soul, including its exile from and eventual restoration to the divine realm. These revelations were packaged in a number of literary genres, some resembling those used by philosophers – didactic treatise, religio-philosophical epistle, dialogue and monologue – and some more typically religious – apocalypse, testament, self-predicatory aretalogy, homily, gospel, liturgical manual, ritual etiology, and the acts (*praxeis*) and sayings (*logoi*) of the sages. In fact, one Nag Hammadi treatise (NHC VI,5) is merely a rough Coptic translation of Plato’s own dialogue on the passions of the human soul excerpted from *Republic* IX 588a–589b.

Almost all extant Gnostic writings are conceived as spoken performances on the part of a revealer, whether as monologues (sometimes with brief oral exchanges) or as dialogues with named interlocutors. Almost all Gnostic literature

thodoxy”, in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels. Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* (ed. by E. Iricinschi et al.; Tübingen 2013) 148–184.

that describes the transcendent realm reflects some version of the Platonic model-copy doctrine. Those containing clear, although unacknowledged, reference to Platonic metaphysical philosophy are cast in three main genres, usually in some combination, rarely in pure form: 1) a philosophical epistle; 2) a dialogue containing the revealer's answers to questions posed by one or more interlocutors in either an earthly or heavenly setting; and 3) a lengthy genealogical narrative of the origin, history, and destiny of the universe in both its transcendent and immanent dimensions in the form of an uninterrupted discourse of a revealer figure.¹⁵

1. *Religio-Philosophical Epistles*

Three Nag Hammadi treatises are composed in the form of religio-philosophical epistles:¹⁶ *Eugnostos the Blessed*, the *Treatise on the Resurrection (Letter of Rheginos)*, and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, to which one may add a portion of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Of these, all except *Eugnostos the Blessed* are clearly Christian and refer to the apostle Paul as an authority. The Codex III version of *Eugnostos* is a philosophical treatise in the form of a letter written by Eugnostos that begins with the sender's name and greetings to the recipients ("Eugnostos the blessed, to those who are his, greetings. I want you to know ..."). Following a critique of certain philosophical opinions on fate and providence, the remainder consists of a lengthy theologonical narrative which concludes with the phrase "This is enough; I have told you all this so that you might accept it, until one who does not need to be taught appears among you." Although the *Treatise on the Resurrection* is a philosophical diatribe on the doctrine of the resurrection, its literary form is that of a letter addressed to a pupil: "Rheginos my son, some people want to become intellectuals. [...] Since you ask about the main issues on resurrection in such a pleasant way, I am writing to you."¹⁷ The epistolary portion of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* occupies only its initial lines (132,10–133,8) without any formal conclusion, while the main body of the treatise is a dialogue between the risen Jesus and his apostles. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* is dominantly a revelation discourse concluding with a brief dialogue between Norea and the

¹⁵ Such dialogues may be set in a heavenly context as angelic revelations granted to a single exceptional, often ancient, seer during a visionary ascent into the transcendent realm as in the *Paraphrase of Shem*, *Apocalypse of Paul*, *First Book of Jeu* 33–38, *Pistis Sophia* 136, *Marsanes*, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, or in an earthly context, most often a post-resurrection dialogue between the risen Jesus and certain of his prominent disciples as in the *Apocryphon of James*, *Apocryphon of John*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the second half of *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *First Apocalypse of James*, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, the *Authoritative Teaching*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, the Berlin Codex' *Gospel of Mary*, and the Tchacos Codex' *Gospel of Judas*.

¹⁶ Examples of this genre in philosophical literature are the seven letters of Plato and the three letters of Epicurus preserved by Diogenes Laertius.

¹⁷ It is possible, on the other hand, that the epistolary genre is simply a literary device and that Rheginos is a fictitious person.

Luminary Eleleth (II 92,19–96,35); although it is introduced by Pauline citations (Col 1:13; Eph 6:12) and an epistolary formula (II 86,27–27: “[I have] sent this because you inquire about the reality [of the] authorities.”), it bears no other epistolary traces other than this.

2. Revelation Dialogues

In his dialogues, Plato never speaks to his audience directly in his own voice, and rarely affirms specific doctrines; it is rather his dialogical interlocutors like Socrates who do all of the affirming, doubting, questioning, and arguing. But this is not so in the Gnostic revelation dialogue, where the presumed teacher speaks apodictically and is often identified as an either human or angelic envoy from a realm that transcends that of his human interlocutors. In contrast to Plato’s dialogues, where the reader or listener is invited to question the teacher’s assertions, the interlocutors of the revelation dialogue are portrayed in a state of unquestioning trust in the teacher’s responses.

The popularity of revelation dialogue genre can be seen from their numbers: 15 of 52 treatises in the Nag Hammadi Codices,¹⁸ 3 of 4 treatises in the Berlin Gnostic Codex, 3 (or perhaps 4) of 5 treatises in the Tchacos Codex, 2 of the 3 treatises in the Bruce Codex, and all four books of *Pistis Sophia* from the Askew Codex.¹⁹ Most of the revelation dialogues are set on earth and occasioned by an earthly appearance of Jesus, whether pre- or post-resurrection, yet some, such as the *Apocalypse of Paul*, *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, and portions of *Marsanes*, are set in the heavenly realm as dialogues between various angelic revealers and a single, often ancient, visionary undergoing an otherworldly journey.²⁰

Some revelation dialogues were created by imposing a dialogue form on an originally non-dialogical discourse. Thus, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* is a revelation dialogue in which the metaphysical teaching of the philosophical epistle

¹⁸ The *Apocryphon of James*, *Apocryphon of John*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the second half of *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the first *Apocalypse of James*, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, *Asclepius* 21–29, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, *Hypsiphron*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, and a few portions of *Marsanes*. See K. Rudolph, “Der gnostische Dialog als literarisches Genus”, in *Probleme der Koptischen Literatur* (ed. by P. Nagel; Halle and Wittenberg 1968); F. T. Fallon, “The Gnostic Apocalypses”, in *Semeia* 14 (1979) 123–158; P. Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York 1980); J. C. Dias Chaves, *The Nag Hammadi Apocalyptic Corpus: Delimitation and Analysis* (MA Thesis; Québec 2007).

¹⁹ The Berlin Codex contains the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*; the Tchacos Codex contains the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, the (*Apocalypse of James*, *Gospel of Judas* and perhaps *Corpus Hermeticum XIII*); the Bruce Codex contains partial dialogues in the two *Books of Jeu*; and the Askew Codex contains Books I–III and Book IV of the *Pistis Sophia* as apparently distinct dialogues.

²⁰ In *Allogenes*, *Allogenes* receives five initial revelations from Youel while on earth, but the final two revelations from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon during his celestial ascent.

Eugnostos the Blessed has been extracted and placed on the lips of the risen Jesus as responses to questions raised by various disciples. Another possible instance of this transformation may be the most well-known of the gnostic genealogical myths, the Sethian *Apocryphon of John*. All four of its versions are presented in the form of a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and his disciple John son of Zebedee. However, since the version of its introductory theogony and cosmogony presented by Irenaeus (*Haer.* I. 29) seems to be unaware of such a dialogical framework, it is possible that it may also have circulated as a non-dialogical revelation monologue.

Other treatises are hybrids, such as the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, a revelation discourse with a brief first-person epistolary introduction that begins as a monologue on cosmogony and anthropogony (NHC II 86,20–92,19), but which concludes with a revelation dialogue on theogony and soteriology between the angel Eleleth (lowest of the Sethian Four Luminaries 92,19–96,35) and Norea, wife-sister of the biblical Seth. Likewise, the *Paraphrase of Shem* begins as a revelatory discourse and then turns into a brief revelatory dialogue, whose unnamed interlocutors are probably the visionary Shem and the heavenly envoy Derdekeas.

Possible antecedents of the Gnostic revelation dialogue include certainly the Platonic dialogues, but also the later philosophical dialogues of Cicero or Plutarch, or certain Hermetic philosophical dialogues between master (Hermes, Isis) and pupil (Tat, Asclepius, Ammon), or even the didactic question-answer treatises like those of Plutarch, Cicero, and Seneca devoted to the exegesis of authoritative texts.²¹ But as PHEME PERKINS has suggested,²² even closer prototypes may have been the dialogues between an ascending seer or visionary and an angelic guide during a heavenly journey in various Jewish apocalypses.²³

²¹ Such sets of questions and answers (*erotapokriseis*) between master and pupils, along with *zētēmata* (inquiries on specific points) and *erotēmata* (questions) were a regular part of the imperial educational system at the grammarian's level, and at an advanced level were devoted by figures such as Philo and Plutarch and even Augustine to complex questions concerning the interpretation of authoritative texts like the Jewish Pentateuch and Plato's dialogues. According to P. Hadot (preface to M.-D. Richard, *L'enseignement oral de Platon* [2nd ed.; Paris 2005] 13), all written dialogues of the imperial period are paraenetic and protreptic, a form of propaganda that "works from afar" to attract adherents to a certain school of thought.

²² Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue* (see n. 18), 19–28.

²³ These are generally modeled on Judaeo-Christian apocalypses that use the device of an otherworldly journey to reveal a process of cosmic salvation that unfolds in time and history, e. g., 1 *Enoch* 14.70–71; 2 *Enoch* 20–22; the *Apocalypses of Abraham* and *Zephaniah*; *Ascension of Isaiah*; 3 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*. There are also Greek exemplars of this genre that feature otherworldly journeys either to the heavens (e. g., Parmenides' *Peri Physeōs*, Plato's myth of Er, *Republic* 614b–621b, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Plutarch's *De genio Socratis* and *De sera numinis vindicta*, the Hermetic *Poimandres* and *Korē Kosmou*) or to the underworld (the *nekylai* of *Odyssey* XI and *Aeneid* VI). In contrast to the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses, they emphasize a more personal than cosmic eschatology, display extensive speculation about the ontology of the transcendent world, and do not develop an extended history of salvation. See H. Attridge, "Greek and Latin Apocalypses", *Semeia* 14 (1979) 159–186.

An interesting example of a hybrid revelation dialogue is the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, whose initial three fifths is a revelation dialogue between the risen Jesus and his twin brother, the apostle Judas Thomas (138,4–142,21), while the remaining two fifths (142,21–145,16) constitutes a long monologue of Jesus in which Thomas no longer plays a role. Ostensibly a Christian document, the basic teaching of the dialogue occupying its first part seems to have been excerpted from a pre-existing Middle-Platonic epitome of Plato's teaching on the soul drawn principally from the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* – or even from those dialogues themselves – and recast into expository units that formed Jesus' answers to fictitious questions asked by his interlocutor Thomas.²⁴ On this construction, the *Book of Thomas* is an interesting example of the Christianizing of Platonic teaching, or better yet, of the Platonizing of Jesus. While the traditional style of Jesuanic wisdom sayings is adapted to the conversational form of the Socratic dialogue, its content – Plato's teaching on the soul – has been transcribed into apodictic summaries, thereby losing the originally maieutic character of those dialogues.²⁵

3. Revelation Discourses

At least 14 of the Nag Hammadi writings appear in the form of extended monological revelation discourses.²⁶ Many of these narrate a global history of the transcendent and immanent cosmos in the form of a genealogical or theogonical myth, which can in turn be embedded in or recast into other literary genres. Thus the *Gospel of the Egyptians* narrates an extensive theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony, and soteriology as an etiologial justification for the ritual acts of a baptismal liturgy that conclude it. The main episodes of its theogony are punctuated with doxological responses on the part the auditors, and it concludes with a set of invocations and prayers that comprise the liturgy itself.

²⁴ The author seems to draw on such a source in the following passages of *Thom. Cont.* (NHC II,7) 138,39–111a; 140,1–5; 140,18b–37a; 141,5–8; 141,10b; 141,14b–18; 141,33b–38; 142,11b–18.

²⁵ Socrates describes himself in *Theaetetus* 149a–151d as practicing the art of maieutics, like a midwife helping his interlocutors give birth to the truth. See J. D. Turner, "The Book of Thomas and the Platonic Jesus", in *L'évangile selon Thomas et les textes de Nag Hammadi: Québec du 29–31 mai 2003* (ed. by L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier; BCNH.E 8; Québec et al. 2007) 599–633.

²⁶ E. g., *On the Origin of the World*, the *Second Apocalypse of James*, the *Authoritative Teaching*, the *Paraphrase of Shem*, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, the *Thunder-Perfect Mind*, the *Concept of Our Great Power*, the *Sethian Apocalypse of Adam*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Marsanes*, and *Melchizedek*, the *Valentinian Tripartite Tractate*, *Interpretation of Knowledge*, and *Valentinian Exposition*. To these one might add the extensive patristic summaries concerning the teaching of Basilides, the Valentinian Ptolemy, the "Simonian" *Megalē Apophasis* among others.

III. From Myth to Metaphysics

1. Genealogical Narrative Myths

Both Gnosticism and later Platonism could offer authoritative interpretations of the origin and nature of the world in the form of discourses and dialogues modeled on the two dominant protological texts of Graeco-Roman antiquity: Plato's *Timaeus* and the biblical book of Genesis, perhaps supplemented by the myth of the Enochian "Book of the Watchers" (1 Enoch 6–36).²⁷

In many Nag Hammadi discourses, dialogues, and epistles, the true nature of the relation between man and world and world and God is explained by a genealogical narrative that traces the genesis of this world from some primordial disruption of the divine transcendence in its original stability and unity. This leads to the emergence of a multiplicity of powers – often regarded as ignorant and even antagonistic to the supreme deity – who become the creators and rulers of a lower world that lacks the purity of its origin.²⁸

Many of these genealogical myths, such as found in the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, or the Valentinian myths of Ptolemy and in the *Tripartite Tractate*, clearly constitute rewritings of biblical stories. The innovative, even counter-traditional, character of these rewritings offer interpretations of passages or elements from Jewish Scripture that were perceived as problematic long before these Gnostic revelations were produced. Many were intended to resolve notorious "difficulties," such as uncomfortably anthropomorphic descriptions of God as having the form or emotions of a human being.²⁹ Perhaps the

²⁷ In fact, the cosmology of the *Timaeus* even served an exegetical template to interpret the Genesis protology, not only for Jewish (e. g., Philo) and various Christian interpreters, but also as the subject of Gnostics revelations.

²⁸ The specifically gnostic element is a necessary, sometimes even catastrophic instability that interrupts the otherwise smooth, orderly, and gradual unfolding of ever lower levels of being from an ultimate divine source. As a crucial episode in the drama, the myth recounts the creation and early fate of humanity, whose essentially divine soul is thought to be imprisoned in the lower world. The final theme is the salvation of the human soul, which, to use the words of H. Jonas ("Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon – Typological and Historical", in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* [Supplements to Numen 12; Leiden 1967] 90–108, here 94), is more than merely human salvation, as it serves as "the instrument of reintegration for the impaired godhead itself, or, the self-saving of God."

²⁹ Already an ancient practice; according to L. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (trans. by C. Tihanyi; Chicago 2004) 32: "It is nonetheless true that sixth-century criticisms of Homer and Hesiod gave rise to a defensive reaction that led to a specific hermeneutic practice powered by two sets of motivations. First, the deep attachment people still had for Homer and Hesiod led their admirers to defend them in the face of the criticism directed at them. These defenders even tried to rediscover in Homer and Hesiod the very rationales at the basis of the criticisms leveled against them. Thus, beneath the literal meaning of these Homeric poems, their defenders claimed to make out a deep meaning, which made it possible to see gods and heroes as representing either the elements (physical allegories) or dispositions of the soul (psychological allegories) or even virtues and

most notorious of these was the phenomenon that Michael Williams has called “biblical demiurgy,” an adaptation of Jewish or Christian protological traditions that assigns primary initiative and responsibility for the creation of the cosmos to one or more creators lower than the highest divinity. In this way, one could explain the origin of what were perceived as defects in the lower created order without holding the highest deity responsible for them.³⁰

The main exegetical template that enabled this view of the creator to be derived from the book of Genesis was probably Plato’s ontological distinction between 1) the supreme and eternally stable being of the paradigmatic Truly Living being, 2) the ever-changing sensible cosmos, and 3) the demiurge who, together with his product, the soul, mediates between them as described in the *Timaeus*. Plato’s successors continued to illustrate this ontological distinction by mythical genealogical sequences: Philo’s distinction between God, the Logos as his elder son, and the cosmos; Numenius’ three gods labeled as grandfather, father, and son; and Plotinus’ use of the names Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus to illustrate the relation between the One, Intellect, and Soul.³¹ For Plotinus, such genealogical sequences were merely reflecting a familiar narrative unfolding in time to illustrate transcendent activities that are really simultaneous and distinguishable only by ontological or causal priority in a continuous spectrum of power, distinctions that Gnostics preferred to portray as a dramatic, adversarial struggle between personified lower and higher powers located at the extremities of such a hierarchy. Thus Gnostic revelations tend to describe what for Plotinus is a eternal and spontaneous generation of reality through endless contemplation (e. g., *Enneades* III.8 [30] 7.14–27) by means of a theogonical drama that narrates the generation of reality as a sequence of distinct episodes governed by named *dramatis personae* engaging in intentional acts of generation.

vices (moral allegory). Second, these three types of allegory were rooted in the common practice of applying etymology to proper names, a practice of which there is a remarkable example in Plato’s *Cratylus*. Socrates too shared the widespread belief according to which, as evidenced by etymology, words do not come from a purely arbitrary convention but, rather, have been instituted by legislators on the basis of their analogy to the nature of the things they were intended to express.”

³⁰ M. A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton 1996). Of course, since Plato’s demiurge is good because he is a god who always does what is best (see *Republic* II 379ac, *Phaedrus* 247a, *Tim.* 29d), it is *necessary* that his product (the cosmos) be inferior both to himself and his eternal model (*Timaeus* 28–30). As Plotinus observed in the case of the One, “what comes from [the One] could not be the same as himself. If then it is not the same, it cannot of course be better: for what could be better than the One or in any way transcend him? It must then be worse; and this means more deficient. What then is more deficient than the One? That which is not one; it is therefore many.” (*Enneades* V.3 [49] 15.7–10).

³¹ Philo, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis* 31; Numenius, *On the Good* (frg. 21 des Places); Plotinus, *Enneades* III.5 [50] 2.19–46; III.8 [30] 11.33–45; IV.4 [28] 9.1–18; 10.1–4; V.1 [10] 4.9–10; 7, 28–35; V.5 [32] 3.4–25; V.8 [31] 12.7–19; 13.1–11.

2. From Myth to Philosophical Metaphysics

Many years ago, Hans Jonas argued that both the ritual practice and the mythical genealogies of Gnostics and other religious groups can develop into a mystical philosophy as a means by which the final, postmortem deliverance of the soul depicted in the myth can be anticipated already in this life through the soul's contemplative reascent to its divine origin. But the myth and rituals that lead to salvation must first be profoundly "rationalized" by transforming the beings who had earlier appeared as actors in the myth into impersonal emanations, and replacing their apparently arbitrary dramatic generative and salvific acts by some kind of logical progression that determines the necessary order of these emanations. Likewise, ostensibly external ritual practices are transformed into self-performable interior ritual techniques of contemplative ascent whose stages inversely retrace the original descending order of these emanations. When the dualism between the evil cosmos and the transcendent god is transformed into a monism in which the cosmos is no longer god's adversary but simply his "other," it achieves philosophical rank. The proactive antagonisms of earlier myth are replaced by a continuum of greater or lesser degrees of perfection extending upwards or downwards throughout the entire chain of being. It is this transformation that permits the mystic to experience as an internal pilgrimage what the gnostic myth had portrayed as an external and often post mortem journey of the soul back to its place of origin.³²

The transformation of the Gnostic sequence of dramatic episodes involving personal actors into a continuous sequence of impersonal emanations was perhaps catalyzed by notions derived from Plato's speculations about first principles hinted at in certain of his dialogues or in his so-called unwritten teaching concerning the production of the multiplicity of the ordered cosmos from the interaction of the One and the Indefinite Dyad.³³ However, such a process requires interaction with a secondary principle. This dualism was rectified in the first century BCE by an emergent monistic Neopythagorean speculation on the generation of the Dyad and subsequent multiplicity from the Monad or One alone by a self-reflexive process of fission or doubling or self-extension.³⁴ Such a

³² H. Jonas, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought", *JR* 49/4 (1969) 315–329.

³³ In the *Philebus* the two ontological principles responsible for the ontogenesis of the world are the Limit (πέρας), i. e. the ordering principle which is defined in the dialogues variously as the Good, as Beauty, and most correctly as Measure, and the Unlimited (ἄπειρον), i. e. the principle of disorder. The Limit interacts with the Unlimited through a divine efficient cause (the δημιουργός) and produces a third element, Mixture (μείξις), which is intrinsic to (sensible) reality. The result of this process is the birth of the cosmos, a divine but matter-bound reality, subject to a cyclical alternation between order and disorder. Typically Plato's position is "Now to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a thing impossible" (*Timaeus* 28c).

³⁴ See the testimonia on Eudorus, *apud* Simplicius, in *Ph.* 9.181.10–30 [Diels], Alexander

derivational monism was developed by a number of Gnostic systems and also by Plotinus, for whom the secondary principle must itself derive directly from the absolute unity of the hyperontic primary principle. In this scheme, an indefinite procession or spontaneous emission of an indefinite activity or otherness from the first completes itself by an eternal act of self-reflection on its prefiguration in the first, and thereby achieves definition as a second principle, usually regarded as a kind of intellect.³⁵ In this way, the absolutely unique and self-directed supreme deity is excused from any responsibility for the existence of anything subsequent to itself.

Polyhistor *apud* Diogenes Laertius VIII 24.7–25.10, on Archaenetus, Philolaus and Brotinus *apud* Syrianus, in *Metaph.* 165.33–166.6 [Kroll], and on Pseudo-Archytas *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.41.2.1–50 = 1.278–9 [Wachsmuth & Hense]. For these thinkers, the Monad becomes a Dyad by a process of self-doubling (διπλασιασμός, επισύνθεσις ἐαυτῆ; Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio* 27.1–7; 100.9–12 [Hiller]; Nicomachus, *Intro. arith.* 113.2–10 [Hoche]; Sextus Empiricus, *Hyp. Pyrrh.* 3.153 [Mutschmann]; *Adv. math.* 10.261 [Mutschmann & Mau]; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 4.43), or begetting ([Iamblichus], *Theol. arith.* 3.17–4.7 [de Falco & Klein]), or by division (διαχωρισμός; [Iamblichus], *Theol. arith.* 5.4–5; 8.20–9.7; 13.9–11), or by ἐκτασις or progression from potentiality as in a seed (ἐπέκτασις in Nicomachus, *apud* Iamblichus, *Theol. arith.* 3.1–8; 16.4–11; Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies* 224:34 [Rehm & Irmischer]: κατὰ γὰρ ἑκτασιν καὶ συστολήν ἢ μονὰς δυὰς εἶναι νομίζεται; cf. *ibid.*: 234:18 ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ εἰς ἄπειρον ἑκτασιν), or by receding from its nature (κατὰ στέρησιν αὐτοῦ χωρεῖν: Moderatus, *apud* Simplicius, in *Ph.* 230.34–231.27 [Diels]; *recedente a natura sua singularitate et in duitatis habitum migrante*: Numenius, frg. 52 [des Places]), or by flowing (ῥεῖν, ῥύσις: Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. math.* 3.19; 3.28; 3.77; 7.99; 9.380; 9.381; 10.281). See H. J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik* (Amsterdam 1967) 320. Hippolytus shows that the Simonian *Megale Apophasis* (*Haer.* 6.18.4–7) – like the Valentinians (*Haer.* 6.29.5–6) – used the concept of emanation (προβολή, προέρχεσθαι) of a Dyad pre-existing in the Monad. Also in the Sethian Platonizing treatises, one finds the notion of self-production by self-extension (*Marsanes* X 32.5–33.2; *Allogenes* XI 45.22–24), by division (*Three Steles of Seth* VII 121.25–123.14), as well as by ἐκτασις (in *Enn.* VI.6 [34] Plotinus calls it ἀπόστασις which also very well picks up the idea of dynamic ontologies [*Zostrianos* VIII 81.1–20], self-contraction [*Allogenes* XI 45.22–24], and self-withdrawal [*Marsanes* X 9.1–21]). Pierre Hadot suggested that such a process of self-reflexive ontogenesis was ultimately derived from a transposition to the metaphysical plane of what was originally a physical or even biological model: specifically, from the Stoic notion of tonic motion (τονική κίνησις), the simultaneous bi-directional expansion and contraction of the divine *pneuma* out of which physical objects and living organisms constitute themselves as in Nemesius, *De nat. hom.* II.44–49 = Numenius, frg. 4b [des Places] = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2:451. See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 Vols. (CEAug 32–33; Paris 1968) 1:68–77.

³⁵ A classic example is offered by Plotinus in *Enn.* V.2 [11] 1.8–13: “It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that Being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes Being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and Being.” (trans. Armstrong, 1966–1988) The later Neoplatonists named these three stages Permanence or Remaining, Procession, and Reversion, and – like the Sethian Platonizing treatises – often characterized the three successive modes of the product’s existence during this process by the terms of the noetic triad of Existence or Being, Life, and Intellect.

Although Plotinus has often been credited with being the first major philosopher to elaborate such a scheme explicitly, it is clear that a similar model of dynamic emanation is widely attested in many Gnostic theogonies of the second century, some of which precede Plotinus chronologically.³⁶ Indeed, one might suggest that, at least in part, Plotinus derived his specific model of ontogenesis – the mechanism by which Intellect and Being emerge from the transcendent One-above-Being through a kind of self-reflexive process whereby a primal duality of thinking subject and object thought is produced from an otherwise absolutely singular, transcendent first principle – from contemporaneous Gnostic systems.³⁷

³⁶ Thus at the beginning of the *Tripertite Tractate* NHC I 56.16–57.3, the ineffable Father has a thought of himself, which is the Son. Likewise in Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 7 [Casey], the Unknown Father is said to emit the second principle, the Monogenes-Son, “as if knowing himself” (ὡς ἄν ἑαυτὸν ἐγνωκώς, [...] προέβαλε τὸν Μονογενῆ). In both *Eugnostos the Blessed* and its Christianized version, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the divine Forefather sees himself “within himself as in a mirror,” and the resultant image is the second principle, the Self-Father. *Eugnostos* NHC III 74.21–75.12: “The Lord of the Universe is not rightly called ‘Father’ but ‘Forefather.’ For the Father is the beginning (or principle) of what is visible. For he (the Lord) is the beginningless Forefather. He sees himself within himself, like a mirror, having appeared in his likeness as Self-Father, that is, Self-Begetter, and as Confronter, since he is face to face with the Unbegotten First Existent. He is indeed of equal age with the one who is before him, but he is not equal to him in power.” Also 72.10–11: “It looks to every side and sees itself from itself.” Cf. The *Sophia of Jesus Christ* NHC III 98.24–99.13 & 95.6. In Ps-Hippolytus’ account (*Haer.* VI.13 [Markovich]) of Simonian doctrine, the pre-existent first principle abides in absolute unity, but gives rise to an intellectual principle through self-manifestation: “manifesting himself to himself, the one who stood became the second.” According to the initial theogony of the *Apocryphon of John*, the supreme Invisible Spirit emanates an overflow of luminous water in which he then sees a reflection of himself; this self-vision then becomes the second, intellectual, principle, Barbelo, the divine First Thought. *Ap. John* BG 8502 26.1–30.4: “For it is he (the Invisible Spirit or Monad) who contemplates himself in his own light that surrounds him, which is he himself, the source of living water [...]. The fountain of the Spirit flowed from the living luminous water and provided all aeons and worlds. In every direction he contemplated his own image (εἰκῶν), beholding it in the pure luminous water that surrounds him. And his Thought (ἐννοία) became active and appeared and stood at rest before him in the brilliance of the light. She [is the Providence (πρόνοια) of the All] the likeness of the light, the image of the invisible One, the perfect power Barbelo.” In turn, Barbelo’s contemplation of this same luminous water manifests itself as the self-generated Autogenes, the “first appearance” of the Invisible Spirit’s invisible first thought.

³⁷ An excellent example of this transformation is offered by the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II 4,36–5,5). Here the theogonical genealogy begins when the supreme Invisible Spirit emits an overflow of luminous water in which he sees a reflection of himself; this act of perception is his first thought, which appears apart from him and becomes instantiated as the second principle, Barbelo, when she reverts upon her source through an act of praise. Likewise, all subsequent aeonic beings are instantiated by similar acts of praise, which in effect constitute acts of reversion of a product upon its immediate source. Such heavenly liturgies of praise on the part of mythical dramatis personae may well be the forerunners of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the ontogenetic phases of Remaining, emanative Procession, and contemplative Reversion.

3. Ontogenesis in the Sethian Platonizing Treatises

The Gnostic treatises that most clearly develop this ontogenetic model are the Nag Hammadi Platonizing Sethian treatises that depict the receipt of revelation during an otherworldly ascent of a visionary: *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*. In a way reminiscent of Jewish heavenly ascent apocalypses, the first three of these texts commemorate the ecstatic ascent of a single exceptional individual such as *Zostrianos* (the alleged uncle or grandfather of Zoroaster), *Allogenes* (perhaps a cognomen of Seth),³⁸ or *Marsanes* (perhaps a contemporary Sethian prophet). The various stages of these ascents are articulated according to ever-ascending levels of transcendent being whose ontology is typical of contemporary Middle Platonic metaphysical treatises, blended with certain features from the metaphysics of Stoicism, Neopythagoreanism, the Old Academy and Plato himself. Within this corpus, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* occupy a special place, since Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 16 tells us that they were studied and critiqued at length by Plotinus and other members of his philosophical seminar in Rome during the years 265–268 CE.³⁹

The metaphysical hierarchy of these treatises is headed by a supreme and pre-existent Unknowable One, often called the Invisible Spirit.⁴⁰ As in Plotinus, this One is clearly beyond being, and can be described only in negative terms mostly derived from the second half of Plato's *Parmenides*, especially its first hypothesis (137c–142a).

Below the supreme One, at the level of determinate being, is the Barbelo Aeon, conceived along the lines of a Middle Platonic tripartite divine Intellect.⁴¹ At the highest level, *Kalyptos* is the “hidden” contemplated intellect (*nous*

³⁸ Perhaps a cognomen of Seth as “one of another kind, race,” a play on στέρμα ἕτερον of Gen 4:25 LXX.

³⁹ Indeed, Plotinus' antignostic critique in *Enn.* II.9 [33] 10 seems actually to cite *Zostrianos* (*Zost.* NHC VIII 10.1–20), and his portrayal of contemplative ascent to the One in *Enn.* III.8 [30] 9.29–39 apparently draws from *Allogenes* (NHC XI) 60.14–61.2, which raises the question of the extent to which the doctrines he read in these Sethian texts may have made positive contributions to his own metaphysical philosophy.

⁴⁰ From certain earlier Sethian treatises (*Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), the Platonizing treatises have inherited a tendency to identify the supreme deity by the somewhat Stoicizing name “the Invisible Spirit.” While the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII 125.23–25) calls this supreme pre-existent One a “single living Spirit,” *Zostrianos* identifies this One as “the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit.” On the other hand, *Allogenes* tends to distinguish this One from both the Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered One, while *Marsanes* subordinates them all to a supreme “unknown silent One.”

⁴¹ For Numenius (frgs. 11, 20–22 des Places), the first God or Intellect is inert and aloof, in a sense hidden from all else except the Second, who contemplates the ideal Forms in the first, while the third God is merely the lower demiurgical aspect of the Second when he directs his attention downwards to impose these Forms on matter to shape the perceptible cosmos. This nomenclature also appears in Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 242.24–253.2 [Schmidt-MacDermot]: “Moreover the power that was given to the forefather is called first-visible because it is he who was first manifest (*prōtophanēs*). And he was called unbegotten because no one had created

noētos) containing the paradigmatic Forms; at the median level, Protophanes is the “first-appearing” intellect (*nous theōrōn* or *kathorōn*) that contemplates them; at the lowest level, Autogenes is a “self-generated” demiurgic intellect (*nous dianououmenos*) who shapes the individuated realm of Nature below him in accordance with these transcendent Forms.⁴²

To account for the emergence of the Barbelo Aeon from the supreme Invisible Spirit, the Platonizing Sethian treatises invoke an abstract, de-substantified version of the noetic triad of Being, Life, and Mind well-known from the thought of Plotinus and subsequent Neoplatonists, who used it to characterize the modes of a product’s existence during the phases of its emanation (Permanence or Remaining, Procession, and Reversion).⁴³ Indeed, Plotinus himself occasionally uses this triad to illustrate how the One gives rise to something other than itself, as in the generation of intellect from a trace of life emitting from the One. But just as the Sethians confined the Kalyptos-Protophanes-Autogenes triad to their second hypostasis Barbelo, Plotinus too mostly confined the function of the noetic triad to his second hypostasis, Intellect, where Mind (*nous*) denotes the thinking subject, Being (*to on*) denotes the object of its thinking, and Life (*zōē*) denotes the activity of thinking itself.

This triad appears as the Invisible Spirit’s Triple Power, whose three powers serve as the emanative means by which the supreme Unknowable One generates the Aeon of Barbelo in three phases. 1) In its initial phase the Triple Power is a purely infinitival Existence (*hyparxis* or *ontotēs*) latent within and identical with the supreme One; 2) in its emanative phase it is an unstable indeterminate Vitality (*zōotēs*) or Blessedness that proceeds forth from One; and 3) in its final phase it is a Mentality (*nootēs*) that contemplates its prefiguration in the supreme One, an act by which it delimits itself as the fully stable determinate being of a new and distinct intellectual entity, the Aeon of Barbelo.⁴⁴

him. And he was (called) the ineffable and the nameless one. And he was also called self-begotten (*autogenēs*) and self-willed because he had revealed himself by his own will.”

⁴² In fact, the names Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes would suggest that they could designate, not just the ontological levels of the Barbelo Aeon, but rather the dynamic stages process by which the Barbelo Aeon gradually unfolds from its source in the Invisible Spirit: at first “hidden” (*kalyptos*) within the Spirit as its prefigurative intellect, then “first appearing” (*protophanēs*) as the initial moment of the Spirit’s separately-existing thought or intelligence, and finally “self-generated” (*autogenēs*) as a fully-formed demiurgic intellect.

⁴³ The ultimate generation of the determinate being of the Barbelo Aeon from a principle that transcends being is described by a purely conceptual triadic hierarchy of paronymous terms in which acts precede their abstract qualities, which in turn precede their substantive results; thus the act of living (*ζεῖν*) manifests a qualitative vitality (*ζωότης*) that instantiates itself as substantive life (*ζωή*); cf. Proclus, *In Parmenidem* 1106,1–1108,19 [Cousin].

⁴⁴ E. g., *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 81.6–20: “She (Barbelo) [was] existing [individually] [as cause] of [the declination]. Lest she come forth anymore or get further away from perfection, she knew herself and him (the Invisible Spirit), and she stood at rest and spread forth on his [behalf] [...] to know herself and the one that pre-exists.” *Allogenes* NHC XI 45.22–30 seems to combine this notion of self-reflexive thinking with elements of the Stoic theory of tonic

4. From Ontogenesis to Mystical Ascent

Halfway through the treatise *Allogenes*, Allogenes – having been instructed in these metaphysical structures by five earthly visitations from the angel Youel – is suddenly raptured into the Aeon of Barbelo, where he is instructed by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon in the means by which he might contemplatively ascend through the levels of the Triple Power and unite with the supreme Unknowable One. As narrated on pages 60–61 of *Allogenes*, Allogenes' subsequent ascent consists of a series of successive self-withdrawals whose stages retrace in reverse order the exact ontogenetic sequence of the phases by which the Invisible Spirit's Triple Power unfolds into the Aeon of Barbelo. In this way, Allogenes contemplatively ascends to reunite with his "originary manifestation," i. e., his own primordial prefiguration still resident in the Unknowable One, at which point he enters into an utter cognitive vacancy where knower and known become completely assimilated to one another:⁴⁵

motion: "For after it (the Barbelo Aeon) [contracted, it expanded] and [spread out] and became complete, [and] it was empowered [with] all of them, by knowing [itself in the perfect Invisible Spirit]. And it [became an] aeon who knows [herself because] she knew that one;" XI 48.15–17: "it is with [the] hiddenness of Existence that he provides Being, [providing] for [it in] every way, since it is this that [shall] come into being when he intelligizes himself" and XI 49.5–26: "He is endowed with [Blessedness] and Goodness, because when he is intelligized as the Delimiter (D) of the Boundlessness (B) of the Invisible Spirit (IS) [that subsists] in him (D), it (B) causes [him (D)] to revert to [it (IS)] in order that it (B) might know what it is that is within it (IS) and how it (IS) exists, and that he (D) might guarantee the endurance of everything by being a cause for those who truly exist. For through him (D) knowledge of it (IS) became available, since he (D) is the one who knows what it (IS; or he, D?) is. But they brought forth nothing [beyond] themselves, neither power nor rank nor glory nor aeon, for they are all eternal."

⁴⁵ Significantly, in *Enn.* III.8 [30] 9.29–39, Plotinus too describes the contemplative ascent to the One as a withdrawal into one's prenoetic, primordial self. Rather than *Allogenes'* phrase "primary revelation" or "originary manifestation" (Coptic οὐρανῶν ἰστορίας ἐβολή, perhaps for Gk. προφαν(ε)ία, on which see Z. Mazur, "Plotinus' Philosophical Opposition to Gnosticism and the Axiom of Continuous Hierarchy", in *History of Platonism: Plato Redivivus* (ed. by J. Finamore and R. Berchman; New Orleans 2005) 95–112. Plotinus denominates as the "first life:" "What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it? Rather, the intellect must first withdraw, so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it – for it faces in both directions; and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is the first life, since it is an activity manifest in the way of outgoing of all things; outgoing not in the sense that it is now in process of going out but that it has gone out. If, then, it is life and outgoing and holds all things distinctly and not in a vague general way – for [in the latter case] it would hold them imperfectly and inarticulately – it must itself derive from something else, which is no more in the way of outgoing, but is the origin of outgoing, and the origin of life and the origin of intellect and all things." Elsewhere Plotinus frequently imputes a kind of transcendent "life" to the activity intrinsic to the One: cf. *Enn.* VI.8 [39] 7.51 and V.3 [49] 16.40. On self-vision, cf. *Enn.* V.8 [31] 11.1–8: "Further, one of us, being unable to see himself, when he is possessed by that god brings his contemplation to the point of vision, and presents himself to his own mind and looks at a beautified image of himself; but then he dismisses that image, beautiful though it is, and comes to unity with

Allogenes NHC XI 60.14–61.22: There was within me a stillness of silence, and I heard the Blessedness whereby I knew (my) proper self. And I withdrew to the Vitality as I sought (myself). And I joined it and stood, not firmly but quietly. And I saw an eternal, intellectual, undivided motion, all-powerful, formless, undetermined by determination. And when I wanted to stand firmly, I withdrew to the Existence, which I found standing and at rest. Like an image and likeness of what had come upon me by means of a manifestation of the Indivisible and the Stable, I was filled with revelation; by means of an originary manifestation of the Unknowable One, [as though] unknowing him, I [knew] him and was empowered by him. Having been permanently strengthened, I knew that [which] exists in me, even the Triple-Powered One and the manifestation of his uncontainableness. [And] by means of an originary manifestation of the universally prime Unknowable One – the God beyond perfection – I saw him and the Triple-Powered One that exists in them all. I was seeking the ineffable and unknowable God of whom – should one know him – one would be completely unknowing, the mediator of the Triple-Powered One, the one who subsists in stillness and silence and is unknowable.

After having unknowingly “known” the unknowable First One, *Allogenes* is finally instructed by the Luminaries to “hear” about him by means of a “revelation” that turns out to be a dominantly negative theology (XI 61.32–62.13) supplemented by a more affirmative theology (XI 62.14–67.20):

Allogenes NHC XI 61.22–31: “And when I was confirmed in these matters, the powers of the Luminaries said to me: ‘Cease dissipating the inactivity that exists in you by (further) inquiry after incomprehensible matters; rather hear about him insofar as it is possible by means of an originary manifestation together with a revelation.’”

IV. Specific Appropriations of Plato’s Dialogues

While texts like the *Book of Thomas the Contender* and the *Apocryphon of John* demonstrate dependence on Platonic teaching that might derive either from the Platonic dialogues themselves or from handbooks, epitomes, and other popular summaries of Plato’s teaching, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* reveal a number of direct readings of Plato’s dialogues themselves. As Plotinus recognized, their authors were adept at finding and exploiting subtle conceptual parallels between their own ideas and the Platonic dialogues from which they adopted passages – often apart from their original context – and even entire literary structures, attributing them, not to Plato, but to revelations from various quite non-Hellenic angelic beings and ancient pre-Platonic worthies like *Zostrianos* and the biblical Seth.

Of at least a half-dozen of such adoptions and adaptations, I will discuss two: first, a possible instance of grafting the literary structure of an entire Platonic dia-

himself, and, making no more separation, is one and all together with that god silently present, and is with him as much as he wants to be and can be.”

logue onto the already-established genre of an apocalyptic otherworldly journey; second, the characterization of intelligible reality through the categories of being and non-being, and third, the use of Platonic dialectic in acquiring knowledge of transcendent reality.

1. *Contemplative Union with the Divine*

Although the literary genre and general plot structure of the Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* are typical of Jewish heavenly ascent apocalypses,⁴⁶ their conceptual content consists almost exclusively of Platonic metaphysical ontology. *Allogenes*, however, goes a step further by transforming its entire structure into that of a Platonic dialogue, namely Plato's *Symposium*. In Platonizing conceptual environments such as that reflected in *Allogenes*' contemplative vision of ultimate reality, one could hardly avoid being consciously influenced by Plato's description of the ascent to the sudden vision of absolute Beauty that Diotima reveals to Socrates in the *Symposium* (210e–211d).⁴⁷

Both the *Symposium* and *Allogenes* present seven initial speeches devoted respectively to the nature of Eros and to the nature of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit. Of these speeches, the sixth is central and devoted to a technique of contemplative ascent: that of Diotima as recited by Socrates in the *Symposium* and, in *Allogenes*, that of the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon as recited by *Allogenes* himself. In both works these central speeches are preceded by five other speeches: in *Allogenes*, five revelations of the feminine Youel occupying its first half (NHC XI 45.6–50.17; 50.17–52.12; 52.13–55.17; 55.17–32; 55.33–58.7) and in the *Sym-*

⁴⁶ All three employ motifs well-known from Jewish apocalypses like *1 Enoch* 14.70–71; 2 *Enoch* 20–22; the *Apocalypse of Abraham*; *Mart. Ascen. Isa*; 3 *Baruch*; 4 *Ezra* 5, such as pseudonymous authorization by an ancient seer who is transfigured and raptured into the heavenly world, participates in a heavenly liturgy, exhibits fear at visitations by heavenly mediators and the majesty of revealed secrets, which is calmed by angelic beings, the proclamation of received revelations, and their transcription into written form. See D. Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories", in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. by J. VanderKam and W. Adler; CRI 3/4; Assen and Minneapolis 1996) 129–200; M. Scopello, "The Apocalypse of Zostrianos [Nag Hammadi VII.1] and the Book of the Secrets of Enoch", *VigChr* 34 (1980) 376–385; and H. Attridge, "Valentinian and Sethian Apocalyptic Traditions", *JES* 8/2 (2000) 173–211.

⁴⁷ According to the analysis of E. O'Brien, *The Essential Plotinus* (New York 1964) 16–17, the method of ascent consists of a qualitative and quantitative purification or purgation of the soul by a redirection of Eros, the moving force of the soul, away from the lower realm to the higher. The qualitative purgation is a progressive shift of attention from the sensible to the intelligible realm in three levels of knowing, which correspond to three levels of experience: physical beauty, moral beauty and intellectual beauty; these are the objects respectively of the bodily senses, the ethical components of the soul, and the intelligizing, contemplative faculty of the reflective soul. The quantitative purgation is a shift of attention away from individual instances of beauty, to the ideal beauty of all forms, and finally to absolute beauty itself, which then discloses itself as a sudden and immediate intuition.

posium, the speeches of five different masculine figures: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon that lead up to that of the feminine Diotima. Moreover, in both the *Symposium* and *Allogenes*, the culminating description of the means of the ultimate ascent are revealed respectively to Socrates by the feminine Diotima (201d–212c) and to Allogenes by the masculine powers of the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon (NHC XI 59.4–68.top). Finally, just as in the *Symposium*, where Diotima’s description of the ascent to a direct vision of absolute Beauty that “suddenly appears” is immediately followed by a negative “theology” of Beauty,⁴⁸ so too in *Allogenes*, the Luminaries’ description of the ascent to a direct vision of the Unknowable One is immediately followed by a negative theology of the supreme One. That is, the entire literary structure of the Sethian Platonizing treatise *Allogenes* appears to be modeled directly on Plato’s *Symposium*, as illustrated in the following table (see next page).

Of course, while Diotima’s speech is a performative exercise in protreptic dialectic delivered on the earthly plane with no subsequent narrative of its actual implementation by Socrates,⁴⁹ in *Allogenes*, the result of the Luminaries’ protreptic instruction is immediately implemented before the reader’s eyes through the narration of an otherworldly ascent modeled upon, but far surpassing, those of Jewish heavenly ascent apocalypses. To read the treatise is itself to make the ascent.

⁴⁸ *Symposium* 210e2–211b5; 211c: “When a man has been thus far tutored in acts of yearning (τὰ ἐρωτικά), correctly beholding successively beautiful things, as he draws to the goal of his yearnings he will suddenly (ἐξαίφνης) discern a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature; and this, Socrates, is the final object of all those previous toils. First of all, it is ever-existent [211a] and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; moreover, it is neither partly beautiful not partly ugly, nor is it something at one time and something else at another, nor beautiful in one respect and ugly in another, nor beautiful to some and ugly to others. Nor again does it appear to him as if it were a face or of hands or any other portion of the body, nor as some kind of reason or knowledge, nor as existing somewhere in something else, such as an animal or [211b] the earth or sky or any other thing; but existing always in singularity of form independent by itself, while all the multitude of beautiful things participate it in such a way that, even though they all come to be and pass away, it becomes neither greater nor less, and is affected by nothing. [...] [211c] Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know [211d] the very essence of beauty.”

⁴⁹ Though not narrated, Socrates’ conversion is made clear (*Symposium* 212b2–3): “This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate for acquiring this than Love. That’s why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love myself and practice them with special diligence, and why I commend them to others.”

Symposium		Allogenes	
<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Stage of Ascent</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Stage of Ascent</i>
Phaedrus 178a–180b	From (physical) love of individual bodies to love of all beautiful bodies, ambition	Youel 45.6–50.17	Discriminating between particulars and universals
Pausanias 180c–185c	From beautiful bodies to beautiful souls and practices, nobility of character	Youel 50.17–52.12	Turning inward to the Good that resides within oneself
Eryximachus 185c–188e	From beautiful practices to beautiful learning, universal harmony of balance/imbalance	Youel 52.13–55.17	Glorification of transcendental realities (cf. Agathon’s speech)
Aristophanes 189a–193d	From beautiful learning to yearning for the beauty of completion and reunification	Youel 55.17–32	Acknowledging the single source of transcendent realities and yearning for higher revelation
Agathon 193d–197e	Knowing the essence of Beauty within oneself; desire for the Good, fulfillment, tranquility	Youel 55.33–58.7	Ascent from knowledge of the Good within oneself to knowledge of the realm of true Being (Barbelo Aeon)
Interlude: 198a–201c	Socrates & Agathon	Interlude: 58.8–59.3	After 100 years Allogenes elevated to a “pure place” sees Barbelo Aeon
Diotima <i>apud</i> Socrates 201d–212c	Visionary ascent ending in a sudden self-manifestation of the beautiful itself + negative theology	Powers of Luminaries 59.4–68.top	Unknowing knowledge of the Unknowable One through originary self-manifestation + negative theology
Alcibiades 212d–222b	Eulogy to Socrates, desire to unite with beauty in Socrates	Unknown male figure 68.16–23	Preservation of the revelation for “those who are worthy”
Epilogue: (222e–223d)	Socrates’ standing self-absorption (222cd)	Allogenes 68.25–69.16	Allogenes writes Book, informs Messos, and stands

2. The modes of Being and Non-Being

Another instance of the direct appropriation of Plato's dialogues occurs in *Zostrianos'* and *Allogenes'* use of terminology derived from Plato's *Sophist* and *Parmenides* to describe the contents Kalyptos, the topmost level of the intelligible Barbelo Aeon, and to show that it contains the archetypes of the entire realm of reality extending from the divine light itself all the way down to chaotic matter:

Zost. NHC VIII 117.1–14: “It is there that all living creatures are, existing individually, although unified. The knowledge of the knowledge is there as well as a basis for ignorance. Chaos is there as well as a [place] for all of them, it being [complete] while they are incomplete. True light (is there), as well as enlightened darkness (i. e. intelligible matter) as well as that which truly is non-existent (i. e. gross matter), that [which] is not-truly existent (i. e. souls), [as well as] the non-existent ones that are not at all (i. e. sensibles).”

Here, the Kalyptos Aeon contains the archetypes of all polarities, such as ultimate knowledge and ignorance, unordered chaos and organized place (characteristics of the receptacle of *Timaeus* 52a8–b5), “true light” and “enlightened darkness.” But it also contains certain categories of non-being 1) “that which is truly non-existent” (*to ontōs ouk on*) i. e., gross matter, 2) “that [which] is not-truly existent” (*to ouk ontōs on*), i. e., souls as source of motion and change, as well as 3) the sensible entities that are moved by them, “the non-existent ones that are not at all” (*ta ouk ontōs ouk onta*).

Two of these three negative categories of being occur also in *Allogenes*, where they are supplemented by the positive categories of “existing” and “truly existing:”

Allogenes NHC XI 55.17–30: “Then the mother of] the glories Youel spoke to me again: [“O *Allogenes*], you [shall surely] know that the [Triple-Powered] One exists before [those that] do not exist (i. e. sensibles), [those that exist] without [truly] existing (i. e. souls), those that exist (i. e. individual forms), [and those that] truly exist (i. e. universal forms). [And all these] exist [in Divinity and Blessedness] [and] Existence, even as non-substantiality and non-being [Existence].”

The ultimate source of these categories of being – which become virtual Neoplatonic definitions of intermediate metaphysical entities – are traditional propositional categories taken from Plato's *Sophist* and *Parmenides*.⁵⁰ In the *Parmenides*

⁵⁰ The significance of these various combinations of negative terms is clarified by Proclus, in *Tim.* I. 233.1–4 [Diehl]: “Accordingly certain of the ancients call the noetic realm ‘truly existent,’ the psychic ‘not truly existent,’ the perceptible ‘not truly non-existent,’ and the material ‘truly non-existent’” (διὸ καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν τινες ὄντως μὲν ὄν καλοῦσι τὸ νοητὸν πλάτος. οὐκ ὄντως δὲ ὄν τὸ ψυχικόν. οὐκ ὄντως δὲ οὐκ ὄν τὸ αἰσθητόν. ὄντως δὲ οὐκ ὄν τὴν ὕλην). According to R. Tournaire, “La classification des existants selon Victorin l’Africain”, *BAGB* 1 (1996) 55–63, the predicate ὄν means innately organized (intelligible or psychic), οὐκ ὄν means innately unorganized (sensible, material), while the qualifier ὄντως signifies what is stable or stabilized (intelligible or material), and οὐκ ὄντως signifies perceptible or intelligible reality subject to change; cf. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (see n. 34), 1.147–211 and P. Henry and P. Hadot, *Marius Victorinus: Traités Théologiques sur la Trinité* (SC 68–69; Paris 1960)

Plato uses them to examine Parmenides' assertion of the unity of the universe and his claim that it is impossible to speak of "what is not." In the *Sophist*, he uses them to show that the false teaching of the Sophists is equivalent to saying "what is not," a reality which – contrary to Parmenides – turns out to be intelligible after all.

In Plato's *Parmenides*, both being and non-being can be the subject of both affirmations and negations, while the *Sophist* (238c) – which distinguishes the copulative and existential senses of "be" ("not to be x" does not mean "not to exist") – suggests "that which is not" (*to mē on auto kath' auton*) as beyond all predication, discourse and thought, which would render the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis of an absolute One and the "One that is not" of hypothesis V as unthinkable because they lack being. On the other hand, according to the *Sophist* 240b1–13, Forms are that which truly exists (*ontōs onta*) and are the object of thought, while copies are not that which truly is (*ouk ontōs onta*), and thus cannot be the object of thought. According to *Sophist* 254d, the supreme category is "being" (*to on*), while "not-being" (*to mē on*) is indeterminate and may or may not really be non-existent (*to mē on hōs estin ontōs mē on*).⁵¹

In the process, the *Sophist* presents a new theory of the Form of Being and its relation to the other most comprehensive forms, but without arranging them into a hierarchy of metaphysical levels of reality as did subsequent interpreters, such as the authors of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and later Neoplatonist philosophers and patristic thinkers such as Proclus and Marius Victorinus. The use of these logical categories indicates that these Sethian authors were students of Plato's dialogues,

2.712. See also F. W. Kohnke, "Plato's Conception of τὸ οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν", *Phron.* 2 (1957) 32–40. In Marius Victorinus, *Ad Candidum* 11.1–12 [Henri & Hadot] one finds the sequence *quae vere sunt, quae sunt, quae non vere non sunt, quae non sunt, quae non vere sunt, vere quae non sunt*. These terms and distinctions seem to originate with Plato, for example in the *Soph.* 240d9–241a1 and 254d1 there is the series ὄντως ὄν. οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν. ὄντως μὴ ὄν, and in the *Parmenides* 162a6–b3 there is the series εἶναι ὄν. εἶναι μὴ ὄν. μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν. μὴ εἶναι ὄν. In *de caelo* 282a4–b7 (reflected also in the *Categories*), Aristotle makes similar distinctions, using αἰεὶ instead of ὄντως. An attempt to invoke the same categories also occurs in a revelation cited in Codex Bruce, *Untitled*, 237,20–23 [Schmidt & MacDermot]: "And when Phosilampes understood, he said: 'On account of him are those things which really and truly exist and those which do not exist truly. This is he on whose account are those that truly exist which are hidden, and those that do not exist truly which are manifest.'" Here the categories alternate between modes of being (both absolute and "hidden" being, intelligibles, and perhaps souls) and non-being (both absolute and visible non-being, matter, and perhaps sensible bodies), rather than exclusively between modes of non-being. Cf. also *Melchizedek* NHC IX 6.12–14; 16.18–19.

⁵¹ Yet in *Sophist* 256de, the Eleatic Stranger says: "So it has to be possible for that which is not to be, in the case of change and also as applied to all the kinds. That's because as applied to all of them the nature of the different makes each of them not be, by making it *different* from that which is. And we're going to be right if we say that all of them *are not* in this same way. And on the other hand we're also going to be right if we say they *are*, because they have a share in that which is."

not only of the popular protology of the *Timaeus*, but also of comparatively more abstruse dialogues such as the *Sophist* and *Parmenides*.

3. Dialectic

Another instance of the direct appropriation of Plato's dialogues in the Sethian Platonizing treatises is their appropriation of Plato's dialectical approach to knowledge. Plato's middle (*Phaedo*, *Republic*, perhaps the *Phaedrus*) and later dialogues (*Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus*) employ the dialectical methods of collection, division and definition in order to know the true intelligible essence or ultimate Idea of things that transcends yet grounds their individual instances. Interestingly, a similar approach to transcendental epistemology occurs in three of the four Platonizing Sethian treatises. In *Marsanes*, the preliminary stages leading to Marsanes' vision of the supreme principles are occupied by discursive dialectic reasoning, specifically the same technique of collection and division as outlined in the *Phaedrus*:⁵²

Marsanes NHC X 4.24–5.21: “For I am he who has [intelligized] that which truly exists, [whether] individually or [as a whole], by difference (*kata diaphoran* cf. *Resp.* VI 509d–511e) [I knew] that they [pre]-exist [in the] entire place that is eternal: all those that have come into existence, whether without substance or with substance, those who are unbegotten, and the divine aeons, as well as the angels and the souls without guile and the soul-[garments], the images of [the] simple ones (souls?). And [afterwards they] were mixed with [those (i. e. their bodies) that were distinct from] them. But [even the] entire [perceptible] substance still resembles the [intelligible substance] as well as the insubstantial. [I have known] the entire corruption [of the former (the perceptible realm)] as well as the immortality of the latter. I have discriminated (*diakrinein* cf. *Soph.* 253d–e) and have attained the boundary of the partial, sense-perceptible world (and) the entire realm of the incorporeal essence. according to the parts of every place, the incorporeal substance and the intelligible cosmos; I knew, in the distinguishing (*diakrinein*), that the sensible cosmos was in every way worthy of being preserved entirely.”

A similar procedure emerges in *Zostrianos* as an interpretation of a celestial “baptism” by which one acquires knowledge of the intelligible realm:⁵³

⁵² *Phaedrus* 266b3–c1: “Now I myself, Phaedrus, am a lover of these processes of division and bringing together (διαρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν), as aids to speech and thought; and if I think any other man is able to see things that can naturally be collected into one and divided into many, him I follow after and walk in his footsteps as if he were a god. And whether the name I give to those who can do this is right or wrong, God knows, but I have called them hitherto dialecticians (διαλεκτικούς).”

⁵³ Largely in response to the metaphysical puzzlements that drive him to despair just prior to his ascent, *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 2.25–3.13: “How can beings – since they are from the aeon of those who derive from an invisible and undivided self-generated Spirit as triform unengendered images – both have an origin superior to Existence and pre-exist all [these] and yet have come to be in the [world]? How do those in its presence with all these [originate from the] Good [that is above]? What sort [of power] and [cause, and] what is [the] place of that [one]? What

Zost. NHC VIII 23.6–17: “And if one understands their origin, how they are all manifest in a single principle, and how all who are joined come to be divided, and how those who were divided join again, and how the parts [join with] the wholes and the species with the [genera] – when one understands these things – one has washed in the baptism of Kalyptos.”

Similarly, dialectic activity prefaces *Allogenes*’ contemplative ascent:

Allogenes NHC XI 50.8–17: “I was able – even though flesh was upon me – to hear from (you) about these things. And because of the teaching that is in them, the thought within me distinguished things beyond measure from unknowable things. Therefore I fear that my wisdom has become excessive.”

These Platonizing treatises have here drawn upon the *Phaedo*, *Sophist* and perhaps the divided line of *Republic* VI 509–511.⁵⁴ Consider, for example, the Stranger’s dialogue with Theaetetus in *Sophist* 253b–e:

Sophist 253b8–e2: “[Stranger:] Since we have agreed also that genera are the same [i. e., as other things previously discussed, some of which mix, and some of which don’t] with respect to the ability to mix with one another, is it not necessary – for one intending to show correctly which of the genera harmonize with which, and which do not receive one other – to proceed through the arguments with some kind of science? And especially if [one intends to show] whether there is a [genus] which holds things together throughout the whole, so that they are able to be commingled, and again in the [case of] divisions, if there are other causes of the divisions throughout the whole? [Theaetetus:] How could one not need such a science, and indeed almost the greatest? [Stranger:] So what then will we call this science, Theaetetus? [...] Will we not declare it to be of the science of dialectic to divide according to genus, and to consider neither the same form to be another nor another to be the same?”

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato distinguishes two kinds of dialectic, an ascending or “synoptic” (*Republic* 537c) dialectic that moves (by recollection) from idea to idea to the supreme idea, and a descending, “diairetic” dialectic that moves from the highest idea and by division distinguishes within the general ideas particular ideas until one reaches ideas that do not include in themselves further ideas. One thus moves from multiplicity to unity and from unity to its expressed multiplicity.

is its principle? How does its product belong both to it and all these? How, [being a] simple [unity], does it differ [from] itself, given that it exists as Existence, Form, and Blessedness, and, being vitally alive, grants power? How has Existence which has no being appeared in a power that has being?”

⁵⁴ In the divided line simile of *Resp.* VI 511a–e, Plato specified two forms of knowledge, opinion (δόξα) and science (ἐπιστήμη), of which opinion is further divided into imagination (εἰκασία) and belief (πίστις) and science into mediated knowledge (διάνοια) and pure intellection (νόησις). These four kinds are distinguished by reference to their respective objects of focus: shadows and images of sensible things, the sensible objects themselves, recognition of Forms through sensible particulars and hypothetical deduction, and lastly the direct apprehension or intuition of the Forms, supreme principles, and their interrelations, an activity known as dialectic.

4. *The Demiurge of the Timaeus and the Sethian Creator*

According to the *Timaeus* (30b8–9), the universe “has come about through divine providence.” Generously modeled on the eternal “living being” by a good and intelligent Demiurge, the universe is exempt from destruction by the everlasting bond of his providence. By contrast, the Gnostic world creator is an inferior fabricator who makes a defective universe according to an archetype he cannot directly see, clearly a negative parody of Plato’s Demiurge. According to the Sethian *Apocryphon of John*:⁵⁵

Ap. John NHC II 12.33–13.5: “Now he put everything in order, in the likeness of the first aeons that had come into being, so as to create them in an incorruptible pattern – not that he himself had actually seen the incorruptible things – rather, it was the power within him that he had received from his Mother, since she had begotten within him the likeness of the cosmos.”

In the *Apocryphon of John*, the Archon of creation – who is *himself* amorphous and chaotic – is no true demiurge.⁵⁶ Even though he thinks he is copying an *image* of the eternal aeonic paradigm, he cannot directly see it and thus produces a chaotic copy with more similarity to his own being than to the image he copies.

A slightly different version of the world creator’s demiurgical activity is offered on pages 9–10 of the Platonizing Sethian treatise *Zostrianos*. In contrast to the incorruptible “airy earth” which originated by a rational principle (*logos*) as the direct archetype of the physical cosmos, we learn of the physical cosmos as “a [substance] and principle of matter, the dark, corrupt [product],” whose pre-cosmic formlessness and shapelessness seems to make room for worldly things (*ko[smikon nim]*) in a way reminiscent of the receptacle of *Timaeus* 48e–52d. Here, Sophia, apparently inhabiting this archetypal “airy earth,” does not herself descend nor does she give rise to the Archon. Instead, she merely “looks down,” thereby illuminating the lower precosmic darkness or matter, in effect generating an initial ‘material’ image of herself – itself deceptive and intermittent (*Zost.* 10.16) – that serves as the archetype on which the creator Archon attempts to

⁵⁵ See J. D. Turner, “The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the *Timaeus* and Parmenides”, *VigChr* 60 (2006) 9–64. In all four versions of *Ap. John*, there is a supreme trinity of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo (also called *Pronoia* and “the womb of the all” resembles the Providence of *Tim.* 30b and the receptacle of *Tim.* 48e–52d), and Autogenes, who are called Father, Mother, and Child in obvious allusion to Plato, *Tim.* 50cd. Together with the Child’s four Luminaries and their attendant Aeons form the equivalent of the realm of Forms, i. e., the *Timaeus*’ truly living being. Sophia, the lowest of the Aeons, apparently playing the role of Necessity or the errant cause of *Tim.* 47e–48a, generates the world-creator as an aborted offspring who, together with his archontic assistants, are modeled on the figures of the demiurge and younger gods of *Tim.* 41a–42e.

⁵⁶ Note that Sethian, unlike Valentinian, sources never call the world creator “demiurge.”

model the cosmos as “an image of an image.”⁵⁷ But when Sophia repents and is restored to the Pleroma, her image reflected in matter similarly vanishes, leaving the Archon to rely upon on his own imagination (*phantazesthai*) of Sophia’s now missing image in order to create the cosmos:

Zost. NHC VIII 9.1–10.20: “The [great] pre-eminence Authrounios said [to me]: “The atmospheric realmairy earth came into being by a rational principle, and it incorruptibly manifests generated and perishable things for the sake of the advent of the great judges (i. e., stars), lest they experience perception and be enclosed in the creation. But when they came upon it and thereby perceived lthe works of the world, they condemned its ruler to a perishability that is a pattern for the world, since it is a [substance] and principle of matter, the dark, corrupt [product]. When Sophia looked [down], she saw the darkness, [illumining it] while maintaining [her own station], being [a] model (*typos*) for [worldly] things, [a principle (*archē*)] for the [insubstantial] substance [and the form]less form [...] a [shapeless] shape. [It makes room] for [every cosmic thing ...] the All [...] the corrupt product. Since it is a rational principle ($\omega\lambda\chi\epsilon \approx \lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) that persuades] the darkness, [he sows from his] reason (*šaje* \approx *logos*), since it [is im]possible [for the Archon] of [creation] to see any of the eternal entities. 10 He saw a reflection (*eidōlon*), and with reference to the reflection that he [saw] therein, he created the world. With a reflection of a reflection ($\epsilon\iota\lambda\omega\lambda\omicron\nu\ \eta\tau\epsilon\ \omicron\gamma\epsilon\iota\lambda\omega\lambda\omicron\nu$) he worked upon the world, and then even the reflection of the appearance was taken from him. But Sophia was given a place of rest in exchange for her repentance. In consequence, because there was within her no pure, original image, either pre-existing in him or that had already come to be through him, he used his imagination ($\phi\alpha\eta\tau\alpha\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$) and fashioned the remainder, for the image ($\epsilon\iota\kappa\omega\nu$) belonging to Sophia is always corrupt [and] deceptive. But the Archon – [since he simulates] and embodies by [pursuing the image ($\epsilon\iota\kappa\omega\nu$)] because of the superabundance [that inclined downward] – looked downward.”

Like Plato’s Demiurge, the Archon of creation here has the task of acting the role of “reason persuading necessity” (as in *Timaeus* 48a). He “[sows from his] reason,” which turns out to be only his imagination. Rather than looking above to the paradigmatic living being and the forms therein (*Timaeus* 39e), he can only look down and chase after fleeting and dim reflections (*eidōla*) of the images (*eikona*) of whatever forms (*eidē*) have been projected into the dark substrate of matter, not the true forms themselves or even their direct images.⁵⁸ In this way, *Zostrianos* combines, not only a negative parody of the demiurge as portrayed in the main creation account of the *Timaeus* (29d7–47e2, esp. 39e) – the works of

⁵⁷ *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII 9.17–10.20) from which Plotinus virtually cites about eleven lines in *Enn.* II.9 [33] 10.19–32. This dependence was first discovered by Tardieu (2005).

⁵⁸ As the Stranger says in *Sophist* 235d–236c, while “images” ($\epsilon\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu\alpha$) are “like” ($\epsilon\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$) but “other than” ($\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$) the true “original” ($\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$), “imagination” ($\phi\alpha\eta\tau\acute{\alpha}\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$) are associated with “reflections” ($\acute{\epsilon}\iota\delta\omega\lambda\alpha$) that only appear to resemble reality but actually do not, esp. 236a4–6: “So the artists ($\delta\eta\mu\iota\omicron\upsilon\rho\gamma\omicron\iota$) abandon the truth and give their figures ($\epsilon\iota\delta\acute{\omega}\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma$) not the actual proportions but those which seem ($\delta\omicron\zeta\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\varsigma$) to be beautiful, do they not?” and 236b6–7: “Shall we not call it, since it appears, but is not like ($\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\iota\kappa\epsilon\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}\ \omicron\upsilon$), a phantom ($\phi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\mu\alpha$)?” Cf. *Sophist* 239d–240a; 264c in addition to *Timaeus* 29b–c; *Resp.* X 596b–e; VI 509e–510a; 515a, and *Phaedrus* 255d.

Reason – but also features from its subsequent account of the works of Necessity (48e–52d), not to mention Plato’s critique of images and mimetic demiurgy in the *Sophist*⁵⁹ and *Republic*.

V. Conclusion

The preceding instances of the appropriation of key features and elements of Plato’s dialogues in the Sethian Platonizing treatises demonstrate that their authors were thoroughly immersed in the thought of Plato, but also in his dialogues themselves. While their authors fail to acknowledge Plato as the originator of these teachings and instead ascribe them to divine revelation, one cannot escape the conclusion that they were engaged in the close reading and highly selective interpretation of the dialogues in much the same way that other Sethians had approached Jewish and Christian scripture. And it is also likely that the common knowledge of their readers would have been sufficient to recognize allusions to these dialogues, thereby reinforcing the authority of these divine revelations with the familiar traditional wisdom of “the ancient philosophy.”

⁵⁹ Plato, *Sophist*. 235d–236b: [Stranger:] I think I see this time also two classes of imitation, but I do not yet seem to be able to make out in which of them the form we are seeking is to be found. [Theaetetus:] Please first make the division and tell us what two classes you mean. [Stranger:] I see the likeness-making art as one part of imitation. This is met with, as a rule, whenever anyone produces the imitation by following the proportions of the original in length, breadth, and depth, and giving, besides, [235e] the appropriate colors to each part. [Theaetetus:] Yes, but do not all imitators try to do this? [Stranger:] Not those who produce some large work of sculpture or painting. For if they reproduced the true proportions of beautiful forms, the upper parts, you know, would seem smaller [236a] and the lower parts larger than they ought, because we see the former from a distance, the latter from near at hand. [Theaetetus:] Certainly. [Stranger:] So the artists (δημιουργοί) abandon the truth and give their figures (ειδώλοισ) not the actual proportions but those which seem (δοξούσας) to be beautiful, do they not? [Theaetetus:] Certainly. [Stranger:] That, then, which is other, but like, we may fairly call a likeness, may we not? [Theaetetus:] Yes. [236b] [Stranger:] And the part of imitation which is concerned with such things, is to be called, as we called it before, likeness-making? [Theaetetus:] It is to be so called. [Stranger:] Now then, what shall we call that which appears, because it is seen from an unfavorable position, to be like the beautiful, but which would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like, if a person were able to see such large works adequately? Shall we not call it, since it appears, but is not like, a phantom (ἔοικε δὲ οὐ φάντασμα)?

I. Apokalypsen in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

Apokalypsen in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

Gregor Wurst

Abstract

Within the corpus of the Nag-Hammadi-Library several texts are labelled as apocalypses in their titles. This contribution gives an overview over the three Coptic-Gnostic Apocalypses of Paul (NHC V,2), Adam (NHC V,5) and Peter (NHC VII,3) and discusses questions of the religious background, the dates of composition, and the literary genre of these texts.

I. Das Textkorpus

Unter den 52 in koptischer Übersetzung überlieferten Schriften aus dem Fund von Nag Hammadi finden sich insgesamt fünf Werke, die den Begriff „Apokalypse“ im Titel führen: Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2), die erste und die zweite Apokalypse des Jakobus (NHC V,3–4), Die Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5) und Die Apokalypse des Petrus (NHC VII,3).¹ Darüber hinaus können bzw. werden weitere Texte bzw. Textpartien bestimmter Schriften in der Forschung als Apokalypsen/apokalyptisch bezeichnet wie z. B. Noëma (NHC VI,4) oder Teile der hermetischen Schrift „Asklepios“ (NHC VI,8 p. 70,3–76,2),² wobei der genaue Umfang des Textkorpus je nach Autor und der verwendeten Gattungsdefinition schwankt. Dieses Textkorpus bildete in der Vergangenheit mehrfach den Gegenstand eingehender, jedoch kaum monographischer Untersuchungen, von denen hier die Studien von F. T. Fallon³ und M. Krause⁴ als grundlegend

¹ Vgl. G. Wurst, Art. Nag Hammadi, LACL³ (2002), 511–514.

² Vgl. zuletzt: J. Holzhausen, Das Corpus Hermeticum Deutsch. Übersetzung, Darstellung und Kommentierung in drei Teilen. Band 2 (Clavis Pansophiae 7/2), Stuttgart 1997, 540–562.

³ F. T. Fallon, The Gnostic Apocalypses, in: J. J. Collins (Hg.), Apocalypse. The Morphology of a Genre (Semeia 14), Missoula 1979, 123–158.

⁴ M. Krause, Die literarischen Gattungen der Apokalypsen von Nag Hammadi, in: D. Hellholm (Hg.), Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East, Tübingen² 1989, 621–637.

hervorzuheben sind,⁵ die sich jedoch in ihrem jeweiligen Verständnis der Gattung Apokalypse grundlegend unterscheiden. Während Krause sich weitgehend an die eher enge Gattungsdefinition Ph. Vielhauers anlehnt,⁶ legt Fallon die Definition von J. J. Collins⁷ so weit aus, dass selbst Texte wie das Evangelium nach Maria darunter fallen können.⁸

Auffällig ist zwar, dass vier der genannten fünf durch ihren Titel als „Apokalypsen“ bezeichneten Schriften in Codex V überliefert sind, der darüber hinaus noch eine Kopie des Brief des Eugnostos (NHC V,1) enthält, also eines Lehrbriefes, der keinerlei apokalyptische Elemente aufweist. Es ist jedoch Konsens der Forschung, dass die beiden Jakobus-Apokalypsen nur in dem weiteren Sinn einer Offenbarungsrede und nicht in Bezug auf ihr *genus litterarium* als solche zu bezeichnen sind, dass es sich dabei vielmehr um der Gattung der Dialoge des Erlösers bzw. der Dialog-Evangelien zuzurechnende Texte handelt.⁹ Diese Einschätzung fand ihre Bestätigung in der Tatsache, dass die Parallelüberlieferung der ersten Apokalypse des Jakobus im sog. Codex Tchacos diesen Begriff auch gar nicht im Titel bzw. der *subscriptio* führt, sondern hier nur unter dem Titel $\text{I}\alpha\kappa\kappa\omega\beta\omicron\varsigma$, also „Jakobus“, firmiert.¹⁰ Die gängige Bezeichnung von Codex V als „Apokalypsen-Kodex“¹¹ ist also nur als rein deskriptiv und am Wortlaut der Titel der einzelnen Schriften orientiert zu verstehen. Hinter diesem handschriftlichen Befund ein tieferes, gar gnostisch-„pädagogisches“ Interesse¹² zu

⁵ Vgl. darüber hinaus die eingehende Diskussion der Gattungsproblematik anhand der Petrusapokalypse bei H. Havelaar, *The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* (Nag Hammadi Codex VII,3) (TU 114), Berlin 1999, 111–130 (besonders 114–123).

⁶ P. Vielhauer/G. Strecker, Einleitung, in: W. Schneemelcher (Hg.), *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*. Band 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes, Tübingen 1989, 489–547 (bes. 506–508); vgl. auch J. C. Dias Chaves, *The Nag Hammadi Apocalyptic Corpus: Delimitation and Analysis*, Mémoire de maîtrise ès arts, Faculté de théologie et des sciences religieuses de l'Université de Laval de Québec, Québec 2007 (online verfügbar unter <http://www.theses.ulaval.ca/2007/24300/>, abgerufen am 24.01.2017), eine Studie, in der jedoch der Forschungsstand nur selektiv wahrgenommen wird.

⁷ J. J. Collins, *The Jewish Apocalypses*, in: ders. (Hg.), *Apocalypse. The Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14), Missoula 1979, 22: „[...] ‚Apocalypse‘ may be defined as a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.“

⁸ Fallon, *Gnostic Apocalypses* (s. Anm. 3), 131–132.

⁹ Vgl. J. Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre. Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmen-erzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge* (TU 146), Berlin 2000, 188; so auch die Einordnung in der Neuausgabe der Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen: C. Marksches/J. Schröter (Hg.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*. Band 1: Evangelien und Verwandtes. Teilband 2, Tübingen 2012, 1152–1194.

¹⁰ Vgl. R. Kasser/G. Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas Together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos*, Washington 2007, 160–161.

¹¹ So zuletzt U.-K. Plisch, *Art. Paulus III* (in den ntl. Apokryphen), *RAC* 26 (2015), 1222.

¹² So F. Morard, *Les apocalypses du codex V de Nag Hammadi*, in: L. Painchaud/A. Pas-

vermuten, bleibt ebenso spekulativ wie der Versuch, auf dieser Grundlage eine Art Gattungsdefinition gnostischer Apokalypsen gewinnen zu wollen.¹³ In diesem Beitrag wird nach dem Vorgang von Vielhauer und Krause an einer engen Definition der Gattung Apokalypse festgehalten.

II. Die Überlieferung

Die Apokalypse des Paulus, Die Apokalypse des Adam und Die Apokalypse des Petrus sind in einer koptisch-sahidischen Übersetzung als zweite und fünfte Schrift des Codex V sowie als dritte Schrift des Codex VII aus Nag Hammadi überliefert. Die Apokalypse des Paulus und Die Apokalypse des Adam wurden zuerst von A. Böhlig im Jahr 1958 herausgegeben,¹⁴ die aktuell maßgeblichen kritischen Editionen wurden von J.-M. Rosenstiehl und M. Kaler sowie F. Morard besorgt.¹⁵ Die Erstedition der Apokalypse des Petrus stammt von M. Krause und die derzeit maßgebliche kritische Edition von H. Havelaar.¹⁶

quier (Hg.), Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification. Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 septembre 1993 (BCNH.E 3), Québec u. a. 1995, 357.

¹³ Morard, Apocalypses (s. Anm. 12), 341: „[...] si ce n'est pour préciser [...] que l'apocalypse gnostique recouvre essentiellement un discours de *révélation* concernant le salut procuré par la gnose.“

¹⁴ A. Böhlig/P. Labib, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypsen aus Codex V von Nag Hammadi im Koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Sonderband, Halle/Saale 1963, 15–26.86–117.

¹⁵ J.-M. Rosenstiehl/M. Kaler, Apocalypse de Paul (NH V,2) (BCNH.T 31), Québec u. a. 2005; F. Morard, L'apocalypse d'Adam (NH V,5) (BCNH.T 15), Québec 1985. Zur Apokalypse des Paulus vgl. darüber hinaus: W. R. Murdock/G. W. MacRae, The Apocalypse of Paul. V,2: 17,19–24,9, in: D. M. Parrott (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4 (NHS 11), Leiden 1979, 47–63; U.-K. Plisch, Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2), in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge, u. a. (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 2: NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4 (GCS.NF 12, Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften III), Berlin/New York 2003, 399–405; J.-M. Rosenstiehl, Apocalypse de Paul (NH V,2), in: J.-P. Mahé/P.-H. Poirier (Hg.), Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Paris 2007, 707–723. Zur Apokalypse des Adam: G. W. MacRae, The Apocalypse of Adam. V,5: 64,1–85,32, in: D. M. Parrott (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4 (NHS 11), Leiden 1979, 151–195; W. Beltz, Die Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5), in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge, u. a. (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 2: NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4 (GCS.NF 12, Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften III), Berlin/New York 2003, 433–441; F. Morard, L'apocalypse d'Adam (NH V,5), in: J.-P. Mahé/P.-H. Poirier (Hg.), Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Paris 2007, 777–805; E. Grypeou, Apokalypse Adams (JSRZ.NF 1,2), Gütersloh 2015.

¹⁶ M. Krause, Die Petrusapokalypse, in: F. Altheim/R. Stiehl (Hg.), Christentum am Roten Meer. Band 2, Berlin/New York 1973, 152–179; Havelaar, Apocalypse (s. Anm. 5); R. Charron, Concordance des textes de Nag Hammadi. Le codex VII (BCNH.Concordances 1), Sainte-Foy 1992, 736–751; vgl. darüber hinaus: J.-D. Dubois, Apocalypse de Pierre (NH VII,3), in: J.-P. Mahé/P.-H. Poirier (Hg.), Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Paris 2007, 1141–1166.

Beide Codices sind nicht vor dem zweiten (NHC V) bzw. dritten Viertel (NHC VII) des 4. Jahrhunderts, aber sicher auch nicht wesentlich später, entstanden, wie sich aus den als Makulatur in die Ledereinbände verklebten dokumentarischen Papyri ergibt.¹⁷ Die koptisch-gnostischen Apokalypsen des Paulus und Petrus stehen dabei trotz des gleichlautenden Titels in keiner Beziehung zu den schon seit langem bekannten orthodox-apokryphen Schriften gleichen Namens.¹⁸

Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2 p. 17,19–24,9) ist insbesondere auf den ersten beiden Seiten aufgrund substantieller materieller Beschädigungen des Papyrus am oberen und unteren Seitenrand unvollständig überliefert. Im Fall der Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5 p. 64,1–85,32) sind ebenfalls teils substantielle materielle Textverluste an den unteren Seitenrändern zu konstatieren, der Text der Apokalypse des Petrus (NHC VII,3 p. 70,13–84,14) hingegen ist so gut wie vollständig erhalten. Alle drei Texte gehen, wie allgemein angenommen wird,¹⁹ auf griechische Originale zurück, was im Fall der Apokalypse des Petrus insbesondere durch die griechische Formulierung des Titels ἀποκαλυψις πετροῦ = Ἀποκάλυψις Πέτροῦ gestützt wird.²⁰

III. Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2)

Ohne dass der neutestamentliche Anknüpfungspunkt im erhaltenen Textbestand genannt wäre, setzt die kurze koptisch-gnostische Apokalypse des Paulus bei der Selbstaussage des Paulus in 2 Kor 12,2–4 über seine Entrückung in den dritten Himmel an. Die dort nur angedeutete Entrückung lokalisiert der Text dabei im Kontext seiner Reise nach Damaskus (vgl. Gal 1,17), und zwar auf dem „Berg Jericho“ (NHC V,2 p. 19,12–13), und spinnt sie zu einem regelrechten Aufstieg vom dritten bis in den zehnten Himmel aus. Geleitet wird Paulus dabei von einem „kleinen Knaben“ (πκοῦει φη[μ, NHC V,2 p. 18,6 u.ö.), den er zu Beginn der Erzählung trifft und der im weiteren Verlauf als „der (heilige) Geist“ (NHC

¹⁷ Vgl. J. W. B. Barns/G. M. Browne u. a., Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers (NHS 16), Leiden 1981, 3.5.

¹⁸ Vgl. W. P. Funk, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypse des Paulus, in: W. Schneemelcher (Hg.), Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. Band 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes, Tübingen ⁶1989, 628; A. Werner, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypse des Petrus, in: W. Schneemelcher (Hg.), Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. Band 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes, Tübingen ⁶1989, 634.

¹⁹ Vgl. Funk, Apokalypse des Paulus (s. Anm. 18), 628–629; Werner, Apokalypse des Petrus (s. Anm. 18), 634; Beltz, Apokalypse des Adam (s. Anm. 15), 434.

²⁰ NHC VII,3 p. 70,13 (*inscriptio*); p. 84,14 (*subscriptio*); die Titel der Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2 p. 17,19; 24,9) und der Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5 p. 64,1; 85,32) sind hingegen sowohl als *inscriptio* als auch als *subscriptio* koptisch formuliert.

V,2 p. 20,4; 22,15–16 u. ö.) bezeichnet wird. Dabei handelt es sich offensichtlich um eine Erscheinung Jesu.²¹

Die Paulusapokalypse ist deutlich in zwei Hauptteile gegliedert, deren erster das Zusammentreffen Pauli mit Jesus zum Gegenstand hat. Paulus erscheint dabei als „Unwissender“, dem der „Weg hinauf nach Jerusalem“ (NHC V,2 p. 18,4–5) erst gewiesen werden muss. Der Knabe hingegen weiß um die besondere Erwählung Pauli – „Du bist es, der vom Mutterleib an gesegnet worden ist“ (NHC V,2 p. 18,16–17; vgl. ebd. p. 23,3–4 „du Gesegneter und vom Mutterleib an Ausgesonderter; vgl. Gal 1,15; Jer 1,5) – und eröffnet ihm in einer kurzen Rede, deren Inhalt aufgrund einer umfangreichen Lakune nicht ganz deutlich wird, einen Einblick in eine von archontischen und dämonischen Mächten geprägte Welt (NHC V,2 p. 18,14–19,7). Die Aussicht, mit den zwölf Aposteln, die als „auserwählte Geister“ bezeichnet werden, zusammenzutreffen (NHC V,2 p. 19,15–18), schließt diesen Teil ab.

Daraufhin entrückt der Knabe Paulus im zweiten Teil des Textes zunächst in den dritten und von dort sogleich weiter in den vierten Himmel. In diesem Kontext wechselt die Erzählperspektive vom Bericht in der dritten Person in die erste Person (NHC V,2 p. 20,5),²² so dass die folgende Beschreibung der Himmelsreise als ein Bericht aus dem Mund des Paulus selbst erscheint. Ausführlich geschildert werden dabei jedoch nur die Stationen vom vierten bis zum siebten Himmel, wo Paulus zunächst, im vierten und fünften Himmel, Zeuge einer Gerichtsszene über eine „Seele aus dem Land der Toten“ wird. Ob man dies unter Verweis auf Eph 4,8–10 als „Höllenfahrt“ bezeichnen soll,²³ obgleich dieser Vorstellungskomplex natürlich im Hintergrund steht, ist fraglich. Ebenso ist es nicht wirklich eindeutig, ob die „Mit[apost]el“ des Paulus (NHC V,2 p. 21,29–30; vgl. p. 22,14) ihn real während seiner Entrückung begleiten oder auf der Erde verweilen und er nur von oben auf sie herabsieht.²⁴

Nach einem Intermezzo im sechsten Himmel begegnet Paulus im siebten Himmel einem „Greis“ (NHC V,2 p. 22,25), der mit dem Schöpfergott der biblischen Tradition zu identifizieren ist.²⁵ Der Gedanke der Befreiung der Gefangenen wird erneut aufgenommen (p. 23,14–17), und Paulus erwähnt ihm gegenüber auch das Ziel seiner Entrückung: „Zu dem Ort will ich gehen, von dem ich gekommen bin“ (p. 23,9–10). Dies wird gegen Ende des Textes jedoch durch die bloße Erwähnung des achten bis zehnten Himmels nur angedeutet (p. 23,29–24,8).

²¹ Vgl. Funk, Apokalypse des Paulus (s. Anm. 18), 629.

²² Der Wechsel in NHC V,2 p. 19,10 ist wohl als Schreibfehler (ⲛⲁⲓ „zu mir“ anstatt ⲛⲁⲗⲥ) „zu ihm“) zu interpretieren.

²³ So Funk, Apokalypse des Paulus (s. Anm. 18), 630.

²⁴ Vgl. Rosenstiehl/Kaler, L'apocalypse (s. Anm. 15), 212–214.

²⁵ Vgl. Rosenstiehl/Kaler, L'apocalypse (s. Anm. 15), 250–255.

Die koptisch-gnostische Paulusapokalypse setzt mit ihrem Rekurs auf „die zwölf Apostel“ zweifelsohne den Abschluss des lukanischen Doppelwerkes voraus, kann also frühestens im zweiten Jahrhundert entstanden sein. Darüber hinaus sind aus dem Text keine eindeutigen Hinweise auf Zeit und Ort der Entstehung zu gewinnen.²⁶

IV. Die Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5)

Mit der koptisch-gnostischen Apokalypse des Adam aus NHC V,5 findet sich auch ein Beispiel der frühjüdischen bzw. -christlichen Adamsliteratur unter den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi. Sie ist nicht identisch mit dem Fragment einer griechischen Adamapokalypse, die im Kölner Mani-Codex zitiert wird.²⁷

Die Apokalypse des Adam beginnt mit den Worten: „Die Offenbarung (ταποκαλυψις), die Adam seinem Sohn Seth im 700. Jahr mitgeteilt hat, indem er sagte: Höre auf meine Worte, mein Sohn Seth“ (NHC V,5 p. 64,2–6). Dem korrespondiert die Schlusspartie des Textes (p. 85,19–31), wo jedoch von „Offenbarungen“ (μιαποκαλυψις) die Rede ist und darüber hinaus festgehalten wird, dass Seth „seinen Samen“ (σπορα, vgl. Gen 4,25 LXX: σπέρμα ἕτερον), das Geschlecht der Sethianer, über „diese verborgene Gnosis“ (†ΓΝΩΣΙΣ ἸΝΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΝ) unterrichtet habe. Die Apokalypse des Adam gehört somit zu jenem Teil der Nag-Hammadi-Texte, die als „sethianisch“ bezeichnet werden.²⁸

Der gesamte Hauptteil des Textes ist als Ich-Bericht Adams gehalten und gliedert sich in drei Abschnitte: Zunächst wird die Geschichte vom Sündenfall in gnostischer Interpretation erzählt, wobei Eva es ist, die Adam „ein Wort der Erkenntnis (ΓΝΩΣΙΣ) des ewigen Gottes“ mitteilt (NHC V,5 p. 64,12–13), was zum Zorn des Schöpfergottes, zur Entstehung der beiden Geschlechter sowie zum Verlust der ursprünglichen „Herrlichkeit“ (εσοϋ) sowie der „ersten Gnosis“ (†ΓΝΩΣΙΣ ἸΝΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΝ) führt (p. 64,24–28), die auf „den Samen des großen Geschlechts“ übergeht (p. 65,8). Sodann fällt Adam in einen „Todesschlaf“, wobei ihm im Traum drei Männer erscheinen, die ihn „über den Äon und den Samen jenes Menschen, zu dem das Leben gekommen ist (*scil.* Seth, belehren wollen)“ (p. 66,2–6). Dieser zweite Abschnitt wird abgeschlossen mit der Episode der Zeugung eines weiteren Sohnes (*scil.* des Kain) aus Eva durch den Demiurgen

²⁶ Funk, Apokalypse des Paulus (s. Anm. 18), 629.

²⁷ CMC p. 48,16–49,18 (L. Koenen/C. Römer, Der Kölner Mani-Kodex. Über das Werden seines Leibes. Kritische Edition [ARWAW. Papyrologica Coloniensia 14], Opladen 1988, 30–33).

²⁸ Vgl. J. D. Turner, Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition (BCNH.E 6), Québec u. a. 2001; zur Kritik an diesem Konzept vgl. G. P. Luttikhuisen, Sethianer?, in: ZAC 13 (2009), 76–86.

(vgl. Gen 4,1 LXX), wodurch die sexuelle Begierde und die Sterblichkeit in die Welt kamen.

Im Zentrum des Hauptteils steht schließlich der Inhalt der Offenbarung, die die drei Männer dem Adam zuteil werden ließen. Dabei handelt es sich um einen gnostischen Abriss der Weltgeschichte, der zunächst die Episode der Sintflut (NHC V,5 p. 67,14–72,14) und dann die Geschichte einer Feuersflut, die den Samen Hams und Japhets trifft, enthält (p. 72,15–76,7). Das Geschlecht des Seth wird aus beiden Episoden errettet und ist schließlich für die dritte Ankunft des „Erleuchters der Gnosis“ (ΠΦΩΣΤΗΡ ΝΤΕ ΠΙΝΩΣΙC) bereit, damit „von dem Samen des Noah und den Söhnen Hams und Japhets“ ein Rest übrigbleibe (p. 76,8–85,18). Innerhalb dieses dritten Abschnitts des Hauptteils findet sich noch ein längerer, insgesamt 14 Strophen umfassender hymnischer Einschub, in dem 13 Königreichen das „königslose Geschlecht“ (*scil.* der Sethianer) gegenübergestellt wird (p. 77,18–83,4). Ob es sich dabei um eine literarkritisch vom Text abhebbare Quelle des Verfassers handelt, wird unterschiedlich bewertet.²⁹

Die religionsgeschichtliche Einordnung der Apokalypse des Adam und eng damit verbunden die Frage ihrer Datierung werden sehr kontrovers diskutiert. Dies hat seinen Grund darin, dass offensichtlich christliche Elemente oder Bezugnahmen auf die Person Jesu und seinen Namen fehlen, so dass die These, es handele sich um eine nicht-christliche, eventuell sogar vor-christliche gnostische Schrift seit der Erstausgabe im Raum steht.³⁰ Es fällt jedoch schwer, die mehrfache Anspielung auf eine jungfräuliche Geburt des „Erleuchters der Gnosis“³¹ im Zusammenhang mit der Aussage: „Dann werden sie das Fleisch des Menschen bestrafen, auf den der Heilige Geist gekommen ist“,³² nicht als Indizien für eine christlich-gnostische Gedankenwelt des Autors zu interpretieren. Hinzuweisen ist auch auf die Bemerkung G. MacRaes, dass der dreigliedrige Engelname $\bar{\iota}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\kappa}\bar{\kappa}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\gamma}\bar{\varsigma}\ \bar{\mu}|\bar{\alpha}\bar{\zeta}|\bar{\alpha}\bar{\rho}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}|\bar{\varsigma}\ \bar{\iota}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\kappa}\bar{\kappa}\bar{\epsilon}|\bar{\lambda}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\kappa}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}\bar{\varsigma}$ (NHC V,5 p. 85,30–31) in seinen ersten beiden Elementen vielleicht nichts anderes als eine Verballhornung von Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωπαῖος ist, womit der chronologisch nachchristliche Charakter des Werkes feststünde.³³ Letztlich ist die Apokalypse des Adam im Rahmen der frühchristli-

²⁹ Vgl. dazu ausführlich Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 15), 12–16; zu diesem Hymnus vgl. zuletzt auch M. Tardieu, Nativités païennes. Les treize „royaumes“ de l’Apocalypse gnostique d’Adam, in: B. Feichtinger/S. Lake u. a. (Hg.), Körper und Seele. Aspekte spätantiker Anthropologie (BzA 215), Leipzig 2006, 9–65.

³⁰ So schon H.-M. Schenke, Rezension zu: A. Böhlig/P. Labib, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypsen aus Codex V von Nag Hammadi im Koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Sonderband, Halle/Saale 1963, in: OLZ 61 (1966), 31–32; die Literatur zu dieser Frage bespricht jetzt ausführlich: Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 15), 22–24.

³¹ NHC V,5 p. 78,19–20: ἀφωπε εβολ ἔν οὔμητρα ἦπαρῆενος; vgl. p. 78,24 (jedoch weitgehend ergänzt).

³² NHC V,5 p. 77,16–18: τότε σενᾶρκολαζε ἦτσαρᾶζ ἦπρωνε εταπῖπᾶ ετογαδδ ει εχωφ.

³³ G. MacRae, The Apocalypse of Adam Reconsidered, in: SBL.SP 2 (1972), 574.

chen, apokryphen Literatur kaum zu datieren, da „no clear indications of its date have been perceived“.³⁴

V. Die Apokalypse des Petrus (NHC VII,3)

Die koptisch-gnostische Petrusapokalypse stellt den Interpreten, obwohl materiell so gut wie vollständig erhalten, aufgrund einer ganzen Reihe sprachlicher Schwierigkeiten vor erhebliche Probleme eines angemessenen Verständnisses. Inhaltlich handelt es sich um eine christlich-gnostische Schrift, die Sonderoffenbarungen an Petrus als den ersterwählten Jünger bzw. als das Haupt des Zwölferkreises enthält.³⁵ Sie bildet darüber hinaus eines der wichtigsten Zeugnisse gnostischer Polemik gegenüber der großkirchlichen Orthodoxie sowie einer doketischen Deutung der Passion Jesu.

Die Petrusapokalypse beginnt mit einer Situationsbeschreibung, deren Bedeutung jedoch weitgehend unklar ist. Sicher sind die Aussagen, dass Jesus, der „Erlöser“, als „im Tempel sitzend“ und „auf“ (ⲉⲓⲗⲁⲛ hat insbesondere eine lokale Bedeutung) der Zahl der lebendigen und unbefleckten Größe „ruhend“³⁶ eingeführt wird – es kann sich also nicht um den realen jüdischen Tempel in Jerusalem, sondern nur um ein Bild für einen idealen, himmlischen Tempel handeln, der wohl für die Gemeinde der Gnostiker steht.³⁷ Zwischen diese beiden Aussagen sind zwei adverbelle Bestimmungen eingeschoben, deren Sinn sich nicht ohne Weiteres erschließt.³⁸ Auf diese Situationsbeschreibung folgt ein von Petrus in der ersten Person erzählter Einleitungsdialog (NHC VII,3 p. 70,20–72,4), in dem der Erlöser ihn direkt anspricht und ihn zur vollkommenen „Erkenntnis“ beruft.³⁹

Es schließen drei sehr klar abzugrenzende Teile an, in denen Petrus zunächst zwei Visionen und eine Audition erhält, die im weiteren Kontext der Gefangennahme Jesu spielen (vgl. Mt 26,47 ff. parr.), also wohl innerhalb der Karwoche

³⁴ G. MacRae, *Apocalypse of Adam* (s. Anm. 15), 152.

³⁵ Vgl. NHC VII,3 p. 71,19–21: „Mit dir *habe ich einen Anfang gemacht* für die Übrigen, die ich zur Erkenntnis erwählt habe“; den Ausdruck ⲁⲓⲉⲣⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲁⲣⲭⲏ mag man dabei auf die Ersterwählung des Petrus als Jünger (Mt 4,18 f. parr.) oder auf seine Stellung als „Fels“ der Kirche (Mt 16,18), so Dubois, *Apocalypse* (s. Anm. 16), 1153, Anm. zu 71,15–21, beziehen.

³⁶ NHC VII,3 p. 70,14–20: ⲉⲣⲉⲙⲟⲟⲥ ⲛⲟⲓ ⲛⲥⲟⲩⲣ̅ ⲛⲉⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲓ ⲛⲓⲣⲏⲉ... ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲣⲙⲟⲩⲧ̅ ⲛⲏⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲗⲁⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲏ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲧⲏⲛⲧⲏⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲟⲛⲉ̅ ⲛⲁⲧⲁⲩⲱⲉⲣ̅ⲛ̅.

³⁷ Vgl. J.-D. Dubois, *Jésus assis au temple ou sur le temple. Remarques sur le préambule de l'Apocalypse copte de Pierre* (NHC VII,3), in: N. Belayche/J.-D. Dubois (Hg.), *L'oïseau et le poisson. Cohabitations religieuses dans les mondes grec et romain* (Religions dans l'Histoire), Paris 2011, 271–272.

³⁸ Dubois, *Jésus* (s. Anm. 37), 263–267 diskutiert die bisherigen Übersetzungen/Interpretationen der Stelle ausführlich.

³⁹ NHC VII,3 p. 71,15–18: „Auch du, Petrus, werde vollkommen in deinem Namen, zusammen mit mir, (mit) demjenigen, der dich erwählt hat.“

anzusetzen sind (NHC VII,3 p. 72,4–73,10). „Die Priester und das Volk“ (NHC VII,3 p. 72,5–6) erscheinen dabei als „Blinde und Taube“ (p. 73,12–14), während Petrus den Erlöser in einem „neuen Licht“ verklärt sieht (p. 72,23–27). Darauf folgt eine ausführliche Geschichtsdeutung (NHC VII,3 p. 73,10–81,3), in der Jesus den Abfall der Menschen von seiner Verkündigung unter dem Oberbegriff des Glaubens an „den Namen eines Toten“ (NHC VII,3 p. 74,13–14) beschreibt. Dieser umfangreichste und monologische Teil der Petrusapokalypse kann als „Häresiengeschichte“ bezeichnet werden. Schließlich folgt als dritter und letzter Teil eine doketische Vision der Kreuzigungsszene (NHC VII,3 p. 81,3–84,6), in der Petrus das eigentliche Wesen Jesu als eines „nur geistig wahrnehmbaren Geistes“, „erfüllt von strahlendem Licht“ (NHC VII,3 p. 83,8–10), offenbart wird, der als „lebendiger Erlöser“ (p. 82,28) dem Geschehen der Passion lachend zuschaut. Davon unterschieden wird der „Leidende“, der nur als Substitut am Kreuz hängt (p. 83,4–6). Hier treten also verschiedene Erscheinungsformen der Person Jesu während der Passion auf, womit der Text der Schilderung der Passion nach dem Gnostiker Basilides nahesteht, wie Irenaeus sie überliefert.⁴⁰

Die Apokalypse des Petrus schließt mit einem Aufruf an Petrus, sich nicht zu fürchten, und einem an ihn gerichteten Friedensgruß (NHC VII,3 p. 84,6–13). Der Schlusssatz „nachdem er (*scil.* der Erlöser) dies gesagt hatte, kam er (*scil.* Petrus) wieder zu sich“ belegt nicht nur den visionären Charakter des ganzen Textes, sondern fällt auch insofern aus der Komposition heraus, als hier die Erzählperspektive unvermittelt von der ersten in die dritte Person wechselt.

Die Deutung der einzelnen gegnerischen Gruppierungen, von denen sich der Text in der „Häresiengeschichte“ absetzt – Havelaar zählt hier insgesamt sieben⁴¹ –, ist zwar strittig, als sicher ist jedoch anzunehmen, dass zu Beginn auf Simon Magus und Helena⁴² und im weiteren Verlauf auf die *Hirt* genannte Schrift des römischen Theologen Hermas angespielt wird.⁴³ Der Autor der Petrusapokalypse rezipiert also den orthodoxen, häresiologischen Topos, dass Simon als Vater aller Häresien gilt.⁴⁴ Nimmt man die Indizien der herausgehobenen Stellung des Petrus in dieser Schrift (s. o.), des mit dem *Hirt* des Hermas an-

⁴⁰ Iren., Haer. I 24,4 (Doutreleau); vgl. Dubois, Apocalypse (s. Anm. 16), 1144–1146.

⁴¹ Havelaar, Apocalypse (s. Anm. 5), 90–99.

⁴² NHC VII,3 p. 74,27–34: „Einige werden sich (danach) benennen, dass sie unter der Gewalt der Archonten stehen, eines Mannes und einer nackten Frau, die vielgestaltig und zahlreichen Leiden unterworfen ist.“

⁴³ NHC VII,3 p. 78,15–17: „Denn sie werden eine bloße Nachahmung (*scil.* der Vergebung) erschaffen auf den Namen eines Toten – das ist Herma(s) – [...]“; die Zurückhaltung von U. Schoenborn, *Diverbium salutis. Studien zur Interdependenz von literarischer Struktur und theologischer Intention des gnostischen Dialogs, ausgeführt an der koptischen ‚Apokalypse des Petrus‘* (StUNT 19), Göttingen 1995, 150–151.158 gegenüber diesen Identifikationen des Simon Magus und des Hermas überzeugt nicht.

⁴⁴ Vgl. Iust., Apol. I 26,2–3 (Marcovich); Iren., Haer. I 23,2 (Doutreleau): „*Simon autem Samaritanus, ex quo universae haereses substiterunt* [...]“

gesprochenen Problems der Möglichkeit einer zweiten Buße sowie der – freilich nur angedeuteten – Problematik eines Strebens nach dem Martyrium, also einer Verfolgungssituation,⁴⁵ ernst, wird man als Entstehungszeit der Petrusapokalypse ein Datum in der Mitte des dritten Jahrhunderts, im weiteren Kontext der Verfolgungen der Kaiser Decius und Valerian bzw. des sogenannten Buß- und des Taufstreites anzunehmen haben. Denn all diese Punkte standen in der Mitte des dritten Jahrhunderts in der Großkirche auf der Tagesordnung.

VI. Zusammenfassung

Die hier vorgestellten drei Texte tragen nicht nur den Begriff „Apokalypse“ im Titel, sondern weisen auch alle wesentlichen Gattungselemente auf, wie sie von Collins⁴⁶ beschrieben worden sind. In allen drei Fällen wird einem menschlichen Empfänger – Paulus, Adam bzw. Seth und Petrus – durch einen himmlischen Offenbarer, der als *angelus interpretis* fungiert – der „Knabe“, die „drei Männer“ sowie der „Erlöser“ –, eine transzendente, heilsrelevante Realität offenbart, die im Fall der Apokalypse des Paulus vermittlels einer Himmelsreise und im Fall der beiden anderen Texte als Geschichtsdeutungen *ex eventu* dargeboten werden. Zurückhaltung bei der Zuweisung einzelner Nag-Hammadi-Texte zur Gattung der Apokalypsen ist nur im Falle von Noêma (NHC VI,4) geboten, eines Textes, dessen Verständnis im Ganzen nach wie vor nicht befriedigend geklärt ist.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ NHC VII,3 p. 78,31–33: „Wieder andere aber von ihnen, die das Leid (ἰκλαρ) haben, [...]“; zur Interpretation dieses Begriffs im Sinne des Martyriums vgl. Havelaar, *Apocalypse* (s. Anm. 5), 98.

⁴⁶ Vgl. Anm. 7.

⁴⁷ Vgl. H.-M. Schenke, *Das Verständnis unserer großen Kraft*, in: ders./H.-G. Bethge u. a. (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 2: NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4 (GCS.NF 12, Koptisch-Gnostische Schiften III)*, Berlin/New York 2003, 483–493.

Die Apokalypse des Adam als ein Werk am Rande der Theologie- und Literaturgeschichte des frühen Christentums¹

Jaan Lahe

Abstract

The Apocalypse of Adam is a gnostic work. One notable feature of this text is the absence of any explicit or clear borrowings from the Christian tradition, but topics occur in the Apoc. Adam, which play an important role in early Christian literature and theology (Adam's original state, fall of the man etc.) and therefore this text is part of the history of early Christian literature and theology.

I. Die einleitenden Fragen:

Bezeugung, Datierung und Struktur der Apokalypse des Adam

Die Apokalypse des Adam (ApkAd), die auf p. 64,1–85,32 im Codex V von Nag Hammadi erhalten ist und ihren Namen nach dem vorangestellten (p. 64,1) und nachgestellten Titel (p. 85,32) bekommen hat, war vor dem Textfund von Nag Hammadi inhaltlich nicht bekannt. Der Kirchenvater Epiphanius (um 315–403 n.Chr.) sagt, dass die „Gnostiker“ unter anderen auch die Apokalypsen Adams (im Plural) benutzt haben (Haer. 26.8.1), aber er sagt nichts zum Inhalt der erwähnten Schriften und deshalb ist es nicht bewiesen, dass die ApkAd schon Epiphanius bekannt war.² Auch im Kölner Mani-Codex ist von *einer* Adamsapokalypse die Rede (p. 48,16 ff.), wobei daraus auch ein Abschnitt zitiert wird.³

¹ Ich danke meinem Kollegen Dr. Uwe-Karsten Plisch, der diesen Beitrag sorgfältig korrigiert hat.

² Dies meint auch Kurt Rudolph (K. Rudolph, Gnosis und Gnostizismus. Ein Forschungsbericht, in: ThR 34/2 [1969], 161).

³ Dort erzählt man über die Erscheinung des Engels Balsamos an Adam: „[...] (vor) seinem strahlenden Antlitz, (vor dir), den ich nicht kenne.“ Darauf antwortete er ihm: „Ich bin Balsamos, der grösste Engel des Lichts. Empfange von mir und schreibe das, was ich dir offenbare, auf ganz reinen Papyrus, der unzerstörbar ist und die Würmer abstösst.“ Ausserdem sagte er ihm noch vieles andere, was er ihm in der Vision enthüllte. Denn sehr gross war der Glanz der Herrlichkeit, die ihn umgab. (Adam) schaute auch (die) Engel und die (Ober)befehlshaber

Die zitierte Stelle kommt in der ApkAd aber nicht vor und deswegen haben wir keinen Grund, diese zwei Schriften gleichzusetzen.⁴ Die anderen in demselben Codex genannten „Adam-Schriften“ (p. 50,6–7)⁵ können unterschiedliche Werke der jüdischen Adamliteratur sein.⁶ Wie viele andere Nag-Hammadi-Schriften, so ist auch der Text der ApkAd nur in einer einzigen Handschrift erhalten, die wie die gesamte sogenannte Nag-Hammadi-Bibliothek auf die erste Hälfte des 4. Jahrhunderts datiert wird.⁷

Sowohl der Entstehungsort als auch die Entstehungszeit der ApkAd bleiben unklar. Walter Beltz, der die Apokalypse in die deutsche Sprache übersetzt und erforscht hat, vermutete, dass sie anfänglich auf Aramäisch in Syrien verfasst wurde.⁸ Doch sind die Hauptargumente von Beltz, dass viele Schriften, die zur Adamliteratur gehören, in Syrien verfasst wurden und dass die eigentliche Heimat der apokryphen Adamliteratur das exilierte Judentum in Syrien war, zur Lokalisierung des Entstehungsortes der ApkAd m. E. ungenügend: hier fehlen jegliche Hinweise auf das syrische Lokalkolorit. Emmanuela Grypeou meint dagegen, dass die ApkAd in Ägypten entstanden ist – ihrer Meinung nach deuten die starke Abhängigkeit der Schrift von jüdisch-apokalyptischen Traditionen wie auch die zahlreichen synkretistischen hellenistischen Elemente auf Ägypten als möglichen Ursprungsort hin.⁹ Es gibt noch andere Hypothesen.¹⁰ Eigentlich ist nur sicher, dass die ApkAd (wie die anderen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften) irgendwo im östlichen Teil des römischen Kaiserreiches entstanden ist. Auch die Vermutung von Beltz, dass die Ursprache der ApkAd das Aramäische sein könnte,¹¹ scheint nicht überzeugend – in der ApkAd fehlen auch jegliche Spuren

(und) die grössten (Mächte) [...]“ (zitiert nach der Ausgabe: L. Koenen/C. Römer (Hg.), *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex. Abbildungen und diplomatischer Text* [PTA 35], Bonn 1985, 30–33).

⁴ Anders Birger A. Pearson (B. A. Pearson, *The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature*, in: B. Layton [Hg.], *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978. Band 2: Sethian Gnosticism* [SHR 41], Leiden 1981, 475–504, hier 495 Anm. 77).

⁵ S. Koenen/Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex* (s. Anm. 3), 50–51.

⁶ B. A. Pearson, *The Problem of „Jewish Gnostic“ Literature*, in: ders., *The Emergence of the Christian Religion. Essays on Early Christianity*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 1997, 122–146, hier 139. S. dazu II.3.

⁷ S. H.-M. Schenke, *Einführung*, in: ders./H.-G. Bethge/U. U. Kaiser (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 1* (GCS.NF 8), Berlin/New York 2001, 1–6, hier 2; H.-M. Schenke, *Art. Nag Hammadi*, TRE 23 (1994), 731–736, hier 731; G. W. MacRae, *Apocalypse of Adam. Introduction*, in: J. H. Charlesworth (Hg.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, New York/London/Toronto u. a. 1983, 707–719, hier 707.

⁸ S. W. Beltz, *Die Apokalypse des Adam* (NHC V.5). *Einleitung*, in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge/U. U. Kaiser (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 2* (GCS.NF 12), Berlin/New York 2003, 434–436, hier 434. Für Syrien als Entstehungsort plädiert auch A. J. Welburn, *From a Virgin Womb. The Apocalypse of Adam and the Virgin Birth* (Bibl.-Interpr.S 91), Leiden 2008, 42.

⁹ E. Grypeou, *Apokalypse Adams* (JSRZ.NF 1/2), Gütersloh 2015, 27.

¹⁰ S. Grypeou, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 9), 19.

¹¹ Beltz, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 8), 434.

von Aramaismen, die in einigen anderen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften, wie z. B. in der Hypostase der Archonten oder im „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ vorhanden sind.¹² In der heutigen Form ist die koptische ApkAd als Übersetzung aus dem Griechischen vorhanden und wir haben keinen Grund zu vermuten, dass die griechische Sprache nicht auch die Ursprache der Schrift war.

Auch die genaue Entstehungszeit der ApkAd bleibt unklar. George W. MacRae, der die Apokalypse ins Englische übersetzt hat¹³ und Charles W. Hedrick¹⁴ vermuteten, dass die Schrift schon im 1. Jahrhundert entstanden sein könnte. Dann wäre der Text so alt wie die überwiegende Mehrzahl der neutestamentlichen Schriften. Zu MacRaes Hauptargument, dass „the *Apocalypse of Adam* does not disclose any explicitly Christian themes“,¹⁵ werden wir unten zurückkommen,¹⁶ aber ganz unabhängig von der Richtigkeit dieses Arguments wäre die Tatsache, dass in einem antiken Text der christliche Stoff nicht vorhanden ist, kein Argument für ihre Datierung. Die ApkAd zeigt viele Berührungen zu anderen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften (sie steht dem Ägyptischen Evangelium besonders nahe) und m. E. gibt es keinen Grund zu vermuten, dass die Apokalypse des Adam älter wäre als z. B. das Ägyptische Evangelium oder das Apokryphon des Johannes. Noch weniger ist A. J. Welburns Hypothese begründet, der die ApkAd aufgrund der Gemeinsamkeiten mit der Henochliteratur ins 1. Jahrhundert v.Chr. datiert.¹⁷ Die Datierung der ApkAd könnte m. E. von der Tatsache ausgehen, dass die Apokalypse viele Berührungen zu anderen „sethianischen Schriften“ von Nag Hammadi zeigt.¹⁸ Da diese Schriften ins 2. oder 3. Jahrhundert n.Chr. datiert werden, ist m. E. am wahrscheinlichsten, dass auch die ApkAd aus derselben Zeit stammt. Wie zu frühe, so sind auch zu späte Datierungen¹⁹ nicht begründet.

ApkAd kann in mehrere Abschnitte unterteilt werden. Fast alle Forscher sind sich darin einig, dass die Apokalypse sich in zwei Hauptteile aufgliedern lässt,

¹² Das bedeutet natürlich nicht, dass die oben genannten Schriften anfänglich in der aramäischen Sprache verfasst wurden. S. zum Problem: J. Lahe, *Gnosis und Judentum. Alttestamentliche und jüdische Motive in der gnostischen Literatur und das Ursprungsproblem der Gnosis* (NHMS 75), Leiden/Boston 2012, 357–374.

¹³ S. G. W. MacRae, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (V,5). Introduction (NHL), Leiden 1984, 256.

¹⁴ C. W. Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis* (SBL.DS 46), Chico, California 1980, 21–28.

¹⁵ MacRae, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (s. Anm. 13), 256.

¹⁶ S. III.1.

¹⁷ S. Welburn, *From a Virgin Womb* (s. Anm. 8). Man muss Schenke zustimmen, wenn er sagt: „einen gnostischen Originaltext aus eindeutig vorchristlicher Zeit enthält der Nag Hammadi-Fund nicht“ (Schenke, *Nag Hammadi* [s. Anm. 7], 734).

¹⁸ S. II.5.

¹⁹ S. z. B. L. Schottroff, *Animae naturaliter salvandae. Zum Problem der himmlischen Herkunft des Gnostikers*, in: W. Eltester (Hg.), *Christentum und Gnosis* (BZNW 37), Berlin 1969, 65–97, hier 68 oder später auch MacRae, *Apocalypse of Adam. Introduction*, (s. Anm. 7), 707–708, die als eine mögliche Datierung auch mit dem 4. Jahrhundert rechnen.

die durch eine Einleitung (64,1–4) und einen Abschluss (85,19–31) eingerahmt sind.²⁰ Der erste Teil (64,4–67,14) berichtet über Adams und Evas Urzustand und über ihren Abfall. Den zweiten Teil (67,14–85,15), den Alexander Böhlig als „die eigentliche Apokalypse“ bezeichnet hat,²¹ kann man wiederum in vier oder fünf unterschiedliche thematische Unterabschnitte aufgliedern. Der erste Unterabschnitt (67,14–85,15) berichtet über die Sintflut als Gottes Angriff auf alle Menschen und die Bewahrung der Nachkommen des Seth und des Noah. Der zweite Unterabschnitt (73,25–76,7) erzählt über den zweiten Versuch Gottes, die Nachkommen des Seth zu vernichten; diesmal geschieht es durch Feuer, aber die Nachkommen des Seth werden gerettet. Der dritte Unterabschnitt (76,8–77,27) prophezeit das Kommen des Erleuchters zur Rettung der Noahsöhne. In einem Exkurs werden die vierzehn Aussagen über die Entstehung des Erleuchters beschrieben (77,27–83,4). Der letzte enthält eine Schilderung über die Buße der Völker und ein prophetisches Wort über die endgültige Rettung der Nachkommen Seths (83,4–85,18).

Rodolphe Kasser, der die französischen Übersetzung der ApkAd verfasst hat, meint, dass das in das Werk eingeschobene Stück 77,27–83,8, das die Schilderungen der 14 bzw. 13 Königreiche über die Entstehung des Erleuchters enthält, ursprünglich selbständig gewesen ist.²² Ein wenig später teilte auch G. W. MacRae die Hypothese, dass ApkAd 77,27–83,8 anfänglich ein selbständiger Hymnus war und ein Ergebnis redaktioneller Prozesse darstellt.²³ Diese Hypothese unterstützen auch Pearson²⁴ und Grypeou,²⁵ die (mit einem Hinweis auf MacRae) betont, dass der Hymnus die kohärente Erzählung unterbricht²⁶ und deswegen wahrscheinlich eine spätere Interpolation darstellt.²⁷ Die inhaltlichen Probleme des Hymnus werden wir unten²⁸ noch betrachten.

²⁰ S. z. B. A. Böhlig, Die Apokalypse Adams. Einführung, in: W. Foerster (Hg.), Die Gnosis. Band 2: Koptische und mandäische Quellen, Düsseldorf 1995, 16–19; Pearson, The Problem (s. Anm. 6), 136–137; C. Colpe, Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi IV, in: JbAC 20 (1977), 163–164; R. Kasser, Textes gnostiques. Nouvelles remarques à propos des Apocalypses Paul, Jacques et Adam, in: Muséon 78 (1965), 299–312.

²¹ Böhlig, Die Apokalypse Adams (s. Anm. 20), 18.

²² Kasser, Textes gnostiques (s. Anm. 20).

²³ G. W. MacRae, The Apocalypse of Adam. V,5:64,1–85,32, in: D. M. Parrott (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI. Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4 (NHS 11), Leiden 1979, 151–195, hier 152.

²⁴ Pearson, The Problem (s. Anm. 6), 136.

²⁵ Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 9), 13.

²⁶ Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 9), 12.

²⁷ Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 9), 13.

²⁸ S. III.1.

II. Die Apokalypse des Adam im Kontext der Religions- und Literaturgeschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit

1. *ApkAd als eine Apokalypse*

Nach Philipp Vielhauer sind die wichtigsten Kennzeichen der Apokalyptik Pseudonymität, Visionsbericht und Geschichtsüberblicke in Futur-Form.²⁹ ApkAd zeigt alle diese Kennzeichen und ist sowohl nach dem Titel als auch nach Gattung und Inhalt eine apokryphe Apokalypse. So hat auch der Kompilator des Codex V von Nag Hammadi dieses Werk verstanden – es ist kein Zufall, dass die ApkAd zusammen mit der Apokalypse des Paulus und den zwei Apokalypsen des Jakobus in denselben Codex gehört.

Wie in anderen Apokalypsen sind die Niederschreiber der Offenbarung die Frommen aus der fernen Vergangenheit; wie Moses, Henoch oder Elia taucht in der ApkAd, die den Inhalt der Schrift bildet, als Empfänger und Niederschreiber der Offenbarung Adams Sohn Seth auf. Die Offenbarung, die Adam „im 700. Jahre“³⁰ empfing und an seinen Sohn Seth weitergab, fand in einer Traumvision statt. Der letzte Teil der Apokalypse berichtet über die Zukunft in Futur-Form. In der Apokalyptik sind Engel als Vermittler der Offenbarung tätig. In der ApkAd treten als Vermittler der Offenbarung drei Männer auf, aber auch in anderen Apokalypsen erscheinen die Engel als Männer (vgl. z. B. Dan 9,21; 12,7). Dabei ist sehr wahrscheinlich, dass hier die Genesiserzählung von den drei Männern, die zu Abraham kamen (Gen 18,1), anklingt. Die bildhafte und mehrdeutige Sprache, die man im Exkurs über die Entstehung des Erleuchters benutzt (77,27–83,4), ist in der apokalyptischen Literatur kennzeichnend. Wie andere Apokalypsen, so redet auch ApkAd über eine Geschichte, die man die „Heilsgeschichte“ nennen kann. Dass die Anschauung von der Heilsgeschichte in der ApkAd eine sehr spezifische theologische Akzentuierung aufweist, hängt von der theologischen Zuordnung dieser Schrift ab, die in den nächsten Unterabschnitten noch näher behandelt wird.

2. *ApkAd als ein Werk der Testamentliteratur*

Nach der ApkAd gibt Adam die Offenbarung weiter an seinen Sohn Seth, wie er es auch im apokalyptischen Werk *Vita Adae et Evae* macht. Da dieses Ereignis

²⁹ P. Vielhauer, Die Apokalyptik. Einleitung, in: E. Hennecke/W. Schneemelcher (Hg.), Neutestamentliche Apokryphen. Band 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes, Tübingen 1964, 408–411.

³⁰ Böhlig hält das für Seths 700. Lebensjahr, 100 Jahre vor Adams Tod (Gen 5,1–5). Grypeou führt die Aufmerksamkeit darauf, dass „im siebenhundertsten Jahr“ Gen 5,4 LXX entspricht und dass die Lesart von Gen 5,4 MT abweicht, wonach Adam nach Seths Geburt noch 800 Jahre lebte (Grypeou, Apokalypse [s. Anm. 9], 39, Anm. a).

vor dem Tod des Adam stattfindet, kann man die Apokalypse des Adam als Testament des Urvaters der Menschheit verstehen. Deswegen kann man die Apokalypse des Adam in die literarische Gattung „Testamentliteratur“ eingliedern, wozu die apokryphen Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen, Testamente der drei Patriarchen, Testamente Hiobs, Moses, Salomos und Adams und die Assumptio Mosis gehören und hat mit ihnen viele Gemeinsamkeiten oder „strukturelle Analogien“. Die wichtigste darunter ist die Ansprache des sterbenden Vorfaters (hier Adam) als eine himmlische Offenbarung und der Befehl, die Offenbarung sorgfältig aufzubewahren und von Generation zu Generation weiterzugeben. Dabei verbindet die Offenbarung die Retrospektive entscheidender Momente der Schöpfungsgeschichte mit einer apokalyptischen Zukunftsprophezeiung.³¹ Das Testament dient hier als ein literarisches Mittel zum Zweck dem Inhalt des Werkes ein größeres Gewicht zu geben.

3. *ApkAd als ein Werk der Adamsliteratur*

ApkAd gehört zur Adamsliteratur, die in den unterschiedlichen Kreisen des Judentums und des frühen Christentums sehr populär war.³² Zu dieser Literatur gehören solche Werke wie z. B. die syrische Schatzhöhle, die griechisch überlieferte Apokalypse des Mose, das syrische Testament Adams, die nur lateinisch erhaltene Vita Adae et Evae, eine altslawische Fassung des Adambuches und das Testament Adams, das in der syrischen, griechischen, arabischen, äthiopischen, georgischen und armenischen Sprache erhalten ist. Die Apokalypse des Mose, die Vita Adae et Evae und die vorgenannte altslawische Fassung des Adambuches, die alle etwa Ende des 1. Jahrhunderts v./Anfang des 1. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. entstanden sind, sind eng miteinander verwandt und dürften auf eine gemeinsame Grundschrift zurückgehen.³³ G. J. Reinink hat die engen Beziehungen auch zwischen dem syrischen Testament des Adam und der ApkAd gezeigt.³⁴ Besonders viele Berührungen und sogar viele inhaltliche Gemeinsamkeiten hat die Apokalypse des Adam zur Vita Adae et Evae. Die auffälligsten seien hier genannt: sowohl nach der ApkAd als auch nach der VitAd verliert Adam durch die Austreibung aus dem Paradies seine Herrlichkeit; in beiden Werken gibt Adam die Offenbarung an seinen Sohn Seth weiter, wobei dies vor dem Tod Adams stattfindet; sowohl in der ApkAd als auch in der VitAd werden den Nachkommen Adams die Sintflut und das Feuer als Strafen prophezeit. G. W. E. Nickelsburg vermutet, dass die VitAd und die ApkAd eine gemeinsame

³¹ Grypeou, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 9), 26.

³² Zur Adamsliteratur s. M. E. Stone, A History of Adam and Eve (SBL.EJL 3), Atlanta, Georgia 1992.

³³ P. Schäfer, Art. Adam II. im Judentum, TRE 1 (1977), 424–427, hier 425.

³⁴ G. J. Reinink, Das Problem des Ursprungs des Testaments Adams, in: OCA 197 (1972), 387–399, hier 397–398.

Vorlage gehabt haben, nämlich ein hebräisches Adamstestament,³⁵ aber m. E. ist es auch möglich, dass der Autor der ApkAd die VitAd gekannt hat und als eine direkte Quelle benutzte. Man muss aber betonen, dass die ApkAd nicht nur von der jüdischen Adamstradition abhängig ist, sondern dass sie, wie auch die alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen, kritisch uminterpretiert werden.³⁶

4. ApkAd als gnostisches Werk

Die Apokalypse des Adam gehört eindeutig zur gnostischen Literatur. Der Gott (*pnoute*), der hier auch den Titel „Pantokrator“ trägt, ist nicht der einzige transzendente Gott, der gleichzeitig Schöpfer und Erlöser ist, sondern der böse Demiurg. Sein Name Saklas (p. 74,3.7), was „Dummkopf“ heißt, kommt auch in anderen gnostischen Texten, wie z. B. im Apokryphon des Johannes (NHC II,1 p. 11,17 par.; BG 2 p. 41,6f.), in der Hypostase der Archonten (NHC II,4 p. 95,7), im Ägyptischen Evangelium (NHC III,2 p. 57,16 par.; 57, 21 [26]; 58,24) und in der dreigestaltigen Protennoia (NHC XIII,1 p. 39,27), vor.³⁷

Obwohl die ApkAd viele alttestamentliche Motive benutzt, sind hier diese Motive (wie in der Gnosis häufig) gründlich uminterpretiert. Die Sintflutgeschichte der Apokalypse des Adam ist m. E. ein Musterbeispiel für die „Protestexegese“, die nur innerhalb der Gnosis vorkommt.³⁸ Die Erzählungen und Berichte über die Sintflut in der gnostischen Literatur stellen verschiedene Interpretationen der biblischen Erzählung über die Sintflut (Gen 6–8) dar. Sie haben viele Unterschiede, aber auch Gemeinsamkeiten, von denen hier die wichtigsten genannt seien. Der Verursacher der Sintflut ist meistens der Demiurg, der verschiedene Namen trägt oder der Demiurg arbeitet gemeinsam mit seinen Archonten. Auch die Begründung für die Sintflut ist ziemlich gleichlautend. Zumeist werden Demiurg und Archonten von niedrigen Motiven wie Zorn oder Neid (besonders gegenüber den Nachkommen Seths) angetrieben.³⁹ Damit wird die biblische Geschichte von der Sintflut von den Gnostikern uminterpretiert, und so geschieht es auch in der Apokalypse des Adam. In der Bibel ist die Ursache für die Sintflut

³⁵ G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Some Related Traditions in the Apocalypse of Adam, the Books of Adam and Eve, and 1 Enoch*, in: B. Layton (Hg.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978. Band 2: Sethian Gnosticism (SHR 41)*, Leiden 1981, 515–539, hier 525. S. zum Text (Übersetzung): S. E. Robinson, *Testament of Adam*, in: J. H. Charlesworth (Hg.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Band 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, New York/London/Toronto u. a. 1983, 989–995.

³⁶ Pearson, *The Problem* (s. Anm. 6), 139. S. dazu: II.5.

³⁷ S. Lahe, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 12), 360–361.

³⁸ S. dazu: Lahe, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 12), 194–195.

³⁹ S. dazu: G. P. Luttikhuisen, *Biblical Narrative in Gnostic Revision: the Story of Noah and the Flood in Classic Gnostic Mythology*, in: F. G. Martinez/G. P. Luttikhuisen (Hg.), *Interpretations of the Flood*, Leiden 1998, 108–120; Lahe, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 12), 297–308.

die Bosheit der Menschen und die Reue Gottes über seine Schöpfung (vgl. Gen 6,5 f.). Dort ist die Sintflut Gottes gerechte Strafe für die Sünde der Menschen. In der Apokalypse des Adam ist sie aber ein Versuch des bösen Demiurgen, die Nachkommen Seths als die Träger der Gnosis zu vernichten, allerdings ein gescheiterter Versuch, der gut die Schwäche und die Ungeschicktheit des Demiurgen demonstriert.⁴⁰ Ein zentrales Thema der ApkAd ist der Antagonismus zwischen dem bösen Demiurg und den Menschen, die Gnosis haben. Als die Träger der Gnosis treten in der ApkAd die Nachkommen Seths auf, die wahrscheinlich mit der „königlosen Generation“ in 82,7 ff. gleichgesetzt werden.⁴¹

5. *ApkAd als sethianisches Werk*

Die „Apokalypse des Adam“ ist repräsentativ für die gnostische Literatur, die man als „sethianisch“ bezeichnet.⁴² Hier kommen viele der Merkmale vor, die nach Hans-Martin Schenke für die sethianische Gnosis kennzeichnend sind.⁴³ Als solche seien hier die folgenden genannt: Die Vorstellung, dass die Gnostiker die Nachkommen Seths seien;⁴⁴ die Figur des bösen Demiurgen, der die Nachkommen Seths zu vernichten versucht; die Dreiteilung der Geschichte, wobei in jedem Zeitalter der Erlöser erscheinen wird; das Vorkommen der göttlichen Wesen Abrasax, Sablo und Gamaliel. Als ein sethianisches Werk hat die ApkAd viele Gemeinsamkeiten mit anderen sethianischen Schriften von Nag Hammadi. Hier ist besonders das Ägyptische Evangelium zu erwähnen, wo auch über die Katastrophen berichtet wird, in denen der Demiurg, der auch im Ägyptischen

⁴⁰ Lahe, Gnosis (s. Anm. 12), 298–299. Vgl. auch A. F. J. Klijn, An Analysis of the Use of the Story of the Flood in the Apocalypse of Adam, in: R. van den Broek/M. J. Vermaseren (Hg.), Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday, Leiden 1981, 218–226.

⁴¹ Zum Begriff s. R. Bergmeier, Königlosigkeit als nachvalentinianisches Heilsprädikat, in: NT 24/4 (1982), 316–339. S. dazu auch: K. Rudolph, Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion, Göttingen 2005, 286–287.

⁴² Zur sethianischen Gnosis als einer Hauptrichtung der gnostischen Bewegung und zu ihrer Literatur s. K.-W. Tröger, Die Gnosis. Heilslehre und Ketzerglaube (Herder spektrum 4953), Freiburg/Basel/Wien 2001, 49–51; J. D. Turner, Sethian Gnosticism. A Literary History, in: C. W. Hedrick/R. Hodgson (Hg.), Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity, Peabody 1986, 55–86; J. D. Turner, Typologies of the Sethian Gnostic Treatises from Nag Hammadi, in: L. Painchaud/A. Pasquier (Hg.), Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification (BCNH.E 3), Québec 1995, 169–217; H.-M. Schenke, The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism, in: B. Layton (Hg.), The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978. Band 2: Sethian Gnosticism (SHR XLI), Leiden 1981, 588–616; H.-M. Schenke, Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften, in: P. Nagel (Hg.), Studia Coptica (Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten 45), Berlin 1974, 165–173.

⁴³ S. Schenke, Das sethianische System (s. Anm. 42); Schenke, The Phenomenon (s. Anm. 42), 588–616. S. auch: Turner, Typologies (s. Anm. 42), 170–171.

⁴⁴ Zu dieser Vorstellung und zur sethianischen Heilsgeschichte s. G. A. G. Stroumsa, Another Seed. Studies in Gnostic Mythology (NHS 24), Leiden 1984.

Evangelium Sakla heißt, den Stamm der Gnostiker auszurotten versucht. Die sethianischen Gnostiker haben sich als eine Art „Urgeschlecht“ verstanden, das seit Entstehung der irdisch-materiellen Welt die Kerntruppe der Menschheit darstellt. Dementsprechend sahen sie in Adam und Eva ihre ersten Vertreter⁴⁵ und deswegen spielen die Urgeschichten der Genesis in der sethianischen Literatur eine hervorragende Rolle.

6. *ApkAd und die alttestamentlichen und jüdischen Motive*

Wie es für die sethianische Literatur kennzeichnend ist, haben die alttestamentlichen Personen und Ereignisse auch in der ApkAd eine wichtige Stelle. Es ist merkwürdig, dass fast alle diese Personen (wie Adam, Eva, Seth, Noah und seine Söhne Ham, Japhet und Sem) und Ereignisse (die Schöpfung des Menschen, Sündenfall, Sintflut) in der Apokalypse des Adam aus dem Buch Genesis stammen. Nur der König Salomo, über den in 78,27–79,18 berichtet wird, ist hier eine Ausnahme.

Die Reihenfolge der Ereignisse, über die in der ApkAd berichtet wird, folgt dem Erzählfaden des Buches Genesis, wobei die Anspielungen auf das Alte Testament in der Apokalypse auf dem Text der LXX beruhen:⁴⁶ die Schöpfung des Menschen (64,8 = Gen 2,7) und sein Urzustand (64,9 ff. = Gen 2,8 ff.); Sündenfall und Vertreibung aus dem Paradies (64,20 ff. = Gen 3,1 ff.); die Sintflut (69,2 ff. = Gen 6,5 ff.); die Nachkommen Noahs (72,15 ff. = Gen 10) und (vielleicht) auch die Zerstörung von Sodom und Gomorra (75,9 ff. = Gen 19).

Viele Motive, die in der ApkAd vorhanden sind, kommen auch in anderen alttestamentlichen Büchern oder in Pseudepigraphen vor. So spielt z. B. die Vorstellung von der Herrlichkeit Adams, die am Anfang der Apokalypse genannt wird (64,9 ff.), eine wichtige Rolle auch in den jüngeren Schriften des Alten Testaments. Der Glanz Adams wird in der jüdischen Tradition als Abglanz der göttlichen Herrlichkeit angesehen.⁴⁷ Für Jesus Sirach war die Herrlichkeit Adams unübertroffen. Er sagt: „Auch Schem und Scheth und Enosch wurden geehrt, doch über allem Lebendigen (steht) die Herrlichkeit Adams“ (Sir 49,16). Die Hinweise auf die außergewöhnliche Herrlichkeit Adams sind auch in den jüdischen Pseudepigraphen zahlreich. Nach dem Noahbuch des äthiopischen 1Hen war Adam ursprünglich „nicht anders als die Engel geschaffen worden“ (69,11). Nach dem slavischen 2Hen setzte Gott ihn als „zweiten Engel, ehrenvoll und groß und herrlich“ auf die Erde und machte ihn „zum König der Erde“

⁴⁵ Rudolph, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 41), 223.

⁴⁶ Ein gutes Beispiel dazu ist die in Anm. 30 genannte Tatsache (s. dort).

⁴⁷ A. Böhlig, *Der jüdische und judenchristliche Hintergrund in gnostischen Texten von Nag Hammadi*, in: U. Bianchi (Hg.), *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina 13–18 Aprile 1966. Testi e Discussioni*, Leiden 1967, 109–140, hier 124.

(30,11). In der Apokalypse des Mose beklagt Adam seine (nach der Sünde) verlorene Herrlichkeit (ApkMos 21,6).

Wenn Adam in der Apokalypse des Adam sagt: „Da trennte uns (d. h. Adam und Eva) der Gott, der Archon der Äonen und der Kräfte, im Zorn. Da wurden wir zu zwei Äonen“⁴⁸ (64, 20 f.), steht hinter seinen Worten die Vorstellung von der Erschaffung des Adam als androgyn. Diese Vorstellung ist sicherlich unter dem Einfluss Platons entstanden, der im Symposium erzählt, wie die Götter einen androgynen Menschen in einen Mann und eine Frau teilten. Gleichzeitig ist das aber eine Interpretation von Gen 5,2, wo man über die Erschaffung des Menschen sagt: „Männlich und weiblich erschuf er sie“. Gottes schöpferischer Akt wird hier zum Angriff des Demiurgen gegen den ersten Menschen aus niederen Motiven uminterpretiert. Der Demiurg war neidisch auf die Menschen, da sie höher als der Gott, der sie geschaffen hatte und die Kräfte, die mit ihm waren, standen und in seinem Zorn trennte er sie. Der Neid ist in der Gnosis immer ein dem Demiurgen sehr charakteristischer Wesenszug und das Hauptmotiv seines Handelns.⁴⁹

Eine besondere Rolle kommt in den gnostischen, besonders in den sethianischen Überlieferungen Adams Sohn Seth zu, der im Alten Testament freilich nur kurz genannt wird (vgl. Gen 4,25 f.; 5,3 f. 6–8; 1 Chron 1,1; Sir 49,16). Er findet sich im AJ, im EvÄg, in der ApkAd, in der HA, in StelSeth und im Ginza und wird auch im EvJud genannt. Auch die Kirchenväter Irenaeus, Hippolytus und Epiphanius berichten von Gnostikern, für die Seth eine zentrale Person darstellte. In den Überlieferungen kommt Seth als geistiges und irdisches Wesen vor. In den Texten von Nag Hammadi und bei den Kirchenvätern fungiert er vorwiegend als Erlöser bzw. Erlösungsmittler, also als überirdisches Wesen. Zugleich ist er der Stammvater jener Gnostiker, die sich selbst als „das lebendige und unerschütterliche Geschlecht des Seth“ (StelSeth NHC VII,5 p. 118,12 f.) oder als „lebendigen und heiligen Samen des Seth“ (Zostr NHC VIII,1 p. 136,16 f.) bezeichnen. In der ApkAd ist Seth der bevorzugte Empfänger von Offenbarungen, die ihm von Adam übermittelt werden.

Die Figur Seths in der gnostischen Literatur hat einen jüdischen Hintergrund. Obwohl Seth im Alten Testament nur kurz genannt wird, spielt er im antiken Judentum eine wichtige Rolle.⁵⁰ So berichtet das Werk *Vita Adae et Evae*, dass Seth an des erschlagenen Abels statt gezeugt wurde (VitAd Par. 4). Von Adams

⁴⁸ Zitiert nach der Übersetzung von Walter Beltz.

⁴⁹ S. dazu: W. C. van Unnik, *Der Neid in der Paradiesgeschichte nach einigen gnostischen Texten*, in: M. Krause (Hg.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, Leiden 1972, 120–132.

⁵⁰ S. dazu: B. A. Pearson, *The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature*, in: B. Layton (Hg.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978. Band 2: Sethian Gnosticism (SHR 41)*, Leiden 1981, 472–504; A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature (NT.S 46)*, Leiden 1977.

Offenbarung an Seth wird berichtet (VitAd Par. 25–29), dass Adam nach der Vertreibung aus dem Paradies des Demiurgen in das „Paradies der Gerechtigkeit“ entrückt wurde und dort den Herrn und die Engel sah. Er erzählte seinem Sohn von den „zukünftigen Geheimnissen“, die ihm hier offenbart wurden. Ihr genauer Inhalt ist nicht bekannt, da der Text nur lückenhaft erhalten ist, doch betreffen sie die Ereignisse, die „in diesem Zeitalter geschehen werden“. Danach wird von Seths Reise ins Paradies des Demiurgen berichtet, die er unternimmt, um Öl vom Baum der Barmherzigkeit zu holen, und von seiner Rückkehr von dort (VitAd Par. 30–44). Zuletzt wird berichtet, dass Eva sechs Tage nach Adams Tod alle ihre Kinder, darunter auch Seth, versammelte und ihnen mitteilte, was der Erzengel Michael ihr nach dem Sündenfall kundgetan hatte: Der Herr werde aufgrund ihrer Übertretung ihre Nachkommen mit einem Zorngericht strafen, erst mit Wasser, dann mit Feuer. Eva verfügte, dass ihre Kinder je zwei Tafeln aus Stein und aus Lehm anfertigten, auf denen ihre Lebensgeschichte niedergeschrieben werden sollte. Würde Gott die Welt mit Wasser richten, würden nur die irdenen Tafeln vergehen, die steinernen aber erhalten bleiben; wenn er sie aber mit Feuer richtete, würden lediglich die steinernen Tafeln vergehen, die irdenen aber zu Ziegeln gebrannt werden. Die Erzählung endet damit, dass Seth die Tafeln anfertigt (VitAd Par. 49–51).⁵¹

Eine wichtige Rolle spielt in der ApkAd die Sintflutgeschichte. Obwohl Noah in der Apokalypse des Adam mit dem griechischen Sintfluthelden Deukalion gleichgesetzt wird, ist die Sintflutgeschichte, die hier eine wichtige Rolle spielt, nicht die Interpretation der Sintflutsage der Griechen, sondern die Sintflutgeschichte der Genesis.⁵² Obgleich Sodom und Gomorra nicht namentlich genannt werden, ist der Versuch Gottes, den Samen Hams und Japhets mit Hilfe von Feuer zu vernichten, eine mögliche Anspielung auf die Vernichtung Sodoms und Gomorras (Gen 19). Die vorgenannten Motive waren im antiken Judentum weithin bekannt. Auch Flavius Josephus erzählt, dass Adam seinen Nachkommen den Untergang aller Dinge durch Feuer und Überschwemmungen vorhergesagt hatte, dass von den Nachkommen Seths zwei Säulen errichtet wurden und sie die Sternkunde erfanden. In Ant. 1, 69–71 wurden die Säulen, eine aus Ziegeln, die andere aus Stein, errichtet, damit die astronomischen Kenntnisse der Seth-Nachkommen nicht verloren gingen. Diese Überlieferung findet sich auch in der sethianischen Nag-Hammadi-Schrift Die drei Stelen des Seth (NHC VII,5), wobei lediglich die Zahl der Stelen von zwei auf drei erhöht wurde.⁵³ Carsten Colpe vermutet hinter dieser Vergrößerung der Anzahl inhaltliche Gründe, wobei wohl die lockere Assoziierbarkeit mit Einheit, Zweiheit und Dreiheit im himmlischen Pleroma ausschlaggebend war.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Pearson, Figure (s. Anm. 50), 288.

⁵² S. dazu: Pearson, Figure (s. Anm. 50), 299.

⁵³ Pearson, Figure (s. Anm. 50), 289.

⁵⁴ C. Colpe, Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag

Die Tatsache, dass Gott die Menschheit sowohl mit Wasser als auch mit Feuer bestraft hat, kommt sowohl im Werk *Vita Adae et Evae* als auch im Werk *Antiquitates Judaicae* von Flavius Josephus vor. In beiden Texten erzählt man, dass Adam diese Ereignisse seinen Nachkommen vorhergesagt hatte. Aber der Sinn dieser Ereignisse wird in der *ApkAd* gründlich uminterpretiert. So etwa kam es zur Sintflut nicht etwa deshalb, weil die Welt verdorben gewesen wäre, sondern weil gute Seth-Menschen in ihr lebten (69,11 ff.). Diese wollte der Schöpfergott durch Feuer, Schwefel und Asphalt vernichten, was ihm aber nicht gelang (NHC V,5 p. 75,5 ff.). Im *EvÄg* findet sich dieselbe Erzählung (vgl. NHC III,2 p. 61,22 ff. par.). Auch hier sind (Welten-)Brand und Sintflut vergebliche Versuche des Demiurgen Sakla, die Seth-Menschen zu vernichten.⁵⁵ Das ist ein gutes Beispiel für die gnostische „Protestexegese“.⁵⁶ Die *Apokalypse* des Adam kann man als einen „Midrasch“ zum Buch Genesis betrachten, die gleichzeitig auch viele Motive aus der außerbiblischen jüdischen apokryphen und pseudepigraphischen Literatur herangezogen hat.

7. *ApkAd* als eine gnostische *Apokalypse*

Emmanouela Grypeou fragt in ihrem Kommentar zur *ApkAd*, ob die *ApkAd* eine Schrift der jüdischen Apokalyptik oder der jüdischen Gnosis ist und nennt die unterschiedlichen Ansichten: C. W. Hedrick und andere Forscher vermuten, dass der Text möglicherweise an der Grenze zwischen Apokalyptik und Gnosis steht; ähnlich F. Morard, die den Text für eine gnostische Überarbeitung einer Legende hält, die aus dem apokalyptischen Judentum stammt; A. J. Welburn behauptet sogar, es handle sich bei der *ApkAd* um einen rein jüdischen Text, in dem alle Charakteristika jüdischer Apokalyptik enthalten und bedeutend seien, und der keine typisch gnostische Erwartung zum Ausdruck bringe.⁵⁷ Meiner Meinung nach ist bei der *ApkAd* eine „entweder... oder“-Frage nicht zutreffend – die Schrift zeigt sowohl apokalyptische als auch gnostische Züge, wobei die Beziehungen der *ApkAd* zum Judentum ebenso außer Zweifel stehen. Deswegen kann man sagen, dass die *ApkAd* gleichzeitig sowohl eine Schrift der jüdischen Apokalyptik als auch der jüdischen Gnosis ist, oder genauer gesagt: sie ist eine gnostische *Apokalypse* mit starkem jüdischen Hintergrund.⁵⁸

Hammadi II, in: JAC 16 (1973), 106–126, hier 124. Die Dreiheit Vater-Mutter-Sohn ist ein charakteristisches Merkmal für die sethianische Gnosis (s. Schenke, *Das sethianische System* [s. Anm. 42], 166; Turner, *Typologies* [s. Anm. 42], 171; Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism* [s. Anm. 42], 61 ff.). Vgl. das mit der Dreiprinzipienlehre bei Hippolytus, *Haer. V* 8,1. S. auch Rudolph, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 41), 94–95.

⁵⁵ Lahe, *Gnosis* (s. Anm. 12), 284–285.

⁵⁶ S. II.4.

⁵⁷ Grypeou, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 9), 24–25.

⁵⁸ Ich stimme also zu, wenn PHEME PERKINS *ApkAd* als „a gnostic Apocalypse“ charakterisiert (P. Perkins, *Apocalypse of Adam: The Genre and Function of a Gnostic Apocalypse*,

III. Die Apokalypse des Adam im Kontext der frühchristlichen Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte

1. Ist die ApkAd eine christliche Schrift?

Eine viel diskutierte Frage ist das Verhältnis der Adamsapokalypse zum Christentum. Martin Krause und Hans-Martin Schenke haben die Nag-Hammadi-Texte nach ihrer Beziehung zur Gnosis und zum Christentum in drei Gruppen geteilt: 1) Texte, die wesentlich christlich-gnostisch sind (wie z. B. „Epistula Jacobi apocrypha“, „Evangelium Veritatis“, „Der Brief an Rheginus“, das Evangelium nach Philippus, Die Apokalypse des Paulus und die erste und zweite Apokalypse des Jakobus); 2) Texte, die sowohl gnostisch als auch christlich sind, aber in denen die spezifisch christlichen Elemente nur eine geringe Rolle spielen (wie z. B. Die Hypostase der Archonten, „Vom Ursprung der Welt“, Der Brief des Eugnostos, Das Apokryphon des Johannes, Das Ägypter-Evangelium und Die dreigestaltige Protennoia); 3) Eindeutig nichtchristliche, aber gnostische Texte (wie z. B. Die Brontê – Vollkommener Verstand, Die drei Stelen des Seth, die „Ode über Norea“, Zostrianus, Marsanes und Allogenes).⁵⁹

Der letzten Gruppe haben Krause und Schenke auch Die Apokalypse des Adam zugeordnet. Auch viele andere Forscher (Alexander Böhlig,⁶⁰ George W. MacRae,⁶¹ Helmut Köster,⁶² Walter Beltz,⁶³ Pheme Perkins,⁶⁴ Gerd Lüdemann,⁶⁵ Birger A. Pearson⁶⁶) meinen, dass in der ApkAd christliches Gedankengut nicht vorhanden ist, doch aber jüdisches. Tuomas Rasimus dagegen rechnet mit einigen „christlichen Einflüssen“, aber er meint, dass sie spätere Interpolationen sein können.⁶⁷ So weist er auf ApkAd 77 hin, wo es heißt: „Dann werden sie

in: CBQ 39 [1977], 382–395) und wenn Birger Pearson die Schrift als „an example of ‚Jewish Gnostic‘ literature“ (Pearson, *The Problem* [s. Anm. 6], 26 ff.) kennzeichnet.

⁵⁹ M. Krause, *Die Texte von Nag Hammadi*, in: B. Aland (Hg.), *Gnosis. FS Hans Jonas*, Göttingen 1978, 238–241; H.-M. Schenke, *Einleitung*, in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge/U. U. Kaiser (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Band 1 (GCS.NF 8)*, Berlin/New York 2001, 3–4; vgl. auch Schenke, *Nag Hammadi* (s. Anm. 7), 733–734.

⁶⁰ Böhlig, *Die Apokalypse Adams* (s. Anm. 20), 20.

⁶¹ MacRae, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (s. Anm. 13), 256; G. W. MacRae, *The Apocalypse of Adam. V,5: 64,1–85,32*, in: D. M. Parrott (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI. Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4 (NHS 11)*, Leiden 1979, 152; G. W. MacRae, *The Coptic Gnostic Apocalypse of Adam*, in: *The Haitrop Journal* 6 (1965), 27–35.

⁶² H. Köster, *Einführung in das Neue Testament im Rahmen der Religionsgeschichte und Kulturgeschichte der hellenistischen und römischen Zeit*, Berlin/New York 1980, 651.

⁶³ Beltz, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 8), 434–435.

⁶⁴ Perkins, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 58).

⁶⁵ G. Lüdemann, *Die Apokalypse des Adam (Einleitung)*, in: G. Lüdemann/M. Janßen, *Bibel der Häretiker. Die gnostischen Schriften aus Nag Hammadi*, Stuttgart 1997, 306–307, hier 307.

⁶⁶ Pearson, *The Problem* (s. Anm. 6), 135–146.

⁶⁷ Rasimus vermerkt dazu: „Kristillistä vaikutusta Aadamin ilmestyksessä on melko vä-

(d. h. die Kräfte) das Fleisch des Menschen bestrafen, auf den der heilige Geist gekommen ist⁶⁸ und sagt, dass es eine Anspielung auf die Taufe Jesu sein kann (vgl. Mt 3,16 und par.).⁶⁹ Nach Robert McLachlan Wilson zeigt die ApkAd „höchstens leichte Spuren christlichen Einflusses.“⁷⁰ Die anderen Forscher rechnen aber mit einer größeren Anzahl an christlichen Motiven in der ApkAd. So meint Robert Haardt, dass die christlichen Reminiszenzen in zwei Motiven der Erlöserdarstellung der ApkAd stecken: ApkAd 77,6 ff. Kreuzigung durch die Archonten und 77,14 f. 20 ff. Unerkennbarkeit des Erlösers.⁷¹ Alexander Böhlig, der sonst meint, dass in der ApkAd christliches Gedankengut nicht vorhanden ist oder zumindest nicht unverhüllt genannt wird,⁷² hält es für möglich, dass der Name Jesseus Mazareus Jessedekeus am Ende der Schrift (85,31) aus Jesus Nazareus korrumpiert sein könnte. ApkAd 78,18 ff., wo von einer jungfräulichen Mutter gesprochen wird, ist nach Böhlig eine Parallele zu Apk 12,5. Auch Christoph Marksches sieht in der ApkAd deutliche Anspielungen auf das Lebensschicksal Jesu: der Erleuchter wohnt in einem Menschen, dessen „Fleisch gestraft wird“ (77,15 f.) und stammt „aus einem jungfräulichen Mutterschoß“ (78,20 f.). Obwohl Walter Beltz die ApkAd als eine nichtchristliche Schrift betrachtet, setzt er doch voraus, dass der Autor der Apokalypse vom Christentum wusste, weil Beltz in der ApkAd Polemik gegen das Christentum (und das Judentum) sieht: in den 13 Königreichssprüchen werden Lehrsysteme vorgestellt, die eine falsche Soteriologie vertreten. Erst die „königlose Generation“ (82,19 f.) erfährt die Wahrheit, die rettende Gnosis.⁷³ Im folgenden werden die vorgenannten Stellen der ApkAd näher betrachtet.

Der *phoster*, der hier *piphoster nte gnosis* („Der Erleuchter der Gnosis“) genannt wird, taucht in der ApkAd erstmalig in 76,8–9 auf, wobei man ihm berichtet, dass er „wiederum – zum dritten Male – in großer Herrlichkeit vorübergehen wird.“ Weiter sagt man, dass der *phoster* „von dem Samen des Noah und den Söhnen Hams und Japhets einen Rest erhalte und sich fruchtbringende Bäume übrig lasse. Er wird ihre Seelen am Tage ihres Todes retten“ (76,15–17). Danach wird über einen Menschen berichtet, der Zeichen und Wunder tun wird, damit er die Kräfte und ihre Archonten beschämt (77,1–3). Am Ende des Abschnitts stehen zwei Aussagen: 1) Die Kräfte werden den Erleucher nicht sehen, 2) Dann

hän, ja kristilliset vaikutteet voivat olla myöhempää lisäystä“ (T. Rasimus, Aadaminn ilmestys [NHK V.5]. Johdanto, in: I. Dunderberg/A. Marjanen [Hg.], Nag Hammadin kätkeyty viisautta. Gnostilaisia ja muita varhaiskristillisiä tekstejä, Helsinki 2005, 91–93, hier 92).

⁶⁸ Zitiert nach der Übersetzung von Walter Beltz.

⁶⁹ Rasimus, Aadaminn ilmestys (s. Anm. 67), 92, Anm. 1.

⁷⁰ R. McLachlan Wilson, Gnosis und Neues Testament, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln u. a. 1971, 127.

⁷¹ R. Haardt, Rezension zu Böhlig/Labib, Koptisch-Gnostische Apokalypsen, in: WZKM 61 (1961), 153–159.

⁷² Böhlig, Die Apokalypse Adams (s. Anm. 20), 20.

⁷³ Beltz, Apokalypse (s. Anm. 8), 435.

werden die Kräfte des Fleisches des Menschen bestrafen, „auf den der heilige Geist gekommen ist.“

Der Titel des *phoster*, der anfänglich aus dem astronomischen Bereich stammt,⁷⁴ kommt in vielen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften vor.⁷⁵ Im AJ (NHC III,1; II,1; IV,1 und BG 2) berichtet man über vier Erleuchter, die die Namen Armozel, Oriael, Daveithai und Eleleth tragen – über vier geistige Wesen, „die dem göttlichen Selbsterzeuger (Autogenes), dem Christus zu Diensten stehen.“ Dieselben vier Wesen werden auch in EvÄg (NHC III,2; NHC IV,2) und in Zostrianus (NHC VIII,1) genannt. In EvPhil redet man über den Erleuchter im Singular und dort (26b, NHC II,3 p. 58,10–14) kommt auch eine Verbindung zwischen dem Erleuchter und dem Heiligen Geist vor. Hier sagt Jesus in einer Danksagung an Gott: „[...] du den vollkommenen Erleuchter mit dem Heiligen Geist vereinigt hast [...]“, wobei er wahrscheinlich unter dem Erleuchter sich selbst versteht. Aber der Titel ist auch außerhalb der Nag-Hammadi-Literatur bezeugt: in Hippolytus, Haer. V,8,40 („Exegese der Naasseener“) ist *phoster* der Erlöser und in ActPhil 21 Jesus. In der ApkAd wird der Erleuchter nicht dem Namen nach genannt, aber viele Forscher vermuten, dass man ihn mit dem himmlischen Seth gleichsetzen kann.⁷⁶ Die Aussage, dass er „wiederum – zum dritten Male – in großer Herrlichkeit vorübergehen wird“ scheint auf seine früheren Ankünfte hinzuweisen, worüber aber in der ApkAd nicht berichtet wird. Die Idee von einer wiederholten Offenbarung spielt aber in der Gnosis eine hervorragende Rolle.⁷⁷

Obwohl alle vorgenannten Wendungen christliche Parallelen haben (der Erleuchter wird die Seelen seiner Auserwählten am Tage ihres Todes retten, s. Jesus als Erlöser; die Archonten werden den Erlöser nicht sehen, s. IgnEph XIX,1, AscJes 9,14 f.; er vollbringt Wunder, s. die Wundertätigkeit Jesu; die Archonten werden das Fleisch des Erleuchters bestrafen, s. Leidensgeschichte Jesu; auf ihn ist der heilige Geist gekommen, s. Taufe Jesu in Mt 3,16 par.), sind diese Hinweise zu unpräzise, um sie als Anspielungen auf das Leben Jesu zu interpretieren – die Wunder des Erleuchters werden nicht beschrieben; das Motiv, dass der Erlöser für die Archonten unsichtbar bleibt, kommt in der Gnosis auch unabhängig von der Gestalt Jesu vor; die Wendung „der Geist kam auf ihn“ ist auch aus der alttestamentlichen Prophetie gut erklärbar, aber das größte Problem ist die ungenaue Beziehung zwischen dem „Mensch“, dessen Fleisch bestraft wird und

⁷⁴ S. *phoster* in: H. G. Liddell/R. A. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford 1968.

⁷⁵ Es wird auch einmal (82,6) in der ApkAd, wie in Gen 1,15 LXX im Plural (*phosteres*) und in der astronomischen Bedeutung (d. h. als Sonne und Mond) benutzt. Dass die ApkAd sich hier planetarischer Vorstellungen bedient, die Sonne und Mond als personifizierte Einheiten bzw. Gottheiten verstehen, wie E. Grypeou meint (Grypeou, Apokalypse [s. Anm. 9], 62, Anm. a), verändert nicht die Sache.

⁷⁶ S. Pearson, The Problem (s. Anm. 6), 31.

⁷⁷ S. dazu: H.-M. Schenke, Die neutestamentliche Christologie und der gnostische Erlöser, in: K.-W. Tröger (Hg.), Gnosis und Neues Testament. Studien aus Religionswissenschaft und Theologie, Berlin 1973, 212–213; Rudolph, Gnosis (s. Anm. 41), 147–148.

dem Erleuchter. 76,8–28 wird über den Erleuchter erzählt. Die letzten Zeilen der Seite 76 sind zerstört, ebenso der Anfang der Seite 77. Am Anfang der Seite 77 wird über „den Menschen“ erzählt, dann wieder über den Erleuchter, der für die Archonten unsichtbar wird. Es bleibt m. E. unsicher, ob man den hier genannten Menschen mit dem Erleuchter gleichsetzen kann.⁷⁸ Wegen dieser Disharmonie meint Tuomas Rasimus, dass die Aussage „Dann werden sie das Fleisch des Menschen bestrafen, auf den der heilige Geist gekommen ist“ eine spätere Interpolation sei.⁷⁹ Auch m. E. ist es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass der Erleuchter und der Mensch, auf dem der heilige Geist war, zwei unterschiedliche Personen sind.

Anschließend folgt der Exkurs, in dem die vierzehn Aussagen über die Entstehung des Erleuchters beschrieben werden (77,27–83,4). Hier gibt es viele Aussagen, die christliche Parallelen haben:

1) „Das erste Königreich nun (sagt über ihn:) ‚[...] Man ernährte ihn in den Himmeln. [...] Er kam an die Brust seiner Mutter, und so kam er auf das Wasser‘“ (78,2–5).⁸⁰ In 2LogSeth (NHC VII,2, 50,16–18) wird Wasser mit der unteren Welt identifiziert. Nach Irenaeus (Haer. 1,15,3) verwendete der Gnostiker Markos (Marcus) den Ausdruck „er kam an das Wasser“ (*cum autem venisset ad aquam*) in Verbindung mit der Taufe Jesu;⁸¹

2) „Das dritte Königreich sagt über ihn: ‚Er entstammt einem jungfräulichen Leib. Man vertrieb ihn und seine Mutter aus seiner Stadt und brachte ihn an einen einsamen Ort und er ernährte sich dort‘“ (78,18–23). Zur Vertreibung des Kindes und seiner Mutter aus einer Stadt vgl. auch Protev. 153, Apk 12,5 f. und 12,13 f., wo ebenfalls eine Verfolgung der Mutter und die Wüste als Zufluchtsort genannt werden;⁸²

3) „Das vierte Reich sagt über ihn: ‚Er stammt von einer Jung(frau), [...] Die Jungfrau wurde schwanger. Sie gebar den Knaben an jenem Ort. Sie ernährte ihn in einer Schlucht der Wüste‘“ (78,27–79,14); auch im Evangelium des Pseudo-Matthäus (13,[2]) fordert ein Engel Josef auf, Maria und das Kind nach Ägypten, in die Wüste, in Sicherheit zu bringen.⁸³

Ohne diese Parallele zu verneinen, sei hier aber die Aufmerksamkeit darauf geführt, dass alle diese Ausdrücke in einem mythischen Kontext vorkommen. In dem Abschnitt 77,27–83,4 können wir die mythischen Motive sehen, wie die Felsgeburt, die Geburt aus der Blutschande usw., die äußerst heterogene Hintergründe haben (der Mithraismus oder der Attis-Kult; die griechische Mythologie usw.). Ebenso ist der Kontext dieser Ausdrücke, wie oben gesagt, polemisch und

⁷⁸ Dies vermutet auch M. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, Edinburgh 1996, XVI.

⁷⁹ Rasimus, *Aadamin ilmestys* (s. Anm. 67), 92, Anm. 1.

⁸⁰ Hier und im Folgenden zitiert nach der Übersetzung von Walter Beltz.

⁸¹ Grypeou, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 9), 57, Anm. a.

⁸² Grypeou, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 9), 57, Anm. c.

⁸³ Grypeou, *Apokalypse* (s. Anm. 9), 58, Anm. e.

der ganze Abschnitt war wahrscheinlich anfänglich ein selbständiger Hymnus, der erst später in die ApkAd eingefügt wurde.⁸⁴ Man kann nicht beweisen, dass hier über den Menschen berichtet wird, „dessen Leib bestraft wird“. Deswegen ist der Abschnitt 77,27–83,4 trotz der möglichen christlichen Parallelen kein Beweis dafür, dass die ApkAd eine christliche Schrift ist.

Zuletzt sei hier noch der Name Jesseus Mazareus Jessedekeus am Ende der Schrift (85,31) genannt. In Zostrianus (NCH VIII,1, 47,5 f.; 57,5) werden drei unsterbliche Geister genannt, deren Namen Jesseus, Mazereus und Jessedekeus sind. Im EvÄg (NHC III,2, 64,10 f.; 66,10) ist Jesseus Mazareus Jessedekeus ein Wesen mit den drei Namen, das als Aufseher über dem lebendigen Wasser steht. Auch m. E. ist es höchst wahrscheinlich, dass hinter diesem Name der Name Jesus Nazareus steht, wie schon Böhlig vermutete, aber das Vorhandensein eines christlichen Namens, der an die *nomina barbara* mit unterschiedlicher Herkunft in den griechisch-römischen magischen Papyri erinnert, ist kein genügender Grund, die ApkAd als ein christliches Werk zu bezeichnen.

Ziehen wir ein Fazit: Die ApkAd ist auch m. E. ein nichtchristliches gnostisches Werk, das einen starken alttestamentlichen und jüdischen Hintergrund hat, doch gehört sie zur frühchristlichen Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte.

2. Warum gehört die Apokalypse des Adam zur frühchristlichen Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte?

Hier seien die Gründe dazu kurz thesehaft zusammengestellt:

1) Es ist sicher, dass der Verfasser des Codex V von Nag Hammadi, der die Schrift mit drei anderen, eindeutig christlichen Texten, Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,5) und die zwei Apokalypsen des Jakobus (NHC V,3; V,4), in denselben Codex gestellt hat, die ApkAd als einen christlichen Text verstanden hat.

2) In der ApkAd sind einige Stellen enthalten, die christliche Parallelen haben. Man kann vermuten, dass der Autor oder wenigstens der Redaktor der ApkAd einige christliche Überlieferungen gekannt und benutzt hat.

3) Die ApkAd gehört zum Genre der Apokalypsen, das nicht nur im Judentum und in der Gnosis, sondern auch im frühen Christentum eine wichtige Rolle gespielt hat. Als Apokalypse trägt die ApkAd gemeinsame Züge mit den frühchristlichen Apokalypsen, zu denen nicht nur die drei Hauptzüge der Apokalyptik, die Philipp Vielhauer genannt hat, gehören,⁸⁵ sondern auch viele andere Merkmale, die für apokalyptische Schriften kennzeichnend sind: die Angelologie, die Periodisierung der Geschichte und die Prophezeiungen über die Zukunft.

4) Als ein Werk, das zur Adamsliteratur gehört, hat die ApkAd viele Gemeinsamkeiten mit den christlichen Adamsbüchern oder den jüdischen Adamsbü-

⁸⁴ S. I. 1.

⁸⁵ S. II.1.

chern, die christliche Interpolationen enthalten. Die ApkAd und die christliche Adamsapokalypse haben dieselben Adams-Traditionen benutzt.

5) Obwohl die Gnosis nicht nur eine innerchristliche religiöse Bewegung war, sondern auch außerhalb des Christentums existierte, war sie gleichzeitig eine wichtige geistige Strömung auch im frühen Christentum. Obgleich die ApkAd eine nichtchristliche Schrift ist, hat sie viele Gemeinsamkeiten mit den eindeutig christlich-gnostischen Schriften, besonders den christlichen oder christianisierten Texten, die gleichzeitig die sethianische Gnosis repräsentieren. Besonders viele Gemeinsamkeiten hat die ApkAd mit dem EvÄg, dem AJ und der HA.

6) Die ApkAd enthält auch die konkreten theologischen Motive und Themen, die im frühen Christentum auch außerhalb der Gnosis eine wichtige Rolle gespielt haben. Solche Themen sind z. B. die Schöpfung des Menschen, sein Urzustand und Fall; die Geschichte als Offenbarungs- bzw. Erlösungsgeschichte; das Wesen des Erlösers. Auch viele konkrete Motive in der ApkAd haben Parallelen in der außergnostischen frühchristlichen Literatur und Theologie. So reden über den Verlust von Adams ursprünglicher Herrlichkeit auch die Kirchenväter Ephräm der Syrer (um 306–373 n.Chr.)⁸⁶ und Johannes Chrysostomus (etwa 349–407 n.Chr.).⁸⁷ Wie in der ApkAd, so haben die Nachkommen Seths eine wichtige Stelle auch in der Syrischen Schatzhöhle, die eine Sammlung apokrypher Schriften aus der frühen syrischen Kirche bildet.⁸⁸ Am nächsten sind der ApkAd die Parallelen, die die christlich-gnostische Literatur bietet.

Die größte Bedeutung der Adamsapokalypse für die frühchristliche Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte besteht m. E. aber darin, dass sie zeigt, dass die frühchristliche Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte weit mehr ist, als nur die Schriften, die ausschließlich von Christen geschrieben wurden. Das frühe Christentum hat nicht nur unterschiedliche geistige Strömungen aufgenommen (darunter auch die Gnosis), sondern hat mit seinem Umfeld rege Interaktion und Ideenaustausch gehabt. Ob man das als „Synkretismus“ bezeichnen kann, ist eine Geschmacksache.⁸⁹ Jedenfalls gehören zum breiten Kreis der frühchristlichen Literatur auch die Schriften, die die Christen mit den Augen ihres Glaubens gelesen oder interpoliert haben, wie das Testimonium Flavianum, die Vita Adae et Evae und auch die Apokalypse des Adam von Nag Hammadi.

⁸⁶ Comm. in Gen 14,2.

⁸⁷ Chrys., Hom. Gen 18,1.

⁸⁸ S. den Text (Übersetzung): P. Riessler, *Altjüdisches Schrifttum außerhalb der Bibel*, Augsburg 1928, 942–1013.

⁸⁹ S. dazu: K. Rudolph, *Syncretism: From Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion*, in: J. S. Jensen (Hg.), *Syncretism in Religion*, London 2004, 68–85.

Is the *Apocalypse of Paul* a Valentinian Apocalypse?

Pseudepigraphy and Group Definition in NHC V,2

Dylan M. Burns

Abstract

Trotz zahlreicher und fundierter Einblicke in die Gattung und den theologischen Inhalt der Nag-Hammadi-Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2) bleibt die genaue Valenz des Textes umstritten: Ist der Text valentinianisch, wie oft behauptet, oder nicht, und was bedeutet die Antwort für unser Verständnis der gnostischen Apokalypsen im Allgemeinen? Dieser Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über das Problem und belegt, dass der Nachweis für eine valentinianische Herkunft des Textes problematisch ist. Vor allem ist es unwahrscheinlich, dass die berühmten valentinianischen Lehrer des 2. Jahrhunderts Bedarf an Pseudonymität gehabt hätten. Ganz im Gegenteil zeigt die Beleglage für die Beziehung zwischen Gruppendifinition und Pseudonymität, dass die bekannten valentinianischen Lehrer ihre Autorität durch ihre kirchlichen Institutionen und hohe Ausbildung begründeten – im Unterschied zu den namenlosen Autoren der pseudonymen Apokalypsen und der sogenannten „sethianischen“ Literatur. Hier erscheint die Möglichkeit, dass die Nag-Hammadi-Apokalypse des Paulus eher ein späterer Text wäre, geschrieben nach der Blüte des Valentinianismus, in einer Zeit, als die valentinianische Theologie eine Art Geheimwissen unabhängig von irgendeiner Schule geworden war.

I. Introduction

The *Apocalypse of Paul* from Nag Hammadi (NHC V,2, henceforth *Apoc. Paul*) is a short but vivid work, a thick plait woven out of a treasure of scriptural intertexts and ancient lore about the post-mortem ascent of the soul. Despite a wealth of studies and a general agreement about its genre and overarching narrative, *Apoc. Paul's* provenance and audience elude scholarly consensus. Is it Gnostic?¹ More specifically, does it belong to that corpus of works we might

¹ The text's "Gnostic" character is questionable but not easily dismissed, due to the text's

call “Valentinian,” and if so, what does that mean? I have addressed the latter question before, but only in passing;² I have therefore been asked to return to the matter and treat it *in extenso*. My answer has not changed: it is probably not helpful to dub *Apoc. Paul* “Valentinian,” but I would now add that this is the case *even if* we concede that some of NHC V,2’s contents are intelligible in terms of our extant Valentinian sources. However, the issue absolutely merits contemplation, as it drives us to pose a set of more interesting questions: given what we know about pseudepigrapha, do we have any reason to think Valentinians would have written pseudepigraphic works? When we compare our evidence about Valentinian production of pseudepigrapha with that pertaining to the “Classic” or “Sethian” corpus, what do we see, and what does this tell us about the sort of social dynamics at work in the groups from which these texts emerged?³ A close look at these issues will, I hope, lend us insight when we return to *Apoc. Paul*, an early Christian pseudepigraphon not only a Valentinian could love.

somewhat negative assessment of the “old man” in the seventh heaven and his dangerous servants, the “principalities and authorities,” see M. Kaler, “Commentaire”, in *L’Apocalypse de Paul (NHC V,2)* (ed. and trans. by J.-M. Rosenstiehl and M. Kaler; BCNH.T 31; Québec et al. 2005) 115–280; M. Kaler, *Flora Tells a Story: The Apocalypse of Paul and Its Contexts* (SCJ 19; Waterloo, ON 2008) 61–63; M. Kaler, “The Heretics’ Apostle and Two Pauline Pseudepigrapha from Nag Hammadi”, in *Paul and Pseudepigraphy* (ed. by S. E. Porter and G. P. Fewster; Pauline Studies 8; Leiden 2013) 337–352, here 340; M. Twigg, “The Mountain of Jericho in the Nag Hammadi Apocalypse of Paul: A Suggestion”, *VC* 69 (2015) 422–442, here 423 n. 1; M. Twigg, *Becoming Paul, Becoming Christ: The Nag Hammadi Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2) in Its Valentinian Context* (D. Phil. Diss.; Regent’s Park College 2015) 19; L. Roig Lanzillotta, “The Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2): Cosmology, Anthropology, and Ethics”, *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 1 (2016) 110–131. Regardless, any such Gnostic identity is peripheral to the present argument.

² D. M. Burns, “Apocalypses amongst Gnostics and Manichaeans”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (ed. by J. J. Collins; New York 2014) 358–372, here 385, in agreement with E. Thomassen, “Notes pour la délimitation d’un corpus valentinien à Nag Hammadi”, in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification. Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 Septembre 1993* (ed. by L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier; BCNH.E 3; Québec 1995) 243–259, here 247, and U.-K. Plitsch, “Die Apokalypse des Paulus (NHC V,2): Einleitung”, in *NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4*, Vol. 2 of *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* (ed. by H.-M. Schenke et al.; GCS 12/KGS 3; Berlin and New York 2003) 399–402, here 402. The ‘pro’-case will be discussed in the following section.

³ Because the internal contours of “Sethianism” (much less “Ophitism”) are not at issue in the present study, I will refer to the “Classic Gnostic” (*sensu* T. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* [NHMS 68; Leiden 2009]) interchangeably with the “Sethian Gnostic” (as delineated by H.-M. Schenke, “The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism”, in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism* [ed. and trans. by B. Layton; Numen Book Series; Leiden 1981] 588–616). This corpus is understood in this study to be the literary product of individuals known to Irenaeus as “Gnostics” (*Haer.* 1.29–30) and Porphyry (*Vit. Plot.* 16) – thus D. Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA 2010); see further D. M. Burns, “Providence, Creation, and Gnosticism According to the Gnostics”, *J ECS* 24/1 (2016) 55–79.

II. The Case for Valentinian Authorship of *Apoc. Paul*

The case for Valentinian authorship of the *Apoc. Paul* from Codex V rests on how we read a passage from book two of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*.⁴ Here, the heresiographer describes a Valentinian exegesis of 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, Paul's laconic account of his ascent to the second and third heavens, and to Paradise. According to Irenaeus, a Valentinian would say that Paul must have ascended beyond the third heaven, since the third heaven is ruled by the demiurge.⁵ He would have ascended into the "middle," the realm of the Mother. Now, in the *Apoc. Paul*, Paul meets a child on the road, who wants to help Paul meet the other apostles in "Jerusalem," that is, heaven.⁶ The child says,

[...] Now, it is to the twelve apostles that you shall go! For they are elect spirits, and they shall greet you." He (i. e., Paul) raised his eyes up and saw them greeting him. Then, the holy [spirit] who had been speaking [with him] snatched him up above unto the [third] Heaven, and he passed into the fourth [heaven].⁷

In his doctoral dissertation, William Murdock argued that Irenaeus' evidence shows that he "knew of Gnostic speculation on 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 which extended by some means Paul's ascension to the realm above the demiurge."⁸ Therefore, "the *Apocalypse of Paul* from Nag Hammadi belonged to this Gnostic speculation on the ascension of Paul."⁹

Michael Kaler, Louis Painchaud, and Marie-Pierre Bussi eres go deeper, drawing many parallels between Irenaeus' account and the content of the *Apoc. Paul*, as follows: 1) both are interested in Paul's exploration of the cosmos beyond the third heaven; 2) both specify that Paul abandoned the body when he began his

⁴ For other testimony about apocalypses pseudepigraphically assigned to the authorship of Paul, see W. Murdock, *The Apocalypse of Paul* (Ph.D. Diss.; Claremont Graduate School 1968) 2–4; M. Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*, Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* 2.30.7, and the Second-Century Battle for Paul's Legacy", *J ECS* 12/2 (2004) 173–193, here 177 n. 8; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 48. For interpretations of Paul's ascent as discussed in heresiographical literature, see Murdock, *The Apocalypse of Paul* (see n. 4), 229–232; Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 178; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 48–49.

⁵ *Haer.* 2.30.7.

⁶ NHC V,2.[18].18–20 (W. Murdock and G. R. MacRae [eds. and trans.], "NHC V,2: The Apocalypse of Paul", in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berlinensis 8502,1 and 4* [ed. by D. M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden 1979] 47–64). All translations given in this paper are my own.

⁷ NHC V,2.[19].15–25.

⁸ Murdock, *The Apocalypse of Paul* (see n. 4), 216.

⁹ Murdock, *The Apocalypse of Paul* (see n. 4), 218. Murdock (*ibid.*, 216–218) also adduces a lengthy Naasene exegesis, which holds that the gateway to the realm of life – accessible only the spirituals (*pneumatikoi*), beyond the scope of the rule of the demiurge and his rule over the psychic and fleshly beings – is mentioned by Paul in 2 Cor 12 (*Haer.* 5.8. 18–45 [Marcovich]). This Naasene reading identifies the pneumatic heaven with paradise (2 Cor 12:4), beyond the third heaven (2 Cor 12:3 – *Haer.* 5.8. 25). Cf. Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 178, and Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 48.

ascent; 3) both describe Paul's ascent past a demiurge-figure (at Nag Hammadi, the "old man" in the seventh heaven), who tries to stop Paul but is unable to do so, due to the invisibility of Paul's "inner person" or – in the Coptic text – his accompanying "spirit;" 4) neither is interested in Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:4 that he has "heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat."¹⁰

Yet, observing that Irenaeus writes in the subjunctive, Kaler, Painchaud, and Bussi eres argue that he presents a hypothetical account of how a Valentinian exegesis of 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 *would* look, *if* a Valentinian were to write one, in order "to counter gnostic claims that Paul himself was a gnostic initiate."¹¹ The *Apoc. Paul* was not, in their view, known to Irenaeus; nor is it a rebuttal to Irenaeus' polemic. Rather, "the similarities are simply due to a commonality of purpose between Irenaeus and the author of the *Apoc. Paul* – namely, that both authors are constructing accounts of Paul's ascension that draw on Valentinian speculation, and both are using 2 Cor 12:2–4."¹² In other words, *both* Irenaeus and the author of the *Apoc. Paul* are doing their best to write an interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12 from a Valentinian perspective. The upshot of the thesis of Kaler, et al. is that, if this reading is correct, it furnishes an early date for the Greek *Vorlage* of the text, insofar as it would be a product of nuanced exchanges between proto-orthodox and Valentinian Christians – something still possible only in the second century CE.¹³

There are problems with this view. Briefly put, each of the parallels between Irenaeus and *Apoc. Paul* – ascent out of the body, past gate-keepers and a celestial vice-regent, thanks to invisibility – are well-worn features of ancient ascent literature in general, not Valentinianism in particular.¹⁴ Kaler notes two further objections to the hypothesis of a Valentinian authorship for *Apoc. Paul*: as Einar Thomassen has argued, the Nag Hammadi text has ten heavens, not the nine we usually associate with Valentinian cosmologies.¹⁵ Kaler responds that the

¹⁰ Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 178–182; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 49–52.

¹¹ Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 182–187, esp. 183. Similarly, Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 52.

¹² Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 189; M. Kaler, "Contextualizing the *Apocalypse of Paul*", *Laval th eologique et philosophique* 61/2 (2005) 233–246, here 241 n. 25; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 58; followed by Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 174–175.

¹³ Kaler et al., "The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*" (see n. 4), 190; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 59.

¹⁴ For the ascending seer's abandonment of the body and subsequent ascent, invisible, past hostile celestial beings headed by a head archon or demiurgic figure, see e.g. *Zost. NHC VIII.1.4.20–31*. The trope of the celestial toll-collectors also "has no relationship with this particular mythology. Rather, it is a topos that can be found in many ancient texts describing the ascent of the soul" (E. Thomassen, "The Valentinian Materials in *James* [NHC V,3 and CT,2]", in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* [ed. by E. Iricinschi et al.; STAC 82; T ubingen 2013] 79–90, here 83, with many references; see also Twigg, *Becoming Paul* [see n. 1], 185–191).

¹⁵ Thomassen, "Notes" (see n. 2), 247.

tenth heaven can be explained as a celestial type of a two-tiered ecclesiology, of ordinary Christians and the elect; Matthew Twigg suggests instead that the final three heavens are meant to represent a “three-tiered spiritual realm” inspired by teaching extant in Theodotus and, in his reading, the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3).¹⁶

Murdock and Kaler allege other ostensible parallels between *Apoc. Paul* and Valentinian theology; they are tantalizing, but ultimately inconclusive.¹⁷ Twigg’s recent interpretation of Paul’s acquisition of a divine “name” and his subsequent ascent beyond the ogdoad in terms of a synthesis of ideas from a diversity of Valentinian sources is ingenious, and merits full review that is not within the scope of the present article. Yet as Twigg himself admits, even these parallels amount to circumstantial evidence.¹⁸ Or, if one were to concede that elements of the text’s theology were Valentinian, writes van den Broek, “this does not imply that the work as a whole should be regarded by Valentinian.”¹⁹

Van den Broek does not say *why* we should not consider NHC V,2 a Valentinian text even if we were to acknowledge a Valentinian sheen of some of its ideas, but a good reason has been raised by Thomassen, as well as Harold W. Attridge: we simply do not know Valentinians to have written apocalyptic literature.²⁰ Kaler’s response is that Thomassen and Attridge misread the evidence of Valentinian composition of pseudepigraphic and apocalyptic texts. It is the problem of whether or not we have reason to believe Valentinians composed pseudepigraphic apocalypses that the remainder of this contribution shall address.

¹⁶ Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 67; Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 164. As Klauck notes, we find not only Valentinian but Hermetic parallels in the veneration of the eighth heaven and the realm(s) beyond it (H.-J. Klauck, “Die Himmelfahrt des Paulus [2 Kor 12,2–4] in der koptischen Paulusapokalypse aus Nag Hammadi [NHC V/2]”, *SNTSU* 10 [1985] 151–190, here 186, re: *Corp. Herm.* 1.26; NHC VI,6; Roig Lanzillotta, “Apocalypse of Paul” [see n. 1] adds *Corp. Herm.* 13).

¹⁷ For instance, the idea that the Twelve Apostles are a τῦπος of the twelve aeons of the Pleroma (Iren., *Haer.* 2.21.1) is also attested in the non-Valentinian *Ap. John* NHC II,1.8.22–26 (Murdock, *Apocalypse of Paul* [see n. 4], 220–221 and 223). Similarly, while both Ptolemy and *Apoc. Paul* express ambivalence about the evil of the demiurge, who “in the Apocalypse of Paul is more like an obstructionist bureaucrat” (Kaler, *Flora* [see n. 1], 65, re: Ptol., *Flor. ap. Epiph.*, *Pan.* 33.7.2–5), we also know non-Valentinian texts to rehabilitate world-rulers, and so mitigate any sense of dualism (e. g. Sabaoth in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* – NHC II,4.95.14–25; II,5.103.32–105.4). Finally, while Twigg presents a convincing exegesis of the “mountain of Jericho” in *Apoc. Paul* as the site of the body that the soul is to escape via the intertexts of John 4:20–24 and Luke 10:29–37, one need not necessarily regard this intertextual play as Valentinian per se (Twigg, “Mountain of Jericho” [see n. 1], 435–437).

¹⁸ Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 224.

¹⁹ R. Van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2013) 78.

²⁰ Kaler cites a personal communication with Thomassen (*Flora* [see n. 1], 66–67); H. W. Attridge, “Valentinian and Sethian Apocalyptic Traditions”, *J ECS* 8/2 (2000) 173–211, here 178.

III. Valentinian Production of Apocalypses and Pseudepigrapha?

We possess a number of apocalypses that, like *Apoc. Paul*, may have some characteristics that recall Valentinian thought.²¹ For instance, the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1) uses a tripartite anthropological schema, dividing humanity into individuals who partake merely of the body, the soul, and, finally, the spirit/intellect (πνεῦμα/νοῦς). Only the latter will be saved.²² Michel Roberge believes that this anthropology is derivative of Valentinianism, and this is certainly possible.²³ At the same time, nobody would call the *Paraphrase of Shem* a “Valentinian” text. Its doctrines seem to derive from a diversity of ancient schools of thought.²⁴

More well-known is the example of the *First Apocalypse of James*, extant in Nag Hammadi Codex V as well as the Tchacos Codex (where the text is simply titled *James*). Amongst the revelations of the risen Jesus to James described in this text is an invocation (*apolytrosis*) to be used by an elect soul departing the body in order to bypass celestial gatekeepers. Irenaeus tells us that a version of this invocation was employed for the same purpose by the followers of Marcus Magus.²⁵ While this led some scholars to designate the text as “Valentinian,” Thomassen maintains that even if the formula originates in a Valentinian milieu, the apocalypse that incorporates it, James, might not.²⁶ (We will return to this point below.) It is equally possible that the formula originated independently of the Marcosians and “circulated widely enough to have been available in written form to both Irenaeus and the author of the *1 Apoc. Jas.*, and thus was known to a variety of Christian groups,” as suggested by Denzey Lewis.²⁷

In other words, while two extant apocalypses besides *Apoc. Paul* have content which we also find in Valentinian sources, they are not “Valentinian” per se, as their theologies are beholden at least in part to other traditions. More importantly, the *Paraphrase of Shem* and the *First Apocalypse of James* make

²¹ I have discussed this material elsewhere, in Burns, “Apocalypses Amongst Gnostics” (see n. 2), 364–365.

²² NHC VII,1.24.16–27; 35.1–36.1.

²³ M. Roberge, “Anthropogonie et anthropologie dans la *Paraphrase de Sem* (NH VII,1)”, *Le Muséon* 99 (1986) 229–248.

²⁴ See recently D. M. Burns, “μίξεως τινι τέχνη κρείττονι – Alchemical Metaphor in the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1)”, *Aries* 15/1 (2015) 79–106; idem, “Gnosis Undomesticated: Archon-Seduction, Demon Sex, and Sodomites in the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1)”, *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 1 (2016) 132–156.

²⁵ NHC V,3.32.28–35.26; TC 19.21–22.23; Iren., *Haer.* 1.21.5; for analysis, see Thomassen, “Valentinian Materials” (see n. 14); N. Denzey Lewis, “*Apolytrosis* as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism”, *J ECS* 17/4 (2009) 525–561.

²⁶ Thomassen, “Valentinian Materials” (see n. 14), 80 and 89–90, reversing his earlier position that *James* is in fact Valentinian (“Notes” [see n. 2], 248; Kaler, *Flora* [see n. 1], 67 took a similar perspective).

²⁷ Denzey Lewis, “*Apolytrosis*” (see n. 25), 545.

pseudepigraphic claims to authority, but *not* the authorities that we associate with Valentinianism. We might then pose the question like this: what would a pseudepigraphic claim to a Valentinian authority look like?

It is no empty truism to state that a Valentinian pseudepigraphon would probably look like a spurious work ascribed to Ptolemy, Theodotus, Heracleon, or Valentinus himself (i. e., to a famous Valentinian teacher). No such works are extant, but some heresiographical evidence suggests that they may have existed. Yet this evidence is problematic. First, the anonymous author of the third-century *Refutation of All Heresies* tells us of an account wherein Valentinus engaged in a revelation-dialogue with the Logos:

For Valentinus too alleges that he had seen a new-born babe, and that, questioning this child, he asked who he might be. And the babe answered, saying that he was the Logos, and then he delivered a sort of tragic myth [i. e., the Gnostic myth]. By means of this (story) does Valentinus wish to validate the heresy he has contrived.²⁸

Kaler is correct that this account is revelatory in nature, but it hardly suffices as evidence of a lost Valentinian apocalypse or pseudepigraphon.²⁹ Indeed, we might just as easily dismiss it as rumor or even slander on the part of the author of the *Refutatio*. Any speculations about the historicity of the matter should be made “nur mit größter Vorsicht.”³⁰ Kaler’s suggestion that Valentinus’ revelation, as related by the author of the *Refutatio*, inspired the very composition of *Apoc. Paul* may be regarded as utter conjecture.³¹

Meanwhile, in chapter twenty of the first book *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus of Lyons accuses his antagonists of circulating pseudepigrapha: “and in addition to these things, they cite an unspeakable multitude of apocryphal and bastard texts which they themselves have forged (ἀμύθητον πλῆθος ἀποκρύφων καὶ νόθων γραφῶν ἃς αὐτοὶ ἐπλασαν παραφέρουσιν).”³² However, even if we take Irenaeus at his word when he says that “they” forge their own scriptures, it is hardly clear here who “they” are in *Haer.* 1.20; as Niclas Förster writes, “die Quellen-zugehörigkeit des Lehrstoffes, den Irenäus in Kapitel 17 bis 20 verarbeitet hat, ist hingegen nicht mehr zu rekonstruieren.”³³ Meanwhile, in his notice on the

²⁸ *Haer.* 6.42.2: καὶ γὰρ Οὐαλεντίνος φάσκει ἑαυτὸν ἑωρακέναι παῖδα νήπιον ἀρτιγέν(ν)ητον· οὐ πυθόμενος ἐπεζήτηε τίς ἂν εἴη, ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο λέγων ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὸν Λόγον· ἔπειτα προσθεὶς τραγικόν τινα μῦθον, ἐκ τούτου συνιστάν βούλεται τὴν ἐπιχειρημένην αὐτῷ αἵρεσιν.

²⁹ See also E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of ‘Valentinians’* (NHMS 60; Leiden 2008) 423; *pace* Kaler, “Contextualizing” (see n. 12), 235; Kaler, “Commentaire” (see n. 1), 157; Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 68; followed by Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 170, also recalling Irenaeus’ claim that Marcus Magus obtained a vision of the *Tetrad* (*Haer.* 1.13.1).

³⁰ C. Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis; mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen 1992) 214; further, *ibid.*, 205–207.

³¹ Cf. Kaler, “Commentaire” (see n. 1), 157.

³² *Iren.*, *Haer.* 1.20.1 (Rousseau/Doutreleau); Kaler, *Flora* (see n. 1), 68.

³³ N. Förster, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen*

students of Ptolemy, Irenaeus does not say that they write pseudepigrapha, but that they use allegory to wring support for their ridiculous ideas out of authoritative texts.³⁴ Taken together, these passages certainly attest that “conflict over the Scriptures, and in particular over the authoritative witness of the apostles, becomes a major theme” in the first book of *Against Heresies*.³⁵ On its own, *Haer.* 1.20.1 constitutes, under the most charitable possible reading, a lone and vague piece of evidence regarding Valentinian composition of pseudepigrapha – the exception that proves the rule. Moreover, what sort of authority such works ostensibly appealed to remains mysterious.

Finally, some have argued that a natural authority for a Valentinian pseud-epigraphon would be none other than the Apostle Paul, since Valentinus reportedly derived his authority from Paul, via Paul’s student Theodas.³⁶ This argument is valid, but not decisive; Paul was of course a favorite source of authority for pseudepigraphers of many stripes, such as the *Acts of Paul* and the *Vision of Paul*.³⁷ Pseudepigraphic ascription of authorship to Paul does not a text Valentinian make.

The *status questionis* on the “Valentinian” nature of *Apoc. Paul* from Nag Hammadi might then be stated as follows: if a Valentinian writer wanted to compose an apocalypse about 2 Corinthians 12, it *might* look like this. Meanwhile, our heresiographical evidence regarding the production of pseudepigrapha amongst Valentinians is sketchy at best. Why is this so? If we step back and recall what little we know about the sorts of groups and social dynamics out of which pseudepigrapha emerge, it becomes clear that we have little reason to believe that members of the Valentinian circles we know from the second century would have wanted to compose pseudepigrapha in the first place – which could explain why there are no obviously Valentinian works amongst our extant corpus of Gnostic apocalypses.

Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar (WUNT 114; Tübingen 1999) 13. On the character of Marcus’ Valentinianism, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 29), 499–500.

³⁴ Iren., *Haer.* 1.9.4; see further H. Lundhaug, “Canon and Interpretation: A Cognitive Perspective”, in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture* (ed. by E. Thomassen; Copenhagen 2010) 67–90, here 87–88. Irenaeus returns to this theme in 18.1 (on which, see previous note).

³⁵ J. Lieu, *Marcion: The Making of a Heretic* (Oxford 2014) 184; see also P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis 2003) 294.

³⁶ Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 171–173, re: Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 7. 17. 106.4, on which, see Marksches, *Valentinus* (see n. 30), 294–302. Kaler’s argument that “the image of Paul presented in the *Apocalypse of Paul* is strikingly similar to the images of Paul presented in several other Valentinian works” (Kaler, *Flora* [see n. 1], 72) proves only that there is nothing about Valentinian depictions of Paul which is mutually exclusive with that of *Apoc. Paul*.

³⁷ For these texts, see recently G. E. Snyder, *Acts of Paul: The Formation of a Pauline Corpus* (WUNT II/352; Tübingen 2013); J. N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz (eds.), *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha; Leuven 2007).

IV. A Suggestion: (Absence of) Apocalypses at Qumran

In a recent study, David Brakke suggests that we can break down the usual teleological narrative governing our sources regarding the formation of the Christian Canon by distinguishing ideal types of the scriptural practices in which these sources engage, and the sort of social situations behind them: “(1) study and contemplation; (2) revelation and continued inspiration; and (3) communal worship and edification.”³⁸ The first sort of scriptural practice, oriented around exegetical study groups led by educated teachers, is the sort in which “Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Valentinus and his successors, Origen,” and others engaged.³⁹ Brakke notes that these scriptural practices often overlapped in real life; for instance, the philosophically-trained exegetes mentioned here (exponents of practice [1]) also engaged in communal worship (practice [3]).⁴⁰ The hypothesis of Valentinian authorship of *Apoc. Paul* presupposes, on the other hand, overlap between practices (1) and (2): contemplative, exegetical study with a teacher, and use of pseudepigraphy to authorize revelatory claims. Do we know these scriptural practices to have overlapped amongst Valentinian groups? In order to answer this question, we might ask what kind of people in ancient Jewish and Christian circles tended to make pseudepigraphic claims to authority, and why, and whether the picture that emerges fits our evidence about Valentinianism.

The social realities behind the production of pseudepigrapha are necessarily difficult to ascertain, for obvious reasons. Nonetheless, there are bodies of research into the question, as for instance in Qumran Studies. We know the Dead Sea Scrolls are replete with ideas and themes many would call “apocalyptic” – the eschatological battle between light and darkness, God’s predetermination of salvation-history, and the like.⁴¹ Fragments of Daniel and *1 Enoch* were discovered at Qumran. Yet, as John Collins writes, “the main sectarian writings from Qumran do not rely on the device of pseudonymity.”⁴² More specifically, he says,

It is a remarkable fact that none of the major sectarian compositions from Qumran is in the form of an apocalypse. Several of them are in the distinctive form of the Serek, or rule book. The genre of pesher is also distinctive and original in the scrolls. The sectarian writings often presuppose a claim of revelation, but they are not formally revelation reports. The Dead Sea scrolls do not enlarge our corpus of apocalypses, with the possible exceptions of some of the fragmentary texts from Cave 4.⁴³

³⁸ D. Brakke, “Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon”, in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (ed. by J. Ulrich et al.; Frankfurt am Main 2011) 271. I thank Karen King for alerting me to this study.

³⁹ Brakke, “Scriptuaral Practices” (see n. 38), 272.

⁴⁰ Brakke, “Scriptuaral Practices” (see n. 38), 280.

⁴¹ Discussed at length in J. J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London 2002).

⁴² Collins, *Apocalypticism* (see n. 41), 4.

⁴³ Collins, *Apocalypticism* (see n. 41), 10.

In other words, apocalyptic as their thinking may have been, the Yaḥad does not appear to have produced any apocalypses.⁴⁴ In Brakke's terms, their "scriptural practices" recalled those of the exegetical study-groups and communal worshippers, not the authors of revelatory literature – such as the Gnostics.

Nobody knows why, but one possibility is that the Yaḥad did not write apocalypses making pseudepigraphic claims to authority because they already had a *living* authority present in their community to authorize their beliefs – the Teacher of Righteousness.⁴⁵ The sectarian works from Qumran make clear that this figure's authority obtained from his ostensibly inerrant and correct interpretation of Scripture – and from the apocalyptic prophecies of which the Yaḥad was evidently so fond.⁴⁶ The investment of the Yaḥad in the Teacher of Righteousness as the ultimate authority over scriptural interpretation in their group ameliorated any possible need to create authority through pseudepigraphic means. One might then say that "the use of pseudepigraphy seems to coincide with low group definition" in Second-Temple Judaism,⁴⁷ and one could hardly term the Yaḥad a low-definition group.

Therefore, we can surmise that second-century Valentinians probably had little need for pseudepigraphic speculations because they had authorities like Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus around. Already in possession of an authoritative corpus of theological exegesis authored by such famous and respected teachers, Valentinian writers would not have needed to resort to claims of authorship by Adam, Seth, or, for that matter, Paul.

V. Pseudepigraphy and Group Definition amongst Gnostics

Limited as our evidence about Valentinian circles might be, we are probably right to speak, however loosely, of a second and early third-century Valentini-

⁴⁴ J. C. Vanderkam, "Apocalyptic Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Religion of Qumran", in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. by J. J. Collins and R. A. Kugler; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI 2000) 113–114, here 114. Reviewing which apocalypses are attested at Qumran (both in terms of MS production and citation in other works), Vanderkam sees a sort of combination of concern with law and more "apocalyptic" (sensu Collins) themes, much as we find in Daniel or Jubilees. "Qumran, whatever its distinctive traits, stands more in the Daniel-Jubilees tradition than the Enochian one; in that it emphasizes the Torah along with apocalyptic themes, it stands more in the Jubilees tradition than the Danielic one" (*ibid.*, 134).

⁴⁵ This thesis has been suggested to me by both John Collins and Esther Chazon, independently of one another, in conversation.

⁴⁶ J. J. Collins, "Pseudepigraphy and Group Formation in Second Temple Judaism", in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12–14 January, 1997* (ed. by E. G. Chazon and M. Stone; STDJ 31; Leiden 1999) 43–58, here 56–58.

⁴⁷ Collins, "Pseudepigraphy and Group Formation" (see n. 46), 56.

an *Church*, with a capital “C” – that is, of relatively high-definition Valentinian social groups. We know these churches formed around Valentinian teachers who brought their charismatic and intellectual expertise to Scriptural exegesis. Ptolemy’s *Epistle to Flora* gives us a stirring example of one of these teachers flexing his hermeneutic and authoritative muscle in a pastoral context. Heresiologists complain about Valentinian churches active in Egypt and Syria in the fourth and fifth centuries, and there is evidence (perhaps specious) regarding their existence even beyond that.⁴⁸ As we have noted already, authority within these Valentinian groups was largely centered on the correct exegesis of Scripture. Here, too, we are reminded of the Yahad and its authority, the Teacher of Righteousness. We might then take this comparison further regarding the importance of exegesis in the pseudepigrapha read at Qumran: Notably, “exegesis plays only a minor role in the pseudepigrapha of Enoch and Daniel [...] even Jubilees and the Temple Scroll are reformulations of the Torah rather than interpretations of it, thus demonstrating a different understanding of revelation than what we find in CD or the pesharim [...] The sectarian scrolls evidence a view of prophecy and legitimization that is quite different from what we find in the pseudepigraphic apocalypses.”⁴⁹ One might say the same of Valentinian texts of all stripes, which are largely occupied with exegesis of Scripture, and even of apocalyptic texts such as *1 Enoch*.⁵⁰

The situation is of course quite different regarding “Classic” or “Sethian” Gnostic literature, which is much less interested in exegesis of Scripture than Valentinian works.⁵¹ As Brakke notes,

The Gnostics may have identified themselves as a αἵρεσις or school of thought, a philosophical term, but their scriptural practices distinguish them from Clement of Alexandria, the Valentinians, and other persons or groups that belong more to my first category. Unlike Valentinus and his students, Gnostic authors, particularly in the second century, did not publish works in their own names or legitimate their teachings by pointing to their academic pedigrees and intellectual training. Instead, they produced revelatory literature that they attributed to persons of the past.⁵²

⁴⁸ K. Koschorke, “Patristische Materialien zur Spätgeschichte der Valentinianischen Gnosis”, in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Eight International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 3rd–8th 1979)* (ed. by M. Krause; NHS 17; Leiden 1981) 120–139.

⁴⁹ Collins, “Pseudepigraphy and Group Formation” (see n. 46), 57.

⁵⁰ On Valentinian interpretation of *1 En.*, see e. g. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 29), 316–323.

⁵¹ It is worth noting that the exceptions here – the *Apocryphon of John*, the second half of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Eugnostos the Blessed*, and the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* – are all works that Tuomas Rasimus has characterized as belonging to a different literary tradition than the Sethian – the “Ophite” school of Gnosticism. The “Classic” Gnostic works with Barbeloite-Sethian but no “Ophite” features are nearly all apocalypses and distant from exegetical concerns – akin to the Enochic-Danielic stripe.

⁵² Brakke, “Scriptural Practices” (see n. 38), 274.

Indeed, Epiphanius of Salamis bemoans the popularity of pseudepigrapha and apocalypses amongst “Gnostics,” “Sethians,” and “Archontics” – all groups whose traditions resemble in some way those found in the “Classic” or “Sethian” corpus.⁵³

Alan Scott has noted that we know of no Sethian authors, nor of any Sethian “church;” we rather possess evidence of the circulation of “Classic Gnostic” or “Sethian” books, which indicates a relatively low level of group formation behind the production of these books. Scott suggests Sethianism to have been a phenomenon akin to what sociologists Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge term “audience cults” – groups resembling networks of individuals with mutual interests, rather than an institution organized around a living authority, as we find in our evidence about Valentinianism.⁵⁴ Alastair Logan, meanwhile, reminds us that some non-Valentinian Gnostic groups did in fact achieve a degree of cultic and communal identity. In his eyes, it might be better to term Gnosticism a “cult movement” that emerged along the lines of a “subculture-evolutionary model” – “without authoritative leaders, achieving radical developments by many small steps, the endpoint being a novel religious culture.”⁵⁵ Most recently, Kaler has argued that we should consider the Nag Hammadi corpus in general to have been the product of a “cultic milieu” inhabited by “seekers, moving more or less freely through a wide variety of contexts, interested in esoteric discovery and open to investigation, questioning, and diversity.”⁵⁶

We need not follow Scott in his recourse to the cliché of Gnostic “parasitism” – nor, indeed, to the entire question of deviance – in order to acknowledge the basic insight that our Sethian evidence tells us about a literary tradition, not a social group.⁵⁷ Similarly, we need not wholly endorse sociological models

⁵³ Epiph., *Pan.* 26.1.2–1.3; 26. 11. 12–12.1; 39.5.1; 40.2.2; 40.7.6–7; for discussion, see M. Tardieu, “Les livres mis sous le nom de Seth et les Sethiens de l’heresiologie”, in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Eight International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 3rd–8th 1979)* (ed. by M. Krause; NHS 17; Leiden 1981) 204–210; D.M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Divinations; Philadelphia, PA 2014) 58–59.

⁵⁴ A. B. Scott, “Churches or Books? Sethian Social Organization”, *J ECS* 3/2 (1995), 109–122, esp. 116–119, followed by Brakke, *The Gnostics* (see n. 3), 87.

⁵⁵ A. H. B. Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London 2006) 58–60, esp. 59. Rasmus disagrees regarding the context of the deviant nature of Sethianism, which he considers deviant in a Jewish context (due to its valorization of Seth over Moses), but not deviant in a Greco-Roman one (due to its embrace of Platonic metaphysics – *Paradise Reconsidered* [see n. 3], 291–292). Yet we ought to recall that *all* Christianity, including Sethian trends, was somewhat deviant in a second- or third-century Greco-Roman context, regardless of its metaphysics.

⁵⁶ M. Kaler, “The Cultic Milieu, the Nag Hammadi Collectors and Gnosticism”, *Religious Studies* 38 (2009) 427–444, here 437.

⁵⁷ Thus M. A. Williams (*Rethinking “Gnosticism”: Arguments for Dismantling a Dubious Category* [Princeton, NJ 1995] 113). In recent articles, Williams has, rather, stressed evidence of sociocultural accommodation in extant Gnostic works (“Life and Happiness in the ‘Platonic

about churches, sects, and cults (to say nothing of “denominations”), nor their exportation to the ancient world out of which *Apoc. Paul* emerged, in order to recognize that the scriptural practices of so much “Sethian” or “Classic Gnostic” literature likely indicate its production by individuals with a low sense of group definition.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, it would be hard to characterize second-century and early third-century Valentinianism without reference to its strong social and institutional character.⁵⁹

To recognize the relatively low grade of group definition behind the production of Sethian literature is not to marginalize the “Seed of Seth” or the works produced in its name. On the contrary, a literary tradition can be widespread and influential, even if it was not produced by a group with a corporate religious identity. Here again, we can learn from our colleagues in Judaic Studies. Scholars used to hypothesize that behind the phenomenon of apocalyptic literature, there lurked apocalyptic “conventicles” – revolutionary groups that venerated the revealed wisdom of Enoch over that granted to Moses. Such hypotheses about “the apocalyptic movement” have been abandoned, and for the better.⁶⁰ Rather, now we simply talk about apocalyptic *literature*, and the different things we know people, Jewish and Christian alike, to have done with it.⁶¹ To take another, related example, we all know “Enochic literature” to have been of great importance, even if there is no evidence that an “Enochic group” existed in any meaningful capacity *separate* from Judaism; rather, we might speak of “a distinctive form

Underworld”, in *Gnosticism, Platonism, and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* [ed. by K. Corrigan et al.; NHMS 82; Leiden 2013] 497–524; “A Life Full of Meaning and Purpose: Demiurgical Myths and Social Implications”, in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* [ed. by E. Iricinschi et al.; STAC 82; Tübingen 2013] 19–59). Conversely, I. Dunderberg considers the *Tripartite Tractate* to alternate between social deviance and accommodation (*Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* [New York 2007] 172–173). The most thorough treatment of ancient sources about Gnosticism with respect to modern research into social deviance is A. D. DeConick, “Gnostic Spirituality at the Crossroads of Christianity: Transgressing Boundaries and Creating Orthodoxy”, in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* (ed. by E. Iricinschi et al.; STAC 82; Tübingen 2013) 148–184.

⁵⁸ For a useful, recent *Forschungsbericht* on various typologies regarding “churches,” “sects,” and “cults,” see D. Bromley, “Sect/Sectarianism/Cult”, *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (ed. by K. von Stuckrad and R. Segal; Leiden 2016). Accessed 13.03.16 from <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/vocabulary-for-the-study-of-religion/sect-sectarianism-cult-COM_00000468>.

⁵⁹ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”* (see n. 57), 111.

⁶⁰ Thus J. J. Collins, “Genre, Ideology, and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism”, in *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies Since the Uppsala Colloquium* (ed. by J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth; JSPE.S 9; Sheffield 1991) 11–32, here 23, respectively.

⁶¹ Examples of this scholarship include J. C. VanderKam and W. Adler (eds.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (CRINT 3/4; Minneapolis 1996); A. Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge 2005).

of Judaism” that esteemed the authority of Enoch.⁶² We must content ourselves with leaving the authors and redactors of apocalyptic and Enochic literature more or less in mystery, and consider them to have probably been relatively independent actors working within larger cultural contexts, such as “Judaism,” or “Christianity.” My sense is that we are in a very similar situation with the “Classic” or “Sethian” Gnostic corpus, which seems to have been produced by individuals inhabiting the borderlines between Judaism and Christianity, and read and copied by Christians.⁶³

As much seems to be confirmed by our single, non-heresiological (if hardly impartial) witness regarding actual, living people reading “Gnostic” apocalypses: Porphyry of Tyre, writing in the later third century CE:

There were in his (Plotinus’) time many others, Christians, in particular heretics who had set out from the ancient philosophy, men belonging to the schools of Adelphius and Aculinus – who possessed many texts of Alexander the Libyan and Philocomus and Demostratus of Lydia, and who produced many treatises and revelations of Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nicotheus and Allogenes and Messos and others of this sort who deceived many, just as they had been deceived, actually alleging that Plato really had not penetrated the depth of intelligible substance. Wherefore, Plotinus often attacked their position in his seminars, and wrote the book which we have entitled *Against the Gnostics* [...] I, Porphyry, wrote a considerable number of arguments against the book of Zoroaster, showing the book to be entirely spurious and contemporary, forged by the founders of the heresy [...]⁶⁴

This is a small, but terribly pregnant slice of evidence. Porphyry says that “Christians” circulated apocalypses in Rome that caused a stir in Plotinus’ seminar in 263 CE, leading the master to write a refutation of their views, which Porphyry chose to entitle *Against the Gnostics*. Porphyry does not say that these Christians are “Sethians,” or members of a “Sethian Church.” He says they adhered to the views of various teachers, whose names he gives: one of them, Aculinus, we know from the later doxological tradition not as a Gnostic, but a Platonist,⁶⁵ while Alexander the Libyan was known as a “Valentinian.”⁶⁶ This group of Gnostics does not have a high degree of self-definition; rather, they identify with a variety of teachers, all the while under the aegis of Christianity. Given the content of these

⁶² Thus J. J. Collins, “Enochic Judaism: An Assessment”, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture: Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (July 6–8, 2008)* (ed. by A. D. Roitman et al.; STDJ 93; Leiden 2011) 219–234.

⁶³ For Sethian literature as emerging from a liminal space between Judaism and Christianity, see Burns, *Apocalypse* (see n. 53), 145–147. Cf. Kaler, writing of the collectors of the Nag Hammadi documents that “insofar as they can be described as members of a given church, that church is [...] Christianity” (“Cultic Milieu” [see n. 56], 437; similarly *ibid.*, 442, re: A. B. Scott, “Churches or Books? Sethian Social Organization”, *J ECS* 3/2 [1995] 109–122, here 121–122).

⁶⁴ *Life of Plotinus* 16, trans. Armstrong (LCL), modified.

⁶⁵ For discussion of the evidence, see Burns, *Apocalypse* (see n. 53), 167 n. 2; M. Edwards, “The Gnostic Aculinus: A Study in Platonism”, *StPatr* 24 (1993) 377–381.

⁶⁶ Burns, *Apocalypse* (see n. 53), 167 n. 3.

Christians' thought, Porphyry thought the title *Against the Gnostics* to be suitable for the treatise Plotinus wrote to refute them. Meanwhile, their authoritative texts are pseudepigraphic; Nicotheos, Messos, and Allogenes are known to us from extant Coptic literature as primordial revelators of Gnostic wisdom, while the *Apocalypse of Zoroaster* trades on the authority of the putative founder of the Persian religion that bears his name.⁶⁷ The relative weight of exegetical and revelatory authority, claimed by means of pseudepigraphy, is at issue too, for Porphyry says that pseudepigraphy is the focus of his refutation of the *Apocalypse of Zoroaster*, and exegesis is at the root of the whole controversy – although it is exegesis of *Plato*, not of Scripture, that is in question.

VI. Conclusions

Second and third-century Valentinianism was a phenomenon characterized by groups around living authorities who governed the correct interpretation of Scripture, interpretations which furnished the group with a high degree of group definition. In the terms of Stark and Bainbridge, we would call it a “church movement”; in Brakke’s terms, its scriptural practices are identical to those of other educated Christian teachers, like Justin Martyr or Clement of Alexandria, who were chiefly concerned with guided exegesis in a “school” setting and collective liturgical practice. This is why we have evidence about living, named Valentinian teachers and the churches of people who adhered to their exegetical teachings and participated in their liturgies. Whatever world lurked behind the production of “Classic” or “Sethian” Gnostic literature was different, characterized by relatively low degrees of group self-definition and by interest in revelatory knowledge, usually authorized by means of pseudepigraphy. In the terms of Stark and Bainbridge, we would call it a “cult” of a type with little formal organization or leadership; in Brakke’s terms, its scriptural practices are centered on revelation and claims to possess extra-institutional authorization. This is why we have almost no evidence about living, named “Classic Gnostic” or “Sethian” teachers; instead, we have Sethian books, ubiquitously pseudepigraphic, usually written in the genre of apocalypse.

Apoc. Paul’s claim to the mantle of the Apostle Paul’s authority indicates that its author did not see his or her institutional or social affiliations as sufficient to authorize the text’s content, namely, teaching about the post-mortem fate of souls vis-à-vis exegesis of 2 Cor 12:2–4 and other passages from the *corpus Paulinum*.⁶⁸ This is not the sort of scriptural practice we associate with the

⁶⁷ Burns, *Apocalypse* (see n. 53), 28–31.

⁶⁸ In addition to 2 Cor 12:2–4, see e. g. Rom 8:38; Gal 1:11–2:2; Eph 1:21,48; 6:12; Col 1:16; Luke 10:29–35; Acts 9:3–19; 22:6–16; 26:12–18. See Klauck, “Himmelfahrt” (see n. 16), 176–178; Kaler, “The Heretics’ Apostle” (see n. 1), 339; Twigg, *Becoming Paul* (see n. 1), 148–159.

Valentinian teachers we know from the second and early third centuries and the sort of groups that formed around them. On the other hand, we know very little about Valentinian circles and their members from the mid-third century and beyond.⁶⁹ Some evidence points towards Valentinian churches existing in the fourth century CE as institutions distinct from Nicene churches,⁷⁰ but this does not exclude the possibility that other networks of people interested in Valentinian teachings came, at this time, to resemble those networks in which Sethian Gnostic texts were traded – subcultures or a “cultic milieu” with low group definition.⁷¹ The *apolytrosis* taught by Marcus Magus and the author of *1 Apoc. Jas.* may show us as much, suggests Thomassen: “it seems likely that Valentinianism also existed as the ideological basis for the activities of religious entrepreneurs offering secret knowledge, ritual experiences and redemption in the afterlife to a more ephemeral type of clientele.”⁷²

Apoc. Paul could conceivably have been written by a member of such a hypothetical network, for such “ephemeral” clientele: i. e., anyone interested in successful navigation of the post-mortem ascent of the soul. Indeed, the central problem the narrative addresses – how to bypass the celestial toll-keepers (τελώναι) after death – is the same as that of the *apolytrosis* we know from *1 Apoc. Jas.* and Irenaeus’ account of the teaching of Marcus. Would it then still be useful to call such an author “Valentinian,” given the distance such a hypothesis assumes from Marcus, Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus, to say nothing of Valentinus himself? Probably not, even if we grant the validity of parallels between the theological underpinnings of *Apoc. Paul* and other Valentinian sources, for “it was not simply the contents of a work that mattered; Christian critics were invested in knowing who actually wrote a work.”⁷³ NHC V,2 confronted its ancient Christian readers with an author by name of “Paul” – a claim with appeal not only for a Valentinian, but any ancient Christian reader interested in the lore of heavenly ascent. These two audiences are not mutually exclusive, which may have been the pseudepigrapher’s intent all along. Leave it to “Paul” to want to have it both ways.

⁶⁹ For overview of the evidence, see Koschorke, “Spätgeschichte” (see n. 48), 120–126; Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 29), 504–508.

⁷⁰ Thus Brakke, *The Gnostics* (see n. 3), 119 and Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 29), 506–508 re: Ambrose of Milan’s report of the burning of Valentinian churches (for text, see Koschorke, “Spätgeschichte” [see n. 48], 133–134).

⁷¹ I thank Matthew Twigg for suggesting this possibility to me.

⁷² Thomassen, “Valentinian Materials” (see n. 14), 88–89.

⁷³ B. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford 2013).

II. Mythologische Traktate in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

Mythological Treatises in the Nag Hammadi Codices¹

Nicola Denzey Lewis

Abstract

Dieser Beitrag untersucht, ob der Begriff „mythologisch“ auf drei Abhandlungen aus Nag Hammadi angewendet werden kann, wie dies häufig in der Forschung geschieht: das Apokryphon des Johannes, die Hypostase der Archonten sowie „Vom Ursprung der Welt“. Das Adjektiv „mythologisch“ wurde dabei grundlegend durch die moderne Forschung beeinflusst, die dem „Mythos“ eine soziale Funktion in einer Gemeinschaft zuwies. Im Gegensatz dazu betrachtet dieser Beitrag einige griechisch-römische Theorien über den Mythos und seine Funktion innerhalb der Rhetorikausbildung. In der Kaiserzeit war mythos (und dessen Auslegung) ein ausdrücklicher Untersuchungsgegenstand, dessen Aufbau einen Teil der Ausbildung der gesellschaftlichen Elite darstellte. Aufgrund bestimmter rationalistischer Bewegungen im 2. Jahrhundert n.Chr. griffen die anonymen Autoren dieser drei Abhandlungen auf ihre Ausbildung in Rhetorik, allegoresis und Philosophie zurück, um einen „Mythos“ in diesem Sinne zu entwerfen. Sie beteiligten sich damit an der Textwelt ihrer Zeit, um den Ruf des Buches Genesis bei einem gebildeten Publikum wiederherzustellen.

There is a certain Proarche, royal, surpassing all thought, a power existing before every other substance, and extended into space in every direction. But along with it there exists a power which I term a Pumpkin (*cucurbita*); and along with this pumpkin there exists a power which again I term Utter-Emptiness. This Pumpkin and Emptiness, since they are one, produced (and yet did not simply produce, so as to be apart from themselves) a fruit, everywhere visible, edible, and delicious, which fruit-language calls a Cucumber (*cucumeris*). Along with this cucumber exists a power of the same essence, which again I call a Melon (*pepo*). These powers, the Pumpkin, Utter-Emptiness, the Cucumber, and the Melon, brought forth the remaining multitude of the delirious melons of Valentinus (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11.4).²

¹ I wish to thank Jens Schröter and Konrad Schwarz for their kind invitation to deliver a keynote address at this very stimulating conference, “The Nag Hammadi Writings within the History of Literature and Theology of Early Christianity,” on which this contribution is based.

² This translation is from Irenaeus, *Against Haereses* (ANF 1; Edinburgh 1867), with minor updates; for the Latin passage, I rely on A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (eds.), Irénée de Lyon,

Thus writes Irenaeus of Lyon in the first book of his heresiological tractate *Adversus haereses*, in a well-known satire of Valentinian mythological cosmology. This may seem a perverse place to start, since my contribution to this volume is neither about Irenaeus nor the Valentinians, but about a series of three Nag Hammadi tractates we conventionally term ‘creation myths,’ or at least, which consist of lengthy mythological cosmologies of the type that Irenaeus ridiculed: The *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the untitled tractate we term *On the Origin of the World*.³ Although various writings within the Nag Hammadi corpus contain mythological cosmologies or other elements of myth,⁴ these three in particular share certain seminal characteristics: a common set of characters; a complete narrative of the drama of creation and the ‘fall’ of humankind; and an exegetical tendency that looks equally to the Book of Genesis – or on traditions around Genesis – and to Plato’s *Timaeus*. Through a Platonic or Platonizing lens, these three texts explicate and illuminate the origin of the cosmos, functioning aetiologically to explain the fallen or alienated state of humankind from its divine source and the nature of salvation. Together, they comprise a genre that, prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, was unknown to us in the modern period. In their style, however, they bear clear similarities with the type of literature which Irenaeus satirized in this passage above. Clearly, in the second century, the rise of the mythological, cosmogonic treatise in the corpus of early Christian textual production represented both an innovation and a point of contention between Christians of different theological persuasions.

In this contribution, I seek to investigate these three Nag Hammadi writings – the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and *On the Origin of the World* – within the broader context of learned Graeco-Roman attitudes toward myth. What do we mean by referring to them, as we do conventionally, as ‘mythological treatises?’ A careful interrogation of the concept or category is in order, beginning with the influence of Irenaeus’s *Adversus haereses*, which aims primarily to ridicule what he considered, following 1 Tim 1:4, to be Gnostic “myths and endless genealogies.” Such tedious and obfuscating language, he insists, in fact characterizes Gnosticism as he understood it. Irenaeus’s scathing critique of so-called Gnostic cosmologizing may have ‘primed the pump,’ so to speak, for us to consider these Nag Hammadi treatises as ‘myth’ where, had we

Contre Les Hérésies. Texte et traduction, Vol. 1/2 of *Contre Les Hérésies* (SC 264; Paris 1979) 174–177.

³ For the purposes of the present paper, I use the following critical editions: for the *Apocryphon of John*, M. Waldstein and F. Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (NHS 38; Leiden 1995). For *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*, B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7: Together with XIII,2*, Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1), and P. OXY.1, 654, 655*, 2 vols. (NHS 20 and 21; Leiden 1989).

⁴ For example, the *Apocalypse of Adam*; the *Exegesis on the Soul*; *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Tripartite Tractate* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* all have significant sections which might be termed ‘mythological.’

initially encountered these documents without the benefit of already knowing Irenaeus's distorting rhetoric, we may not have done so. In this contribution, then, I critique the category of 'mythological treatise,' whether at Nag Hammadi specifically, or among so-called Gnostic writings in general. I do so for two key reasons. First, abundant work in the history of religions reveals that 'myth' is itself often not a true literary genre, but rather a controversial label; it carries with it particular, functionalist, subjective ideas about ancient literature that grafts onto that literature a set of suppositions and inclinations tinged with nationalistic sentiments about the nature of a healthy society. In other words, it is a particular and peculiar facet of twentieth-century scholarship that sees 'myth' as the necessary vernacular for the spiritual strivings of a *Volk*. Analytically, 'myth' is thus set into a resolutely social framework; it is never the product of a lone writer, but is the literary 'song' of a community. To claim there is such a thing as 'Gnostic myth' – and especially a 'Gnostic myth,' is to claim, implicitly, that there was such a thing as a 'Gnostic community' that produced and used that myth. In essence, to take our three mythological tractates from Nag Hammadi and to condense or harmonize them into one essential, cohesive mythic narrative, or even to focus on their shared imagery and characters, is to fall into the trap of searching for a unifying 'Gnostic myth' and thus, a single and unified 'Gnostic community.' I will return this point presently.

A second critique: if 'myth' is a label that we, as modern readers, impose upon a set of ancient documents that express, in a certain way, the nature of the cosmos and its coming into being, it is worth considering whether or not ancient writers considered that they were writing 'myth' at all, or something else entirely. To this end, I look to some other philosophical writings contemporaneous with the Nag Hammadi treatises that engage the category of 'myth' more directly. From these *comparanda*, we may tentatively come closer to understanding the particular impetus of the author of, for example, the *Apocryphon of John*, as he participated in a particular literary and intellectual culture of the Second Sophistic. I argue that it is just as likely that these three Nag Hammadi treatises were akin to what we might call 'scientific' writings – driven by reason and a desire to rationalizing the cosmos – rather than 'mythological,' which implies its opposite: a deliberate attempt to re-enchant a de-mythologized view of the world. Of course, interpreting the literature of a pre-modern culture by means of a division between 'science' and 'myth' is misleading and unhelpful; lines were drawn differently in antiquity. It is beyond question that the writers of these three Nag Hammadi tractates engaged actively in *mythopoesis* as well as rationalizing discourses – but why this was the case needs to be carefully considered. I will end with some observations and hypotheses concerning the nature of these writings within the context of the second century and formative Christianity.

I. The Problem of Mythology: Some Methodological Considerations

The academic study of myth has its roots in seventeenth-century encounters with cultural others, redoubling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into an interest in defining a *Volksggeist* or spirit of a peoples, generally in relation to one's own heritage. Thus the first studies of mythology were comparative, but also sought to find common threads or motifs, particularly between diverse cultures deemed morally superior. The work of early scholars such as Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) connected the dots, so to speak, between mythology, ethnology (the 'science of race'), and the search for an essential, pure heritage that had, over time, disintegrated into a diversity of *Volk*, separated linguistically, geographically, and culturally.⁵ Such approaches by scholars of mythology such as Friedrich Max Müller⁶ or Sir James Frazer⁷ emphasized such fictitious heritages as a common proto-Indo-European set of mythological traditions and motifs. Traces of this school of thought can still be found in, for instance, the work of Kurt Rudolph, which found in 'gnostic myth' Greek, Iranian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Near Eastern elements.⁸

In the twentieth century, the study of mythology became the domain of cultural anthropologists, who understood myth not simply as a literary genre, but as the literary product of various social forces. Unlike Max Müller, for instance, who saw myth as a "disease of language," a muddled attempt to express poorly-understood natural phenomena, these new mythologists understood myth as the sacred story of a people. Such a move had already been precipitated by Herder, who saw myth as "a crucial resource for collective identity."⁹ In particular, the Romanian History of Religion scholar Mircea Eliade established influential criteria for myth, particularly creation myths: they take place *in illo tempore*, and they establish a founding narrative for a community.¹⁰ In the Eliadean perspective, myth is the medium for deep meaning, a meaning that transcends individual histories to assume social dimensions. Myth justifies a community, tracing its

⁵ See J. G. von Herder, "On Contemporary Uses of Mythology", in *The Rise of Modern Mythology* (ed. by B. Feldman and R. D. Richardson; Bloomington 2000) 230–232. For a critique of this form of comparative mythology, see S. Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols. Indo-European Mythology as Science and Ideology* (Chicago 2006), and, less pointedly, W. Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York 1998).

⁶ F. M. Müller, *Comparative Mythology* (New York 1909).

⁷ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York 1950).

⁸ K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; San Francisco 1987) 54.

⁹ B. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago 1999) 53.

¹⁰ M. Eliade, "Eschatology and Cosmogony", in *Myth and Reality* (trans. W. Trask; New York 1953) 54–74; more generally on myth, see also M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York 1959) and M. Eliade, *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries* (trans. P. Mairet; New York 1967).

origins back to a primordial time. Myth is *Heilsgeschichte*, a literary or narrative *axis mundi*, a centering principle without which a community would be rootless.

The presumed connection that Eliade made between ‘myth’ and ‘community’ is central to my critique; for now, it suffices only to highlight the pairing of these two constructions. According to Eliade, myth cannot function apart from society; it drives, shapes, and articulates the key language of a society’s spiritual striving. Myth, since it tapped into foundational notions of that society’s origins, also offered a golden thread that, if followed, could set a wayward society back on the right path. A myth could correct, censure, or heal. It might lay out basic principles in human society and connect these with the gods. For Eliade, this functionalist understanding of myth replaced or rehabilitated it from more dismissive scholars such as Müller. This, in itself, was a good thing.

However, Eliade’s ideas on myth have been rightly criticized in the past twenty-five years, particularly for the fascist and nationalist underpinnings of his scholarship.¹¹ He also came under fire for his ‘armchair ethnography,’ where he drew examples for his ideas from cultures he himself had never encountered. Nevertheless, although we now reject Eliade’s perspectives, the connections in our minds between ‘myth’ and ‘community,’ first made by cultural anthropologists upon whose work Eliade depended, are rarely severed. I fear that when we use the term ‘mythological’ to refer to a treatise such as the *Apocryphon of John*, we unconsciously slip into a set of assumptions concerning the origins and use of this treatise within the context of a community, concerning which we know nothing at all. We do more than assign it a literary genre, as we might if we termed it ‘poetry’ or ‘exegesis.’ We assign it an implicit social function.

If these Nag Hammadi writings do not constitute ‘myth’ in the unreconstructed Irenaeian sense of the word as ‘falsehood,’ neither, I suspect, were they ‘myth’ in the Eliadean sense of the word, where myth plays a significant role in expressing and perpetuating the social and even spiritual life of a community; as Clifford Geertz calls it, “the stories that people tell themselves about themselves.”¹² Yet many of us, children of the History of Religions approach to myth (and I include myself here) have tended to take for granted this idea that the mythological treatises of Nag Hammadi had a significant social function. More precisely, we tend to believe that they provided to some community lost to us today a sacred story of origins, the primary utility of which, as emic literature, was to support the community through building social cohesion, the sense of ‘groupness’ that comes from expressing a shared myth.

¹¹ R. Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Issues in the Study of Religion; Albany, NY 1999); Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols* (see n. 5), 221, calls Eliade a “Fascist historian of religion.”

¹² C. Geertz, quoted in B. Lincoln, *Gods and Demons: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago 2012) 54.

Built into this Eliadean idea of myth, then, is the fantasy of its communal authorship and creativity. If we just read our Nag Hammadi mythological treatises correctly, we will see emerge before our eyes a community that felt itself disaffected, on the one hand, from the oppressive political and military hegemony of the Roman Empire (hence the malevolent beings in them are given the political term ‘archons’ rather than the apolitical ‘demons’ or ‘unclean spirits’) and, on the other hand a community (more controversially) disaffected also from Judaism, which offered a Chief God whose primary characteristics were ignorance, blindness, and a sheer malevolence.¹³ This community felt profoundly disaffected, too, from emergent, proto-orthodox Christianity, the leaders of which derived from an inferior seed and who were psychically unequipped, literally, for the salvation of which this community felt assured.¹⁴ And surely there is some truth to these reconstructions, but here I think we must exercise substantial caution and rein in our own exegetical impulses.

In 2011, Stanley Stowers published an insightful essay on the problem of presuming a coherent community behind New Testament texts.¹⁵ He condemns this practice (in New Testament studies, known as ‘mirror-reading’) as untheorized and absurd, leading exegetes down a garden path of wrongful suppositions. Stowers notes that the use of ‘community’ and ‘communities’ in discussing early Christian literature is “almost always unjustified.” He continues, “By unjustified, I mean that writers do not give evidence and arguments for taking the social formations in question to be highly cohesive with commonality in belief and practice.”¹⁶ This is certainly true for any study of early Christianity that assumes a monolithic sense of community identity, whether ‘Gnostic’ or otherwise. By extension, we should be cautious before we assume that ‘myth’ is the product of a community asserting its collective origins *in illo tempore* that correlates

¹³ Hence the famous concept of ‘protest exegesis’ put forth by Rudolph, *Gnosis* (see n. 8), 54, also found in B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis 1990) 37–40, where exegesis was assigned a specific social function for a fictive community, though now ‘protest exegesis’ is rejected as overly simplistic. For critiques, see M. A. Williams, *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton 1996) 54–79; K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge 2003) 342 n. 95; I. Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality Revisited* (Tübingen 2015) 80.

¹⁴ Thus, most famously, the work of E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York 1979), reflecting new interest within American scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s in reconstructing Early Christian social history. Proposing a community behind the text also continues in the work of Karen King, particularly *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge 2006); K. L. King and E. Pagels, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (New York 2007); and A. H. B. Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (New York 2006). Again, may I emphasize that these are excellent, stimulating studies, but they are born of a particular methodological approach first developed within New Testament Studies.

¹⁵ S. Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’ and the History of Early Christianity”, *MTR* 23 (2011) 238–256.

¹⁶ Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’” (see n. 15), 245.

with that community's ritual practice,¹⁷ just as we should not assume that the exegetical passages in these same treatises are 'protest exegesis' from a disaffected community, nor that apocalyptic passages also signaled a clearly-defined group's 'crisis literature.'

For most of us – perhaps particularly those of us with a background in biblical studies – seeking to uncover the ostensible social function of Nag Hammadi texts has become second nature. The act of mirror-reading has leaked over as a technique into our approach to these texts, wherein a community behind each text is presumed. Thus we say, often, that the *Apocryphon of John* is Sethian not merely because it shares literary characteristics with other texts that we similarly classify as Sethian; we go farther and begin to tease out the contours of that particular Sethian community that might have stood behind that text.¹⁸ This is certainly true of approaches to *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* as well. For example, Roger Bullard, in his brief introduction to Bentley Layton's translation of *Hypostasis of the Archons*, never hesitates to call *Hyp. Arch.* 'mythological,' just as he confidently lays out its ostensible social context:

The audience is a Christian Gnostic community, aware of material of both testaments and accepting the authority of Paul. They are familiar with Jewish literary traditions, including apocalyptic. A traditional function of apocalyptic – providing reassurance for an insecure community – is operative here. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* is thus an esoteric work, written for a self-conscious community which probably felt pressure from a Christian community that defined itself as orthodox and others as heretical.¹⁹

Bullard implicitly sees 'myth' as the venue through which this "Christian Gnostic community" expresses not only its "grim reality" socially, but also its hope for vindication as they "will know the Father and praise him."²⁰ In short, we engage in mirror-reading when we see any community behind any of these texts, when we draw from them a social history of Gnosticism or even, more broadly, second-century Christianity.

¹⁷ For a critique of this linkage, see I. Strenski, "The Rise of Ritual and the Hegemony of Myth: Silvain Levi, the Durkheimians, and Max Müller", in *Myth and Method* (ed. by L. Patton and W. Doniger; Charlottesville 1996) 52–81.

¹⁸ A good example of mirror-reading Sethianism in Gnostic Studies is the work of John Turner, particularly "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History", in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (ed. by C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson; Peabody, MA 1986) 55–86. Although Turner rarely uses the term 'community' in this essay until his final paragraphs, he treats Sethianism as a type of social phenomenon and Sethians as a social group, in interaction with other religious streams over the course of four centuries. However, Turner is certainly not the only scholar to reify community from text; the tendency has been everywhere and driven at least two generations of Gnosticism scholars.

¹⁹ R. Bullard, "Introduction", *Hypostasis of the Archons*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. by J. Robinson; San Francisco 1990) 161–162.

²⁰ Bullard, "Introduction" (see n. 19), 162.

Interestingly, however, we might note that all these Nag Hammadi mythological treatises lack community language. Were they, then, ever read aloud to a community? They never invoke ‘we’ or ‘us,’ even when placed within a specifically narratological frame, as with the *Apocryphon of John*. The closest we come to community framing is the invocation of Ephesians 6:12 at the opening of *Hyp. Arch.*, and this is, in my opinion at least, not enough to warrant claiming a community behind it. We should, then, consider abandoning the reconstruction of specific communities behind these three texts, and turn instead to a consideration of, on the one hand, what their individual authors were doing, and on the other, to how ancient redactors and readers changed and interpreted these texts as they encountered them.

II. The Myth of the ‘Gnostic Myth’

Let us move away now from the idea that our three treatises reflected any coherent community to return to the question of whether or not they were ‘myth.’ That second-century ‘Gnostic’ thinkers were good at creating ‘sacred story’ – already visible through Irenaeus’s sometimes distorting and satirical lens – becomes evident from our three Nag Hammadi tractates themselves, which are redolent with mythic elements, language, and meta-narratives of creation and salvation. Because of the scholarly rehabilitation of the category of ‘myth’ – particularly the sub-category ‘creation myth’ under the influence of Eliade – modern scholars of Gnosticism have brought to this still relatively new material, therefore, a more-or-less sympathetic fondness for ‘Gnostic myth,’ along with an understanding of what that, at least in our minds, constitutes. A definition of the core ‘Gnostic myth’ emerged fifty years ago at the Messina conference of 1966, just as the Nag Hammadi documents were reaching the desks of Gnosticism scholars – and thus reflects critical readings of non-Nag Hammadi Gnosticism. The Messina Definition of “the idea of the presence in man of a divine ‘spark’ [...] which has proceeded from the divine world and has fallen into this world of destiny, birth and death [...]” reflects no single Gnostic document, and certainly no single Nag Hammadi creation treatise, but it has nevertheless laid the groundwork for reading Nag Hammadi in such a way as to expect various articulations of this myth.²¹ Thus, in a very real sense, the essence of Gnosticism is, by this definition, myth. Those treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* are, consequently, the most significant and compelling of all the Nag Hammadi writings, because they fully articulate variants of this foundational myth.

Post-Messina, variations on ‘the Gnostic myth’ have become the subject of significant studies of the Nag Hammadi documents, beginning with Michel

²¹ For the Messina Definition, see the conference proceedings: U. Bianchi (ed.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina 13–18 aprile, 1966* (Leiden 1967) xxvi–xxix.

Tardieu's *Trois mythes gnostiques*,²² Francis Fallon's monograph on the enthronement of Sabaoth,²³ and Gedaliahu Stroumsa's *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*.²⁴ Clearly, then, we take the category 'Gnostic myth' as self-evident, just as we assume that there were communities who expressed myth through ritual, or who expressed their collective truth through the language of mythology. Although we are more careful these days not to speak of "the Gnostic myth" as did, for example, Kurt Rudolph²⁵ or Hans Jonas,²⁶ we still take for granted that making myth(s) is simply something that our so-called Gnostic authors did – something that is self-evident when we pick up the Nag Hammadi codices, a number of which begin with the 'mythological' *Apocryphon of John*. We continue to be quick to identify constituent elements of these creation accounts as mythical, from characters like Ialdabaoth who populate a mythic cosmos, to some kind of understanding of a 'myth of salvation.' As other scholars of religion before us, in studying the Nag Hammadi writings we use the term 'myth' in a purely positive sense. Yet, for all this, the category 'myth' at the Nag Hammadi remains undertheorized. Even on a basic level, we might ask if we have even correctly any of these three Nag Hammadi treatises as 'myth.'²⁷ Are all creation accounts in Nag Hammadi examples of mythmaking? Do they represent the aims and aspirations of a community? What separates one person's 'myth' from another person's 'history,' or 'scientific narrative'?

III. Turning to Antiquity

In his critique of scholarly tendencies to offer functionalist interpretations for ancient writings, Stanley Stowers rightly points out that we engage in mirror-

²² M. Tardieu, *Trois mythes gnostiques: Adam, Éros et les animaux d'Égypte dans un écrit de Nag Hammadi (II,5)* (Paris 1974).

²³ F. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (Leiden 1978).

²⁴ G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden 1984).

²⁵ "The gnostic expositions gain their thread of continuity or their consistence just through the gnostic 'myth' which we shall examine more closely in what follows. The individual parts of this 'myth' can be called the gnostic myths; they confront us throughout as parts of one or another gnostic system. Since they are built together out of older mythological material they give the impression of artificiality as compared with the old developed myths of primal times." Rudolph, *Gnosis* (see n. 8), 54.

²⁶ H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston 2001) 45.

²⁷ It is worth pointing out that some scholars do not categorize *On the Origin of the World* as mythological. H.-G. Bethge does not use the word in his brief introduction to the tractate in J. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco 1990) 170, nor does Marvin Meyer in his introduction in M. Meyer (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (San Francisco 2007) 199–202. However, *Orig. World* contains references to Greek myth which *Ap. John* and *Hyp. Arch.* lack.

reading only with early Christian documents.²⁸ We do not assume that texts by Roman writers reflect the strivings and aspirations of a clearly defined community. We do not read Virgil, for instance, to glean information about Virgil's immediate community of Virgilian pagans. For this reason alone, I will introduce some classical theorizing on myth, to attempt to uncover what the social process of 'mythmaking' in the second century might have involved, without imagining that it reflected the spiritual aims of a Gnostic community.

I propose, first, to explore whether or not myth as 'sacred story,' *Heilsgeschichte*, existed as a category in the second century, or in the fourth. Paul Veyne, in his famous long essay, "Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?"²⁹ demonstrates that the term *mūthos* has been contested since at least the fifth century BCE, and generally perceived with the negative associations (a 'falsehood') we attribute to the term in English aside from its rehabilitation within the Academy. Veyne himself was primarily concerned with Hellenistic and Second Sophistic writers, and in the end, answers in the affirmative: "but of course Greeks believed in their myths!"³⁰ But this answer is a playful one; ultimately, Veyne asserts that like us, the Greeks' capacity for believing in their myths ended at the point in which it no longer served their interests to do so; thus 'belief' teetered close to 'disbelief' in a manner consummately pragmatic. Greeks believed in their myths as long as it suited them to do so.

I am tempted to ask, facetiously paraphrasing Veyne, "Did Gnostics believe in their myths?" As Veyne did for the Greeks, we must first ask, "what do we mean by 'believe in?'" And did all Gnostics believe the same way? I suspect that these creation myths were not narratives that were 'believed in,' in any simplistic manner. Surely the aims of their authors were more sophisticated and complex than this. But strikingly, it is a technique of Irenaeus to suggest to his readers that the duped followers of Gnostic teachers really were this simple, by himself taking these mythological accounts quite literally, rather than, as Paul Parvis puts it, "poetic and indirect reflection[s] on the nature of ultimate reality."³¹

Parvis's words here draw on the similar conclusions by the classicist Luc Brisson.³² Greek myth, in an encounter with Greek and Roman philosophy, Brisson writes, survived being dismissed as 'untruth' or examples of 'irrationalism' through the technique of allegorical interpretation, where myth might thus express moral, psychological, physical, and metaphysical lessons. This technique

²⁸ Stowers, "The Concept of 'Community'" (see n. 15), 247.

²⁹ P. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (trans. P. Wissing; Chicago 1988).

³⁰ Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths* (see n. 29), 129.

³¹ P. Parvis, "Who Was Irenaeus? An Introduction to the Man and His Work", in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (ed. by S. Parvis and P. Foster; Minneapolis 2012) 17.

³² L. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago 2004).

was already developed by Greek philosophers such as Theagenes and Euhemerus, and continued into the Roman period.³³ Already by the first century of the Common Era, Stoic philosophers developed elaborate allegorical interpretations to rehabilitate the mythic narratives of Hesiod and Homer – works that had been dismissed by Greek rationalist philosophers in the sixth century BCE as ridiculous, impervious to both logic and verifiability.³⁴ Thus philosophical hermeneutics became, in the High Empire, the medium by which myth was transmitted and retained – or even gained – significance.

Although Brisson does not discuss the type of myth we find demonstrated at Nag Hammadi, we might detect the same move here in our Nag Hammadi mythological treatises, by which philosophy augments an older mythological narrative drawn from Genesis and the *Timaeus* simultaneously; the principles of allegory mitigate the inherent implausibility of the literal meaning of, say, Genesis's creation myth to invest it with new meaning. For example, we might consider the passage in Gen 2:21b, where God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and the manner in which the author of *Ap. John* III 29.1–7 interprets it:

But (δὲ) I said to him, “Lord, what is the ‘trance’ (ἔκστασις)?” He smiled and said, “Are you thinking that it is as (κατά) Moses said, ‘He put him to sleep’? No, but (ἀλλά) it was his perception (αἴσθησις) that he veiled with lack of perception (ἀναισθησία).”³⁵

Hypostasis of the Archons makes a similar turn to allegorical explanation:

The rulers took counsel with one another and said, “Come, let us cause a deep sleep (οὐρανὸν) to fall upon Adam.” And he slept. Now the deep sleep that they “caused to fall upon him and he slept” is ignorance (τῆν ἄγνοϊαν).³⁶

Here, an allegorical interpretation rationalizes the absurd idea that a woman might be created from Adam's side as he slumbered, unaware. The gloss does not properly replicate the myth of Genesis – it is not in fact mythology here at all – but rather rehabilitates it for a discerning, critical audience trained to expect a hidden meaning behind a patently implausible account. Just as Roman *allegoresis* saves Homer from being dismissed as irrational nonsense, Gnostic *allegoresis* saves the Book of Genesis from the same potential scorn.

Allegorical interpretation was not just the trade of Roman philosophers. Rhetoricians and poets aspired to the same, also working to rehabilitate the category of ‘myth.’ What Brisson does with ancient philosophy and myth, classicists

³³ For the Greek material, see K. Freeman, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford 1946).

³⁴ For allegorical readings of myth in Roman Stoicism, see M. C. Nussbaum, “Poetry and the Passions”, in *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophies of Mind* (ed. by J. Brunshwig and M. C. Nussbaum; Cambridge 2004).

³⁵ I have used the version here of NHC III, which retains more of the Greek loanwords from the LXX in its *allegoresis* than the other recensions.

³⁶ *Hyp. Arch.* 89.8–9.

Peter Struck and Ilaria Ramelli do with Roman poetry and rhetoric.³⁷ Struck explores the use of language in poetry to bridge the gap between the plausibility of ancient creation myths, taken literally, and their reception within intellectual circles. Ramelli explores the power of allegory as an interpretive tool even among ancient Christian scholars, most notably Origen.³⁸ Both focus on the Graeco-Roman development of a discourse around symbols and symbolism for reinterpreting the past in new, positive ways. Together, Struck and Ramelli agree that *allegoresis* functioned to muddy the waters of any facile understanding of what made a myth believable in antiquity. The ability to interpret the troubling elements of myth as allegorical formed a significant part of education in antiquity, from the first until at least the fourth century – an era in which we still find Secundus Salutiarius, the Emperor Julian’s learned *quaestor*, claiming, “myths never happened at all, but were allegories of eternal truths.”³⁹

While the world of Greek and Latin rhetoric and poetry is a different ambit from our Nag Hammadi creation accounts, there is surely not so very much distance between second-century ‘Gnostic’ authors and second-century Roman rhetoricians and philosophers. As Struck points out, perhaps the greatest allegorist in Graeco-Roman literature was no other than Porphyry of Tyre, who himself was well acquainted with so-called ‘Gnostics’ and shared with them a common education, if not precisely a common philosophy.⁴⁰ Although it is overly simplistic to read Nag Hammadi treatises in such a way as to draw from them ‘communities,’ it is not a fool’s enterprise to consider the manner in which their authors had similar educations as other second- and third-century intellectuals, and certainly aspired to participate in learned discourses and fashionable modes of textual production.

Unfortunately, the Nag Hammadi creation accounts do not come with a reader’s guide, and any theoretic discussion of myth within them is entirely absent. We do not know, therefore, whether Gnostics ‘believed in’ their myths, or in what manner these texts were received. Allegory was but one technique that is employed in our Nag Hammadi creation accounts, after all, and although it helps us to explain some features of these narratives, it is alone an insufficient hermeneutical key to explain their apparent preoccupation with cosmogony.

We might ask a more sophisticated question, then: what did our authors of the Nag Hammadi creation accounts *think* they were writing? Myth? Allegorical interpretation of myth? Exegesis of scripture? Learned etymologies and word-

³⁷ P. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton 2004).

³⁸ I. Ramelli, “Valuing Antiquity in Antiquity By Means of *Allegoresis*”, in *Valuing the Past in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. by J. Ker and C. Pieper; Leiden 2014).

³⁹ Secundus Salutiarius, *De diis et mundo* 4.9, cited in Ramelli, “Valuing Antiquity” (see n. 38), 503.

⁴⁰ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol* (see n. 37), 23.

plays? All of the above? Again, we have no direct answer. We do, however, have the attestations of other ancient writers. By the turn of the Common Era, rhetoricians and grammarians influenced by Plato and Aristotle divided narrative into three types: 1) *historia*, a true account of events that actually occurred; 2) *plasma* or *argumentum*, an account narrating events that did not occur but that are like real events; and 3) *mūthos* or *fabula*, an account that narrates events that are not true and not similar to real events. Although *mūthos* was generally understood as a false story, ancient philosophers since Plato played with the category.⁴¹ Plato, while decrying myth, also averred that people needed them, thus calling his drama of the soul's fate a "likely" or "plausible" myth.⁴² He contrasted the myths of Hesiod and Homer with what he argued was "true history."⁴³ And he himself used the word *mūthos* in a positive sense, to refer to his creation narrative in the *Phaedo*⁴⁴ and the myth of Er, with which he ended his *Republic*.⁴⁵ Centuries later, Philo, in *De opificio mundi* 1.13–15, contrasts the false myths of others with the truth that is Moses's accurate account of creation in Genesis – a perspective which, again, writers of our Nag Hammadi treatises appear to have shared.

Those rhetoricians and philosophers who directly address the topic of myth in the imperial period, such as Theon of Alexandria in his *Progymnasma*, make it clear that myth, unallegorized, was not a valued category.⁴⁶ We learn from Theon some other elements that do not conform well to Eliade's idea of myth as 'sacred story.' In Greek and Roman literature, myth was not passed down orally within a group or tribe, but was deliberately constructed according to formal principles. Theon writes,

As an exercise, *mūthos* is treated in a variety of ways, for we state the fable (*mūthos*) and inflect its grammatical form and weave in into a narrative, and we expand it and compress it. It is possible also to add some explanation to it, or if this is prefixed, an appropriate fable can be adapted. In addition, we refute it and confirm it.⁴⁷

The *mūthos* was a literary product from the start. Just as it should be formally composed, it should be refuted according to formal principles of argument. Myth invited a response, refutation, and further explanation, each according to an established set of rules within rhetoric. There was no sense of myth as a social charter, of sacred story. It was, rather, a common schoolroom exercise to compose one, just as it was a schoolroom exercise to allegorize or refute an earlier work of

⁴¹ M. Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology* (trans. M. Cook; Chicago 1986) 86–87; W. Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths: the Cave of Echoes* (New York 1988) 25–33.

⁴² Plato, *Timaeus* 29d, 59d, 68d.

⁴³ Plato, *Timaeus* 19d, 26e; *Laws* 10.887.c8–e1.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Phaedo* 110b–114a.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Republic* 10 (621b–c).

⁴⁶ "The Exercises of Aelius", in G. A. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden 2003) 23–41.

⁴⁷ "The Exercises of Aelius" (see n. 46), 24.

mythology.⁴⁸ It is instructive to think of our Nag Hammadi treatises in light of these exercises. They, too, expand and compress prior narrative, refute it at times, explain, adapt, and ultimately confirm earlier material from Genesis which they certainly recognized as *mūthos*, just as the author of *Orig. World* likely recognized the myth of Eros as fable, or the author of *Hyp. Arch.* likely recognized the myth of Apollo and Daphne as fable. These were narrativized – adapted and embedded into a broader narrative that itself, at turns expands and compresses Genesis.

I imagine, then, that in terms of theoretical positioning, the writers of *Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On the Origin of the World*, and others who turned to Genesis and the *Timaeus* together, were already well-versed in the opinion that although myth itself was false, these two accounts were true, however they chose to understand the word. We are left, then, with two possibilities. Either our writers of these treatises considered Genesis as *historia* – and what they were writing as *historia* (a true account of events that really happened) – or else they were considering it *mūthos*, but one that was, in the Platonic sense, plausible or likely myth.

Let me consider first the latter possibility. Since Truth remained epistemologically inaccessible – that is, since even Genesis and *Timaeus* remained only refracted accounts of a transcendent reality, unworthy of ‘believing in’ as anything but imperfect and human attempts at expressing a higher Truth – as such, these accounts might be expanded, compressed, combined, interpreted, improvised upon, and thus probably improved, provided the writer were working to access and express that higher Truth. This, in and of itself – as the *Timaeus* and even Philo’s *De opificio mundi* demonstrate for earlier periods (much earlier, in the case of Plato) – was a practice in which educated people of the second century actively participated. In this case, the authors of these three tractates were truly engaged in a creative literary activity, what Bruce Lincoln would, nevertheless, term “mythmaking.” In an essay entitled “Between History and Myth,” Lincoln considers the case of state-founding narratives in medieval Norway.⁴⁹ Although we are far, here, from the social context of Nag Hammadi creation myth, there are some provocative points of comparison. Lincoln notes that the “project – and the ethic – of the mythmaker” is to advance a social critique by “reworking details of the story and turning the narrative against the purposes of rival narrators.”⁵⁰ Certainly we find this in our Nag Hammadi treatises, where the basic contours of Genesis are sometimes retained, but sometimes entirely subverted, and in each case, details are altered subtly to suit the agenda of the treatise. No doubt there were rival narrators of Genesis’s story in the imperial period, whether Jewish or Christian or even ‘Gnostic.’ In fact, one way of reading our three existence

⁴⁸ A. Gangloff, “Mythes, fables, et rhétorique à l’époque impériale”, *Rhetorica* 20 (2002) 25–56.

⁴⁹ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons* (see n. 12), 53–62.

⁵⁰ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons* (see n. 12), 62.

‘mythological treatises’ from Nag Hammadi is consider them engaged in active contestation for who had the proper reading of Genesis, rather than three authors reworking Genesis traditions without an active knowledge of others doing the same thing. The *Apocryphon of John* does different things with Genesis than the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, yet we recognize, as readers, that both are reworking Genesis’s details. Lincoln continues, “Although their view of the Norwegian state – and, no doubt, of the world in general – differs sharply from that of their adversaries, they feel equally empowered to revise the origin story as they like *and to reshape the world in so doing*.”⁵¹ The power in Lincoln’s observation here lies in his recognition that mythmaking around origin stories, whether ‘Gnostic’ or Norwegian, evokes tremendous authority for the mythmaker, as for the reworked origin story itself.

IV. *Mūthos?* Or *Historia?*

But let me turn now to the first of the two possibilities I suggested above ago: that the writers of these texts perhaps considered them *historia* rather than *mūthos*. Perhaps these were, for them, literally true accounts, not myth. Particularly at some parts (and *Ap. John* and *Orig. World* more than *Hyp. Arch.*), these narratives read like rational or scientific commentaries on Genesis, combined with rhetorical and exegetical exercises in introducing principles of reason and rationality to ancient writings. These Nag Hammadi ‘mythological treatises,’ after all, feature state-of-the-question astronomic models, iatroastrological additions of demonic names corresponding to parts of the human body presumably for medicinal use, plus emotional theory and physics drawn from Hellenistic moral philosophy worked into the names of demons.⁵² Consider this brief excerpt from the long recension of the *Apocryphon of John*:

And the origin of these demons who are in the whole body is determined to be four: heat, cold, wetness, and dryness. And the mother of them all is matter (ὕλη). The one who rules over the heat, Phloxpha. The one who rules over the cold, Oroorrothos. The one who rules over what is dry, Erimacho. The one who rules over the wetness, Athuro. The mother of all these, Onorthochrasaei stands in their midst, for it is she who is limitless, and she mixes with them all. And she is truly matter, for they are nourished by her. The four chief demons are:

Ephememphi who belongs to pleasure. Yoko who belongs to desire. Nenentophni who belongs to grief. Blaomen is the one who belongs to fear.

⁵¹ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons* (see n. 12), 62.

⁵² I. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York 2008) 6–18.

The mother of them all is Esthensis-Ouch-Epi-Ptoe. From these four demons passions (πάθος) came forth. (*Ap. John* II 18.2–20, with minor changes from Waldstein/Wisse, 108–109).

Is this myth, or something else? In some measure, this passage constitutes *mythopoesis*, in that in what seems to be a creative act of constructing narrative, a cosmos is populated with beings who have delightful names, mostly likely invented. And yet if we focus on the creative elements of the passage, we lose sight of what the author attempts to do here with Genesis's creation account: to historicize, or scientificize the creation of Adam's physical body, a text which pushed the margins of literal credibility. He does so not by allegorizing, but by alluding to Stoic emotional theory, where, as Ismo Dunderberg has demonstrated, πάθος was divided into four main categories: distress (λύπη), fear (φόβος), delight (ἡδονή), and desire (ἐπιθυμία).⁵³

It may be that if we adjust our expectations of these treatises away from *mythopoesis* to read them differently, we may find in them new things that we had not seen before. I am reminded of a recent article by Taylor Petrey on the scientific, and material, dimensions of *pneuma* and semen in early Christianity.⁵⁴ In his analysis of Tertullian, the term *semen* or *seed* – so often interpreted metaphorically or ethereally as a spiritual substance that is passed down through lineages – is placed in the context of Greek embryology. He notes that those early Christian writers who mobilized discourses of generation and reproduction drew on competing embryological positions about parental contribution; in other words, this language was not metaphor as much as it was science, and scientific ways of understanding descent and kinship. Petrey's work suggests that all the discussion about the 'work of the spirit' in texts from Nag Hammadi was not some grand metaphor, but something much more akin to scientific materialism. Thus our mythological treatises from Nag Hammadi, read differently, contain embedded ideas of embryology, genetics, medicine, physics, and biology, all placed within the frame of formal rules of engaging myth and re-centering the resultant text(s) as something more than a simple 'myth of origins.'

Around the second century, then, a number of anonymous writers turned to Genesis, tackling the problem of its 'mythicness.' They did so using a variety of techniques, including *allegoresis*, exegesis, etymologizing, and adding tags and glosses to render Genesis more rational than before. To use Plato to help clarify or augment Genesis – as particularly the *Apocryphon of John's* long recension does in the account of Adam's seven souls – is not to create, support, or engage in mythopoetic thinking but its opposite. Attuned to this new hypothesis that this account constituted *historia* – an account of origins as it really happens – we

⁵³ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism* (see n. 52), 109–110.

⁵⁴ T. G. Petrey, "Semen Stains: Seminal Procreation and the Patrilineal Genealogy of Salvation in Tertullian", *J ECS* 22/3 (2014) 343–372.

see something else here elaborating Gen 2:4a: neither myth nor metaphor, but a straightforward scientific account of human biological difference (drawn of course from Plato) despite transcendent spiritual origins. This is not myth, but a highly technical, scientific gloss.

If the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and *On the Origin of the World* are ‘mythological,’ they are also, in turns, also prayers embedded in passages with mythic-sounding language and imagery, apocalyptic, exegesis, exhortation, and creative dialogue: true composites of literary genres. It is not merely scientific knowledge upon which the authors of these treatises drew; it was the entire weight of a classical education: rhetoric, medicine, philosophy, and so on. Attuned to what is *not* myth in our Nag Hammadi treatises, we might, for instance, also hear the opening of *On the Origin of the World* differently:

Seeing that everybody, gods of the world and humankind, says that nothing existed prior to chaos, I, in distinction to them, shall demonstrate that they are all mistaken, because they are not acquainted with the origin of chaos, or its root. Here is the demonstration (ΤΑΠΟΔΙΖΕΙC).

How well it suits all men, on the subject of chaos, to say that it is a kind of darkness! But in fact it comes from a shadow, which has been called by the name ‘darkness’. And the shadow comes from a product that has existed since the beginning. It is, moreover, clear that it existed before chaos came into being, and that the latter is posterior to the first product. Let us therefore concern ourselves with the facts of the matter; and in particular, with the first product, from which chaos was projected. And in this way the truth will be clearly demonstrated (ΔΥΩ ΝΤΕΕΙΡΕ CΝΑΟΥΩΝΗ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΓΙ ΤΑΠΟΔΙΖΕΙC ΝΤΜΕ) (97.24–98.11).

Here, we begin not with the deliberate presentation of a sacred story, but a statement of purpose and method.⁵⁵ The author offers a *demonstratio*, a refutation of common opinion, an assertion that the author will address the matter only with reference to fact, and in the end, demonstrate “the truth.” In fact, a technical exposition could not be more clear. In his introduction to his critical edition of the text, Louis Painchaud demonstrated that *Orig. World*’s structure follows Graeco-Roman rhetorical handbooks quite perfectly; the author moves from the *exordium* or *prooimion* passage I have cited here (97.24–98.11), to a *narratio* or *diēgēsis* (98.11–123.2) on the creation of the world. The third part, the brief *probatio* or *pistis* (123.2–31) offers an argument for the power of error and ignorance; in the fourth part, the *peroratio* or *epilogos* (123.31–127.17) concludes the tractate with an apocalyptic passage.⁵⁶

What we learn from all three creation narratives in the Nag Hammadi collection, ultimately, is that creation unfolded not whimsically or impressionalisti-

⁵⁵ For this reason, clearly, H.-G. Bethge in his introduction to the English critical edition of *Orig. World* terms this a “treatise or apologetic essay” rather than a myth (Bethge, “Introduction”, in *Nag Hammadi Codex* [ed. by Layton] [see n. 3]).

⁵⁶ L. Painchaud (ed.), *L’Écrit sans titre: Traité sur l’origine du monde (NH II,5 et XIII,2 et Brit. Lib. Or. 4926[1])* (BCNH 21; Québec 1995).

cally, but according to a fixed set of laws. The expression and investigation of this phenomenon we call ‘science,’ not ‘myth.’ At the same time, in imperial literature, what we call ‘science’ was part of philosophy, and it is clear that the authors of our creation narratives had solid training in the principles of philosophical and rhetorical composition. The aim, in any case, was to compose a reasonable account of human origins, within established rhetorical parameters, drawing on established *mūthoi*.

V. Conclusions

I offered here a series of questions that drove my analysis. What constituted ‘myth’ in antiquity, and did it, at any point, resemble what Eliade termed the “sacred stories” of a community? My answer is no; although we find substantial theoretical discussion in antiquity of what constituted myth, the only people to call something like the content of our Nag Hammadi treatises ‘myth’ were those seeking to dismiss it. Irenaeus did so, partly by labeling the content of, for example, Valentinian treatises on the creation of the world as ‘myth’ using 1 Tim 1:4 as a sort of rhetorical sledgehammer, and partly by satirically over-literalizing Valentinian cosmogonic material, as in his Pumpkin speech from Book One, with which I began this paper.

I have in this contribution rejected the idea that these creation accounts reveal the sacred story of a community. Let me be clear, however, that of course any literary production is primarily a social product. But we should not think in terms of communities we might uncover by a clever and careful mirror-reading of the texts, but in terms of a loose network of second- and third-century intellectuals, who received a common training in rhetoric and philosophy, and who aimed to apply this education to a text – the Book of Genesis – which looked too much like the sort of irrational ‘myth’ that other contemporary rationalists eschewed. I see these treatises, then, as exercises in reconciling contradictions inherent in Genesis’s creation accounts, by applying principles of reasoning, elementary physics and biology, and, in short, the complete schoolroom curriculum of the second century. And remarkably, these authors managed, in a sense, to demythologize Genesis while, at the same time, managing to still consider it a sacred text, from which they could compose prayers, revelation discourses, and hymns. These texts were then, over time, transmitted, augmented, corrected, left uncorrected, and ultimately abandoned in Christian tradition, misunderstood, I think, as merely silly myths and endless genealogies, by those who themselves participated in their own acts of building a new Christian myth of origins, a history of the Church.

„Und sie wurde unter ihren Händen ein Baum“
(HA, NHC II,4 p. 89,26f.)

Die Hypostase der Archonten und die antike Mythologie

Ursula Ulrike Kaiser

Abstract

The article explores the mythology of the Nag Hammadi Treatise Hypostasis of the Archons (Hyp. Arch.) and highlights parallels of the escape of the spiritual woman and her transformation into a tree and the escape of Norea from the clutches of the archons with the well-known myth of Apollo and Daphne as well as with the myth of Pan and Syrinx. Certain features of the archons in the Hyp. Arch. are also interpreted in the light of the monstrous Typhon in ancient mythology. The Nag Hammadi text is shown to have a good knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman mythological material and to use it to create an exciting story full of action and allusions to entertain the informed reader.

In meinem Beitrag greife ich die Anregung des Symposiums auf, die Hypostase der Archonten als mythologischen Traktat zu betrachten. Dabei geht es mir nicht um eine Gattungseinordnung, sondern vielmehr um die mythologischen Stoffe in diesem Text überhaupt. Danach zu fragen liegt durchaus nahe, denn die vierte Schrift aus NH-Codex II befasst sich in großen Teilen mit der Erzählung von Schöpfungsmythen. Das ist zumindest das, was sofort ins Auge springt. Aber es wird zu zeigen sein, dass sich im antiken Kontext noch einige weitere mythologische Bezüge ausmachen lassen.

Zuerst einmal ist die erste Hälfte der Hypostase der Archonten vor allem eine Neuerzählung von Gen 1–6 in Auszügen. Sie ist darin ein gutes Beispiel für das, was Kirchenväter, wie Irenaeus, unter anderem so aufgebracht hat gegen die „gnostische“ Bibeldeutung. Denn sie kommt oft mit wenigen kleinen Umwandlungen der Schöpfungsgeschichte aus, um den Dingen eine völlig gegensätzliche Deutung zu verleihen. Besonders im Vergleich mit der im Codex nachfolgenden titellosen Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ (NHC II,5), die auffällige inhaltliche Ähnlichkeiten zur Hypostase der Archonten aufweist, hat die Forschung als

gemeinsame Quelle für beide Schriften eine „gnostische“ Genesis-Paraphrase vorgeschlagen.¹

Bernard Barc hat diese These noch weiter ausdifferenziert (und dabei in gewisser Weise auch kritisiert) und geht von *zwei* Quellen aus: *zum einem* von einem gnostischen „schéma anthropogonique“, das der titellosen Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“, der Hypostase der Archonten *und* dem Apokryphon des Johannes zugrunde gelegen habe und das im Wesentlichen unabhängig von der Erzählung der biblischen Genesis sei und nur teilweise Inspiration von Motiven aus diesem Buch aufweise,² und *zum anderen* von einer „Genèse véritable“, also von einer „wahren“ Entstehungsgeschichte der ersten Menschen, die – aus Sicht der Hypostase der Archonten – eben gerade *nicht* in der biblischen Genesis-Erzählung zu finden sei, sondern von der diese vielmehr nur eine Verfälschung darstelle.³

Wie auch immer man aber die Abhängigkeit der in der Hypostase der Archonten erzählten Schöpfungsgeschichte von den Ereignissen aus den ersten Kapiteln der biblischen Genesis betrachtet und mit welchen Vorzeichen von wahr und falsch: Mir soll es im vorliegenden Beitrag *nicht* um eine möglicherweise gemeinsam benutzte Genesisparaphrase gehen, sondern vielmehr um jene Züge des Schöpfungsmythos und insbesondere um Züge der Anthropogonie in der Hypostase der Archonten, die sich aus Genesis-Vorgaben, aus deren „gnostischer“ Umdeutung oder aus weiteren frühjüdischen Einflüssen *nicht* ohne Weiteres erklären lassen.

Dazu will ich die Begebenheiten kurz in Erinnerung rufen. Ich tue das, indem ich mich vorerst auf die *gemeinsamen* Motive der Anthropogonie in der Hypostase der Archonten, in der titellosen Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ und außerdem im Apokryphon des Johannes (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1 und BG 2) konzentriere,⁴ um erst im *Anschluss* daran die besonderen Elemente in der Version aus der Hypostase der Archonten zu betonen, um die es mir im Speziellen geht. Gemeinsam ist den drei genannten Texten zuerst, dass der Anlass zur Erschaffung des Menschen von einer himmlischen Stimme herrührt, die die Archonten vernehmen. Zugleich mit dieser Stimme wird auch ein himmlisches Bild sichtbar, das sich unten in den Wassern des Chaos spiegelt und das zusammen mit dem Aussehen der Archonten selbst zum Vorbild für die konkrete Gestaltung des Menschen wird. „Sie hatten [Staub] von der Erde genommen und [ihren Menschen] geformt, ihrem eigenen Körper entsprechend und [nach dem Bild] Gottes, das [ihnen] in den Wassern erschienen war“, fasst HA p. 87,29–33

¹ So z. B. H.-G. Bethge, „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ (NHC II,5), in: H.-M. Schenke/U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch (Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften II und III). Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Mitgliedern des Berliner Arbeitskreises für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften. Band 1: NHC I,1–V,1 (GCS.NF 8), Berlin 2001, 235–262, hier 239.

² B. Barc, 'L'Hypostase des Archontes'. *Traité gnostique sur l'origine de l'homme, du monde et des Archontes* (NH II, 4) (BCNH.T 5), Québec u. a. 1980, 5–19.

³ Barc, *L'Hypostase* (s. Anm. 2), 19–27.

⁴ Vgl. HA p. 87,11–89,31; UW p. 108,5–117,15; AJ NHC II,1 p. 14,13–24,16; NHC III,1 p. 21,16–31,10; BG 2 p. 47,14–62,8.

das Geschehen rückblickend zusammen. Alle drei Schriften bieten mit diesem zweifachen Vorbild für die Gestaltung des Menschen zugleich eine Lösung an für die auffällige Doppelung von εἰκὼν und ὁμοίωσις in Gen 1,26 LXX.

Aber das Gebilde der Archonten bleibt mangelhaft, es kann sich nicht bewegen und aufrichten. Das alles wird erst möglich durch eine weitere Intervention von oben, bei der in allen drei Texten eine weibliche Gestalt eine wichtige Rolle spielt: Es handelt sich um die Gestalt der Zoe, die auch Lebens-Eva oder geistige Frau heißen kann,⁵ und die damit bereits in ihrem Namen auf die mit ihr verbundene Lebenskraft verweist. Im Apokryphon des Johannes wird sie außerdem auch als Epinoia des Lichts bezeichnet (vgl. NHC II,1 p. 20,25 parr.). Sie ist es, die Adam zum Leben erweckt, die ihn aufrichtet und die ihn damit zugleich in einen Erkenntnisstand versetzt, mit dem er den Archonten überlegen ist. Die Archonten bemerken diese Veränderung sehr wohl, obwohl sie nicht sicher deuten können, was genau eigentlich passiert ist. In jedem Falle wollen sie an diese neue geistige Lebens-Kraft in Adam herankommen. Sie versenken ihn dazu in einen Schlaf⁶ und gestalten ein weiteres, nun eindeutig weibliches Geschöpf, genauer gesagt öffnen sie einfach nur Adams Seite und lösen die gewissermaßen schon vorhandene Frau aus Adam heraus, der zuvor androgyn war. Der Plan hinter dieser Aktion besteht darin, dass die Archonten glauben, mit Hilfe dieser Frau besser an das geistige Element im Menschen heranzukommen. Denn wenn sie sich dieser Frau einfach sexuell bemächtigten – so ihr Kalkül – könnten sie damit nicht nur sie, sondern auch die Lichtkraft in ihr in ihre Gewalt bringen. Aber dieser Plan misslingt, denn der geistige, der Licht-Anteil, der in diesem weiblichen Geschöpf verborgen ist, bleibt – wie es das Apokryphon des Johannes in aller Kürze mitteilt (vgl. AJ NHC II,1 p. 22,31) – für die Archonten der Finsternis unerreichbar. Denn die Epinoia des Lichts ist längst aus der Frau entwichen, als die Archonten sie vergewaltigen.

Die titellose Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ erzählt den gleichen Sachverhalt deutlich plastischer (vgl. p. 116,25–117,15): Sie *erzählt*, wie die wahre Eva die Archonten mit ihren Plänen auslacht, wie sie sie blendet, wegläuft und nur ihr Abbild bei ihnen zurücklässt. Und wie die Archonten dann nur dieses Abbild schänden, während die wahre Eva selbst *in den Baum der Erkenntnis hineingeht*. Diese Wendung im Mythos, die offensichtlich ein Genesismotiv aufgreift, es aber außerdem mit frühjüdischen Traditionen von der Schändung Evas durch die Schlange bzw. den Teufel vermischt, hat im Apokryphon des Johannes insofern aber doch eine Parallele, als dass dort bereits *vor* der Vergewaltigungsgeschichte die Epinoia des Lichts mit dem Baum der Erkenntnis gleichgesetzt wird (NHC II,1 p. 22,4f. parr.), allerdings ohne daraus *narrativen* Gewinn zu ziehen.

⁵ Vgl. HA p. 89,11; UW p. 113,33; AJ NHC II,1 p. 20,19 parr.

⁶ In UW differiert die Darstellung leicht: Die Archonten sehen die Licht-Eva und wollen Adam im Schlaf nur mitteilen, dass sie aus seiner Rippe sei, erschaffen selbst aber keine Frau.

In der Hypostase der Archonten dagegen wird die Geschichte noch einmal anders erzählt: Hier rettet sich die himmlische Frau vor den Nachstellungen der Archonten nicht nur, indem sie *in* einen Baum hineingeht, sondern indem sie selbst *zum Baum wird* (vgl. p. 89,17–31). Dass eine Frau auf der Flucht vor der unbändigen Lust eines männlichen Verfolgers zum Baum wird, ist nun aber wahrlich kein Genesisstoff mehr – und die Hypostase der Archonten identifiziert diese baumgewordene Frau auch nirgends mit dem Baum der Erkenntnis,⁷ sondern ruft hier einen ganz anderen Mythos auf: nämlich die Geschichte von Apollo und Daphne.

Diese Geschichte erzählt,⁸ wie die Bergnymphe Daphne vom Gott Apollo in eindeutiger Absicht verfolgt wird und sich nur retten kann, indem sie ihren Vater, den Flussgott Peneius,⁹ um Hilfe anruft, und wie dieser sie zum Baum werden lässt. Ein Bodenmosaik aus dem 2./3. Jahrhundert im Archäologischen Museum Antakya zeigt eine sehr schöne antike Darstellung dieser mythologischen Begebenheit. *Literarisch* am bekanntesten ist vermutlich die Version dieser Geschichte, die Ovidius in seinen *Metamorphosen* bietet (s. Anm. 8). Wichtiger noch, um den allgemeinen Bekanntheitsgrad der Geschichte einzuschätzen, ist aber, dass Lucianus in seinen „*Verae Historiae*“ die Begebenheit ganz beiläufig zur Illustration eines ganz anderen Sachverhalts benutzen kann: Denn nur um die merkwürdige Beschaffenheit der Rebfrauen zu erklären, die aus Mensch und Pflanze zusammengesetzt sind, fügt Lucianus hinzu: „[...] etwa so, wie man bei uns die Daphne darstellt, als sie gerade von Apoll ergriffen wird und sich in einen Baum verwandelt“.¹⁰ Der Mythos ist also als weithin bekannt vorauszusetzen.

Wenn die Hypostase der Archonten nun von der zum Baum werdenden geistigen Frau erzählt, wird einem damaligen Publikum nicht notwendig zuerst der Baum der Erkenntnis eingefallen sein, sondern vielmehr die fliehende und zum Lorbeerbaum werdende Daphne. Die Hypostase der Archonten tut einiges dafür, genau diese Anklänge an den antiken Mythos deutlich werden zu lassen und die Dramatik der Daphnegeschichte auch in die Verfolgung der geistigen Frau durch die Archonten einzubringen: So heißt es p. 89,26 f.: „Und sie wurde *unter ihren Händen* ein Baum (ἀσπ̄ οὐραν̄ ἤτοστον).“¹¹ Weder die Titellose Schrift noch das Apokryphon des Johannes schildern das in vergleichbarer Wei-

⁷ Diskutiert werden kann, ob eine solche Identifizierung unter Kenntnis der anderen Texte oder vergleichbarer Traditionen dennoch funktioniert bzw. ob die geistige Frau zum Baum des Lebens wird: vgl. dazu ausführlicher U. U. Kaiser, *Die Hypostase der Archonten* (NHC II,4). Neu hg., übers. und erklärt (TU 156), Berlin u. a. 2006, 228–230.

⁸ Vgl. bes. Ovidius, *Met.* 1,452–567.

⁹ Andere Überlieferungen (z. B. Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1,16; Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 8,20,1–4) nennen als Vater Daphnes den Flussgott Ladon.

¹⁰ Lucianus, *Verae Historiae* 1,8 (Übersetzung nach M. Baumbach, *Lukian: Wahre Geschichten*, Zürich 2000, 10).

¹¹ Die Form ἤτοστον kann zwar auch einfach „durch sie“ heißen, die oben gegebene Übersetzung legt sich aber näher.

se. Weiterhin trägt zur Annäherung an den antiken Mythos bei, dass die Handlung in der Hypostase der Archonten von Anfang an von Liebe und Begierde getrieben ist: Weil sich die Archonten in das Spiegelbild der Unvergänglichkeit *verlieben*, wollen sie es besitzen und erschaffen deshalb den Menschen, damit er die im Bild erschienene Gestalt anlocke und damit sich wiederum das Bild in das von ihnen gemachte Gebilde verliebe. Als sie dann die geistige Frau bei Adam stehen sehen, ist es wiederum reine *Begierde*, die sie treibt und aus der heraus sie diese Frau besitzen wollen, und erst in zweiter Linie ist es das Kalkül, dass sie dadurch auch der geistigen Macht, über die diese Frau verfügt, habhaft werden könnten.

All das erinnert an *Apollo*, der, von Amors Liebespfeil getroffen,¹² gar nicht anders kann, als Daphne bis zum bitteren Ende zu verfolgen und zu begehren. Allerdings ist spätestens hier auch eine Einschränkung der Parallelen angebracht: Denn mit dem göttlich schönen *Apollo* haben die Archonten tatsächlich wenig gemein. Weitaus passender scheint an dieser Stelle eine ganz ähnliche Verwandlungsgeschichte zu sein, die ebenfalls von einer Nymphe, nämlich von *Syrinx*, erzählt, die sich vor den wollüstigen Nachstellungen des Gottes *Pan* ebenfalls nur zu retten weiß, indem sie ihren Vater, den Flussgott *Ladon*, um Hilfe anruft und sich von ihm in Schilfrohr verwandeln lässt.¹³ Die hybride Gestalt *Pans*, aus Mensch und Ziegenbock zusammengesetzt, passt viel eher zum Bild der teriomorphen Archonten. Auch das mit *Pan* verbundene tierische Element der Triebhaftigkeit ist in der Art und Weise, wie die Archonten in der Hypostase der Archonten dargestellt werden, überall präsent.

Anders als *Daphne* oder *Syrinx* benötigt die geistige Frau in der Hypostase der Archonten aber *keine* Hilfe einer göttlichen Vatergestalt, um sich zu retten; ebenso wie dies auch für die Lebens-Eva in der Titellosen Schrift und die *Epinoia* des Lichts im Apokryphon des Johannes gilt. Und doch erzählt die Hypostase der Archonten *auch* vom Hilferuf zum göttlichen Vater und von dessen Eingreifen, denn die Geschichte der Verfolgung und Rettung doppelt sich: Nicht nur die geistige Frau muss vor den Archonten und deren triebgesteuerter Zudringlichkeit fliehen. In der zweiten Variante vielmehr, die es *nur* in der Hypostase der Archonten so gibt, ist es die Tochter *Evas*, *Norea*, die in ganz ähnlicher Weise wie ihre geistige Mutter von den Archonten bedrängt wird (HA p. 92,18–93,2). Auch wenn *Norea nicht* zum Baum wird, um gerettet zu werden, stellt der Text der Hypostase der Archonten doch einen ausdrücklichen Bezug zu der anderen Verfolgungs- und Verwandlungsgeschichte her, indem die Archonten *Norea* gegenüber behaupten: „Du musst uns dienstbar sein *wie auch deine Mutter Eva*“ (p. 92,30f.). Diese Behauptung stimmt zwar

¹² Vgl. Ovidius, *Met.* 1,467–474. Die Liebe Apollos zu *Daphne* wird jedoch nicht notwendig auf Amors Eingreifen zurückgeführt (vgl. z. B. Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 8,20,4).

¹³ Vgl. z. B. Ovidius, *Met.* 1,689–712.

nicht wirklich, weil die Archonten nicht die wahre Eva, sondern nur ihr Abbild vergewaltigt hatten, die Situation ist deshalb für Norea aber nicht weniger bedrohlich. Und sie tut daher genau das, was ihre Mutter, die geistige Frau, nicht tun musste, was Norea aber wiederum in große Nähe zu Daphne und Syrinx bringt: Sie ruft laut nach oben zum Gott des Alls um Hilfe: „Hilf mir vor den Archonten des Frevels und errette mich aus ihren Händen – schnell!“ (p. 93,1 f.) Die Hilfe wird ihr zuteil – nicht durch Verwandlung allerdings, sondern durch die Erscheinung des großen Engels Eleleth, der sie über ihren wahren Ursprung belehrt (p. 93,2–13).

Zum Glück also muss Norea nicht zum Baum werden, denn für jene, für die der Text der Hypostase der Archonten rettendes Wissen vermitteln soll, wäre wenig gewonnen, wenn von Norea nur ein Ruhmeskranz bliebe, den die Archonten, wie Apollo, aus ihren Zweigen flechten könnten, oder eine Flöte, die sie, wie Pan, aus dem Schilfrohr zusammenbänden. Norea darf durch das Eingreifen von oben vielmehr Norea bleiben und wird zur zentralen Offenbarungsmittlerin im Text. Zugleich jedoch erinnert sie mit dem antiken Mythos im Hintergrund an das Schicksal der geistigen Frau und an ihre mythologischen Abbilder, an Daphne und an Syrinx, die ihre Unbeflecktheit zwar retten konnten, aber nur unter Aufgabe ihres Körpers. Nicht immer also bleibt bei der Rettung des geistigen Anteils im Menschen sein körperlicher Teil unbeschadet.¹⁴ Das erzählt jeder dieser verschiedenen Mythen.

Auf noch eine weitere Gestalt des klassischen Mythos will ich zum Schluss zu sprechen kommen: Denn so, wie die Archonten in der Hypostase der Archonten Züge von Pan tragen und ihm in ihrem triebhaften Verhalten in nichts nachstehen, so weisen sie auch Züge eines weiteren Wesens der antiken Mythologie auf, nämlich des Monsters schlechthin: *Typhon*.¹⁵ Besonders Jaldabaoth, der Vater und Anführer der Archonten, lässt sich in einigen Punkten mit Typhon vergleichen, die nicht nur auf die Hypostase der Archonten beschränkt sind: So lässt sich etwa die Entstehung Jaldabaoths aus der Materie mit Typhons Herkunft aus der Erde vergleichen. Folgt man der Dritten Homerischen Hymne an den delischen Apollo (300–355),¹⁶ so ist Hera seine Mutter, die ihn allein – ohne

¹⁴ Karen King bemerkt dazu: „This strategy for dealing with pain and suffering in the world closely resembles that of the ascetic who also must practice psychic dissociation in the denial of the physical body“ (K. L. King, *Ridicule and Rape, Rule and Rebellion. “The Hypostasis of the Archons”*, in: J. E. Goehring u. a. [Hg.], *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World*. In Honour of James M. Robinson, Sonoma, CA 1990, 3–24, hier 14); vgl. insgesamt die ausführliche Betrachtung des Daphne-Mythos Kings aaO., 12–15. Vgl. dazu auch Kaiser, *Hypostase* (s. Anm. 7), 231. Auch Birger A. Pearson (B. A. Pearson, *She Became a Tree – A Note to CG II*, 4: 89, 25–26, in: *HThR* 69 [1976], 413–415) geht, wenn auch nur kurz, auf die Bezüge zwischen der HA und dem Mythos von Apollo und Daphne ein.

¹⁵ Vgl. zur Beschreibung Typhons bes. Hesiod, *Theog.* 820–880.

¹⁶ In anderen Überlieferungen ist Typhon (oder Typhoeus – die Namensformen variieren) dagegen entweder nur der Erdgeborene (Ovidius, *Met.* 5,321–331; Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 351; Aeschylus, *Septem contra Thebas* 522f.) oder Gaia selbst wird als seine Mutter bezeichnet (vgl.

ihren Göttergatten Zeus – und nur unter Mithilfe der Erde, Gaia, gebiert, und zwar aus Zorn darüber, dass wiederum Zeus zuvor Athene allein aus seinem Haupt geboren hat.¹⁷ Das aus diesem Alleingang Heras entstehende Monster ist, wie Pan, eine Mischung von Mensch und Tier und wird wiederholt als Fluch für Götter und Menschen bezeichnet.¹⁸ Am Ende kann ihn Zeus schließlich mit seinem Blitz besiegen und in den Tartarus werfen. In vergleichbarer Weise berichtet die Hypostase der Archonten, dass auch Jaldabaoth von der Tochter der Pistis Sophia, von Zoe, in seinen unrechtmäßigen Machtansprüchen zurückgewiesen wird. Der Text erzählt, wie Zoe ihm daraufhin in das Gesicht bläst, ihr Atem zu einem feurigen Engel wird und dieser Engel Jaldabaoth bindet und in den Tartarus unterhalb des Abgrunds wirft (HA p. 95,8–13).

Schließlich zeigt eine weitere Begebenheit in der Hypostase der Archonten die große Ähnlichkeit der Archonten zu Typhon und führt uns zum Schluss noch einmal mitten in die Anthropogonie hinein, von der wir ausgegangen waren: Es ist die Szene, in der die Archonten vergeblich versuchen, ihr menschliches Gebilde aufzurichten, indem sie ihm den Lebensatem einhauchen wollen, wie es auch Gen 2,7 beschreibt. Schauen wir zuerst auf die Variante dieser Begebenheit, wie sie das Apokryphon des Johannes berichtet: Hier hören wir davon, dass Jaldabaoth aufgrund eines *Ratschlags der oberen göttlichen Wesen* in den am Boden liegenden Menschen hineinbläst, um ihn zu beleben. Das Ganze gelingt: Der Mensch bewegt sich daraufhin tatsächlich und sein ganzer Leib wird stark und leuchtet (AJ II p. 19; BG 2 p. 51/52 hier ohne Leuchten). Allerdings ist das Ganze eine *List*, denn Jaldabaoth wird auf diese Weise dazu gebracht, den von der göttlichen Mutter gestohlenen Geist an sein Geschöpf abzugeben.

In der Hypostase der Archonten dagegen gibt es keinen solchen gestohlenen Geist. Auch hier bläst zwar der Anführer der Archonten in das Gesicht seines Geschöpfes hinein, das daraufhin seelisch wird, mehr jedoch tut sich nicht. Der Mensch bleibt weiterhin am Boden liegen und kann sich noch immer nicht aufrichten. Daraufhin erzählt der Text, wie sich nun alle Archonten um ihr Geschöpf bemühen und „wie die Wirbelwinde“ blasen (vgl. p. 88,3–9). Auch hinter den Wirbelwinden steht vermutlich Typhon als Vorbild,¹⁹ der in der Antike als Herr der zerstörerischen Winde gilt und etymologisch auch dem Taifun seinen

z. B. Vergilius, *Georgica* 1,278 f.). Hesiod, *Theog.* 820–822 erwähnt neben Gaia als Mutter auch den Tartarus als Vater.

¹⁷ Den Zorn Heras auf Zeus erwähnt auch Stesichorus; vgl. Fragment 239 der Edition von D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*. Band 3: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others (LCL 476), Cambridge, MA 1991, 166–167: „Typhoeus: Hesiod makes him son of Gaia (Earth), Stesichorus son of Hera, who bore him without a father in order to spite Zeus.“

¹⁸ Vgl. zur Ähnlichkeit Jaldabaoths mit Pan insgesamt auch J. E. Goehring, *A Classical Influence on the Gnostic Sophia Myth*, in: *VigChr* 35 (1981), 16–23, hier 19f.

¹⁹ Das kopt. Wort *χαττοϋ* übersetzt vermutlich griech. *τύφος/τυφῶς*; vgl. ausführlicher Kaiser, *Hypostase* (s. Anm. 7), 200f.

Namen gegeben hat.²⁰ Es ist kaum überraschend, dass eine solche Behandlung das Geschöpf der Archonten nicht wirklich aufzurichten und lebensstüchtig zu machen vermag.

Zum Schluss: Was bringt es, all diese mythologischen Parallelen heranzuziehen? Es zeigt, so meine ich, wie gut der Verfasser der Hypostase der Archonten in den mythologischen Traditionen seiner Zeit beheimatet ist – sei es die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Genesis, frühjüdisches Traditionsgut oder die griechisch-römischen Göttergeschichten und wie gut er mit dem verfügbaren mythologischen Material umzugehen weiß. Durch Anspielung auf weithin bekannte Mythen erreicht er Ausdrucksstärke und vor allem – eine spannende Erzählung. Anders als die titellose Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ und das Apokryphon des Johannes, die ihre Schöpfungsgeschichte immer wieder durch erklärende Passagen unterbrechen und kommentierend vor- und zurückschauen, *erzählt* die Hypostase der Archonten einfach und hat dabei etwas ganz Wichtiges erkannt: Mythen wollen nicht so sehr erklärt werden, sondern erklären sich selbst *indem sie erzählt werden*.

²⁰ Ebenso wie die griechische Wurzel τῦφῶν spielt auch chinesisch „tai fung“ für „großer Wind“ eine Rolle bei der Entstehung des Wortes: vgl. Art. Taifun, Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, Onlineausgabe (2012), eingesehen am 4. 10. 2015.

The Apocryphon of John: Genre and Christian Re-Making of the World

Karen L. King

Abstract

Im Mittelmeerraum der ersten Jahrhunderte n.Chr. schufen die Christinnen und Christen Erzählungen, die viele der vorherrschenden Formen des Verständnisses von Gott, der Menschheit und der Welt veränderten, interpretierten, herausforderten und kritisierten. Aus dieser Perspektive beteiligte sich die frühchristliche Literatur an nichts geringerem als an der Erschaffung eines neuen Weltbildes. Dieser Essay untersucht das Apokryphon des Johannes zusammen mit der Johannesapokalypse um zu zeigen, wie Diskurse über Autorenfunktion und Gattung (Apokalypse) sowohl ermöglichten als auch begrenzten, wie christliche Erzählungen geformt wurden, sowie welche Absichten und Auswirkungen dies hatte. Der Essay konzentriert sich auf drei Themen: die Praxis der Zuschreibung von Schriften, die Komplexität von Gattungen sowie Wahrheitseffekte.

“Stories change our experience of the way things are,” writes Michael Jackson.¹ Just so, in the Mediterranean world of the first centuries C. E., Christians told stories that both reproduced and challenged many of the dominant ways in which people traditionally understood the nature of God, humanity, and the world. They told stories about the present, the past, and the future that were based, they said, on the surety of divine revelation and the truth of how things really are. To inhabit such stories reoriented people, sometimes dramatically, to inherited religious practices, to social-economic and political structures, to family relations, and indeed to their own bodies. From this perspective, early Christian literature was involved in nothing less than remaking the world.

Christians did not, however, invent their stories *ex nihilo*, but drew selectively upon the contents and genres of the most prestigious and wide-spread literature of their times. This means that by attending to the literary characteristics of early

¹ M. Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen 2006) 30.

Christian works,² it becomes possible to grasp how literary works participated in Christian projects of re-making the world. This essay will examine one work where these efforts are abundantly apparent, *The Apocryphon of John* (*Ap. John*).

Four copies in Coptic are extant: three from the fourth to fifth century Nag Hammadi codices (II,1; III,1; and IV,1) and one from the fifth to sixth century Berlin Codex.³ The four copies constitute three separate versions translated independently from Greek, of which two represent shorter versions (BG and III), and two a single longer version (II and IV). While there are many variants among these three versions, the most notable generic consideration is that the longer version contains an extensive list of body parts, and a concluding first-person narrative account of the triple descent of Christ-Pronoia into the world. Lundhaug and Jenott have argued that “cenobitic monks in Upper Egypt are the most likely people to have produced and read” the Nag Hammadi codices.⁴ They also venture that the incised leather cover of the Berlin Codex indicates that it was owned by an abbot named Zacharias.⁵ This literary history indicates a complex stemma of transmission, and situates the extant manuscripts within Christian monasticism.

In addition, scholars have pointed to a number of striking similarities to other literature.⁶ The theogony of the Barbeloites described by Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,29 resembles that of *Ap. John* 4.22–14.2.⁷ Some have seen the material in Irenaeus as evidence for a second century composition of *Ap. John*, while others consider that both works relied on an earlier “Gnostic document.”⁸ In either case, scholars date the original composition of *Ap. John* as it now stands to shortly before or after Irenaeus (i. e., late second to early third century).

Another tractate from Nag Hammadi, *Allogenes*, contains a description of the transcendent Deity (XI,1 62.27–63.25) with parallels to *Ap. John* II 3.20–33. It,

² Over the course of the conference, several foci were discussed, including the parameters of “early Christian literature” (see the introductory discussion of Christoph Marksches in this volume, “Offene Fragen zur historischen und literaturgeschichtlichen Einordnung der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften”). This essay assumes “early Christian literature” to refer the period from the first to the end of the fifth century C. E., a span which includes all the existing Coptic manuscripts of *Ap. John*.

³ For a synoptic version of the Coptic texts of *Ap. John* with English translation, see M. Waldstein and F. Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John* (NHS 33; Leiden 1995).

⁴ H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 9; Tübingen 2015) 267.

⁵ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins* (see n. 4), 163–164.

⁶ The edition of Waldstein and Wisse includes the texts and translations of the relevant “parallels” discussed below from *Allogenes*, Irenaeus, Theodoret, and Theodore bar Konai, as well as the Bala’izah fr. 52 (*Apocryphon of John* [see n. 3], 184–195).

⁷ See also Theodoret, *Haer. Fab.* 13. This fifth century work may be based on a Greek version of Irenaeus.

⁸ For example, Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John* (see n. 3), 1; M. Waldstein, “Das Apocryphon des Johannes (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1 und BG,2)”, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch Studienausgabe* (2nd ed.; ed. by H.-M. Schenke et al.; Berlin 2010) 74–76.

too, is assigned to a cenobitic context by Lundhaug and Jenott.⁹ A Greek version of *Allogenes* may have been known by the third-century Neo-Platonist Plotinus, suggesting both a date of composition in the third century and communication among Platonizing circles.¹⁰ It is interesting, however, to note that *Allogenes*, which modern scholars classify as Sethian (Gnostic), is inscribed in Codex XI with a set of Valentinian works. This would seem to indicate, not separate Sethian, Valentinian, and orthodox social groups, but circulation among monastics, at least in the fourth to fifth centuries.

An intriguing Coptic fragment from the monastery of Apa Apollo at Deir el-Bala'izah in upper Egypt contains a pedagogical dialogue between a teacher (Jesus?) and his student John, which discusses passages from Genesis and mentions "sealing with the five powers" (Bala'izah fr. 52),¹¹ all prominent features of *Ap. John*. Dated to the fourth century on paleographic grounds, the fragment illustrates again how these topics were in circulation in monastic settings of the period.

A final parallel is offered by the eighth century Syriac theologian Theodore bar Konai, who presents a list of the holy creatures that created the various parts of the human body according to an *Apocalypse of John* he says was used by Audius. This parallel falls outside our chronological scope of "early Christian literature," but is interesting in showing that materials shared with *Ap. John* are still in use in this late period.

All together, these materials illustrate a complex stemma for *Ap. John*, with related materials evident from the second to eighth centuries, in a variety of contexts (Christian heresiological polemics, a Platonizing philosophical school, and especially Christian monasticism) and locales (Rome, Egypt, and Syria). We can conclude, based on dating and evidence of circulation primarily in Christian contexts, that *Ap. John* belongs to a history of early Christian literature.

The analysis here will treat especially the version of *Ap. John* in Nag Hammadi Codex II,1,¹² and will focus in particular on three topics: attribution practices, generic complexity, and truth-effects. In order to situate this work within the context of early Christian literature more generally, comparison will be offered selectively with features of the *Apocalypse of John (Rev)*.

⁹ See especially the discussion of sub-groups in Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins* (see n. 4), 208–214 and 231–233.

¹⁰ See the discussion of K. L. King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God with Text, Translation and Notes to NHC XI,3 Allogenes* (Santa Rosa, CA 1995) 47–50; D. M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God. Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia, PA 2014).

¹¹ For a discussion of the relation of this fragment to *Ap. John*, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins* (see n. 4), 162–163.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *Ap. John* are from Nag Hammadi Codex II, the edition of Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John* (see n. 3). English translations are my own.

I. Attribution practices

Much current discussion of attribution centers around questions such as: Who actually composed a work and is the assigned attribution correct? While these are worthwhile lines of investigation for contemporary historiography, my interest in this section is focused instead on other questions: What is the relation of attribution practices to genre and what work does attribution do in early Christian practices of remaking the world? Answering these questions requires shifting attention from “*Who* is an author?” to “*What* is an author?,” from defining the term “author” and determining who fits the definition accurately to investigating author-function as discourse.¹³ This shift assumes that practices of attribution are historically and socially contextual. What it means to ascribe a work (or *not* to do so) varies with time and place. For example, modern attribution practices signal unique creativity, ownership, and copyright (“authorship”) in line with modern social and economic conditions. Conventions such as quotation marks and footnotes, or institutions such as law courts and the US Library of Congress Copyright Office enable and reproduce these understandings of authorship. In modern author-function, various roles are distinguished (author, editor, and publisher, among others). Confidence in the stability of transmission relies on technologies able to reproduce multiple exact copies, like the printing press or the copy machine. Significant challenges, however, are appearing with new technologies, such as the internet, which destabilize transmission and copyright, as well as the modern notion of authorship itself. As in antiquity, modern attribution practices also vary with genre; only certain kinds of works have “authors” or are eligible for copyright.¹⁴ The recipe or the folk tale do not have “authors,”

¹³ Here I follow M. Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. by P. Rabinow; New York 1984) 101–120. The following discussion of ancient author-function is elaborated in K. L. King, “What is an Author? Ancient Author-Function in *The Apocryphon of John* and *The Apocalypse of John*,” in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures Among Jesus’ Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg* (ed. by W. Arnal et al.; BEThL 285; Leuven 2016) 15–42.

¹⁴ Of course, not all genre apply attribution, for example, school exercises, graffiti, traditional know-how, local myths, or magical spells. As Foucault, *What is an Author?* (see n. 13), 109, notes, “In our civilization, it has not always been the same types of texts which have required attribution to an author” (see also 105–109 and 113). We can hypothesize that for various reasons such unattributed (“anonymous”) writings were not perceived to require author-function (see K. Van der Toorn, “Authorship in Antiquity. Practice and Perception”, in *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* [ed. by K. Van der Toorn; Cambridge, MA 2007] 31–33), or anonymity may have created this effect (i. e., anonymity may be a claim to truth, stability, and place within tradition). That could change in some cases, for example, if a scroll were being filed in a library organized by names, it might be assigned an author in order to know where to find it; so, too, if a work needed to be situated so as to give it authority (for example, by linking gospels to apostles), it might receive attribution. In other genre, however, not only is attribution given but it is valorized by activating certain shared values and assumptions, such as respect for age and antiquity, social hierarchies of power and prestige,

while homework and scientific treatises do. Finally, the functions of attribution are not universal, but belong to particular historically and socially-culturally structured fields and the types of social groups and the activities that operate within them. For example, letter-writing, crafting legislation, test-taking, and academic research signal particular social groups that have distinct institutional bases, social-economic effects, and aims or functions, such as communication between named parties, group collaboration, certification, or promotion.

What are the characteristics of ancient author-function? I have argued more extensively elsewhere that ancient discourses of author-function share three characteristics, variably deployed: 1) to indicate the source of the work's contents, 2) to guarantee stable transmission, and 3) to situate the work within some broader context.¹⁵ The three are not all always present or equally emphasized in every work, but these are fundamental ways in which ancients might understand what was being communicated when a particular name (individual or collective, from the epic past or the near-present) was assigned to a literary work. To be clear, none of the claims made in a given work would necessarily be seen by ancient readers as "true" in the sense of conformity to ancient (or modern) standards of accuracy. Like modern readers, they too could ask and care about whether attribution was accurate or not. The difference is that for ancients accepting or rejecting a particular attribution was based on judging the accuracy of claims about the character or status of the source, the reliability of transmission, and the appropriate place of the work within a particular context (e. g., as apostolic lineage, Johannine Christianity, canon, heresy), while for moderns correct attribution also includes judgments about claims to individual creativity and intention, ownership, or copyright, but excludes lines of transmission from author-function.

From the perspective of modern author-function, modern scholarship also judges the accuracy of attribution claims based on fit to particular narratives, such as the standards of historicism or religious-theological typologies. For example, the attribution of the *Ap. John* to the apostle John is generally considered by modern historians to be false, a case of the widespread practice of pseudonymity. It is also frequently classified as Gnostic, and this tends to negatively impact judgment that the author could be a prominent disciple of Jesus. Additionally, some scholars regard *Ap. John* as a composite work, not unified by any single authorial intent (individual creativity or purpose). Thus they ascribe its production to an editor, not an author. For others the real author is identified with the impersonal narrator (e. g., an anonymous Gnostic author).¹⁶ Despite

and moral character (including motives). In antiquity these specific forms of valorization – age, virtue, social standing, and relation to divinity – were deployed in author-function to naturalize discursive claims to truth.

¹⁵ See King, "What is an Author?" (see n. 13).

¹⁶ See the discussion of Z. Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe. Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John* (NHMS 52; Leiden 2006) 18.

the consensus about false attribution and anonymity, however, whoever ascribed the work to the apostle John would seem to have intended that *Ap. John* be placed within the purview of early Christianity.

If we instead consider *Ap. John*'s practices of attribution in terms of the three characteristics of ancient author-function, we can better see how attribution functions and to what ends.

In *Ap. John* (NHC II), the title of the work, "*The Apocryphon according to John*," appears in an indented and decorated subscript (32.8–10). It describes the contents as an "apocryphon" and implies a restrictive relationship to John, although whether as composer, scribe, owner, or character in the narrative is not clear.¹⁷ Ascription in the title is, however, only one device of author-function, and it tells us very little.

What else does the text say about John and the roles he plays? The prologue offers more information:

"The teaching [of the Savi]or and the re[vel]ation of the mysteries [together with the things] hidden in silence a[nd those (things) w]hich he taught to Joh[n, his dis]ciple" (*Ap. John* 1.1–4).

Here John is identified as the recipient of the Savior's oral instruction and revelation. The source of the teachings is the Savior, who appears to John as a polymorphic likeness, identified as the undefiled and unpolluted God: the Father, the Mother, the Son (*Ap. John* 2.13–15).¹⁸ John's prophetic role is confirmed and further elaborated in the main section where John gives a first-person account of the Savior's teachings (*Ap. John* 2.17–31.37). The first characteristic of author-function, indication of source, applies not to John but to the divine Savior. The prestige and authority of the work is secured rhetorically by ascribing its content to this highest possible source.

The Savior assigns John two additional roles: scribe and apostle. At *Ap. John* 2.23–25, he commissioned John to transmit the teaching to select others ("fellow spirits from the immovable generation of the perfect Human"). At the end of the revelation, the Savior repeats his commission to John, emphasizing now that he is to write the teachings down and give them to his "fellow spirits" (31.28–30). In the final frame, the impersonal narrator also tells readers that "the Savior gave

¹⁷ In his careful and illuminating work on authorship and narrative voices in *Ap. John*, Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 7–20, already noted the complexity of the presentation of the figure of John. I draw on his careful and illuminating work while yet redirecting some of his insights toward questions of author-function.

¹⁸ See the discussion of W. C. van Unnik, "Die 'geöffneten Himmel' in der Offenbarungsvision des Apocryphon Johannis", in *Apophoreta. Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Dezember 1964* (ed. by W. Eltester and F. H. Kettler; BZNW 30; Berlin 1964) 269–280; G. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologique: l'Apocryphon de Jean et ses sources", *VC* 35 (1981) 412–434; Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 25–40.

these things to him so that he might write them down and keep them secure” (*Ap. John* 31.32–34). After the Savior leaves, John does not, however, immediately sit down and begin to write, but instead goes to his fellow disciples and relates the teaching to them orally (*Ap. John* 31.4–5). John is represented as a scribe who records the revelation in writing and as an apostle to other disciples. He is thus not only the recipient of revelation, but also the first in the line of stable transmission to fellow spirits and disciples, both orally and in secure written form. The ascription of the treatise to John clearly does not mean that he is the source of its teaching, but that he guarantees stable transmission. This stability is further guaranteed by passing it down only to reliable recipients, that is, fellow spirits and disciples.¹⁹

Arguably, the inscribed book also takes on author-function, insofar as it enables secure transmission (*Ap. John* 31.33–34). Its reliability is guarded against potential corruption by a curse from the Savior intended to fall on anyone who would sell the book for material gain of any kind (*Ap. John* 31.34–32.1). Moreover, by providing the story of *Ap. John’s* origin as a material object (an inscribed book), the narrative deploys the discourse of ancient author-function to claim the book to be the reliably inscribed material memory of the oral revelation transmitted from the divine Savior through the prophet-apostle-scribe John to its intended audience.²⁰ In this sense, material objects can carry author-function, serving as one link in the chain of transmission by providing a basis for performing the Savior’s teaching anew as it is encountered by new readers and transmitters. The second characteristic of author-function, guaranteeing stable transmission, is expressed in the first instance by attribution to John, and in the second instance to the book itself and to those who received the teaching orally.

Finally, with regard to the third feature of ancient author-function, the ascription to John situates *Ap. John* overtly within the broader gospel tradition by identifying John as the brother of James and son of Zebedee and by mentioning “other disciples” (e. g. Matt 10:22–24²¹), and even more specifically by placing

¹⁹ By attending to guaranteeing reliable transmission as one characteristic of ancient author-function – one not present in modern author-function –, it may be argued that the function of indicating specific recipients is not primarily about limiting salvation to an elite, but about secure transmission.

²⁰ The revelation is to be revealed in “mystery” specifically to “fellow spirits” of “the immovable generation” and passed on “in secret.” For discussion of the seeming contradiction between the command for secrecy and the act writing down the revelation to promulgate it, between secrecy and *Ap. John’s* universal mission to save all of humanity (except apostates), see K. L. King, “Mystery and Secrecy in *The Apocryphon of John*”, in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty* (ed. by J. Turner et al.; NHMS 76; Leiden 2011) 61–85.

²¹ The Gospel of John mentions “the sons of Zebedee” (21:2) in a list of disciples gathering after the resurrection of Jesus, but does not specifically identify them with James and John. See also P. Perkins, “Christian Books and Sethian Revelations”, in *Coptica-Gnostica-Manichaica*:

Ap. John within the Johannine tradition. Moreover, the many connections to the Gospel of John²² point toward an exegetical interest, situating *Ap. John* as fulfilling Christ's promise to return (John 14:3) and filling gaps in the Johannine gospel by offering a fuller narrative of salvation within a cosmic framework of creation and destruction.²³

The result is that author-function (identifying source, securing transmission, and situating the work) is distributed among the Savior, John, the impersonal narrator, and the material artifact (the book). Different figures or voices have different characteristics and occupy different positions – or the same figure can even occupy a variety of positions, as does John the disciple, the prophet, the scribe, the apostle – but they all work simultaneously to express a coherent author-function.²⁴

Situating *Ap. John* within the Johannine *gospel* tradition, however, lets one feature stand out prominently, namely that in the Gospel of John, John is not represented as a seer. Notably, a figure named John is featured prominently as a seer in another book ascribed to John: the Apocalypse of John (Rev). As we'll see, despite the crucial differences in the content of *Ap. John* and Rev, their deployments of author-function are strikingly similar.

As in the *Ap. John*, attribution in Rev is found in the title, a third-person prologue, and first person account. According to the prologue (Rev 1:1–2), the ultimate source of the revelation is God (Rev 1:1–2); the revelation is mediated through a line of transmission from God to Jesus Christ to his angel to John to God's slaves. In this way, author-function (source and transmission) is initially distributed among four figures. Their number is multiplied in the visionary rev-

Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk (ed. by L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier; BCNH.E 7; Québec 2006) 697–730; B. Barc and L. Painchaud, “La réécriture de l'Apocryphon de Jean à la lumière de l'hymne final de la version longue”, *Muséon* 112 (1999) 317–333.

²² See J. D. Turner, “The Johannine Legacy: The Gospel and Apocryphon of John”, in *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. by T. Rasimus; NT.S 132; Leiden 2009) 105–144.

²³ Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 23–24, suggests, “One of the primary functions of the *Apocryphon of John* [...] is to supply, in the form of a narrative (διήγημα), the interpretive key for the enigmatic content of the Fourth Gospel, and to make up for it[s] communicative weakness and polemical short-comings.” See also K. L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA 2006) 235–238.

²⁴ Pleše, too, has emphasized “the impressive list of the roles John assumes” (as character in the story, protagonist, witness, and interlocutor) and the accompanying shifts in narrative perspective and genre (*Poetics* [see n. 16], 10–16). He sees this multipositionality of John as a problem for alleged authorship, given that “multiplying the points of view from which the action is narrated” “complicates the meaning of this attribution” (*Poetics* [see n. 16], 10). He adjudicates this problem in part by distinguishing between the “narrator” and the real “author” (an “anonymous Gnostic”; *ibid.*, 18) – an implementation of the modern notion of authorship. The framework of author-function, however, resolves the problem, or rather undermines the problematic itself by noting Foucault's view that author function can be distributed over a number of figures and narrative positionalities (“What is an Author?” [see n. 13], 111–113).

elation itself (Rev 4–22), where many more characters participate in the transmission to John, transporting him, instructing him, and showing him various sights. John also occupies several positions: slave of Christ (Rev 1:1; 22:9), ecstatic seer (Rev 1:10; 22:8) and prophetic recipient of revelation (see Rev 22:9), witness (one who gives testimony; Rev 1:1–2), and scribe (Rev 1:11.19, et al.). John describes himself as a persecuted follower of Jesus who was living on the island of Patmos when he heard a loud voice instructing him to write everything he would see and hear in a book and send it to seven specific churches (Rev 1:9–20). Although he does not go forth as an apostle,²⁵ he does communicate the revelation in writing through letters, thereby acting as a mediator in the line of transmission. Following the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2–3), the core of the revelation contains John’s account of his heavenly travels, visions, deeds, and all that he overheard, as well as all that was said directly to him. Numerous voices are recorded, but the entire is represented as John’s eye- and ear-witness account as a kind of participant-observer, as in *Ap. John*. Rather than confuse the reader, however, this complex distribution of author-function among God, Christ, angels, John, an impersonal narrator, and the material artifact works to strengthen the attestation that the source of the revelation given to John is divine, and that its transmission is secure.

Thus in both *Ap. John* and Rev, John is a prophet who receives revelation from the divine and transmits it in writing to specified, insider recipients (Rev 1:4: the seven churches in Asia; *Ap. John* 3.18: fellow spirits of the immovable generation of the perfect Human). As in *Ap. John*, the truth of the work’s content is based on the claim that John has seen and heard directly what his writing testifies. Also like *Ap. John*, while the revelation given to John in Rev is both visual and auditory, he is commanded to inscribe it in a book (Rev 1:11; 22:16). Thus the *Apocalypse* as material artifact itself participates in author-function insofar as it is a link in the chain of stable and reliable transmission; it is the material presence of John’s voice to those who hear the message of the book (Rev 1:3). At the end they are warned that anyone who adds or subtracts from “the words of the prophecy of this book” will be cursed with plagues and excluded from the tree of life and the holy city (Rev 22:18–19), a warning that seems aimed at ensuring the stability of textual transmission.

In summary, by analyzing the attribution practices in *Ap. John* and Rev in terms of the three characteristics of ancient author-function, we can see how attribution is working to establish the authority and truth of the texts’ contents by ascribing them to a divine source and a prophetic intermediary (or intermediaries). Attribution works to ensure confidence in the stability of transmis-

²⁵ John is never explicitly called an apostle in Rev, but his statement that he was on Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1:9) may indicate such a role was implied, or alternatively it may simply indicate that he was exiled to Patmos because of persecution.

sion by confirming the character of the intermediary (John) and addressing the security of the written line of scribal transmission (the material book). Finally, attribution to John situates both works within larger Christian (gospel and/or prophetic) narratives as on-going revelation of the Savior, providing a “view from heaven” of how things really are. Indeed by associating its John with features familiar from the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John,²⁶ and the Apocalypse of John,²⁷ *Ap. John* is among the first to point toward a wider Johannine tradition.

Attending to ancient author-function thus lets us see how ancient attribution practices function and to what ends. Analysis of *Ap. John* and Rev illumines crucial strategies in how Christians asserted the truth of their stories and their reliable transmission, and the ways that particular deployments of the discourse of ancient author-function shaped early Christian narratives that emphasize on-going revelation.²⁸

II. Generic complexity

It is widely recognized that all versions of *Ap. John* incorporate materials from Genesis, *1 Enoch*, Jewish Wisdom literature, Platonizing philosophy, ancient astrology, and the Gospel of John, among others.²⁹ Most often allusions are dispersed throughout the work, fully merged in the unity of the story. Sometimes,

²⁶ The *Apocryphon of John* in particular attempts to situate itself with regard to the Gospel of John by filling in the gaps, or as Pleše puts it, “Translated into modern terms, John’s request for vision may reflect the desire on the part of some readers of the Fourth Gospel to elucidate its obscure message and widen its limited perspective by writing a revisionary supplement – the *Apocryphon of John*” (*Poetics* [see n. 16], 10). Modern scholarship in contrast uses the rubric of reception history to situate *Ap. John* (and other apocryphal works) in the history of early Christian literature, whether as exegetical, complementary, or an attempt to displace or replace the Gospel of John. *Ap. John* itself, however, appears to write the story of Christianity as one of on-going revelation, and to locate itself as part of that prophetic tradition.

²⁷ The ascription to John of Patmos does not explicitly connect Rev with the New Testament gospels or letters of John, but later Christians will do so, beginning at least with Justin (*Dial.* 81,6).

²⁸ I do not, however, mean by this to suggest that *Ap. John* and Rev’s similar deployments of author-function are due to direct literary dependence; for that, there is no evidence. Rather I want to suggest, as an hypothesis, that these similarities in practices of attribution are due in large part to their participation in the genre of apocalypse.

²⁹ See B. A. Pearson, “*1 Enoch* in the *Apocryphon of John*”, in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman* (Oslo 1995) 355–367; B. A. Pearson, “Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature”, in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. by M. E. Stone; Assen and Philadelphia 1984) 443–481; J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH 6; Québec 2001) 221–253; Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16); King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (see n. 23), 177–238; Barc and Painchaud, “La réécriture de l’*Apocryphon de Jean*” (see n. 21).

however, these materials appear in relatively well-defined generic units. Comparison of the three versions clearly indicate that the longer version of *Ap. John* (NHC II/IV) includes two such units: a catalogue of body parts with associated demons (*Ap. John* 15.29–19.10) and the Pronoia “hymn” (*Ap. John* 30.11–31.25), as well as other smaller changes throughout.

How are these intertextual allusions and evident differences among the versions to be interpreted? One approach has been to situate *Ap. John* in the history of Christianity by reconstructing hypothetical stages of composition and editing, and then aligning those with stages in the linear unfolding of Christian or Sethian Gnostic history.³⁰ For example, by disaggregating the common materials into distinct literary sources and genre, such as Jewish apocalypse or Platonizing treatise, some scholars have characterized *Ap. John* as a compilation whose original sources were secondarily combined and then superficially Christianized by substituting Christ with the Sethian figure Autogenes, and by the addition of the frame narrative and other minor elements, such as the question and answer format of the dialogue between the Savior and John or allusions to the Gospel of John.³¹

Work on other early Christian literature, however, suggests such approaches to interpreting the evidence can be problematic. Yarbrow Collins, for example, in discussing the genre of the Gospel of Mark, notes that it is “rooted in specific Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic traditions” that included a variety of genre: prophetic legend, apocalypse, biography, and history. “Gospel,” she states, is less a genre for Mark than an indication of its view that “the good news is that the divine plan, which had been foretold, is about to be put into effect.”³² Moreover, she sees Mark’s gospel as attempting to achieve “a universal perspective” whose significance extends to “the situation of the entire human race in the world.”³³ The Christian character of Mark is not generally considered to be in doubt simply

³⁰ See for example, Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism* (see n. 29), 255–301.

³¹ See, for example, S. Arai, “Zur Christologie des Apocryphons des Johannes”, *NTS* 15 (1968/69) 302–318; B. A. Pearson, “From Jewish Apocalypticism to Gnosis”, 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 Occasions of the 50th Anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery* (ed. by S. Giversen et al.; Historisk-filosofiske Skrifter 26; Copenhagen 2002) 146–163; B. A. Pearson “*Apocryphon Johannis* Revisited”, in *Apocryphon Severini presented to Sören Giversen* (ed. by P. Bilde et al.; Aarhus 1993) 155–165; Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism* (see n. 29), 68 and 136–140; A. H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody, MA 1996) xx–xxi; Waldstein, “Das Apocryphon des Johannes” (see n. 8), 74–76. For an overview of these positions, see Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 15, esp. n. 8. Pleše himself argues, “While this sort of archeological search for sources, cultural stimuli, and intellectual borrowings may be revealing, it tends to remove from view a more important question of what the *Apocryphon of John* was intending to convey in its own right [...] and shows little respect for the unity of a literary creation” (*Poetics* [see n. 16], 17).

³² A. Yarbrow Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN 2007) 16; for the discussion of gospel as a genre, and especially as a new and specifically Christian genre, see pp. 15–22.

³³ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark* (see n. 32), 18.

because it draws on Jewish apocalypse and Hellenistic biography in the context of writing Christian “history.” Indeed this participation in generic breadth is central to its project of universal mission. Similarly the range of intertextual materials and genre cited in *Ap. John* (and *Rev*), including the narrative frames and dialogue, are constitutive of its universalizing story. From my perspective, Mark offers an excellent example of Christian re-making of the world comparable to that of *Ap. John* and *Rev*.

Pleše counters the argument that specifically Christian materials are present in *Ap. John* only in the frame narrative and rarely elsewhere, by pointing out that Luke 24:13–53 presents a risen Christ interpreting scripture to his disciples: “Christ’s hermeneutical strategy, as described in Luke, is therefore not much different from the Savior’s exegesis of Genesis and Wisdom literature in the ‘core document,’ or ‘Ur-text,’ of the *Apocryphon of John*.”³⁴ There is strong evidence in antiquity that bringing known materials into new arrangements was an accepted practice in literary composition. In his work on the morphology of apocalypse, J. J. Collins includes narrative frames and dialogue as standard elements in his paradigm.³⁵ Arguably, *Ap. John* used the narrative frame of revelation to John to incorporate a variety of smaller genre and other material through a set of literary practices common in ancient literature: an encompassing plot structure, “re-telling,” re-contextualization, narrative elaboration, allegory, and identification of characters from different stories with each other.³⁶ The use of such devices points not to linear chronological development of religious history, but to a style of literature open to generic “mixing” as well as modification of content.

To understand this generic complexity, typological approaches that define genre in terms of a set of characteristics are less useful. Such approaches define genre by extrapolating individual characteristics from particular texts, grouping them typologically as collective identifiers of particular genres, and then using these characteristics aggregately to determine which texts fit within the generic boundaries thus constructed.³⁷ Even when this approach is nuanced to include a wider array of features and functions, it is clear that characteristics can belong to more than one genre, and individual texts only evince some characteristics.³⁸ The method thus can divert questions of genre into problems of managing the incongruities between the paradigm and the texts, without illuminating the

³⁴ Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 17; see also pp. 8–9.

³⁵ J. J. Collins, “Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre”, *Semeia* 14 (1979) esp. 5–10.

³⁶ King, *Secret Revelation of John* (see n. 23), 177–190.

³⁷ See Collins, *Apocalypse* (see n. 35), 1–20; F. T. Fallon, “The Gnostic Apocalypses”, in *Apocalypse* (ed. by Collins [see n. 35]), 123–158; M. Krause, “Die literarischen Gattungen der Apokalypsen von Nag Hammadi”, in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1972* (ed. by D. Hellholm; Tübingen 1983) 621–637.

³⁸ See D. Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John”, *Semeia* 36 (1986) esp. 23–25.

fluidity of generic construction or the possibilities for creative manipulation within the parameters of generic constraints.

Alternative approaches have turned toward cognitive science. Newsom notes, “The key insight of the cognitive theory of categories is that conceptual categories are not best thought of as defined by distinctive features possessed by every member of the group but, rather, by a recognition of prototypical examples that serve as templates against which other possible instances are viewed.”³⁹ According to this framework, she argues, what “triggers recognition of a genre” is not its “elements,” but “the way (elements) are related to one another in a *Gestalt* structure that serves as a cognitive model.”⁴⁰ The advantage of this approach for considering *Ap. John* is that “Because the *Gestalt* structure contains default and optional components, as well as necessary ones, individual exemplars can depart from the prototypical exemplars with respect to default and optional elements and still be recognizable as an extended case of ‘that sort of text.’”⁴¹ From this perspective, one can think of particular texts like *Ap. John* and *Rev* as participating differentially in the genre of apocalypse, rather than as cases that only more or less contain the typological characteristics of the genre.

I have found Derrida’s study of the “law of genre” to be particularly helpful. Rather than conceive of discrete genre being “mixed,” he understands the relation of individual texts to genres in terms of citation and participation. “Citation” refers not to direct quotation or even allusion but to how texts are identifiable as conforming with and participating performatively in an iterable model (genre) that allows both resemblance and deviation.⁴² We can speak of a work not as *belonging* to a genre, but as *participating* in genre. So-called “generic mixing,” then, is reconceptualized from combining separate generic units to citing multiple genre, sometimes simultaneously. Indeed some genre may be characteristically complex in terms of form.

Frow usefully speaks of generic complexity by contrasting a simple, univocal genre that speaks in its own ‘voice’ using a singular formal logic with a complex multivocal genre whose “formal logic allows or encourages the incorporation of other forms, other ‘voices.’”⁴³ Complex genres can include, he says, not only specific texts, but structured pieces like proverbs, general forms of organization (e.g., genres, speech varieties or conventional plot structures), or bodies

³⁹ C. A. Newsom, “Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genealogy”, in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. by R. L. Troxel et al.; Winona Lake, IN 2005) 437–450, here 442.

⁴⁰ Newsom, “Spying” (see n. 39), 444.

⁴¹ Newsom, “Spying” (see n. 39), 444.

⁴² See J. Derrida, “The Law of Genre”, *Glyph* 7 (1980) 202–232; J. Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”, in *Limited Inc.* (ed. by G. Graff; trans. by S. Weber and J. Mehlman; Evanston 1988) 1–23, esp. 18.

⁴³ J. Frow, *Genre* (London and New York 2006) 41.

of knowledge.⁴⁴ Any complex genre, he argue, “is built out of allusions to and stylisations of other genres, and constructs its authority and credibility on this basis.”⁴⁵ Within this approach to genre, intertextuality points to how “(a)ll texts are shaped by the repetition and the transformation of other textual structures. [...] The intertext, the precursor text, is never singular and never a moment of pure origin.”⁴⁶ From this perspective, for example, the use of sources such as Genesis, *I Enoch*, or Plato’s *Timaeus* in *Ap. John* is not evidence of the work’s origin in Jewish or Platonizing social groups, but rather of its generic complexity operating in Christian literary practices of remaking the world.

The concept of generic complexity is helpful, too, in understanding the epistemological work that genres do in the social organization of knowledge.⁴⁷ Genres both enable and constrain ways of looking at the world. Particular genre, for example, lead to expectations of certain kinds of thematic content, i. e., what to expect in a letter, a contract, a recipe, a joke, an apocalypse, or a philosophical treatise. These forms organize knowledge about matters particular to each, and thus enable and constrain different ways of construing truth and reality. They are socially and historically contextual. Each literary work has its own particular relation to the genre system operating in its historical period.⁴⁸ “System” here refers not to stability or closure, but to the way that “we can identify a genre because we are at some level aware of other genres that it is not, and it is this relationship that is systemic.”⁴⁹ To put it another way, Frow writes: “No text is unique; we could not recognise it if it were. All texts are relevantly similar to some texts and relevantly dissimilar to others.”⁵⁰ *Ap. John* and *Rev* demonstrate ways of organizing knowledge through complex genre that both shape and constrain the stories they tell.

Genre systems also indicate relative hierarchical valuation, for example, medical treatises are more prestigious than spells, or philosophical dialogues than folk tales. Social groups and institutional contexts also show preferences for particular genre (e. g., the philosophical school for the dialogue or treatise; the civic festival for tragedy; the exorcist for the spell), so that the valuation of genres are linked with the social status and relative prestige of the groups who use them and the institutional contexts in which they are used. These in turn are linked with the perceived value of their social-political-material effects (e. g. to train an elite, to cement social solidarity, or to heal). Thus the form, logics, expectations of topics or themes, hierarchical value, and (implied) social-institutional context

⁴⁴ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 48–49.

⁴⁵ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 45.

⁴⁶ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 48 and 49.

⁴⁷ See Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 72–99.

⁴⁸ For the discussion of genre systems, see Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 72–77.

⁴⁹ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 125.

⁵⁰ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 48.

of genre both enable and constrain particular ways of construing the world, of saying how things are. Genres not only organize knowledge, but they indicate *what* can be constituted as knowledge and *how* things can be known. Genre is deeply implicated in judgments about the plausibility of claims to truth and authority. A literary history of Christianity is thus enriched by investigating how genre shapes Christian teaching and how it conveys that such teaching is true and authoritative.

Ap. John evinces this kind of generic complexity. Although typologically classified as an apocalypse,⁵¹ it cites multiple forms: impersonal narration, a vision account, dialogue, catalogue, and narrative episodes, among others. In practice, the citation of multiple genre is common among apocalypses⁵² – we see it, too, in the Apocalypse of John⁵³ – so that it is useful to think of apocalypse as a complex genre.

This complexity enables several important effects in re-making the world. First of all, it allows for a wide range of materials, such as Genesis and *Timaeus* to be appropriated and incorporated into the Christian story by situating them within the revelation from the Savior to John. The materials themselves are thereby Christianized, that is, they now belong to the Christian story. As part of that story, they take on new meanings and significance.

An illustrative example is the long catalogue detailing the name of the particular *daimon* (creator or ruler) associated with each part or aspect of the body in *Ap. John* 15.29–19.10.⁵⁴ In his discussion of canon, Smith discusses catalogues as “a subtype of the list whose major function is that of information retrieval.”⁵⁵ Catalogues possess codes of classification; their contents are heterogeneous. While they are in principle open, he argues that “an account of why the items have been brought together can be given, transmitted, and learned.”⁵⁶ The catalogue in *Ap. John* is largely ordered according to a three-fold composition of the body: “limb by limb” (with body parts listed from head to toenails, right and left), the ruling aspects of the soul, and the material elements and passions. The

⁵¹ See Fallon, “Gnostic Apocalypses” (see n. 37), 130–131. The titling of a work as “apocryphon” or “apocalypse” is not important to determination of genre. Even as “apocryphon” does not indicate the genre of *Ap. John* but only that its contents are “hidden,” so, too, the use of the term “apocalypse” in Rev 1:1 does not indicate a genre, but characterizes the content as revelation. The use of the term “apocalypse” as a genre is later (see J. Z. Smith, “A Twice-Told Tale: The History of Religions’ History”, *Numen* 48/2 [2001] 131–146). Arguably this is the case for “gospel” as well (see Yarbrow Collins, *Mark* [see n. 32], 19–22).

⁵² See Newsom, “Spying” (see n. 39), 448.

⁵³ Rev cites many of the same genre as *Ap. John* (visions, dialogue, narrative episodes, etc.), but others that are distinctive, notably the letter form.

⁵⁴ *Ap. John* 19.6–10 mentions a work called “the book of Zoroaster” which contains the names of those in charge of other passions, but it is unclear whether the catalogue itself derives from this book.

⁵⁵ J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago 1982) 45.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Imagining Religion* (see n. 55), 45.

open and heterogeneous aspects of this catalogue are displayed by its doublets and incongruities. The items have been brought together, I have argued elsewhere, for use in healing through exorcism,⁵⁷ and its systematic orderliness no doubt aided in retrieving the necessary information in an efficient way.

Once incorporated within *Ap. John*, the catalogue's function is shifted and enlarged. The catalogue is now positioned within the revelation from the Savior to John, where he is detailing the creation of the first human by the lower powers (the Chief Ruler, his authorities and angels). In this position, the catalogue's function is not only for healing, but also for illustrating how the body of the primal human (and by extension all humans) came to be under the charge of the lower powers. The initial immobility of the body exposes the impotence of the powers that created it. The primal human becomes a living being only as the divine Spirit is breathed into it, and "the body moved and gained strength and it was luminous" (19.32–33).

By contextualizing the catalogue within the story of creating and enlivening the archetypal human body, *Ap. John* appropriates healing exorcism for the Christian story and simultaneously re-interprets it by subordinating all such healing practice to the life-giving power of the divine Mother. The reality of demonic influences on human well-being – a view shared by Christians and non-Christians alike – is now naturalized within the Christian story. Placing the catalogue within the genre of prophetic revelation affirms the divine source of the teaching, thereby guaranteeing the reliability of this information about the human condition and the efficacy of Christian exorcism. The fact that the catalogue is clearly a secondary addition lets us see the process and effects of incorporating diverse cultural materials into the ambit of Christianity all the more clearly.

From the perspective of those acquainted with materials in other contexts, the new meanings can appear to be wrong. They also can function as criticism. For example, to portray the God of Genesis not as a good and all-powerful creator, but as an ignorant, malicious, and ultimately impotent demi-god not only offends traditional belief, it also allows for a systemic critique of unjust power relations in the lower world. The contrast with the true Deity above creates a framework within which the violence and injustice of the world's rulers can be exposed and overcome.⁵⁸ So, too, Platonism provides not only the materials with which to depict the true nature of the transcendent Christian God, but as with Genesis, its appropriation is not neutral. The demiurgic creator god of *Ap. John* (Yaldabaoth) creates everything according to the heavenly model (*Ap. John* 12.33–13.5), but the result is not the best possible world as in the *Timaeus*, but a deceptive and violent parody of divine goodness that indicts the rulers of this world as well

⁵⁷ King, *Secret Revelation of John* (see n. 23), 152–153.

⁵⁸ See M. A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism.' An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ 1996) 54–79; King, *Secret Revelation of John* (see n. 23), 89–121 and 157–173.

as those of the lower planetary sphere.⁵⁹ Through this kind of intertextuality, generic complexity allows for appropriation, resignification, and critique.

The incorporation of diverse materials can also enlarge the universalizing scope of the Christian story. As we noted above, particular genre lead to expectations of certain kinds of thematic content. Apocalypses discuss similar topics: “what is above” (the heavenly world), “what is beneath” (cosmology and the “lot of human beings on earth”), “what was beforetime” (primeval past), and “what is to come” (eschatology).⁶⁰ These topics in *Ap. John*, however, are structured following the plot of the *Timaeus* into an account of “what is, was, and will be.”⁶¹ Thus the complex citation of both apocalypse and philosophical dialogue structures the social organization of knowledge in *Ap. John* as a story from the unfolding of the divine world (“what is”), through all of creation and human history (“what was”), to its eschatological *telos* (“what will be”).⁶² The generic complexity of apocalypse naturalizes the confluence of similar thematic content from different genre (primal epic and dialogue) and different social-cultural spheres (Jewish synagogue and philosophical school). In this way, philosophical topics and materials become intelligibly integrated with scriptural references, visions, cosmic battle, and the topic of secrecy within a frame of visionary revelation.

But while the generic complexity of apocalypse affords a huge scope for the Savior’s revelation – and the relevance of the Christian message – it also constrains what can be talked about and how such knowledge can be organized. Knowledge of theology and anthropology, for example, are organized as “historical” description and events (in heaven and on earth) along teleological lines (from The Beginning until The End). There is no room for the speculative inquiry of the Platonic dialogue. Moreover, for modern sensibilities that treat anthropology in medical, biological (evolutionary), or psychological generic frames of analysis, the apocalyptic organization of such knowledge appears as “myth.” In antiquity, however, the effect of the generic interplay of revelation with Plato’s dialogues is that the “probable” or “true myth” of the *Timaeus* is interpreted, corrected, and transformed into the absolute truth of divine revelation.⁶³

⁵⁹ See King, *Secret Revelation of John* (see n. 23), 198–205.

⁶⁰ Following Pearson, “From Jewish Apocalypticism” (see n. 31), 156–159. See also Collins, *Apocalypse* (see n. 35), 6–8.

⁶¹ See Pleše, *Poetics* (see n. 16), 43–73.

⁶² See *Ap. John* II 2.16–19.

⁶³ My dictionary (*The New Oxford American Dictionary* embedded in Microsoft Office 365) defines “myth” as a kind of story about supernatural beings and events, and associates it with the terms “traditional,” “false,” “fictitious,” and “imaginary.” Such a definition invokes binaries such as myth/history, natural/supernatural, or fact/fiction. In modern scholarship on religion, the term “myth” is fraught with epistemological, even ontological issues about reality and truth, belief and imagination (see e.g., P. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* [Chicago 1988]). The term “myth” thus conveys a complex history far beyond any clear classification of the genre of a work (see Denzey in this

Finally, attention to the use of dialogue illustrates how the genre system operates to establish and reproduce hierarchies of value. Dialogue appears in both *Ap. John* and Rev as communication from a divine revealer (or revealers) to the recipient, John, and is a common feature of apocalypses. But in the ancient world, dialogue is also associated with historical or epic narrative, dramatic performance, philosophical epistemology, and pedagogical instruction. The citation of the dialogue form therefore enables potential citation of these other genre as well. By citing philosophical-school dialogue (genre) within the prophetic frame, *Ap. John* is effectively able to naturalize the presence of philosophical contents, and also to appropriate the social and cultural status, authority, truth, and intellectual prestige associated with elite philosophical schools, while simultaneously subordinating both philosophical genre and content to the divine speech of prophetic revelation. This subordination may be considered a Christian intervention in the ancient genre system.

In summary, performative citation of varied genre in the apocalypse frame works variously toward appropriating, naturalizing, reinterpreting, correcting, and/or authorizing diverse intellectual contents and social-cultural contexts *as specifically Christian truth*. Generic complexity serves to situate all knowledge within a specifically Christian re-making of the world by portraying the truth of how things are, what really happened, and final ends. *Ap. John*, like other early Christian works such as the Gospel of Mark or the Apocalypse of John, is thus at once an iterative citation of the known and a revolutionary act of world-making.⁶⁴ It claims to offer a secure framework for re-making the everyday world and for guiding human actions within it.

III. Truth effects and authority

A text's genre works to generate certain truth effects. As Frow puts it:

Relations between speakers [...] involved a negotiation and an agreement (or disagreement) about the kind of truth status that is to be attributed to what is being talked about: it may be fictitious or non-fictitious, a matter of opinion or absolute truth, a truth of this world or of some other; it is 'keyed' and qualified in particular ways. Credibility, authority, and emotional tone are effects of these rhetorical relations and of their formal expression [...]⁶⁵

volume), and I think it is not useful for writing a literary history of early Christianity. For a discussion of the apologetics in talk about "the tension between myth and history," see A. Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies Near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century," *HTHR* 104/4 (2011) 456–457.

⁶⁴ For elaboration of this point, see King, "Mystery and Secrecy" (see n. 20).

⁶⁵ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 75.

The Christian teachings of *Ap. John* and *Rev* sometimes departed significantly from more broadly accepted storyings of “reality.” We do not have to appeal to inner-Christian strife or Roman persecution to think that the more or less heavily veiled criticism of certain economic-social-power relations and highly valued intellectual and theological views would have made those who believed and taught these “new” teachings susceptible to reproach and rejection, and sometimes overt violence. Plausibility was thus very important. How does genre operate in the task of convincing readers that its contents are true and authoritative in the face of perceptions that Christian teaching was “new” and “deviant?”

As is already clear, in both *Ap. John* and *Rev*, author-function in apocalypses indicates that the expected truth status is absolute by claiming the literary work is an accurately transmitted record of the voice and vision of God or God’s immediate representatives. The claim to the authority of the text’s message is thus directly tied to the claim of the divine status of its source.

The emotional tone of the apocalypse genre also engenders truth effects. The “John” figure of both *Ap. John* and *Rev* expresses amazement, fear, and awe as well as careful attention and obedience. Insofar as these reactions conform to readers’ expectations about the proper reception of revelation, they lend a sense of affective realism to the fantastic events of theophany. If fear and awe are engendered in the reader as well, the facticity of the affective experience in one’s own bodily sensations (pulse, skin temperature, and so on) would also work to make the revelation *feel* real and therefore seem true.

“Historical” contextualization in the frame narratives also works to establish plausibility by setting the ‘new’ teaching into a specified time and place. *Ap. John* counters charges of being false by directly addressing the problem of rejection. It frames the Savior’s revelation as a response to the Pharisee’s charge that John’s teacher has led him astray from the traditions of his fathers. The context is a Jewish follower of Christ going to the Jewish Temple, a scenario that both unbelievers and Christians may have considered realistic. The man is distressed and goes out into the desert – a place rhetorically well-established for confronting doubt and receiving insight. For Christians, the plausibility of this event as a real occurrence is further substantiated (rhetorically) by populating the scene with known characters: John, a Pharisee, the Savior, and other disciples. So, too, the *Apocalypse of John* supplied a specific time, location, and type of character that provided a realistic setting for its revelation.

Within *Ap. John*, the generic theme of secrecy further contributes to the plausibility of the Savior’s teaching by explaining why it is that no one has known this teaching until now. The revelation, he says, is to be revealed specifically to “fellow spirits” of “the immoveable generation,” and the revelation is given in “mystery” and passed on “in secret.”⁶⁶ “Mystery” refers not only to the content

⁶⁶ Elsewhere, I have argued that the pervasive themes of mystery and secrecy in *Ap. John*

of the Savior's revelation, but also to its mode of disclosure. It indicates a hermeneutics for deciphering the true meaning of scripture and tradition, as well as for interpreting events in a world created and ruled by ignorant powers, that is, to counter purposeful deception in the context of battle between forces of good and evil. Together these themes help clarify not only the kind of truth revealed by the Savior, but also how and why that truth had not been uncovered before now. In this and other ways, the expected generic theme of secrecy generates a kind of truth effect.

Finally the generic expectation that the revelation be written down – as also in the Apocalypse of John – means that the material books' very existence provide evidence of their contents' veracity. That is, the realness of the material artifact generates its own truth effect, which then impacts the truth-status of the book's content. The logic is: "The angel/the Savior commanded John to write it down, and look – here it is!" If the book is real, the contents are true.

Other examples could be presented, but hopefully these are sufficient to illustrate how genre generates certain truth effects through attribution practices, emotional tone, "historical" contextualization, and themes such as secrecy.

IV. Conclusion

To quote Frow one last time, genre "acts as a constraint upon – that is, a structuring and shaping of – meaning and value at the level of text for certain strategic ends; it produces effects of truth and authority that are specific to it, and projects a 'world' that is generically specific."⁶⁷ By attending to author-function, generic complexity, and their truth effects, it becomes possible to see in action Christians remaking the world, and not just any world, but a world of a particular generic kind. These topics let us see more clearly how discourses and literary forms both enable and constrain the shaping of Christian narratives and what strategies were deployed to persuade readers that their teachings were true and authoritative. The comparison of *Ap. John* and *Rev* illustrates how much productive work participating in a common genre system did in the formation of ancient Christianity, even as we see these two visions of reality and truth converge and diverge, leaving a legacy of what we call Johannine tradition or, more capaciously, early Christian literature.

point to multiple meanings and strategic (rhetorical) functions (see King, "Mystery and Secrecy" [see n. 20]).

⁶⁷ Frow, *Genre* (see n. 43), 73.

III. Liturgische Texte in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

Prayer in the Nag Hammadi Codices

Hugo Lundhaug

Abstract

In den frühen Phasen der Beschäftigung mit den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften bestand eine gewisse Verwunderung bezüglich des Vorkommens von Gebeten in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices, da „Gnostiker“ logischerweise wenig Verwendung für Gebete haben sollten. Jetzt, nachdem die Kategorie „Gnosis“ aufgegeben wurde, ist es möglich, das Problem aus einer neuen Perspektive zu betrachten. Die vorliegende Untersuchung geht vom ägyptisch-monastischen Kontext der Nag-Hammadi-Codices aus und zeigt, inwiefern mehrere Gebete oder Besprechungen von Gebeten in den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften enge Parallelen in zum „Mainstream“ gehörenden christlichen und monastischen Schriften des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts besitzen.

In the *Dialogue of the Savior*, Jesus introduces a short doxological prayer with the words, “So when you glorify, do like this,”¹ demonstrating to his apostles, and by extension the readers of Nag Hammadi Codex III, how they should praise the Father. While such references to explicit instruction on liturgical practice is more the exception than the rule in the Nag Hammadi Codices, there is nevertheless much to be said on the topic of prayer in these codices – far more, in fact, than can be dealt with in the space of the present contribution.

Prayers are found scattered throughout the Nag Hammadi Codices. There are some that stand on their own, as complete texts in themselves, such as the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* or the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, and others that are embedded in narratives, sermons, letters, or doctrinal treatises. Prayers are quoted partly or in their entirety in texts as varied as the *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5), the *(Second) Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,4), the *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6), the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5), *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1), *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,1), the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI,6), and *On the Anointing* (NHC XI,2a), to mention just a few texts scattered among the Nag Hammadi Codices. In addition to such texts that include or constitute prayers, some of the

¹ *Dial. Sav.* 121.3–4. All translations from *Dial. Sav.* are my own, based on the Coptic text of S. Emmel, *Nag Hammadi Codex III,5: The Dialogue of the Savior* (NHS 26; Leiden 1984).

Nag Hammadi Codices also include prayers added by the scribes in colophons. Prayer is also discussed as a topic in itself in such texts as the *Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II,2), the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3), the *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6), the *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5), and the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. Within the scope of the present article it is only possible to take a closer look at some of this material.

Much has happened in Nag Hammadi studies in the seventy years since the discovery of the Codices, and we have now thankfully moved beyond such stereotypes and generalizations about “Gnosticism” that caused such a fine scholar as Eric Segelberg to express a certain degree of surprise at the very presence of prayers in the Nag Hammadi texts, since “Gnostics” should have no need for praying.² While Segelberg had some trouble understanding “why the Gnostics should pray at all,”³ and suggested that certain texts containing apparently quite normal Christian prayers, such as the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, was only secondarily Christianized so as to lure Christians into “Gnosticism” or *vice versa*,⁴ we can now ask different questions, without invoking the category of “Gnosticism” at all when analyzing the Nag Hammadi texts.⁵ Thus, when we look at the phenomenon of prayers in the Nag Hammadi Codices, “Gnosticism” does not need to be included in our box of analytical tools.

One important consequence of not having to study the Nag Hammadi texts through the lens of “Gnosticism” is that it opens up for the study of these texts as parts of the broader history of Christianity. From such a perspective, the present article will show how some of the prayers and discussions of the practice of praying found in the Nag Hammadi Codices are closer to the “mainstream” of early Christianity’s literary and theological history than is often acknowledged.

It is increasingly being acknowledged that the textual transmission of the Nag Hammadi texts is likely to have been highly fluid, and that it is therefore not unproblematic to treat the texts as they appear in these codices as if they were practically identical to their hypothetical originals.⁶ In this contribution I have

² E. Segelberg, “‘Prayer Among the Gnostics?’ The Evidence of Some Nag Hammadi Documents”, in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers Read at the Seventh International Congress on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 8th-13th 1975)* (ed. by M. Krause; NHS 8; Leiden 1977) 55. Cf. also G. W. MacRae, “Prayer and Knowledge of Self in Gnosticism”, in *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism* (ed. by D. J. Harrington and S. B. Marrow; Good News Studies 26; Wilmington 1987) 224.

³ Segelberg, “Prayer Among the Gnostics” (see n. 2), 55.

⁴ Segelberg, “Prayer Among the Gnostics” (see n. 2), 63–64.

⁵ This is not least due to the highly important studies by M. A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton 1996), and K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA 2003).

⁶ On textual fluidity and rewriting in the Nag Hammadi Codices, see H. Lundhaug, “An Illusion of Textual Stability: Textual Fluidity, New Philology, and the Nag Hammadi Codices”, in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (ed. by L. I. Lied and H. Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin 2017) 20–54;

therefore chosen to focus on the prayer-texts in the context of the manuscripts themselves, whose primary context of production and use were most likely fourth- and fifth-century Egyptian monasticism.⁷ The following presentation will be neither systematic nor exhaustive, but the focus will be on those prayers and discussions of prayer in the Nag Hammadi Codices that find close parallels in literature related to Christianity and monasticism in fourth- and fifth-century Egypt. Indeed, there are several important fourth- and fifth-century works on prayer related in some way to the Egyptian monastic tradition, several of which will be dealt with below.⁸

It should be noted, however, that there are also many prayers in the Nag Hammadi Codices that are quite different from the ones I will treat here. There are prayers in the Platonizing Sethian texts, for example, and in such texts as *Melchizedek* (NHC XI,1) and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII,1), that present many additional questions and difficulties of genre and contents, such as the inclusion of phrases and formulas that seem to find their closest parallels in “magical” incantations rather than in more “orthodox” prayers.⁹

For the present purposes I will operate with a broad understanding of prayer. Mark Kiley’s definition of prayer as “an address to or celebration of a deity”¹⁰ is apt, and includes such subcategories as “petition, intercession, thanksgiving and adoration.”¹¹ John Cassian, writing in the early fifth century, at a time when the Nag Hammadi Codices may well have been in use, understood the general term “prayer” (*oratio*) to refer to any kind of communication with God, whether petitionary or doxological, individual or communal, audible or silent, verbal or wordless.¹² Greatly inspired by the teachings of Origen and Evagrius Ponticus,

L. Jenott, “Reading Variants in *James* and the *Apocalypse of James*: A Perspective from New Philology”, in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (ed. by L. I. Lied and H. Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin 2017) 55–84; S. Emmel, “Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission, and the Nag Hammadi Codices”, in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (ed. by J. D. Turner and A. McGuire; NHMS 44; Leiden 1997) 34–43; L. Painchaud, “La classification des textes de Nag Hammadi et le phénomène des réécritures”, in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification: Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 septembre 1993* (ed. by L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier; BCNH.E 3; Québec 1995) 51–85; A. Camplani, “Sulla trasmissione di testi gnostici in copto”, in *L’Egitto Cristiano: Aspetti e problem in età tardo-antica* (ed. by A. Camplani; SEAug 56; Rome 1997) 121–175.

⁷ For the monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 97; Tübingen 2015).

⁸ See C. Stewart, “Prayer”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. by S. A. Harvey and D. C. Hunter; Oxford 2008) 746.

⁹ E. g., *Zostrianos* 51.24–52.25; *Allogenes* 54.6–37.

¹⁰ M. Kiley, “General Introduction”, in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine* (ed. by M. Kiley et al.; London 1997) 1.

¹¹ Kiley, “General Introduction” (see n. 10), 1.

¹² C. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York 1998)

the 9th and 10th chapters of his *Conferences* constitute “the most extensive single treatment of prayer in early monastic literature.”¹³ In the Nag Hammadi Codices we find examples of the types of prayer discussed by Cassian, and his reflections on the practice and significance of prayer have close parallels in several of the Nag Hammadi texts. Cassian’s writings on prayer are thus highly relevant to the discussions and quotations of prayer in the Nag Hammadi Codices, as are several other contemporary texts dealing with this topic, as will become apparent.

I. On Prayer

In some of the Nag Hammadi texts prayer is discussed as a topic. As already mentioned, the question of how one should pray is addressed in the *Dialogue of the Savior*, where the answer is provided by Jesus in the form of an example:

So when you glorify, do like this: “Hear us, Father, as you have heard your only-begotten Son and have received him, [giving] him rest from all [...]” (*Dial. Sav.* 121.3–8)

The following lines in the manuscript are unfortunately marred by lacunae, but contain references to power, armor, light, living, Word, repentance, and life. The text continues then:

you are [the] thought and the entire carefreeness (τμητάρπουσ) of the monks (μονοχος).¹⁴ Again, hear us like you have heard your chosen ones in your offering (προσφο[ρ]α), who enter by means of their [good] works, who have saved their souls from these blind limbs, so that they might become eternal. Amen.” (*Dial. Sav.* 121.16–122.1)

While Jesus promised to teach his disciples how to glorify God, the prayer he chose as an example is in reality more a supplication than a doxology. The prayer is directed to the Father asking him to hear the supplicants, who desire to be set free from the material body and enter heaven like Christ and the chosen

100. Following Origen’s exegesis of 1 Tim 2:1 (*Or.* 14.2–6), Cassian also distinguishes between four types, namely “supplications” (*obsecrationes*), “prayers” (*orationes*) in the narrow sense, “intercessions” (*postulationes*), and “thanksgivings” (*gratiarum actiones*). See Cassian, *Conf.* 9.9–14; Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (see n. 12), 107.

¹³ Stewart, “Prayer” (see n. 8), 753.

¹⁴ While translators geared towards the meaning of the original text have chosen to translate ἡμονοχος as “the solitary” (Emmel, *Dialogue of the Savior* [see n. 1], 43), “die Einzelnen” (S. Petersen and H.-G. Bethge, “Der Dialog des Erlösers [NHC III,5]”, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* [ed. by H.-M. Schenke, H.-G. Bethge, and U. U. Kaiser; 2 Vols.; GCS.NF 8; Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften 2; Berlin 2001–2003] 1:382), or “les solitaires” (P. Létourneau, *Le Dialogue du Sauveur [NH III,5]: Texte établi, traduit et présenté* [BCNH.T 29; Québec 2003] 51), on the basis of a hypothetical original text authored before the advent of monasticism, it is likely that the readers of Nag Hammadi Codex III in the fourth or fifth centuries would have understood the term more in the sense of a reference to contemporary monastics. For an analysis of *Dial. Sav.* in the context of early Egyptian monasticism, see H. Lundhaug, “The *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5) as a Monastic Text”, in *Studia Patristica* (ed. by M. Vinzent; Leuven forthcoming).

ones, where they will obtain immortality. The prayer claims that the father has already heard his Son and the chosen ones, and that the latter have saved their souls from their material bodies and are saved on account of their good works. The supplicants wish to obtain the same. Moreover, the reference to the Father hearing the chosen ones “in your offering” (προςφο[ρ]ᾶ), indicates that this may perhaps be interpreted as a Eucharistic prayer. Whether this prayer of Jesus once had a life outside of the *Dialogue of the Savior*, we do not know. Its character is more that of a liturgical prayer than a personal prayer, but it may of course still be an entirely literary creation. It certainly has an important literary function within this particular text.

While the prayer in the *Dialogue of the Savior* is more a supplication than a doxology, we find better examples of glorification elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi Codices, like in the *Teachings of Silvanus*:

Lord Almighty (παντοκρατωρ), how much shall I glorify you? No one has been able to glorify God as he is. It is you who have glorified your Word in order to save everyone, Merciful God, he who has come from your mouth and up from your heart, the First-born, the Wisdom, the Prototype, the First Light. (*Teach. Silv.* 112.27–37)¹⁵

Elsewhere in the same text, doxology is combined with a prayer for forgiveness:

O this great goodness (ἄνετηχῶ)¹⁶ of God! O Christ (πῆχῶ), the King who has revealed to men the Great Divinity, the King of every virtue (ἀρετην) and the King of Life, the King of the ages and the Great One of the heavens, hear my words and forgive me! (*Teach. Silv.* 111.13–20)

Returning to the *Dialogue of the Savior* Jesus is there also asked by Judas (Thomas) how to pray. Having given, as we have seen, a somewhat misleading example of how to glorify, Jesus answers the question of *how* to pray by instead specifying *where* to do so:

Judas said: “You have told us this from the mind of Truth. When we pray, how shall we pray?”¹⁷ The Lord said: “Pray in the place where there is no woman.” (*Dial. Sav.* 144.14–16)

The instruction to pray separately from women is in line with the general ascetic character of the *Dialogue of the Savior*, and can be understood as a method by which one avoids unnecessary distraction. The specific question of *how* to pray,

¹⁵ Translations of *Teach. Silv.* are my own, based on the Coptic text of M. Peel (ed. and trans.) and J. Zandee (trans.), “NHC VII,4: The Teachings of Silvanus”, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII* (ed. by B. Pearson; NHMS 33; Leiden 1996) 278–369. Cf. also *Teach. Silv.* 114.26–30: “O this patience of God, which bears with everyone, which desires everyone to be saved who has become subject to sin!”

¹⁶ Since the manuscript here uses the spelling χῶ for χριστος (“good”), the reference to the “goodness” (ἄνετηχῶ) of God may also be read as an allusion to Christ (χριστος, which is commonly rendered by the *nominum sacrum* χῶ).

¹⁷ Also in *Gos. Thom.*, Logion 6, Jesus is asked by his disciples how to pray (*Gos. Thom.* 33.16), but does not answer this question.

on the other hand, is better treated in other Nag Hammadi texts. One of them is the *Exegesis on the Soul*, where we are told that it is appropriate to pray to God with outstretched hands,¹⁸ night and day.¹⁹ Such a call for prayer night and day echoes the importance of the concept of unceasing prayer in monastic sources.²⁰ Like in those sources, prayer has indeed a prominent position in the *Exegesis on the Soul*, and it is placed primarily in the context of repentance. The soul weeps, repents, and prays to God. Quoting Luke and Acts, the *Exegesis on the Soul* states that

“If one does not hate his own soul he will not be able to follow me” (Luke 14:26). For the beginning of salvation is repentance. Therefore, “before the arrival of Christ, John came, preach[ing] the baptism of repentance” (Acts 13:24). And repentance comes about in pain and grief. But the Father is a good lover of humanity and he hears the soul who calls up to him and he sends her the saving light. (*Exeg. Soul* 135.19–29)²¹

The strong emphasis throughout the *Exegesis on the Soul* on repentance, compunction, and prayer is close to the sentiments found in Cassian’s writings on prayer. For Cassian as well, compunction, repentance, and tears are central aspects in the process of getting closer to God through prayer.²²

Such a focus on compunction and repentance is also on display in the Pachomian writings. In the *Life of Pachomius* we hear, for instance, Theodore describe how Pachomius worked hard “night and day, with fasts, prayers and abundant tears,”²³ and we are subsequently told how Theodore himself “remained standing the whole night in prayer to God,”²⁴ while another brother watched him, “listening to him utter all these words with bitter weeping and groaning,”²⁵ and how “he often used to put on hair garments and go up to the mountain by himself. He would spend the whole night praying tearfully to the Lord and he would come down to the monastery in the morning.”²⁶ We are also told how Theodore prayed to God, saying: “may your mercy and your goodness rest on us in the whole sorry

¹⁸ *Exeg. Soul.* 136.16–17.

¹⁹ *Exeg. Soul.* 136.17–18.

²⁰ For Cassian, see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (see n. 12), 100–113.

²¹ Translations from *Exeg. Soul* are my own, based on the Coptic text of H. Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (NHMS 73; Leiden 2010).

²² See Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (see n. 12), 122–129.

²³ SBo 198 (trans. A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* [3 Vols.; Cistercian Studies 45–47; Kalamazoo, Mich. 1980–1982] 1:246); cf. SBo 107, where Pachomius prescribes this practice to sinners whom he sends away from his monasteries. SBo is the recension of the *Life of Pachomius* reconstructed by A. Veilleux based on the Bohairic version, supplemented by the Arabic and various Sahidic versions where the Bohairic is lacking. The connection between fasting and prayer is also seen in *Gos. Thom.* 50.11–12 (Logion 104).

²⁴ SBo 198 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [see n. 23], 1:246).

²⁵ SBo 198 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [see n. 23], 1:247).

²⁶ SBo 198 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [see n. 23], 1:245).

state in which we find ourselves. For we have turned from the paths of life [...] Indeed, we are like those at sea in the time of a storm [...]"²⁷

The comparison with people in danger at sea is also found in the *Exegesis on the Soul*, in a passage that also stresses unceasing prayer:

it is appropriate to pray to God night and day, stretching our hands up to him like those who are sailing in the midst of the sea. They pray to God with all their heart without hypocrisy, for those who pray hypocritically deceive only themselves. (*Exeg. Soul* 136.16–22)

The additional emphasis seen here on the importance of praying sincerely, “without hypocrisy,” is also stressed elsewhere in the *Exegesis on the Soul*. In an intriguing passage, the text makes clear that salvation is ultimately God’s gift, and ascetic practice, skills, or learning, are therefore not sufficient:

So when she becomes renewed she will ascend, praising the Father and her brother by whom she was saved. Thus the soul will be saved by means of the rebirth, but this does not come about through ascetic words (ἡσυχαστικῶν ἡσυχαστικῶν) nor from skills (ἡτεχνῆν) nor from written teaching (βιβλῶν ἡσυχαστικῶν), but the grace of [...], but the gift of [...] For this thing is heavenly. (*Exeg. Soul* 134.25–34)

Ascetic practice alone is not enough. By “ascetic words” (ἡσυχαστικῶν ἡσυχαστικῶν), the *Exegesis on the Soul* is probably referring to the practice of *melete* (or *meditation*), the recitation of scripture as a common monastic discipline. Reading, learning by heart, and recitation, while important, was not enough. Sincere repentance was a necessary requirement for God’s compassion. Hypocrites will not be saved, but the *Exegesis on the Soul* assures us that “If we truly repent, God, the patient and abundantly merciful, will hear us.”²⁸

Repentance, weeping, and unceasing prayer are promoted, but the kind of prayer that is prescribed seems to be an inward prayer of the heart, rather than external audible prayer. The *Exegesis on the Soul* explains:

It is therefore appropriate to pray to the Father and for us to call up to him with all our soul, *not with the external lips, but with the spirit within*, the one which came from the depth (cf. 1 Cor 2:10–13), sighing (cf. Rom 8:26), and repenting for the life we have led, confessing the sins, perceiving the empty error we were in and the empty haste, weeping like we were in the darkness and the wave, mourning ourselves so that he may have pity on us, hating ourselves as we are now. (*Exeg. Soul* 135.4–15)

Whether this statement is to be understood as advocating silent prayer *to the exclusion of* audible prayer, or simply that it is absolutely necessary for the prayer to be sincere, is not entirely clear, but it is worth noting that a similar point regarding silent prayer seem to be made in the *Gospel of Philip*:

²⁷ SBo 198 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [see n. 23], 1:245–246).

²⁸ *Exeg. Soul* 137.22–25.

He said, “My Father who is in secret.” He said, “Enter into your closet and shut your door behind you and pray to your Father who is in secret,” that is, the one who is within them all. (*Gos. Phil.* 68.8–13)

With its quotation of Matthew 6:6, this may be understood as advocating silent prayer in a manner quite close to what we also find in certain monastic authors. While silent prayer seems to have been uncommon in antiquity,²⁹ John Cassian, for instance, argues that “prayer should be made in complete silence,”³⁰ and cites Matt 6:6 in support, stating that

Before everything, that gospel precept must be most diligently observed, which tells us to enter our room, shut the door and pray to our Father. This may be fulfilled by us as follows: we make our request within our room when, drawing our hearts within, away from the tumult of all thoughts and cares, we disclose our petitions to the Lord intimately and in secret. We pray with the door closed when we pray with closed lips and total silence to the one who scrutinises not words, but hearts. We pray in secret when we reveal our requests to God alone from the heart and fervent mind, so that no hostile powers are able to recognize of what kind our petition is. On this account, prayer should be made in complete silence.³¹

The *Gospel of Philip* also discusses prayer elsewhere, where it displays a negative attitude towards “praying in the world.”

Those who sow in the winter reap in the summer. The winter is the world (πικοςμος), the summer is the other world (πικεαιων). Let us sow in the world (πικοςμος) so that we may reap in the summer. Therefore it is appropriate for us not to pray in the winter. That which follows the winter is the summer, but if one reaps in the winter he will not reap, but he will pluck out. (*Gos. Phil.* 52.25–32)

Praying “in the world” is clearly disparaged, but what does it mean? In light of the previous passage, and other passages in the text, it is quite clear that it is not to be understood as a statement against praying in general. Rather, the advice not to pray in the world, but instead in “your closet” (πικεταμειον) is probably best understood as prescribing a practice of inward, silent, prayer. Outward, vocalized prayer – prayer in the world – is not as valuable as inward, silent prayer. Another point that seems to be made here has to do with the object of prayer. The point that if one reaps in winter, one will not be able to also reap in summer, indicates that one should only pray for rewards in the hereafter – in the other world – and not for things of this world.³²

²⁹ Stewart, “Prayer” (see n. 8), 744.

³⁰ Cassian, *Conf.* 9.35.3 (trans. A. M. Casiday, *Saint John Cassian on Prayer* [Oxford 2006] 34).

³¹ Cassian, *Conf.* 9.35.1–3 (trans. Casiday, *Saint John Cassian on Prayer* [see n. 30], 34).

³² This interpretation is supported by yet another passage in *Gos. Phil.*, where Jesus rebukes a disciple who asks for “a thing of the world” (ουζωβ ητεπικοςμος). See *Gos. Phil.* 59.23–27.

II. Personal Prayer

Prayers for redemption, rather than for benefits in this world, are unsurprisingly the norm among Nag Hammadi prayers, but sometimes the two are combined. In the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, a prayer written on both sides of the front flyleaf of Nag Hammadi Codex I by its main scribe, probably after the rest of the codex had already been finished,³³ the redeemer (περσωντε) is addressed with the following words:

[My] redeem[er] ([παρεφς]ωντε), redeem me, for [I am] yours, the one who has come forth from you. You are [my] mind, beget me! You are my treasury, open for me! You [are] my fullness, accept me! You are (my) rest, give me [the] perfect thing that cannot be possessed! (*Pr. Paul* A. 3–11)³⁴

In its second part, the prayer is directed to “He who is and who pre-existed in the name [which is] exalted above every name.”³⁵ It is not addressed directly to him, however, but “through Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of lords, the King of the ages,”³⁶ asking for what the speaker refers to as “your gifts” (νεκτ), and to do so “through the Son of Man, the Spirit, the Paraclete of [Truth].”³⁷ The prayer also asks for “authority” (εξουσια) and bodily “healing” (ταλσο), curiously phrased as “when I ask you through the Evangelist.”³⁸ Moreover, there is an additional request for redemption of what is referred to as “my eternal light-soul and my spirit,”³⁹ and for the mental revelation of “the First-born of the fullness of grace.”⁴⁰

The request for revelation is continued in the final part of the prayer, where God, through an allusion to *First Corinthians* 2:9, is requested to “Grant what no angel-eye has [seen] and no ruler-ear (has) heard and what has not arisen from

³³ If the scribe had planned to include the prayer in the codex from the beginning it is unlikely to have been copied on the front flyleaf. Since it was copied on the front flyleaf and also resembles more the end of *Tri. Trac.* than the beginning of *Ap. Jas.* in its handwriting, it is more likely to have been added after the rest of the codex was finished. See D. Mueller, “Prayer of the Apostle Paul: I, I: A. 1–B. 10”, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)* (2 Vols., ed. by H. W. Attridge; NHS 22–23; Leiden 1985) 1:6. M. Kaler argues that it might even have been composed, or at least altered, in order to fit the contents of the rest of the codex. See M. Kaler, “The Prayer of the Apostle Paul in the Context of Nag Hammadi Codex I”, *J ECS* 16/3 (2008) 319–339. Together with L. Painchaud he has even suggested that it may have been intended as an introduction to a supposed three-volume sub-collection consisting of Codices I, XI, and VII (in that order). See L. Painchaud and M. Kaler, “From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* to the *Three Steles of Seth*: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as a Collection”, *VC* 61 (2007) 445–469.

³⁴ Translations of *Pr. Paul* are my own, based on the Coptic text of Mueller, “Prayer of the Apostle Paul” (see n. 33), 1:5–11.

³⁵ *Pr. Paul* A. 11–13.

³⁶ *Pr. Paul* A. 13–14.

³⁷ *Pr. Paul* A. 15–18.

³⁸ *Pr. Paul* A. 18–21.

³⁹ *Pr. Paul* A. 22–23.

⁴⁰ *Pr. Paul* A. 23–25.

the human heart.”⁴¹ He also asks that God “Place upon me your beloved, elect, and blessed greatness, the First-born, the First-begotten, and the [amazing] mystery of your house.”⁴²

The supplicant is not modest in his requests, while the only claim he makes to piety is that he has “faith and hope.”⁴³ The prayer concludes with a doxology: “[for] yours is the power [and] the glory and the praise and the greatness for ever and ever. [Amen.]”⁴⁴ Sadly, its opening lines are missing, so we do not know whether it carried a superscript title or any form of introduction, but it does have a subscript title in Greek identifying it as “the Prayer of Paul the Apostle” (προσευχῆ πα[ύλου] ἀποστόλου),⁴⁵ followed by the Greek phrases ἐν ἐρημίᾳ⁴⁶ and ὁ Ⲭ δαίσιος.⁴⁷

Other prayers are more concerned with distancing the supplicants from this world and material concerns. We saw this in Jesus’ prayer in the *Dialogue of the Savior*, and we see it at the end of the *Book of Thomas* as well:

Watch and pray that you do not come to be in the flesh, but rather that you *come forth from the bondage* of the bitterness of this life. And as you pray, you will *find rest*, for you have left behind the suffering and inner reproach. For when you come forth from the sufferings and passions of the body, you will *receive rest* from the good one, and you will reign with the king, being joined with him and he being joined with you, from now on, for ever and ever. Amen. (*Thom. Cont.* 145.8–16)⁴⁸

This prayer for rest and respite from the sufferings, passions, and bondage of material existence is a call to ascetic personal prayer. As such, it echoes what we find in contemporary monastic literature.⁴⁹

A similar prayer to God for him to “give rest to each of them” and to “release them from bonds” is also found in the Prayer for the People in the *Sacramentary* of Serapion.⁵⁰ As we shall see, this collection of prayers, ascribed to the fourth-century bishop Serapion of Thmuis, supporter of Athanasius and friend of St. Antony, is roughly contemporary with the Nag Hammadi Codices and often comes close to the latter’s prayers, but first, let us take a look at another good

⁴¹ *Pr. Paul* A. 25–29.

⁴² *Pr. Paul* A. 35–B. 2.

⁴³ *Pr. Paul* A. 33–34.

⁴⁴ *Pr. Paul* B. 2–7.

⁴⁵ *Pr. Paul* B. 8–9.

⁴⁶ *Pr. Paul* B. 9.

⁴⁷ *Pr. Paul* B. 10.

⁴⁸ Translations of *Thom. Cont.* and the colophon that follows it in the manuscript are my own, based on the Coptic text of B. Layton (ed.) and J. D. Turner (trans.), “The Book of Thomas the Contender”, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 Together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and *P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655* (2 Vols.; ed. by B. Layton; NHS 20–21; Leiden 1989) 2:180–205.

⁴⁹ See, e. g., Antony, *Ep.* 5.8–9; 6.16; SBo 82, 112.

⁵⁰ Serapion, *Pr.* 27. Text and translation in M. E. Johnson, *The Prayers of Serapion of Thmuis: A Literary, Liturgical, and Theological Analysis* (OCA 249; Rome 1995) 80–81.

example of a prayer for deliverance, this time in the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James* in Nag Hammadi Codex V.

At the end of the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James*, James is being stoned to death and delivers the following prayer to God with his hands outstretched:

My God and Father, who saved me from this dead hope, who kept me alive through a mystery of that which he wills, do not let these days of this world be prolonged for me, but the day of your [light ...] (2 *Apoc. Jas.* 62.16–24)⁵¹

The bottom four lines of manuscript page 62 are too damaged to make any continuous sense of it, but we rejoin the prayer at the top of page 63:

salvation. Release me from this [place of] sojourn! Do not let your grace remain in me, but may your grace be holy! Save me from an evil death! Bring me out of a tomb alive, for your grace, Love, is alive in me to do a work of fullness! Save me from a sinful flesh, because I am in agreement with you with all my strength, for you are Life of Life! Save me from a humiliating enemy! You shall not turn me over to the hand of a judge severe with sin! Forgive me all my debts of the days, for I am alive in you, and your grace is alive in me! I have renounced everyone, but I have confessed you. Save me from an evil affliction! But now is the [time] and the hour. Holy [Spirit], send [me] salvation [...] the light [...] the light [...] with strength [...] When he had [spoken, he] fell silent. (2 *Apoc. Jas.* 63.1–30)

James prays for three things: deliverance (from the world, from an evil death, from sinful flesh, from a humiliating enemy, and from evil affliction), forgiveness, and resurrection. At the end of the prayer, he also calls specifically upon the Holy Spirit for salvation. Some of these requests, like deliverance from an evil death and from a humiliating enemy seem rather out of place in the context in which the prayer is placed in the text, as James is already being stoned, leading some scholars to draw the conclusion that this may not have been the prayer's original setting, but that it is "an independent piece of liturgical tradition."⁵² It is also worth noting that in its introduction to this prayer, the text tells us either that this was *not* James' usual prayer, or that it *was* his usual prayer, depending on whether we choose to read $\alpha\mathfrak{N}$ as the negative particle or as a variant spelling of $\text{O}\mathfrak{N}$.⁵³

Another text where persecution provides the setting for prayer is the *Letter of Peter to Philip*. We are told that Peter and Philip went up to the Mount of Olives, "the place where they used to gather with the blessed Christ when he was in the body."⁵⁴ Here Peter, Philip, and the apostles throw themselves upon their knees and pray, as follows:

⁵¹ Translations of 2 *Apoc. Jas.* are my own, based on the Coptic text of C. W. Hedrick, "The (Second) Apocalypse of James: V,4:44,11–63,32", in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI, with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1 and 4* (ed. by D. M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden 1979) 105–149.

⁵² This is the suggestion of Wolf-Peter Funk, according to Hedrick, "The (Second) Apocalypse of James" (see n. 51), 107.

⁵³ 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 62.15. See the note in Hedrick, "The (Second) Apocalypse of James" (see n. 51), 145.

⁵⁴ *Ep. Pet. Phil.* 133.15–17. Translations of *Ep. Pet. Phil.* are my own, based on the Coptic

Father, Father, Father of the Light who possesses the incorruptible things (παφθαρεια), hear us like [you] have been pleased with your holy child Jesus Christ, for he has become an illuminator (φωστηρ) for us in the darkness. Yea hear us! (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 133.21–134.1)

This prayer directed to the Father is then followed directly by another prayer, which is addressed to the Son:

And they returned another time and prayed, saying, “Son of Life, Son of Immortality, who is in the light, Son, Christ of Immortality, our Redeemer, give us strength, for they seek us in order to kill us.” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 134.2–9)

In the first one, the Father, addressed with the phrase “Father, Father, Father of the Light,” is simply called upon to “hear” the supplicants. In the second prayer, Jesus Christ, who is described in the first prayer as “an illuminator in the darkness,” is referred to with a string of epithets. He is “Son of Life,” “Son of Immortality,” “light,” “Son,” “Christ of Immortality,” and “our Redeemer,” and, as we have seen in the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James*, he is called upon to provide the apostles with the necessary strength to prevail against their oppressors. A third prayer goes further, requesting not simply strength (ουγαμ), but even the ability to “perform wonders” (ειρε ηρενσομ):

[Our Lord Jesus] Christ, author [of our] rest, give us a spirit of understanding in order that we too may perform wonders. (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 140.3–7)

In this case we are told that the prayer is successful. The apostles get a vision of Christ and are “filled with a holy spirit” (μουρ εβολ [ρη]ουγην[α] εφογααβ),⁵⁵ which subsequently enables them to start healing people. Unlike the other prayers we have seen so far, this one also benefits others, and not just the supplicants themselves. In a sense it can be categorized as an indirect intercession.

Finally, the *Letter of Peter to Philip* also contains references to prayers of thanksgiving: “The apostles gave thanks to the Lord with every blessing” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 138.8–9), and Jesus tells them that they should let their prayer “be known” (ουωνε εβολ).⁵⁶ There is also a liturgical echo, with an allusion to the kiss of peace, when we are told that

they came together and kissed each other saying, “Amen.” Then Jesus appeared, saying to them, “Peace to you [all] and everyone who believes in my name.” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 140.13–19)

Prayer and the kiss of peace is followed by the appearance of Christ, who then takes on the role of a priest blessing the congregation.

text of F. Wisse, “NHC VIII,2: The Letter of Peter to Philip: Text and Translation”, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII* (ed. by J. H. Sieber; NHS 31; Leiden 1991) 234–251.

⁵⁵ *Ep. Pet. Phil.* 140.8–10.

⁵⁶ (Jesus says:) “gird yourselves with the power of my Father, and let your prayer be known” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* 137.26–28).

III. Liturgical Prayer

While it is often difficult to know in the cases surveyed above whether the prayers recited or discussed are to be considered personal or liturgical,⁵⁷ some Nag Hammadi prayers are more explicit regarding their liturgical setting. In Nag Hammadi Codex XI there are five short untitled sections of text that conclude the work of the first of the two scribes who collaborated on the codex. Although these short pieces have commonly been grouped together with the preceding and equally acephalous *A Valentinian Exposition*,⁵⁸ and it has thus usually been taken for granted that the *Liturgical Fragments* are also “Valentinian,” on closer inspection there is little reason to regard them as such, apart from the fact that they follow *A Valentinian Exposition* in this particular manuscript. From what we can gather of their theology, the *Liturgical Fragments* have very little in common with either the *A Valentinian Exposition* or even with “Valentinianism” in general.⁵⁹ In certain respects they even contradict other evidence traditionally used to reconstruct “Valentinian” liturgical practice.⁶⁰ The three fragments *On the Anointing*, *On the Eucharist A*, and *On the Eucharist B*, provide us with interesting examples of liturgical prayers,⁶¹ while *On Baptism A* and *B*, on the other hand, must be seen primarily as mystagogical pieces.⁶²

The first of the fragments, *On the Anointing*, is clearly a liturgical prayer consisting of an invocation ending in a doxology, where Christ is called upon in what seems to be a pre-baptismal context:

It is fitting [for you now] to send your [Son Jesus] Christ and for him to anoint us so that we may be able to trample upon the head of the [serpent]s and [...] of the scorpions and

⁵⁷ Indeed, most personal prayers were in some way influenced by the conventions of liturgical prayer. See Stewart, “Prayer” (see n. 2), 746.

⁵⁸ The title *A Valentinian Exposition* is a modern convention, as Codex XI itself does not preserve any title for its second tractate. The five liturgical pieces are separated from each other and from the surrounding texts using the same kind of dividers and decoration used by this scribe in his part of Codex XI and also after the *Treatise on the Resurrection* in Codex I. In Codex XI, then, the *Liturgical Fragments* have the appearance of five separate pieces of text, with no special connection to *Val. Exp.*

⁵⁹ See H. Lundhaug, “Evidence of ‘Valentinian’ Ritual Practice? The *Liturgical Fragments* of Nag Hammadi Codex XI (NHX XI,2a–e)”, in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* (ed. by K. Corrigan and T. Rasimus; NHMS 82; Leiden 2013) 225–243.

⁶⁰ Pre-baptismal anointing, for instance, which is the focus of *On Anointing*, is not attested elsewhere in sources commonly classified as “Valentinian.” See E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (NHMS 60; Leiden 2006) 357.

⁶¹ For in-depth analysis of all five fragments, see my “Evidence of ‘Valentinian’ Ritual Practice” (see n. 59).

⁶² It is clear from what is left of *On Baptism A* that it is concerned with baptismal immersion in water modeled on the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. While *On Baptism B* is too heavily damaged to allow for any kind of certainty, it too seems to deal with baptismal immersion. The mystagogical contents of both are consistent with this context.

[all] the power of the Devil by means of the [... shepherd] Jesus [Christ]. It is through him that we have [known] you, the Father in the [...] in the Son, the [Father... the] holy [church and the] holy [angels]. From [the beginning] he exists until [eternity in] eternal [fellowship, from] eternity until untraceable ages of ages. Amen. (*On Anointing* 40.11–29)⁶³

This may be described as an epiclesis prayer. While most such prayers call for the descent of the Holy Spirit, and do so in the context of the Eucharist, there are exceptions, of which *On the Anointing* is an example. Here the context is pre-baptismal,⁶⁴ and those about to be baptized call upon the Father to send his “[Son Jesus] Christ” to anoint them. Such an epiclesis of Christ, rather than of the Holy Spirit, has its closest parallel in the Egyptian liturgical tradition. The fourth-century *Sacramentary* of Serapion of Thmuis,⁶⁵ while not directly referring to the sending of “Jesus Christ” using these names, contains both a baptismal and a Eucharistic prayer where the Father is called upon to send his “Logos.”⁶⁶ The prayer for the sanctification of the baptismal waters, for instance, calls for the descent of the Logos:

And as your only-begotten Word, when he descended upon the waters of the Jordan made them holy, so also now let him descend into these (baptismal waters). Let him make them holy and spiritual in order that those who are baptized may no longer be flesh and blood but spiritual. (Serapion, *Pr. 7*)⁶⁷

At the beginning of this prayer, Serapion also speaks about “the descent of your only-begotten Jesus Christ,”⁶⁸ so while the epiclesis itself is here of the Logos, Serapion’s prayer for the sanctification of the waters comes very close to the language and concepts found in *On the Anointing*. Moreover, the power to combat the forces of evil is also in other early-Christian sources associated with prebaptismal anointing.⁶⁹ While it does not use the exact same metaphor of trampling upon snakes or scorpions, Serapion’s prayer over the oil to be used in

⁶³ Translations of *Lit. Frag.* are my own, based primarily on the Coptic text of W.-P. Funk, *Concordance des textes de Nag Hammadi: Les codices X et XIA* (BCNH.C 6; Québec 2000) 325–327, supplemented by that of J. D. Turner, “NHC XI,2: A Valentinian Exposition: Transcription and Translation”, in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII* (ed. by C. W. Hedrick; NHS 28; Leiden 1990) 106–141, and my own readings of the *Facsimile Edition* of the manuscript. For the Coptic text underlying the translations given here, see Lundhaug, “Evidence” (see n. 59).

⁶⁴ Since *On the Anointing* is placed before fragments dealing with baptism in Codex XI, it is likely that the context of its prayer is that of prebaptismal anointing.

⁶⁵ For the dating of this text, see Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* (see n. 50), 281.

⁶⁶ Serapion, *Pr. 1*; 7 (Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* [see n. 50], 46–47; 54–55).

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* (see n. 50), 55 (trans.), 54 (text).

⁶⁸ Serapion, *Pr. 7* (Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* [see n. 50], 55 [trans.], 54 [text]).

⁶⁹ On the apotropaic function of prebaptismal anointing in post-Nicene rites of initiation, see, e. g., T. M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt* (Message of the Fathers of the Church 6; Collegeville 1992) 20; M. E. Johnson, “Christian Initiation”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. by S. A. Harvey and

the anointing refers to the strength-producing power of pre-baptismal anointing and its effectiveness against sin, lawlessness, and evil, as well as to its ability to help guard against everything that opposes a Christian way of life. Although it does not directly request that Christ himself anoint the candidates, it does request that he works in and through the oil: “we anoint with this oil those who approach this divine rebirth, imploring that our Lord Christ Jesus may work in it and reveal healing and strength-producing power through this oil.”⁷⁰ And although it does not *directly* describe Christ as a “shepherd” (ποιμήν), as in *On the Anointing*, it does so *indirectly*, by referring to his “flock” (ποιμνῆ). As for *On the Anointing’s* concluding doxology, it is similar to doxologies found in other Coptic texts.⁷¹

The two pieces known as *On the Eucharist A* and *B* that follow after two mystagogical fragments on baptism are both seriously damaged, but the reasonably well-preserved last few lines of *On the Eucharist A* clearly constitute a thanksgiving prayer ending in a doxology:

[...] they do your will [through the] name of Jesus Christ [and they will] do your will [...] always, filled with every grace and [every] purity. Glory be to thee through thy firstborn Son Jesus Christ [from now] until forever! Amen. (*On Euch. A* 43.31–38)

There are two terms in the preserved parts of *On the Eucharist A* that point toward a Eucharistic context, [Ϡ]Ϡπρμα[τ]⁷² and [ῤεγχαρι]στε⁷³ (both terms meaning to “give thanks”), but due to the damaged state of the manuscript, this connection must remain hypothetical.

With regard to *On the Eucharist B*, very little of it has been preserved at all. Again, the appearance of the word τροφή (food) as many as three times in the surviving text⁷⁴ point in the direction of a Eucharistic context for the prayer, and just like the *A*-fragment, *On the Eucharist B* also ends in a doxology:

[when you] die [purely, you] will become pure so that everyone who will receive food and [drink from] him/it may [live]. Glory be to you until eternity! [A]men. (*On Euch. B* 44.31–37)

D. C. Hunter; Oxford 2008) 703; J. Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem: Fourth- and Fifth-Century Evidence from Palestine, Syria and Egypt* (Liturgy, Worship and Society; Aldershot 2007) 65.

⁷⁰ Serapion, *Pr.* 15 (Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* [see n. 50], 63 [trans.], 62 [text]); cf. also *Pr.* 16 and 17.

⁷¹ See, e. g., C. S. Wansink, “Encomium on the Four Bodiless Living Creatures, Attributed to John Chrysostom (M612, ff. 2r–17v and Berlin P. 11965, ff. 1r–6r)”, in *Homiletica From the Pierpont Morgan Library* (ed. by L. Depuydt; CSCO 524; Scriptorum Coptici 43; Leuven 1991) 27–47.

⁷² *On Euch. A* 43.20.

⁷³ *On Euch. A* 43.20–21.

⁷⁴ *On Euch. B* 44.19, 21, 35. There are also isolated references to “word” (λογο[ς]), and “Church” (ἐκκλη[σί]α), but with no readable context.

The liturgy referenced by the *Liturgical Fragments* taken together seems to consist of pre-baptismal anointing followed by baptism and Eucharist, interpreted in terms of renunciation of and combat with the Devil, forgiveness of sins, adoption, ascent into heaven (equated with a journey into the Promised Land), incorporation into a new community, and transformation into perfect spirits with angelic qualities.⁷⁵

The three fragments *On the Anointing*, *On the Eucharist A* and *On the Eucharist B* can all be characterized as prayers, and they all end in doxologies and a concluding “Amen.”⁷⁶ While the prayer in *On the Anointing* is evidently set in the context of a prebaptismal anointing, the prayer in *On the Eucharist A* is more difficult to place. It may be a postbaptismal prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts received in baptism, in either a postbaptismal or Eucharistic context. The last fragment, *On the Eucharist B*, with its many references to food, seems most likely to be a Eucharistic prayer.

References to Eucharistic prayer are also found elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi Codices. The *Gospel of Philip*, a text which strongly emphasizes the importance of the Eucharist, at one point refers to the Eucharistic chalice as “the cup of prayer” (ΠΟΤΗΡΙΟΝ ἸΠΩΛΛΗ),⁷⁷ and elsewhere it recites a short Eucharistic prayer attributed to Jesus himself. The *Gospel of Philip* reports this as a prayer addressed to the Father by Jesus “in the Eucharist.”

He said on that day in the Eucharist: “He who joined the perfect, the light, with the Holy Spirit, join the angels with us also, with the images!” (*Gos. Phil.* 58.10–14)

In the context in which it appears, this prayer may be seen in connection with the preceding passage, where the *Gospel of Philip* treats Christ’s transfiguration on the mountain, stating that “he [appeared to the] angels as an angel” (ἀφο[ΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ ἸΠ] ἄγγελος ῥωος ἄγγελος),⁷⁸ thus making sense of the idea that Jesus and his disciples may be regarded as images of angels, i. e., as being like angels. But what kind of joining with the angels is Jesus praying for? While most scholars have connected the passage with the “Valentinian” idea of a unification between the individual and his or her personal angel,⁷⁹ in the context in which it actually

⁷⁵ See, Lundhaug, “Evidence” (see n. 59).

⁷⁶ C. Colpe, “Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi III”, *JAC* 17 (1974) 109–125 even claims that if it had not been for the presence of “Amen” at the end of the fragments there would have been scant reason for calling them prayers (p. 113).

⁷⁷ *Gos. Phil.* 75.14–15. Translations of the *Gospel of Philip* are my own, based on the Coptic text of Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth* (see n. 21). On the importance and interpretation of the Eucharist in *Gos. Phil.*, see *ibid.*, 154–399.

⁷⁸ *Gos. Phil.* 57.35–58.1.

⁷⁹ For references and discussion along these lines, see H.-M. Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,3): Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (TUGAL 143; Berlin 1997) 248–252. See also Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 60), 99 and 345.

appears in the *Gospel of Philip*, as a Eucharistic prayer, it arguably makes more sense to understand it along more orthodox lines as a reference to the angels joining the congregation in their liturgical celebration, in this case the celebration of the Eucharist. The idea of the angels taking part in the liturgy is indeed well-attested in other Early Christian texts from Egypt. The angels have an important role in the celebration of the Eucharist according to an intriguing passage in the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius*, where they are invisibly giving or withholding the Eucharistic elements to the communicants,⁸⁰ and elsewhere reference to joining with the angles is found in the context of postbaptismal prayer. In the *Sacramentary* of Serapion, for example, there is a prayer where God is asked to bless the newly baptized and

Show him pure in the new birth. Place him in communion with your angelic powers so that he may no longer be called flesh but spiritual, having a share of your divine and beneficial gift. (Serapion, *Pr.* 11)⁸¹

It is worth noting that it is not only the reference to the communion with the angels in this passage from the *Sacramentary* of Serapion that is relevant to the *Gospel of Philip*, but also the idea of a ritually connected rebirth that involves a transformation from fleshly to spiritual.⁸² With regard to the connection between the *Gospel of Philip*'s account of this "Eucharistic" prayer and the transfiguration, it should be kept in mind that the account of the transfiguration found in the Gospel of Luke, an important intertext in the *Gospel of Philip*, in fact connects it with Jesus praying, and states that his appearance changed "as he prayed" (ἐμπροσώπου).⁸³ When the prayer of Jesus referred to in Luke 9:29 is identified with the prayer quoted in the *Gospel of Philip*, it becomes apparent that the connection between the Eucharist and the transfiguration is not a mere coincidence, but that it fits well with the overall Eucharistic theology of the text. As we gather from other parts of the *Gospel of Philip*, the Eucharist has a transformative effect on the communicants, who appropriate the likeness of Christ through it, making them in effect "images" of Christ, just like Christ and the apostles are described as images of the angels in this prayer. Taking the *Gospel of Philip*'s prayer performed by Jesus "in the Eucharist" seriously as a reference to a Eucharistic prayer thus makes good sense.

⁸⁰ SBo 83. Cf. also Rev 7:9–17.

⁸¹ Trans. Johnson, *Prayers of Serapion* (see n. 50), 59 (Greek text on p. 58).

⁸² See Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth* (see n. 21). It is worth noting that in order to stay within the boundaries of emerging orthodoxy *Gos. Phil.* resorts to the concept of a spiritual flesh (see H. Lundhaug, "Begotten, Not Made, to Arise in This Flesh: The Post-Nicene Soteriology of the *Gospel of Philip*", in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* [ed. by E. Iricinschi et al.; STAC 82; Tübingen 2013] 235–271).

⁸³ On angelification in the context of prayer, see also Cassian, *Conf.* 9.6.5; Evagrius Ponticus, *Or.* 113.

A more indirect connection with the Eucharist is found in Codex VI's *Prayer of Thanksgiving*. This is an interesting text from several perspectives. It follows the Hermetic *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, and was probably purposefully added by the scribe at the end of that text.⁸⁴ Introduced in Codex VI with the phrase "this is the prayer that they said,"⁸⁵ it is easily understood in this context as a prayer performed by Hermes Trismegistus and his pupil. However, the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* is especially interesting since it is also attested in Greek, as a part of a magical papyrus, and in Latin as part of *Asclepius* in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It is instructive to compare the three versions. Of particular note in the present context is the ending of the text. The Nag Hammadi version's statement that "When they had said these things in prayer, they kissed each other (ἀγρᾶσπαζε ἡνεγερηοῦ) and went to eat their holy bloodless food,"⁸⁶ is notably different from the ending of the Latin version, which has "Wishing these things, we turn to a pure meal without any flesh of animals,"⁸⁷ or the Greek version that has no such ending at all.

These differences may indicate that in Codex VI the text has been adapted to fit a Christian context. It is certainly easy to imagine how, in its current form, it might have been received by fourth- or fifth- century readers as a Christian prayer.⁸⁸ Indeed, its ending might even be interpreted as giving the prayer a Eucharistic setting. A kiss, or embrace, was a common component of the Eucharistic celebrations in the fourth and fifth centuries,⁸⁹ and the Eucharist is commonly referred to as a bloodless sacrifice. In the *Sacramentary* of Serapion, for instance, the *Prayer of Offering* states that "to you (i. e., to God) we offered this living sacrifice (τὴν ζῶσαν θυσίαν), the unbloody offering (τὴν προσφορὰν τὴν ἀνάιμακτον)."⁹⁰

⁸⁴ See M. A. Williams and L. Jenott, "Inside the Covers of Codex VI", in *Coptica-Gnostica-Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. by L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier; BCNH.E 7; Québec 2006) 1025–1052.

⁸⁵ *Pr. Thanks*. 63.33: παῖ πε πωληη ἡταχσοοφ. Translations of *Pr. Thanks* are my own, based on the Coptic text of P. Dirkse and J. Brashler, "The Prayer of Thanksgiving", in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 85022,1 and 4* (ed. by D. M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden 1979) 375–387.

⁸⁶ *Pr. Thanks*. 65.2–7: ἡταροχρε ναῖ εγωληη ἀγρᾶσπαζε ἡνεγερηοῦ ἀγω ἀγβοκ εγναοωδη ἡτεγτροφη εσογαδβ' εμῆσνοφ ἡρητῆ.

⁸⁷ *haec optantes conuertimus nos ad puram et sine animalibus cenam*; text and trans. Dirkse and Brashler, "Prayer of Thanksgiving" (see n. 85), 384–387.

⁸⁸ Even in modern times, *Pr. Thanks* has been appropriated as a Christian prayer, as illustrated by the fact that it was chosen as the opening text of H. Taussig (ed.), *A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-First Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (Boston 2013).

⁸⁹ See L. E. Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Gorgias Liturgical Studies 36; Cambridge 1996); M. P. Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia 2005). On the ritual kiss in *Gos. Phil.* 59.2–6, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth* (see n. 21), 207–208.

⁹⁰ Serapion, *Pr. 1* (Johnson, *Prayers* [see n. 50], 46 [text], 47 [trans.]).

The *Prayer of Thanksgiving* in Codex VI may thus be seen as an example of a non-Christian text that may have been appropriated, adapted, and read in a Christian way. As such it is not dissimilar to the way in which the excerpt from Plato's *Republic*, contained in the same codex, has been rewritten to suit Christian monastic interests and tastes decidedly different from those of its originally intended audience.

Similarly it is not difficult to see how the prayers of the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, which play a major role in this text, might have resonated with Christian readers. The phrase, "O my son, what is fitting is to pray to God with all our mind and all our heart and our soul" (*Disc.* 8–9 55.10–14), could just as well have been a quotation from the *Exegesis on the Soul*, or indeed the Pachomian *Testament of Horsiesios*,⁹¹ as from the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*.

IV. Scribal Prayers

Finally it is worth mentioning some of the evidence that brings us the closest to the people who manufactured and read the Nag Hammadi Codices, namely the prayers added by some of the scribes. The scribes of both Codex VII and Codex II added colophons, with blessings and prayers, at the very end of their codices when they had finished copying.⁹² In the latter, the scribe wrote:

Remember me also, my brothers,
in your prayers.
Peace to the holy
and spiritual ones. (*Thom. Cont.* 145.20–23)

Such requests for remembrance in prayer are common in colophons of Coptic literary manuscripts, as, for example, in BL Or. 7029, where the scribe calls upon his fellow monks to "Remember me in love, my fathers and my brothers. Behold my repentance. Pray to the Lord on my behalf."⁹³ Inscriptions with similar formulae have been found all over Egypt, including the Wadi Sheikh Ali close to the discovery site of the Nag Hammadi Codices,⁹⁴ and we also find such requests

⁹¹ Cf. *Hors. Test.* 33 and 35.

⁹² For in-depth analysis of these Nag Hammadi colophons, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins* (see n. 7), 178–206.

⁹³ Coptic text in E. A. W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, Vol. 5 of *Coptic Texts: Edited with Introductions and English Translations* (London 1915) 524. See also the numerous examples in A. van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d'Égypte: Tome I: Les colophons coptes des manuscrits sahidiques (Mémoire couronné au Concours Universitaire pour 1924–1926)* (2 Vols.; Bibliothèque du Muséon 1; Leuven 1929).

⁹⁴ See M. W. Meyer, "Archaeological Survey of the Wadi Sheikh Ali December 1980", *Göttinger Miszellen* 64 (1983) 77–82, esp. 78–80. Similar formulae are found in graffiti on the walls of churches, monasteries, and caves all over Egypt.

in monastic literary sources,⁹⁵ as well as in ostraca⁹⁶ and documentary papyri, such as the fourth-century Coptic letter, currently in the British Library, where a monk named Hatre from “the island of Pahom” (χατρε πρῆνιτμοῦ ἡπαρωμ) addresses “his father Paeiew” and the brothers of the Hathor-monastery, asking them to “remember me also and pray for me” (ἀρῖπα[με]εγε ζωω νῆτω[β]ῆ ε.α.ωει).⁹⁷

V. Conclusion

In the Nag Hammadi texts surveyed above we have seen anonymous prayers and prayers put into the mouth of Jesus, the apostles, and Hermes. In most cases God the Father is the one addressed, although some are also addressed to the Son. Origen famously held that one should pray to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit,⁹⁸ but in the Nag Hammadi evidence presently surveyed, the Father is usually addressed directly, without intermediaries, with the exception of the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, where prayer is directed to the Father through the Son. The prayers are mainly for deliverance (from this world, from sin and evil, and from one’s enemies), for strength, and for revelation.

We have encountered personal prayers as well as liturgical prayers, silent as well as audible prayers, and scattered references to postures such as kneeling, or standing with outstretched hands, all providing some insight into the bodily practices of prayer. The more specific contexts of the various prayers are more difficult to determine. Were any of the prayers or liturgies of the Nag Hammadi Codices actually performed by the owners of the codices, or were any of the codices used liturgically? No paratextual features in the codices seem to indicate that they were, and the great diversity of prayers and liturgies contained in them – and often within the same codex – would tend to suggest that they were not. This should not necessarily surprise us, since there is no reason to think that people would believe, adhere to, or practice the contents of all the books they owned or read – not today, and not in late antiquity. This does not necessarily mean that there was no communal use of the codices. They may well have been read and discussed in common, perhaps they were even read aloud in the refectory of a

⁹⁵ In the *Life of Pachomius*, Theodore and some of the brothers ask archbishop Athanasius to “remember us in your holy prayers” (ἀρπενμεγῖ ζεννεκαωηλ εσογав). L. T. Lefort, *S. Pachomii Vita Bohairice Scripta* (CSCO 89; *Scriptores Coptici* 7; Leuven 1953) 201.

⁹⁶ E. g., W. C. Till, *Die koptischen Ostraka der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften 78/1; Graz 1960) Nos. 171, 204, 221, 281.

⁹⁷ P. Lond. 1920 (H. I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy* [Westport 1924] 92). See also P. Lond. 1921 (Bell, *ibid.*, 95).

⁹⁸ Orig., *Or.* 20; cf. Stewart, “Prayer” (see n. 8), 751–752, 756.

monastery, which was certainly the case in later times with such, in many ways comparable, texts as the apocryphal acts of the apostles.⁹⁹ In that sense they may have had a liturgical function.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ F. Bovon, "Beyond the Canonical and the Apocryphal Books, the Presence of a Third Category: The Books Useful for the Soul", *HTR* 105/2 (2012) 134.

¹⁰⁰ This essay has been written under the aegis of project NEWCONT (New Contexts for Old Texts: Unorthodox Texts and Monastic Manuscript Culture in 4th- and 5th-Cent. Egypt) at the University of Oslo, Faculty of Theology. The project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013)/ERC Grant agreement no 283741. Hugo Lundhaug is Professor of Biblical Reception and Early Christian Literature at the University of Oslo, Faculty of Theology.

Baptism in the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2 and IV,2)

Antti Marjanen

Abstract

Die Absicht dieses Aufsatzes ist, die Taufterminologie eines sethianischen Textes, „Das heilige Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes“, auch bekannt als „Ägyptisches Evangelium“, zu untersuchen. Der Verfasser argumentiert, dass anders als in einigen anderen sethianischen Texten, in denen die Taufe als ein symbolischer Ausdruck einer himmlischen Aufstiegserfahrung betrachtet wird, die Taufe in „Das heilige Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes“ als ein irdischer und unwiederholbarer Erlösungsakt angesehen wird, durch den ein Getaufte auch in eine religiöse Gruppe eingeweiht wird.

Introduction

Several of the so-called Sethian writings of the Nag Hammadi Codices¹ contain references to baptismal imagery, though it is also evident that these references do not reflect a univocal understanding of baptism. While some of the texts seem to treat baptism as a religious rite signifying a baptizand's reception of salvific knowledge,² others regard baptism as a symbolic act that takes place in the tran-

¹ Following the lead of Hans-Martin Schenke (cf., e.g., “Das sethianische System nach Nag Hammadi-Handschriften”, in *Der Same Seths: Hans-Martin Schenkes Kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuem Testament* [ed. by G. Schenke Robinson, G. Schenke and U.-K. Plisch; NHMS 78; Leiden 2012] 285–292), with whom most scholars agree, I identify as Sethian at least the following texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices: the *Apocryphon of John* (*Ap. John*), the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (*Hyp. Arch.*), the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (*Holy Book*), the *Apocalypse of Adam* (*Apoc. Adam*), the *Three Steles of Seth* (*Steles Seth*), *Zostrianos* (*Zost.*), *Melchizedek* (*Melch.*), the *Thought of Norea* (*Norea*), and *Trimorphic Protennoia* (*Trim. Prot.*). Some scholars also regard *On the Origin of the World* (*Orig. World*) as a Sethian work; others consider it an Ophite text (see T. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Myth-making: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* [NHMS 68; Leiden 2009] 62).

² Most clearly in the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1), *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*.

scendental realm in connection with an experience of heavenly ascent.³ Since it is not possible to analyze thoroughly all Sethian texts dealing with baptismal imagery in a short article such as this, I will focus on one text in which baptism plays an especially prominent role and in light of which I can also make some general comparative comments concerning the use of baptismal imagery and terminology in other Sethian sources. The purpose of this article is thus to investigate baptismal references in the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (= the *Holy Book*), also known as the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.⁴ The choice of this text to illustrate Sethian ideas of baptism was not made by me but by those who invited me to present a paper at the symposium whose proceedings have now been collected in the present volume. The organizers of the symposium are to be congratulated for their choice, as the text is highly appropriate for two reasons: first, the *Holy Book* is a good representative of the Sethian tradition, for, as Michael Williams argues, it comes closest to presenting all the basic features usually linked with Sethianism.⁵ Second, as stated by Birger Pearson, the *Holy Book* “is centered on baptism and its liturgy.”⁶ As a matter of fact, the final main section of the tractate (III 62.24–68.1) consists of baptismal traditions and prayers and is preceded by sections that provide a mythological justification for them.⁷ Therefore, the *Holy Book* provides a good starting point for the study of Sethian baptismal imagery.

This article is not the first investigation into baptism in the Sethian writings of the Nag Hammadi Codices, in general, and not even of that in the *Holy Book*, in particular. There are three earlier studies I want to draw attention to. In much of what I say in my article, I am indebted to what the following three writers have said in their works. In 1986, Jean-Marie Sevrin published *Le dossier baptismal séthien*, in which he presents analyses of baptismal texts in seven Sethian writings.⁸ In the 2006 Festschrift for Wolf-Peter Funk, John Turner examines baptism in Sethian texts, focusing on the same tractates as Sevrin did.⁹ A third

³ Most importantly in *Zostrianos* and the *Three Steles of Seth*.

⁴ In this study, the Coptic text of the *Holy Book* is quoted according to the first critical edition of the text (NHC III,2 and NHC IV,2) in *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2: The Gospel of the Egyptians (The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit)* (ed. by A. Böhlig and F. Wisse in cooperation with P. Labib; NHS 4; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1975). The English translations are from M. Meyer, “The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit”, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. by M. Meyer; New York 2007), unless otherwise noted.

⁵ M. A. Williams, “Sethianism”, in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian ‘Heretics’* (ed. by A. Marjanen and P. Luomanen; SVigChr 76; Leiden 2005) 32–63, here 36.

⁶ B. A. Pearson, “Baptism in Sethian Gnostic Texts”, in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (ed. by D. Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176/1; Berlin 2011) 119–143, here 120.

⁷ J. D. Turner, “The Sethian Baptismal Rite”, in *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. by L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier; BCNH.E 7; Quebec 2006) 941–992, here 955; Pearson, “Baptism” (see n. 6), 132.

⁸ J.-M. Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien* (BCNH.E 2; Quebec 1986).

⁹ For the reference, see note 7.

general presentation of Sethian writings dealing with baptism is provided by Birger Pearson in an article included in the multi-volume work *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism*, the most comprehensive study of early Christian baptism ever, edited by a Norwegian team led by David Hellholm.¹⁰

In this article, I will focus on six particular questions concerning the baptismal ritual in the *Holy Book*. All of them have more to do with the practical aspects of the baptismal rite than its mythologoumena. Therefore, most of the text material I utilize are from the last main section of the *Holy Book* (III 62.24–68.1), which deals with the mission of Seth and practical issues related to baptism. The six questions are as follows: 1) What is the origin of baptism according to the *Holy Book*? 2) What constitutes the rite of baptism? 3) Who administers the baptism in the *Holy Book*? 4) What are the prerequisites for and the corollaries of baptism in the *Holy Book*? 5) Is baptism an uniterable event or is it a repeatable act? 6) What is meant by a baptismal rite of “five seals” in the *Holy Book*?

While attempting to answer all these questions within the context of the *Holy Book* itself, I will also try to offer some comments as to how the features and emphases of baptism in the *Holy Book* are related to those of other Sethian texts. This is important since the Sethian texts that refer to baptism – and not all of them do¹¹ – do not present a univocal view or understanding of baptism. In addition, in some places, I also make observations that may have bearing on the question of whether the view of baptism in the *Holy Book* may have been influenced by notions in other early Christian texts or whether it developed independently of them, perhaps under the influence of a Jewish baptismal sect, as Jean-Marie Sevrin has suggested.¹²

Before we move on to discuss the six questions I have presented above, one further preliminary remark is in order. As is commonly known, there are two different versions of the *Holy Book* in the Nag Hammadi Codices (III,2 and IV,2). Neither of them is intact. The usual way to get around this difficulty is to use both versions to supplement each other whenever the other version is deficient in material. This solution is very common in modern translations of the text.¹³ In this way, the combined text is rather complete. Yet, since the versions are not

¹⁰ For the reference, see note 6.

¹¹ The *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On the Origin of the World*, and the *Thought of Norea* do not contain baptismal imagery.

¹² Sevrin, *Le dossier* (see n. 8), 284–290.

¹³ See, e. g., M. Meyer, “The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit”, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. by M. Meyer; New York 2007) 252–269. The leading German translation of the text is an exception. It provides a two-column translation that makes comparison between the versions easy and also reveals the parts of the versions that contain lacunae. See U.-K. Plisch, “Das heilige Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes (NHC III,2; IV,2) (Das ägyptische Evangelium)”, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch: Studienausgabe: Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Mitgliedern des Berliner Arbeitskreises für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften* (ed. by H.-M. Schenke et al.; Berlin 2007) 215–239.

identical, the solution entails methodological uncertainties that should not be forgotten in reconstructions of the view of baptism in the text.¹⁴

1. What Is the Origin of Baptism in the *Holy Book*?

The origin of baptism is clearly explained in *Holy Book* III 63.23–64.3, where Seth is said to have established baptism through Pronoia and Jesus, the latter of whom he had put on. Of the three appearances Seth is assigned to undertake according to the *Holy Book*, it is the third one, the judgement of the archons, powers, and authorities (III 63.5), that marks the introduction of baptism. That this is said to have taken place in connection with the judgement of the archons, powers, and authorities and through the living Jesus intimates that the baptism that marks the reception of οὐροπλον̄ ἡσοοῖν ἡτειαληθῆια (“armor of the knowledge of truth;” III 63.7–8) is to be regarded as an earthly baptism, introduced by Jesus, in whom Seth is incarnated, to provide a means of receiving salvific knowledge,¹⁵ not as a symbolic and substitutionary celestial act.¹⁶ The introduction of this kind of earthly baptism through Seth, incarnated in Jesus, creates the possibility of present and future salvation for the seed of Seth.

2. What Constitutes the Rite of Baptism?

Although the text, especially its last major section dealing with baptismal traditions and prayers (III 64.9–68.1), refers to various parts of the baptismal act, the exact content and order of the components is not always clear. I will, at any rate, venture to reconstruct a description of possible elements of the baptismal rite, with the notable help of Sevrin,¹⁷ though I also slightly disagree with him in some places.

The obvious core event of the baptismal rite in the *Holy Book* is the act of baptism in the narrow sense of the word. But how is the act of baptism to be viewed? Is it a concrete, earthly ritual act or a metaphor standing for something else? The reference to baptism in the *Holy Book* can hardly be merely metaphorical, as it is perhaps in *Zostrianos* where the protagonist of the text undergoes several “baptisms” in the course of his ascent through the heavens.¹⁸ The fact

¹⁴ Fortunately, the major part of the text dealing with baptism is preserved in both versions, which makes comparison between the two versions possible.

¹⁵ Cf. also Böhlig and Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2* (see n. 4), 192.

¹⁶ Pace N. Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to 'Gnosticism': Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (New York 2013) 173.

¹⁷ Sevrin, *Le dossier* (see n. 8), 91–109.

¹⁸ Pearson, “Baptism” (see n. 6), 135.

that, in the *Holy Book*, baptism is viewed as an earthly rite, delivering baptizands from the power of various archontic figures (see above), suggests that the prominent position of water terminology in the poetic description of those powers a baptizand is expected to invoke in connection with his or her baptism should be taken as a concrete reference to water baptism. For example, the first power that appears to baptizands, Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekus (Ἰεσσεῦ Μαζαρεῦ Ἰεσσεδεκεῦ; III 64.10–11), the power that most probably stands for Jesus the Nazarene and Jesus the righteous (δικαίος),¹⁹ is introduced as “the living water.” This is a very appropriate introduction for a figure in whose form Seth is incarnated to establish water baptism. Micheus, Michar, and Mnesinous are portrayed as those “stationed over the wellspring of truth” (III 64.14–16; cf. also III 64.19–20).²⁰ Sesengenbarpharanges, the purifier, is depicted in concrete terms as “one stationed over the baptism of the living” (IV 76.5–7).²¹ It is also worth noting that the description of the baptizands in *Holy Book* III 64.5–6, as those “who are brought in and go out (νεταρε μῆ νεταπαρε),” resembles the baptismal imagery of immersion.²² The same is even clearer in the parallel text of codex IV, where the aorist forms are used: “[...] they are brought in (aor.) and they are received (aor.) (ὑλαγῆτογ ἁγ[ω] ὑλαγῆτογ; IV 75.20–21).” In light of these observations, it seems most likely to take the mention of baptism in the *Holy Book* as a reference to a concrete ritual act of immersion. The terms used to describe the baptism in the *Holy Book* both in Greek (βάπτισμα; III 63.24) and in Coptic (ωμῆ; IV 75.13) seem to confirm this impression. Both of them usually have the connotation of immersion. Even χωκῆ, which can certainly be used to refer to any kind of washing (cf., e. g., Acts 9:37), can also mean immersion in *Holy Book* III 65.24, where it is used together with βάπτισμα.

As stated above, the mere act of baptism, most likely in the form of an immersion, is not the only component of the baptismal rite. In *Holy Book* III 65.26–66.8, three additional features linked with the rite of baptism are introduced. The first is the invocation (ἐπίκλησις).²³ The word seems to refer to a prayer that is directed to the spiritual powers at work in baptism. It is not clear if such an invocation should be seen as part of the baptism itself, perhaps immediately preceding it, if the invocation should be seen as a corollary of baptism, or if it

¹⁹ Meyer, “The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit” (see n. 13), 265 n. 71.

²⁰ As Turner (“The Sethian Baptismal Rite” [see n. 7], 961) has pointed out, this triad of names also occurs in other Sethian writings but always in baptismal contexts. To be sure, in *Zostrianos*, for example, where two of the three, Michar and Micheus, are mentioned, the baptism that the text speaks about may very well be metaphorical (6.7–10). In *Trimorphic Protennoia*, however, the reference to Micheus, Michar, and Mnesinous as baptizers (!) clearly implies that some people have played actual “roles” in a concrete ritual act of water baptism (48.18–19).

²¹ The reading of the *Holy Book* IV is clear and understandable at this point, whereas the reading of *Holy Book* III (64.16–18) is no doubt corrupt.

²² So also Meyer, “The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit” (see n. 13), 265 n. 70.

²³ The word “invocation” is absent in codex IV.

should be understood as a necessary and actual prerequisite to the baptism. It is at least clear, according to the third-codex version of the *Holy Book*, that the baptizands need already to be or then to become worthy of it.

The second feature the baptizands must be worthy of, according to *Holy Book* III 65.26–66.8, is the “renunciation of the Five Seals in the baptism of running water (ⲁⲡⲞⲤⲀⲪⲒⲤ ⲛⲧⲓⲉ ⲛⲥⲢⲂⲀⲒⲤ ⲉⲃⲓ ⲡⲓⲬⲀⲒⲤⲤⲤⲀ ⲛⲡⲏⲒⲏ; III 66.3–4).” In the same way as the ἐπίκλησις, the renunciation is also seen as either a prerequisite for or a closely connected component of the act of baptism itself. But what is actually required? What must a baptizand be worthy of renouncing? If the text is read as it stands in codex III, it seems to require that, before, during, or after the act of baptism, a baptizand has to give up the five seals. In the context of Sethian writings, this suggestion does not, however, make much sense. Whatever the five seals mean in the case of each Sethian text, it is clear that the five-seal baptism is the most commendable – and, in fact, the only acceptable – form of baptism within Sethianism. The same is also true in the *Holy Book*, where the positive character of the five seals is underlined by the fact that they belong to the most eminent, incorruptible beings of the Pleroma (IV 56.23–57.1; III 63.3). Therefore, I suggest that the text in codex III is, for some reason, corrupt at this point and that the original text should be read according to codex IV. *Holy Book* IV 78.1–6 reads as follows:

[...] through him who is [holy] [and in]corruptible, Poimael, [and] through those who are worthy of the baptisms [of] the renunciation and the seals of the ineffable waters²⁴ of [their] baptism [...]²⁵

If the text is read in this way, the target of the renunciation is by no means the baptism of five seals. On the contrary, it is possible that the requirement for being worthy of “the seals of the ineffable waters of [their] baptism” refers to the baptism of the five seals and thus enhances its positive value. If this is so, what then does a baptizand have to renounce? John Turner has suggested that, in the context of the *Holy Book*, “the baptisms of the renunciation” may signify a purifying abandonment “of the corrupting influence of the world.”²⁶ In light of *Holy Book* III 63.4–64.3, which emphasizes the “renunciation of the world” as a consequence of Seth’s decisive salvific act, this interpretation is very likely. One further question remains to be asked: why does the text speak about “the baptisms [of] the renunciation?” Why is the plural used? Is the baptism in the *Holy Book* to be seen as a recurring act? As we are going to see, the answer to this question is most probably negative. If this is the case, the best way to explain the plural in “the baptisms of the renunciation” is not to take “baptisms” as a

²⁴ The Coptic word ⲙⲟ[ⲟ]ϣ is here understood as a plural form of the word “water,” for another instance of this, see, e. g., Matt. 14:28.

²⁵ The translation is mine.

²⁶ Turner, “The Sethian Baptismal Rite” (see n. 7), 947.

reference to actual concrete baptismal acts but to see it as a metaphor that emphasizes renunciation as a process.

The third important feature connected with the rite of baptism has to do with the description of the baptizand after he or she has become worthy of invoking spiritual powers and renouncing the corrupting influence of the world. We are told that he or she will also come to know his or her own receivers (ΠΑΡΑΛΗΜΠΤΩΡ; III 66.4–5). What does this mean? First of all, the text presupposes that the ability to know the receivers is due to a special teaching (III 66.5–7). After the baptizands have come to know their receivers, they also become known by them. This mutual knowledge has an important soteriological significance: the baptized Sethians who have reached this position “shall not taste death” (III 66.7–8). A similar understanding is also reflected in *Ap. John* II 31.22–25, which portrays a paradigmatic act of baptism administered by the Pronoia/Savior. There, the baptized John is also given a promise that “death might not have power over him from this time on.”²⁷

Who, then, are the receivers (ΠΑΡΑΛΗΜΠΤΩΡ)? A conclusive answer can hardly be found, but two possibilities present themselves. First, if the baptism can be understood as a communal act, then these receivers may be community officials who welcome new baptizands into a Sethian group. Secondly, and perhaps more probably, these receivers may be Pleromatic attendants who will meet with baptized Sethians while they are returning to the realm of the Great Invisible Spirit.

To summarize, the baptismal rite of the *Holy Book* consists at least of 1) an invocation, possibly pre-baptismal, which may also include a praise of various spiritual powers; 2) a renunciation of the corrupting influence of the world; 3) the baptism itself, probably in the form of an immersion; 4) the knowledge of the receivers that guarantees immortality, probably in the realm of the light. The exact order and relationship of these components of the baptismal rite, however, is not clearly explicated in the *Holy Book*.

3. Who Administers the Baptism in the *Holy Book*?

There is only one text in the *Holy Book* that discusses the identity of the one who administers baptism. In *Holy Book* III 65.23–26, after the description of the four great Sethian lights, the text introduces the fifth figure, Yoel, who is presented as the one “stationed over the name of the one who will be ordained to baptize.” The text is extremely cryptic and leaves the actual baptizer anonymous. Yoel, who authorizes the baptizer to do his or her task, is a known figure and belongs to the

²⁷ The translation is from *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (ed. by M. Waldstein and F. Wisse; NHMS 33; Leiden 1995) 175.

divine pentad in the *Holy Book* (49.22–50.3). The name, or its variant Youel, appears also in two other Sethian texts. In *Allogenes the Stranger*, Youel is a female revealer who imparts to Allogenes five revelations, on the Barbelo Aeon and the Triple-Powered One, and the means by which they can be known and praised, but her revelations do not deal with baptism (45.1–58.7). In *Zostrianos*, on the other hand, Yoel/Youel has a definite link to baptism. The all-glorious male and virginal Yoel/Youel is the leader of those glories who help one during a mystical experience of ascent through the aeons, and he also administers several baptisms for Zostrianos, though it is possible that these baptisms are not concrete rituals but rather symbolic actions (57.13–63.8). In any case, the way Yoel/Youel is portrayed in *Zostrianos* and the *Holy Book* shows that Yoel/Youel is connected to baptism in two Sethian traditions, though the portrayals are markedly different.

Who, then, is the one whom Yoel authorizes to administer baptism in the *Holy Book*? John Turner has suggested that even the baptizer is to be seen as a mythological figure, who he assumes could be Autogenes.²⁸ If the text refers to an earthly baptismal rite instead of a transcendental symbolic one, as I have suggested above, it is more likely to think that the anonymous baptizer, who acts with the authorization of Yoel, is a Sethian who assists another person to be baptized. If this is true, it rules out the possibility of a self-administered baptism. It may thus also suggest that there might have been a communal dimension among Sethian devotees, reflected at least in the *Holy Book*, and that baptism may have served as a rite of initiation.²⁹

4. What Are the Prerequisites for and the Corollaries of Baptism in the *Holy Book*?

In *Holy Book* III 64.6–9, it is stated that “he (= Seth) has equipped them with the armor of the knowledge of truth.” Yet the text does not make it completely clear at the outset whether Seth has done this to the baptizands in order to qualify them for baptism or whether this knowledge is something offered to them during baptism. The same holds true regarding the invocation as well as the renunciation of the corrupt influence of the world (III 66.2–4; IV 78.2–4³⁰). Are they presented as prerequisites for baptism, or are they gifts bestowed on the baptizand during baptism? Although no conclusive answer can be given, it is perhaps more likely that the gift of knowledge, the ability to invoke transcendental powers, and the ardor to renounce worldly influence in one’s life are a gift following baptism rather than preliminaries thereto. This is corroborated by the

²⁸ Turner, “The Sethian Baptismal Rite” (see n. 7), 963.

²⁹ A similar suggestion has been made by Williams, “Sethianism” (see n. 5), 57.

³⁰ For readings of these texts, see ch. “2. What Constitutes the Rite of Baptism” above?

fact that, when Seth descends to save his race, which has gone astray (III 63.8–10), it is through the “reconciliation (ϩⲱⲣⲣ³¹) of the world” that salvation takes place. Clearly, it is the divine realm which initiates the salvific process, not the lost race of Seth. Baptism thus has an important soteriological function through which the members of the race of Seth find salvific knowledge regarding their own divine origin.

5. Is Baptism an Uniterable Event or Is It a Repeatable Act?

No explicit answer is given to this question, but the fact that baptized Sethians “will not taste death,” according to the *Holy Book* (66.7–8), is more understandable in the context of a single definitive baptismal act than that of several repeatable baptisms. If this conclusion is accepted, the *Holy Book*, like some other Sethian treatises (*Ap. John*; *Trim. Prot.*), presents a similar view of baptism as that of most early Christian texts: baptism is an uniterable rite of initiation. As John Turner has pointed out, Mandaean texts divulge a different picture. *Masbuta* constitutes a definitely non-initiatory rite and can be repeated indefinitely.³²

6. What Is Meant by a Baptismal Rite of the “Five Seals” in the *Holy Book*?

Unlike many other Sethian texts (*Ap. John* II 31.22–25; *Zost.* 6.7–7.22; 53.14–24; *Trim. Prot.* 48.15–35), the *Holy Book* does not mention the baptism of the five seals at all, but it does speak about the five seals as a being of a divine heavenly realm (III 55.12; IV 56.23–57.1; III 63.3). Do these references to the five seals in the *Holy Book* have anything to do with the baptism of the five seals found in other Sethian texts? It is unlikely that the five seals, as they are presented here in the description of the divine heavenly realm, would refer to an earthly initiation rite, but they probably do stand for a personified mythological being.³³ One can, of course, speculate whether the choice of this mythological name “five seals” is due to an important role the baptism of five seals played in the ritual life of Sethian groups. One passage in the *Holy Book* in fact lends support to this suggestion. In *Holy Book* IV 78.4–6, the seals are linked together with baptism, though

³¹ This form of the Coptic word occurs in III 63.9,16 and means “reconciliation,” whereas in the parallel texts of IV 74.[24]; 75.3 the word is spelled ϩⲱⲣⲉ. That word normally means “killing” and is not completely impossible as a variant reading. It is nevertheless equally possible to assume that the readings of codex IV are phonetic variants of ϩⲱⲣⲣ. See Böhlig and Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2* (see n. 4), 192.

³² Turner, “The Sethian Baptismal Rite” (see n. 7), 978.

³³ See Turner, “The Sethian Baptismal Rite” (see n. 7), 955.

the text does not give an exact number of these seals. The passage states that those who are worthy of “the seals of the ineffable waters of their baptism”³⁴ will not experience death but will gain eternal salvation. Although no exact number of these seals is mentioned in connection with salvific baptism, it is likely that that number is five, since the same number occurs in the name of the above-mentioned mythological figure of the heavenly realm.

If the baptism of the *Holy Book* is conceived of as the baptism of the five seals, it is important to ask what exactly is meant by these five seals. Since the *Holy Book* does not explicitly address this issue, we can turn to another Sethian text for an explanation. *Trimorphic Protennoia* is an especially useful point of comparison, since it has the closest parallel to the *Holy Book* with respect to its view of baptism as an earthly initiation ritual.³⁵ The most important passage in *Trimorphic Protennoia* on the basis of which the baptism of the five seals has been scrutinized is 48.15–35:³⁶

I (= Protennoia) delivered him to those who give robes, Yammon, Elasso, Amenai, and they clothed him with a robe from the robes of light. I delivered him to the baptizers, and they baptized him, Micheus, Michar, Mnesinous, and they immersed him in the spring of the [water] of life. I delivered him to those who enthrone, Bariel, Nouthan, Sabenai, and they enthroned him from the throne of glory. I delivered him to those who glorify, Ariom, Elien, Phariel, and they glorified him with the glory of the fatherhood. Those who rapture raptured, Kamaliel, [...]anen, Samblo, the servants of (the) great holy luminaries, and they took him into the place of the light of his fatherhood. And he received the Five Seals from the light of the Mother Protennoia, First Thought, and it was [granted] him to partake of the mystery of knowledge, and [he became light] in light.

There are usually two alternative interpretations of the five seals in this text, depending on how one construes the last sentence on the reception of the five seals. Scholars who think that the last sentence describes a distinct event following a quintuple immersion argue that these five seals refer to a post-baptismal prophylactic anointing/sealing, through which the five sense organs³⁷ or bodily orifices³⁸ are protected from the attacks of evil powers.³⁹ Another, more likely interpretation of the last sentence about the reception of the five seals in *Trim.*

³⁴ The translation is mine; see my discussion on the text in ch. “What Does the Rite of Baptism Consist Of?”

³⁵ For a different view, see J. D. Turner (“Three Forms of First Thought”, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* [ed. by M. Meyer; New York 2007] 715–735, here 717), who argues that “the Five Seals are interpreted as a five-stage ritual of psychical ascent.”

³⁶ The translation is from Turner, “Three Forms of First Thought” (see n. 35), 715–735.

³⁷ Thus in Y. Janssens, *La Prôtennoia Trimorphe* (BCNH.T 4; Québec 1978) 80.

³⁸ Thus in T. Rasimus, “The Three Descents of Barbelo and Sethian Initiation”, an unpublished article; similarly, A. Logan, “The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered”, *VigChr* 51 (1997) 188–206, here 192.

³⁹ Rasimus (“The Three Descents of Barbelo” [see n. 38]) has pointed out that this kind of prophylactic anointing or sealing was rather common in connection to early Christian baptism.

Prot. 48.15–35 is to maintain that it does not refer to a separate event following the baptismal ritual but that it forms a summary of the five actions described above. This is shown by the change of the subject from the first-person to the third-person singular. Thus, the “five seals” refer to the five actions constituting the five elements of baptism in *Trimorphic Protennoia* and probably also in the *Holy Book*:⁴⁰ investiture, baptismal immersion, enthronement, glorification, and rapture.⁴¹ The fact that various mythological figures are agents of various baptismal acts does not mean that these acts should be seen as events of non-earthly psychical ascent. Rather, the mythological figures should be seen as transcendental beings who authorize members of Sethian groups to act as their earthly proxies.

Epilogue

In this article, I have tried to argue that baptism in the *Holy Book* is to be seen as an earthly ritual, through which a person can be delivered from the domination of archontic powers. At the same time, baptism provides a baptizand with the gift of spiritual knowledge, which guarantees him or her immortality and eternal salvation. Baptism also seems to serve as a means of initiation by which a baptizand can become a member of a Sethian group. Thus, one of the main results of this article is to have shown that the study of such a theme as baptism makes it difficult to think that all Sethians might have been people whose religiosity was of a private type. At least in the *Holy Book*, baptism seems to have the function of an initiatory act that connects a baptizand to a community of some sort. Regrettably, the baptismal passages do not reveal to us what kind of communal life we should envisage.

⁴⁰ Thus also in Pearson, “Baptism” (see n. 6), 128.

⁴¹ Pearson (“Baptism” [see n. 6], 128) is probably right when he claims that the ritual acts given by *Trim. Prot.* 48.15–35 are not in the right order. He suggests that at least investiture and baptismal immersion should be in reverse order.

IV. Evangelien in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

The Nag Hammadi Gospels

Simon Gathercole

Abstract

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die sogenannten ‚Evangelien‘ unter den Nag-Hammadi-Schriften. Insbesondere diskutiert er die Wirkung der Bezeichnung dieser Texte als ‚Evangelium‘. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird den Werken gewidmet, deren Kolophon den Titel ‚Evangelium‘ (Thomas, Philippus, „Ägypter-Evangelium“) enthält. Ebenfalls wird das „Evangelium Veritatis“ betrachtet, dessen Titel im Werk enthalten ist und auch von Irenaeus erwähnt wird.

The texts labelled as Gospels in the Nag Hammadi codices are an extremely varied group. One, the *Gospel of Philip*, is largely a series of bite-sized didactic musings. The most famous, the *Gospel of Thomas*, is a collection of sayings of, or dialogues with, Jesus. The *Gospel of the Egyptians*, or the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, is a mythological treatise. Another, the *Gospel of Truth*, has often been described as a homily, but in truth its genre is very unclear. None of them shares the narrative form of the canonical gospels, and none of them – even the longest, the *Gospel of Philip* – comes very close to the length of the shortest New Testament Gospel, the *Gospel of Mark*.¹

My aim in this chapter is to see what happens when the term “Gospel” is put to work as a title for these Nag Hammadi works, that is to say, to explore the effect of identifying these works as “Gospel.” The argument presented here, then, will not come up with a definition of Gospel, apply that definition, and see which Nag Hammadi writings put their hands up as belonging to the group. Rather, for

¹ The word counts of translations into English illustrate this:
– *Gospel of Truth*: 5695 words in the Attridge/MacRae translation;
– *Gospel of the Egyptians*: 4401 in that of Boehlig/Wisse;
– *Gospel of Thomas*: 5222 in Lambdin’s translation;
– *Gospel of Philip*: 9161 in Isenberg’s translation;
– *Gospel of Mark*: 13582 in the NIV.

For comparisons of the Coptic versions of the canonical Gospels and *Thomas*, see S. J. Gathercole, “Named Testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas: An Expanded Inventory and Analysis”, *HTR* 105 (2012) 53–89, here 68.

the purpose of the argument, this chapter will apply a “nominalist” criterion to define the scope of the group of works to be discussed, that is, the exploration will be of those works which are called Gospels.² What is under consideration in this paper, then, is how a particular work is affected by being called a Gospel. This enables us to avoid the vexed question of what the “essence” of a Gospel might be, and focus instead on the effects of calling a work a Gospel.

The *Gospel of Thomas*, then, is covered here because it is referred to as a Gospel both in its colophon and by patristic authors.³ “The Gospel of Truth” is the title of a Valentinian composition according to Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.11.9). The *Gospel of Truth* in Codex I, though without an *inscriptio* or *subscriptio*, has as its opening words ‘The Gospel of Truth is ...’ The title therefore probably came from this opening phrase, as often happened with opening words.⁴ Irenaeus’s *testimonium* is almost certainly to an earlier version of this Nag Hammadi tractate: it would be an extraordinary coincidence if Irenaeus referred to a work by this title, and that there was also another Valentinian work which had the phrase as its opening line.⁵ (The phrase “gospel of truth,” as Nagel notes, is by no means a common one.⁶) The fact that there is not a title appended to the text in Nag Hammadi Codex I may well be a result of the character of this codex rather than necessarily because the work did not have a title.⁷ The title of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*

² See C. M. Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (OECGT; Oxford 2007) vi: ‘An alternative approach [sc. to deciding whether a work is a Gospel on the basis of its content] might be to accept as a “gospel” anything which claims the name “gospel” for itself, and/or perhaps is claimed by others to have such a name (a so-called nominalist approach). This would certainly provide a more extensive list than some “essentialist” approaches; it would, however, come up against potential problems in cases where the text concerned is not extant in full and/or no third party refers to it: hence we do not have any claims, one way or the other, about what title the text claimed for itself or how others regarded it.’ In the cases we are dealing with in this chapter, we do have references internally and/or externally.

³ See Gathercole, “Named Testimonia” (see n. 1), and S. J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden 2014) 35–61, on named testimonia, and 617–618 on the *subscriptio*.

⁴ See E. Nachmanson, *Der griechische Buchtitel: Einige Beobachtungen* (Darmstadt 1969) 37–52, for examples of titles derived from the opening words of works.

⁵ On the improbability of such a coincidence, see P. Nagel, *Evangelien und Apostelgeschichten aus den Schriften von Nag Hammadi und verwandten Kodizes. Koptisch und Deutsch*, Vol. 1 of *Codex Apocryphus Gnosticus Novi Testamenti* (WUNT 326; Tübingen 2014) 31–32, contra C. Marksches in idem and J. Schröter (eds.), *Evangelien und Verwandtes*, Vol. 1 of *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (Tübingen 2012) 349. On the other hand, Nagel takes this Nag Hammadi work to be referring to and presupposing, rather than identifying itself as, the *Gospel of Truth* referred to by Irenaeus (*Codex Apocryphus*, 3). This seems to be an unnecessary multiplication of entities, however.

⁶ Nagel, *Codex Apocryphus* (see n. 5), 31.

⁷ B. Standaert, “‘Evangelium Veritatis’ et ‘Veritatis Evangelium’: La question du titre et les témoins patristiques”, *VC* 30 (1976) 138–150, here 140: ‘il semble bien que la raison de l’absence de titre pour le second texte du Codex Jung est à chercher non pas dans le texte mais dans le Codex. [...] Ce resultat codicologique negatif ne permet cependant pas de conclure qu’à cette époque l’ouvrage n’avait pas encore de titre.’ Certainly, to look at the facsimile edition, one is

is more complicated, because its colophon reads, *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*. However, in its larger colophon, the title *Gospel of the Egyptians* is also present – and it is of course not unusual for a book in antiquity to have more than one title.⁸ This title of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* might alternatively be translated as the *Egyptian Gospel*.⁹ Again, the *Gospel of Philip* gives us its title from its colophon.¹⁰

As stated above, then, this chapter will see what happens when the term “Gospel” is put to work as a title for these Nag Hammadi works. The procedure will first be to sketch the overall theological “message” of each of these four works, with a particular focus on their attention to Jesus and his role in salvation. After that, I will address the question of what effects result from giving these works the title “Gospel.”

I. The *Gospel of Truth*

I will begin with the *Gospel of Truth*, one of the few Nag Hammadi texts which is also good literature. As Prof. Thomassen has ably shown, protology and salvation-history are all interwoven, and Valentinian ritual is also hinted at as well. This

struck by the erratic layout: see J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex I* (Leiden 1977). Only two works in Codex I have a title. The first (the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*) is inscribed on the fly-leaf, and because of the stylized nature of the script of the title it is hard to tell whether it is in a different hand. The second, the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, is certainly written in a different hand from the rest of the codex (Standaert, “Evangelium Veritatis”, 139), as can easily be seen from looking at the facsimile.

⁸ See further § V/1 below for evidence.

⁹ This is preferred by B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London 1987) 101.

¹⁰ P. Nagel, “Das (Buch) nach Philippus’: Zur Titelnachschrift Nag Hammadi Codex II,3: p. 86,18–19”, *ZNW* 99 (2008) 99–111, quite rightly points out the odd appearance of the title appended to the text of the (from his point of view, so-called) *Gospel of Philip*: rather than a two-line title marked off at the end of the text, *παραγγελιον* comes shortly after the end of the text with some spacing but on the same line, whereas *παραφιλπιπος* appears after a line-break in the normal way of a Gospel title. I would disagree with Nagel’s conclusion that *παραφιλπιπος* implies an original title other than “Gospel” however. In the first place, one could account for this as a scribal mistake. The *παραγγελιον* is in the same hand as the rest of the text, suggesting an *in scribendo* correction. Alternatively, *παραφιλπιπος* would be a perfectly acceptable abbreviation for *παραγγελιον παραφιλπιπος*, especially after a previous Gospel (*Thomas* precedes it): such abbreviation is not as unusual as Nagel makes out (110 n. 31), as the shorter form appears (though less commonly than the fuller form) in both initial titles, running headers and end titles in Gospel manuscripts. See S. J. Gathercole, “The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts”, *ZNW* 104 (2013) 33–76, here 72–76. We would then have in Codex II, ‘the Gospel according to Thomas,’ followed by ‘that according to Philip.’ Finally, Nagel’s alternative ‘Buch’ is certainly no improvement on Gospel, because the use of *κατα* with “book” would be unusual, whereas *κατα* with Gospel is widely established. There are also problems with the assumptions that Nagel begins with about what form a work ought to take to be called a Gospel (104), which will be addressed more fully later.

all needs to be taken into account when considering the message of the *Gospel of Truth* and of the saving role or roles that Jesus is envisaged as carrying out.

The message can be summarized briefly as follows.¹¹ As a result of a fall from primordial union with the Father, the resulting alienation leads to a distinct “All,” or “Entirety.” This All is now characterized by two key features, (a) deficiency and (b) ignorance. Corresponding to these aspects of the plight is a solution which involves (a) perfecting or filling up the deficiency, and (b) replacing ignorance with knowledge; the consequence of these is – more experientially – pictured as waking up joyfully from an agonizing nightmare.

Jesus has a number of identities and roles crucial to this soteriological process. With the inevitable problems of an artificial division and a degree of selectivity, the functions of Jesus will be summarized, at least in the first instance, with reference to the two roles of (1.) providing fullness or perfecting, and (2.) revealing knowledge.

1. *Filling and Perfection*

In two places, Jesus is identified as $\chi\rho(\iota\sigma\tau\omicron)\varsigma$. In one of these,¹² the author plays – as does the *Gospel of Philip*¹³ – on the etymology of $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$:

“That is why Christ was spoken of in their midst, so that those who were disturbed might receive a bringing-back, and he might anoint them with the ointment. This ointment is the mercy of the Father, who will have mercy on them. But those whom he has anointed are the ones who have become perfect.” (*Gos. Truth* 36.13–20)

The discourse continues in parabolic mode, discussing the “jars” which apparently correspond to individual human subjects. The jars had originally been full,¹⁴ but their oil had been drawn out,¹⁵ and so deficiency or emptiness resulted (36.24). Jesus fills the empty jars with the anointing oil and thus makes them

¹¹ For other, more lengthy summaries, see A. C. Robinson, “The ‘Evangelium Veritatis’: Its Doctrine, Character, and Origin”, *JR* 43 (1963) 234–243; A. McGuire, “Conversion and Gnosis in the ‘Gospel of Truth’”, *NovT* 28 (1986) 338–355 (esp. 344–353); E. Thomassen, “The Gospel of Truth: Introduction”, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (ed. by M. Meyer; New York 2007) 31–35; E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (Leiden 2006) 146–165.

¹² In the other, there is no obvious significance to the deployment of the $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ title: ‘Jesus Christ ($\eta\epsilon[\sigma\omicron\upsilon]\varsigma$ $\nu\epsilon\chi\rho[\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma]\varsigma$) enlightened those who were in darkness through oblivion. He enlightened them; he showed (them) a way; and the way is the truth which he taught them’ (18.16–21).

¹³ *Gos. Phil.* 74.13–16: “The chrism is superior to baptism, for it is from the word ‘Chrism’ that we have been called ‘Christians,’ certainly not because of the word ‘baptism.’ And it is because of the chrism that ‘the Christ’ has his name.”

¹⁴ When the jar was originally full, it seems either to have lacked an adequate seal or to have been damaged: there is a ‘thing by which its ointment goes’ (36.25–27).

¹⁵ It is emptied – according to an obscure statement – by some kind of (demonic?) suction: ‘a breath draws it’ (36.28).

perfect.¹⁶ Here the fall is pictured not, as at the start, as a departure from the Father, but rather from the All's point of view, or perhaps better as the falls of individuated human subjects.

Also to be noted here are the undoubted connections with the Valentinian ritual of anointing, with the "Christ" passage hinting at the anointing of the initiates by Christ, even if the *Gospel of Truth* has no explicit mention of ritual.¹⁷

2. Revelation and Knowledge

The Christ figure is also identifiable with the 'Word' (λογος) who initially resides 'in the thought and the mind of the Father' (16.35–36).¹⁸ The Word does not remain there, however, but comes forth, appears and – in a paean devoted to the Word – takes flesh.¹⁹ Similarly, Jesus is also the 'Son' who is the hidden being of the Father, but also revealed (24.11–14). The Son is also the revealed *name* of the Father (38.6–41.3). In the earthly realm, Jesus enlightens, shows the way, teaches the truth – and as a result 'was nailed to a tree' (18.24). Even that 'nailing,' however, has some kind of revelatory function: Jesus on the tree thereby 'became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father' (18.24–26).²⁰

There are two additional motifs, however, which may complicate an artificial division of deficiency/fullness and ignorance/knowledge.

3. The Book

In the first place, there are the book and the names. In one respect, the book is revelatory: this book which existed in the mind of the Father is now manifest (19.34–20.3). On the other hand, receiving the name contained in the book is receiving a filling-up of what was deficient. It is equivalent to the Father's gift of

¹⁶ The true 'Christian,' however, neither is nor ever can be deficient, because the seal of his jar is immovable, and indeed the Father constantly fills him (36.29–35).

¹⁷ The *Gospel of Philip* talks of the anointing of Christians not so much by Christ as by the apostles whom Christ anointed: 'For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us' (*Gos. Phil.* 74.16–18).

¹⁸ This is the case whether grammatically the 'Word' or the 'Pleroma' is the antecedent of the phrase, because the Word also comes from the Pleroma.

¹⁹ The Word is the mediator in the protological myth, who corresponds to Jesus as the mediator in history, as Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 11), 158, rightly notes.

²⁰ While there is some ambiguity, it is probable that a real death of the saviour is talked of: Jesus is 'the merciful one, the faithful one [...] patient in accepting sufferings' (*Gos. Truth* 20.10–11). Thomassen captures the ambiguity well: 'Nevertheless, the nature of the suffering and death of the Saviour remains ambiguous. On the one hand, he is said to be clothed in eternal life even as he descends into death. [...] This suggests that the Saviour only *appeared* to be incarnate in a human body, and that he remained all the time an imperishable, eternally living being. On the other hand, he is also said to have "been patient in suffering," the ultimate of which is death itself' (*Spiritual Seed* [see n. 11], 154).

the perfection of the All, which he had previously retained in himself. As Thomassen has put it: “The called person’s true self has been kept and prepared in the thought and the mind of the Father since the beginning. The revelation of the Saviour brings about unification with this true self, represented as the person’s ‘name.’”²¹ The revelatory name has the same function in the *Gospel of Truth* as the perfection which the Father retained.

4. *The Complex Relation of the Son-Word to the Aeons/All*

Finally, Thomassen’s view that the “All” or “Entirety” is not simply the fallen element redeemed by a saviour *separate* from it merits comment. Prof. Thomassen argues that the fall of the “Entirety” is both a fall and a revelation at the same time, and that in some sense the manifestation/fall of the aeons is identical with the coming forth of the Son: ‘he [sc. the Son-Word] can be described as [...] manifesting what is inside the Father, which from one point of view is nothing other than the aeons themselves.’²² It is on this point that I would myself hesitate to go this far, though it is certainly a very intriguing possibility.

5. *Conclusion*

One can summarize the *Gospel of Truth*, then, as follows. The Son is the *Doppelgänger* of the Father, the name. He is the revelation of the Father as the Word. As the saviour, ‘being knowledge and perfection’ (20.38–39), he is the double-solution to the double-plight. The All languishes in oblivious ignorance, hence needs ‘knowledge.’ Similarly it stands empty and deficient, and hence needs ‘perfection.’ Salvation consists in individuals receiving the name and their names, and the All returning to the Father. The reference to the anointing by Christ gestures at the Valentinian ritual of chrism.

II. *The Gospel of Philip*

There is sustained interest in the *Gospel of Philip* both in who Christ is, and in what he achieved through his coming.

1. *The Identity of Jesus: Names and Nature*

As in the *Gospel of Truth*, there is a complicated and paradoxical understanding of the naming of Jesus.

²¹ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n.11), 152, provides the helpful distinction between ‘empirical self’ and ‘higher self.’

²² Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 11), 160.

In the first place, the Father gives the Son the Father's own name. The Son thereby in some sense becomes the Father by possessing his name. It is an ineffable name, known to the elect but not spoken by them (54.5–13). Jesus also has other designations and titles such as 'lord,' 'word,' and 'son of man.'²³ In particular, Jesus is his universal name, the same in every language; yet in another sense it is also hidden (56.3–7). 'The Nazarene,' a 'middle name,' reveals what is hidden (56.12–13), and perhaps relatedly also means 'truth' (62.14–15). Christ, unlike Jesus, is a title which varies across languages – between Christ and Messiah in particular (56.7–9). Messiah also means 'measured' (62.11–13). The name Christ (*passim*) is in some places related to his being both anointed and anointer (74.15–16).

2. The soteriological roles of Jesus

This role of Jesus as 'anointer' leads neatly into discussion of his soteriological roles. Like the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of Philip* interweaves protology, salvation history, and ritual.

To take one instance of soteriology expressed in protological terms, there is a seemingly important explanation of the language of Mark 10:45/Matthew 20:28 where Jesus lays down his soul: 'Not only did he voluntarily lay down his soul when he appeared, but *from the day the world existed he laid down his soul*. At the moment he wished to do so, he came forward to take it back' (53.6–10).²⁴ This is usually taken specifically to refer to Jesus' recovery of the souls of the spirituals,²⁵ but perhaps it could additionally encompass the psychic element.

The salvation of the spirituals is the focus in particular in the accounts of the historical coming of Jesus, which also corresponds to events in the protological realm.²⁶ Just as salvation can be located in the protological realm, in the historical realm *Philip* can talk of salvation being accomplished variously by the incarnation, the baptism, or the death of Jesus. His incarnation was the result of the union of the Father of the All with a virgin (probably Sophia), and as Jesus came in a body in the bridal chamber, he also 'established all [or: *the All*] within it:' the incarnation thus has a redemptive effect for all who are saved.²⁷ One

²³ For 'Lord'/'lord,' see 55.34; 56.16; 59.7; 63.25; 67.27; 74.25; 78.22; 81.16. For 'Son,' see e. g. 54.5–10; for 'Son of God,' see e. g. 78.20–21. Jesus is also 'the son of man' (63.29–30; 81.14–21), the 'heavenly man' (58.17), the perfect man (58.20–21; 76.22–23), even 'the wholly perfect man' (75.19), although in some of these cases it is hard to know whether the Jesus figure or the higher selves of other people are primarily in view.

²⁴ For this translation, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 11), 373.

²⁵ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 11), 373.

²⁶ We have an account of Christ's coming to ransom, to save and to redeem after one slightly obscure passage: The uncertainty arises over whether the $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\ \pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\ \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\iota$ ('since Christ came') in 52.19 goes with the preceding or the following. The translations of Isenberg and Schenke illustrate the differing possibilities.

²⁷ See Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 11), 91, on the composition of Jesus' body. It may also be the case that the incarnation of Jesus takes place through the demiurge, as Thomassen

of Jesus' names 'Pharisatha,' or 'spread out,' is connected with his crucifixion, because he came 'to crucify the world' (63.21–24).²⁸ He came for a universal reunification, described in prosaic terms (in a very lacunose passage) as the unifying of above and below (67.30–34), as well as in the parable of Jesus as the dyer who turns 72 colours all into white (63.25–30).²⁹ Two images reversing the situation in the Garden of Eden also come into prominence. In one case, human beings are envisaged as eating like animals to begin with (55.10–11). Christ therefore came from heaven to bring food fit for humans (55.11–14; cf. 73.23–27).³⁰ Additionally, following the fall in which Adam and Eve became separated, Jesus came to reunite them (70.9–22). Jesus' baptism was saving in the sense that he purified the waters of baptism (72.29–73.1), and he anoints others just as he himself is anointed by the Father. So the primordial and historical dimensions of *Philip's* soteriology – the protological myth together with the "Christ-event" of the incarnation, baptism and death of Jesus – are inseparable from the ritual elements.

III. The Gospel of the *Egyptians*

In discussions of the *Gospel of Truth* and *Philip*, the challenge lies in trying to see how all the layers of Jesus/Christ/the Son/the Word fit together in a single description. The difficulty with treating the figure of Christ in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* is almost the mirror of image of that, because there is an irreducible multiplicity of Jesus, Son, and Christ figures.³¹ The first three sections, at least on one account of the structure, consist of the following. In Part 1, the opening focuses on the Great Invisible Spirit's generation of the Father-Mother-Son ogdoads (III 40.12–44.9). There is a series here of sons, whose number is difficult to calculate.³² Part 2 contains the praises and requests by which the heavenly ex-

suggests, because Joseph is a type of the demiurge, though I am not as confident as Thomassen on this point.

²⁸ The CAL database gives a variety of glosses for *prs*, including 'spread,' 'spread out,' 'extend.'

²⁹ There is not space to dwell on the point here, but it would be interesting to explore this motif in *Gos. Phil.* in the context of ancient colour theory.

³⁰ Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 71.24–26, where Adam became an animal by eating from the tree which bears animals.

³¹ I leave aside here the portrayal of Christ in the copyist's note (by Concessus, a.k.a. Eugnostos), since (a) it is not part of the main body of the text, and (b) it merely contains the stereotypical motif of the IXΘΥΣ (in both contracted and expanded form).

³² At first, the Great Invisible Spirit dwells in splendid isolation, but generates the Father-Mother-Son triad. Each element of this triad then evolves into an *ogdoad*. Alongside this process, the Domedon Doxomedon aeon comes forth (a feature which does not easily map on to what has preceded), in whom the *thrice-male child* resides. So we already have two Son figures so far, with more to follow.

pansion (including some more sons) takes place (III 44.9–56.22). Part 3 describes the emergence of the demonic realm (III 56.22–60.2). It should be stressed that this is only one possible structure, and one geared towards the particular discussion in which I am engaged here; given the fragmentary texts in both Codices III and IV, any account of the structure is difficult.³³

1. *The Great Christ*

In the middle section consisting of the series of praises and requests, what I have called Part 2 above (III 44.9–56.22), we come across a figure ‘the great Christ’ who is designated the Father of the ‘thrice male child.’ One traditional element is incorporated here, namely the anointing motif: ‘the great Christ’ is designated as such because he has been anointed by the Great Invisible Spirit (III 44.22–24). He is further specified as ‘the great Christ, who is from silence, who is the incorruptible child Telmael Telmachaël Eli Eli Machar Machar Seth, the power which really truly lives’ (IV 59.21–22). This figure does not have any clear soteriological function, except in so far as he is caught up in the process of the Great Invisible Spirit’s series of emanations.³⁴

2. *Jesus*

A fourth part (60.2–63.23) gives an account of the salvation of the seed of Seth. This is described by several different mechanisms – by Seth’s passage through tribulations in his three descents, the flood, fire, and judgment,³⁵ as well as by repentance, filling of deficiency, and the depiction of a form of incarnation.

The first and last of these, the three descents and the incarnation, relate most directly to Jesus’ role. According to the version in Codex III,³⁶ Seth’s third tribulation, the ‘judgement of the rulers, powers and authorities,’ consists of his undergoing baptism through a logos-begotten body, a body which he himself

³³ Probably the most influential account of the work’s structure is that of John Turner. For a convenient summary, see J. D. Turner, “The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit: Introduction”, in *Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (ed. by M. Meyer; New York 2007) 247–251. Turner’s unequal bipartite structure has as the first part the whole theogony (III 40.12–62.42), i. e. most of my first four parts above; his second part (III 62.24–68.1) contains Seth’s descents in a baptismal context. These two parts are followed by the conclusion about Seth’s composition of the work (68.1–69.5) and the copyist’s note (69.6–20).

³⁴ NHC IV 59.16–22 may possibly suggest an identity between the Great Christ and Seth, but the text is too fragmentary for certainty, and it seems unlikely in the overall flow of the theogony.

³⁵ NHC III 63.4–9, where Seth’s passage is ‘to save that (the race) which went astray.’ Cf. the flood, fire and punishment in *Apoc. Adam* 69.2–77.18.

³⁶ Two overlapping accounts of this are given, in the transitional sections linking the myth and the baptismal material (III 62.12–63.23 and 63.23–64.9).

had produced through the virgin (63.10–13). Baptism is thus established by the Father, through the incorruptible and logos-begotten living Jesus: this Jesus figure is the one whom Seth had ‘put on,’ through whom Seth nailed the powers of the thirteen aeons, and secured the position of his elect.³⁷ (Later he is described as crucifying what is in or under the Law.³⁸) This nailing of the thirteen aeons and establishment of the seed, in the climactic third descent, are of clear soteriological significance in the book.

There are some differences between the two texts in Codices III and IV, but in both the Jesus figure is, or is in possession of, a body which Seth had procured for himself and which was begotten by the logos. As a result, although neither text is as clear as one might like, I would take issue with the formulation simply that ‘Jesus is the embodiment of Seth on earth,’ as Wisse and Böhlig put it,³⁹ or that the relation between Seth and Jesus is equated with that between the soul and the body (so Layton).⁴⁰ The difficulty with the former is that what appears to be envisaged is more a union of Seth and Jesus than Jesus representing Seth; the problem with the latter is that the *Gospel of the Egyptians* pictures the “Jesus” figure as a distinct being in some sense, rather than merely an empty physical shell.⁴¹

This section, in which Jesus is also one of the agents through which baptism is established, can be seen as transitional leading into the final parts.

3. *Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekus*

This leads us into the final section (63.23–68.1), which a number of scholars consider the real focus of the book. After the account of the establishment of baptism, there is a large list of appearances, presumably of those who appeared at that prototypical baptism of the incarnate Seth.

The first figure to appear is the great attendant ‘Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekus’ (Ἰεσσεὺς μαζαρεὺς Ἰεσσεδάκεος). The first two names are clearly a bas-

³⁷ Cf. NHC IV 74.24–75.24 according to which Seth underwent bodily baptism through the logos-begotten one whom Seth had secretly produced through the virgin; thus the great Seth put on Jesus, who had been begotten by a living word.

³⁸ NHC III 65.18 (‘in the Law’)/NHC IV 75.15 (‘under the Law’).

³⁹ A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2: The Gospel of the Egyptians (The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit)* (NHS 4; Leiden, New York and Cologne 1975) 21.

⁴⁰ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures* (see n. 9), 116 n. 75c.

⁴¹ Although in NHC III 63.10–11 we have the ‘logos-begotten body,’ in III 63.25–64.3 the figure whom Jesus puts on is the ‘incorruptible Logos-begotten one, Jesus the living one.’ To call Jesus ‘the living one’ suggests rather more than a mere physical body assumed by Seth. In NHC IV the point is even clearer, since we do not have the phrase ‘logos-begotten body’ in the first place: the reference is rather, as already noted above, to ‘the baptism of the body through the Logos-begotten one’ (IV 74.24–26).

as male androgyny. Entering the kingdom is closely related to this: becoming reunited with Jesus understood as 'light.' 'Rest' is also another important result (*Gos. Thom.* 51; 60; 90), signalling freedom from the temptations of the world and – ultimately – freedom from the labour of discipleship. About a good deal of this, there is – as much as one can ever say this about *Thomas* – a reasonable degree of scholarly agreement.

On the other hand, there is considerable dispute about the identity of Jesus and his role in salvation in *Thomas*. For some, Jesus is a Gnostic redeemer,⁴⁷ for others he is more of a sage or teacher of common wisdom;⁴⁸ still others, by contrast, consider Christology of little or no importance in *Thomas*.⁴⁹ Finally, Prof. Marjanen has argued that 'egalitarian Christology' is the best way of capturing both the uniqueness of Jesus as revealer, and the elevation of disciples, who accept that revelation, to a status as Jesus' equals.⁵⁰

To comment briefly on these four views, it can first be said fairly uncontroversially that *Thomas's* Jesus is not Gnostic in any meaningful way.⁵¹ Some of the themes in *Thomas* may well have been influenced by Gnostic ideas, or by ideas which have themselves been influenced by Gnosticism. Popkes, for example, may be correct that the "image" language is influenced by that of the *Apocryphon of John*. These influences are confined to snippets here and there, however. On the other hand, scholars who want to present a less exalted Jesus in *Thomas* often stumble over passages such as *Gos. Thom.* 77, where Jesus says: 'I am the light who is above all things. I am the all. From me the all came forth, and the all reaches to me.' This is hard to reconcile with the idea of Jesus being a sage – to say nothing of the fact that the designation 'wise philosopher' in *Gos. Thom.* 13 seems not to be one approved of by the author. The picture of Jesus in *Thomas*, then, makes it difficult to sustain either the "low christology" view, or the "no Christology" view, because Jesus is thematised,⁵² and thematised in remarkable terms, not just as a sage.

Absolutely central to the christology of *Thomas* is Jesus' identity as revealer. In *Gos. Thom.* 17 this is highlighted: 'I will give you what eye has not seen, and what ear has not heard, and what hand has not touched, nor has it ascended to the heart of man.' The theme is picked up in *Gos. Thom.* 38, highlighting Jesus

⁴⁷ B. E. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London and New York 1961).

⁴⁸ H. Taussig, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Case for Jesus the Teacher of Common Wisdom", *Forum* 10 (1994) 31–46.

⁴⁹ S. L. Davies, "The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas", *JBL* 111 (1992) 663–682.

⁵⁰ A. Marjanen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas", in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. by J. M. Asgeirsson, A. D. DeConick and R. Uro; NHMS 59; Leiden 2006) 209–219.

⁵¹ On my understanding of "Gnostic," see Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 168–175.

⁵² In addition to the passages already noted, *Gos. Thom.* 61 also highlights the unique identity of Jesus.

(and by implication the *Gospel of Thomas*) as the unique source of revelation. The format of the whole Gospel ('Jesus says...', 'Jesus says...', 'Jesus says...') draws attention to just this point. The opening lines of the Gospel set out the significance of this revelation entrusted to Thomas, this revelation which must be rightly understood and which is the means to escaping death (Prologue + *Gos. Thom.* 1). Although there is a sense in which the true disciple can be identified with Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 108) and the disciple Thomas should not even call Jesus 'master' (*Gos. Thom.* 13), nevertheless in various other ways Jesus retains a transcendence.⁵³ He is, for example, the agent of election (*Gos. Thom.* 23) and judgment (*Gos. Thom.* 10; 16); the elect are *his* disciples (*Gos. Thom.* 55), and are under his 'yoke' and 'lordship' (*Gos. Thom.* 90); Jesus is the one who makes Mary male (*Gos. Thom.* 114); all are to give him his due (*Gos. Thom.* 100), and supremely as we have seen, he is not just 'the all,' but also the light *above* all in *Gos. Thom.* 77. Salvation consists in living 'from the living one,' though that may refer to the Father rather than the Son (*Gos. Thom.* 111).⁵⁴ It makes sense, then, to speak of Jesus having a central role in salvation, focused on revelation, but not limited to it.

V. Comparative Analysis

Now that we have sketched the key elements of the messages of, and the roles of Jesus in, these Gospels, we can return to the original question posed: what happens when the term "Gospel" is put to work as a title for these Nag Hammadi works? Or, what does this usage mean for the sense of the term "Gospel," and how does that usage shape the claims of the particular text? Here we engage more specifically with the question in view in this volume, that of the place of the Nag Hammadi Gospels in the context of the history of earliest Christian literature.

1. *Secondary Gospel Titles?*

I want to address briefly the question of whether these Gospel titles were "secondary" or not. I merely observe that the repeated assertion, that the titles of the Nag Hammadi Gospels are secondary, is based on very slim evidence. In the case of the *Gospel of Truth*, for example, Irenaeus comments – no doubt correctly – that

⁵³ Pace Marjanen, "Portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas" (see n. 50).

⁵⁴ I am not persuaded that Jesus is in some sense the twin of the Father, as argued by A. Gagné, "Jésus, la lumière et le Père Vivant. Principe de gémellité dans l'Évangile selon Thomas", *Apocrypha* 23 (2013) 209–221, here 220–221, and earlier by R. Trevijano Etcheverría, "La cristología del Evangelio de Tomás", in *Estudios sobre el Evangelio de Tomás* (R. Trevijano Etcheverría; Fuentes Patristicas, Estudios 2; Madrid 1997) 207–269.

this Valentinian Gospel was written not many years before Irenaeus was writing *Against Heresies*, and yet it already had a title at that stage. Similarly, in the case of the *Gospel of Thomas*, the title is known by Hippolytus (or Ps-Hippolytus) and Origen:⁵⁵ again, as far back as we can go, it has a title, and it is a perfectly rational one. The seemingly arbitrary connection between the contents of the *Gospel of Philip* and its patron saint, Philip, is not a particularly potent argument for the title being secondary: someone at some stage made this choice – we simply do not know when that choice was made. In connection with the *Gospel of the Egyptians* or, the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, there is no logical reason why a double title cannot exist at the outset, as in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*, or J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*. There are models in antiquity as well, with Plautus giving bilingual (though not synonymous) titles and the works of Varro and Lucian, for example, being transmitted with multiple titles.⁵⁶ What we call Plato's *Phaedo* was known by this title, but was also called *On the Soul*.⁵⁷ The same is true of others: the *Euthyphro* or *On Holiness*, the *Crito* or *On what is to be done*, indeed Diogenes Laertius gives double-titles for most of the Platonic dialogues, usually with the first title being the name of the interlocutor and the second the theme.⁵⁸ Diogenes Laertius even provides a triple title for the Pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, or *Nocturnal Gathering*, or *Philosopher*.⁵⁹ This means that the title *Gospel of the Egyptians* could perfectly well have been original or at least close to original. We do not know that it was original, of course, but neither do we know that it was added later. My point here is merely that we should be wary of stating that a title is secondary until we actually find some evidence (like an autograph, for example!).

2. Gospel Genre?

Clearly the application of the title "Gospel" to these works is not so much a statement about literary form, and much more an indication of subject matter. The title "Gospel," I would suggest, identifies the particular work within a tradition of discussions of *Heilsbotschaft*. In terms of other types of literature, the closest analogy to "Gospel" is not "Epistle" (an epistle can be about anything). A slightly closer analogy is "apocalypse," because there are some consistent theological topics which arise at least in many apocalypses, at least in a Jewish-Christian

⁵⁵ I am taking Origen as, to the best of my knowledge, writing without knowledge of the (Pseudo-)Hippolytan *Elenchos*.

⁵⁶ See A. P. Bitel, "Quis ille Asinus aureus? The Metamorphoses of Apuleius' Title", *Ancient Narrative* 1 (2000–2001) 208–244, which also has a helpful bibliography.

⁵⁷ See e. g. Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 3.50 for the former, *VP* 3.37 for the latter; together in *VP* 3.58.

⁵⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 3.58–61.

⁵⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 3.60.

context. But I would suggest that perhaps a closer analogy still is, for example, the ancient tradition of writing books with the title *On the Soul*, Περὶ ψυχῆς or *De Anima*. Here, the title is defined not by genre, but by the subject matter. This subject matter is so important that Plato wrote a book known by this title, as did Aristotle, Tertullian, and Alexander of Aphrodisias; closer to home there is also in Nag Hammadi Codex II the *Exegesis on the Soul* (τεζηγησις εἰς τὴν ψυχήν). With the subject matter defined, the literary form – dialogue (the *Phaedo*), polemical treatise (in Tertullian's case), narrative (*Exegesis on the Soul*) or whatever – is a matter of choice. To be clear, I am not saying that the Gospels are works about the 'soul.' Rather, just as there is a literary tradition of works concerned with the soul, so it is also with the title Gospel. The subject matter is defined: the nature of salvation and how Jesus has effected it. Thereafter, as far as literary form is concerned, it is a case of *chacun à son gout*.

To give a work the title of "Apocalypse" rather than "Gospel" creates a different effect. The *Gospel of the Egyptians*, for example, might alternatively have been labelled an apocalypse. In that case, there would have been a focus on the source of the revelation, the event of transmission and the recipient. We do have some such account of a process in *Gospel of the Egyptians*, but only relatively "tucked away" at the end, rather than foregrounded as in the canonical book of Revelation or in the *Apocryphon of John*. Again in an *epistle*, there is a focus on a particularly authoritative author and perhaps a concentration of emphasis on a particularly controverted topic, as for example in Galatians or the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (or *Epistle to Rheginus*), or on addressing problems in particular communities, as in 1 Corinthians or 1 *Clement*. Calling a text a Gospel discourages a kind of 'mirror-reading' or an attention to the social situation of the text. It points rather to the work's particular construal of Jesus and what he is thought to have achieved.

3. Gospel Authority

A claim to be a Gospel is of course also a claim to be an authoritative work. This is no less true of the Nag Hammadi Gospels. Since the kind of authority which each claims is not the same, however, it is worthwhile to compare the claims to authority represented in these works.

At the gentle end to some extent is the *Gospel of Truth*, which does not really reflect upon its own status as a work; if anything, it points away from itself towards a more divine 'living book,' which is manifest not as a written text but is 'written in the thought and mind of the Father,' as discussed earlier. The *Gospel of Truth* is clearly not identical with this book. On the other hand, the Gospel title attached to it or introducing it is a very grand one: it is not relativized with a *kata* or by reference to a human author. It is simply *the truth*. Similarly, the *Gospel of Philip* makes no grand claims for itself; indeed, 'the truth which existed from the

beginning is sown everywhere' (*Gos. Phil.* 55.19–20). On the other hand, it has a very confident tone.⁶⁰

By contrast, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* does make a statement about its authorship. It claims to be a composition of the Great Seth himself, a composition which took Seth 130 years to write and which was hidden away for many epochs. If 'the old is better,' then a claim to authorship by Seth trumps that of any other biblical author, even Moses. It is even 'God-written,' though again one can debate how original this designation in the colophon might be (*NHC III* 69.6–17).

The *Gospel of Thomas* also lays stress on its authorship. The real author is not Thomas but is the living Jesus, as the disciple Thomas in the Prologue is depicted merely as the scribe: 'These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke, and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down.' A distinct element of *Thomas*, moreover, is the way in which the work demands the reader's attention to, and reverence for its logia. At the outset, labouring at the interpretation of the *Gospel of Thomas* is nothing short of being *the* precondition for salvation: 'Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.' This theme is also scattered throughout: the status of cosmic rule can be attained only through attending to Jesus' words (*Gos. Thom.* 19.2); the moment of revelation means that Jesus' words must be heeded (*Gos. Thom.* 38.1; 92.2). As Pokorný and others have recognised, this focus on Jesus' words is an implicit claim on the part of *Thomas* to the work's own prime importance and soteriological relevance.⁶¹ There is a variety of approaches to the claim of authority in these works, then.

4. Location with other Gospels

If calling a book a "Gospel" is not a statement about its literary genre, it does – in addition to claiming intrinsic authority – also locate that work in relation to other existing Gospels. In addition to the canonical Gospels which predated the four Nag Hammadi works, there may have been others: we know, for example, that the *Gospel of Judas* existed in the second century, and the same is almost certainly true of the *Gospel of Mary*. What, then, are authors or scribes up to in calling their works Gospels? Do they mean these works to supplement existing material? Or do they mean to supplant it?

The picture of Jesus in *Thomas* has an edge to it. In the place where the contested identity of Jesus is most thematised, in *Gos. Thom.* 13, the authority of the Gospel of Matthew and the Christian message embodied in the Petrine

⁶⁰ The subscriptio to the *Gospel of Philip* attributes some kind of patronage to (presumably) the apostle Philip; he is uniquely among the disciples mentioned in the work as a source, but still only once.

⁶¹ P. Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas: From Interpretations to the Interpreted* (London and New York 2009) 62; Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 290, both on 19.2 in particular.

tradition is implicitly rejected.⁶² Jesus is certainly not a righteous angel or a wise philosopher. The disciple Thomas, however, is the recipient of the secret wisdom which probably has some relationship to the mysterious truth underlying the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The framing of the Gospel: ‘These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which (Didymus) Judas Thomas wrote down’ is a clear assertion of authority. On its own, it could be read as a supplement to existing revelation – these are the secret, esoteric sayings which need to be taken into account alongside the *public, exoteric* teaching of Jesus. Read alongside the dialogue in *Gos. Thom.* 13, and assertions such as ‘I gave you what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no hand has touched, and has not arisen in hearts [...]’ (*Gos. Thom.* 17; cf. 38.1), however, the work as a whole seems to claim a more exclusive authority. In support of this, the strong impression from *Thomas* is of a set of practices which is incommensurable with the lived practice presupposed in the canonical Gospels, especially given *Thomas*’s prohibition of prayer.

Something similar could be said of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The conclusion to the work makes no bones about its status. It was written by Seth, secreted in a mountain crag inaccessible to the sun. The author echoes the quasi-scriptural formula cited in *Gos. Thom.* 17: ‘And since the days of the prophets and the apostles and the preachers, the name has not at all risen upon their hearts, nor is it possible (that it should do so). And their ear has not heard it.’ The whole period of the history of Israel and the emergence of Christianity, then, is a vacuum as far as true revelation is concerned. From its own point of view, reference to it would not be appropriate in the present volume: it has no relation to ‘the history of early Christian literature’! Seth deliberately hid this text ‘in order that, at the end of the times and the eras [...] it may come forth and reveal this incorruptible, holy race of the great saviour.’ Perhaps one cannot assume this to be a complete denial of the usefulness of other related texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of Judas*, but the message of the work, with its multiplicity of Jesus or Christ figures, is clearly authorised to the detriment of some other comparable works. The immodesty of the principal title, the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, certainly would encourage the reader to take “Gospel” here in a similarly strong sense. This is not only an authoritative account of Jesus/Christ, but an exclusively authoritative one.⁶³

It seems likely that in the cases of the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth* a more complementary relationship is intended. In *Philip* in particular, there are two quotations from the canonical Gospels introduced by ‘the word/Word says ...’, first citing ‘Already the axe is laid at the root of the trees’ (Matt. 3:10) and

⁶² Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 262–263.

⁶³ In practice of course, it may have functioned alongside other texts, just as it does now in Nag Hammadi Codices III and IV.

then, 'If you know the truth, the truth will make you free' (John 8:32).⁶⁴ There are other citations as well.⁶⁵

It is likely that 'the Word' here is a reference to Jesus rather than the written word, because all the other citations are introduced as sayings of Jesus in various ways (e.g. 'The Lord said...'), and 'Word' is a frequent Christological title in *Philip*. It is also possible that *Philip* intends to suppress the canonical provenance of these sayings, but it is unlikely. We know that the Valentinians appeared to use all four canonical Gospels⁶⁶ alongside their own productions, and some may have used others as well, as the citations – if they are such – of *Gos. Thom.* in *Philip* might suggest.⁶⁷ The *Gospel of Truth* alludes in a number of places, more fleetingly than does *Philip*, to existing Gospels. Despite the confidence of their tone, however, neither *Philip* nor *Truth* lay claim to any sort of exclusive authority.

On the other hand, in certain respects the *Gospel of Philip* is the most polemical of the Nag Hammadi Gospels. It is not as sweeping in its dismissal as the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, or as programmatic about the authority of its collection as *Thomas*. It does engage, however, in polemic at quite a close level of detail. In several passages there is explicit polemic using language such as: 'Some say X: they are wrong. They don't know what they're talking about' (*Gos. Phil.* 55.23–25) or 'those who say X are wrong' (*Gos. Phil.* 56.15–17).

a) *The heavenly arrangements*

The first of these is unfortunately unclear precisely in what it is opposing because of lacunae in the text. It is usually restored, 'Those who say, "[There is a heavenly man and] there is one above [him], are wrong."⁶⁸ Peter Nagel has, 'Die da sagen,

⁶⁴ Respectively, 83.11–13 and 84.7–9.

⁶⁵ Matt 3:15: 'Thus we should fulfill all righteousness' (*Gos. Phil.* 72.34–73.1); Matt 6:6: 'Go into your chamber and shut the door behind you, and pray to your father who is in secret' (68.10–12); Matt 15:13: 'Every plant which my father who is in heaven has not planted will be plucked out' (85.29–31); Matt 16:17: 'My Father who is in Heaven' (55.34); Mark 15:34/Matt 27:46 (modified): 'My God, my God, why o Lord have you forsaken me' (68.26–27); John 6:53: 'He who shall not eat my flesh and drink my blood has not life in him' (57.4–5); John 8:34: 'He who sins is the slave of sin' (77.17–19).

There are also Pauline citations: 1 Cor 8:1: 'Knowledge [...] puffs up; love builds up' (77.19–26); 1 Cor 15:50: 'Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (56.32–57.1); 1 Pet 4:8: 'love covers a multitude of sins' (78.11–12).

⁶⁶ Cf. the citation of the fourth Gospel attributed to an apostle in *Ptolemy to Flora*, and of course Heracleon's commentary. See e.g. F. B. Watson, *Gospel Writing* (Grand Rapids 2013) 494–495.

⁶⁷ See esp. 'The Lord said, "Blessed is he who is before he came into being"' (64.9–11), possibly drawn directly from *Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 19.1). See further Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 76–77.

⁶⁸ 67.36–38. See B. Layton and W. Isenberg, "Tractate 3: The Gospel according to Philip",

“Es gibt einen ausserhalb seiner, es gibt einen oberhalb seiner”, irren sich.⁶⁹ What is relatively clear is that *Philip* in response rejects a higher/lower contrast and prefers to speak of an inner/outer contrast. If the contrast is between a heavenly man and another, one of these figures may well be a designation of Christ. In this case, the polemic might equally be against not a *mehrheitskirchliche* group but against the kind of Gnostic view set out in the *Apocryphon of John*, *Eugnostos*, and other related writings: in these texts Adam or Adamas is the man above, occupying the first aeon, and the Son of Man is below, occupying the second aeon.⁷⁰

b) *The Incarnation*

A similar polemical stance appears against Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. This is taken as an impossibility because the Spirit is female and Jesus did not have two mothers. In fact the earthly Jesus is the son of Joseph (*Gos. Phil.* 73.8–15), and he has another Father in heaven (55.33–36). The traditional language of virginal conception is taken up mythologically instead: ‘It is necessary to speak a mystery: the Father of All united with the Virgin who had come down and a fire illuminated him on that day’ (71.4–7). Here *Philip* is probably opposing something like a “majority church” position on the virgin birth, at least as set out in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁷¹

c) *Death and Resurrection*

Finally, the *Gospel of Philip* up-ends the traditional formulation that Christ died and then rose.⁷² ‘Those who say that the lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died.’⁷³ The logic here, clarified in a more satisfactory manner in the broader application, is that someone must get hold of risen life before death, otherwise that death will mean perishing. Such a polemic explains why *Philip* does not construct his Gospel as a narrative, because it would be difficult to narrate a story in which resurrection preceded death!

in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7, together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and *P. Oxy. 1*, 654, 655, Vol. 1 (ed. by B. Layton; NHS 20; Leiden 1989) 176–177.

⁶⁹ Nagel, *Codex Apocryphus* (see n. 5), 212–213. Schenke leaves it blank in his translation.

⁷⁰ *Ap. John* II 8.28–9.24; *Eugnostos* NHC V 13.8–11//NHC III 85.9–14; *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (BG) 108.1–11; cf. also the sequential references to ‘Man’ and ‘Son of Man’ in *Sophia of Jesus Christ* NHC III 105.4–106.24.

⁷¹ More mildly, *Philip* denies that Jesus’ incarnate appearance revealed his true nature, affirming instead that Jesus appeared so as to become visible (57.28–58.10). He does contain the things that he appears as, however (56.13–15).

⁷² Familiar in formulaic statements such as 1 Cor 15:3–4 and 1 Thess 4:14, as well as from the obvious sequence of the NT Gospel narratives.

⁷³ *Gos. Phil.* 56.15–18; trans. Isenberg.

Is *Philip* lodging actual criticism of the canonical narratives in the second and third polemics here? It may well be that *Philip* at least does not simply assume an infallibility to the canonical Gospels, but can at certain points be critical of them. In any case, the range of texts or ideas with which he is in dialogue is much wider, as can probably be seen in the “man above/man below” polemic.

VI. Conclusion

We can draw out some further implications of this discussion in closing. What all this means is that we can provisionally place these texts, by virtue of their titles, within the subfield of early Christian studies which we might call *the study of early Christian Gospels*. Just as this conference is an analysis of a corpus of literature defined by its provenance – “the *Nag Hammadi* literature,” so also one can identify a corpus of literature by the title assigned to it – *Gospel*. As a result, these Nag Hammadi Gospels deserve consideration alongside the Gospels of Matthew, Mary, Mark, Peter, Luke, Judas and John. They need to be taken seriously as potentially part of this corpus, and we need to keep in mind what the corpus looks like with and without them.

When these texts are viewed under the umbrella of “Gospel,” they can play a role in the construction of an answer to the commonly asked question, “What is a Gospel?” They might be helpful in moving the discussion away from defining the term almost exclusively in terms of the canonical Gospels, even if these latter are the earliest instances of the – not *genre*, but literary tradition focused on particular subject matter. (Again, they have in common what the *De Anima* works of Plato, Aristotle and Tertullian have in common – not a common genre but a common *Sache*, or topic.) These Nag Hammadi Gospels helpfully remind us that the term εὐαγγέλιον implies primarily not a form of literature but a saving message. One might say that those who labelled these Nag Hammadi texts in this way were recovering a more original or everyday sense of the term. But this would be to presuppose that in some intervening period this sense had been lost – an assumption which itself needs examining.

From 1897 to 2015: Some Aspects of the Research on the *Gospel according to Thomas*

Paul-Hubert Poirier

Abstract

Das Evangelium nach Thomas wurde in einer vollständigen koptischen Version im Dezember 1945 entdeckt. Jedoch wurden zwischen 1897 und 1903 mehr als zwanzig Sprüche Jesu in Oxyrhynchos ausgegraben, die griechische Reste eines originalen Evangeliums nach Thomas zu sein scheinen. Von 1897 bis 1945 waren die Oxyrhynchos-Fragmente Gegenstand einer beständigen Aufmerksamkeit, die programmatisch für die künftige Forschung über das Evangelium nach Thomas sein sollte.

Just as did the Jesus of the canonical Gospels, the *Gospel according to Thomas* (hereinafter *Gos. Thom.*)¹ went through a hidden life and a public life. Even though a *Gospel according to Thomas* had been known since the antiquity by a significant number of testimonies, the oldest being a citation from it made by the Pseudo-Hippolytus in the *Elenchos*'s report on the Naassenes,² this gospel remained essentially a title in the many lists of apocryphal or forbidden books.³ It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the situation changed with the excavations conducted, from 1896–1897, by the Egypt Exploration Fund at Behnesa, Middle Egypt, on the site of the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus.⁴ The

¹ The standard edition of the *Gos. Thom.* is H. Koester et al., "Tractate 2: The Gospel According to Thomas", in *Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, Vol. 1 of *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (I), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655* (ed. by B. Layton; NHS 20; Leiden 1989) 37–125. Among the many other editions, translations and commentaries, it is worth mentioning those of A. D. De-Conick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation. With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (LNTS 287; London and New York 2006) and U.-K. Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas. Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart 2008).

² 5,7,20–21, in P. Wendland, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Vol. 3 of *Hippolytus Werke* (GCS 26; Leipzig 1916) 83, lines 5–21.

³ For an exhaustive inventory of "Named Testimonia to *Thomas*", see S. J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas. Introduction and Commentary* (TENTS 11; Leiden and Boston 2014) 35–61.

⁴ B. P. Grenfell, "The Oldest Record of Christ's Life. The First Complete Account of the

very first papyrus fragment discovered by Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt on January 11, 1897 revealed eight sayings of Jesus, all introduced, save for the first (of which only the end was preserved), by the caption λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς, “Jesus says,” and therefore termed by the discoverers “logia.” This fragment – P. Oxy. 1 – was published almost immediately after its discovery, sometime before July 1897,⁵ and a year later, in the first volume of the series *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*.⁶ In February 1903, during their second excavation season at Oxyrhynchus, Grenfell and Hunt discovered “by a curious stroke of good fortune”⁷ another papyrus fragment (P. Oxy. 654) which offered, after a prologue, a series of five – according to Grenfell and Hunt’s numeration – sayings of Jesus similarly introduced by the formula λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς. With this fragment, another was discovered, which was labeled by Grenfell and Hunt “Fragment of a Lost Gospel” (P. Oxy. 655).⁸ While they had considered the first two papyri as parts of the same collection of sayings of Jesus, the absence of the introductory formula “Jesus says” in the third – at least in what was legible on the papyrus – prevented them from joining it to the two others. These two fragments – P. Oxy. 1 and 654 – aroused considerable interest, as it appears from the great number of editions, articles, short notices circulated between July 1897, just after the publication of the *editio princeps* of P. Oxy. 1, and, say, 1920, when Hugh Gerard Evelyn White issued a combined edition of P. Oxy. 654 and 1 – in that order – with a critical apparatus and a commentary.⁹

From 1897 to 1920, several propositions were made concerning the naming, the identification and the nature of the fragments. Even if Grenfell and Hunt identified the fragments with neither of these collections, the title λόγια Ἰησοῦ given to the sayings by their discoverers was no doubt inspired, in addition to the introductory formula λέγει Ἰησοῦς, by the mention by Papias, the second-century bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, of a σύνταξις of the κυριακὰ λόγια and of λόγια in Hebrew collected by Matthew.¹⁰ Most of the commentators or specialists who dealt with the fragments retained the term *Logia* to identi-

Recent Finding of the ‘Sayings of Our Lord’”, *McClure’s Magazine* 9 (1897) 1022–1030; see the maps in L. H. Blumell and T. A. Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus. Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, Texas 2015) xx–xxi.

⁵ B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ. Sayings of Our Lord from an Early Greek Papyrus* (London 1897).

⁶ In B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 1 (London 1898) 1–3.

⁷ B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus and Fragment of a Lost Gospel from Oxyrhynchus Edited with Translation and Commentary* (Egypt Exploration Fund, Graeco-Roman Branch; London 1904) 9; B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (London 1904) 1.

⁸ Editions of P. Oxy. 654 and 655 in Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), and Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 1–28.

⁹ H. G. Evelyn White, *The Sayings of Jesus from Oxyrhynchus* (Cambridge 1920).

¹⁰ Cited by Eusebius, *History*, 3.39.15–16, Vol. 1 of *Eusebius. The Ecclesiastical History* (ed. by K. Lake; LCL 153; London and Cambridge, Massachusetts 1926) 296–297; see E. Norelli,

fy the sayings, but there were a few discordant voices, among them Walter Lock who considered that “the exact title Λόγια [...] has no authority as the title of this document,” and that it is “at least as probable that the real title was Λόγοι Ἰησοῦ.”¹¹ The discovery, in 1903, of P. Oxy. 654, which begins with what is obviously a prologue: οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι,¹² confirmed in a certain measure Lock’s proposal. Grenfell and Hunt themselves concurred eventually with this view.¹³

As to the nature of the sayings, Grenfell and Hunt made very perceptive observations solely on the basis of P. Oxy. 1. Rejecting any identification of it with the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, or “to any so-called ‘Gospels,’”¹⁴ they concluded that “a more satisfactory view, though not free from difficulties, is that this fragment is what it professes to be, a collection of some of our Lord’s sayings,” perhaps “for the first time a concrete example of what was meant by the Logia which Papias tells us were compiled by St. Matthew, and the λόγια κυριακά upon which Papias himself wrote a commentary.”¹⁵ Grenfell and Hunt considered, notwithstanding their recantation of 1904, that “it is difficult to imagine a title better suited to a series of sayings, each introduced by the phrase λέγει Ἰησοῦς, than Logia; and the discovery strongly supports the view that in speaking of λόγια Papias and Eusebius intended some similar collection.”¹⁶ Furthermore, judging from the “archaic tone and frame work” of the sayings, they deemed that “it is quite possible that they embody a tradition independent of those which have taken shape in our Canonical Gospels.”¹⁷ Grenfell and Hunt excluded therefore the possibility that the sayings could be “only another instance of free citation from our Gospels.”¹⁸ The concluding lines of their *editio princeps* of P. Oxy. 1 are almost prophetic in regard to the research to come on the *Gos. Thom.*: “Whether free or not from Gnostic influence, the

Papia di Hierapolis. Esposizione degli oracoli del signore. I frammenti (LCPM 36; Milan 2005) 236–238.

¹¹ In W. Lock and W. Sanday, *Two Lectures on the ‘Sayings of Jesus’ Delivered at Oxford on Oct. 23, 1897* (Oxford 1897) 16.

¹² I quote the emendated text according to Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus* (see n. 4), 239; see also T. A. Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha (100–400 CE)* (New York and London 2013) 173 and 394.

¹³ See Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 25; Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 16 and 20.

¹⁴ Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ (see n. 5), 17; the fragments of the *Gospels of the Egyptians* and *according to the Hebrews* are conveniently found in D. Lührmann and E. Schlarb, *Fragmente apokryph gewordener Evangelien in griechischer und lateinischer Sprache* (MThSt 59; Marburg 2000) 26–31 and 40–55; B. D. Ehrman and Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels. Texts and Translations* (New York 2011) 218–221 and 223–229.

¹⁵ Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ (see n. 5), 18.

¹⁶ Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ (see n. 5), 18.

¹⁷ Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ (see n. 5), 18.

¹⁸ Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ (see n. 5), 19.

genuine ring of what is new in this fragment, and the primitive cast of the whole, are all in favor of its independence of our Gospels in their present shape.”¹⁹

In 1904, Grenfell and Hunt published the *editio princeps* of the second papyrus – this time, a sheet from a roll and not from a book – containing sayings of Jesus.²⁰ This preliminary edition was followed in the same year by a more definitive one, in the fourth part of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, where the fragment received the number 654.²¹ In both editions, the Greek text and its translation were followed by general remarks, roughly identical but more developed in the latter than in the former. Once again, these remarks are distinguished by a great perspicacity. Considering P. Oxy. 1 and 654 as belonging to a same series of sayings, of which P. Oxy. 654 gave the introduction (οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι οἱ [ἀπόκρυφοί]), Grenfell and Hunt concluded that this series did not represent, for its “editor,” “extracts from any work” but was rather “a collection of λόγοι, a circumstance which seems to provide an adequate explanation not only of the disconnected character of the sayings in part of the collection, but of the repetition of the formula λέγει Ἰησοῦς before each one.”²² It was a collection, which “was meant by the ‘editor’ to be regarded as an independent literary work, complete in itself.”²³ It is worth quoting their conclusion:

Hence we think that no theory of the origin of the Sayings as a whole is to be considered satisfactory unless it at the same time provides a reasonable explanation of the fact that some one not later than the middle of the second century published the Sayings as especially connected with St. Thomas (and perhaps another disciple) and that the collection attained sufficient importance for it to be read, and presumably accepted as genuine, in the chief towns of Upper Egypt in the century following.²⁴

Grenfell and Hunt also did their best to explain the mention of Thomas on line 3 of P. Oxy. 654, “and perhaps [of] another disciple.” This reservation was fully justified at that time by the lacuna, which occurs at the end of line 2, before καὶ Θωμᾶ(ς). The most obvious solution would have been to find a link of some sort between the Oxyrhynchus fragments and an existing *Gospel of Thomas*. In the early twentieth century, two gospels under the name of the apostle were potential candidates: the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (the παιδικὰ τοῦ Κυρίου)²⁵ and the “Gospel entitled ‘according to Thomas’” used by the Naas-

¹⁹ Grenfell and Hunt, *ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ* (see n. 5), 20.

²⁰ Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7).

²¹ Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 1–22.

²² Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 16; Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 28.

²³ Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 16; Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 28.

²⁴ Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 16; Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 28.

²⁵ T. Burke, *De infantia Iesu evangelium Thomae graece* (CCSA 17; Turnhout 2010).

senes, of which a citation is given by the *Elenchos*. Already in 1899, in the wake of the publication of P. Oxy. 1, Charles Taylor had made a scrupulous inventory of all the possible parallels between the papyrus and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,²⁶ but it was clear that there was little chance that the Oxyrhynchus fragments were lost parts of that gospel, but it was less obvious in the case of what Grenfell and Hunt called “the earlier Gospel of Thomas,” that is, the Naassene one.²⁷ Their position on this point is both prudent and prescient: “If the Sayings are to be derived from it, the current view of the Gospel of Thomas must be entirely changed; and it is very doubtful whether this can be done except by postulating the existence of an original Thomas Gospel behind that condemned by Hippolytus.”²⁸ Some forty years later, history and another “stroke of good fortune” would vindicate this prediction. For sake of completeness and in fairness to a forgotten contributor to the research on the Oxyrhynchus fragments, it must be remembered that the possibility that the papyri were “excerpts from the Gospel according to Thomas” was thoroughly considered as early as 1909 by a Dutch scholar, J. A. H. Michelsen.²⁹

If I have reported at some length the comments of Grenfell and Hunt on P. Oxy. 1 and 654 – P. Oxy. 655 can be left aside since they considered it a “fragment of a Lost Gospel,” that is, different from the “Sayings of Jesus,” – it is because, despite a very narrow textual basis, they have anticipated many of the issues, which would be raised once the (real) *Gos. Thom.* would come to light.

From 1904 to 1945, on the eve of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, a fair number of publications – mainly articles – were devoted to the Oxyrhynchus fragments, of which, as a kind of *point d'orgue*, we may cite the conclusion of the 1946 article of Leon Edward Wright, who saw in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, “a collection of pregnant sayings homiletically elaborated,” consonant with the Hermetic literature.³⁰ He writes:

Indeed, further investigation of these Sayings would seem to me more profitable in such a direction as I have suggested rather than in the continued conviction of their dependence upon the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* – a document too palpably Jewish-Christian in its special interests to serve convincingly as the matrix for our present material.³¹

²⁶ C. Taylor, *The Oxyrhynchus Logia and the Apocryphal Gospels* (Oxford 1899) 90–99.

²⁷ Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 18; Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 31.

²⁸ Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 4 (see n. 7), 19; Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings of Jesus* (see n. 7), 32.

²⁹ J. A. H. Michelsen, “Uittreksels uit het Evangelie volgens Thomas”, *Teyler's Theologisch Tijdschrift* 3 (1909) 214–233; this important article was saved from oblivion by G. Garitte, “Les ‘Logoi’ d’Oxyrhynque et l’apocryphe copte dit ‘Évangile de Thomas’”, *Mus* 73 (1960) 151–172, here 152 and n. 4.

³⁰ L. E. Wright, “The Oxyrhynchus Sayings of Jesus”, *JBL* 65 (1946) 175–183, here 182.

³¹ Wright, “The Oxyrhynchus Sayings of Jesus” (see n. 30), 183.

The complete version, in a Coptic translation, of the *Gos. Thom.* was discovered in December 1945, at Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt.³² It formed the second writing of a codex, which was finally given the number two.³³ But it was only three years later, on December 4, 1948, that its existence was signaled by Jean Doresse in the very first inventory of the contents of the Nag Hammadi Codices sent from Cairo by him to Henri-Charles Puech.³⁴ The *Gos. Thom.* is listed there as the second tractate in Doresse's Codex III. Also, Doresse provided Puech with a French translation of the incipit and explicit of the gospel.³⁵ The discovery of the *Gos. Thom.* was first made public on June 17, 1949, in Doresse's communication at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. In this short paper, Doresse mentions the "Évangile de Thomas" among "pseudo-Christian apocrypha used by the sectarians," that is, "the sethian or ophite Gnostics."³⁶ He adds that none of these apocrypha contained in his Codex III corresponds to the fragments of Christian apocrypha previously known under similar titles. On July 4, 1949, Doresse gave another communication, this time at the Académie royale de Belgique, in which he described more specifically the *Gos. Thom.* as "a Gnostic composition" which had nothing to do with the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* but was probably identical to the gospel used by the Naassenes and the Manichaeans.³⁷ In 1950, Puech, on the basis of Doresse's listing of 1948, published in Crum's memorial volume "a first inventory and tentative identification" of all the writings contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices, and among them, "L'Évangile selon Thomas" (no. 11; Puech's Codex III).³⁸ Puech seems to consider the *Gos.*

³² For what can reasonably be said about the circumstances of the discovery (and notwithstanding M. Kotrosits, "Romance and Danger at Nag Hammadi", *Bible and Critical Theory* 8 (2012) 39–52; M. S. Goodacre, "How Reliable is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?", *JSNT* 35 (2013) 303–322; N. Denzey Lewis and J. A. Blount, "Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices", *JBL* 133 (2014) 399–419), see J. M. Robinson, *The Discovery and Monopoly*, Vol. 1 of *The Nag Hammadi Story* (NHMS 86; Leiden and Boston 2014), especially the first chapter.

³³ J. M. Robinson, "Introduction", in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Introduction* (ed. by J. M. Robinson; Leiden 1984) 1–102, here 31, gives a table of correspondences for the varying numerations of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Codex II was successively referred to as Codex I (Doresse-Togo Mina), III (Puech) and X (Doresse).

³⁴ The inventory was actually incomplete since it mentions only eleven out of thirteen codices.

³⁵ Edition of the letter, under no. 20, in E. Crégheur et al., *Histoire des manuscrits gnostiques coptes. La correspondance Doresse-Puech 1947–1970* (BCNH.E 9; Québec and Louvain 2015) 191–195 (193 for the *Gos. Thom.*), reproduced for the mention of the *Gos. Thom.*, with an English translation, in J. M. Robinson, *The Publication*, Vol. 2 of *The Nag Hammadi Story* (NHMS 86; Leiden and Boston 2014) 799 and n. 1.

³⁶ J. Doresse, "Nouveaux documents gnostiques coptes découverts en Haute-Égypte", *CRAI* 93/2 (1949) 176–180, here 179.

³⁷ J. Doresse, "Une bibliothèque gnostique copte découverte en Haute Égypte", *Académie royale de Belgique, Bulletin de la classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques* 5^e série 35 (1949) 435–449, here 440.

³⁸ H.-C. Puech, "Les nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Haute-Égypte. Premier

Thom. identical with the Εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Θωμᾶν mentioned by the Pseudo-Hippolytus and Origen.³⁹ But the first major turning point for the research on the *Gos. Thom.* was the discovery made by Puech, in July 1952, according to his letter to Doresse dated July 29, 1952, of “the Greek text of all the beginning and of one of the subsequent passages of the Gospel of Thomas and the Latin translation of another bit of the same writing. The Greek text, continues Puech, is conserved, more or less mutilated in two distinct papyri; the Latin version is provided, without any identification of the source, by a tract that is Gnostic, or, in any case, anti-biblical, which St. Augustine refutes.”⁴⁰ The Greek papyri are obviously P. Oxy. 654, which gives the prologue and the seven first sayings of the *Gos. Thom.*, and P. Oxy. 1, which preserves sayings 26–33.⁴¹ The “Latin version” is a parallel to saying 52.2 (“You have dismissed the Living One who is before you and you have spoken about the dead”⁴²) found in Augustine’s *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*.⁴³ The questions, which Puech addressed to Doresse in the same letter, show that he had also identified parallels to the Coptic gospel in P. Oxy. 655. These identifications had only been made possible on the basis of the partial transcriptions and translations provided to Puech by Doresse.⁴⁴ Puech announced them in a short paper delivered to the Société Ernest Renan on May 29, 1954 and published in 1955. On the same occasion, Puech revealed the existence of a fragment of a shroud bought in 1953 at Behnesa (Oxyrhynchus) with an inscription very close to the saying 5.2 of the *Gos. Thom.*⁴⁵

The year 1956 was decisive for the divulgation of the *Gos. Thom.*, with the publication, in September, of the facsimile edition of Pahor Labib⁴⁶ and the

inventaire et essai d’identification”, in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (ed. by M. Malinine; Bulletin of the Byzantine Institute 2; Boston 1950) 91–154, here 104.

³⁹ Puech, “Les nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Haute-Égypte” (see n. 38), 118.

⁴⁰ Edition of the letter, under no. 61, in Crégheur et al., *Histoire des manuscrits gnostiques coptes* (see n. 35), 264, reproduced for the passage mentioning the *Gos. Thom.*, with an English translation (which I use), in Robinson, *The Publication* (see n. 35), 800–801.

⁴¹ And not P. Oxy. 654 and 655, as Robinson indicates in a parenthesis (Robinson, *The Publication* [see n. 35], 800).

⁴² English translation from A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden et al. 1959) 31.

⁴³ K.-D. Daur, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum. Com-monitorium Orosii et sancti Aurelii Augustini contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* (CCSL 49; Turnhout 1985) 102, lines 471–476.

⁴⁴ See J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d’Égypte II. L’Évangile de Thomas ou les paroles secrètes de Jésus* (Paris 1959) 16.

⁴⁵ H.-C. Puech, “Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire”, in: *Bulletin de la société Ernest Renan*, RHR 147 (1955) 126–129; a photograph of the shroud is reproduced as a frontispiece in H.-C. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose. II. Sur l’Évangile selon Thomas. Esquisse d’une interprétation systématique* (Bibliothèque des sciences humaines; Paris 1978). See also Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 87–88; A. Luijendijk, “Jesus says: There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised’. A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context”, *ZAC* 15 (2011) 389–410.

⁴⁶ P. Labib, *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo*, Vol. 1 (Cairo 1956).

collation, in October, in Cairo, of the Coptic text of the *Gos. Thom.* by Puech, Gilles Quispel, Antoine Guillaumont and Yassah ‘Abd al Masīḥ.⁴⁷ It was probably at that time that the division of the *Gos. Thom.* in 114 sayings was made.⁴⁸ In any case, it is mentioned by Quispel in his first article on the *Gos. Thom.* published in the Fall of 1957.⁴⁹ Labib’s photographic edition actually meant “the breaking of the monopoly on *The Gospel of Thomas*,” to quote James Robinson.⁵⁰ In early 1957, Gérard Garitte published a lengthy review of Labib’s edition, in which he gave a Latin translation of the Coptic sayings corresponding to those preserved in the Oxyrhynchus papyri. On May 24, 1957, in a communication addressed to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Puech presented a preliminary synthesis of his findings on the *Gos. Thom.*, in which he described the work in the following terms: “It is not, properly speaking, a ‘Gospel,’ or a composition of the ordinary type of the canonical, apocryphal or gnostic Gospels: it is nothing else, nothing less, than a collection of 114 *logia*, the largest collection of ‘Sayings of Jesus,’ or of words attributed to Jesus, ever transmitted to us.”⁵¹ In 1958, the first complete translation of the *Gos. Thom.* in a modern language – German – was published by Johannes Leipoldt, and in 1959 appeared successively, in May, Jean Doresse’s *L’Évangile selon Thomas ou Les paroles secrètes de Jésus*, to the great dismay of Puech, who accused Doresse of plagiarism,⁵² and, in November, the *editio princeps* of the *Gos. Thom.* in four versions (with translations into French, English, German and Dutch).⁵³ Henceforth, the *Gos. Thom.* was part of the public domain.

Since the publication of the *editio princeps*, in 1959, the *Gos. Thom.* has been the subject of a considerable number of studies, monographs, book chapters or articles. Numerous *Forschungsberichte* or *Status quaestionis* have been produced which give a very good idea of the major trends of the research devoted to the *Gos. Thom.*⁵⁴ In the second part of this paper, I would like to evoke rapidly a few questions which are still mobilizing scholars and readers of the *Gos. Thom.*

⁴⁷ See M. Tardieu in Crégheur et al., *Histoire des manuscrits gnostiques coptes* (see n. 35), 75–76; Robinson, *The Publication* (see n. 35), 718–719.

⁴⁸ Divergent numberings: 113 *logia*: G. Garitte, “Le premier volume de l’édition photographique des manuscrits gnostiques coptes et l’Évangile de Thomas”, *Mus* 70 (1957) 59–73, here 62; 112 *logia*: J. Leipoldt, “Ein neues Evangelium? Das koptische Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen”, *TLZ* 83 (1958) 481–496.

⁴⁹ G. Quispel, “The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament”, *VC* 11 (1957) 189–207, here 189.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *The Publication* (see n. 35), 873.

⁵¹ H.-C. Puech, “Une collection des paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: l’Évangile selon Thomas”, *CRAI* 101/2 (1957) 146–166, here 152.

⁵² See the letter of Puech to Doresse of May 25, 1959, in Crégheur et al., *Histoire des manuscrits gnostiques coptes* (see n. 35), 334–335, n. 118, reproduced with an English translation in Robinson, *The Publication* (see n. 35), 890–891 and n. 129.

⁵³ Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas* (see n. 42).

⁵⁴ See J. B. Bauer, “Das Thomas-Evangelium in der neuesten Forschung”, in *Geheime*

The major issue concerning the *Gos. Thom.*, as is the case with any ancient historical source, is the assessment of its date of composition. A *terminus ante quem* is quite easy to determine. The single ancient testimony, which mentions the *Gos. Thom.* by its title and quotes from it, the *Elenchos* of the Pseudo-Hippolytus, is to be dated between 222 and 235.⁵⁵ Even if the date of the Greek fragments discovered at Oxyrhynchus is still debated, the consensus is that they were copied in the late second or early third century.⁵⁶ It is therefore reasonable to infer that the *Gos. Thom.* circulated in Greek in the first quarter of the third century at the latest. For the Coptic version of the *Gos. Thom.*, no mention of date or any other element suggestive of a date is to be found in Nag Hammadi Codex II. We have to rely on paleographical or codicological criteria. According to Søren Giversen and Michael Williams, the handwriting of Codex II can be dated sometime in the first half of the fourth century.⁵⁷ Concerning the translation of the text from Greek into Coptic, Wolf-Peter Funk thinks that it could

Worte Jesu: Das Thomas-Evangelium. Mit einem Beitrag: Das Thomas-Evangelium in der neuesten Forschung von J. B. Bauer. Übersetzung des Evangelium nach Thomas von H. Quecke (ed. by R. M. Grant and D. N. Freedman; Frankfurt am Main 1960) 182–205; E. Haenchen, “Literatur zum Thomasevangelium”, *TRu* 27 (1961) 247–278 and 306–338; K. Rudolph, “Gnosis und Gnostizismus, ein Forschungsbericht”, *TRu* 34 (1969) 121–175, 181–231 and 358–361, here 181–194; F. T. Fallon and R. Cameron, “The Gospel of Thomas. A Forschungsbericht and Analysis”, in *Religion*, Vol. 25/6 of *Principat*, Part II of ANRW (ed. by W. Haase and H. Temporini; Berlin 1988) 4195–4251; S. J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique”, *FF* 8 (1992) 45–97; B. Dehandschutter, “Recent Research on the Gospel of Thomas”, in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neiryneck* (ed. by F. Van Segbroeck et al.; BETL 100; Leuven 1992) 2257–2262; G. J. Riley, “The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Scholarship”, *CurBS* 2 (1994) 227–252; N. Perrin, “Recent Trends in Gospel of Thomas Research (1991–2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels”, *CurBR* 5 (2007) 183–206; N. Perrin and C. W. Skinner, “Recent Trends in Gospel of Thomas Research (1989–2011): Part II, Genre, Theology and Relationship to the Gospel of John”, *CurBR* 11 (2012) 65–86; C. W. Skinner, *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas?* (New York and Mahwah 2012).

⁵⁵ Text in Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 35–36; for the date, see also S. J. Gathercole, “Named Testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas: An Expanded Inventory and Analysis”, *HThR* 105 (2012) 53–89, here 55.

⁵⁶ Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 3), 8, gives a “sample of dates assigned to the Greek fragments.”

⁵⁷ S. Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis. The Coptic Text of the Apocryphon Johannis in the Nag Hammadi Codex II with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (ATDan 5; Copenhagen 1963) 40: “An absolute dating places it as contemporary with Br. M. Pap. 1920 and therefore from 330–340, or more loosely from the first half of the fourth century”; M. A. Williams, “The Scribes of the Nag Hammadi Codices”, *Newsletter of the American Research Center in Egypt* 139 (1987) 1–7, here 4; cf. M. Krause, in *Gnostische und hermetische Schriften aus Codex II und Codex VI* (ed. by M. Krause and P. Labib; Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe 2; Glückstadt 1971) 14: “Ich setze [die Schrift] in die Mitte des 4. Jh.s”; cf. B. Layton, “The Hypostasis of the Archons or *The Reality of the Rulers*: A Gnostic Story of the Creation, Fall, and Ultimate Salvation of Man, and the Origin and Reality of His enemies; Newly Edited from the Cairo Manuscript with a Preface, English Translation, Notes, and Indexes”, *HThR* 67 (1974) 351–425, here 358–359.

have been realized at any time between 250 and 350, just before the fabrication of Codex II.⁵⁸

If it is relatively easy to fix the *terminus ante quem* of the *Gos. Thom.*, the determination of a *terminus post quem* is a thornier question. Since the very beginning of the research on the Oxyrhynchus fragments and, later, on the *Gos. Thom.* itself, the scholarship has been dominated if not obsessed by the question of the “authenticity” of the λόγια Ἰησοῦ, that is, the possibility that they are authentic sayings of Jesus, offering hence a supplement or an alternative to the canonical Gospels. The renewal of the quest for the historical Jesus, in the second half of the twentieth century, has just heightened this tendency. If the very nature of the *Gos. Thom.* – “not a narrative, but a list”⁵⁹ made of very disparate material – obliges us to leave open the possibility that it contains sayings which could originate from a very early stratum in the fixation and transmission of Jesus traditions, the question is, how to identify these sayings.

Dating the *Gos. Thom.* is a two-step operation and it is crucial, from a methodological point of view, to differentiate these steps: firstly, the dating of the *Gos. Thom.* as a whole, as an autonomous literary piece, and, secondly, the dating of the individual sayings. It is self-evident that the *Gos. Thom.* is the result of the combination of a certain number of sources and that the formative process which produced the text must have lasted several decades. If it is a legitimate if not a necessary historical venture to identify successive stages in the development of the *Gos. Thom.*, it cannot be done mechanically, by the application of a chronological stratification elaborated, for example, solely on the basis of the multiple attestation criterion or on form-critical principles.⁶⁰ As Ed Parish Sanders said, “there are no hard and fast laws of the development of the Synoptic traditions.”⁶¹ This applies fully in the case of the *Gos. Thom.*: there is no fast track from *Formgeschichte* to *Redaktionsgeschichte*. To quote Stephen Patterson, “the

⁵⁸ W.-P. Funk, “The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codices”, in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification: Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 septembre 1993* (ed. by L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier; BCNH.E 3; Québec et al. 1995) 107–147, here 143, opinion endorsed by S. Emmel, “The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions”, in *Das Thomasevangelium. Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie* (ed. by J. Frey et al.; BZNW 157; Berlin and New York 2008) 33–49, here 40.

⁵⁹ S. J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and Historical Jesus Research”, in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica. Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. by L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier; BCNH.E 7; Québec et al. 2006) 663–684, here 672.

⁶⁰ As it is the case with J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus. The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco 1991) 427–430, and A. D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas. A History of the Gospel and its Growth* (LNTS 286; London and New York 2005).

⁶¹ E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 9; Cambridge 1969) 272; see also E. P. Sanders and M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London and Philadelphia 1989) 123–137.

reality is that texts that draw from oral tradition (e. g., any of our known early Gospels) are a mix of the simple and the complex, and there is no form-critical correlation to their known stratifications.”⁶²

It is evident that a clear and straightforward answer to the question of the dependence or independence of the *Gos. Thom.* on the synoptic tradition is impossible. Ancient and recent scholarship on this question has amply shown that, in addition to literary relationship, place should be made to other factors such as the enduring oral creation and transmission of Jesus’s sayings down to the second half of the second century and to what has been called “secondary orality.”⁶³ This being said, the *Gos. Thom.* as we have it – that is, in its final version – is clearly characterized by a certain form of eclecticism. Beside obvious synoptic parallels, whatever they mean, many logia evoke a great diversity of literary or doctrinal contexts. Even if one does not concur with Charles Hedrick when he concludes that “Thomas appears to be merely a transmitter of traditional material,”⁶⁴ it appears that the *Gos. Thom.*, as we read it today, amalgamates very diverse traditions. Some of them attest a fluidity in the transmission of Jesus’s words, others take up Jewish themes or images (e. g., the “man of light” in log. 24, or the twenty-four prophets in log. 52),⁶⁵ and still others echo the Imperial gnomological or philosophical culture. This last aspect has been emphasized recently by Stephen Patterson. Comparing Q and the *Gos. Thom.*, Patterson observes that, if “in the Q trajectory an apocalyptic reading of the tradition took hold, in the Thomas trajectory, a more Platonizing reading flourished.” And he adds: “Both of these theological options were, of course, ready to hand in the diverse world of first century Judaism.”⁶⁶ If there was such a thing as an “esoteric, Platonizing theology that is so distinctive of the Gospel of Thomas,”⁶⁷ such a theology was at least as much at home in the second as in the first century.

⁶² S. J. Patterson, review of A. D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 1), in *RBL* 3 (2010).

⁶³ See on this R. Uro, “Thomas and Oral Gospel Tradition”, in *Thomas at the Crossroads. Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. by R. Uro; Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh 1998) 8–32, R. Uro, *Thomas. Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London and New York 2003) 106–133.

⁶⁴ C. Hedrick, “Thomas and the Synoptics: Aiming at a Consensus”, *Second Century* 7 (1989) 39–56, here 47.

⁶⁵ P.-H. Poirier, “Un parallèle grec partiel au Logion 24 de l’Évangile selon Thomas”, in *For the Children, Perfect Instruction. Studies in Honor of Hans-Martin Schenke on the Occasion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften’s Thirtieth Year* (ed. by H.-G. Bethge et al.; NHMS 54; Leiden and Boston 2002) 95–100.

⁶⁶ S. J. Patterson, “The Gospel of (Judas) Thomas and the Synoptic Problem”, in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem. Oxford Conference, April 2008. Essays in Honour of Christopher M. Tuckett* (ed. by P. Foster et al.; BETL 239; Leuven et al. 2011) 784–808, here 800; reprinted in S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Gospels. Essays on the Fifth Gospel* (NHMS 84; Leiden and Boston 2013) 110.

⁶⁷ Patterson, “The Gospel of (Judas) Thomas and the Synoptic Problem” (see n. 66), 798; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Gospels* (see n. 66), 108; also S. J. Patterson,

Another question which early on mobilized research on the *Gos. Thom.* was that of the original language of the writing. In fact, the question was raised by the very existence of textual witnesses in two different languages, Greek and Coptic. Since the three Oxyrhynchus fragments are obviously parts of the same work as the *Gos. Thom.* preserved in Nag Hammadi Codex II, and they are of an earlier date than the Coptic manuscript, it was only reasonable to conclude that the original language of the *Gos. Thom.* was Greek. This conclusion soon became the *opinio communis*. Nevertheless, shortly after the discovery and publication of the *Gos. Thom.*, many scholars drew attention to the fact that the new gospel contained a certain number of expressions or syntactical constructions which could be labelled as semiticisms. It was the case, in the early days of the research, with Puech, Quispel and Garitte,⁶⁸ but Guillaumont was the first to propose an inventory of supposed semiticisms in the *Gos. Thom.*⁶⁹

More recently, Nicholas Perrin sought to establish that the *Gos. Thom.* was composed in Syriac, that this Syriac text forms a unity and not a random collection of sayings, and that the author of the *Gos. Thom.* relied on written Syriac sources, among them, Tatian's *Diatessaron*.⁷⁰ This view suggests that the *Gos. Thom.* be assigned a relatively late date of redaction, since it is generally agreed that the *Diatessaron* was composed sometime after 170 AD. Therefore Perrin's thesis opposed the course of a significant part of the *Gos. Thom.* scholarship, which dates the gospel to the beginning of the second century, if not earlier. Perrin's procedures and conclusions have met with skepticism, to say the least.⁷¹ There is an unmistakable Semitic, i. e. Aramaic or Syriac, flavor in the *Gos. Thom.*, but Perrin's hypothesis is far from being the safest way to establish that the *Gos. Thom.* was composed in Syriac. The main difficulty with such an argument lies in the fact that we have absolutely no evidence of Syriac literary texts prior

⁶⁸ "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Middle Platonism", in *Das Thomasevangelium. Entstehung - Rezeption - Theologie* (ed. by J. Frey et al.; BZNW 157; Berlin and New York 2008) 181–205; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Gospels* (see n. 66), chapter two.

⁶⁸ Puech, "Une collection des paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée" (see n. 51), 146–166, here 159; G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament", *VC* 11 (1957) 189–207, here 199–203; G. Garitte, "Le premier volume de l'édition photographique des manuscrits gnostiques coptes et l'Évangile de Thomas", *Mus* 70 (1957) 59–73, here 65–66.

⁶⁹ A. Guillaumont, "Sémitismes dans les logia de Jésus retrouvés à Nag-Hamâdi", *JA* 246 (1958) 113–123; see also A. Guillaumont, "Les sémitismes dans l'Évangile selon Thomas. Essai de classement", in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. by R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren; EPRO 91; Leiden 1981) 190–204.

⁷⁰ N. Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian. The Relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* (SBLABib 5; Atlanta 2002).

⁷¹ As it appears in reviews of Perrin's book: D. C. Parker, in *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 8 (2003); P.-H. Poirier, in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6/2 (2003); R. F. Shedinger, in *JBL* 122 (2003) 387–391; C. Gianotto, in *Apocrypha* 15 (2004) 340–344, J. Joosten, in *AS* 2 (2004) 126–130; P. J. Williams, in *EuroJTh* 13 (2004) 139–140.

to the Bardesarian *Book of the Laws of Countries* (end of the 2nd–beginning of 3rd century). As to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, if it was ever composed in Syriac, it can be reconstructed only indirectly. Perrin has made out the case for Tatianic dependence to his *own* satisfaction but the case has yet to be proven. A supposed Western Aramaic origin or substratum for the *Gos. Thom.* has also been postulated,⁷² which does not seem to rest on very solid ground either. Literary remains of Western Palestinian Aramaic from the first century CE are very scant if not nonexistent. Even if one does not agree with every detail of his argument, Simon Gathercole has recently made a strong case in favor of a Greek language origin for the *Gos. Thom.*⁷³ Nevertheless, the fact that the *Gos. Thom.* as we have it was composed in Greek does not preclude the presence of semiticisms or aramaisms in some logia, but they can well be accounted for by a simpler explanation than an original partial or complete composition in Aramaic or Syriac.⁷⁴

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words on another contentious issue regarding the *Gos. Thom.*, namely its alleged relationship with Gnosticism. That the *Gos. Thom.* had to be a Gnostic production was more or less an unquestioned dogma of the early scholarship, even if there were some strong objecting voices.⁷⁵ In recent Thomasine research, this question has been at the forefront anew, in the wake of the powerful questioning, by Williams, of the validity – if not of the very existence – of the “dubious category” of Gnosticism.⁷⁶ For one, I still hold it historically legitimate to use the label “Gnostic,” if we consider how deeply Christianity of the first centuries, in all its varieties, was characterized by an overriding desire to attain the “knowledge (γνῶσις) of salvation” (Luke 1:17; cf. Rom. 15:14; John 8:32). The question is then, how the quest for knowledge by the “Gnostics” differed from that of their fellow Christians. In some sense, during the first few Christian centuries, professing to be a “Gnostic” was essentially just one more way of being a Christian.⁷⁷ Concerning the *Gos. Thom.*, it is evident that it cannot be termed a “Gnostic” writing with-

⁷² As advocated by DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 1), 11–13 and 14–15 (chart 2).

⁷³ S. J. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas. Original Language and Influences* (SNTSMS 151; Cambridge and New York 2012).

⁷⁴ Many of A. Guillaumont's observations, formulated in his articles of 1958 and 1981, are still valid; see also P.-H. Poirier, “L'Évangile selon Thomas (log. 16 et 23) et Aphraate (*Dém.* XVIII,10–11)”, in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont. Contributions à l'étude des christianismes orientaux* (Cahiers d'orientalisme 20; Geneva 1988) 15–18.

⁷⁵ In the first place among them is Gilles Quispel, see Skinner, *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas?* (see n. 54), 60.

⁷⁶ M. A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”. An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton 1996), followed by K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge and London 2003). For a more traditional and balanced approach, see C. Marksches, *Gnosis. An Introduction* (London and New York 2003).

⁷⁷ Cf. P.-H. Poirier, “Gnosticism”, in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (ed. by I. A. McFarland et al.; Cambridge, Cambridge 2011) 199–200.

out qualification, but, on the other hand, there is no avoiding the fact that the prologue and logion 1 of the gospel describe it as the repository of secret words (λόγοι ἀπόκρυφοί) whose interpretation (ἐρμηνεία) saves from death. Furthermore, the very fact that the only copy of the *Gos. Thom.* was preserved in a Gnostic codicological environment, just after the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1) suggests that the gospel could at least have appealed to a Gnostic audience or readership even if it does not itself present any kind of developed Gnostic myth. The question of the relationship of the *Gos. Thom.* with second century Gnosticism, which is far from being “some late ‘heresy,’”⁷⁸ is therefore still an undecided one.⁷⁹

After more than 65 years of sustained investigation, the *Gos. Thom.* still remains in many ways a λόγος ἀπόκρυφος, a riddle as fascinating as it is exasperating. But it represents nevertheless a unique opportunity for scholarship, an open window on the diversity and vitality of Christian thought and piety in the late first and early second century.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (see n. 60), 242.

⁷⁹ See on this question the numerous well-balanced contributions of Jean-Marie Sevrin, among them: “L’Évangile selon Thomas: Paroles de Jésus et révélation gnostique”, *RTL* 8 (1977) 265–292; “L’Évangile apocryphe de Thomas: un enseignement gnostique”, *FoiVie* 81 (1982) 62–80; “L’interprétation de l’Évangile selon Thomas, entre tradition et rédaction”, in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years. Proceeding of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (ed. by J. D. Turner and A. McGuire; NHMS 44; Leiden et al. 1997) 347–359; “L’Évangile selon Thomas comme exercice spirituel”, in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi: histoire des religions et approches contemporaines. Actes du colloque international réuni à Paris, le 11 décembre 2008, à la fondation Simone et Cino del Duca, le 12 décembre 2008, au palais de l’Institut de France* (ed. by J.-P. Mahé et al.; Paris 2010) 203–213.

⁸⁰ I would like to thank Kale Coghlan, who was kind enough to revise my English.

The Gospel of Truth

Katrine Brix

Abstract

Im Einklang mit einer viergliedrigen platonischen Epistemologie schildert EvVer p. 18,24–29 Jesus als ein einnehmbares Bild der väterlichen Erkenntnis. Durch Abwendung von menschlichen Vorstellungen und meditative Zuwendung zu biblischen Schriften tritt die menschliche Imagination in die göttliche hinein, in der das Bild wahrlich durch Synesthesia gegessen werden kann.

I. Introduction

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices, it has been a challenge to classify the genres of their manuscripts. The text of NHC I,3 is no exception. NHC I,3 begins with the words “The Gospel of Truth is a joy,”¹ words that have long served as an argument for relating NHC I,3 to the valentinian *Gospel of Truth* mentioned by Irenaeus in the second century.² Despite this coherence, *Gos. Truth* does not tally with the genre of the canonical gospels. The canonical gospels report chronologically about the life and ministry of Jesus, and relate this to the Old Testament tradition and the Jewish heritage of Jesus. The *Gos. Truth* is instead concerned with how Christian believers enter the realm of the divine Father by joining his mind, using the story of Jesus’ crucifixion to depict, and even produce, this union with the Father. In this way, *Gos. Truth* departs from the ordinary Gospel genre.³ Whereas the canonical gospels intend to demonstrate what Jesus said and did, and *that* he brought salvation, the intention

¹ *Gos. Truth* 16,31: “πεγαργελιον η̅τ̅μ̅νε̅ ο̅υ̅τε̅λη̅τ̅ πε̅”. All quotations from the *Gospel of Truth* in this article are from H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, “The Gospel of Truth”, in *The Coptic Gnostic Library* (ed. by J. M. Robinson; Leiden et al. 2000) 55–117, here 82.

² Irenaeus writes in *Haer.* III 11,9 (SC 211, 172–174 Rousseau and Doutreleau): “Hi uero qui sunt a Valentino iterum existentes extra omnem timorem, suas conscriptiones proferentes, plura habere gloriantur quam sunt ipsa Euangelia, siquidem in tantum processerunt audaciae uti quod ab his non olim conscriptum est ‘ueritatis Euangelium’ titulent.”

³ The thematic of gospel literary genre goes beyond the scope of this paper. For further

of *Gos. Truth* is to explain *how* Jesus brought salvation, and how this salvation constitutes a relationship of the believer with the divine Father. For this reason, we ought rather to classify *Gos. Truth* as exegetical rewriting, or as Attridge and MacRae states, “a homiletic reflection.”⁴ It would also be natural to call this “reflection” a meditation, which the publishers of *Gos. Truth* did already back in 1956.⁵ And when K. Grovel, a few years later, published his work on *Gos. Truth* he added the subtitle “A valentinian meditation on the Gospel” to his book.⁶ The aim of this present article is not to offer an answer neither to the genre nor the exact historical context of *Gos. Truth*. Instead it examines the function of *Gos. Truth* for its antique reader, in the hope that the illustration of this function may shed light both on the enigmatic transformation of Jesus that *Gos. Truth* features at *Gos. Truth* p. 18,24–29, and on how *Gos. Truth* employs the crucifixion account to teach union with the divine paternal mind.

In this article I shift the focus from the text to its reader and treat *Gos. Truth* as a meditation that is supposed to trigger divine imagination in its reader, in order to lead her or him to union with the divine mind. I wish to illustrate how it is possible to eat an image through imagination, and that *Gos. Truth* employs this idea of imaginary eating, so as to convey union with the divine. I scrutinize this thesis by elucidating the eating of Jesus as the fruit of the Father’s knowledge, which *Gos. Truth* depicts at *Gos. Truth* p. 18,24–29. Finally, the Christian setting of *Gos. Truth* encourages us also to consider the consequences of an imaginary consummation of Jesus for the celebration of Eucharist. This however is a question that can only be touched upon briefly.

I now turn to the *Gos. Truth* 18,24–29 quoting the passage through which I wish to illustrate how *Gos. Truth* uses imagination to create access to divine reality. There *Gos. Truth* states:

He [namely Jesus *KB*] was nailed to a tree. He became a fruit of the Father’s knowledge. It did not cause destruction because it was eaten, but those, who ate it, it gave that they would be in joy beneath in the discovery of him.⁷

research on Gospel genre see e. g.: R. Guelich, “The Gospel Genre”, in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (ed. by P. Stuhlmacher; Tübingen 1983) 183–219.

⁴ Attridge and MacRae, “Gospel of Truth” (see n. 1): “The *Gospel of Truth*, then, may best be characterized as a homiletic reflection on the ‘Gospel’ or the message of salvation provided by Jesus Christ,” 67.

⁵ M. Malinine et al. (eds.), *Evangelium Veritatis* (Zürich 1956): “De toute façon; il paraît être, bien plutôt qu’un ‘évangile’ à proprement parler, une méditation, une ‘élevation’ sur l’Évangile, une sorte de commentaire enthousiaste, d’effusion spirituelle, exaltant ce qu’est, en son essence,” xv.

⁶ K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth. A Valentinian Meditation on the Gospel* (New York and Nashville 1960).

⁷ *Gos. Truth* p. 18,24–29: “ἀγαπῆς· ἀγαπῆ· ἀφωπῆ· ἡνοῦταξ· ἡπισαῦνε· ἡτε· ἡωτ· ἡταφτεκο· θε· εν· δε· ἀρογαμῆ· ἡενταρογαμῆ· δε· ἀφῆ· νεῦ· ἀτρογῶπῆ· ἀρεῶε· ἡρηῆ· ἡρῆ· ἡσῆ· ἡταφ.” This translation is my own.

II. The Image

As a starting point for understanding *Gos. Truth* p. 18,24–29 I shall regard the transformation of Jesus that takes place in this account from the perspective of a middle platonic approach to the relationship between the highest divine reality and its images, reflections and imitations. I consider Jesus as the fruit of the Father's knowledge as a true image of the Father, first removed from Reality, in accord with a fourfold middle platonic epistemological view of the relationship between the highest reality and its images, reflections and imitations.⁸ The influence of this fourfold middle platonic structure upon Valentinian thinking is rendered by H. J. Krämer in his *Der Ursprung der Geistesmetaphysik*.⁹ In a later work, J. D. Turner demonstrates how several gnostic movements adopted this teaching,¹⁰ and today also D. Burns illustrates in his dissertation *Out of Heaven*¹¹ how the Sethian movement taught a middle platonic fourfold epistemological

⁸ This fourfold epistemological manifestation of Reality is based on Plato's theory of the divided line at *Resp.* VI, 509d–511e. Cf. Plato, *Resp.* VI, 511d–e in: G. P. Goold (ed.), *Plato The Republic Book 6–10*, Vol. 2 of *Plato The Republic* (trans. P. Shorey; LCL 276; Cambridge, Massachusetts 1987) 116: “καὶ μοι ἐπὶ τοῖς τέτταρσι τμήμασι τέτταρα ταῦτα παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γιγνόμενα λαβέ, νόησιν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνωτάτῳ, διάνοιαν δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ, τῷ τρίτῳ δὲ πίστιν ἀπόδος καὶ τῷ τελευταίῳ εἰκασίαν, καὶ τάξον αὐτὰ ἀνὰ λόγον, ὥσπερ ἐφ’ οἷς ἔστιν ἀληθείας μετέχειν, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας ἡγησάμενος μετέχειν.” Translation Shorey, 117: “And now answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul: intellection or reason for the highest, understanding for the second; assign belief to the third, and to the last picture-thinking or conjecture, and arrange them in a proportion, considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality.” The four Platonic capacities of the soul, “νόησις, διάνοια, πίστις, εἰκασία” has among other been translated as: “Understanding/Thought/Belief/Imagination,” cf. N. Rescher exposes these four epistemological levels in N. Rescher, “On the Epistemology of Plato's Divided Line”, *Logos & Episteme. An International Journal of Epistemology* 1 (2010) 133–164. Rescher offers a survey over the most usual translations of the four levels, which he designates: “epitêmê//logos//pistis//eikasias” in idem., 138. Rescher translates Plato, *Resp.* 511e as follows: “Accept the four response-capacities (pathêmata) of the soul as corresponding to those four sectors: rational insight (noësis) as the highest, ratiocination (dianoia) as the second, conviction (pistis) as the third, and supposition (eikasias) as the last; and arrange them proportionately, considering that they involve clarity (saphêneia) to the extent that the objects involve actual truth (alêtheia).” Idem., 137.

⁹ H. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam 1964) 241–259.

¹⁰ J. D. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature”, in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern* 6 (ed. by R. T. Wallis and J. Bregman; New York 1992) 425–459, here 452: “The four level metaphysic, with its ultimate principle absolutely transcending the physical and even intellectual world, was increasingly adopted by philosophers such as Thrasyllus, Moderatus, Nichomachus and other arithmologists, Philo, Julian author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Plotinus and later Neoplatonists, and by many Gnostics, such as Basilides, Monoimus, the Valentinians, the Naasenes, Peratae, Docetics, Sethians and Archontics, and the system of the ‘Simonian’ *Magalê Apophasis*.”

¹¹ D. Burns, *Out of Heaven* (Yale 2010) 166.

manifestation of Reality. There, the true image of the highest divine being is first removed from its source of Reality and is, as such, its true expression.¹² I argue that *Gos. Truth* likewise operates with a fourfold epistemological path to reality that is equivalent to the divided line of Plato's *Republic* 511b–e. I further argue that the Planē of *Gos. Truth* operates on the level of *eikasia*,¹³ which is third removed from Truth/Reality and is a level in which apprehension is taken from reflections and shadows.¹⁴ On a higher level second removed from Truth, we find the earthly material as handiworks, etc. which is the wood of the cross. On the level first removed from Truth is the true image of Reality/Truth, and at the first level, Reality/Truth itself.

I propose that the image into which Jesus mutates in *Gos. Truth* 18,24–29 is an ontologically true image of the Father's mind, which is on the level first removed from Truth. This level is assible through divine imagination. Jesus does not only appear like a fruit of the Father's knowledge; he *becomes* a fruit of the Father's knowledge. The Fruit of the Father's knowledge is a true image of the Father's mind. Therefore, that the transformation of Jesus is ontological. Jesus transforms into an image of the highest divine Reality. This image is a true existent image and, as I shall argue, it can be perceived through the good divine imagination. Moreover, the image of Jesus as a fruit of the Father's knowledge fits into a fundamental use of vegetative imagery in *Gos. Truth*. Throughout *Gos. Truth* vegetative imagery illustrates the relationship between the Father, Jesus and the believers in a way that agrees with Plotinus' idea of the One as a World Tree found in *Enneades* III.3.7.10–25.¹⁵ It would go beyond the scope of this

¹² Burns, *Heaven* (see n. 11), 199: "The idea that the intelligible world is an image of the ineffable first principle is standard Platonism, particularly strongly articulated by Plotinus. Yet the Sethian texts describe the permutations of the Barbelo aeon not as images of descending quality, but as perfect images, snapshots of development within a single hypostasis (Mind)."

¹³ For more information on the theory of *eikasia* in Plato's *Republic*, cf. Rescher, "Epistemology" (see n. 8), 136, in which Rescher refers to: H. J. Paton, "Plato's Theory of Eikasia", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 22 (1921/1922) 69–104, and D. W. Hamlyn, "Eikasia in Plato's *Republic*", *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1958) 14–23.

¹⁴ LSJ translates "eikasia" of Plato, *Resp.* 511e and 534a as: "Apprehension of or by means of images or shadows," H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, Vol. 1 of *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford 1925/1940) 484b.

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enn.* III, *On Prov.*, (LCL 442) 134, 136 Henderson. "Πρόρισι δὲ ἦδη ἐκ ταύτης ἕκαστα μενούσης εκείνης ἔνδον οἶον ἐκ ρίζης μιᾶς ἐστώσης αὐτῆς ἐν αὐτῇ· τὰ δὲ ἐξήνηθησαν εἰς πλῆθος μεμερισμένον εἰδωλον ἕκαστον ἐκείνου φέρον, ἄλλο δὲ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐνταῦθα ἦδη ἐγίνετο καὶ ἦν τὰ μὲν πλησίον τῆς ρίζης, τὰ δὲ προϊόντα εἰς τὸ πόρρω ἐσχίζετο καὶ μέχρις οἶον κλάδων καὶ ἄκρων καὶ καρπῶν καὶ φύλλων· καὶ τὰ μὲν ἔμενον αἰεὶ, τὰ δὲ ἐγίνετο αἰεὶ, οἱ καρποὶ καὶ τὰ φύλλα· καὶ τὰ γινόμενα αἰεὶ εἶχε τοὺς τῶν ἐπάνω λόγους ἐν αὐτοῖς οἶον μικρὰ δένδρα βουληθέντα εἶναι, καὶ εἰ ἐγέννησε πρὶν φθαρῆναι, τὸ ἐγγὺς ἐγένενα μόνον. Τὰ δὲ διάκενα οἶον τῶν κλάδων ἐπληροῦτο ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐκ τῆς ρίζης καὶ αὐτῶν ἄλλον τρόπον πεφυκότων, ἐξ ὧν καὶ ἔπασχε τὰ ἄκρα τῶν κλάδων, ὡς ἐκ τοῦ πλησίον οἶεσθαι τὸ πάθος ἰέναι μόνον· τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτὸ μὲν ἔπασχε, τὸ δὲ ἐποίηε, ἢ δὲ ἀρχὴ ἀνήρητο καὶ αὐτῇ. Πόρρωθεν μὲν γὰρ ἐλθόντα ἄλλα τὰ ποιοῦντα εἰς ἄλληλα, ἐξ ἀρχῆς δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ, οἶον εἰ ἀδελφοὶ δρῶντι ἀλλήλους ὅμοιοι γενόμενοι ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ὀρμηθέντες τῶν πεποικύτων." Translation: A. H.

paper to examine the encompassing vegetative imagery of *Gos. Truth*. Still, the imagery deserves mention, because it illustrates the union between the image and its perceiver in the divine imagery. Moreover, I shall argue that the believer enters the divine imagery through divine imagination.

After this short introduction to the nature of the image, I proceed to my experiment, by way of which I argue for the consummation of the image. How is it possible to eat an image, as the Gospel of Truth so bluntly states? My answer is that an image must be consumed through imagination. One might well say that imaginary consumption is not real consummation, objecting that the imaginary eating of an image does not equate to actually eating the image. I shall argue that the image is actually being consumed. I demonstrate how this perception and consumption of the image in *Gos. Truth* happens through imagination. In order to do this, I first put forward some observations on the concept of imagination. Then I describe the phenomenon of synesthesia, a phenomenon that involves the blending of senses, makes imaginative consummation of the image possible.

III. The Imagination

While imagination today is thought of as the rendering of something in the mind, which is unreal, there is no good reason to believe that this was the case for the antique reader of the *Gos. Truth*. On the contrary, imagination can also be regarded as the gateway to the higher realities, or as a means to create new realities. In his book, *The Wake of Imagination*,¹⁶ Richard Kearney defines the concept of imagination in the hebraic tradition as the ability to form and create with the mind.¹⁷ Kearney also details the ambiguity of imagination as both good divine creativeness of God and the evil earthly imagination, the *yetser hara*.¹⁸ The latter

Armstrong (LCL 442) 135,137: "And individual things proceed from this principle while it remains within; they come from it as from a single root which remains static in itself, but they flower out into a divided multiplicity, each one bearing an image of that higher reality, but when they reach this lower world one comes to be in one place and one in another, and some are close to the root and others advance farther and split up to the point of becoming, so to speak, branches and twigs and fruits and leaves; and those that are closer to the root remain for ever, and the others come into being for ever, the fruits and the leaves; and those which come into being for ever have in them the rational forming principles of those above them, as if they wanted to be little trees; and if they produce before they pass away, they only produce what is near to them. And what are like empty spaces between the branches are filled with shoots which also grow from the root, these, too, in a different way; and the twigs on the branches are also affected by these, so that they think the effect on them is only produced by what is close to them; but in fact the acting and being acted upon are in the principle, and the principle itself, too, is dependent."

¹⁶ R. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (New York 1988).

¹⁷ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 39–40, 43.

¹⁸ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 42–46. Kearney states: "We are confronted with the essential ambiguity of imagination as it relates to *both* a divine *and* a human source," 45.

becomes manifest as digression from God with the opening of Adam and Eve's eyes.¹⁹ Kearney illustrates how Jewish exegesis from the Talmud to Martin Buber has interpreted the opening of Adam and Eve's eyes as the awakening of human imagination that brings human being into sin.²⁰ With the ability to distinguish between good and evil, the human being then becomes able to imagine, and by this means form with his mind his own wicked forms.²¹ In the Hebrew Bible, the word for "to form" or "create" is called *yetser*, יצר (e. g. Gen 2:7), which is also a term for imagination.²² Brown/Driver/Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon translates it as, among others things, "frame, devise in the mind"²³ and "imagination."²⁴ At Genesis 8:21 the Septuagint translates יצר with δίανοια as the wicked intention of human being.²⁵ While the noun δίανοια generally means human intention as "thought," "mind," or "process of thinking."²⁶ Meanwhile the verb διανοέομαι is also used for God's good "intention" or "purpose" at Zech 8:15 LXX. At Deuteronomy 31:21 the Septuagint translates יצר as πονηρία, which again relates the thoughts and mind of human being to wickedness.

Kearney demonstrates that we also find a negative view of human imagination in Hellenic philosophy. He writes that human imagination according to Plato is "Condemned to a pseudo-world of imitations,"²⁷ and "in so far as it identifies itself with the shaping activity of the divine demiurge, imagination easily leads to idolatry."²⁸ Accordingly, human imagination is concerned with the lower world forming for itself images and reflections that do not refer to the reality above it, but are only poor imitations. As Kearney states, "In presuming to create a world in its own image, the human imagination resides at a third remove from the truth."²⁹ This agrees with the fourfold epistemological revelation of truth as mentioned above. In *Gos. Truth* we find the imitations of Planē at this level. Human imagination is situated at the same stage of reality, at a third remove from the truth, like the imitations of Planē, which are substitutes for the truth leading man astray, just as human imagination according to Plato also leads man astray.³⁰ This allows us to situate the Planē of *Gos. Truth* at the same lowest level of reality, the third level removed from truth, where truth has ceased and only

¹⁹ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 39–43.

²⁰ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 39–43.

²¹ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 39–43.

²² Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 39: "The main hebraic term for imagination is *yetser*."

²³ F. Brown et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (2007) 427b.

²⁴ Brown et al., *Lexicon* (see n. 23), 428a.

²⁵ Gen 8:21 LXX.

²⁶ Liddle-Scott Jones (see n. 14).

²⁷ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 88.

²⁸ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 88.

²⁹ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 88.

³⁰ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 88: "The imagination, by contrast, simply leads man further astray."

the imitations of the divine world of forms are left as imitations of the truth created by the wicked human imagination.

Nevertheless, Kearney reveals that there is in Jewish tradition the idea of “integration of the evil imagination into the good imagination.”³¹ He refers to the goodness of creation according to Genesis 1:31, and explains that according to Jewish tradition imagination itself is not evil, but only became so because of the transgression of human beings.³² God created man with two *yetsers*, the good and the evil.³³ Accordingly, the human being is able to integrate its evil imagination into the good divine imagination when following the Torah and by this means entering into dialogue with God.³⁴ For Plato also there is a way for human beings to turn away from the world of imitations. By directing ones reason, *nous*, towards the higher transcendental Ideas, and abandoning the imitations of the lower world, human beings “behold no longer an image, but truth itself.”³⁵

As we see, both the Jewish and Hellenic traditions have a negative view of human imagination. Human imagination digresses from the good true creation and creates for itself a world of imitations. Still, both traditions describe a way for human imagination to turn away from its tendency to create imitations. *Gos. Truth* is also aware of a wicked human imagination that produces its own false and misleading imitations. This digressing human imagination is depicted in the figure of Planē. Planē leads human being astray by creating imitations of the Truth (*Gos. Truth* p. 17,15–21.30–36). Consequently, we can regard the Planē of *Gos. Truth* as situated on the level of *eikasia* in Plato’s *Resp.* 511e, cf. above. The imitations, that Planē produces, engender *eikasia*, which is not divine imagination, but apprehension by means of shadows and reflections that does not lead to insight about reality and truth. In *Gos. Truth* we also find imagination in its true divine constitution accessible through the scriptures. *Gos. Truth* meditates on biblical scriptures, in particular two essential biblical events: the Fall from Eden and the crucifixion of Jesus. Meditating on these biblical events *Gos. Truth* engenders divine imagination by means of which Jesus is comprehended as the Fruit of the Father’s knowledge. This vision of Jesus as the fruit of the Father’s knowledge³⁶ appears through meditation on these biblical events, and is, as such, an image generated by biblical events producing divine imagination. Moreover,

³¹ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 46.

³² Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 47.

³³ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 47–48.

³⁴ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 47–49.

³⁵ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 91. Kearney refers to Plato, *Republic* VII, 533a and interprets as follows: “The Good remains inaccessible to those who cling to their images thereby condemning themselves to the phantasmagoria with the cave. But those who abandon the imitations of *eikasia* for the realities of *nous* behold no longer an image (*eikōn*) but truth itself.”

³⁶ At *Gos. Truth* p. 20,24–25 Jesus appears as a book. This is also an image generated by divine imagination. In this present article focus is on the mutation/vision seen in the first crucifixionaccount within *Gos. Truth*.

this image not only opposes the original fall of Adam and Eve, but it is also the route through which the human being can escape the world of imitations and gain access to the divine nous. This process of recognition brings platonism into a Christian Jewish setting, namely the setting of Jesus' crucifixion and the Tree of Knowledge from Gen 3. Accordingly, *Gos. Truth* explains the union between Father and believers as the integration of the evil imagination into the good imagination and the idea of turning away from the world of imitations by joining the paternal mind, the divine nous, through meditation on biblical scriptures.

We now turn to another scholar whose observations also yields some insight into the use of, and approach to, imagination by the community behind the *Gos. Truth*. Violet MacDermot, in *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East*,³⁷ her encompassing work on vision in the ancient Middle East, illustrates how the Egyptian ascetic monk probably used imagination as a tool for the creation of a non-material world based on emotion.³⁸ MacDermot, drawing on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Budge II, *Questions and Answers*, comments on Palladius' description of a monk who imagines the torments of hell as compared with the joys of heaven, noting that:

"He [the monk *added KB*] was thus able to create for himself, in his imagination, a non-material world, based on the events in the Scriptures. This was the 'vision' of the ascetic; it was not 'seen' in a dream or trance, it could be shared with others, and it concerned this life as well as the next. It was a world, not only of thought, but of emotion."³⁹

MacDermot also emphasizes that "participation in imagination in the Biblical events was an emotional experience."⁴⁰

Gos. Truth plays on a wide range of biblical scriptures. And as mentioned above, *Gos. Truth* has been defined as a meditation.⁴¹ Therefore, there is no reason to question the notion that the many biblical references in *Gos. Truth* might function as a meditation on biblical scriptures. And when we add the meditation on biblical scriptures, which is so apparent in *Gos. Truth*, to its intention of releasing the human being from the fog of imitations, in order to integrate into the good imagination by attaching oneself to the divine nous, we approach an understanding of the mutation and consummation of Jesus that takes place at *Gos. Truth* p. 18,24–27. Moreover, the vision that the *Gospel of Truth* presents of Jesus as a fruit of the Father's knowledge gives rise to emotions. Namely, the emotion of joy in the discovery of the Father (*Gos. Truth* p. 18,27–29),⁴² as this vision is

³⁷ V. MacDermot, *The Cult of the Seer in The Ancient Middle East. A Contribution to Current Research on Hallucinations Drawn from Coptic and Other Texts* (Berkley and Los Angeles 1971).

³⁸ MacDermot, *Cult* (see n. 37), 52.

³⁹ MacDermot, *Cult* (see n. 37), 52.

⁴⁰ MacDermot, *Cult* (see n. 37), 53.

⁴¹ Malinine et al., *Evangelium Veritatis* (see n. 5), xv.

⁴² *Gos. Truth* 18,27–29: "ΝΕΝΤΑΖΟΥΑΜΥ ΔΕ ΔΥΤ ΝΕΥ ΑΤΡΟΥΩΩΠΕ ΔΥΡΕΩΕ ΝΕΡΗΪ ΝΕΡΪ ΠΙΣΙΝΕ"

being eaten. In *Gos. Truth* the experience of union with the divine engenders emotions that are felt, experienced, and could even be shared by the community. And this union with the divine imagination that the *Gos. Truth* presents features an example of what Kearney would call “integration of the evil imagination into the good imagination.”⁴³

Kearney’s study of imagination in Jewish and Hellenic thought combined with McDermot’s observation on the use of imagination in Egyptian monasticism provides a path for the observation that the contemplation on the crucifixion of Jesus that *Gos. Truth* presents may well feature a Christian-Platonic belief, in which the human being ought to turn away from the false and imitating human imagination towards union with divine imagination in order to enter the divine mind. In this case, the image of Jesus as the fruit of the Father’s knowledge is conveyed by divine imagination in the mind of the contemplating believer, and only by the human mind insofar as this directs its mindedness towards the biblical events. The vision of Jesus is thus not an image or a reflection or an imitation produced by a human mind, but is rather a divine image, a product of the good divine imagination, and, as such, a divine revelation from the truth above.⁴⁴

Before we leave this section on imagination, we would do well to recognize that Augustine’s theory of the three visions could also shed some light on the vivid imagery found in *Gos. Truth*, as well as the mutation of Jesus that happens on the cross.

In the twelfth book of *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine describes three kinds of vision: 1) The corporeal vision *per oculos*, 2) the spiritual vision of the imagination *per spiritum hominis*, and 3) the intellectual vision *per contuitum mentis*.⁴⁵ These three kinds of visions were for Augustine inspired by Neopla-

ἄραϑ”. Translation: Attridge and MacRae, “Gospel of Truth” (see n. 1), 85: “but to those who ate it it gave (cause) to become glad in the discovery.”

⁴³ Kearney, *Wake* (see n. 16), 46.

⁴⁴ In this way, one can even suggest that the initial words of NHC I,3: “ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ἄΤΗΜΕ” assign the message revealed in NHC I,3 to the truth. NHC I,3 depicts the gospel in truth when perceived by divine imagination, and not the gospel as the story perceived literally as the lower worldly account that is only a reflection.

⁴⁵ St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram Libri Duodecim*, Book XII,7 (ed. by J. Zycha; CSEL 28) 387–388: “Haec sunt tria genera uisionum, [...] primum ergo appellemus corporale, quia per corpus percipitur et corporis sensibus exhibetur; secundum spiritale: quidquid enim corpus non est et tamen aliquid est, iam recte spiritus dicitur et utique non est corpus, quamuis corpori similis sit, imago absentis corporis, nec ille ipse obtutus, quo cernitur; tertium uero intellectuale ab intellectu, quia mentale a mente ipsa uocabuli nouitate nimis absurdum est ut dicamus.” Translation by E. Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine, On Genesis* (New York 2002) 471: “These are the three kinds of vision,” [omitted KB]. “So let us call the first kind of vision ‘bodily,’ because it is perceived through the body, and presented to the senses of the body. The second one ‘spiritual’; anything, you see, that is not body and for all that is still something can now correctly be called spirit, and the image of an absent body, though like a body, is of course not itself a body, and neither is the glance or gaze by which it is perceived. The third one, finally,

tonic thought,⁴⁶ and he also operated with a distinction between imagination and intelligence (nous) that is in accord with Kearneys observations on the Hellenic and Jewish view on imagination. With regard to Augustine's three visions, Jesse Keskiaho, in her *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages*, states the following:

"But already in the 390s he [Augustine added KB] started to discuss dreams and visions in the context of a Neoplatonic theoretical framework of human cognition, which posited a strict difference between corporeal and spiritual realities, and seeing and understanding, and considered avisual cognition the highest form of human perception."⁴⁷

Keskiaho goes on to reveal examples from Augustine's works where Augustine not only exposes the three kinds of visions, but also teaches the supremacy of intelligence over human imagination as a way to understand the Trinity. Keskiaho even demonstrates, based on a reading of Augustine's *Epistulae* 120.2.7–10, 710–713, that intelligence according to Augustine needs to combat human imagination, because this leads to idolatry.⁴⁸ In this way, what Kearney would define as the good divine imagination, is for Augustine the divine intelligence, the Nous of God. Therefore seeing is for Augustine not merely seeing, but understanding.⁴⁹ With respect to the third vision Keskiaho refers to Augustine's *Contra Adimantum*, in which the Church Father writes:

"The third kind of vision then happens through the contemplation of the mind, by which the understanding of truth and wisdom are perceived. Without this kind of vision the two kinds first introduced would either be useless or even lead into error. For when that, which is divinely shown either to the corporeal senses or to the visual imagination [lit. that part of the soul which seizes the images of bodies/objects] is not only sensed but also understood by the mind, the revelation is perfect."⁵⁰

'intellectual' from the intellect, because if we call it mental from *mens*, mind, the very novelty of the word will render it disagreeable to the ear."

Cf. also D. Chidester, *Word and Light. Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse* (Urbana and Chicago 1992) 70–71.

⁴⁶ J. Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages. The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge 2015) 139.

⁴⁷ Keskiaho, *Dreams* (see n. 46), 139.

⁴⁸ Keskiaho, *Dreams* (see n. 46), 143: "This true intelligence is the only way to combat imagination, which cannot accurately represent the Trinity but still tries and thus leads to idolatry."

⁴⁹ Keskiaho, *Dreams* (see n. 46), 139: "But his [Augustine's added KB] emphasis is not on the ability to see, but on the ability to understand."

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Contra Adimantum* 28, *Œuvres De Augustin* 17 (ed. by R. Jovilet and M. Jourjon; BAUG; Paris 1961) 370: "Tertium autem genus visionis est secundum mentis intuitum, quo intellecta conspiciuntur veritas atque sapientia: sine quo genere illa duo, quae prius posui, vel infructuosa sunt vel etiam in errorem mittunt. Cum enim ea, quae sive corporeis sensibus, sive illi parti animae quae corporalium rerum imagines capit, divinitus demonstrantur, non solum sentiuntur his modis, sed etiam mente intelleguntur, tunc est perfecta revelatio." Translation: Keskiaho, *Dreams* (see n. 46), 140. As I shall illustrate below Chidester defines the third intellectual vision as synesthetic, cf. Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 71.

According to this view, it is not human vision – whether based in the corporeal or in the human imagination – that perceives the divine,⁵¹ but it is the contemplating mind. In this case the contemplating mind perceives by “nous,” which is the good divine imagination.

IV. Synesthesia

Now that we have identified the image of Jesus as a fruit of the Father’s knowledge and the access to this fruit of knowledge through meditation and divine imagination, the next challenge is to illustrate how this image can be eaten. Here the concept of synesthesia can help us to overcome this challenge. Synesthesia means a blend of senses through which sound, vision, taste, touch and smell unite into an idiosyncratic perception.⁵² We probably all understand the following expressions: “a warm or cold color,” “a dark sound,” “a light voice” or “a sharp taste.” And while we may not think of these expressions as something unusual, this perceptual blend of color, sound, and temperature is indeed a puzzling phenomenon. In recent years this phenomenon has become a subject of scientific investigation.⁵³ Today there is a common consensus about its existence,⁵⁴ though psychologists and neuroscientist have still not found a method of mapping out the phenomenon. Synesthesia can also be found in early Christian literature, as David Chidester reveals in his book, *Word and Light. Seeing, Hearing and Religious Discourse*.⁵⁵ Here Chidester illustrates the phenomenon of synesthesia in the works of Philo, Augustine, and Origen, among others. He

⁵¹ Keskiäho even demonstrates under reference to Augustine, *Epistulae* 120.2.7–10, in A. Goldbacher (ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini opera*, Vol. 2 (CSEL 34; Vienna 1895–1898) 710–713 that human imagination according to Augustine could lead to idolatry. Cf. Keskiäho, *Dreams* (see n. 46), 143.

⁵² E. M. Hubbard, “Synesthesia”, in Vol. 2 of *Encyclopedia of the Mind* (ed. by H. Pashler; San Diego 2013) 725: “Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory modality or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, conscious experiences in a second, unstimulated pathway.”

⁵³ Hubbard, “Synesthesia” (see n. 52), 726: “Although synesthesia was a topic of intensive scientific, artistic, and cultural interest in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was largely forgotten until the late 20th century.”

⁵⁴ L. C. Robertson and N. Sagiv, *Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience* (Cary, US 2004) vii: “Recent scientific evidence [...], demonstrates that the question of its existence as a ‘real’ phenomenon is no longer in doubt [...] Neuroscientific evidence using functional imaging techniques have shown brain activation in predicted areas that corresponds to synesthetes reported experiences.”

Hubbard, “Synesthesia” (see n. 52), 725: “Synesthesia research has expanded dramatically in the past 20 years. This research has demonstrated that synesthesia is a real phenomenon, explored its neural basis, and begun to uncover the genetic mechanisms that might lead to synesthesia.”

⁵⁵ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45).

refers to Philo's *Decalogue* 46, where Philo describes the voice on Zion as not only heard but also seen.⁵⁶ The relevant passage is worth quoting:

"From the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience, and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they seemed to see rather than to hear them."⁵⁷

In terms of Augustine's third vision, Chidester rightly notes that Augustine regarded the intellectual visions of Moses at Num 12:8 and Paul at 2 Cor 12:4 as synesthetic. Chidester states:

"The intellectual visions of Moses and Paul were visions of words that were beyond sight or sound. Intellectual vision, therefore, was synesthetic."⁵⁸ And Chidester continues: "Both visions, therefore, were mysterious types of visionary hearing."⁵⁹

According to Chidester, this intellectual vision was for Augustine not only limited to enigmas, "but saw directly the *species*, the essence or sight of a higher reality."⁶⁰ Chidester also points to Origen's idea of a "genetic divine sense,"⁶¹ "which only the man who is blessed finds on this earth."⁶² Origen describes this genetic divine sense as sensing with the mind as we know it from the phenomenon of synesthesia. Origen describes in his *Contra Celsum* I 48 how among others the prophet Ezekiel, as told in Ezekiel 2:9–3:3, could eat the role of a book by this genetic divine sense. Origen writes:

"The blessed prophets found this divine sense, and their vision and hearing were spiritual; in a similar way they tasted and smelt, so to speak, with a sense which was not sensible. And they touched the Word by faith so that an emanation came from him to them, which he healed. In this way they saw what they record that they saw, and they heard what they say they heard, and their experience was similar when, as they recorded, they ate the roll of a book which was given to them."⁶³

⁵⁶ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 30–31.

⁵⁷ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 30–31. Chidester refers to Philo, *Decal.* 46 and 47. Philo, *De Decalogo* 46–47 (ed. by L. Cohn and P. Wendland; Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt 4; Berlin 1902) 230: "φωνὴ δ' ἐκ μέσου τοῦ ῥυέντος ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ πυρὸς ἐξήχει καταπληκτικωτάτη, τῆς φλογὸς εἰς διάλεκτον ἀρθρομένης τὴν συνήθη τοῖς ἀκρωμένοις, ἢ τὰ λεγόμενα οὕτως ἐναργῶς ἐτρανοῦτο, ὡς ὄραν αὐτὰ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀκούειν δοκεῖν." Translation Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 30. Philo in his *Decal.* 47 also refers to Exod 20:18 LXX: "πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἑώρα τὴν φωνὴν." Translation: "The whole people saw the voice."

⁵⁸ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 71.

⁵⁹ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 71.

⁶⁰ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 71.

⁶¹ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 70. Origen, *Contra Celsum* I 48,28: "θείας τινὸς γενικῆς αἰσθήσεως."

⁶² H. Chadwick, *Origen. Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 1980) 44.

⁶³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I 48,39–47 (M. Borret, *Origène Contra Celse Tome I* [SC 132; Paris 1967] 204 and 206): "οἱ μακάριοι προφήται τὴν θείαν αἰσθησιν εὐρόντες καὶ βλέποντες θείως, καὶ ἀκούοντες θείως καὶ γεύομενοι ὁμοίως καὶ ὁσφραίνόμενοι, ἴν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, αἰσθήσει οὐκ αἰσθητῇ καὶ ἀπτόμενοι τοῦ λόγου μετὰ πίστεως, ὥστ' ἀπορροῇν αὐτοῦ ἦκειν

Origen specifies that this kind of perception is to be sensed with the mind rather than by the senses,⁶⁴ and in book I 48, prior to the previously quoted passage, Origen even asks rhetorically:

“Why then is it strange to suppose that the force which forms an impression on the mind in a dream can also do so in the daytime for the benefit of the man on whom the impression is made, or for those who will hear about it from him?”⁶⁵

and Origen continues:

“Just as we receive an impression in a dream that we hear and that our sense of hearing has been physically affected, and that we see with our eyes, although these impressions are not experienced by our bodily eyes or made by any vibration in our ears, but are only in our mind; so also there is nothing extraordinary in such things having happened to the prophets when, as the Bible says, they saw certain marvellous visions, or heard utterances of the Lord, or saw the heavens opened.”⁶⁶

These words from Origen combined with Augustine’s teaching of the third intellectual vision allow us to regard the imaginative consuming of Jesus that takes place in *Gos. Truth* as a consumation with the mind, which can in fact be tasted. And this consumation is to its contemporary audience even more real than a corporeal consumation, because it happens with a mind that contemplates on the higher divine reality and truth. The imaginative consumation enabled by *Gos. Truth* happens through divine imagination and is engendered by contemplation on the divine biblical scripture, in particular the crucifixion of Jesus. The image being consumed is a product of divine imagination and conveys a vision that evokes even the senses of smell and taste. This explains why the image is truly being consumed by the perceiving believer.

These examples of synesthesia in ancient literature reveal that the blending of senses occurring in the *Gos. Truth* is no unique phenomenon, and that it is possible to imagine the mutation of the man on the cross into something that

εις αὐτοὺς θεραπεύσουσαν αὐτοὺς, οὕτως ἑώρων ἃ ἀναγράφουσιν ἑωρακέναι καὶ ἤκουον ἃ λέγουσιν ἀκηκοέναι καὶ τὰ παρα-πλήσια ἔπασχον, ὡς ἀνέγραφον, ἐσθιοντες «κεφαλίδα» διδομένην αὐτοῖς βιβλίου.” Translation: H. Chadwick, *Origen* (see n. 62), 44–45.

⁶⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I 48,15–16 in Borret, *Origène* (see n. 63), 202: “οὔτε τῶν τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμῶν οὔτε τῆς ἀκοῆς πλησσομένης ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ταῦτα πάσχοντος.” Translation: Chadwick, *Origen* (see n. 62), 44: “These impressions are not experienced by our bodily eyes or made by any vibration in our ears, but are only in our mind.”

⁶⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I 48,10–13 in Borret, *Origène* (see n. 63), 202: “οὕτως τί ἄτοπον τὸ τυποῦν τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν ἐν ὄνειρῳ δύνασθαι αὐτὸ τυποῦν καὶ ἕπαρ πρὸς τὸ χρήσιμον τὸ ἐν ᾧ τυποῦται ἢ τοῖς παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἀκουσομένοις;” Translation: Chadwick, *Origen* (see n. 62), 44.

⁶⁶ Origen *Contra Celsum*, I 48,13–20 in Borret, *Origène* (see n. 63), 202: “Καὶ ὡσπερ φαντασίαν λαμβάνομεν ὄναρ ἀκούειν καὶ πλησσεσθαι τὴν αἰσθητὴν ἀκοὴν καὶ ὄραν δι’ ὀφθαλμῶν, οὔτε τῶν τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμῶν οὔτε τῆς ἀκοῆς πλησσομένης ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ταῦτα πάσχοντος, οὕτως οὐδὲν ἄτοπον τοιαῦτα γεγονέναι ἐπὶ τῶν προφητῶν, ὅτε ἀναγέγραπται ἑωρακέναι τινὰ αὐτοὺς παραδοξότερα ἢ ἀκηκοέναι λόγους κυρίου ἢ τεθεωρηκέναι οὐρανοὺς ἀνοιγομένους.” Translation: Chadwick, *Origen* (see n. 62), 44.

can be smelled, tasted, and taken in. Chidester even mentions *Gos. Truth* page 30, line 26 to 31 as an example of synesthesia.⁶⁷ Here the *Gospel of Truth* writes: “For when they had seen him and heard him, he granted them to taste him and smell him, and to touch the beloved Son.”⁶⁸

Chidester also refers to the Desert Fathers and the Pachomian community as an example of a vivid employment of synesthesia in their literature.⁶⁹ The following is a quote from MacDermots translation of *The Life of Saint Pachomius* 156b,35–157a,27:

“A great flash of light came in the words, so that all the brethren were like men drunk with wine. (*omitted MacDermot*) And they saw the words coming forth from his mouth like birds of gold, silver and precious stones, which flew over the brethren in secret and went into the ears of many of those who listened well.”⁷⁰

V. Conclusion

The consummation of Jesus that takes place in the *Gos. Truth* happens by means of imaginative divine perception. Fundamental for this divine perception are the biblical scriptures. Divine perception in *Gos. Truth* springs from contemplation on two biblical events, namely Genesis 3 and the crucifixion of Jesus. Contemplation on these biblical events turns human imagination away from its own wicked tendency to create human forms and imitations. Instead, human imagination integrates into divine imagination, in which Jesus is sensed and taken in as a fruit of the Father’s knowledge. In this way, union with the divine comes about in the divine imagery and the perception of it. The transformation of Jesus is a vision that emerges in the mind of the contemplating person. The vision possesses true reality, being a product of divine imagination and not of the lower human imagination. In other words, the human imagination of the visionary transforms into divine imagination, allowing him or her to sense divine reality and experience union with the divine mind.

Consequently, it is, as such, in union with the divine mind that Jesus in *Gos. Truth* is perceived as a fruit of the Father’s knowledge. And just as the mind

⁶⁷ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 21.

⁶⁸ *Gos. Truth* p. 30,26–31: “ἵταροῦνεῦ γαρ ἀραϑ’ ἀγω ἀϑωτῆ ἀραϑ’ ἀϑτ’ νεῦ ἀτροῦχι ἑπε’ ἀβαλ ἴμαϑ οὔαζῆ ἀποῦϑαλλμεϑ οὔαζῆν τοῦεμαζτε ἀχῆ πῶρῆμῆριτ.” Translation: Attridge and MacRae, “Gospel of Truth” (see n. 1), 101.

⁶⁹ Chidester, *Word* (see n. 45), 20.

⁷⁰ MacDermot, *Cult* (see n. 37), 380. S. Pachomii Vitae Sahidice Scriptae 132,3–27 (ed. by L. T. Lefort; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 99 and 100; Paris 1933) 157a,3–27: “ϑαρεοῦνοϑ ἴεβρηϑε ἴοῦοειν ϑωπε’ ζῆῆϑαχε’ ζωστε’ ἴτενεσνηῦ τηροῦ ῖ ὅε ἴρενωμε εὔταζε ζῆῆοῦηρῆ· [*omitted KB according to MacDermot’s translation*] ἀγω νε ϑαϑηαῦ ἴϑαχε εὔτηηῦ εβολ ζῆ ταϑταπρο’ εῦῶ ἴῆε ἴῆπῆνε’ ἴρεηαλατε ἴῆοῦβ’ ζῆατ’ ζῆωνε’ ἴῆε, εὔηηλ’ εβολ εχῆεσνηῦ’ ζῆ οὔῖπεῆητ’ ἀγω ἴσεβωκ εροῦη ἴῆααχε’ ἴρεαζ ζῆ νετσωτῆ καλωϑ.”

of the visionary is capable of seeing this fruit, the mind is also capable of smelling and tasting it. When *Gos. Truth* reports that the vision is eaten, this is possible because vision and taste blend into one idiosyncratic divine perception that is as real as physical consummation. One may even suggest that this divine consummation is even more real since it is not consummation of the physical element. After all, the physical element is nevertheless only a reflection of the real element and, as such, second removed from reality. Consummation of the true image by divine imagination brings the believer closer to reality as the image, which he or she consumes, is first removed from reality. This divine consummation involves all senses; it includes smell and touch, and as Jesus is perceived, or rather eaten, emotions are evoked in the contemplating believer. These emotions, which are “joy in the finding of the Father” (*Gos. Truth* 18,27–29), could be shared by the community, become manifest in it, and establish it.

To conclude, I shall mention the question of the necessity of a physical element in this imaginary Eucharist. Namely, is it possible that *Gos. Truth* taught a Eucharist without elements? A Eucharist without a physical element may have been possible, but not necessary. Against an ascetic non-physical Eucharist, one may argue that other Valentinian texts, for example the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3 p. 75,14–21), have a very physical understanding of the Eucharist. Still, I would suggest that consummation of a physical element during contemplation on scripture may have been distracting and was not necessarily required. In addition, in the case of a Eucharist without physical elements, a monk was even able to celebrate for himself the divine mystery of the Eucharist alone in his cell without bread, wine and water.

Die Weisheit Jesu Christi (SJC)

Judith Hartenstein

Abstract

The Wisdom (Sophia) of Jesus Christ (Soph. Jes. Chr.) is one of the gospels of Nag Hammadi (and related codices) in the form of a post-resurrection revelation dialogue. The Soph. Jes. Chr. is connected to different strands of early Christianity, it uses the Gospel of Matthew as well as Euginostic and gnostic-mythological ideas and there might be a link to an ascetic-charismatic Pauline tradition via the term "wisdom of Jesus Christ," which has an interesting parallel in the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

I. Einführung

Zu den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi, die meist als „Evangelien“ angesehen werden, gehört die Sophia Jesu Christi – so der gewohnte Titel, obwohl er besser als Weisheit Jesu Christi wiedergegeben würde.¹ Die SJC ist ein typisches Beispiel für die Schriften, die beschreibend als „dialogische Evangelien“ bezeichnet werden.² In ihnen belehrt Jesus seine Jüngerinnen und Jünger (einzeln oder als Gruppe) im Dialog, meist ausdrücklich nach der Auferstehung.

¹ Zum Titel s. u. Abschnitt II.1.

² So die Überschrift der Rubrik in „Antike christliche Apokryphen“, weitere übliche Bezeichnungen, die aber jeweils eine etwas unterschiedliche Auswahl an Schriften umfassen, sind Dialogevangelien, Erscheinungsdialoge, Erscheinungsevangelien, Gespräche mit dem auferstandenen Jesus, gnostische Evangelien. Insbesondere ist strittig, ob auch Dialoge ohne eine Rahmenerzählung wie der Dialog des Erlösers (NHC III,5) einbezogen werden; der Begriff gnostische Dialoge o.ä. schließt auch Schriften ein, in denen nicht Jesus der Dialogpartner ist. Vgl. J. Hartenstein, Dialogische Evangelien. Einleitung, in: C. Marksches/J. Schröter (Hg.), Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. 7. Auflage der von Edgar Hennecke begründeten und von Wilhelm Schneemelcher fortgeführten Sammlung der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen. Band 1, Teilband 2: Evangelien und Verwandtes, Tübingen 2012, 1051–1058. Zur Begründung einer literarischen Gattung, für die die Rahmenerzählung konstitutiv ist, J. Hartenstein, Die zweite Lehre. Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge (TU 146), Berlin 2001, 249–259.

Die Schrift ist als vierte Schrift von NHC III (p. 90,14–119,18) überliefert und außerdem als dritte Schrift des BG (p. 77,8–127,12). Beide sind fast vollständig erhalten und voneinander unabhängige Übersetzungen ins Koptische von einer weitgehend übereinstimmenden griechischen Vorlage.³ Die Textbasis ist so sehr gut. Darüber hinaus gibt es mit Eug eine weitere Schrift aus Nag Hammadi (NHC III,3 und V,1), deren Text über weite Strecken wörtlich parallel zur SJC ist, es fehlt in Eug aber die Rahmenerzählung und damit Jesus als Sprecher und die Fragen der Jüngerinnen und Jünger. Eug ist eine philosophische Abhandlung in Briefform über den obersten Gott und die himmlischen Welten. Die SJC bietet diesen Inhalt mit wenigen Auslassungen und einigen Zusätzen als Belehrung Jesu nach seiner Auferstehung an seine zwölf Jünger und sieben Jüngerinnen. Es ist Konsens, dass die SJC eine Überarbeitung von Eug ist.⁴ Anders als bei vielen anderen Schriften, bei denen eine Entstehung in mehreren Schritten bzw. eine Verwendung von Quellen vermutet wird, ist bei der SJC eine Quellenschrift also real vorhanden und es ist damit möglich, Redaktionskritik methodisch abzusichern durchzuführen.⁵

Wie ordnet sich die SJC nun in den Kontext der antiken christlichen Literatur ein? Zur Klärung dieser Frage werde ich genauer auf den Titel eingehen, dann auf die Rahmenerzählung mit ihren Bezügen zum Matthäusevangelium und schließlich noch auf die Beziehung zu Eug. Meines Erachtens zeigt die SJC dabei Verbindungen zu durchaus unterschiedlichen Strömungen im frühen Christentum.

II. Die Weisheit Jesu Christi. Zum Titel der Schrift

1. Die SJC als Evangelium

Anders als z. B. das Evangelium nach Thomas (so der Titel der Schrift in NHC II p. 51,27f.) oder das „Evangelium Veritatis“ (die titellose Schrift beginnt in NHC I p. 16,31 mit den Worten „Das Evangelium der Wahrheit“) wird die SJC in der

³ Mit P. Oxy. 1081 existiert auch noch ein griechisches Fragment.

⁴ Grundlegend ist der Aufsatz von M. Krause, Das literarische Verhältnis des Eugnostosbriefes zur Sophia Jesu Christi. Zur Auseinandersetzung der Gnosis mit dem Christentum, in: A. Stuiber/A. Hermann (Hg.), *Mullus*. FS Theodor Klauser, Münster 1964, 215–223. Vgl. z. B. auch D. Parrott (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081*. *Eugnostos and the Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHS 27), Leiden u. a. 1991, 3; C. Barry, *La Sagesse de Jésus-Christ* (BG 3; NH III,4). *Texte établi, traduit et commenté* (BCNH.T 20), Québec 1993, 1f.

⁵ Diese Entstehung ist vermutlich aber auch ein Grund, dass die SJC als bloß „sekundäre Überarbeitung“ bisher nicht so sehr viel Aufmerksamkeit erfahren hat. Vgl. G. Wurst, *Das Problem der Datierung der Sophia Jesu Christi und des Eugnostosbriefes*, in: J. Frey/J. Schröter (Hg.), *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen* (WUNT 254), Tübingen 2010, 373–386, hier 373f.

handschriftlichen Überlieferung nicht ausdrücklich als Evangelium charakterisiert. Der Begriff kommt aber zweimal in der Schrift vor: An der ersten Stelle ist es ein Verweis auf eine Größe außerhalb – dies kann entweder eine Schrift oder mündliche Evangeliumspredigt sein –, in der vom Mensch bzw. Menschensohn die Rede ist.⁶ Zum anderen wird am Ende festgehalten, dass die Jüngerinnen und Jünger aufbrechen, um das Evangelium zu predigen, damit ist sicher die in der Schrift dargebotene Lehre Jesu gemeint.⁷ Diese zweite Stelle zeigt, dass sich die SJC inhaltlich als ein Evangelium im Sinne der frohen Botschaft vom Heil durch Jesus Christus versteht. Die Zuordnung zu einer literarischen Gattung ist damit aber noch nicht gegeben, sondern hängt von der jeweiligen Definition der Gattung ab. Ich verstehe Evangelien als Berichte von Worten und/oder Taten Jesu, die den Lesenden Heil und Leben vermitteln sollen. Dem entspricht die Darstellung der SJC, auch wenn sie deutlich mehr Worte als Erzählungen enthält und zeitlich nur einen kleinen Ausschnitt des irdischen Wirkens abdeckt, nämlich die Zeit nach der Auferstehung.⁸

Aber warum nennt sich die SJC nicht selbst Evangelium? Es ist denkbar, dass die Verwendung des Begriffs zur Bezeichnung von Schriften zur Zeit ihrer Abfassung noch nicht gängig war.⁹ Die meisten dialogischen Evangelien verwenden ihn ebenfalls nicht, aber EvMar und EvJud – beide eher später zu datieren als die SJC – zeigen, dass eine solche Benennung möglich war. Anders als bei etlichen anderen Schriften scheint mir der Titel Die Weisheit Jesu Christi genuiner Bestandteil der Schrift zu sein, nicht eine spätere Zufügung. In beiden koptischen Handschriften erscheint er als Titel markiert am Ende der Schrift,¹⁰ aber auch am Anfang des Textes als normaler Bestandteil des Textes geschrieben.¹¹ Am Anfang bildet die Erwähnung von Jesus Christus im vorangestellten Titel auch einen sinnvollen Bezugspunkt für die folgenden Possessivpronomen im ersten Satz („Die Weisheit Jesu Christi. Nach seiner Auferstehung von den Toten, als

⁶ „Da sagte Bartholomäus zu ihm: ‚Warum wird er im Evangelium der ‚Mensch‘ und der ‚Menschensohn‘ genannt? Wessen (Sohn) ist dieser Sohn?‘“ (SJC BG p. 98,7–13 par.)

⁷ „Von jenem Tag an begannen seine Jüngerinnen und Jünger das Evangelium von Gott, dem ewigen Vater der in Ewigkeit Unvergänglichen, zu predigen.“ (SJC BG p. 127,4–10 par.)

⁸ Vgl. zur genaueren Begründung J. Hartenstein, Erscheinungsevangelien (Gespräche mit dem Auferstandenen) im Kontext frühchristlicher Theologie. Anknüpfungspunkte und Besonderheiten der christologischen Vorstellungen, in: J. Schröter (Hg.), *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology* (BETHL 260), Leuven 2013, 305–332, hier 305 f.

⁹ Die Datierung der SJC ist umstritten, ich halte eine Abfassung um die Mitte oder sogar in der 1. Hälfte des 2. Jahrhunderts für wahrscheinlich, aber es gibt auch spätere Ansätze, zuletzt Wurst, *Problem* (s. Anm. 5), 378.386. Vgl. Hartenstein, *Erscheinungsevangelien* (s. Anm. 8), 307 f. Den ersten sicheren Beleg für die Bezeichnung von Evangelien als Evangelien bietet Justin, aber bei ihm spielt diese Benennung nur eine Nebenrolle. Vgl. zum Problem S. Petersen, *Die Evangelienüberschriften und die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, in: ZNW 97 (2006), 250–274, hier 264 f. und passim.

¹⁰ BG p. 127,11 f. par. NHC III p. 119,18 (hier in einer kürzeren Form: Die Weisheit Jesu).

¹¹ BG p. 77,8 par. NHC III p. 90,14.

seine zwölf Jünger [...]“ SJC BG p. 77,8–13), dessen Subjekt, der Erlöser, erst später genannt wird (SJC BG p. 78,11 f.). Vermutlich begann der Text schon immer mit der Kurzcharakterisierung und Überschrift: „Die Weisheit Jesu Christi“ und gab damit den Lesenden eine erste Einführung in die Schrift. Die Formulierung konnte dann auch als separater Titel verwendet werden.

Die Formulierung hält zunächst Jesus Christus als zentrale Autorität für alles Folgende fest.¹² Anders als bei den Titeln der Gestalt „Evangelium nach ...“ ist keine Einzelperson aus dem Jüngerkreis namentlich genannt. Möglicherweise ist aber – im 2. Jahrhundert – eine Nennung von Jesus Christus in Kombination mit dem Begriff Evangelium als Titel ausgeschlossen. Meines Wissens gibt es keine frühchristliche Schrift, die sich selbst Evangelium Jesu Christi nennt bzw. in den Handschriften so bezeichnet wird.¹³ Dahinter könnte ein Gespür dafür stecken, dass „Evangelium Jesu Christi“ die Heilsbotschaft insgesamt ist, nicht eine konkrete Darstellung von bestimmten Worten und/oder Taten. Vielleicht ist die Näherbestimmung auch zu unspezifisch, von Jesus Christus handeln alle Evangelien. Schriften, die sich Evangelium nennen (oder so genannt werden) müssen deshalb im Titel eine Näherbestimmung bieten, z. B. durch eine Gewährsperson.¹⁴ Bei den Schriften des 2. Jahrhunderts ist das meist eine Person, die im Jüngerkreis nach Darstellung der Schrift eine hervorgehobene Rolle spielt.¹⁵ Einige Schriften, in denen die ganze Gruppe gleichermaßen beteiligt ist, wählen dagegen einen Titel, in dem Jesus genannt, die Schrift aber nicht als Evangelium charakterisiert wird.¹⁶ Jedenfalls wird durch den Titel der SJC keine

¹² Vgl. den Anfang des Markusevangeliums!

¹³ Auch nicht „Evangelium des Erlösers“ o.ä. Möglich sind aber neben Einzelpersonen Gruppen wie die Zwölf, die Nennung der Entstehungs- oder Zielgruppe (Ägypter-, Hebräer-evangelium) oder inhaltliche Charakterisierungen („Evangelium Veritatis“).

¹⁴ Am ehesten könnte noch der erste Satz des Markusevangeliums als Verbindung von Jesus Christus und Evangelium in einer Titelformulierung verstanden werden, wenn er als eine Überschrift für die Gesamtschrift gemeint ist und nicht nur als Einführung in das Auftreten von Johannes dem Täufer. Aber auch hier wird nicht einfach von „Evangelium Jesu Christi“ gesprochen, sondern von der ἀρχή (Anfang, oder eher Grundlegung ...) des Evangeliums Jesu Christi. „Evangelium“ ist in diesem Zusammenhang dann die Gesamtbotschaft, nicht eine konkrete Schrift. In der Handschriftenüberlieferung ist nicht dies als Titel verwendet worden, sondern die Näherbestimmung von Evangelium durch den Namen Markus.

Ein möglicherweise analoges Phänomen findet sich bei den Apokalypsen. Die neutestamentliche Johannesapokalypse nennt sich selbst in 1,1 Offenbarung Jesu Christi, dieser Titel hat sich aber nicht durchgesetzt, sondern die Nennung von Johannes als Gewährsmann, der anderen Titeln von Apokalypsen entspricht. Möglicherweise war zur Zeit der Abfassung von Apk die Näherbestimmung mit Jesus Christus sinnvoll zur Abgrenzung von anderen Apokalypsen, mit einer Vielzahl von christlichen Apokalypsen war eine andere Unterscheidung nötig.

¹⁵ Vgl. J. Hartenstein, *Autoritätskonstellationen in apokryphen und kanonischen Evangelien*, in: J. Frey/J. Schröter (Hg.), *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen. Beiträge zu außerkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen aus verschiedenen Sprach- und Kulturtraditionen* (WUNT 254), Tübingen 2010, 423–444, hier 438 f.

¹⁶ Neben der SJC gilt dies für den Dialog des Erlösers (Dial NHC III,5) und die Bücher des Jeû (1/2)Jeû).

besondere Hervorhebung einer Einzelperson aus dem Jüngerkreis deutlich und das entspricht der Gestaltung in der SJC: Die Offenbarungen Jesu ergehen an zwölf Jünger und sieben Jüngerinnen, die insgesamt am Gespräch beteiligt sind. Auch wenn fünf Einzelpersonen namentlich genannt sind, wird keine Hierarchie sichtbar wie etwa im EvThom oder im EvMar.

Der Begriff Weisheit/Sophia im Titel verweist auf eine Weisheitslehre, nicht auf die himmlische Gestalt.¹⁷ Die nächste Parallele für einen solchen Titel ist die Sapientia Salomonis, es ist also eine bekannte Möglichkeit, Inhalte mit dieser Formulierung einer Autorität zuzuordnen. Der Verlauf der Schrift zeigt dann, dass es dabei nicht um eine irgendwie menschliche Weisheit eines irdischen Lehrers geht, sondern allein um himmlische Weisheit, die Jesus vermitteln kann, weil er selbst von oben, aus dem Licht kommt, wie mehrfach betont wird.¹⁸ Das passt in das Bedeutungsspektrum des Begriffs in seiner jüdischen und frühchristlichen Verwendung, konzentriert sich aber auf einen, den himmlischen Pol.¹⁹ Es gibt Anknüpfungspunkte in der Jesusüberlieferung (z. B. Mt 11,27), aber der Großteil der überlieferten weisheitlichen Lehre Jesu ist in der SJC nicht erfasst.

Viele andere Aspekte des Wirkens Jesu fehlen ebenfalls: Der Titel macht deutlich, dass Jesus als Lehrer, konkret als Vermittler himmlischen Wissens wichtig ist. Seine Taten, z. B. Wunder, spielen keine Rolle, auch die Passion nicht – obwohl sie vorausgesetzt wird, wenn die SJC die berichteten Ereignisse nach seiner Auferstehung einordnet.

2. Die Weisheit Jesu Christi in den *Theklaakten* – eine Verbindung der SJC zur Paulustradition

Der Titel zeigt die SJC also als eine spezifische Ausprägung von Evangelienliteratur und charakterisiert so die Schrift. Vielleicht lässt sich aber noch genauer bestimmen, in welchen Bereichen des frühen Christentums eine Formulierung wie „Weisheit Jesu Christi“ genutzt werden konnte und was sich mit ihr verbindet. Erstaunlicherweise kommt die Verbindung Weisheit – Jesus nur relativ selten vor:

In Die Lehren des Silvanus (NHC VII,4) ist die Schlussmahnung der weisheitlich-pädagogischen Schrift: „Nimm die Weisheit des geduldigen und freundlichen Christus an und bewahre diese, o mein Sohn, da du weißt, dass Gottes Weg allzeit von Nutzen ist.“²⁰ Das ist aber eine eher ungewöhnliche Formulierung in

¹⁷ Vgl. z. B. Parrott, Eugnostos (s. Anm. 4), 3; Hartenstein, Lehre (s. Anm. 2), 36. Einen doppelten Bezug sieht Barry, Sagesse (s. Anm. 4), 191 f.

¹⁸ Z. B. SJC BG p. 81,17–82,3; 83,15–19; 87,13–15; 102,1–6 par.

¹⁹ Vgl. 1 Kor 2,7.

²⁰ Silv NHC VII p. 118,2–7, Übersetzung aus H.-M. Schenke/W.-P. Funk, Die Lehren des Silvanus (NHC VII,4), in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge/U. U. Kaiser (Hg.), Nag Hammadi

einer Schrift, in der Jesus Christus sonst mit der Weisheit identifiziert wird.²¹ Inhaltlich ist die Lehre der Schrift ganz anders ausgerichtet als SJC, nämlich auf praktisches, moralisches Verhalten und auf ein richtiges Verständnis der Person Jesu.

In 1Jeû 3 preisen die Apostel Jesus: „Herr Jesus, Du Lebendiger, dessen Güte ausgebreitet ist über die, welche seine Weisheit und seine Gestalt, in der er leuchtete, gefunden haben, – o Licht, das in dem Lichte, das unsere Herzen erleuchtet hat, bis wir das Licht des Lebens empfangen, – o wahres Wort, das durch die Erkenntnis uns die verborgene Erkenntnis des Herrn Jesus, des Lebendigen, lehrt.“²² Hier ist „seine Weisheit“ nur ein Element unter vielen anderen, aber sie beschreibt wie in der SJC das, was Jesus zum Heil der Jünger bietet. Die Jeû-Bücher sind überhaupt in vielem parallel zur SJC, wie diese sind es Offenbarungsdialoge, wenn auch inhaltlich noch schwerer zugänglich.²³

Die m. E. interessanteste Parallele für die Formulierung „Weisheit Jesu Christi“ findet sich im Thekla-Teil der Paulusakten. Relativ am Anfang (5 f.) hält Paulus eine Predigt im Haus des Onesiphorus, die aus einer Reihe von Seligpreisungen besteht, die überwiegend um das Thema Enthaltensamkeit kreisen. Diese Predigt hört Thekla und wird von ihr überzeugt, das setzt die weiteren Ereignisse in Gang.

ActThekla 5 f.:²⁴

Und als Paulus im Hause des Onesiphorus eingekehrt war, herrschte dort große Freude; die Knie wurden gebeugt und das Brot gebrochen und das Wort Gottes von der Enthaltensamkeit und der Auferstehung (verkündigt), indem Paulus sprach:

- (1) „Selig sind, die reines Herzens sind, denn sie werden Gott schauen.
- (2) Selig sind, die ihr Fleisch rein bewahrt haben, denn sie werden ein Tempel Gottes werden.
- (3) Selig sind die Enthaltensamen, denn Gott wird zu ihnen reden.
- (4) Selig sind, die dieser Welt entsagt haben, denn sie werden Gott wohlgefallen.
- (5) Selig sind, die Frauen haben als hätten sie nicht, denn sie werden Gott beerben.
- (6) Selig sind, die Gottesfurcht haben, denn sie werden Engel Gottes werden.
- (7) Selig sind, die vor den Worten Gottes zittern, denn sie werden geröstet werden.

Deutsch. Band 2: NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4. Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Mitgliedern des Berliner Arbeitskreises für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften (GCS.NF 12/Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften III), Berlin/New York 2003, 601–624.

²¹ Vgl. Silv NHC VII p. 106,22 f.; 107,3 f.; 112,33–37; 113,14 f.

²² Übersetzung aus C. Schmidt, Koptisch-gnostische Schriften, erster Band. Die Pistis Sophia, Die beiden Bücher des Jeû, Unbekanntes altgnostisches Werk (GCS), Berlin ⁴1981. (Der verwirrende Wechsel zwischen 2. und 3. Person gehört schon zum koptischen Text.)

²³ Außerdem spricht der Kirchenvater Amphilochius (4. Jahrhundert) in der Schlussmahnung einer Schrift über die Taufe von „honigsüßer Weisheit“ Jesu Christi (Amphilochius Iconiensis, Oratio VII De Recens Baptizatis 6; CChr.SG 3).

²⁴ Übersetzung aus W. Schneemelcher, Paulusakten, in: NTApO. Band 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes, ⁶1999, 193–243. Die Nummerierung der Seligpreisungen habe ich zugefügt.

- (8) Selig sind, die die Weisheit Jesu Christi ergriffen haben, denn sie werden Söhne des Höchsten heißen.
- (9) Selig sind, die die Taufe bewahrt haben, denn sie werden bei dem Vater und dem Sohn ausruhen.
- (10) Selig sind, die das Verständnis Jesu Christi erfasst haben, denn sie werden im Lichte sein.
- (11) Selig sind, die um der Liebe Gottes willen das weltliche Wesen verlassen haben, denn sie werden Engel richten und zur Rechten des Vaters gesegnet werden.
- (12) Selig sind die Barmherzigen, denn sie werden Barmherzigkeit erlangen, und den bitteren Tag des Gerichts werden sie nicht sehen.
- (13) Selig sind die Leiber der Jungfrauen, denn sie werden Gott wohlgefallen, und sie werden den Lohn ihrer Keuschheit nicht verlieren. Denn das Wort des Vaters wird ihnen zum Werk der Rettung auf den Tag des Sohnes werden, und sie werden Ruhe finden in alle Ewigkeit.

Formal orientieren sich die Seligpreisungen an Mt 5, am Anfang (Nr. 1 = Mt 5,8) und am Ende (Nr. 12 = Mt 5,7) gibt es sogar zwei direkte Zitate, daneben einige weitere sprachliche Anlehnungen in den Verheißungen.²⁵ Es werden aber auch paulinische Gedanken vor allem aus 1 Kor 6f. aufgegriffen, z. B. die Vorstellung vom Körper als Tempel (Nr. 2, vgl. 1 Kor 6,19); die Idee, Frauen zu haben als hätte man nicht (Nr. 5, vgl. 1 Kor 7,29); die Aussicht, Engel zu richten (Nr. 11, vgl. 1 Kor 6,3).²⁶

Neben Enthaltensamkeit und Weltentsagung in verschiedenen Varianten (Nr. 2–5 sowie 13, evtl. auch 11) gehören Gottesfurcht bzw. Zittern vor Worten Gottes (6f.), das Ergreifen bzw. Empfangen der Weisheit Jesu Christi (8), das Bewahren der Taufe (9) und das Erfassen des Verständnisses Jesu Christi (10) zur Liste. Dieser mittlere Abschnitt der Seligpreisungen ist stärker an der Gottesbeziehung und -erkenntnis orientiert als am praktischen (asketischen) Leben und verspricht dabei eschatologischen Lohn.²⁷ Zu diesem Teil gehört auch die 8. der Seligpreisungen:

Selig sind, die die Weisheit Jesu Christi ergriffen [oder: empfangen] haben, denn sie werden Söhne [oder: Kinder] des Höchsten heißen.

μακάριοι οἱ σοφίαν λαβόντες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου κληθήσονται.

„Weisheit Jesu Christi“ scheint hier eine Lehre Jesu zu sein, deren Erhalt entscheidend ist, die konkrete Umsetzung von Anweisungen Jesu ist weniger im Blick. Nach zwei Seligpreisungen, die sich auf Gott beziehen und das Verhältnis zu ihm behandeln, geht es hier und in der übernächsten Seligpreisung um Jesus Christus, um seine Weisheit und das Verständnis seiner Person, dazwischen

²⁵ Vgl. M. Ebner, Paulinische Seligpreisungen à la Thekla. Narrative Relecture der Markismenreihe in ActThecl 5f., in: ders. (Hg.), Aus Liebe zu Paulus? Die Akte Thekla neu aufgerollt (SBS 206), Stuttgart 2005, 64–79, hier 67.

²⁶ Vgl. Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 67f.

²⁷ Vgl. Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 69.

um die Taufe. Inhaltlich bedeutet es wohl nur eine geringe Verschiebung von Worten Gottes zur Weisheit Jesu Christi, der Fokus liegt in diesem Teil der Seligpreisungen jedenfalls auf der Lehre und auf der richtigen Haltung Gott und Jesus gegenüber. Ab der 11. Seligpreisung ist dann wieder das konkrete Verhalten der Angesprochenen im Blick.

Sowohl Annette Merz als auch Martin Ebner vermuten, dass die Liste der Seligpreisungen älter als die Theklaakten ist und ihnen schon vorgelegen hat.²⁸ In der erzählerischen Umsetzung wird dann vor allem das Thema der Enthaltbarkeit mit seinen praktischen Folgen aufgegriffen, während andere Punkte wie die Frage der Gotteserkenntnis mit ihren inneren Konsequenzen nicht weiter behandelt werden. Beide sehen noch eine weitere Spannung zur Gesamtschrift: In den Seligpreisungen scheinen vor allem männliche Asketen angesprochen (vor allem Nr. 5), während die Theklaakten dann eine weibliche Heldin haben – ich habe allerdings Zweifel, ob dieses Argument trägt.²⁹ Auch in der grundsätzlichen Konzeption gibt es Unterschiede, die Theklaakten nehmen die Seligpreisungen zwar auf, verschieben aber manche Punkte. „Die Makarismen lassen also auf ein asketisches Milieu schließen, in dem das enthaltene Leben eng verbunden war mit besonderen Erleuchtungs- und Offenbarungserfahrungen, wovon in den Theklaakten sonst nichts mehr zu spüren ist.“³⁰

Ebner sieht, wie auch Merz, die Seligpreisungen vor allem im Kontrast zu den Pastoralbriefen, mit denen sie die Berufung auf Paulus und die Idee, dass Verkündigung/Lehre Bedeutung für die eigene Rettung hat, teilen. In den Pastoralbriefen ist Voraussetzung für die Rolle der Angesprochenen als Lehrer, dass sie als Familienväter ihrem eigenen Haushalt gut vorstehen; ihre Lehre soll die richtig bewahrte Hinterlassenschaft des Paulus sein.³¹ Die Seligpreisungen fordern dagegen Enthaltbarkeit, den Rückzug aus Ehe und Welt als Voraussetzung, dies führt zum direkten Offenbarungsempfang als Quelle für die eigene Lehre. „Hier haben wir ein charismatisches Christentum vor uns, das sich auf himmlische Offenbarungen beruft, von dort Weisheit Christi und schließlich durch deren Verkündigung Rettung erwartet.“³² Ebner zieht keine Verbindungen zur SJC, aber m. E. ist dies eine sehr treffende Beschreibung nicht nur der Seligpreisungen, sondern auch der SJC.³³ Die Schrift schildert himmlische Offenbarungen, die an die Gruppe der Jüngerinnen und Jünger ergehen – ohne

²⁸ Vgl. A. Merz, Die fiktive Selbstausslegung des Paulus (NTOA/StUNT 52), Göttingen 2004, 323–325; Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 65.

²⁹ S. u.

³⁰ Merz, Selbstausslegung (s. Anm. 28), 325.

³¹ Vgl. Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 70f.

³² Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 71.

³³ In den späteren Theklaakten ist dann nach Ebner Enthaltbarkeit die Voraussetzung für Lehre (bei Paulus und bei Thekla), aber die Verkündigung beruht nicht auf je eigenen Offenbarungen, sondern auf denen des Paulus, das Konzept liegt also zwischen dem der Seligpreisungen und dem der Pastoralbriefe. Vgl. Ebner, Seligpreisungen (s. Anm. 25), 75.

Hierarchien oder andere Regelungen – und am Ende verkündigt werden. Und nennt dies „Weisheit Jesu Christi“.

Neben der Titelformulierung und der theologischen Gesamttendenz gibt es weitere Parallelen in einzelnen Gedanken zwischen SJC und den Seligpreisungen, zunächst im unmittelbaren Kontext.

ActThekla 6:

(8) Selig sind, die die Weisheit Jesu Christi ergriffen haben, denn sie werden Söhne des Höchsten heißen.

μακάριοι οἱ σοφίαν λαβόντες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου κληθήσονται.

(9) Selig sind, die die Taufe bewahrt haben, denn sie werden bei dem Vater und dem Sohn ausruhen.

μακάριοι οἱ τὸ βάπτισμα τηρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἀναπαύσονται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν.

(10) Selig sind, die das Verständnis Jesu Christi erfasst haben, denn sie werden im Lichte sein.

μακάριοι οἱ σύνεσιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χωρήσαντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐν φωτὶ γενήσονται.

SJC BG p. 123,2–124,9; 126,5–127,12

Wer also den Vater in heiligem Wissen kennt, wird zum Vater gehen und wird ruhen im ungewordenen Vater. Wer ihn aber mangelhaft kennt, wird im Mangel entstehen³⁴ und in der Achtheit ruhen. Wer aber den unsterblichen Geist, der das Licht ist, in Schweigen durch das Nachdenken und das Wohlwollen wahrhaftig kennt, möge mir Zeichen des Unsichtbaren bringen, und er wird zu Licht im Geist des (p. 124) Schweigens werden. Wer den Menschensohn in Wissen und Liebe kennt, möge mir ein Zeichen vom Menschensohn bringen, und er wird an jenem Orten mit denen, die in der Achtheit sind, sein. [...]

Ihr also, tretet auf ihre Gräber und demütigt ihre Vorsehung und zerbrecht ihr Joch und richtet auf, was mein ist! Denn ich habe euch Vollmacht über alles gegeben als Kinder des Lichts, mit euren Füßen auf ihre Kraft zu treten.“

Dies sagte der selige Erlöser und er (p. 127) entschwand von ihnen. Sie gerieten in große, unbeschreibliche Freude im Geist. Von jenem Tag an begannen seine Jüngerinnen und Jünger das Evangelium von Gott, dem ewigen Vater der in Ewigkeit Unvergänglichen (pl.), zu predigen. Die Weisheit Jesu Christi

Ähnlich wie in der Verheißung der 8. Seligpreisung, Söhne bzw. Kinder des Höchsten zu werden, sagt Jesus den Jüngerinnen und Jüngern ganz am Ende der SJC zu, Söhne bzw. Kinder des Lichts zu sein (BG p. 126,14f. par.).³⁵ Licht als Ziel des Heils begegnet in der 10. Seligpreisung und ist in der SJC ein zentraler Gedanke, der in BG p. 123,11–124,1 par. auch mit Erkennen verbunden ist, und zwar des unsterblichen Geistes (eine Bezeichnung des höchsten Gottes). In der SJC wird hier allerdings eine Differenzierung sichtbar, die sich in den Seligprei-

³⁴ Oder: sein.

³⁵ Vgl. auch Kinder Gottes (BG p. 92,14 par. NHC III p. 100,1 f. Kinder des ungewordenen Vaters).

sungen nicht findet: Die richtige Erkenntnis des obersten Gottes führt ins Licht und zum Ruhen beim Vater, die Alternative, den Menschensohn zu kennen, dagegen nur bis zur Achtheit/Ogdoas und zum Ruhen dort. In der 9. Seligpreisung der Theklaakten bilden Vater und Sohn dagegen einen Ruheort, der durch das Bewahren der Taufe erreicht wird. Auf die Taufe wird vermutlich auch in der SJC in diesem Zusammenhang verwiesen: Das Kennen des Menschensohnes zeigt sich in einem Zeichen (συμβολον) des Menschensohnes (BG p. 124,5f. par.) – damit ist vermutlich die Taufe als Sakrament gemeint. Um das Kennen des unsterblichen Geistes nachzuweisen, sind mehrere Zeichen (unbestimmter Pluralartikel: ἡν̄συμβολον) nötig.

Auch zur dritten Seligpreisung und damit zum Motiv der Askese lassen sich Parallelen finden:

(3) Selig sind die Enthaltamen, denn Gott wird zu ihnen reden.

μακάριοι οἱ ἐγκρατεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοῖς λαλήσει ὁ θεός

SJC BG p. 82,9–19; 105,14–106,10

Euch aber ist es erlaubt zu wissen. Und denen, die des Wissens würdig sind, wird es gegeben werden; denen, die nicht hervorgebracht wurden aus dem Samen des schmutzigen Treibens³⁶, sondern aus dem Ersten, der gesandt wurde: Dieser ist nämlich unsterblich inmitten von sterblichen Menschen.

[...]

Ihr wurdet gesandt durch den Sohn, der gesandt wurde, damit ihr erleuchtet werdet (p. 106) und euch losreißt vom Vergessen der Mächte und damit das schmutzige Treiben³⁷, das aus dem <Feuer>³⁸ (ist), das mit ihm aus ihrer fleischlichen (Schöpfung) kam, durch euch nun nicht mehr erscheine. Und ihr werdet auf ihre Vorsehung treten!“

Am Anfang der Belehrungen spricht Jesus den Jüngerinnen und Jüngern zu, dass sie seiner Offenbarungen würdig sind, weil sie nicht durch abwertend bezeichnete Sexualität entstanden sind, sondern aus Gott. Später gibt es auch eine ausdrückliche Aufforderung zur Enthaltamkeit – sie soll ebenso wie Erleuchtung durch Jesus bewirkt werden. Sowohl in der SJC als auch in den Seligpreisungen hängen die Offenbarungen und der Verzicht auf Sexualität zusammen, auch wenn letzteres Thema in der SJC nicht annähernd so viel Raum einnimmt wie in den Theklaakten. Es ist aber denkbar, dass Askese als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt wird, so dass sie nicht ausführlich thematisiert werden muss.³⁹

Insgesamt lässt sich m. E. sagen, dass eine deutliche Nähe zwischen den Seligpreisungen und der SJC besteht, nicht nur in der Formulierung „Weisheit Jesu

³⁶ Oder: Reiben.

³⁷ Oder: Reiben.

³⁸ Im Text steht „Eifer“ (κωρ) – ich vermute eine Verschreibung von κωρτ (Feuer), vgl. die Parallele in NHC III p. 108,13.

³⁹ Vgl. J. Hartenstein, Encratism, Asceticism and the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity in Apocryphal Gospels, in: A. Gregory/C. Tuckett (Hg.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, Oxford 2015, 389–406, hier 397.

Christi“, sondern in der Bedeutung von Offenbarung und Gotteserkenntnis und einer allgemein himmlischen Orientierung, die aber irdische Gegebenheiten wie Sakramente nicht ausschließt.⁴⁰ Eine Besonderheit der SJC liegt in einer gewissen Abstufung im Heil. Es sind vor allem die Punkte, die in den Theklaakten dann nicht aufgegriffen werden, zu denen die SJC eine inhaltliche Nähe hat, während der Aspekt von Askese nur am Rande vorkommt, auch wenn er möglicherweise vorausgesetzt wird.

Parallel gerade zu den Theklaakten ist aber die starke Rolle von Frauen. In der SJC ergehen die Offenbarungen Jesu ausdrücklich an eine Gruppe aus zwölf Jüngern und sieben Jüngerinnen, die dann am Ende zur Mission aufbrechen.⁴¹ Am Gespräch vorher sind die Gesamtgruppe sowie Einzelpersonen (vier Männer und eine Frau) beteiligt. Nach Merz und Ebner sind die Seligpreisungen dagegen ausschließlich an Männern orientiert.⁴² Aber mich überzeugen die sprachlichen Indizien dafür nicht: „Söhne des Höchsten“ kann m. E. problemlos inklusiv als „Kinder des Höchsten“ verstanden werden,⁴³ dies gilt auch für die weiteren grammatisch maskulinen Formen. Nur die 5. Seligpreisung hat eindeutig nur Männer im Blick. Aber hier fehlt vielleicht die weibliche Parallele deshalb, weil die Möglichkeit einer Enthaltbarkeit in der Ehe oder auch von Sexualität ohne Begierde eher Männern möglich war.⁴⁴ Auch in 1 Kor 7,29 sind in einem ganz weitgehend geschlechtersymmetrischen Text in dieser Hinsicht nur Männer angesprochen. Diese eine Seligpreisung spricht also nicht dagegen, dass in den Seligpreisungen insgesamt eine gemischt männlich-weibliche Zielgruppe angesprochen ist. Auf der anderen Seite bezeugen die Pastoralbriefe (und auch schon 1 Kor), dass in der charismatisch-asketischen Paulustradition Frauen stark beteiligt waren – und das setzt sich dann in den Theklaakten fort. Es wäre erstaunlich, wenn die Seligpreisungen als Bindeglied einen primär männlichen Kontext voraussetzen würden, und m. E. legt ihre Textgestalt dies auch nicht nahe. Die SJC schließt hier dann gut an.

Es lassen sich also einige inhaltlich-theologische Berührungen finden, eine literarische Abhängigkeit ist damit aber nicht gegeben. Mein Ziel ist vielmehr, über die Formulierung „Weisheit Jesu Christi“ nach christlichen Kreisen bzw. Literatur zu suchen, die ähnlich denken, und so einen möglichen Kontext zu erschließen (und genauer zu verorten), in dem „Weisheit Jesu Christi“ eine zentrale Bedeutung hat. Die Seligpreisungen der Theklaakten schaffen dabei eine

⁴⁰ Auch eine gewisse Spannung von präsentischer und futurischer Eschatologie (allerdings weniger Bezüge auf das Gericht) findet sich m. E. in der SJC, vgl. zu den Seligpreisungen Merz, *Selbstausslegung* (s. Anm. 28), 325.

⁴¹ Am Ende sind nicht wie bei der Erscheinung explizit Frauen und Männer genannt, sondern einfach $\nu\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\omicron\theta\eta\tau\iota\varsigma$. Im Kontext der Schrift ist der geschlechtlich nicht festgelegte Pluralartikel eindeutig inklusiv zu verstehen, als seine JüngerInnen.

⁴² Vgl. Ebner, *Seligpreisungen* (s. Anm. 25), 65; Merz, *Selbstausslegung* (s. Anm. 28), 323 f.

⁴³ Vgl. Mt 5,9 Kinder Gottes; oder Joh 12,36 Kinder des Lichts, so auch SJC.

⁴⁴ Vgl. Hartenstein, *Encratism* (s. Anm. 39), 387 f.

Verbindung zu einem charismatisch-asketischen Teil der Paulustradition, mit der die SJC grundlegende Ansätze teilt⁴⁵ und den sie in eine spezifische Richtung weiterentwickelt – wie auch die Theklaakten als eine Weiterentwicklung mit eigenem Profil verstanden werden können. Dieser Bezug zu einem Teil der Paulustradition ist m. E. ein Punkt zur Verortung der Schrift in der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte.

III. Verbindungen der SJC zum Matthäusevangelium

Ich bin auf den Titel mit seinen Konsequenzen jetzt sehr ausführlich eingegangen, weil es eine neue Idee ist. Sehr viel einfacher und schon oft erkannt ist die Beziehung der SJC zu Mt.⁴⁶ Nach der Überschrift beginnt die Rahmenerzählung, die klar die Abschlussscheinung Jesu in Mt 28,16–20 aufnimmt. Die Jüngergruppe geht nach Galiläa auf einen Berg, wo ihnen Jesus in himmlischer Vollmacht erscheint und auf ihre Ratlosigkeit mit seinen Belehrungen antwortet. Am Ende der Schrift gibt es auch eine Art Aussendung und die Jüngerinnen und Jünger brechen dann zur Mission auf.

SJC BG p. 77,9–80,3

Nach seiner Auferstehung von den Toten, als seine zwölf Jünger und sieben Frauen, die ihm Jüngerinnen waren, nach Galiläa kamen, auf den Berg, der (p. 78) ‚Weissagung und Freude‘ genannt wird, wobei sie nun ratlos waren über das Wesen des Alls und den Heilsplan und die heilige Vorsehung und die Vortrefflichkeit der Mächte (und) über alles, was der Erlöser mit ihnen macht im Geheimnis des heiligen Heilsplanes, da erschien ihnen der Erlöser, nicht in seiner früheren Gestalt, sondern in unsichtbarem Geist. Sein Aussehen aber war das Aussehen eines großen Lichtengels. (p. 79) Seine Art aber werde ich nicht beschreiben können. Kein sterbliches Fleisch wird sie tragen können, sondern nur ein reines, vollkommenes Fleisch, wie er sich uns zeigte auf dem Berg, der ‚Ölberg‘ genannt wird, in Galiläa⁴⁷.

Er sagte: „Friede sei mit euch! Meinen Frieden gebe ich euch.“ Und sie wunderten sich alle und fürchteten sich. Der Erlöser lachte. Er sagte zu ihnen: „Über was denkt ihr nach? Worüber seid ihr ratlos? Wonach sucht ihr?“

Philippus sagte: (p. 80) „Über das Wesen des Alls und den Heilsplan des Erlösers.“

⁴⁵ Die SJC greift möglicherweise auch die Vorstellung einer Aufhebung der Geschlechterdifferenz und der Rückkehr in einen ursprünglichen Schöpfungszustand auf, die mit einem asketischen Lebensstil und einer starken Frauenrolle verbunden sind und sich ausführlicher z. B. im EvThom finden lassen, aber vielleicht auch schon in den Auseinandersetzungen von 1 Kor. Vgl. Hartenstein, *Encratism* (s. Anm. 39), 403 f. Die Pastoralbriefe bilden auch hier einen Gegenentwurf.

⁴⁶ Vgl. Hartenstein, *Lehre* (s. Anm. 2), 57 f.; W.-D. Köhler, *Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangelium in der Zeit vor Irenäus* (WUNT II/24), Tübingen 1987, 400.

⁴⁷ Vgl. Mk 9,2–8 par.

Mit dieser deutlich sichtbaren Anknüpfung schafft die SJC eine positive Verbindung zu Mt und möglicherweise noch anderen narrativen Evangelien. Die SJC schließt sich – anders als z. B. das EvThom – an das dort entwickelte Zeitschema an, indem sie nach der Auferstehung Jesu einsetzt. Die vorausgehenden Ereignisse werden einfach als bekannt und wichtig vorausgesetzt.⁴⁸ Die Erscheinungsgeschichte wird ausgebaut und weiterentwickelt – nicht nur durch die langen Belehrungen Jesu, sondern auch schon in den Einzelheiten der Erzählung. Der Berg hat einen Namen, die Ratlosigkeit⁴⁹ der Jüngergruppe wird in konkreten Fragen ausgedrückt, der Erschienene wird beschrieben. Die Darstellung ist so gegenüber Mt gesteigert, insbesondere wird die himmlische Vollmacht Jesu in der Beschreibung ausgestaltet, nicht nur festgestellt. Die Fortschreibung der Erzählung interpretiert sie so in eine bestimmte Richtung, die im Mt-Text möglich, aber nicht klar vorgegeben ist.⁵⁰ Ein eigener Zug ist die ausdrückliche Beteiligung der Frauengruppe, die im Mt-Text nicht angelegt ist.

Für die Stellung der SJC im Kontext der antiken christlichen Literatur bedeutet dieser Bezug der Rahmenerzählung auf Mt einen Anschluss an einen breiten frühchristlichen Konsens. Das Matthäusevangelium ist im 2. Jahrhundert das am häufigsten rezipierte Evangelium, in allen Strömungen des frühen Christentums.⁵¹ Die SJC setzt Mt voraus und baut positiv darauf auf, es wird weder Konkurrenz sichtbar noch der Versuch, die andere Schrift zu verdrängen. Die SJC ergänzt Mt vielmehr, entwickelt es weiter und überbietet es in gewisser Weise, denn sie erzählt die letzten und nach der Auferstehung besonders vollmächtigen Lehren Jesu.⁵² Sie bietet dabei im Dialog ganz eigenständige Inhalte, aber in der Darstellung der SJC schließen sie sich mühelos an das schon vorhandene an. Die SJC schätzt die eigene Lehre hoch, aber ohne sich negativ von anderen abzugrenzen.⁵³ Inhaltlich verbindet die Rahmenerzählung mit ihrer Anknüpfung an schon vorhandene Evangelien die SJC mit der großen Mehrheit des frühen Christentums.

Literarisch ist der durch die Erscheinung Jesu gerahmte Dialog aber eine eigene Form, die in einem spezifischen Kontext verortet ist. Sie ist keine eigenständige ursprüngliche Form von Evangelium, sondern auf die schon vorhandenen Evangelien wie Mt angewiesen, also erst im 2. Jahrhundert entstanden. Sie findet dann aber weite Verbreitung, es sind etliche Schriften erhalten, die diese Form aufnehmen, aber auch variieren und weiterentwickeln. Sie finden sich fast alle

⁴⁸ Auf die Verklärung wird im Rahmen der Erscheinung dann ausdrücklich Bezug genommen.

⁴⁹ Sie könnte dem Zweifel aus Mt 28,17 entsprechen.

⁵⁰ Vgl. Hartenstein, *Lehre* (s. Anm. 2), 296 f.

⁵¹ Vgl. Köhler, *Rezeption* (s. Anm. 46), 522.

⁵² Vgl. Hartenstein, *Lehre* (s. Anm. 2), 295 f.

⁵³ Vgl. die oben schon erwähnten Abstufungen im Heil je nach Erkenntnisstand, die aber keine Verdammung bedeuten.

in Nag Hammadi und verwandten Kodizes.⁵⁴ Die Form ist also in einem relativ spezifischen Bereich des frühen Christentums beliebt, der im Zusammenhang mit „gnostischen“ Vorstellungen steht, auch wenn das vielleicht nicht für alle einzelnen Schriften gilt. Die einzige Ausnahme ist die *Epistula Apostolorum*, die unabhängig von diesem Milieu überliefert ist, aber sich inhaltlich deutlich mit „gnostischen“ Vorstellungen auseinandersetzt.⁵⁵ Für die Verortung der SJC aufgrund ihrer Rahmenerzählung ist also eine gewisse Spannung erkennbar, sie verweist sowohl auf ein ganz breites Christentum als auch auf einen engeren Kontext.⁵⁶ Deutlich wird die Zugehörigkeit zu Evangelienliteratur, die SJC stellt sich als Lehre Jesu wie bei Mt dar.⁵⁷

IV. Die Aufnahme und Verarbeitung von Eug in der SJC

Der größte Teil des Stoffes, den die SJC in die Ausgestaltung der Geschichte aus Mt einbringt und mit ihr verbindet, also das, was Jesus in der Schrift lehrt, stammt aus Eug. Eug ist damit ein zentraler – vom Umfang her der bedeutendste – Anknüpfungspunkt zur Verortung der SJC. Unklar ist allerdings, wie Eug einzuordnen ist, die philosophische Schrift ist jedenfalls platonisch geprägt, enthält aber weder eindeutig christliche Elemente noch direkte Bezüge zu „gnostischen“ Vorstellungen. Für einen „gnostischen“ Hintergrund spricht aber die enge Beziehung zur Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ (NHC II,5), durch die Eug Teil eines größeren mythologischen Konzepts wird, auch wenn die Schrift selbst nur die obersten Himmel behandelt.⁵⁸ Auch für einen christlichen Ursprung und Bezüge zu christlicher Theologie gibt es Indizien.⁵⁹ Die Unsicherheiten bei der Verortung von Eug sind für die SJC allerdings nicht entscheidend, weil diese Schrift in beiden Bereichen für Klarheit sorgt. In ihrer Bearbeitung macht die SJC aus dem Stoff von Eug eine christliche Lehre, indem sie ihn Jesus in den

⁵⁴ Neben der SJC lassen sich noch AJ, EpPetr, 1ApkJak, EpJac jeweils aus Nag Hammadi, EvMar aus BG und EvJud aus CT sowie PistSoph und 1/2Jeû nennen.

⁵⁵ Vgl. Hartenstein, *Lehre* (s. Anm. 2), 102–107.

⁵⁶ Allerdings ist zu fragen, wie weit zur Zeit der Abfassung der SJC die spezifische Verwendung der Form schon deutlich war. Die SJC gehört in die Frühzeit ihrer Entwicklung, ich halte es sogar für möglich, dass in ihr die Form erstmalig entwickelt wurde, vgl. Hartenstein, *Lehre* (s. Anm. 2), 313 f. Das würde dann eine einseitige Rezeption der Schrift bedeuten.

⁵⁷ Auch hier besteht allerdings eine gewisse Ambivalenz, weil die eigene Lehre einerseits als besonders und überlegen betont wird, andererseits aber Mt als Grundlage vorausgesetzt wird und damit ja eigentlich wichtiger ist.

⁵⁸ Vgl. L. Painchaud, *The Literary 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)*, in: JBL 114 (1995), 81–101.

⁵⁹ Vgl. Wurst, *Problem* (s. Anm. 5), 379–385. Die Verbindungen sind m. E. überzeugend, auch wenn ich eher eine weitere Verwandtschaft annehme als die konkrete Einordnung bei Wurst.

Mund legt. Die Beschreibungen des obersten Gottes und der himmlischen Welten werden zu Worten Jesu, der durch einige kleine Zusätze selber in die himmlische Welt eingeordnet wird. Zu den Änderungen gegenüber Eug gehört auch die Zufügung von zwei längeren Abschnitten von Worten Jesu in der Mitte und am Ende der Schrift, die gnostisch-mythologische Elemente enthalten, z. B. den Namen Jaldabaoth. Auch unabhängig vom Verständnis von Eug knüpft die SJC also an „gnostische“ Vorstellungen an. Sie sind in der Schrift aber nur ein Element unter vielen und in eine eigenständige Theologie eingebaut.⁶⁰

Der m. E. interessanteste Unterschied zu Eug liegt im Charakter der Schriften. Eug ist eine philosophische Abhandlung, die auf das Mitdenken und Verstehen der Lesenden setzt. In der SJC werden die Ausführungen zu einer himmlischen Offenbarung an die Jüngerinnen und Jünger, die die Erkenntnisse prinzipiell nicht selbst erlangen können. Dies wird am Anfang schön deutlich: Während in Eug andere philosophische Meinungen wiedergegeben und als unzureichend kritisiert werden, um zu einem eigenen anderen Weg zur Wahrheit aufzufordern, sind in der SJC die philosophischen Positionen schon deshalb falsch, weil sie von Menschen sind (Eug NHC III p. 70,8–71,1 par. SJC BG p. 80,12–81,17) – dem gegenüber stehen Jesus als himmlischer Offenbarer (SJC BG p. 81,17–82,3) und die Würdigkeit derer, die dieses Wissen bekommen (nicht selbst finden!).⁶¹ Auch wenn SJC also inhaltlich über weite Strecken mit Eug übereinstimmt und die Vorstellungen vom obersten Gott und seinen Emanationen übernimmt, verschiebt sich der Charakter der Ausführungen. Die SJC ist eine Offenbarungsschrift und rechnet nicht mit nennenswerten eigenem Zutun der Belehrten. Das Heil wird übergeben, von Gott/Jesu übermittelt, nicht selbst erarbeitet.

Die Verwendung von Eug zeigt also, dass die SJC Zugang zu einer philosophisch orientierten und mit gnostisch-mythologischen Vorstellungen verbundenen Gotteslehre hat und diese ebenso selbstverständlich aufnimmt und ausgestaltet wie Mt. Es bestehen hier Verbindungen zu einer spezifischen Strömung im frühen Christentum, die aber eigenständig verarbeitet wird.

V. Fazit

Was für eine Art von Evangelium ist die SJC? Wo ist ihr Ort in der Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums? Meine Untersuchung hat Verbindungen zu ganz unterschiedlichen Traditionen und Bereichen des frühen Christentums gezeigt. Vermutlich hat sie Beziehungen zu einem Teil der Paulustradition, sicher greift sie Mt auf, sie verwendet philosophische Theologie (ob christlich oder nicht) und gnostische Mythologie. Das alles verarbeitet sie mit

⁶⁰ Vgl. Hartenstein, Erscheinungsevangelien (s. Anm. 8), 330 f.

⁶¹ Vgl. Hartenstein, Erscheinungsevangelien (s. Anm. 8), 313–315.

einem eigenständigen Profil: Der Konzentration auf Jesus als Offenbarer von himmlischer Weisheit, die den Jüngerinnen und Jüngern zu ihrem Heil gegeben wird. Sie hat dabei eine universale Ausrichtung, die Lehre ist nicht geheim oder auf eine bestimmte Zielgruppe beschränkt, und ein deutliches Interesse an der Beteiligung von Frauen. Konflikte oder Abgrenzungen von anderen christlichen Positionen werden nicht sichtbar. Nur im eschatologischen Heil gibt es eine gewisse Abstufung zwischen voller Erkenntnis des obersten Gottes, wie sie wohl durch die Schrift vermittelt wird, und geringerer.

Sowohl die literarische Form als ein von einer Erscheinung Jesu gerahmter Dialog als auch die Aufnahme von Eug als Quellenschrift und von gnostisch-mythologischen Vorstellungen verweisen auf eine spezifische Strömung im frühen Christentum. In diesem „gnostischen“ Kontext ist die Schrift dann auch überliefert worden. Die SJC zeigt aber auch, dass es sich hierbei nicht um einen separaten, in sich geschlossenen Teil des frühen Christentums handelt, sondern um theologische Ideen, die aufgenommen, mit anderen verbunden und neu verknüpft werden können. Die SJC verwendet eben nicht nur Eug, sondern auch Mt, und ihre Theologie ist eine eigenständige Mischung. Trotz Jaldabaoth steht sie insgesamt m. E. einer charismatisch-asketischen Paulustradition näher als vielen Schriften, die einem „gnostischen“ Kontext zugerechnet werden. Möglicherweise ist der auffällige Befund, dass das Heil allein auf das Handeln Gottes bzw. Jesu zurückgeht und nicht an Leistungen der Jüngerinnen und Jünger gebunden ist – auch nicht an deren Bemühen um Erkenntnis –, ein Erbe dieser Paulustradition. Im eigenen Selbstverständnis ist diese Lehre an alle gerichtet, es ist keine Sondertradition nur für einen kleinen Kreis. Es lassen sich kaum Indizien finden, dass die Schrift an eine sozial abgrenzbare Gruppe gerichtet ist. Sie verweist eher auf den Kontakt und Austausch von Ideen, auf ein Netzwerk, in dem theologische Vorstellungen und literarische Elemente immer neu zusammengesetzt werden können.

V. Theologische und philosophische Traktate
in den Nag-Hammadi-Codices

Theological and Philosophical Treatises in the Nag Hammadi Codices

Einar Thomassen

Abstract

Dieser Beitrag hinterfragt die Textsorte ‚Traktat‘ im Hinblick auf die Nag-Hammadi-Texte, wo zumeist Mischformen zu finden sind. Dabei werden die Beziehungen zwischen Traktat, Brief, Offenbarungsdilog, Apokalypse, mythologischer Erzählung und philosophischen Traktaten diskutiert. Darüber hinaus werden die Kommunikationssituation von Traktaten sowie die Spannung zwischen narrativen und theoretischen Denkformen erörtert.

I. What is a ‘treatise?’

The topic assigned to me for this paper is “Theological and Philosophical Treatises in the Nag Hammadi Codices.” Since a main purpose of our conference is to discuss literary forms and genres, the assignment may be taken as an invitation to give at least some attention to the concept of ‘treatise’ as such, and in particular to the treatise as a literary form. But can ‘treatise’ be understood as the name of a distinct literary genre? Perhaps it can. Dictionaries tell us, for instance, that a treatise is “a written work dealing formally and systematically with a subject” (OED). In antiquity, texts that may be called treatises in this sense were obviously written, even though the Greek language did not possess a distinctive term for this kind of writing, other than *logos*. The treatise is a form of exposition that was widely used in philosophy, as well as in the sciences, in order to deal discursively with a specific topic of investigation. It was less commonly used in theology, at least if we want to draw a line between the treatise and the homily, which we probably should. Tertullian’s works on various subjects, however, are probably to be called treatises, together with one or two of the writings of Clement of Alexandria, whereas Origen is usually assumed to have written the first Christian comprehensive, systematic theological treatise with his *Peri archōn*.

1. Treatises, letters and revelation dialogues

I do not wish to spend time here on a general discussion of the question of the treatise as a genre. That would be a rather futile exercise, I suspect. Instead, I propose to discuss the genre of the treatise more specifically with reference to the Nag Hammadi texts, a task that is challenging enough in itself. As a matter of fact, many of the tractates in the Nag Hammadi Library have an ambiguous relationship to their genre. For example, the fourth treatise of Codex I carries the subscript title ΠΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΤΩΒΕ ΤΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ, and is accordingly most often designated *Treatise on the Resurrection*. Actually, however, the text has the form of a letter, addressed to a named recipient, Rheginus, and has therefore also been referred to by scholars as *The Letter to Rheginus*. It is, more specifically, a didactic letter, a genre of which other examples can be found among the Valentinian sources, such as *The Letter to Flora* and three of the fragments of Valentinus' own writings.¹

A somewhat more complex case is that of *Eugnostos* (NHC III and V), which to all intents and purposes is a theological treatise describing the various levels of the transcendent world. The text is framed, however, as a letter written by Eugnostos "to those who are his."² As is well known, the text of *Eugnostos* was later reframed as a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples and named *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, preserved in two copies (NHC III and the Berlin Codex). It is not possible to tell if the epistolary frame of *Eugnostos* is a feature of the text as it was originally composed, and was dropped by the author of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, or if the author of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* was using a text that lacked such a frame. A similar case is that of the *Valentinian Lehrbrief* preserved by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 31.5–6), which also carries an epistolary introduction: "[...] indestructible Mind greets the indestructible ones."³ The introductory formula is here merely a literary device – as is evidently the case in *Eugnostos* as well – and probably a secondary feature, designed to turn the treatise into a revelatory message deriving from a super-human source. A third text, the so-called *A Valentinian Exposition* from Codex XI, also looks as if it may have been framed as a letter, though it is very fragmentarily preserved at the beginning: "[...] my my[stery to those who] belong to me and [those who will be] mine."⁴ It thus seems that the practice of framing a

¹ The general category of "didactic letter" covers a diversity of sub-genres and styles, and overlaps with other genres such as the treatise and the homily. This is not the place to discuss the particularly Valentinian use of the genre, a task that still remains to be done. For comments on the genre of the *Letter to Flora*, see C. Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus", *ZAC* 4 (2000) 225–254, here 228–233, while Ismo Dunderberg, somewhat unnecessarily, wants to classify the text as "an introductory treatise" rather than a letter (I. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* [New York 2008] 233 n. 1).

² ΕΥΓΝΩΣΤΟΣ ΠΝΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΠΝΕΤΕΝΟΥΦ ΝΕ ΧΕ ΡΑΩΕ, NHC III 70,1–2. The introductory section of the second version of *Eugnostos* in NHC V is severely damaged, but χαίρε in 1,3 shows that this version as well was framed as a letter.

³ νοῦς ἀκατάρρητος τοῖς ἀκαταρρήτοις χαίρειν, *Eriph.*, *Pan.* 31.5.1.

⁴ [...] ΠΑΜΥΣ[ΓΗΡΙΟΝ ΔΝΕΙ ΕΤ]ΔΡΟΠ ΝΗΙ Μῆ[ΝΕΤΝΑΩΠΕ Ν]ΗΙ, NHC XI 22,16–18; Turn-

treatise as what may be called a *revelatory letter* may have been a widespread and somewhat significant phenomenon.

The secondary framing of a treatise into *revelation dialogue* is a phenomenon that was already commented on above with reference to *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. I find it likely that the text we now know as the *Apocryphon of John* has undergone the same process. The materials used in the *Apocryphon of John*, framed in a dialogue between Jesus and his disciple John, are most of them also found in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, Book I, chapter 29, but apparently without the dialogue framework. There is no indication that Irenaeus knew the text in the form of a dialogue; he simply describes it as representing the doctrine of the Barbelo-Gnostics. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the materials in the *Apocryphon of John* started their life as a treatise before they were reworked as a revelation dialogue with Jesus as the revealer.

It may be added that Irenaeus' presentation of these materials in *Haer.* 1.29 corresponds to the way he in 1.30 presents the doctrine of "others" (by later heresiologists identified as "the Ophites"). In that section, too, he seems to be referring to some kind of treatise, not a revelation put into the mouth of an authoritative figure. On reflection, it is worthy of notice how little Irenaeus refers to pseudepigraphal authorship in his reports on various texts and systems in Book I; this may lead us to suspect that the re-presentation of treatises as revelations or as the work of some authoritative figure was a later trend in the development of this type of literature.

Some of the Nag Hammadi texts seem not to have undergone this kind of transformation, among them the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*. These texts still appear more or less in the shape of treatises, although here, too, the category of treatise is somewhat messy. *Hyp. Arch.* presents itself as a didactic letter addressed by an anonymous author to an unknown recipient. *Orig. World*, on the other hand is a proper treatise, as was recognised by Hans-Martin Schenke in 1959.⁵ It is a text in which the author at the outset announces that he intends to prove a certain point, specifically that something existed before chaos, and he then goes on to narrate the story of Sophia and the subsequent creation of the world. On the other hand, the demonstration here carried out takes the form of a narrative rather than that of a theoretical discourse, and the narrative goes on to relate the story of the world from beginning to end. This has led some scholars in the past to describe *Orig. World* as an apocalypse.⁶

er's reconstruction in E. H. Pagels and J. D. Turner, "NHC XI,2: A Valentinian Exposition", in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII* (ed. by C. W. Hedrick; NHC 28; Leiden 1990) 89–172, here 106. The reconstruction must be regarded as tentative.

⁵ H.-M. Schenke, "Vom Ursprung der Welt: Eine titellose gnostische Abhandlung aus dem Funde von Nag-Hamadi", *ThLZ* 84 (1959) 243–256.

⁶ See L. Painchaud, *L'Écrit sans titre: traité sur l'origine du monde (NH II,5 et XIII,2 et Brit. Lib Or. 4926[1])* (BCNH.T 21; Québec and Louvain 1995) 15.

However, the text is not presented as a vision or a revelation, which is, I think, a necessary prerequisite for classifying a text as an apocalypse.

II. Treatise, apocalypse, mythological narrative and philosophical physics

As a general observation it should be said, however, that the generic distinction between treatise and apocalypse is not entirely obvious with regard to the texts found in the Nag Hammadi Library. This is particularly the case with treatises that aim to explain the entire course of the world from before its creation until its ultimate dissolution. Such all-embracing narrative scenarios are traditionally the subject matter of apocalyptic literature. They were not traditionally dealt with in the form of a treatise, it would seem, until our so-called Gnostics began to compose treatises of universal salvation history.⁷

At Nag Hammadi, such salvation historical treatises are represented, in addition to *On the Origin of the World*, by the two Valentinian texts *Tripartite Tractate* and *A Valentinian Exposition*. These two treatises are examples of a type of writing that is well attested in the Patristic reports on the Valentinian system. The Valentinian system texts have a certain number of characteristics of their own, but in so far as they may be described as universal salvation historical accounts they are comparable to the kind of documents that were used by the Church Fathers in their reports on several non-Valentinian groups and figures, such as the systems of Basilides in Irenaeus and Hippolytus, Justin's *Book of Baruch* in Hippolytus, and others. In view of the prevalence of this type of sources in the reports of the Church Fathers, it is a bit puzzling that texts of this genre deriving from other groups than the Valentinians are not better represented in the Nag Hammadi Library.

These systematic texts look as if they may have inherited the universal scope of their narratives from the genre of apocalyptic literature. However, their pre-occupation with protological speculation also give them, on the one hand, an affinity with traditional cosmogonic mythology – or, rather, to contemporary versions of such mythology, whether Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician or the Orphic *Rhapsodies* – while on the other hand an influence from philosophical physics is also often present. The influence from philosophy is evident thematically, as theories of first principles, cosmology and anthropology, as well as stylistically by the discursive manner of writing used in some of these texts. This latter feature – the discursive style of writing – must be considered an essential element of what makes such a text a treatise. The systematic Gnostic salvation

⁷ The universal historical treatise of course became an important genre later, with Iulius Africanus and Eusebius as the pioneers. Such treatises are, however, historiographical in a way the Gnostic treatises on universal salvation history are not.

historical treatises, however, appear as a hybrid form, being part mythological narrative, part apocalypse and part treatise. If narrative and theoretic thinking are two distinct operations of the human brain, as some cognitive psychologists claim, and represent two distinct stages in the evolution of the human mind,⁸ the Gnostic treatises seem peculiarly ambivalent about what kind of mental faculties they are exercising. Are they making a theoretical argument, or are they trying to tell a convincing story? The Valentinian treatises in particular seem to try to do both at the same time, but they are certainly not alone in displaying this kind of ambivalence.

III. Narrative and theoretical thinking: the Valentinian treatises in particular

Attempts to fuse mythological narrative and theoretical argument are known elsewhere in the intellectual world of the Roman Empire. The Stoics tried to make philosophical sense out of Homer, Plutarch tried to do so with Egyptian myth, Philo of Alexandria attempted it with the Book of Genesis, and the Neoplatonists fused Plato's philosophy with the mythological accounts of the *Chaldean Oracles* and the Orphic *Rhapsodies*, to name just a few well-known examples. In these cases, philosophical theory is superimposed upon an already existing mythological narrative. The theory comments upon the myth. With the so-called Gnostic treatises, however, the reverse situation seems to exist. There, the myth seems to be constructed in order to transform a certain theoretical material into a narrative. The myth comments upon the theory. More than that, the mythological narrative appears to be treated as a superior form of exposition, as a more satisfactory vehicle for conveying the desired truth than the theoretical mode of argument used in philosophical discourse.

This is the case in particular with the Valentinian treatises. The two Valentinian treatises in the Nag Hammadi Codices, the *Tripartite Tractate* and *A Valentinian Exposition*, stand in the tradition of the several Valentinian system texts reported by Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Clement of Alexandria. They are not identical to any of them – indeed, this is a tradition of constant rewriting, with individual teachers creating their own versions of the system as they saw fit. It can nevertheless be observed that *A Valentinian Exposition* bears a particularly close relationship to the version of the system attributed (certainly in error) by Irenaeus to Valentinus himself in Book I, chapter 11 of *Adversus Haereses*.⁹

⁸ Thus M. Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1991) esp. chapter 8. See also his *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York 2001).

⁹ E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed* (NHMS 60; Leiden 2006) 232–233, 266–267.

The *Tripartite Tractate* has some peculiar features in that it does not employ the 30-aeons model of the Pleroma, nor the name Sophia for the fallen aeon; nevertheless, the narrative and the systematic structure unfolded in that treatise are in close agreement with the known Valentinian system texts. Behind this narrative lie philosophical ideas borrowed from contemporary, Neopythagorean physics.¹⁰

According to these ideas the Dyad emerges from the Monad by a process of extension, or spreading out. The Dyad is the principle of duality, and hence of infinity, geometrically exemplified by the line in distinction to the monadic point. The extension or spreading out of the Dyad is then arrested by an operation of division, or cutting off, and by the imposition of Limit. This operation is followed by the withdrawal of the monadic principle, which was the source of the Dyad, from the Dyad, with the result that the Dyad itself is left in a state of deprivation and infinite extension, and thereby becomes the origin of matter. The Valentinian systems make use of these ideas in order to explain how duality and matter came into being. But they do so by means of a narrative recounting the acts of personal beings. A main agent in this narrative is of course Sophia (who is alluded to by the generic name “the logos” in the *Tripartite Tractate*). Sophia is the personified Neopythagorean Dyad; her passion causes her to extend into infinity, until she is cut in two and her two parts are separated by the Limit that is installed in order to fence off the Pleroma from the realm of matter.

The Valentinian theologians thus used the myth of Sophia, inherited from pre-Valentinian sources, to give an account of the origin of matter that was modelled upon Neopythagorean physics. This is not the whole story, however. The passion of Sophia in its Valentinian version had a second model as well: the passion of the Saviour during his incarnation life and death in this world.¹¹ This is why the Limit is identified with the Cross: the Cross of the crucifixion is the place where the Saviour extended his limbs and then gave up his spirit, that is, the place where he suffered until his spiritual nature was eventually separated from his physical body. His material part was left behind, fixed to the wood of the Cross, while the spiritual part of the Saviour returned to its place of origin. The connection between the passion of the Saviour and the passion of Sophia is clear in the oldest versions of the myth, attested in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11 and the *Excerpts from Theodotus* (23,32–33), which both let Sophia give birth to Christ during her passion. The motif of separation is expressed as a separation between Christ and his mother: Christ detaches himself from her and returns inside the Limit, while Sophia is left outside. The crucifixion, where Christ abandons his material body on the Cross, is clearly the implicit reference for this version of Sophia’s passion. In later versions of the system this reference has been abandoned,

¹⁰ For a full discussion, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 9), ch. 23.

¹¹ For the following: Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 9), esp. ch. 21.

and a split of Sophia herself into an upper and a lower Sophia figure has replaced the separation of Christ and Sophia.

The Nag Hammadi Valentinian treatises, however, have retained the earlier version of the Sophia narrative. *A Valentinian Exposition* gives us the same version as the system attributed by Irenaeus to Valentinus: “[...] these things Sophia endured after her son had hastened upwards from her.”¹² This, together with some other features of the text, shows that the treatise represented by the Coptic text is either to be dated to an early period in the history of Valentinianism, or has used for its main source a document deriving from that early period.¹³ With the *Tripartite Tractate* the situation is more complicated. Here, there is no mention of Christ, or Sophia’s son, as the one who separated from Sophia and hastened on high. We are told only that “the logos” gave birth to itself, was split in two and that one part, which was born as a perfectly single, unitary aeon, abandoned the deficient part of the logos and hastened upwards “to its kin” (NHC I 77–78). This account is less specific than any of the others, since no names are used; the *Tripartite Tractate* concentrates on the event and the idea of the separation itself. It tells the story at a higher level of generality, as a sort of meta-commentary on this particular episode in the traditional Valentinian narrative. This corresponds to the way the *Tripartite Tractate* deals with the projection of the Pleroma in the first section of the text, where names of aeons and the numerical composition of the Pleroma are omitted. In this sense, the discourse narrating the Valentinian system in the *Tripartite Tractate* is less mythological in form and more theoretical in its approach than any other known textual articulation of the system. It is intellectually interested in structure and not preoccupied with the knowledge of names.

We have not yet finished with the Valentinian use of Neopythagorean theories of ontological derivation, however. *A Valentinian Exposition* and *Tripartite Tractate* are both remarkable in that they show that those theories apply not only to the account of the split of the last aeon from the Pleroma and the origin of matter, but are used at a higher level as well, in the presentation of the primary moment of divine self-exteriorisation. *A Valentinian Exposition* describes the unfolding of the paternal Monad into a Tetrad as a “spreading out:” “He brought himself forth. In Two he revealed his Will, and in Four he spread himself out.”¹⁴ The *Tripartite Tractate* is more explicit. While the Father “[remains] ineffable [and] unnameable, transcending all mind and all speech,” the Son, on the other hand, “extended himself and spread himself out. It is he who gave firmness, location, and a dwelling place to the All [...] through his constant suffering on their

¹² Ν(ε)ϵΙ ΝΔε ρρΔΓςΟφΙα ϩΑΠΟΥ ΝΓΑΡϵϩΠΟΤ ΔΓΠϵ ΑΒΑΛ ΝϩΗΤς Νϩ[Ι] ΠϵςϩΩΗϵ, NHC XI 33,35–37.

¹³ Cf. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see n. 9), 266–267.

¹⁴ ΔϩΩϩΠΠ ΕΙΝ[ε ΜΗΔ] ΟΥΔϵϵΤϩ ΔΥΩ ΞΝ ΤΗΔρςΝ[τε ΔϩΟΥ]ΩΝρ ΑΒΑΛ ΜΠϵϩΟΥΩϩε [ΔΥΩ] ΞΝ ΤΗΔρϩΤΟϵ ΔϩΠΩΡΩ [ΑΒΔ]λ ΜΗΔϩ ΟΥΔϵϵΤϩ, NHC XI 23,27–31.

behalf.”¹⁵ Here, the language of extending, spreading out and suffering alludes to the crucifixion at the same time as it uses the Neopythagorean language associated with the derivation of the Dyad. Thus, the Nag Hammadi Valentinian treatises help us to see that this pattern is a pervasive feature of the Valentinian system and that it belongs to the ontological presuppositions of the system as a whole. Already the first movement from the oneness of the Father to the duality of a second being involves an element of suffering, albeit qualified as “compassion,” because the generation of the Son enables the aeons to come into being and partake of the divine essence. The passion of the last aeon and the passion of the Saviour on the Cross are embedded in this larger ontological scheme, which ultimately is concerned with the problems of how duality arose and how unity may be restored.

Thus, a genuine theoretical interest lies behind the Valentinian treatises. They work with ontological problems. On the other hand, they do so in the context of a Christian salvation historical narrative, and so they also tell a story. They use concepts, but the concepts also appear as personal agents. The narrative form leaves the texts open for the charge of arbitrariness in their mode of arguing, a charge that was made by philosophers like Plotinus, who did not regard the Gnostics as genuine philosophers. On the other hand, the use of narrative is not unknown in philosophical writing either, including the works of Plato, whose *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* in particular left an impact on Gnostic mythmaking. Even the texts of Plotinus himself are not devoid of narrative passages. Possibly, theoretical discourse can never do totally without narrative as long as it seeks also to have human significance.

IV. The communication situation

I now would like to consider the communication situation and the practical function of these treatises. For what purpose were they written? Obviously they were not composed in order to be recited during religious services. On the other hand, what went on in the religious services of the Valentinians would make little sense unless the participants possessed the kind of knowledge that the treatises sought to convey. The invocations made during the Valentinian initiation ritual and the ideology of the bridal chamber associated with it, the hymns and homilies made during regular services, the outbursts of prophetic speech – all these ritual situations derive their meaning, semantically and emotionally, from the narrative told in the treatises. The treatises provide a context for the ritual practices. But

¹⁵ [εϕωροπ̄ ἡ]ατϱεξε αραϕ [αϱω] ἡατξε ρε[η] αραϕ αϱω εϕ[α]αϑι ανουϑε ηηη αϱω αϱεξε ηηη παει δε αϑσα[ϳ]τῆ ἡηαϑ αβαλ ἡηηη ἡῆ[αϑ] αϱω πεηταϑπαρεϱϱῆ αβ[αλ] πεει πεῆταετ̄ ἡηουταχρο ἡ[ἡ]ουτοποϑ ηῆ οϳμα ἡωωπε ηητηρηῆ [...] [α]βαλ ἡτεϑη[ἡτ]ωοη ρῆε αραϑ ετωοοη, NHC I 65,1–12.

knowledge about the contents of the treatises must have been acquired outside of the ritual situations themselves.

Valentinianism is often described as a “school.” It certainly was not. Valentinian Christians formed religious communities in which ritual activities performed in the hope of procuring salvation were essential. But there must also have been teaching. At the end of his *Letter to Flora*, Ptolemy tells his female friend that she may learn in the future, if God permits, how the natures of the Middle and of corruption have been generated from a single principle, which is the origin of all things (Epiph., *Pan.* 33.7.8–9). This is precisely the kind of information the system texts provide, and it may be assumed that it was taught. Flora was probably not expected only to read in private Ptolemy’s treatise expounding his version of the system. Since Valentinianism was a movement in which individual teachers were particularly prominent, and so many different versions of the Valentinian system have been preserved, it is reasonable to infer that these individual teachers conducted a form of classroom instruction based on a version of the system they themselves had composed. The teacher’s treatise served, one may imagine, as a textbook for the class and the teacher would comment on and explain it, constantly drawing on texts from the gospels and the apostle Paul in order to demonstrate the apostolic validity of his teaching. (Ptolemy assures Flora that “We can prove all our statements from the teaching of the Saviour” [κανονίσαι πάντας τοὺς λόγους τῆ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν διδασκαλίᾳ 7.9]).

1. *The Tripartite Tractate*

Thus, the treatises were probably working texts, produced for instruction purposes by individual teachers. The *Tripartite Tractate* appears to be an example of this genre, the work of an unknown Valentinian teacher who was operating in the context of a specific community and put together his own text on the basis of older Valentinian literature.

For the most part such treatises seem to have been considered profane texts written by a human author. An exception to this is the *Sige* of Marcus Magus, which the author pretends was revealed to him by the supreme Tetrad, who descended to Marcus in female shape (Iren., *Haer.* 1.14.1). Thus the text may be classified as an apocalypse as well as a treatise. This exceptional case is of course in line with Marcus’ general character, as it is known from the rest of Irenaeus’ description of this figure (*Haer.* 1.13).

The *Lehrbrief* in Epiphanius is, as noted already, framed as a letter sent down from above, and this may be the case with *A Valentinian Exposition* as well. It is probable that such superhuman authorisation of a text is a secondary invention. This phenomenon points to the further possibility that treatises composed by Valentinian teachers may in some cases have obtained a second life and circulated outside of their original teaching context as independent documents, more

or less reedited in order to appeal to a wider readership interested in the occult and the esoteric. In general, we need to be alert to the likelihood that the user contexts for the Nag Hammadi texts have changed over the centuries, and that the texts were modified in the process to suit their new contexts.

2. On the Origin of the World and Euginostos

Other than The *Tripartite Tractate*, the only text in the Nag Hammadi Library that is just a treatise is *On the Origin of the World*. This statement is, of course, overly pedantic, because, as we have seen, a treatise may be formally embedded in another genre, such as a letter, whether didactic or revelatory, or a revelation dialogue. An example of a treatise framed as a letter is *Euginostos*. The close relationship between *Orig. World* and *Euginostos* has been brilliantly demonstrated by Louis Painchaud in an article published 20 years ago.¹⁶ Painchaud also described the literary structure of both texts and showed that their *dispositio* obeys the conventions of ancient rhetoric. Thus, *Orig. World* begins with an *exordium* announcing the topic of the treatise and what the author intends to demonstrate, in this case that something existed before chaos. Then follows the *narratio*, the longest section of the treatise, which tells about Sophia, the coming into being of Yaldabaoth, the origin of the cosmic rulers, the creation of the world, the first humans and paradise. The third, short section is a *probatio*, or the “proof,” setting forth the truth about the rulers. The final section consists of a *peroratio* that draws the consequences for humanity of what has been demonstrated and looks ahead to the end of the world. Now, Painchaud showed not only that *Euginostos* was constructed on the same rhetorical model as *Orig. World*, used the same vocabulary and shared a number of expressions, but also that an intertextual relationship exists between the two texts. At the same time the subject matter dealt with in *Euginostos* is different from that of *Orig. World*. The latter text starts its narrative with Sophia: “After the nature of the immortals was completed in the infinite, a form called Sophia flowed from Pistis [...]”¹⁷ It then goes on to tell about Yaldabaoth. *Euginostos* on the other hand describes the architecture of the eternal realms, a series of pairs of immortal, archetypal humans that came into being from the One Who Is. *Euginostos* ends where *Orig. World* begins. Following a suggestion originally made by Jean Doresse, Painchaud has argued, rather convincingly, that the two texts were deliberately written in order to complement one another. He concludes his 1995 article by further suggesting that the two texts together formed “a strategy of persuasion”: “Within this strategy, *Orig.*

¹⁶ L. Painchaud, “The Literary Contacts Between the Writing Without Title *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5 and XIII,2) and *Euginostos the Blessed* (CG III,3 and V,1)”, *JBL* 114 (1995) 81–101. See also his *L'Écrit sans titre* (see n. 6), esp. 10–11, 98–101, 105.

¹⁷ τφγσεῖς δὲ ἰννιδτμογ ἰτταρεσχακ εβολ εἰπ πετε ἰνντεφαρηχῃ τοτε ογϋνε ααϋτϋε εβολ εἰπ τπιστικ, NHC II 98,11–14.

World appears as a treatise intended to alienate its readers from the creator God of the First Testament in order to prepare them to receive the full revelation of the true God which is contained in *Eugnostos*.¹⁸

This is of course a highly significant observation. However, with regard to the matters discussed in the present paper, a couple of questions may be asked. If the two texts were conceived of together, why is the one framed as a letter, with a named author, when the other so clearly presents itself as a treatise? Does this not rather suggest that the epistolary frame as well as the attribution to an author is a secondary addition? In fact, the epistolary introduction may easily be removed without affecting the contents, and the resulting opening words of *Eugnostos* then become very similar to the opening words of *Orig. World*:

Eugnostos, NHC III 1–8

ΕΥΓΝΩΣΤΟΣ ΠΝΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΠΝΕΤΕΝΟΥϞ ΝΕ ΧΕ
ΡΑΩϞ ΕΠΝΕΕΓ: ΕΤΡΕΤΠΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ
ΡΩΜΕ ΝΙΜ ΠΤΑΥΧΠΟΥ ΧΠΠΤΚΑΤΑΒΟΛΗ
ΠΠΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΟΥΑ ΤΕΝΟΥ ΣΕΟ ΠΩΡΙΣ ΕΥΩΠΙΕ
ΝΣΑ ΠΠΟΥΤΕ ΧΕ ΝΙΜ ΠΕ Η ΟΥΕΩϞ ΝΖΕ ΠΕ
ΠΠΟΥΖΕ ΕΡΟΥϞ

Eugnostos the blessed, to those who are his. Greetings. I want you to know that all people born from the foundation of the world until now are dust. They have sought to find who God is and what he is like, but they have not found him [...]

Orig. World, NHC II 97,24–28

ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ ΠΠΟΥΤΕ ΠΠΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΑΥΩ
ΠΡΩΜΕ ΣΕΧΩ ΠΠΟΣ ΧΕ ΜΠΛΑΔΥΕ ΩΟΟΠ ΖΑ
ΤΕΖΗ ΠΠΧΑΟΣ ΔΝΟΚ ΔΕ †ΝΑΡΑΠΟΔΙΚΝΥΕ ΧΕ
Α[Υ]Ρ[Ι]ΛΑΝΑ ΤΗΡΟΥϞ

Since everyone, both the gods of this world and people, says that nothing existed before chaos, I shall prove that they are all wrong [...]

It thus seems probable that *Eugnostos* was originally written as a treatise, employing the same type of rhetorical introductory formula as *Orig. World*, and that the epistolary frame was added later.

Another question that may be asked regarding these two texts has to do with the communication situation. In the case of the Valentinian treatises it was argued above that those texts may be understood as teaching materials used in the context of a religious education that prepared the pupils for intelligent participation in the life of a community. But can we imagine a similar function for such treatises as *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos*? Or should they rather be seen as just literary creations, designed to fulfil their “strategy of persuasion” simply by being read, as Painchaud seems to imply? If they were meant to be read in a certain order in order to achieve their effect, how could one make sure that the readers actually did so? Does not the idea of a strategy of persuasion imply some sort of curriculum, graded readings for adepts under the supervision of a mentor, or actual classes taught on the basis of the texts? Unfortunately, however, we can

¹⁸ Painchaud, “Literary Contacts” (see n. 16), 101.

form no clear idea about the context in which these texts may have been written and used.

It bears repeating that these texts also have a history. *Orig. World* went through two later redactions after it was first written in conjunction with *Eugnostos*.¹⁹ By then it had very probably lost contact with its former partner and led a life of its own. But what kind of life? Who used it, and what for?²⁰ *Eugnostos'* description of the eternal realms as well obviously continued to attract readers after it had been disjoined from its cosmogonical supplement. Its subject matter may have appealed to the same sort of readership as the Valentinian *Lehrbrief*, which also restricts itself to mapping the transcendent world of the Pleroma. It is a known fact that literary contacts between the two texts show that at one point or another in the history of their transmission *Eugnostos* and the *Lehrbrief* were used in the same environment.²¹ It may be speculated that groups and individuals who took an interest in such maps of the higher realms were people whose primary desire was to go there. That is to say that alternative cosmogonies may have been an important matter in the first phase of the movement we loosely call Gnosticism, when various dissenting groups felt a need to polemicize against mainstream Christianity Judaism and Greek philosophy, and to give their own interpretation of the origin of the world, but in later phases, as those groups became increasingly marginalised, such matters were overshadowed by an interest in the possibility of mystical ascent to the realities beyond the created cosmos.

V. From cosmogonies to ascent texts

Such a scenario would correspond, it may seem, to the distinction made by John Turner between a descent and an ascent pattern in the Sethian texts.²² The descent pattern is part of a narrative in which a revealer, who is a manifes-

¹⁹ See the detailed analysis in Painchaud, *L'Écrit sans titre* (see n. 6).

²⁰ Painchaud's admirable reconstruction of the history of the text contains valuable observations on the general character of the two milieux in which *Orig. World* was subsequently modified (esp. *L'Écrit sans titre* [see n. 6], 117–121), but the precise functions of the rewritten versions in their respective contexts remain unclear, and perhaps unavoidably so.

²¹ A. H. B. Logan, "The Epistle of Eugnostos and Valentinianism", in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Eighth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, September 3rd–8th 1979* (ed. by M. Krause; NHS 17; Leiden 1981) 66–75; M. Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* (SGM 1; Paris 1984) 60–61, 65–67, 389; C. Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos im Gnostizismus nach den Texten von Nag Hammadi* (JAC Ergänzungsbände 14; Münster 1987) 249–252; G. Chiapparini, *Il divino senza veli: La dottrina gnostica della 'Lettera valentiniana' di Epifanio, Panarion 31 5–6: Testo, traduzione e commento storico-religioso* (SPMed 29; Milan 2015) esp. 97–102.

²² See in particular J. Turner, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom", *NT 22* (1980) 324–351, and J. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH.E 6; Québec and Louvain-Paris 2001) 80–84.

tation of the divine Thought, descends at three successive points in the history of salvation. The ascent pattern, on the other hand, describes the upward journey of a visionary through the various levels of the spiritual world. It is notable that the descent pattern seems to dominate in the early Sethian texts, such as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Texts in which the ascent pattern dominates seem, on the other hand, to belong to a later stage in the history of Sethianism: *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, *Three Steles of Seth*, *Marsanes*. Thus, the chronology of the Sethian texts provides another indication that there was a general shift in focus in later phases of Gnosticism from cosmogonies and salvation historical narratives to theories and techniques of mystical ascent based on detailed knowledge of the architecture of the transcendent world.

VI. Sethian text types

The Sethian texts are, for the most part, apocalypses rather than treatises. As I have suggested already, however, the distinction between apocalypse and treatise is not altogether evident. The *Apocryphon of John* is a treatise that was turned into a revelation dialogue, a genre which is itself related to apocalyptic, but even as a treatise it shares with much of apocalyptic literature the project of delivering a comprehensive salvation historical account. In addition to that, however, it is also a rewriting of the book of Genesis, and in that respect comparable to such texts as the Book of Watchers in *1 Enoch*, the *Jubilees* and the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran. Substantial parts of the *Apocryphon of John* also read like a *commentary* on the Book of Genesis, and it has been argued that the narrative to a large extent is governed by the text of Genesis. In these respects the *Apocryphon of John* is similar to a treatise like the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, which also contains a paraphrase of the first four chapters of Genesis, but different from the Valentinian treatises, in which the Book of Genesis and other texts from the Jewish scriptures no longer play a formative role in the elaboration of the systematic narrative.

In the Valentinian treatises Genesis was replaced by a combination of the passion narrative of the gospels and contemporary philosophy as the point of reference for the system. In so doing these treatises brought the mythological narratives of their predecessors to a further level of theoretical reflection, though without abandoning the narrative form which allowed them to serve as religiously meaningful texts.

VII. Conclusion: the first systematic theological treatises?

In the history of ancient Christian literature, the so-called Gnostics seem to have been the first to write systematic expositions both on more restricted topics and on the structure of reality as a whole. In so doing they may be said to have anticipated the efforts of mainstream Christian theologians to theorize their faith and give it a systematic interpretation. An Italian colleague once described the *Tripartite Tractate* as “una summa di teologia gnostica.”²³ The Valentinian systems are said to have anticipated and even inspired Origen’s *Peri archōn*. But the Valentinian systematic treatises are tributary in both form and content to older works comparable to the *Apocryphon of John*, or, rather, the treatise used as a source in that text. The form of those treatises cannot, however, be identified with a single historical model. It is partly modelled on Jewish apocalyptic scenarios, partly on Greek philosophical treatises on physics, partly on traditional mythology and partly on Biblical exegesis. The relative proportions of these various text types as sources of inspiration vary from one treatise to another. Typical of all these treatises, however, is the never resolved tension between their theoretical ambitions and their narrative form. In the end narrative seems to prevail over theory. In this, the systematic theology unfolded in Gnostic treatises differs from the dogmatic expositions of the Christian faith constructed later in the history of the Church, which present themselves as theoretical demonstration while the inescapable narrative presuppositions of the dogmas are concealed.

²³ D. Devoti, “Una summa di teologia gnostica; II Tractatus Tripartitus”, *RSLR* 13 (1977) 326–353.

Zostrianus, der philosophisch orientierte Sethianismus und das Gebet des Seth

Uwe-Karsten Plisch

Abstract

This essay discusses the reception of the Sethian platonizing tractate Zostrianos, the first writing in Nag Hammadi codex VIII, in the neoplatonic circle of Plotinus and its relations to the Prayer of Seth (P. Berol. 17207), including a re-edition of this Greek witness of a Sethian prayer.

I. Zostrianus

Zostrianus ist die erste und bei weitem längste Schrift aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex VIII, mit 132 Papyrusseiten sogar einer der längsten NH-Texte überhaupt. Mit den Schriften Allogenes (NHC XI,3), den Drei Stelen des Seth (NHC VII,5) und Marsanes (NHC X) gehört Zostr zur Gruppe der philosophisch orientierten, platonisierenden sethianischen Texte. Diese vier zusammengehörenden Schriften verteilen sich innerhalb des Nag-Hammadi-Fundes auf vier verschiedene Codizes. Nach dem Stemma von John Turner ist Zostr die älteste der platonisierenden sethianischen Nag-Hammadi-Schriften (um 200 n.Chr.), gefolgt von Allog, StelSeth und Marsanes (ca. 250–300 n.Chr.).¹ Durch die Erwähnung bei Porphyrius (s. u.) haben wir für Zostr (und für Allog) immerhin einen Terminus post quem non.

Diese philosophisch orientierten Texte sind tendenziell jünger als die mythologisch orientierten sethianischen Schriften und wieder auf dem Weg weg vom Christentum. Ihr tendenziell nichtchristlicher Charakter ist also eher Ausdruck

¹ J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH.E 6), Québec 2001, 220. In einem früheren Aufsatz hatte Turner allerdings noch die Reihenfolge Allog – Zostr – StelSeth – Marsanes erwogen, vgl. ders., *Sethian Gnosticism. A Literary History*, in: C. W. Hedrick/R. Hodgson (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, Peabody 1986, 55–86, hier 82. Vgl. aber ders., *Typologies of the Sethian Gnostic Treatises from Nag Hammadi*, in: L. Painchaud/A. Pasquier (Hg.), *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi et le Problème de Leur Classification* (BCNH.E 3), Québec 1995, 169–217, hier 217.

von Entchristianisierung, denn ein Beleg für eine – grundsätzlich erwägenswerte – außer- und/oder vorchristliche Entstehung.

Zu den mythologisch orientierten sethianischen Texten gehören wiederum Das Apokryphon des Johannes (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1 und BG 2); Die Hypostase der Archonten (NHC II,4); Das heilige Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes/Ägyptisches Evangelium (NHC III,2; IV,2); Die Apokalypse des Adam (NHC V,5); Melchisedek (NHC IX,1); „Die Ode über Norea“ (NHC IX,2) und Die dreigestaltige Protennoia (NHC XIII,1).

Die Unterscheidung in mythologisch geprägte einerseits und philosophisch orientierte Texte andererseits bedeutet natürlich nicht, dass sich nicht auch in der Gruppe der philosophisch orientierten Texte mythologische und/oder kultpraktisch-liturgische Elemente fänden. So ist Zostr bspw. ein ausgesprochen feuchter Text, insofern der Offenbarungsempfänger während seines Seelenaufstiegs durch die Äonen mehr als 20 Mal getauft wird (Turner spricht geradezu von „Taufexzessen“), nämlich bei Erreichen einer jeden neuen Erkenntnisstufe. Dabei werden auch die aus dem Heiligen Buch des großen unsichtbaren Geistes bekannten Namen der Hüter des himmlischen Taufwassers, Micheus und Michar, sowie der Name des himmlischen Taufwassers, Jesseus Mazareus Jessedekeus, genannt.

1. Der Streit um Zostrianus (und verwandte Schriften) in der Schule Plotins

Porphyrus schreibt in seiner „Vita Plotini“ (Kap. 16) folgendes:

Damals gab es einerseits viele Christen, und (darunter) andererseits andere, Häretiker, die von der alten Philosophie ausgegangen waren, (etwa) die Anhänger des Adelphios und Aquilinos, die zahlreiche Schriften des Alexander von Libyen, des Philokomos und des Demonstratos von Lydien besaßen und *Apokalypsen* des Zoroaster, *des Zostrianos*, des Nekotheos, *des Allogenes* und des Messos und anderer solcher präsentierten, viele täuschend und selbst getäuscht, dass Plato nicht in die Tiefe der intelligiblen Substanz vorgedrungen wäre. Daher hat er (i. e. Plotin) einerseits viele Widerlegungen in den Lehrveranstaltungen vorgebracht und andererseits ein Buch geschrieben, das ich ‚Gegen die Gnostiker‘ betitelt habe. Uns überließ er es, das Übrige zu beurteilen. Amelius verfasste an die vierzig Bücher gegen das Buch des *Zostrianos*, um es zurückzuweisen. Ich aber, Porphyrius, habe häufig Widerlegungen gegen das Buch des Zoroaster vorgebracht, indem ich nachwies, dass die Schrift sowohl unecht als auch neu ist und von den Begründern der Häresie angefertigt wurde, um den Anschein zu erwecken, dass es sich um die Lehren des alten Zoroaster handle, die sie hochzuachten wünschten.

Es ist weithin Konsens, dass unser Zostr zumindest eine Version der von Porphyrius erwähnten Apokalypse des Zostrianus darstellt. NHC VIII,1 trägt zwar am Ende nur den Kurztitel „Zostrianus“,² die Bezeichnung als Apokalypse ist

² Vgl. den Kurztitel „Iakkobos“, den Die erste Apokalypse des Jakobus (NHC V,3) im sogenannten Codex Tchacos (CT 2) trägt.

aber sowohl durch den Charakter der Schrift als auch durch ihren Anfang gedeckt:

(p. 1) [Das Buch] der [Herrlichkeit] der Worte [...] lebendig ist in Ewigkeit, jener (Worte), [die] ich, Zostrianus, [...] und Jolaos, [als] ich in der Welt war, [aufgeschrieben habe] für die, [die] in meinem Alter sind, und (für) [die], die nach mir kommen, (für) [die] lebendigen Erwählten.³

Plausibel ist auch, dass zumindest eine Beziehung zwischen der bei Porphyrius erwähnten Apokalypse des Allogenes und des Messos (ein Text) bzw. den Apokalypsen des Allogenes und des Messos (mindestens zwei Texte) und der dritten Schrift in NHC XI besteht, die wiederum den Kurztitel Allogenes trägt und an ihrem Ende als *letzte* der Allogenes-Schriften apostrophiert wird (das macht die Schwierigkeit der Identifizierung aus). Messos, hinter dem sich möglicherweise Mose verbirgt⁴ (während Allogenes eine Bezeichnung für Seth ist), wird wiederum in NHC XI,3 mehrfach angesprochen, was Karen King zu der plausiblen These verdichtet hat, „the whole apocalypse is an epistolary narration to Messos“.⁵ Das wiederum könnte bedeuten, dass Porphyrius mit „Apokalypse(n) des Allogenes und des Messos“ eben nur eine und nicht zwei (oder mehrere) Schriften meint.

Bemerkenswert ist an der Notiz des Porphyrius vor allem zweierlei (von der bloßen Bezeugung der Texte abgesehen): 1) die Trägergruppe der besagten philosophisch orientierten sethianischen Texte hat im Umkreis der Schule Plotins eine beachtliche und von Porphyrius auch zugestandene Wirkung entfaltet. 2) Die Schule Plotins hat sich dadurch soweit herausgefordert gesehen, dass sie zu einer nicht eben kleinen literarischen Gegenoffensive übergegangen ist: „Amelius verfasste an die vierzig (!) Bücher gegen das Werk des Zostrianos“. Mit einer Haltung nach dem Motto „Mit solchen Scharlatanen geben wir uns gar nicht ab“ war es also nicht getan. Auch wenn der Disput philosophisch nicht auf Augenhöhe geführt wurde, waren die gnostischen Unruhestifter immerhin der Auseinandersetzung wert.

In den „Enneaden“ 2,9 hat Porphyrius zusammengestellt, was Plotin selbst an Widerlegungen gegen die Sethianer vorgebracht hat. Was Plotin besonders an ihnen stört, kommt sehr schön in Abschnitt 14 und 15 zum Ausdruck:⁶

³ Übersetzung von H.-M. Schenke in: U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Studienausgabe, Berlin ³2013, 442.

⁴ Vgl. H.-M. Schenke, Bemerkungen zur Apokalypse des Allogenes (NHC XI,3), in: W. Godlewski (Hg.), Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies, Warsaw, 20–25 August 1984, Varsovie 1990, 422.

⁵ K. L. King, Revelation of the Unknowable God, with Text, Translation, and Notes to NHC XI,3 Allogenes, Santa Rosa, Cal. 1995, 77.

⁶ Übersetzung nach H. F. Müller, Die Enneaden des Plotin, Berlin 1878. Hervorhebungen von mir.

14. Gerade sie aber lassen auch anderweitig jene Welt nicht unversehrt. Denn wenn sie Zauberformeln aufschreiben, die sie an jenes richten, nicht bloß an die Seele sondern auch an das Höhere: was tun sie (anderes) als Zaubereien, Bannsprüche und Beschwörungsformeln hersagen in der Voraussetzung, dass jenes dem Worte gehorcht und durch dasselbe sich leiten lässt, sobald jemand von uns nur in der Kunst bewandert ist, diese bestimmten Worte zu sprechen und auf diese bestimmte Weise Melodien, Töne, Anhauchungen, gewisse zischende Laute hervorzubringen und was sonst dort noch für Zauberkünste vorgeschrieben sind. Ist das aber nicht ihre Meinung, wie wollen sie durch Laute der Stimme auf das Unkörperliche wirken? Gerade durch dasjenige also, wodurch sie ihren Worten einen majestätischen Anstrich zu geben suchen, entkleiden sie ohne es zu merken jenes seiner Majestät.

[...]

15. Das aber ganz besonders darf uns nicht verborgen bleiben, welchen Einfluss diese Lehren auf die Seelen der Hörer üben, denen man eingeredet hat, die Welt und was in ihr zu verachten. Da es nämlich zwei Hauptansichten von der Art der Erreichung des letzten Zweckes gibt, die eine, welche die Lust des Körpers als Endzweck setzt, die andere, welche das Schöne und die Tugend erwählt, deren Streben aus Gott ist und auf Gott gerichtet – [...] – so leugnet Epikur die Vorsehung und fordert uns auf, der Lust und deren Befriedigung nachzujagen, was dann allein noch übrig bleibt. Diese Lehre aber tadelt in noch frecherer Weise den Herrn der Vorsehung und die Vorsehung selbst, verachtet alle hier gültigen Gesetze, gibt die seit jeher als gültig aufgestellte Tugend (ἀρετή) und die besonnene Mäßigung dem Gelächter preis, damit hier unten ja nichts Schönes erblickt würde, beseitigt die Besonnenheit und die mit dem sittlichen Gefühl verwachsene Gerechtigkeit, welche durch Vernunft und Hebung vervollkommen wird, und überhaupt alles, wodurch ein Mensch tugendhaft werden könnte.

[...]

Dafür zeugt auch der Umstand, dass sie von der Tugend gar nicht sprechen, die Untersuchung über diese Fragen bei ihnen gänzlich wegfällt, dass sie weder sagen, was die Tugend ist, noch wie viele es ihrer gibt, noch wie viele und treffliche Ansichten darüber in den Lehren der Alten niedergelegt sind, noch wodurch sie erworben und gewonnen wird, noch endlich wie die Seele geheiligt und gereinigt wird.

Drei Dinge sind hier besonders prägnant: Plotin rückt die Gegner eher in die Nähe von Magie, er kritisiert ihre Weltverachtung und sie sind (für ihn) eigentlich gar keine richtigen Philosophen, da sie sich nicht mit der Tugend beschäftigen. Plotin steht hier ganz in der Tradition der klassischen Philosophie, deren eigentlicher Gegenstand die (Lehre der) Tugend (ἀρετή) ist.

2. Die Bezüge des Traktats *Zostrianus* zum Mittelplatonismus

1996 veröffentlichte Michel Tardieu eine umfangreiche Untersuchung zur Nag-Hammadi-Schrift *Zostrianus*, in der er eine überaus bemerkenswerte Entdeckung öffentlich machte:

Ein Abschnitt aus *Zostr* hat eine Entsprechung bei Marius Victorinus *Adversus Arium*, genauer: Der koptische Text von *Zostr* p. 64,13–66,12 hat eine wörtliche und die Fortsetzung in p. 66,12–84,22 hat eine sachliche Parallele in

dem lateinischen Text des Marius Victorinus *Adversus Arium* I 49,9–50,21. Direkte Abhängigkeit kann weder in der einen noch in der anderen Richtung bestehen: *Adversus Arium* wurde nicht vor 359 n. Chr. (also deutlich nach Zostr) und auf Lateinisch geschrieben, andererseits hat Marius Victorinus die gemeinsame Quelle umfangreicher aufgenommen als Zostr, wo im zweiten Teil nur Inhalte paraphrasiert bzw. einzelne Aspekte aufgenommen werden. Daraus folgt: beide haben auf eine gemeinsame, griechische, Quelle zurückgegriffen, die von Tardieu als mittelplatonisch bestimmt und Numenius von Apamea (ca. Mitte 2. Jahrhundert) zugewiesen wird. Wegen seiner Hochschätzung des Mose und seiner Lehre von den drei Aspekten der Gottheit, war Numenius für christliche Apologeten anschlussfähig; Plotin wiederum behandelte Numenius ausführlich in seinem Unterricht. Die konkrete Zuordnung ist jedoch weniger wichtig als die Tatsache, dass es sich um eine mittelplatonische Quelle handelt. Das hat nämlich auch Auswirkungen auf die Forschung über Marius Victorinus, der bis dahin als (nur) im Neuplatonismus verwurzelt, konkret in Abhängigkeit von Porphyrius, gesehen wurde. Darum ist Tardieus Buch auch ein Beitrag von Pierre Hadot, dem Altmeister der Marius-Victorinus-Forschung, beigegeben.⁷

Bemerkenswert ist weiterhin, *wo* der Autor von Zostr sein wörtlich übernommenes mittelplatonisches Fundstück platziert hat. Es steht nämlich nicht irgendwo im Text, sondern ist gewissermaßen der erste Höhepunkt des Werkes. Nachdem der Offenbarungsempfänger alle Äonen durchmessen und alle Taufen empfangen hat, befindet er sich nun auf dem Gipfel der Erkenntnis (p. 64,13–66,12):

Zostrianus! [Höre] von den Dingen, nach denen du suchst!
(Beginn des Zitates:) [Es] war einer, und er war ein einziger, [der] vor [allen], die wirklich existieren, existierte, [ein] unermesslicher Geist und einer, der nicht unterscheidbar ist von etwas [anderem], in Bezug auf alles, was in ihm ist, was aus ihm ist und was nach ihm ist, indem er allein es ist, der sich überschreitet als [etwas Begrenztes] (p. 65) [...] ohne [...], ohne] Figur, ohne [...], ohne [Erscheinung], ohne Form, ohne [Gestalt] für alle, als [ein erster] von allen, [als ein erster] Ursprung von [jedem Ursprung, als] ein erster Gedanke von jedem Gedanken, [als eine Stärke] von jeder Kraft, [einer, der schneller ist] als das, was [sich bewegt], einer, der fester ist als [ein] Bestehen, einer, der dichter ist als das, was eng zusammenkommt, und ein Unbegrenzter und einer, der jedem Unzugänglichen überlegen ist, und einer, der be[grenzt], einer, der größer ist als jeder Körper, [einer], der reiner ist als alles Unkörperliche, einer, der eindringlicher ist als jeder Gedanke und jeder Körper, [einer, der] stärker ist als alle, jede Art und [jede] Form, einer, der etwas Umfassendes von ihnen ist, (p. 66) [der wirklich ganz] Existierende, und, [was die] wirklich Existierenden betrifft, so [ist] er identisch mit allen. Denn [er ist größer] als alles, und zwar das Körperliche und das Unkörperliche, einer, der etwas Partikuläres [von] allen Teilen [ist, die] in einer [un]erkennbaren und [reinen Kraft existieren, er], aus dem alle

⁷ M. Tardieu, *Recherches sur la Formation de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien et les Sources de Marius Victorinus*. P. Hadot, „Porphyre et Victorinus“. *Questions et Hypothèses* (RO IX), Bures-sur-Yvette 1996.

wirklich Existierenden [stammen], (die Fortsetzung des Satzes ist wieder Text des Verfassers von Zostr).⁸

Wörtlich übernommen werden in Zostr nur die Aussagen negativer Theologie.

II. Das Gebet des Seth

1. Ein wenig beachtetes Zeugnis für die sethianische Gnosis

Neben den koptisch überlieferten Originalzeugnissen für die sethianische Gnosis aus dem Fund von Nag Hammadi gibt es noch einige weitere, teils wenig beachtete Zeugnisse des Sethianismus. Hier wäre zunächst die Erwähnung der Lehre der Sethianer im sogenannten „Berliner koptischen Buch“,⁹ das von Gesine Schenke Robinson als ein vorclementinisches Werk möglicherweise des Pantainos bestimmt worden ist,¹⁰ zu nennen. Auf Nr. 128 heißt es:¹¹

Andere] aber sagten: „[Ein mächtiger] Archont | [aber] schuf den Menschen.“ [Diesen mächtigen] | Archonten aber, der über [sie] herrscht, den | nannten [sie] selbst: [Jaldab]baoth, während [bei] ihm (noch) Sabaoth | [ist], und (außerdem) Adonaios, [Jaoth], | Eloaios, Orais und [Astaphaios], | auf dass sie teilhaben an der [Schaffung] | des Menschen. Dies [also ist die Lehre] | der Sethianer.¹²

Diese kurze Zusammenfassung der Lehre der Sethianer steht im Zusammenhang der Auslegung der Schöpfungsgeschichte aus Gen 1. Der Verfasser führt die Lehre der Sethianer als Beispiel für eine unrichtige Auslegung des Plurals in Gen 1,26 an, jedoch vergleichsweise unpolemisch; allenfalls die Wendung „der über sie herrscht“ kann auch als feine Ironie aufgefasst werden. Die Aufzählung des Demiurgen Jaldabaoth und seiner Nachkommen hat ihre nächste Parallele in der titellosen Schrift „Vom Ursprung der Welt“ (NHC II,5), p. 100–102, wo alle sieben hier genannten Archonten ebenfalls erscheinen. Interessanterweise findet sich auf dem nächsten rekonstruierten Blatt des Berliner koptischen Buches (Nr. 129) auch eine Erwähnung des Zoroaster (Zeile 12: ζ]ροαστ]ρ]ης, der Zusammenhang ist allerdings unklar), möglicherweise ein Indiz dafür, dass die

⁸ Übersetzung von H.-M. Schenke in: U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Studienausgabe, Berlin ³2013, 456.

⁹ Das Berliner Koptische Buch (P 20915). Eine wiederhergestellte frühchristlich-theologische Abhandlung (bearbeitet von G. Schenke Robinson unter Mitarbeit von H.-M. Schenke/U.-K. Plisch; CSCO 610 = Textus; CSCO 611 = Verso), Louvain 2004.

¹⁰ Schenke Robinson, Buch (s. Anm. 9), XI–XV.

¹¹ Wegen des stark fragmentarischen Charakters des Buches werden die Seiten der einzelnen rekonstruierten Blätter, deren Abfolge teilweise höchst unsicher ist, nicht mit „Seite“, sondern mit „Nr.“ bezeichnet.

¹² Übersetzung von Schenke Robinson, Buch (s. Anm. 9), 130.

sethianische Tradition sich schon relativ früh – wie in Zostr, aber auch z. B. im Apokryphon des Johannes¹³ – zoroastrischer Motive bedient hat.

2. Das Gebet des Seth

Insbesondere in den philosophisch orientierten sethianischen Nag-Hammadi-Texten (und merkwürdigerweise gerade dort), des Näheren in Zostr, Allog und StelSeth, finden sich deutliche Spuren eines sethianischen Gebetes.

Drei Belege finden sich in Zostr:¹⁴

Zostr p. 51,24–52,25

„Du bist einer, du bist [einer], du bist einer, o Kind (p. 52) des [Kindes ...] o Jatomenos [...] existiert [...], nachdem sie gekommen ist [...] dich [...] du bist einer, du bist [einer ...] Semelel [...] Telmachael [...]omothem[...] männlich, der [...] der] Erzeuger [...] der, der] die [Herrlichkeit] umfaßt, [der,] der geliebt werden muß, der, der als ganz [vollkommener] bei allen ganz Vollkommenen ist: Akron [...], o dreifach Männlicher: aaaaa ooooo, zwei drei [eins] (?), du bist Geist aus Geist, du bist Licht aus Licht, du bist [Schweigen] aus Schweigen, [du bist ein] Gedanke aus einem Gedanken, o [vollkommener] Sohn Gottes 7 80 400 (?) (Zauberzeichen).“

Zostr p. 86,13–24

„Du bist groß, Deiphaneus.“ Die Wirksamkeit von ihm und Leben und Göttlichkeit ist es. „Du bist groß, Harmedon, allherrlicher Epiphaneus.“ Seine Seligkeit aber und die Vollkommenheit der Einzigkeit, die zu einem ganz Alleinigen gehört, auf ein [...]

Zostr p. 88,10–22

„O, Beritheus, [Erigenaor], Orimenios, Aramen, Alphleges, Elilioupheus, Lalameus, Noetheus! [Denn] groß ist dein Name und stark. Wer [dich] erkennt, erkennt alles. Du bist einer, du bist einer, Sious, E[.], Aphredon. Du bist der Äon der Äonen des großen, Vollkommenen, des ersten Verborgenen der dritten Wirksamkeit.“

Ein Beleg in Allog:

Allog p. 54,11–37:¹⁵

„Du bist [groß, Deiphane]us! Solmis, [du bist groß]! Gemäß der Lebenskraft, [die du] hast, [ja] dem ersten Wirken, das aus der Gottheit hervorgeht. Du bist groß, Armédôn! Du bist vollkommen, Epiphaneus! Gemäß dem Wirken, das du hast, der zweiten Kraft, {und} der Denkkraft, aus welcher die Seligkeit hervorgeht. Autoêr! Bêrtheus! Êrigenaôr! Ôrmenios! Aramen! Alphleges! Hélioupheus! Lalameus! Jetheus! Noêtheus! Du bist groß!

¹³ Vgl. U.-K. Plisch, *The Right and the Left Penis. Remarks on Textual Problems in the Apocryphon of John*, in: Adamantius 18 (2012), 65–70, hier 66f.

¹⁴ Übersetzung jeweils von H.-M. Schenke, in: U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Studienausgabe*, Berlin ³2013, 454 und 459.

¹⁵ Übersetzung von W.-P. Funk, in: U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Studienausgabe*, Berlin ³2013, 534f.

Wer dich begreift, begreift alles. Du bist Einer! Du bist Einer! Der Gute, Aphrêdôn! Du bist der Äon der Äonen, der allzeit Seiende!“

Dann pries sie den All-Einen mit den Worten:

„Lalameus! Noêtheus! Sênaôn! Asineus! Hôriphanios! Mellephaneus! Elemaôn! Ismûn! Optaôn! Seiender, du bist der Seiende, der Äon der Äonen! Der Ungezeugte, höher als die Ungezeugten, Iatomenos! Du allein bist es, dem alle Ungeborenen hervorgebracht wurden! Unbenennbarer!“

Und ein Beleg in StelSeth:

StelSeth p. 125,23–126,17:¹⁶

„Du bist einer, du bist einer, wie einer zu dir sagen wird, dass du einer bist. Du bist ein einziger, lebendiger Geist. Wie sollen wir dich benennen? Es ist nicht unsere Sache! Denn du bist das Sein von allen. Du bist das Leben von allen. Du bist der Verstand von allen. Du [bist es, dem] alle zujubeln. (p. 126) Du hast es allen gewährt, dass sie errettet werden durch dein Wort [...] sie. Du [...] Herrlichkeit, die bei ihm ist. [Du] Verborgener! Du seliger Senaon, [der] aus sich selbst entstanden ist, [Asi]neus, [...]euphneu(s), Optaon, Elemaon. Du Großer an Kraft, Emouniar, Nibareus, Kandephoros, Aphredon, Deiphaneus. Du bist es, der Harmedon für mich ist. Du Krafterzeuger, Thalanatheus, Antitheus. Du bist es, der in dir selbst existiert. Du bist es, der vor dir selbst ist. Und nach dir ist niemand in die Lage gekommen zu wirken.“

Zu diesen Zeugnissen eines sethianischen Gebetes gesellt sich nun eine griechisch, also in der Originalsprache, überlieferte Parallele auf einem Berliner Papyrusblatt (P. Berol. 17207), das bereits 1996 von W. Brashear im Archiv für Papyrusforschung ediert wurde, aber bisher nicht die gebührende Aufmerksamkeit gefunden hat.¹⁷ Die Rezeption wurde möglicherweise auch dadurch erschwert, dass Brashear seine, an sich mustergültige, Edition des griechischen Textes (eine Übersetzung ist nicht beigegeben) mit einigen eher unwahrscheinlichen bzw. methodisch problematischen Überlegungen beschwert hat. So listet Brashear zwar eine Reihe paläografischer Vergleichstexte auf, die allesamt auf das 2./3. Jahrhundert datiert werden,¹⁸ hält aber eine so frühe Datierung für P. Berol. 17207 „angesichts des Textinhalts (für) ausgeschlossen“ und datiert das Manuskript stattdessen in das 4./5. Jahrhundert. Dahinter steht u. a. die irrije Erwägung, es könne sich bei dem Seth-Gebet um eine Übersetzung aus dem Koptischen handeln; offenbar hält Brashear die Entstehungszeit der Nag-Hammadi-Codizes (Mitte 4. Jahrhundert), die ja nur koptische Übersetzungen verlorener griechischer Originale enthalten, zugleich für die Entstehungszeit der (vermeintlich originalkoptischen) Schriften.¹⁹ Aus inhaltlichen Gründen

¹⁶ Übersetzung von H.-M. Schenke, in: U. U. Kaiser/H.-G. Bethge (Hg.), Nag Hammadi Deutsch. Studienausgabe, Berlin ³2013, 437 f.

¹⁷ W. Brashear, Seth-Gebet, in: APF 42 (1996), 26–34.

¹⁸ Ein von ihm angeführter datierter Text stammt aus dem Jahr 208 n. Chr. (P. Lugd. Bat. IIIA, no. 19).

¹⁹ Vgl. Brashear, Seth-Gebet (s. Anm. 17), 26 f.

spricht aber überhaupt nichts gegen eine Datierung des Seth-Gebetes in das 2. Jahrhundert (vgl. oben die Datierung der sethianischen Vergleichstexte aus Nag Hammadi). Allerdings kann die uns vorliegende Papyrushandschrift aus technischen Gründen nicht aus dem 2. Jahrhundert stammen. Nach Auskunft von Myriam Krutzsch, der Restauratorin der Berliner Papyrussammlung, ist der vorliegende Papyrustyp mit seiner spezifischen Herstellungsart nicht vor Ende des 3. Jahrhunderts belegt.²⁰ Auch das sich auf der Rückseite unterhalb der subscriptio und des Friedensgrußes befindende Zierkreuz tritt in dieser Form in Ägypten nicht vor dem 4. Jahrhundert auf.²¹ Die mikroskopische Untersuchung des Kreuzes hat auch keinen Anhalt für einen späteren Nachtrag von anderer Hand ergeben.²² Ob es sich bei dem erhaltenen Einzelblatt wirklich, wie von Brashear vermutet, um eine ursprüngliche Codexseite handelt, ist nicht sicher, da die Ränder allesamt beschädigt sind und sich keine Spuren von Heftung oder Reste der anderen Hälfte eines Doppelblattes ausmachen lassen. Die von Brashear festgestellten Spuren einer Klebung stammen aus dem Herstellungsprozess des Papyrus und lassen keine Rückschlüsse auf eine ursprüngliche Codexzugehörigkeit zu. Die Möglichkeit, dass es sich von vornherein um ein Einzelblatt handelt, das dann eben nur das Gebet des Seth enthielt, erscheint zumindest nicht ausgeschlossen. Vergleichbar ist auch das Gebet des Apostels Paulus aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex I. Dieses beidseitig auf ein Einzelblatt geschriebene Gebet wurde dem fertigen, mit p. 1 beginnenden Codex nachträglich als Vorsatzblatt eingefügt. Wie das Seth-Gebet, so endet auch das Gebet des Apostels Paulus mit einer subscriptio, die die ursprünglich griechische Gestalt des Titels auch in koptischer Verkleidung bzw. Umgebung noch gut erkennen lässt: *προσευχη παυλου αποστολου*.

P. Berol. 17207: Das Gebet des Seth:

(vertikale Faserrichtung)²³

Ϛ[.]ⲁⲱⲛ ⲉ[
 ⲙ]ⲉⲗⲗⲉϫⲁⲟϥ ⲉⲗ[λ]ⲉⲛⲛ[ⲁⲱⲛ
 [.] ⲓⲥⲥⲙⲟϥⲛ ⲉⲡⲧⲁⲱⲛ ϫ[
 [.] ⲥⲉ ⲕⲁⲓ ⲁⲟϫⲁϫⲱ ϫⲉ ⲉϫ ⲉⲕ . [
 [ⲧ]ⲛⲥ ⲛⲉⲱⲧⲉⲣⲁⲥ ⲧⲛⲥ ϫⲛⲥ ⲉ . . [
 [.]ⲛⲥ ⲧⲛⲥ γϣⲱϫⲣⲱⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲛⲥ [
 ⲉⲛⲕⲣⲁⲧⲓⲁⲥ ⲧⲛⲥ ϫⲛⲕⲣⲁⲧⲓⲁⲥ [
 ⲧⲛⲥ ⲱⲕⲣⲁⲧⲓⲁⲥ ⲧⲛ ⲡⲣⲟⲥ [
 ⲧⲟⲙⲟⲟϫⲟϥⲛⲥϥⲛ[

²⁰ Ausschlaggebend für diese zeitliche Einordnung ist insbesondere die für diese Epoche charakteristische Breite der Blattklebung. Vgl. dazu den Aufsatz von M. Krutzsch, Einzelblatt und Rolle, in: F. Feder (Hg.), Gedenkschrift für Erika Endesfelder (im Druck).

²¹ Persönliche Auskunft von Dominique Buckles.

²² Ich danke an dieser Stelle herzlich sowohl Myriam Krutzsch als auch Marius Gerhardt für vielfältige Unterstützung bei der Kollationierung der Handschrift.

²³ S. Abb. 1.

ΛΟΝ Η ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜ[Η
 ΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΩΛΟΥ Ε[. . . ΚΑΙ ΔΟ]
 ΞΑΞΩ ΣΕ ΕΞ [
 ΤΩ ΟΝΩΜΑ[ΤΙ

(horizontale Faserrichtung)²⁴

]ΞΝΤΙΝ . . . ΠΡΟΣΩΠ[
]ΟC ΔΓΕΝΗΗΤΟΥ Δ[

]ΠΛΗ[. . .]Η ΕΥΧΗ ΣΗΤ

[Ε]ΙΡΗΝΗ ΤΩ ΓΡΑΨΑΝ
 [ΤΙ] ΚΑΙ [ΤΩ] ΑΝΑΓΙΝΩ
 [ΣΚΟΝΤΙ

Der erhaltene Text des Seth-Gebetes (es ist Seth, der betet, nicht der, der angerufen wird, s. u. zur subscriptio), beginnt mit einer Reihe von Nomina sacra, wie sie sich auch in den oben zitierten Parallelen aus sethianischen Nag-Hammadi-Texten finden. In der ersten Zeile ist nur das Ende eines Namens (-ΑΩΝ) erhalten, das sich nicht sicher einem bestimmten Namen zuweisen lässt. Am ehesten käme Sēnaōn (wie in StelSeth p. 126,6 und Allog p. 54,28 f. belegt) in Frage, wenn sich das erhaltene γ als /i/-Variante zu η interpretieren ließe. Mellephanou (= Mellephanus) in Zeile 2 findet sich auch Allog p. 54,30 und in der ebenfalls sethianischen Schrift Die dreigestaltige Protennoia NHC XIII p. 39,2. Ellemmaōn findet sich auch Allog p. 54,30 und StelSeth p. 126,8. Issmoun in Zeile 3 findet sich auch in Allog p. 54,30 f.,²⁵ Eptaōn in Allog p. 54,31 und StelSeth p. 126,8 (dort allerdings jeweils in der Form ΟΠΤΑΩΝ). Der weitere Text lässt sich bei aller Bruchstückhaftigkeit auf Grund der Anrufungen in der 1. Pers. sg. („ich preise dich“ Zeile 4 und 12) gut als Gebet identifizieren.

Auf der Rückseite folgt auf nur zwei unvollständig erhaltene Zeilen die grafisch mit Zierleisten abgesetzte subscriptio, die eindeutig das Ende des Textes markiert. Das η vor ΕΥΧΗ kann theoretisch sowohl für den def. fem. Artikel stehen, als auch das Ende eines vorangehenden Adjektivs markieren. Die erhaltenen Buchstaben am Zeilenanfang grenzen die Suche nach einer möglichen Lakunefüllung zwar ein, ein eindeutiges Ergebnis lässt sich aber nicht erzielen. Vielleicht ist zu lesen: ΠΛΗ[ΡΗΣ] Η ΕΥΧΗ ΣΗΤ *Das vollständige Gebet des Seth.*²⁶

²⁴ S. Abb. 2.

²⁵ Allog p. 54,30 f. liest ΕΛΕΜΑΩΝ | ΣΜΟΥΝ; sodass alle bisherigen Ausgaben des koptischen Textes den Text zu Elemaoni! Smoun! o.ä. auflösen. Es handelt sich wegen des Zeilenumbruchs aber wohl um eine irrtümliche Zäsur. Mit Hilfe des Seth-Gebetes lässt sich der Text nun aber zu Elemaon! Ismoun! korrigieren. Entsprechend hat bereits W.-P. Funk in Nag Hammadi Deutsch übersetzt, vgl. ders., *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3), in: H.-M. Schenke/H.-G. Bethge/U. U. Kaiser (Hg.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*. Band 2 (GCS.NF 12), Berlin 2003, 779 mit Anm. 55. Vgl. a. den Kommentar zur Stelle in: W.-P. Funk/P.-H. Poirier/M. Scopello u. a. (Hg.), *L'Allogène* (NH XI,3) (BCNH.T 30), Louvain 2004, 249.

²⁶ Zur Wortstellung vgl. Mk 4,28 v. l.: πλήρης ὁ σίτος.

Indeklinable alttestamentliche Eigennamen sind auch in Genetivkonstruktionen ganz geläufig (vgl. nur den Stammbaum Jesu in Lk 3,23 ff., insbesondere Vers 38: τοῦ Σήθ), hier allerdings unter Wegfall des Artikels im Genetiv.

Der subscriptio folgt noch ein Friedensgruß des Schreibers („Friede dem Schreiber und dem Leser“), der allgemein geläufig und offenbar weit verbreitet war. Er findet sich z. B. in so unterschiedlichen Handschriften wie der von Budge edierten koptischen Sammelhandschrift BL Or. 7594, dort am Ende des Deuteronomiums und vor Jona, oder im griechischen neutestamentlichen Papyrus 72, dort am Ende von 1 Petr.

Ein kurzes Fazit: Mit dem im Papyrus Berol. 17207 erhaltenen Gebet des Seth liegt uns nun also das bislang einzige erhaltene originalsprachliche, nämlich griechische, Zeugnis eines sethianischen Textes vor. Der Textzeuge ist etwa so alt wie die koptischen Zeugnisse sethianischer Texte aus dem Handschriftenfund von Nag Hammadi. Traditionsgeschichtlich dürfte der griechische Text des P. Berol. 17207 jedoch älter sein als seine koptischen Verwandten. Möglicherweise handelt es sich um eine Art Grundform eines Seth-Gebetes, das dann vielfältige Aufnahme und Ausformung insbesondere in den philosophisch orientierten sethianischen Traktaten erfahren hat.

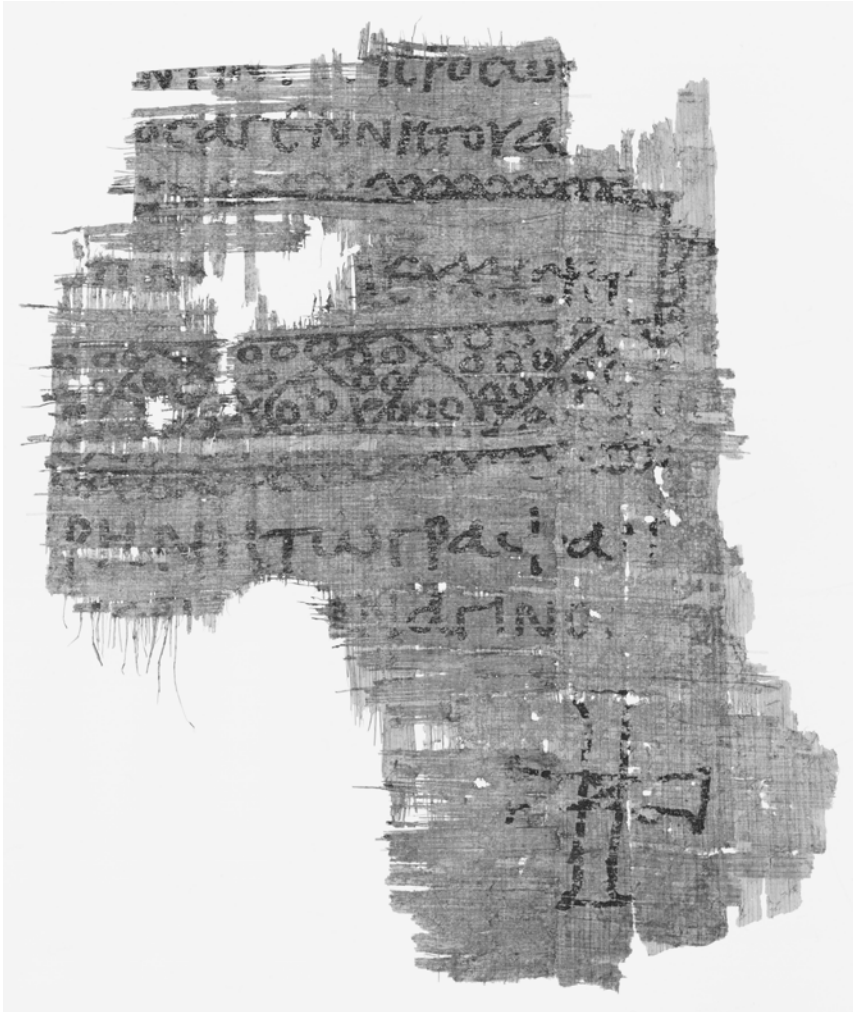


Abbildung 2: P. Berol. 17207R

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