

The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books

Edited by
HUGO LUNDHAUG and
CHRISTIAN H. BULL

*Studien und Texte zu
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134

Mohr Siebeck

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Hugo Lundhaug and Christian H. Bull

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Abbreviations

ActIr	Acta Iranica
ACS	Ancient Commentaries on Scripture
ADAI.K	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe
<i>Aeg</i>	<i>Aegyptus</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGLB	Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AnBoll</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ANTF	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
<i>APF</i>	<i>Archiv für Papyrussforschung</i>
<i>Ap. Patr.</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i>
<i>ARG</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du service des antiquités de l’Égypte</i>
ASKÄ	Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten
ASP	American Studies in Papyrology
ATSLLC.S	Accademia Toscana di scienze e lettere La Colombaria, “Studi”
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAB.L</i>	<i>Bulletin de l’Académie royale de Belgique: Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BCNH	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi
BCNH.C	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Concordances”
BCNH.É	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études”
BCNH.T	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Textes”
BEHE.R	Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses
BG	Berlin Gnostic Codex (P. Berol. 8502)
BKP	Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie
<i>BIE</i>	<i>Bulletin de l’Institut Égyptien</i>
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BO</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BSAC</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société d’archéologie copte</i>
BSIH	Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History
<i>BSR</i>	<i>Bulletin for the Study of Religion</i>
<i>ByzZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
C1, C2, etc.	P. Nag Hamm. Coptic 1, Coptic 2, etc.
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series

CBC	Cahiers de la Bibliothèque copte
CBM	Chester Beatty Monographs
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCR	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CFM	Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum
CH	<i>Corpus Hermeticum</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CM	Cursor Mundi
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres</i>
<i>CRBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CS	Cistercian Studies
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
CT	Codex Tchacos
CUFr	Collections des universités de France
ECF	The Early Church Fathers
ECS	Early Christian Studies
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
FDS	Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker
FH	<i>Fragmenta Hermetica</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
G ¹ , G ² , etc.	<i>First Greek Life of Pachomius, Second Greek Life of Pachomius, etc.</i>
G1, G2, etc.	P. Nag Hamm. Greek 1, Greek 2, etc.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GCS.NF	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte: Neue Folge
<i>HistTh</i>	<i>History and Theory</i>
<i>Hors. Reg.</i>	<i>Regulations of Horsiesios</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
Hyp	Hypomnemata
<i>HZ</i>	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
IBAES	Internet-Beiträge zur Ägyptologie und Sudanarchäologie
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOC	Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Coptic Studies</i>
<i>JCSCS</i>	<i>Journal for the Canadian Society of Coptic Studies</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>

<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>J. Ethics</i>	<i>Journal of Ethics</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JJP</i>	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>International Journal of the Platonic Tradition</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSRC</i>	Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LEGC</i>	Letteratura egiziana gnostica e cristiana
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, Scott, and Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (9 th ed.)
<i>LTP</i>	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique</i>
<i>MDAI</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>MDAI.K</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i>
<i>MRE</i>	Monographies Reine Elisabeth
<i>MTSR</i>	<i>Method & Theory in the Study of Religion</i>
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Le Muséon</i>
<i>NAPSPMS</i>	North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series
<i>NHC</i>	Nag Hammadi Codex/Codices
<i>NHMS</i>	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
<i>NHS</i>	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NPNF²</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2</i>
<i>NTOA</i>	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTTS</i>	New Testament Tools and Studies
<i>O. Mon. Epiph.</i>	Ostraca from the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia christiana periodica</i>
<i>OECS</i>	Oxford Early Christian Studies
<i>OECT</i>	Oxford Early Christian Texts
<i>OECGT</i>	Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts
<i>OLA</i>	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>OPIAC</i>	Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Occasional Papers
<i>PAM</i>	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
<i>PapyBrux</i>	Papyrologica Bruxellensia
<i>PapyCol</i>	Papyrologica Coloniensia
<i>Paral.</i>	<i>Paralipomena</i>
<i>PAST</i>	Percorsi, Strumenti e Temi di Archeologia
<i>PatSor</i>	Patristica Sorbonensia
<i>PEES.GR</i>	Publications of the Egypt Exploration Society, Graeco Roman Memoirs
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia graeca. Edited by J.-P. Migne
<i>PGL</i>	<i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (Lampe)
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i>

PLB	Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava
Pr.	<i>Praecepta</i>
PTA	Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
QSGKAM	Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums und des Mittelalters
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RdE</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie</i>
RGRW	Religions of the Graeco-Roman World
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
<i>RSPT</i>	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie</i>
RVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
S ¹ , S ² , etc.	<i>First Sahidic Life of Pachomius, Second Sahidic Life of Pachomius, etc.</i>
SAA	Studia Antiqua Australiensia
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SBo	Recension of the <i>Life of Pachomius</i> represented by the Bo, Av, S ⁴ , S ⁵ , S ⁶ , S ⁷ , etc. (compiled and translated by Armand Veilleux, <i>Pachomian Koinonia</i> , vol. 1)
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
<i>SecCent</i>	<i>Second Century</i>
SGM	Sources gnostiques et manichéennes
SH	<i>Stobaei Hermetica</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplements to <i>Numen</i>)
<i>SMSR</i>	<i>Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPAW.PH	Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
SPNPT	Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StOR	Studies in Oriental Religions
StPatr	Studia Patristica
<i>TC</i>	<i>TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism</i>
TENT	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
Theoph	Theophaneia
<i>TJT</i>	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>

TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
TVOA	Testi del Vicino Oriente antico
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WGRV	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>YCS</i>	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Monastic Readings of the Nag Hammadi Codices

Christian H. Bull and Hugo Lundhaug

The Nag Hammadi Codices remain some of the most enigmatic manuscripts from Late Antiquity. Despite thousands of scholarly publications on the texts contained in the remains of these thirteen papyrus codices, consensus regarding the times, places, and purposes of their authorship, or their intended original readers, remains elusive. Recently, however, progress has been made regarding the producers and users of these manuscripts, which were discovered in 1945 at the Jabal al-Tarif in Upper Egypt, a cliff littered with ancient tombs and caves, situated close to the sites of the ancient Pachomian monasteries of Shenaset and Pbow.¹

Research into the question of who produced and used the Nag Hammadi Codices got a major boost through the European Research Council's funding of the University of Oslo-based research project *New Contexts for Old Texts: Unorthodox Texts and Monastic Manuscript Culture in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt* (NEWCONT), a project that ran from 2012 to 2016.² The work of this project resulted in a number of publications demonstrating the likelihood of a monastic provenance for the Nag Hammadi Codices,³ as well as a

¹ Today, these are the sites of the modern villages of al-Qasr and Faw Qibli respectively.

² The research team consisted of Hugo Lundhaug (PI), Lance Jenott and Christian H. Bull (postdocs), and Kristine Toft Rosland (PhD student), together with close collaborators Paula Tutty and Lloyd Abercrombie (PhD students), all located at the University of Oslo, Faculty of Theology.

³ See esp. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 97; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); idem, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); idem, "Production, Distribution and Ownership of Books in the Monasteries of Upper Egypt: The Evidence of the Nag Hammadi Colophons," in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical Paideia* (ed. Lillian Larsen and Samuel Rubenson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 306–25; Christian H. Bull, "Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in the Apocryphon of John and Its Monastic Manuscript-Context," in *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* (ed. Ulla Tervahauta et al.; VCSup 144; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 75–107; idem, "An Origenistic Reading of Plato in Nag Hammadi Codex VI," in *Studia Patristica LXXV: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2015. Volume 1: Studia Patristica; Platonism and the Fathers; Maximus the Confessor* (ed. Markus Vinzent; StPatr 75; Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 31–40; idem, "The Great Demon of the Air and the Punishment of Souls: The *Perfect Discourse* (NHC VI,8) and Hermetic and Monastic Demonologies," in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? Colloque international, Québec, Université*

number of studies focusing on various aspects of methodology, most notably material philology and textual fluidity, as well as manuscript dating.⁴

Laval, 29–31 mai 2015 (ed. Eric Crégheur et al.; BCNH.É 10; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 105–20; idem, “The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology* (ed. Paola Buzi; PaST Percorsi di Archeologia 5; Rome: Quasar, 2020), 133–47; Lance Jenott, “Recovering Adam’s Lost Glory: Nag Hammadi Codex II in its Egyptian Monastic Environment,” in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lance Jenott and Sarit Kattan Gräbetz; TSAJ 155; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 222–43; idem, “The *Book of the Foreigner* from Codex Tchacos,” *BASP* 57 (2020): 235–76; Hugo Lundhaug, “Origenism in Fifth-Century Upper Egypt: Shenoute of Atripe and the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *Studia Patristica LXIV: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011: Vol. 12: Ascetica; Liturgica; Orientalia; Critica et Philologica* (ed. Markus Vinzent; StPatr 64; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 217–28; idem, “Nag Hammadi Codex VII and Monastic Manuscript Culture,” in *Coptic Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Rome, September 17th–22nd, 2012, and Plenary Reports of the Ninth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Cairo, September 15th–19th, 2008* (2 Vols.; ed. Paola Buzi et al.; OLA 247; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 1177–92; idem, “Monastic Exegesis and the Female Soul in the *Exegesis on the Soul*,” in *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* (ed. Ulla Tervahauta et al.; VCSup 144; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 221–33; idem, “The *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5) as a Monastic Text,” in *Studia Patristica XCIII: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2015: Volume 19: The First Two Centuries; Apocrypha and Gnostica* (ed. Markus Vinzent; StPatr 93; Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 335–46; idem, “The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices: The Remains of a Single Monastic Library?” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 329–86; Paula Tutty, “The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Contextualizing a Fourth Century Monastic Community,” (PhD dissertation; University of Oslo, 2019); eadem, “Is the Canon of the Scriptures Closed? Recent Interest in the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Early Church* (ed. Ilaria L. E. Ramelli et al.; T&T Clark Companion; London: T&T Clark, 2021), 620–44.

⁴ See esp. Lance 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. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 55–84; Hugo 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. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 20–54; idem, “Textual Fluidity and Post-Nicene Rewriting in the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu’avons nous appris? Colloque international, Québec, Université Laval, 2931 mai 2015* (ed. Eric Crégheur et al.; BCNH.É 10; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 47–67; Hugo Lundhaug and Liv Ingeborg Lied, “Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology,” in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017),

The studies in the present volume build specifically on one of the publications that emerged from the NEWCONT project, the monograph by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in which it is argued that the most likely producers and users of these manuscripts were fourth- and/or fifth-century monastics in Upper Egypt, and that the *most likely* candidates for such monastics would be those of the Pachomian monasteries in the vicinity of the manuscripts' discovery location.⁵ It should be noted that the argument of the book concerns the *codices* as material objects, and not the authorship of the *texts* they contain.⁶ The argument is based on the combined evidence of the cartonnage documents contained in the covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices,⁷ the colophons found in some of the codices,⁸ their discovery location and dating,⁹ as well as contextual evidence for the reading of apocrypha by Egyptian monastics.¹⁰ The book also challenges alternative theories of "Gnostics" or "urban intellectuals" as the codices' producers and users.¹¹ Having assessed the available evidence, the authors conclude:

While there were also other ascetics in the area, the Pachomian monks who lived close to the Jabal al-Tarif, at the monasteries of Shenaset and Pbow, are in our view the most likely people to have owned the Nag Hammadi Codices. Even if one doubts that the owners were specifically Pachomians, the evidence from the colophons, cartonnage, location of manufacture and discovery, and from the controversial history over apocryphal books and "Origenist" teachings in Egyptian monasteries, not to mention the Coptic (not Greek) language of the texts, point overwhelmingly to a cenobitic monastic community.¹²

1–19; Hugo Lundhaug, "Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices: Selected Papers from the Conference "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices" in Berlin, 20–22 July 2018* (ed. Dylan M. Burns and Matthew Goff; NHMS 103; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 107–43. On manuscript dating, see See Hugo Lundhaug, "The Date of MS 193 in the Schøyen Collection: New Radiocarbon Evidence," *BASP* 57 (2020): 219–34; idem, "Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts: A Multi-Methodological Approach Including New Radiocarbon Evidence," in *Texts in Context: Essays on Dating and Contextualising Christian Writings of the Second and Early Third Century* (ed. Joseph Verheyden, Jens Schröter, and Tobias Nicklas; BETL 319; Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 117–42.

⁵ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*. See also idem, "Production, Distribution and Ownership."

⁶ The question of the texts' original authorship is only briefly discussed towards the end of the volume, primarily in the context of the textual fluidity of the transmission of the texts (see below).

⁷ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 46–55; 104–45.

⁸ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 178–206.

⁹ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 9–21.

¹⁰ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 146–77, 234–62.

¹¹ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 56–103.

¹² Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 256.

Importantly, the conclusions of this study open further questions for discussion. If those who manufactured and read the Nag Hammadi Codices were monastics, maybe even Pachomian monastics, what interest did they have in the texts contained in them? This is what the contributions in the present volume seek to address.

The relevance of a reading of the texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices exactly as they are found there, and in the historical context of the codices themselves and of Coptic literature, was already emphasized by Stephen Emmel in a seminal essay given at the 50-year commemoration of the discovery of the codices at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held in Philadelphia in 1995, where he stated that “The task is to read the texts exactly as we have them in the Nag Hammadi Codices in an effort to reconstruct the reading experience of whoever owned each of the Codices.”¹³ Lundhaug and Jenott make some preliminary suggestions along these lines in their monograph,¹⁴ but more in-depth studies have also been published alongside and following that volume, not least in their 2018 edited volume *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*.¹⁵ While that volume approached the Nag Hammadi Codices and their texts from a broad fourth- to fifth-century perspective, the contributions to the present volume focus specifically on the *monastic* context of the transmission, and especially reception, of the texts they contain.¹⁶ For if the codices were owned by monastics, the task at hand, following Emmel’s suggestion, is to read them in light of fourth- and fifth-century monasticism, and ask why Egyptian monks, Pachomian or otherwise, would have read such books.

1. Short History of Scholarship

The first announcement of the astounding discovery of our papyrus codices only mentioned that the fellahin who discovered them came from the area near Nag Hammadi, the village with the closest railway station, but in 1949 Jean Doresse was able to affirm that the jar containing the codices had in fact been discovered at the foot of the Jabal al-Tarif, and henceforth he referred to it as the “Chenoboskion library,” in recognition of the nearby ancient village called Chenoboskion in Greek and Shenaset in Coptic, which was the location of a

¹³ Stephen 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. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 42.

¹⁴ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 256–62.

¹⁵ Lundhaug and Jenott, eds., *Nag Hammadi Codices*.

¹⁶ While this was also the focus of some of the contributions of Lundhaug and Jenott, eds., *Nag Hammadi Codices*, the present volume is dedicated to this perspective in its entirety.

major Pachomian monastery.¹⁷ Yet, Doresse and his collaborators did not entertain the notion that the Pachomians may have been the owners of these manuscripts; the library must rather have belonged to a Gnostic sect still thriving in the area in the fourth century, it was believed, and the sectarians must have buried the books due to pressure from the nearby monasteries, and then gone underground since the Pachomian literature does not mention any conflict with Gnostics.¹⁸ In his later monograph, Doresse changed his mind and stated that the Pachomians did in fact struggle with the local Gnostics, since we know that the abbot Theodore in 367 had received Athanasius' famous Easter letter of this year – which included a list of canonical biblical writings and an attack on apocrypha – and had it translated and read aloud in his monasteries in order to combat heresy.¹⁹

For nearly thirty years after Doresse, it was taken for granted that a group of Gnostics were the owners of the library, until John Barns in 1975 published a preliminary report of his findings from an analysis of the cartonnage of the leather bindings of the codices, which turned out to contain monastic papyrus fragments.²⁰ This prompted Torgny Säve-Söderbergh in the same year to propose that the owners of the books were monks who had used the texts in order to combat heresy.²¹ Frederik Wisse, at the 1976 First International Congress of Coptic Studies, went further and pointed out that the lack of ecclesiastical control over fourth-century monasticism made it possible that there were “Gnostics” within the walls of monasteries, and that the Nag Hammadi Codices were

¹⁷ Jean Doresse and Togo Mina, “Nouveaux Textes Gnostiques Coptes Découverts en Haute-Egypte la Bibliothèque de Chenoboskion,” *VC* 3 (1949): 129–41.

¹⁸ Doresse and Mina, “Nouveaux Textes Gnostiques,” 138–39.

¹⁹ Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion: With an English Translation and Critical Evaluation of the Gospel According to Thomas* (trans. Leonard Johnston; London: Hollis & Carter, 1960), 135. On Athanasius' 39th *Festal Letter*, see, e.g., Louis-Théophile Lefort, “Théodore de Tabennési et la lettre pascale de St-Athanase sur le canon de la bible,” *Mus* 29 (1910): 205–16; David Brakke, “A New Fragment of Athanasius' Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon,” *HTR* 103 (2010): 47–66. On the translation of the letter, see Christian H. Bull, “The Coptic Translation of Epiphanius of Salamis's *Ancoratus* and the Origenist Controversy in Upper Egypt,” *ZAC* 26 (2022): 230–63.

²⁰ John W. B. Barns, “Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Preliminary Report,” in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib* (ed. Martin Krause; NHS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 9–18.

²¹ Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, “Holy Scriptures or Apologetic Documentations? The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Nag Hammadi Library,” in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque du Centre d'Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23–25 octobre 1974)* (ed. Jacques-E. Menard; NHS 7; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3–14. See also idem, “The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism,” in *Colloque international sur les textes de Nag Hammadi (Québec, 22–25 août 1978)* (ed. Bernard Barc; BCNH.É 1; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981), 74.

produced by the nearby Pachomians.²² However, after the death of Barns, John C. Shelton took over the project of publishing the cartonnage materials, and in his introduction to the 1981 publication he claimed that much of the cartonnage-material precluded the possibility of a monastic provenance.²³ For this reason, James M. Robinson, who initially embraced the idea of a Pachomian provenance in his introduction to the first edition of *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* of 1977, revised his views in the third edition of 1988, where he simply stated that the Pachomian connection remained “a tantalizing possibility.”²⁴ Soon after, a prominent scholar of Pachomian monasticism, Armand Veilleux, published a two-part article in which he minimized the importance of the cartonnage and reasserted that in his opinion monasticism and Gnosticism are two separate “universal archetypes.”²⁵ After this, the popularity of the hypothesis of a monastic provenance began to wane, even though scholars such as Jon F. Dechow, Clemens Scholten, and James E. Goehring continued to show that fourth-century monastic diversity was such that producers, owners,

²² Frederik Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 433–34. See also Henry Chadwick, “The Domestication of Gnosis,” in *The School of Valentinus* (vol. 1 of *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*; ed. Bentley Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 14–16; Roelof van den Broek, “The Present State of Gnostic Studies,” *VC* 37 (1983): 47.

²³ John C. Shelton, “Introduction,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers* (ed. John W. B. Barns, Gerald M. Browne, and John C. Shelton; NHS 16; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–11.

²⁴ James M. Robinson, “Introduction,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (1st ed. Leiden: Brill, 1977), 16–21, (3rd ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 1–26 quote at 17. In the first edition, before Shelton’s publication of the cartonnage, the Pachomian identity of the owners was accepted. See also Charles W. Hedrick, “Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the Sitz im Leben of the Nag Hammadi Library,” *NovT* 22 (1980): 78–94; Bernhard Büchler, *Die Armut der Armen: Über den ursprünglichen Sinn der mönchischen Armut* (München: Kösel, 1980), 141–44, claims that if the NHC derive from a Pachomian monastery they must have been read without the knowledge of Pachomius, possibly under his successor Theodore.

²⁵ Armand Veilleux, “Monachisme et Gnose. Première partie: Le cénobitisme Pachômien et la bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi,” *LTP* 40 (1984): 275–94; idem, “Monachisme et gnose. Deuxième partie: contacts littéraires et doctrinaux entre monachisme et gnose,” *LTP* 41 (1985): 3–24; cf. idem, “Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring; SAC; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 271–306. In fact, Veilleux leaves open the possibility that Pachomian monks produced and buried the manuscripts, but simply avers that this has not yet been proven. See also Antoine Guillaumont, “Gnose et monachisme,” in *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: Actes du Colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve, 11-14 mars 1980* (ed. Julien Ries; Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut orientaliste, 1982), 301–10. Against this argument, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 264–65.

and readers of the Nag Hammadi texts could easily have found a home in the monasteries.²⁶ The majority of scholars were only too happy to revert to the hypothesis of Gnostic owners.

2. Alternative Hypotheses

2.1 Gnostics

The suggestion that the NHC were owned by Gnostic sectarians rests primarily on the testimony of Epiphanius of Salamis, that he encountered such Gnostics in Egypt, together with testimonies of Didymus the Blind and Serapion of Thmuis concerning Manichaeans.²⁷ Epiphanius unfortunately does not give us a very lucid picture of his run-in with “the Gnostics” (his sect #26). He states that it happened in his youth, hence likely in the late 320s or early 330s, and that women including “the Egyptian wife of the chief cook” were in charge of “flirty-fishing” prospective members.²⁸ Only after reading their books did the young Epiphanius understand that these women adhered to heretical myths, and he promptly procured the names of the heretics *hidden within the church*, rattling them out to the local bishops so that eighty people were expelled from the city. The mention of several bishops indicates that this was during a synod in Alexandria, where Epiphanius spent time in his youth. We are thus not speaking of a Gnostic sect in Upper Egypt, but – if Epiphanius can be taken at

²⁶ See Jon F. Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* (NAPSPMS 13; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988); idem, “The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies (with Appendix 2015),” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 11–51; Clemens Scholten, “Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer,” *JAC* 31 (1988): 144–72; James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (SAC; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999); idem, “The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More,” in *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999: Ascetica, Gnostica, Liturgica, Orientalia* (ed. Maurice F. Wiles and Edward Y. Yarnold; StPatr 35; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 234–53; see also Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (SAC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Lance Jenott and Elaine H. Pagels, “Antony’s Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt” *J ECS* 18 (2010): 557–89.

²⁷ Henri-Charles Puech, and Jean Doresse, “Nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Égypte,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 92^e année 1 (1948): 91.

²⁸ See Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, “Flirty Fishing and Poisonous Serpents: Epiphanius of Salamis Inside His Medical Chest Against Heresies,” in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past* (ed. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau, and Jörg Rüpke; RVV 68; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 93–108

face value – of a group around eighty people who *were part of the church of Alexandria*, and evidently went undetected as regular members of the Christian church until the youthful heresy-hunter rooted them out. In the wake of the influential deconstructions of the term “Gnosticism” by Michael A. Williams and Karen L. King,²⁹ the idea of Gnostic sectarians in fourth-century Egypt has fallen out of favor. If anything, the testimony of Epiphanius shows that Christians who were attracted to this kind of myth could happily find their place in the same church as Nicene Christians, perhaps constituting an extra-curricular study-group devoted to esoteric interpretation of Scripture.³⁰

Another contemporary “Gnostic” mentioned by Epiphanius is Peter the Archontic, who supposedly belonged to many a Gnostic sect in his youth, yet became a presbyter in the Church, and was only found out and deposed by a bishop named Aetius, who must be Aetius of Lydda.³¹ Defrocked, he went to Arabia, and Epiphanius implies he consorted with the Ebionites and Nazoreans there. In his old age he returned to Palestine before the end of the reign of Constantius (361), where he settled in a cave as a hermit, gathered other ascetics who called him “father,” and “wore a sheep’s fleece on the outside, and it was not realized that on the inside he was a ravening wolf.”³² It was only “from

²⁹ Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); idem, “Was There a Gnostic Religion? Strategies for a Clearer Analysis,” in *Was There a Gnostic Religion?* (ed. Antti Marjanen; Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 87; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005), 55–79; Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2003).

³⁰ Cf. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 64–68.

³¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.1.3–7. See Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 68–69. Andrew S. Jacobs, *Epiphanius of Salamis: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 78, no doubt correctly identifies Aetius as the bishop of Lydda, placing Peter’s expulsion from the presbytery before the 340s. The bishop cannot be Aetius of Antioch, denounced by Epiphanius as the founder of the heresy of the Anomoeans in *Panarion* 56, where he also quotes Aetius’ *Syntagmaton* in full and refutes it point by point.

³² Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.1.3: ἔξωθεν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθῶς κώδιον προβάτου ἠμφίεστο, ἠγνοεῖτο δὲ ἐνδοθεν λύκος ὑπάρχων ἄρπαξ (Karl Holl, *Epiphanius* [3 vols.; GCS 25, 31, 37; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915, 1922, 1933]; trans. Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1–46)* [2nd ed.; NHMS 63; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 283–84). The Armenian Eutactus is said (*Pan.* 40.1.2) to have received his heretical teachings from Peter at the end of the reign of Constantius in Palestine. Presumably Epiphanius exposed him shortly after this, when he was still head of the monastery near Eleutheropolis (see Epiphanius, *Anchoratus*, proem.), not far from where Peter dwelled, close to Hebron. See Bentley Layton with David Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 243–46, who place the encounter between Epiphanius and Peter in 350. It is more economical to presume that Epiphanius found out about the proclivities of Peter because of his teaching of Eutactus, ca. 360–361. See Oliver Kösters, *Die Trinitätslehre des Epiphanius*

things he had whispered to certain persons”³³ that Epiphanius himself claimed to have exposed and anathematized him, so that he had to move to a cave, “abhorred by all and isolated from the brotherhood and from most who cared for their salvation.”³⁴ Again, taking Epiphanius on his word, we see that Peter was *not* isolated in a Gnostic sect, but rather first served as a presbyter and later as a monastic (wearing the *melotes* sheepskin),³⁵ apparently respected by most Christians, until his heterodox theological views were twice uncovered, and he was twice deposed, first from his priesthood, then from his monastic status. One wonders what Peter would say in his own defense against the accusations of Epiphanius, who was not averse to painting his opponents with the heresiological tarbrush.³⁶ In any case, Peter was settled in Palestine, and for some time Arabia, and had no connection to Egypt as far as we can tell. The story of Epiphanius can thus not be used to shed light on supposed fourth century Upper Egyptian Gnostic sects.³⁷ Far from it, it indicates that people who were venerated as monks could harbor views incompatible with the orthodoxy of bishops (whether Nicene or Arian), and read suppressed literature, like Peter who as an “Archontic” supposedly used the *Ascension of Isaiah*, books of Allogenes, and a *Greater and Lesser Harmony*.³⁸

von Salamis: *Kommentar zum „Ancoratus“* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 29–33, on Epiphanius in Palestine.

³³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.1.6: ἀφ’ ὧν εἰς ὧτά τινων ἐψιθύρισε ῥημάτων (Holl, *Epiphanius*).

³⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.1.7: καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ λοιπόν, βδελυχθεὶς ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ μονωθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς ἀδελφότητος καὶ ἀπὸ πλείστων τῶν τῆς ζωῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐπιμελομένων (Holl, *Epiphanius*). Cf. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 68–69. Jacobs, *Epiphanius*, 78–80, accuses Epiphanius of inconsistency, since Peter lives in a cave as a monk before and after the exposure of Epiphanius. But this misses the point: Epiphanius says Peter before his exposure lived in a cave as a seeming hermit, venerated by all, whereas afterwards he also lived in a cave, but now shunned by all, with no pretense of genuine monkhood.

³⁵ See Ingvald Sælid Gilhus, *Clothes and Monasticism in Ancient Christian Egypt: New Perspective on Religious Garments* (London: Routledge, 2021), 136–37, who suggests that Epiphanius does not use the traditional term *melotes* so as not to sully the venerable garb by association with Peter.

³⁶ See Aline Pourkier, *L’hérésologie chez Épiphane de Salamine* (Christianisme antique 4; Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), 488. Pourkier also supposes (*ibid.*, 39–41) that Epiphanius encountered more groups in his time in Palestine, but this is far from certain.

³⁷ Contra Alastair Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 26.

³⁸ See Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 69; Jenott, “*Book of the Foreigner*,” 271–76.

2.2 Manichaeans

Didymus the Blind and Sarapion of Thmuis, who have also been invoked for the presence of Gnostics in fourth-century Egypt, do not write about Gnostics in the sense of adherents of the mythical system variously called Classical Gnosticism, or Sethian Gnosticism, to which several of the Nag Hammadi texts can be said to belong, but rather about Manichaeans.³⁹ No one has so far provided a sustained argument for the Manichaean provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices, though Przemysław Piwowarczyk and Ewa Wipszycka have recently asserted that “the Manichaean connection seems equally – if not more – promising as the monastic one.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, despite the presence of Manichaeans in Kellis, Medinet Madi in the Fayyum, and Lycopolis at least in the late third century, there are no indications of any Manichaean presence on the Dishna plain surrounding Jabal al-Tarif, where the Nag Hammadi Codices were discovered, nor in Upper Egypt at all.⁴¹ Naturally, we do not dispute that Manichaeans would likely have been very interested in our *texts*, and indeed they also read and produced texts in Coptic. We also grant that Manichaeism may have influenced the development of monasticism, as Guy G. Stroumsa has proposed,⁴² and that early Pachomian coenobitism may have borrowed elements from Manichaeism, as James E. Goehring has suggested.⁴³ Moreover, there may be Manichaean influence on some of the texts in the Nag Hammadi Codices, as Timothy Pettipiece, René Falkenberg, and Dylan Burns have

³⁹ Didymus the Blind, *Contra Manichaeos*, and several references in his commentaries, referring also to a meeting with a Manichaean; but again, this would be in Alexandria or its environs, not Upper Egypt. See Byard Bennett, “Didymus the Blind’s Knowledge of Manichaeism,” in *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and its World* (ed. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn; NHMS 50; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 49–50; Serapion of Thmuis, *Contra Manichaeos*, provides no concrete information about Egyptian Manichaeism. See Oliver Herbel, *Sarapion of Thmuis: Against the Manichaeans and Pastoral Letters* (ECS 14; Strathfield: St Pauls, 2011).

⁴⁰ Przemysław Piwowarczyk and Ewa Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin of the Nag Hammadi Codices?” *Adamantius* 23 (2017): 457. See also Alexandr Khosoryev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Probleme des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (ASKÄ 7; Altenberge: Oros, 1995), 104–31.

⁴¹ The reason why Lundhaug and Jenott do not discuss a possible Manichaean provenance for the Nag Hammadi Codices is not that they were unaware of the Kellis discoveries, as Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka claim, but rather that these discoveries throw little light on the question of the provenance of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts. See Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 235 n. 4.

⁴² Guy G. Stroumsa, “Monachisme et Marranisme chez les Manichéens d’Égypte,” *Nu-men* 29 (1982): 184–201.

⁴³ James E. Goehring, “Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt,” *J ECS* 5 (1997): 78.

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