

# A Gnostic Gospel? Title and Genre in the Nag Hammadi Collection

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Our esteemed colleague, Professor Frederik Wisse, threw down the gauntlet to those engaged in studying the Nag Hammadi codices over thirty years ago, when he challenged the validity of patristic categories in their interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, old habits have remained hard to break as reconstructions of Sethianism continue to be a growth industry.<sup>2</sup> Even those unwilling to follow Professor Wisse's lead in considering the Nag Hammadi texts as the speculations of individual Christian teachers rather than the product of sharply delineated ideological schools are indebted to him for his philological work. His editions, translations, and study of fragments, Coptic dialects and codices have provided the foundations for all of our work in this field.<sup>3</sup> As a small acknowledgment of this debt, I propose a return to the larger issue. Are scholars routinely missing the point in the categories we use to refer to the codices from Nag Hammadi?

Rather than return to the debates over Gnostic sectarianism or monastic provenance,<sup>4</sup> I investigate a small piece of the puzzle, the titles attributed to the various writings found at Nag Hammadi. Even scholars who disagreed with Professor Wisse's warning against relying on patristic categories must acknowledge a failure to match patristic statements about books employed by heretics with the Nag Hammadi tractates with the same (e.g., *Gos. Truth*<sup>5</sup>) or similar (e.g., *Paraph. Shem*<sup>6</sup>) titles. Had the work been titled according to its genre, *Paraph. Shem* would have been described as an apocalypse.<sup>7</sup> One finds a clear case in which the concluding title fits the genre in *Apoc. Adam* (V 85,32).<sup>8</sup> Whether or not the title provided by a redactor indicates awareness of the *Paraphrase of Seth* known to Hippolytus is contested.<sup>9</sup> *Gos. Eg.* presents a more complicated case in which a copyist has added "Gospel of the Egyptians" to an original title, "holy book of the great invisible spirit," (III 69,18–20).<sup>10</sup> Nothing in the text supports the designation "Egyptian". Could the secondary title indicate a copyist familiar with the apocryphal *Gospel of the Egyptians*?<sup>11</sup>

Böhlig and Wisse treat each of these cases as examples of three distinctive patterns of title assignment in the Nag Hammadi collection.<sup>12</sup> *Gos. Truth* reflects the case in which there is no title formally marked in the manuscript. A text is identified with words from its opening (“the gospel of truth is a joy for those...”, 16,31). A scribe may use decorative lines to set these words apart (so *Pr. Thanks.*). A more formal title appears when indentation and decorative marks set off a phrase or abbreviation of the incipit as in *Paraph. Shem* (also *Hyp. Arch.*; *Apoc. Adam*; *Steles Seth*; and *Zost.?*). The formal colophon at the conclusion to *Gos. Eg.* fits this pattern. However with the addition of the “gospel of the Egyptians” the text can be identified with the final group in which titles have been formed by interpretive rephrasing of the incipit. The resulting titles often employ genre terms from the NT canon—gospel, letter and apocalypse—even when they are not employed by the work itself (*Ap. John*; *Gos. Thom.*; *Thom. Cont.*; *Eugnostos*; *Apoc. Paul*; *Apoc. James*; *Apoc. James*; *Ep. Pet. Phil.*).

These observations suggest that assimilation of some of the Nag Hammadi tractates to categories familiar to readers of a NT canon was a secondary development. Reed has argued that even Irenaeus continues to use the expression “gospel” for the oral communication of authentic apostolic tradition.<sup>13</sup> His “four-formed” gospel (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8) refers to the embodiment of that “canon of truth” in those writings, not to their circulation as a collection in a single codex.<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus asserts that production of more gospels and entitling one of them “Gospel of Truth” are evidence of Valentinian audacity. Its dissimilarity to the apostolic gospels, he argues, demonstrates that Valentinians possess no gospel without blasphemy and that the apostolic tradition is not the so-called “Gospel of Truth” (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.9). While Attridge and MacRae rely on Irenaeus to conclude that the untitled third tractate of Codex I should be titled “Gospel of Truth” using the opening words of its incipit, they admit that the offensive title could be the invention of Irenaeus’s well-turned rhetoric.<sup>15</sup>

From a contemporary perspective, Attridge and MacRae conclude that the genre of *Gos. Truth* is best described as “a homiletic reflection on the ‘Gospel’ or the message of salvation provided by Jesus Christ.”<sup>16</sup> Attridge considers *Gos. Truth* an exoteric work designed to appeal to a broad Christian audience.<sup>17</sup> Though Justin Martyr provides evidence for the emerging view of “gospels” as books representing the “memoirs” of the apostles (*1 Apol.* 66.3),<sup>18</sup> there is no hint of such an understand-

ing in *Gos. Truth*.<sup>19</sup> *Gos. Truth* persistently uses the word “gospel” in the earlier sense of a proclamation of salvation such as one finds in Paul (e.g. Gal 1:6) or Mark 1:1 (*Gos. Truth* 16,31; 17,2; 18,11). Adopting Wisse’s warning not to import categories derived from heresiological polemics into our analysis should lead us to challenge modern use of “gospel” for this untitled tractate. Despite Irenaeus’s assertion, the Valentinians may not have intended to produce a “substitute” for “gospel” understood as apostolic memoir.

Would the Valentinians have given any title to this work? Most of the tractates in Codex I are untitled,<sup>20</sup> leaving modern editors to come up with designations for them (I, 2: *Apoc. Jas.*;<sup>21</sup> I, 3: *Gos. Truth*; and I, 5: *Tri. Trac.*<sup>22</sup>). The “cover letter” to *Apoc. Jas.* refers to what follows as an apocryphon. Some editors have preferred to title this work on the basis of that introduction as “apocryphal epistle of James” rather than “apocryphon.”<sup>23</sup> The only tractate entitled “gospel” which includes materials of Valentinian provenance is *Gos. Phil.*<sup>24</sup> Though interpreters remain divided over how many allusions to the canonical gospels are found in *Gos. Phil.*, a number of citations appear to be taken from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John.<sup>25</sup> The title appears to have been begun as though the copyist thought it were a regular text line. Upon noticing that it was a title, the scribe decorates the final part of the title in a manner characteristic of the other titles in Codex II. Consequently, M. Turner proposes that the manuscript being copied had a title awkwardly inserted at the end of *Gos. Phil.*<sup>26</sup> As she observes, the contents of *Gos. Phil.* fit neither the first-century meaning of “gospel” as proclamation of salvation, nor the shift emerging in the mid to late second century of “gospel” as written, apostolic recollections concerning Jesus.<sup>27</sup> If the “Gospel according to Philip” title was created by a scribe prior to the copy found in Codex II, then it may derive from the story attributed to Philip in 73,8-15 that Joseph had made Jesus’s cross from one of his own olive trees. The author then interprets this tradition, so the authorial voice of *Gos. Phil.* is not a pseudonymous Philip. Therefore the title appears to have been a scribe’s best guess at some stage in the transmission of this work.

Had the secondary character of the title *Gos. Eg.* been recognized early enough for scholars to employ the codex title, *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, there would be no discussion of a “gospel” among the treatises commonly grouped together by shared Sethian mytho-

logoumena either. James Goehring acknowledges disagreement among those scholars who hold the Sethian hypothesis about which texts belong in this category. He proposes the following list as generally agreed upon: *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Gos. Eg.*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Steles Seth*, *Zost.*, *Melch.*, *Norea*, *Marsanes*, *Allogenes*, and *Trim. Prot.*<sup>28</sup> With the exception of *Ap. John*, all of these treatises involve the revelations conveyed by heavenly figures to ancient prophets of the first-person voice of such figures.<sup>29</sup> Their use of a divine triad (Being, Mind, Life) familiar in Neoplatonic circles has led scholars to identify *Zost.*,<sup>30</sup> *Marsanes*,<sup>31</sup> *Allogenes*,<sup>32</sup> and *Steles Seth*<sup>33</sup> with gnostics familiar to Plotinus. Porphyry says that he titled *Enn. 2.9* “Against the Gnostics” because Plotinus opposed their teachings. The books of these gnostics included revelations by Zostrianos and Allogenes (*Vit. Plot.* 16). Porphyry refers to Christians and others in these philosophical circles, but distinguishes them from the gnostics, whom he describes as “deceived themselves and deceiving many, alleging that Plato had not penetrated to the depths of intelligible reality.”<sup>34</sup>

While the mid-third century date of this platonizing gnostic circle supports Wisse’s conviction that even the earliest gnostic mythological speculation does not emerge earlier than the second century C.E.,<sup>35</sup> it raises some difficulties for his hypothesis that the various tractates are the product of individual religious speculation. The authors of these platonizing revelations depicting the soul’s progress through the angelic heavens and into the highest levels of being have combined two disparate traditions, a gnostic speculative mythologizing of Genesis and Neoplatonism. Both philosophic speculation and ritual practices aimed at fostering gnostic enlightenment are in play in these texts.<sup>36</sup> Philosophic speculation has led to a reconceptualization of the triadic Barbelo aeon (from *Ap. John* II 5,8–9; *Trim. Prot.* 39,26–27).<sup>37</sup> Rituals of baptismal awakening and illumination, the backbone of *Gos. Eg.*, are either reinterpreted as in *Zost.*<sup>38</sup> or dropped in favor of verbal forms of theurgy as in *Allogenes*<sup>39</sup> and *Steles Seth*.<sup>40</sup> Disputes over the efficacy of baptismal rites were not limited to this platonizing group. *Apoc. Adam* 84,5–28 refers to familiar angelic guardians of baptism, Micheu, Michar, and Mnesinous (cp. *Zost.* 6,8–17; *Gos. Eg.* III 64,14–20; and *Trim. Prot.* 48,18–21) in the context of polemic against some who “having defiled the water of life, you have drawn it within the will of the powers” (II. 18–21).<sup>41</sup> The true living water is guarded by the three illuminators, Yesseus, Mazareus,

and Yessedekus (85,28-31; see *Zost.* 47,5-6; *Gos. Eg.* III 65,10-11; 66,10-11).

The relationships between the so-called Sethian tractates are a function of shared elements of tradition in their content. Their distribution throughout the Nag Hammadi codices (as well as BG 8502) indicates that they did not circulate as a group. Most exist as single copies. Those Nag Hammadi tractates which have been preserved in multiple copies might be considered arguably more significant or widely distributed than the others. With the exception of *Gos. Truth* (I,3; XII,2), each member of this multiple copy set occurs in a codex that also contains another member in at least one case [see Table One, p.11].

These observations suggest that if any core group of gnostic tracts existed, it comprised *Ap. John*, *Gos. Eg.*, *Eugnostos*, and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* *Ap. John* has been transmitted in two versions, a long (II,1; IV, 1) and short (III,1; BG 8502,2) recension. The two versions diverged as composed in Greek. Each version was then independently translated into Coptic. *Gos. Eg.*, on the other hand, has been copied from two different translations of the same Greek *Vorlage*.<sup>42</sup> Parrott reaches similar conclusions about *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*<sup>43</sup> *Eugnostos* was circulating in at least two Greek versions. Though it lacks one section found in *Eugnostos* III (73,14-20), *Eugnostos* V is otherwise more expansive than *Eugnostos* III. Both copies of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, however, reflect different Coptic translations of a single Greek *Vorlage*. The considerable overlap in content between *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* provides evidence for what may be a third version that was largely identical with *Eugnostos* III but contained some variants found in *Eugnostos* V. Further evidence of the significance and wide circulation of *Eugnostos* has been detected in Syriac traditions familiar to Bardesanes and in a Valentinian letter copied by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 31.5,1-8,3) that includes quotations from *Eugnostos*.<sup>44</sup>

The evidence for multiple versions as well as the many surviving copies of the tractates of Codex III,1-4 already demonstrates their significance for third- and fourth-century Christians interested in gnostic speculation. The case is strengthened by surveying the links between these works and other tractates in the Nag Hammadi collection [see Table Two, p.12].

Table One: Nag Hammadi Tractates in Multiple Versions

Treatise	Occurs in Codices	Other treatise in codex
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	1,2 XII,2	
<i>Ap. John</i>	II,1 III,1  IV,1 BG 8502,2	II,5 ( <i>Orig. World</i> ) III,2 ( <i>Gos. Eg.</i> ) III,3 ( <i>Eugnostos</i> ); III,4 ( <i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i> ) IV,2 ( <i>Gos. Eg.</i> ) BG 3 ( <i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i> )
<i>Orig. World</i>	II,5 XIII,2	II,1 ( <i>Ap. John</i> )
<i>Gos. Eg.</i>	III,2  IV,2	III,1 ( <i>Ap. John</i> ) III,3 ( <i>Eugnostos</i> ); III,4 ( <i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i> ) IV,1 ( <i>Ap. John</i> )
<i>Eugnostos</i>	III,3  V,1	III,1 ( <i>Ap. John</i> ) III,2 ( <i>Gos. Eg.</i> ); III,4 ( <i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i> )
<i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i>	III,4	III,1 ( <i>Ap. John</i> ) III,2 ( <i>Gos. Eg.</i> ) III,3 ( <i>Eugnostos</i> ) BG 2 ( <i>Ap. John</i> )

Table Two: Codex III, 1–4 and Other Nag Hammadi Tractates

	Has taken traditions from:	Has contributed to:
<i>Ap. John</i>	[source of Irenaeus, <i>Adv. Haer</i> 1.29]	<i>Trim. Prot.</i> (XIII,1) expansion on the Pronoia hymn in the long version (II 30,11–31,25)
<i>Gos. Eg.</i>	[shared mythological traditions: <i>Ap. John.</i> ; <i>Orig. World</i> ; <i>Apoc. Adam</i> ]	<i>Apoc. Adam</i> (V,5); <i>Zost.</i> (VIII,1); <i>Steles Seth</i> (VII,5), cp. Book Seth inscribed in the mountain (III 68,1–14)
<i>Eugnostos</i>		<i>Orig. World</i> (II,5), which incorporates traditions employed in <i>Hyp. Arch.</i> (II,4) and the first-person hymnic proclamation of Eve (II 114, 8–15) is associated with <i>Thund.</i> (VI 13,19–14,9a)
<i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i>	<i>Eugnostos</i> ; framework of resurrection dialogue between Jesus and disciple(s) from <i>Ap. John.</i>	

The complex interrelationships between these texts still await further clarification. Painchaud traces stages of redaction by which *Orig. World* contributed to *Eugnostos* but was also further redacted. The self-designation “generation without a king” hints at a common milieu linking the long version of *Ap. John* and the group which transformed *Eugnostos* into *Soph. Jes. Chr.*<sup>45</sup> The long version of *Ap. John* appears with *Orig. World* in Codex II, though the correlation between *Ap. John* and *Orig. World* is not as strong as that between *Ap. John* and the three tractates which follow it in Codex III.<sup>46</sup>

Codex III exhibits a number of unusual features which leave open the possibility that it did not come from the same find as the other codices.<sup>47</sup> Its first four tractates are linguistically close to reflecting standard Sahidic. In addition, the scribe took unusual care in attempting to correct errors in transcribing the final tractate.<sup>48</sup> We would suggest that the first four tractates of Codex III had already been circulating as a group to which the final tractate was added either when Codex III was copied or in the text being used by the scribe. Further support for this suggestion is provided by BG 8502 where the other copies of the short version of *Ap. John* and of the same translation of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* are found. In that codex, the two texts associated with Eugnostos as transmitter, *Gos. Eg.* (based on the colophon: III 69,10) and *Eugnostos* (singled out as “blessed” in III 90,12 contrast V 17,18) have been omitted. The *Ap. John/Soph. Jes. Chr.* pair is framed by *Gos. Mary* and *Act Pet.* respectively. Williams has suggested that *Act Pet.* occupies a similar position in the ordering of tractates in a codex to *Dial. Sav.* in Codex III.<sup>49</sup>

If we pursue the possibility that the collection of tractates in Codex III had been redacted to travel as a group, other bits of evidence fall into line. The scribe who created the grouping created the unusual colophon so that *Gos. Eg.* and *Eugnostos* are from the same individual. He may also have considered Jesus in *Soph. Jes. Chr.* to be the “one who need not be taught” prophesied at the conclusion of *Eugnostos* (III 90,7–11) as Williams proposes.<sup>50</sup> Noting the similarity of their covers, Williams also notes that if Codices IV and VIII comprised a set, we would have another series of tractates comparable to Codex III,1–4, namely: *Ap. John*, *Gos. Eg.*, *Zost.*, and *Ep. Pet. Phil.*<sup>51</sup> Based on Funk’s linguistic research, we would have to assume that this group of texts was assembled for the purpose of creating the codex in which they are found. *Ap. John* and *Gos. Eg.* reflect southern and northern linguistic groups respectively. Codex VIII,2 (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*) is too short to provide credible linguistic data, but VIII,1 (*Zost.*) belongs to the northern group and reflects a somewhat different state of the language from that of the relatively homogeneous Codex V.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, while my analysis confirms Williams’s recognition of the importance of *Ap. John* and of a pattern of tractates exemplified in Codex III to understanding how the aggregates of gnostic texts were formed, I disagree with his attempt to derive a universal schema to



parallel or substitute for an emerging Christian canon.<sup>53</sup> As I suggested at the beginning of this article, the category “gospel” which is so fundamental to precipitating a group of Christian writings to serve as a counterpart to inherited LXX scripture does not serve the authors of these texts as genre or title. Modern scholars have fallen into a misperception of the literary intention of these works by presuming that gnostics were out to produce their own gospels as Irenaeus charged.<sup>54</sup> Even the gnosticizing adaptation of a collection of Jesus’s sayings, *Gos. Thom.* only carries the designation “gospel” secondarily. The incipit specifies its genre as “secret sayings” recorded by Jude Thomas. A related form of this incipit appears in the final tractate of Codex II, *Thom. Cont.*, “the secret words which the Savior spoke to Judas Thomas, which I Mathias wrote down” (138,1–3). This text clearly situates the tradition in question as a post-resurrection revelation dialogue between Jesus and Thomas.<sup>55</sup> Linguistically, tractates II,1 and II,7 constitute a different group from the others in Codex II.<sup>56</sup> Adopting Turner’s suggestion that in its present form, *Thom. Cont.* is intended to be the final speech of the risen Jesus,<sup>57</sup> we conclude that whoever compiled Codex II began with a resurrection dialogue which was considered the first such appearance of Jesus, *Ap. John*, and concluded with another dialogue representing the last appearance of Jesus.<sup>58</sup>

If there is a literary genre to which the gnostics are drawn, it is not “gospel” in any of the forms which such Jesus traditions assumed in the second and third centuries, but the post-resurrection revelation discourse.<sup>59</sup> The pairing of *Ap. John* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* in Codex III and BG 8502 also suggest a movement from the initial revelation to John, which he then communicates to fellow disciples (III 40,6–9 par.), to an appearance which involves a group of disciples (twelve male disciples and seven women, III 90,14–18 par.). The intervening two tractates in Codex III fill out the content of the “gospel of God, the eternal imperishable Spirit (or “Father” in BG; III 119,14–16) which is then preached by these newly enlightened disciples. Once again, we also find in Tractate III,5 an eschatological discourse employed as the final work in the codex. *Dial. Sav.* is so fragmentary that its interpretation remains tentative, but the dialogue repeatedly emphasizes the soul’s entry into light/life (e.g. 120,1–25). In the Codex IV/VIII set, *Zost.* has replaced *Gos. Eg.*, traditions from which have been incorporated into its platonized ascent pattern. And another

post-resurrection revelation, *Ep. Pet. Phil.* takes the place of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* Both *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (III 91,20) and *Ep. Pet. Phil.* (VIII 133,15-16) are set on the Mount of Olives<sup>60</sup> and may have been considered variants of the same events. However, *Ep. Pet. Phil.* incorporates the revelation dialogue into a more expansive framework, which establishes Peter's authority as gnostic interpreter of the Savior's teaching and leader of the twelve.<sup>61</sup> The anomalous women disciples have also disappeared from *Ep. Pet. Phil.*

*Ep. Pet. Phil.* also sets its resurrection appearance traditions under the seal of the Christian canon by concluding with a final resurrection appearance and blessing that echoes all three of those narratives (140,15-23). Just as *Zost.* represents a reconceptualized version of the baptismal tradition as visionary ascent, so *Ep. Pet. Phil.* moves the revelation dialogue from its concern with gnostic cosmogony and soteriology to its intersection with the gospels and Acts. A mid-third-century date for both works seems quite plausible. Finally, we might suggest that the tractates assembled in BG 8502 might have been intended to follow an order dictated by a sequence of characters from John 20-21: Mary Magdalene (*Gos. Mary*), Beloved Disciple (*Ap. John*), assembled disciples (*Soph. Jes. Chr.*) and finally, Peter as shepherd of Jesus's flock (*Apoc. Pet.*). These developments of a core group of gnostic texts represented by Codex III,1-4 provide additional evidence for Frederik Wisse's insistence that those who composed, translated, copied, and collected our codices were all part of the Christian religious spectrum. A great deal of research and debate remains before we can map the relationships between this rich collection of texts which he has worked so diligently to make available for scholarly study. And while we congratulate and honor Professor Wisse's achievement, we also look forward to his participation in those conversations.

## Notes

1. Frederik Wisse, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," *VC* 25 (1971): 205-23; idem, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians," in B. Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*. Vol. 2: *Sethian Gnosticism* (Suppl. to *Numen* 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 563-78.
2. See the helpful summary of attempts to classify the Nag Hammadi codices along these lines in Michael Williams (*Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* [Princeton: Princeton University,

1996], 47, 90–91). The most elaborate reconstruction of Sethianism, which proposes a history spanning several centuries, is now to be found in John Turner (*Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* [Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi section “Études” 6; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 2001]).

3. The most widely known and used is certainly the synopsis of *Ap. John* prepared with Michael Waldstein (*The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* [NHMS 33; Leiden: Brill, 1995]). Professor Wisse has been involved in editing and translating many of the other Nag Hammadi texts as well: fragments to *Gos. Tr.* (in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)*, ed. H. Attridge [NHS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1985], 119–22) and more recently in his complete edition of Codex XII which also contains *Sent. Sextus* (in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C.W. Hedrick [NHS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1990], 289–355); *Gos. Eg.* with Alexander Böhlig (*Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2. The Gospel of the Egyptians (The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit)*, ed. A. Böhlig and F. Wisse [NHS 4; Leiden: Brill, 1975]); *Great Pow.* with Francis Williams (*Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, ed. D. Parrott [NHS 11; Leiden: Brill, 1979], 291–323); *Paraph. Shem* (in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Birger Pearson [NHMS 30; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 1–127); *Ep. Pet. Phil.* with Marvin Meyer (in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. J. Sieber [NHS 31; Leiden: Brill, 1991], 234–51).

4. See F. Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 431–40.

5. Attributed to Valentinians in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.9, who castigates his opponents for producing a gospel that differs radically from that transmitted by the apostles, written recently in their own circles and thus disqualified from being “the truth.” H. Attridge and G.W. MacRae, (*Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 65–67) argue that since Irenaeus only speaks of its dissimilarity to the apostolic gospels, *Gos. Truth* might be the work to which Irenaeus refers.

6. Initially assumed to have been a version of the *Paraphrase of Seth* attributed to the “Sethians” in Hippolytus *Refutatio* 5.19–22. However the Christian allusions of the latter make it quite different from the apocalyptic mythology of *Paraph. Shem*. Wisse concedes that both might have drawn on some earlier document referred to as a “paraphrase” (in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 15). Michel Roberge (*La Paraphrase de Sem (NH VII, 1)* [Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Textes” 25; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 2000], 40) considers the title “paraphrase” to be the creation of a later redactor based on the use of the term *paraphrasis* at 32,37 to designate what follows. He finds comparisons with both “Sethian” and “Valentinian” sources inadequate to the cosmogony of *Paraph. Shem* which appears to have developed a system which anticipates features of later Manichean sources (100–8).

7. Roberge, *La Paraphrase*, 112.
8. In this instance the title reflects the beginning of the rhetorical conclusion to the text, itself, “these are the revelations (apocalypses) which Adam revealed to his son Seth” (85,19–21).
9. Roberge (*La Paraphrase*, 113) relies on content parallels to suggest that *Paraph. Shem* represents a resurgence of gnostic speculation at the end of the third century and is dependent on Sethian, Valentinian, and Christian traditions. In that setting, he hypothesizes intentional substitution of “Shem” for “Seth.”
10. The initial title found in the Greek *Vorlage* was the holy book of the Egyptians (Böhlig and Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2*, 18–21; 168). *Gos. Eg.* appears in a colophon (III 69,6–17) that can be attributed to a copyist, who requests prayers for himself and his “fellow lights”. It has either been lost or was not attached to the copy in codex IV, which represents a different translation of the same Greek *Vorlage* (31).
11. Only known from patristic references (Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 3.6.45; 3.9.63–66; 3.13.92f; Hippolytus *Haer.* 5.7; Epiphanius *Pan.* 62.2.4). Epiphanius attaches this gospel to Sabellian heresy. Hippolytus asserts that Naasene teaching on the soul was found in this work. The quotations found in Clement of Alexandria introduce Salome among the disciples as advocate of asceticism that rejects the “works of the female” and procreation. Overcoming gender differentiation in this fashion echoes sayings in *Gos. Thom.* 22 and 114 as well as 2 *Clem.* 12, 2, 4, 5.
12. Böhlig and Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2*, 19–21.
13. Annette Yoshiko Reed, “ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus’s *Adversus Haereses*,” *VC* 56 (2002): 11–46.
14. Reed, “ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ”, 13–14, 18–19. The phrase “canon of truth” (*Haer.* 1.9.4; 22.1; 2.25.2; 27.1; 28.1,3; 3.15.1; 4.35.4, also 1.10.1; 3.2.2; 4.1; 5.1; 14.4; 4.32.1; 33.8) is never used for written works (idem, 13). Reed’s detailed linguistic analysis of phrases in which Irenaeus uses the word “gospel” casts doubt on the assumption that Irenaeus thinks of a codex with the four gospels in it as canon (40–41; against T.C. Skeat, “Irenaeus and the Four-Fold Gospel Canon,” *NovT* 34 [1992]: 194–99).
15. Attridge and MacRae, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 65–66. On the lack of consistent conventions in assigning titles to remains of ancient Christian “gospels” generally, see Charles W. Hedrick and Paul A. Mirecki, *Gospel of the Savior* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1999), 17.
16. Attridge and MacRae, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 67.
17. Harold Attridge, “Gospel of Truth as an Exoteric Text,” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C.W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody,

Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986) 239–55. Attridge detects a wider range of allusions to Christian texts than one finds in the later NT canon, a phenomenon characteristic of mid-second-century Christianity (243–44).

18. See the discussion in Reed, “EYATTEAION,” 16–18.

19. Contrast the explicit use of “*euangelion*” for a written account of the Transfiguration by which the author of *Treat. Res.* supports his exposition of the resurrection (I 48,3–19).

20. Jean-Daniel Dubois, “Les titres du codex I (Jung) de Nag Hammadi,” in *La formation des canons scripturaires*, ed. M. Tardieu (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 219–35. Dubois proposes that Valentinians dropped the titles in order to present the collection as under the patronage of St. Paul, hence the opening *Pr. Paul*. As Michael Williams has pointed out (“Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as “Collection[s]” in the History of Gnosticism[s],” in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi et le Problème de leur Classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier [Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Études” 3; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 1995], 11–14) the production of Codex I demonstrates that it had been planned prior to copying. *Pr. Paul* is inscribed on the flyleaf prior to the beginning of numbered pages. The same scribe copied tractates 1–3 and 5 leaving blank pages unnumbered into which a different scribe copied *Treat. Res.* That scribe turns up as the copyist of the first part of Codex XI, which is then completed by a scribe who also copied Codex VII. Whatever rationale one proposes for their contents, this evidence for production of the surviving codices as a group combined with the final colophon in Codex VII, a blessing on the “fatherhood,” that is, a monastic community, indicates that it was being used in some fashion by a community of ascetic Christians in Egypt (19–20).

21. An initial cover letter in the text (1,1–35) presents *Ap. Jas.* as a hidden book (apocryphon) being sent by James to a recipient (2d pers. sing.) whose name is lost. A second introduction describing the apostles writing their memoirs when the Savior takes James and Peter apart for further revelation (2,10–35) suggests that its author is familiar with the heresiological polemic concerning authentic “apostolic memoirs” over against revelations to individuals. See my “Johannine Traditions in *Ap. Jas.* (NHC I,2),” *JBL* 101 (1982): 403–14.

22. Damage to the final page of this codex makes it impossible to be certain that it had none. However Thomassen suggests that such Valentinian tracts may not have been titled, noting that Irenaeus never supplies titles for the Valentinian materials he has consulted. See Louis Painchaud and Einar Thomassen, *Le Traité Tripartite (NH I,5)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Textes” 19; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 1989), 9–10.

23. So Donald Rouleau, *L'Épître Apocryphe de Jacques* (NH I,2) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section "Textes" 18; Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1987), 3.

24. Including what appear to be Valentinian exegesis of gospel traditions, see Louis Painchaud, "Le Christ Vainqueur de la Mort dans L'Évangile selon Philippe une Exégèse Valentinienne de Matt. 27:46," *NovT* 38 (1996): 382–92. Defending the Valentinian perspective of *Gos. Phil.* as a whole, see Einar Thomassen, "How Valentinian Is The Gospel of Philip?" in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, ed. J.D. Turner and A. McGuire (NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 251–79. On *Gos. Phil.* as a compilation of materials from diverse sources, including what she calls a primitive Valentinian tradition, see Martha Lee Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip. The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection* (NHMS 38; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

25. Painchaud, "Le Christ," 383.

26. M. Turner, *Gospel*, 9–10.

27. M. Turner, *Gospel*, 8. She points out that Epiphanius quotes a "fictitious gospel in the name of the holy disciple, Philip" as used among libertine gnostics in Egypt (*Pan.* 26.13.2–3). It has no evident overlap with *Gos. Phil. Pistis Sophia* has a scene in which Philip's interpretation of the 5th repentance of Pistis Sophia elicits Jesus's praise and the commission to sit and write down Jesus's words, what Jesus does and what Philip will see (43–44). Thomas and Matthew are also designated "to write every word of the Kingdom of Light and to bear witness to them." That detail hints at the possibility of Jesus traditions circulating under the name of Philip (9).

28. Goehring, *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 373.

29. *Hyp. Arch.* opens with a quasi-epistolary introduction (86,20–27) from a writer who invokes the words of the "great apostle" (= Paul; Col 1:13; Eph 6:12) about the powers whose origins and influence will be described in what follows. The text begins as a retelling of Genesis origins using familiar gnostic mythemes. At the point at which the angel Eleleth descends to rescue and enlighten Norea (93,3–13), that is, at the conclusion with its eschatological promise of the destruction of the authorities by the appearance of the children of light (96,33–97,20), the account is confirmed by angelic revelation. Its title is based on the introduction (R. Bullard, "Tractate 4: The Hypostasis of the Archons," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7 together with XIII,2, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. B. Layton [NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989] 221). Norea's prayer in *Hyp. Arch.* appears to be the basis for Norea's prayer in the untitled piece of 52 lines in IX,2 (see Birger A. Pearson, "The Thought of Norea," in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, ed. B. Pearson [NHS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1981], 89–90).

30. See Catherine Barry, Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirer and John D. Turner, *Zostrien* (NH VIII,1) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section "Textes" 24; Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2000), 163–217. Details of the angelic structure in *Zost.* shows that its author has reworked material familiar from *Gos. Eg.* (217–22).

31. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 241; Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirer and John D. Turner, *Marsanes* (NH X) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section "Textes" 27; Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2000), 200–8. The surviving text is so fragmentary that its interpretation remains difficult. Like *Zost.* the seer's name stands between lines of decoration at the conclusion to the tractate (68,18). The name was not followed by the confessional cryptogram found in *Zost.* (VIII 132,7–9; decoded as "words of truth of Zostrianos. God of truth. Words of Zostrianos," Barry et al., *Zostrien*, 480–81).

32. See Karen L. King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995), 47. King appeals to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 40.7,1–5) for the identification of *Allogenes* as Seth. Also Antoinette Wire and John Turner, "Allogenes" in C. Hedrick ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII* (NHS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 183–90. As was the case in *Marsanes* and *Zost.* before the additional colophon, the title is simply the seer's name.

33. Goehring, *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 382–84. Elements of its hymnic material are closely paralleled in the baptismal hymns at the conclusion of *Gos. Eg.* (III 66,8–68,1; p. 374).

34. Trans. A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus I* (LCL) 45.

35. F. Wisse, "After the Synopsis: Prospects and Problems in Establishing a Critical Text of the Apocryphon of John and Defining Its Historical Location," in Turner and McGuire, *Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, 149.

36. See King, *Unknowable God*, 3–16.

37. The foundational divine triad in the so-called "Sethian" system, see Turner (*Sethian Gnosticism*, 531–56).

38. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 603–8.

39. King (*Unknowable God*, 14–15) recognizes this transition but still assumes that the water rite was practiced.

40. Goehring, *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 380–81.

41. See F. Morard, "L'Apocalypse d'Adam du Codex V de Nag Hammadi et sa polémique anti-baptismale," *RSR* 51 (1977): 214–33. Guy Stroumsa (*Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* [NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984], 102–3) rejects the anti-baptismal understanding of this passage. He suggests that the angelic triad are a gloss attempting to identify the voice which is

speaking. The author of *Apoc. Adam* juxtaposes gnostic baptism to Christian rites subjected to the hostile powers which govern the lower world.

42. Böhlig and Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2*, 11–14.

43. Douglas M. Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 3-4 and V, 1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrynchus Papyrus 1081* (NHS 27; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 16–18; for a description of Codex III, see F. Wisse, “Nag Hammadi Codex III: Codicological Introduction,” in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause (NHS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 225–38).

44. See Anne Pasquier, *Eugnoste. Lettre sur le Dieu Transcendant (NH III,3 et V,1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Textes” 26; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 2000), 1–3.

45. Louis Painchaud, “La Classification des Textes de Nag Hammadi et le Phénomène des Réécritures,” in Painchaud and Pasquier, eds., *Les Textes*, 85.

46. If the first tractate in Codex XIII were *Ap. John* as some have suggested, then we would have further evidence of a correlation between the two (see discussion in Williams, “Interpreting,” 20).

47. Pierre Létourneau, *Le Dialogue du Sauveur (NH III,5)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Textes” 29; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 2003), 2. It was acquired separately by the Coptic Museum in 1946 from a regional school teacher. The scribe has a distinctive style not found elsewhere in the collection. Wolf-Peter Funk’s linguistic analyses have shown that this codex comes closer to standard middle Egyptian Sahidic throughout than any of the other codices (“The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in Painchaud and Pasquier, *Les Textes*, 107–47). In addition, Codex III, 1–4 are closer to each other than to III, 5, though the distinctions are small. Similarly, BG 8502, 2 and 3 (*Ap. John* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* are nearly identical from a linguistic point of view (107). Funk has shown that among the Nag Hammadi codices those which reflect a single stage of the language or regional dialect type across the tractates are rare. Only Codex V comes close to Codex III in homogeneity. Its texts are of northern origin and as in Codex III, the final tractate (V, 5, *Apoc. Adam* exhibits some linguistic peculiarities over against the others; idem, 139–42). By contrast to Codex III, the versions of *Ap. John* and *Gos. Eg.* in Codex IV originated in different linguistic regions. *Ap. John* is a more standardized editing of the same text as Codex II,1 in southern regional Sahidic while *Gos. Eg.* reflects the mixed language common of texts in the northern group. Thus *Gos. Eg.* in IV,2 has not only been translated from a different Greek text from that in III,2, it also derives from a different geographical area (129).

48. Létourneau, *Dialogue*, 4; Stephen Emmel, *Nag Hammadi Codex III,5. The Dialogue of the Savior* (NHS 26; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 27–29; Wisse observes



that there are more corrections in Codex III as a whole than in any other codex ("Codex III," 236).

49. Williams, "Interpreting," 20.

50. Especially since *Soph. Jes. Chr.* takes over and elaborates most of *Eugnostos* (see Williams, "Interpreting," 22–24). On the other hand, the extensive overlap could also explain the omission of *Eugnostos* (and its companion *Gos. Eg.*) by the compiler of BG 8502.

51. Williams, "Interpreting," 24.

52. Funk, "Linguistic Aspect," 136. Funk finds VIII,1 to be the most extreme example of a "crypto-Bohairic" dialect in the collection.

53. Williams, "Interpreting," 14–15.

54. This fundamental misunderstanding is further exacerbated when collections of gnostic literature translated by reputable scholars are marketed as though an alternate to Christian Scripture had been discovered, e.g. Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, eds. *The Gnostic Bible* (Boston: Shambala, 2003)—though the subtitle indicates to the reader that this is a wide-ranging collection of texts from diverse ancient and medieval sources.

55. John D. Turner, "The Book of Thomas the Contender Writing to the Perfect," in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, 173–75.

56. Funk, "Linguistic Aspect," 126.

57. Turner, "Book of Thomas," 175.

58. It is difficult to discern any satisfactory order for the middle group of tractates, which have a different linguistic provenance. Williams's attempt mixes elements from the literary frame, genre, and content: *Ap. John*, overview/rewritten Genesis; *Gos. Thom.*, gospel #1: Sayings of the Living Jesus; *Gos. Phil.*, gospel #2: meditations on various doctrines; *Hyp. Arch.*, commentary on Paul's words about the Rulers; [*Orig. World*], eschatology, first exegesis on the soul; *Exeg. Soul*, second exegesis on the soul; *Thom. Cont.*, concluding dialogue on the spiritual struggle (Williams, "Interpreting," 28).

59. See PHEME PERKINS, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1980). The post-resurrection setting should be assumed in such gnostic dialogues unless the author provides explicit indications to the contrary as in *Apoc. Pet.* The modern scholarly hunt for gospels among the gnostics often misleads interpreters into insisting upon the opposite (as in Létourneau, *Le Dialogue*, 15–16).

60. Though *Soph. Jes. Chr.* locates the mountain in Galilee perhaps as a harmonizing identification with traditions of the Transfiguration or of Jesus's resurrection appearance on a mountain in Galilee (e.g., Matt 28:16).

61. Marvin Meyer, *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, 227–31.