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The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books

Edited by

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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 Grïbetz; 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; Bernward 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.

shown.⁴⁴ Despite all this, the absence of Manichaeans in the area of discovery must be restated; furthermore – and importantly – there are no Manichaean texts included in the codices, no indications of Manichaeism in the colophons and scribal notes, nor are there any traces of Manichaeans in the cartonnage.⁴⁵

2.3 An Individual Owner

Since Jean Doresse had claimed that the jar containing the Nag Hammadi Codices had been buried in a tomb at the foot of Jabal al-Tarif, Martin Krause suggested that the books had likely been buried as grave goods along with their wealthy owner, who was a Gnostic.⁴⁶ This suggestion did not gain much traction, until it was revived by Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount, who proposed that the books may have served as Christian “Books of the Dead,” thus being a survival of the ancient Egyptian religion.⁴⁷ Yet, the suggestion that the Nag Hammadi Codices were owned and used by a single individual has the major flaw that it does not take into consideration the combined evidence of the colophons and cartonnage documents that indicate that the codices were produced and used by a community. Moreover, the suggestion that they may have been buried as “Books of the Dead” has been convincingly rejected by Paula Tutty, who shows not only that the purported Christian custom of using books as grave goods has been overstated, but also that the Egyptian Book of the Dead had long since gone out of use by the fourth century and there was thus no longer such a religious custom for the Christians to take over.

⁴⁴ Timothy T. Pettipiece, “Towards a Manichaean Reading of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 3–4 (2012): 43–54; René Falkenberg, “What Has Nag Hammadi to Do with Medinet Madi? The Case of *Eugnostos* and Manichaeism,” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Context of Fourth- and Fifth-century Christianity in Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 261–86; Dylan M. Burns, “Gnosis Undomesticated: Archon-Seduction, Demon Sex, and Sodomites in the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1),” *Gnosis* 1–2 (2016): 140–44.

⁴⁵ See Bull, “Panopolis Connection,” 135.

⁴⁶ Doresse, *Secret Books*, 134; Martin Krause, “Die Texte von Nag Hammadi,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 221, 241–43, states that the monastic cartonnage does not matter much since the codices could have been produced in monasteries and then sold to non-Christians (“Auch den in den Bucheinbänden verklebten Papyri aus den Klöstern Pachoms kommt keine entscheidende Aussagekraft zu, weil diese Codices zwar in den Klöstern hergestellt, aber an Nichtchristen zum Beschriften verkauft worden sein konnten,” quote from p. 242).

⁴⁷ Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount, “Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 399–419; Nicola Denzey Lewis, “Death on the Nile: Egyptian Codices, Gnosticism, and Early Christian Books of the Dead,” in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature: Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson* (ed. April D. DeConick et al.; NHMS 85; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 161–80; eadem, “Rethinking the Rethinking of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *BSR* 45 (2016): 39–45.

Furthermore, as Tutty shows, the cemetery mentioned by Doresse was not confirmed by archaeological excavations and likely never existed in the first place.⁴⁸

2.4 Urban Intellectuals

In 1995, Alexandr Khosroyev published a monograph proposing that the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices were urban intellectuals of an eclectically esoteric bent.⁴⁹ This group was neither unambiguously Christian nor a sect *per se*, rather the variety of literature in the Nag Hammadi Codices would reflect their non-committal attitude. Khosroyev proffers Zosimus of Panopolis as an example of the kind of person who might have owned the codices, as someone with a working knowledge of Greek philosophy and an interest in Gnostic scriptures and Hermetica.⁵⁰

First of all, Khosroyev neglects to mention in which city these intellectuals lived. The “metropolis” of the Diospolite nome, nearby Diospolis Parva, shows no archaeological signs of habitation around its Roman-era temple after the reign of Gallienus, and must have been much reduced in the fourth century.⁵¹ It is thus unlikely that a group of educated elite urbanites dwelled here in the fourth century. Panopolis is a better candidate, and we could perhaps envision the children or grandchildren of Zosimus’ circle as the owners, but one would also have to explain why these Panopolitans saw fit to travel all the way to the Jabal al-Tarif to bury their books right under the noses of the Pachomians.⁵²

There is no doubt that Zosimus and his circle, like the Manichaeans, would have been interested in most of the texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Yet if urban intellectuals owned the codices, why are the texts written in Coptic and not Greek, the language of intellectual culture in Greco-Roman Egypt? Stephen Emmel has attempted to answer this question by proposing that such a group may have translated the texts into Coptic in order to make a new, Christianized

⁴⁸ Paula Tutty, “Books of the Dead or Books with the Dead,” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 287–326; see also Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 5–6; 17 n. 49; Bull, “Panopolis Connection,” 134; Bull, “Women, Angels,” 82 n. 29.

⁴⁹ Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Probleme des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (ASKÄ 7; Altenberge: Oros, 1995).

⁵⁰ Khosroyev, *Bibliothek*, 99.

⁵¹ William M. Flinders Petrie, *Diospolis Parva: The Cemeteries of Abadiyeh and Hu* (London: The Egypt Exploration Fund, 1901), 56–57. The Coptic monastery and cemetery mentioned by Petrie postdate the fourth century.

⁵² See Bull, “Panopolis Connection,” 135. It may also be noted that the Nag Hammadi colophons do not resemble the way Zosimus addresses his correspondent, Theosebeia. On the NHC colophons, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 178–206.

version of authentically Egyptian esoteric wisdom.⁵³ But there is no evidence for this taking place. A much less cumbersome explanation is simply that the texts were translated from Greek to Coptic so they could be read by, or to, people who did not understand Greek – or who did not understand Greek as well as they understood Coptic. Again, a monastic community, like the one depicted in the *Life of Pachomius*, with some bilingual members and many more who did not understand Greek, accounts well for the Coptic language of the codices.⁵⁴

2.5 Non-Pachomian Monks

It has rightly been pointed out that the Pachomians were not the only monks in Upper Egypt, and that other monastics with a less clear record of staunch orthodoxy (however *post hoc*) may be viable candidates as owners and producers of the codices. We do not wish to reject this possibility and would like to reiterate that the Pachomians are simply offered as the *most likely* of potential monastic readers given the sources that are currently available. Veilleux states that there were other monastic groups in the area, “both orthodox and heterodox,” as well as independent hermits attested in the Pachomian lives.⁵⁵ But, not counting the originally unaffiliated individual monasteries that chose to join the Pachomian monastic order,⁵⁶ there is no other monastic order established on the Dishna plain in the fourth century that we know of, and though unaffiliated monks may have been present, we have no direct evidence of them.⁵⁷ The other monks mentioned in the *vitae* may have come from anywhere in Egypt, and there seems to be no reason to suppose, as Veilleux does, that the disciples of Palamon remained near Sheneset unaffected by the Pachomian expansion.⁵⁸

⁵³ Stephen Emmel, “The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions,” in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno E. Popkes, and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 48. Cf. Christian H. Bull, “Hermes Between Pagans and Christians: The Nag Hammadi Hermetica in Context,” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 244–45.

⁵⁴ See Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 90–102.

⁵⁵ Veilleux, “Monachisme I,” 282. See discussion of the evidence in Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 33–34.

⁵⁶ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 30–34.

⁵⁷ None of the monks and monasteries mentioned in the *vitae* cited by Veilleux, “Monachisme I,” 280 n. 29, are situated near Sheneset or Pbow.

⁵⁸ The *Life of Pachomius*, SBo 18, states that when Palamon was on his deathbed they called for Pachomius, and when the latter returned south they stated “we have become orphans.” See Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* (3 vols.; CS 45–47; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980–1982), 40. It seems likely that the Apa Ebonh who joined his monastery in

Veilleux also claims that a Meletian provenance is quite as likely as any other hypothesis advanced.⁵⁹ But again, he can only mention Meletians living in the region near Antony, that is to say in Lower Egypt. Of course, there are also Melitian materials from the archives of Paieous, Paphnouthios and Nephros, all likely related to the monastery of Hathor in the upper Lycopolite nome, but this is still far north of Jabal al-Tarif.⁶⁰ While Melitians or adherents of other monastic groups certainly cannot be ruled out as owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices, it must be remembered that, unlike the Pachomians, we have no evidence of their presence in the area close to where the codices were discovered.

The letter of Paphnutius to Pachomius in the cartonnage of Codex VII remains an important testimony. Even though it has been pointed out that both names were common, it seems somewhat far-fetched to propose that another monk named Paphnutius wrote to another monastic leader named Pachomius, whom he also addresses as a superior.⁶¹ The simplest explanation still seems to be that this letter was written by the Pachomian Paphnutius to the founder of the order. This is in itself no smoking gun for the Pachomian provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices, but when the cumulative evidence of the find-spot in the Pachomian heartland, the cartonnage, the codicology, and the colophons are taken into consideration, then the Pachomians remain the *most plausible* owners and producers of the physical objects known as the Nag Hammadi Codices.

3. Recent Criticism of the Monastic Hypothesis

Although the monastic hypothesis has inspired a new generation of scholars to read the Nag Hammadi treatises in light of fourth-century monasticism, its re-assertion has not been equally well received by everyone. Two criticisms in particular must be briefly discussed: first the arguments of those who cast doubt on James Robinson's discovery story; and second, a polemic against Lundhaug and Jenott's arguments for a connection between the Nag Hammadi Codices and monasticism in Egypt.

Sheneset to the Pachomian federation (SBo 50; G¹ 54b) must have been a successor of Palamon, after the brothers there became "orphans," *pace* Veilleux, "Monachisme I," 280.

⁵⁹ Veilleux, "Monachisme I," 280 n. 30, 288.

⁶⁰ Goehring "Monastic Diversity," 64–72; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 44–46, 235–38.

⁶¹ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 136–39.

3.1 Criticism of Robinson's Discovery Story

In recent years there have been several attempts to undermine James Robinson's account of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices⁶² – and by extension the viability of the monastic hypothesis.⁶³ Yet, many of these arguments rest on questionable presuppositions and, in the end, do not present viable alternatives.⁶⁴

Robinson's recent critics privilege the accounts given by Doresse,⁶⁵ as well as the opinion of Kasser and Krause,⁶⁶ despite the fact that Robinson, contrary to Doresse, Kasser, and Krause, had access to the sources closest to the discovery and also conducted by far the most thorough examination of it, including extensive interviews in the surrounding villages.⁶⁷ These interviews are important. As Dylan Burns points out:

⁶² James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Codices: A General Introduction to the Nature and Significance of the Coptic Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi* (2nd rev. ed.; Claremont: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1977), 2–3; idem, "The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *BA* 42 (1979): 206–24; idem, "From the Cliff to Cairo: The Story of the Discoverers and the Middlemen of the Nag Hammadi Codices," 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), 21–58; idem, *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Introduction*. Leiden: Brill, 1984, 3–5; idem, "The Discovering and Marketing of Coptic Manuscripts: The Nag Hammadi Codices and the Bodmer Papyri," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring; SAC; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 2–25; idem, "Introduction," 22–26; idem, "The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *JCS* 11 (2009): 1–21; idem, *The Nag Hammadi Story* (2 vols.; NHMS 86; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 20–40.

⁶³ Denzey Lewis and Blunt, "Rethinking the Origins"; Denzey Lewis, "Rethinking the Rethinking"; Mark Goodacre, "How Reliable is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?" *JSNT* 35 (2013): 303–22.

⁶⁴ See esp. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 11–21; Dylan M. Burns, "Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories," *BSR* 45 (2016): 5–11; Brent Nongbri, "Finding Early Christian Books at Nag Hammadi and Beyond." *BSR* 45 (2016): 11–19.

⁶⁵ Doresse, *Secret Books*, 116–36.

⁶⁶ Kasser and Krause's doubts regarding Robinson's reconstruction are famously stated in the first footnote of James M. Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Introduction* (ed. James M. Robinson; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 1–102. It is stated here that they "do not consider as assured anything more than the core of the story (the general location and approximate date of the discovery), the rest not having for them more than the value of stories and fables that one can collect in popular Egyptian circles thirty years after an event whose exceptional significance protagonists could not at the time understand" (ibid., 1 n. 1).

⁶⁷ Jean Doresse spent only two days at Nag Hammadi in 1950 and conducted the rest of his investigations in Cairo during extended stays from 1947 to 1953 (Robinson, "Introduction," 1). As Robinson points out, "Jean Doresse did not identify and hence did not interview any of the principals involved prior to the material reaching the two main Cairo antiquities dealers Phokion J. Tano and Albert Eid, and hence his publication of the story a generation

If there is a cornerstone upon which the veracity of Robinson's account as a whole stands or falls, it is occupied chiefly ... by Raghīb Andarawus at al-Qasr – an individual unmentioned by Doriesse, Kasser, Krause, Goodacre, and Denzey Lewis and Blount, but who Robinson interviewed repeatedly from 1975–1978, and who told his own story of his involvement with the codices at a panel entitled “A Report on the Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices” on 10 December 1976 at the meeting of the International Committee for the Nag Hammadi Codices in Cairo.⁶⁸

At this meeting he appeared together with another important informant of Robinson, by the name of Bibawī.⁶⁹ Not only did Andarawus and Bibawī corroborate Mohammad Ali al-Samman's claim to be the discoverer of the Nag Hammadi Codices and the veracity of the blood-feud in which he was involved, but their presence at this meeting also invalidates a significant aspect of Kasser and Krause's criticism, quoted by Robinson's recent critics,⁷⁰ that Robinson's informants were not available for questioning by others.⁷¹ Moreover, as Burns succinctly puts it:

if anyone has silenced the subaltern in relating the Nag Hammadi discovery, it is Kasser and Krause, who, present at the meeting of the International Committee for the Nag Hammadi Codices in Cairo in 1976 when two Egyptians recounted their experiences regarding the codices, went and dismissed these Copts' testimony entirely, as they denounced Robinson's rendering of it.⁷²

At the end of the day, while one may question the veracity of some of the details of the accounts of the discovery given by Muhammad Ali al-Samman and others, we see little reason to doubt that he and his companions found the Nag Hammadi Codices in a sealed jar by the Jabal al-Tarif – either buried somewhere in the talus or in one of the caves.⁷³ Moreover, it is worth pointing out once more that both Doriesse and Robinson pinpoint the same limited area by the Jabal al-Tarif as their preferred site of discovery, and that even Kasser and Krause considered “as assured” “the general location” of the discovery.⁷⁴

ago did not go beyond ‘the general location and approximate date of the discovery’” (Robinson, “Introduction,” 1 n. 1). Robinson himself conducted interviews with the discoverers and middlemen during multiple visits to the Nag Hammadi area in 1966, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1978, and 1980 (see *ibid.*).

⁶⁸ Burns, “Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories,” 6–7.

⁶⁹ Burns, “Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories,” 7.

⁷⁰ See Denzey Lewis and Blunt, “Rethinking the Origins,” 400; Goodacre, “How Reliable,” 308–10.

⁷¹ See Burns, “Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories,” 6–8.

⁷² Burns, “Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories,” 9. Cf. also Nongbri, “Finding Early Christian Books,” 17–18.

⁷³ See the map in Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 15. It should be noted that the latter possibility is rejected by Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 2:1148.

⁷⁴ See Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 1:11; Robinson, “Introduction,” 1 n. 1. As Robinson puts it, although the excavations conducted in the mid-70s did not produce any evidence

Moreover, Mark Goodacre as well as Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount doubt Robinson's account of the blood-feud between families from the adjacent villages of al-Qasr and Hamrah Dum. Ignoring the real significance of the blood-feud in Robinson's account, they claim his description to be the result of an orientalizing western perspective. However, the existence of blood-feuds and general lawlessness in this area of Egypt is far from something Robinson made up. Not only are blood-feuds well-known and common in the Egyptian countryside, but the particular blood-feud referred to by Robinson and his informant, Mohammad Ali al-Samman, is well-documented.⁷⁵ In this regard there is also considerable continuity between the situation in this part of Egypt shortly after the Second World War up until recent times.⁷⁶ A relatively recent newspaper report, dated August 31, 2014, describes the situation in Hamrah Dum as follows:

Villagers are walking around carrying guns and rifles for self-defence; no women are seen in the streets, the small police office chain-locked, and the village's medical center deserted with only some decaying posters of medical instructions hanging on its old walls. That is how things look like in Hamra Doum, or known as "the Village of Blood and Fire."⁷⁷

The report also mentions "the revenge issues in the village," and the fact that no less than the governor of Qena had been called upon "to launch a reconciliation initiative between three main fighting families in Hamra Doum."⁷⁸ Moreover, the function of the blood-feud in Robinson's account is not simply to add spice to the story of the discovery, but it serves as the most important

verifying the site of the discovery, "the many local reports agree on the identity of the discoverer and of the site of the find at the Jabal al-Tarif, specifically the same southern part of the foot of the cliff that had been pointed out to Doresse in 1950" (Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 2:1118). These facts are glossed over by Robinson's recent critics, Goodacre and Denzey Lewis and Blount.

⁷⁵ Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 20–27, 42–43.

⁷⁶ One may compare the accounts given by Robinson, as well as Doresse's previously unpublished account of his visit to the site of the discovery (published in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 1:78–92), with recent accounts such as, e.g., Yassin Gaber, "Tea and Guns with the Sa'idi of Egypt," *Roadsandkingdoms.com* (<http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2014/tea-and-guns-with-the-saidi-of-egypt/>). See also Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad, "The Region of Upper Egypt: Identity and Change," in *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change* (ed. Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), esp. 13–15.

⁷⁷ "Feature: Upper Egypt's village of 'blood and fire' appeals for services, security," http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2014-08/31/content_33387179.htm. See also the report on the situation in Egypt, dated December 12, 2001, compiled by The Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland entitled "Information on Blood Feuds, Including Information on any Police Protection Available," (<http://www.refworld.org/publisher,RDCI,,4f1025b62,0.html>).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

means by which the discovery is dated, and also provides the reason why Muhammad Ali had not dared to return to the site of discovery before Robinson managed to convince him to do so many years later.

Furthermore, Denzey Lewis and Blount also regard Robinson's description of Mohammad Ali's alleged fear of jinn to be fanciful, and claim that rural Egyptians "do not fear *jinni* in bottles," attributing this part of Robinson's account as well to "orientalizing elements" that they label "relics of a bygone era in Egyptian archaeology."⁷⁹ However, rather than discrediting Robinson, this statement only betrays their own unfamiliarity with rural Egyptian folk beliefs.⁸⁰ Indeed, while accusing Robinson of Orientalism, these modern critics themselves dismiss the accounts of the local Egyptians while also seeming unaware of the realities on the ground in Upper Egypt. And one must also not forget that belief in spirits or other supernatural entities is pervasive among the majority of the world's population, even in first-world countries.

3.2 Criticism of The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices

Secondly, we need to address in more detail a polemical review of Lundhaug and Jenott's *Monastic Origins* by Polish papyrologists Przemysław Piwowarczyk and Ewa Wipszycka, since it in several ways misrepresents the thesis and arguments of the book.⁸¹ We have already discussed part of their criticism above, but a few additional points deserve brief discussion.

⁷⁹ Denzey Lewis and Blount, "Rethinking the Origins," 418.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., El-Sayed El-Aswad, *Religion and Folk Cosmology: Scenarios of the Visible and Invisible in Rural Egypt* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 39–41, 71.

⁸¹ The review article by Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, "A Monastic Origin of the Nag Hammadi Codices?" is indeed remarkable for its hostile tone as well as for its many misrepresentations. For instance, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka claim that Lundhaug and Jenott, in their discussion of the names Eugnostos and Gongessos in the colophon of NHC III, "do not give any source-rooted (sic!) example of a change of the name or of adoption of a spiritual name; they cannot do it, because such a practice did not exist in Egyptian monasticism" ("A Monastic Origin," 454). Yet, Lundhaug and Jenott do cite such examples in their discussion of this topic on the very page to which the reviewers refer (*Monastic Origins*, 193). Again, when Lundhaug and Jenott argue that there is no evidence of "Gnostics" in Egypt in the fourth century, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka claim that they ignore the evidence of Epiphanius ("A Monastic Origin," 441), whereas in fact they discuss Epiphanius' testimony at length, arguing *inter alia*: "There is little reason to doubt that Epiphanius encountered Christians in Egypt whom he regarded as heretics. But what is important for our current discussion is that the reliable part of Epiphanius' eye-witness testimony actually calls into question [the] idea that such people belonged to a 'Gnostic cult movement'" (Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 64–69, quotation from p. 67). Elsewhere, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka discuss the negative views of Athanasius regarding the reading of apocrypha, and evidence of censorship in antiquity, but neglect to mention that all of this is in fact discussed at length in Lundhaug and Jenott's book (Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, "A Monastic Origin," 441; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, e.g., 146–52 [in a section entitled "Censors and

Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka maintain that Lundhaug and Jenott should have discussed the identity of the authors and readers of what the reviewers refer to as the “Gnostic” texts *before the rise of monasticism*.⁸² This, however, is not the purpose of Lundhaug and Jenott’s book, which focuses on the identity of those who produced and read the Nag Hammadi Codices – the material artifacts which can safely be dated after the advent of monasticism. It must again be emphasized that the main argument of Lundhaug and Jenott’s book is that the Nag Hammadi Codices were produced and used by Egyptian monastics. The book does *not* argue that all the works contained in these codices were *authored* in the same context. These works had highly different transmission histories and in a number of cases no doubt ultimately derive from a time, place, and context of authorship far removed from the monasteries of Upper Egypt. Conversely, some of the works had *shorter* histories of transmission, and we should not rule out by default that *some* of the texts may have been authored close to the time, place, and context of the Nag Hammadi Codices themselves. Moreover, considering the fluid nature of the transmission of this type of literature in late antique manuscript culture, we should not be surprised to find evidence of adaptation to the contexts through which these works may have passed in transmission. Even works authored long before the fourth century may show traces of the fourth-century context(s) in which they were copied and read.⁸³ Arguments for the existence and importance of specific adaptations of this sort must of course be made on a case-by-case basis.⁸⁴ In their

Symphathizers”]; 164, 166, 169, 175, 182, 205, 239, 249). Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka also question Lundhaug and Jenott’s emphasis on the presence of works of Origen in monasteries (“A Monastic Origin,” 445), though it is made abundantly clear throughout the book that this is important since the reading of apocryphal books is associated in many sources with Origen or “Origenists” (Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 35–38, 175–76; 238–56). This is only a small sample of the many misrepresentations of the review, and a final example will have to suffice. Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka attempt to dismiss the evidence of the colophon in Codex VII, arguing that the term “fatherhood” does not *necessarily* mean “abbot” (“A Monastic Origin,” 453). But Lundhaug and Jenott already admitted as much, and merely argue, on the basis of much cited evidence, that the term most probably refers to a monastic superior in *the context of this particular colophon* (Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 180–82).

⁸² Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 441. They also state with confidence that these texts already circulated in Egypt not only in Greek, but also in Coptic, prior to the advent of monasticism, but there is in fact no concrete evidence of any of these texts existing in Coptic prior to the fourth century.

⁸³ Cf. Lundhaug and Lied, “Studying Snapshots”; Lundhaug, “An Illusion of Textual Stability”; idem, “Textual Fluidity.”

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Bull, “Women, Angels”; idem, “An Origenistic Reading”; idem, “Great Demon”; Jenott, “Reading Variants”; Lundhaug, “An Illusion of Textual Stability”; idem, “Dialogue of the Savior”; idem, “Monastic Exegesis”; idem, “Textual Fluidity”; René Falkenberg, “The Making of a Secret Book of John: Nag Hammadi Codex III in Light of New Philology,” in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture*,

book, Lundhaug and Jenott do not argue against the circulation of any of the Nag Hammadi texts outside a monastic context, and doing so would indeed have been ludicrous. They simply argue that *these particular codices* derive from such a context and that the texts they contain may have been altered, to greater or lesser degree, to fit that context.⁸⁵

Piowarczyk and Wipszycka assert that Lundhaug and Jenott “entirely ignore the fact that even though monks did read apocrypha, they were not their only readers.”⁸⁶ But obviously they do no such thing. The argument of the book is simply that the most likely readers of the apocrypha *as they appear in the Nag Hammadi Codices* were upper Egyptian monks, most likely belonging to the Pachomian monastic federation. Lundhaug and Jenott do not argue that it was monastics who authored the *Gospel of Thomas*, for instance, or who produced and used the Oxyrhynchus fragments attesting to the circulation of this work in Greek, as Piowarczyk and Wipszycka imply.⁸⁷ What their book does argue is that the Nag Hammadi Codex in which an entire version of the *Gospel of Thomas* has been preserved in Coptic was produced and read by monastics, and that these monastics *may* even have rewritten or edited certain parts in order to make it more suitable for their context of use.⁸⁸

Another point on which Piowarczyk and Wipszycka take issue with Lundhaug and Jenott is in their evaluation of the nature and significance of the cartonnage evidence. Piowarczyk and Wipszycka repeat the “wastepaper dealer” explanation for how the monastic letters ended up in the cartonnage of

Textual Fluidity, and New Philology (ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug; TUGAL 175; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 85–125.

⁸⁵ Piowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 449, state that “the idea that the *Gospel of Philip* could have been created in the course of Origenist disputes (p. 246) seems to be too radical (it could have been just rewritten or supplemented).” However, when one takes a look at page 246 in *Monastic Origins*, one finds that what is argued there is simply that “the *Gospel of Philip* seems to reflect the theological debates of the Origenist controversy in Egypt, and may even be responding to anti-Origenist polemics in its own unique interpretations.” What is argued here, using the word “reflect,” is in fact nothing more than what Piowarczyk and Wipszycka themselves suggest, namely that the text seems at least to have been rewritten. Lundhaug and Jenott do not argue for the “Origenist origin of [the] text,” as Piowarczyk and Wipszycka try to present it (*ibid.*), but rather that the text in several ways echoes the debates about Origenism and Origen’s theology that were current at the time when the Nag Hammadi Codices were produced, which may very well have been the result of rewriting.

⁸⁶ Piowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 450.

⁸⁷ Piowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 451.

⁸⁸ We would of course agree with Piowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 451, that texts like “the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary* seem to have enjoyed comparable popularity,” but take issue with their suggestion that Lundhaug and Jenott assume that “all readers of such texts collectively joined the monastic movement” (*ibid.*). This is of course not what is argued.

the Nag Hammadi Codices, a theory originally proposed by Wipszycka herself,⁸⁹ without mentioning the fact that it has been pointed out not only by Lundhaug and Jenott, but also by Roger Bagnall that there is no evidence for such a trade.⁹⁰ This hypothesis, which Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka simply repeat,⁹¹ can therefore not be used to dismiss the evidence of the monastic letters from the cartonnage in any discussion of the provenance of the codices.

Moreover, the reviewers claim that Lundhaug and Jenott “had to prove that all the papyri from the codex covers came into existence as a result of the functioning of Pachomian monastic administration.”⁹² Yet again, this is not what is argued. Instead, the book proposes that the majority of the documents found in the cartonnage of the covers *could have* come into existence as a result of internal monastic administration.⁹³ Lundhaug and Jenott argue this in response to Shelton, who claimed that Pachomian monks could not have produced such documents since they were so isolated from the material affairs of the world.⁹⁴ The monastic hypothesis accounts for the fact that wastepaper used by monks

⁸⁹ Ewa Wipszycka, “The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist’s Point of View,” *JJP* 30 (2000): 179–91.

⁹⁰ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 434–35; Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 58; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 139–42. Erja Salmenkivi, “Reuse and Recycling of Papyrus,” in *Recycling and Reuse in the Roman Economy* (ed. Chloë N. Duckworth and Andrew Wilson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 274–79, notes the lack of evidence for wastepaper dealers, but wrongly implies that Lundhaug and Jenott base the monastic provenance hypothesis solely on cartonnage material.

⁹¹ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 439.

⁹² Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 435.

⁹³ For instance, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka misrepresent Lundhaug and Jenott’s argument regarding the cartonnage document G1. Lundhaug and Jenott do not try to prove that this is a monastic product, but simply argue that it is not necessarily non-monastic. This is an important distinction. Similarly, with G3, where Lundhaug and Jenott argue that this might also have originated in a monastic context, rather than necessarily a “private” one, they are not trying to prove that it could only have been produced in a monastic context. Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka quote Malcolm Choat’s comment in a recent article on monastic letters from Late Antique Egypt to the effect that he found it “not entirely convincing” that *all* the cartonnage documents could derive from a monastic context (Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 436; Malcolm Choat, “Monastic Letters on Papyrus from Late Antique Egypt,” in *Writing and Communication in Early Egyptian Monasticism* [ed. Malcolm Choat and Mariachiara Giorda; Leiden: Brill, 2017], 34 n. 88), but they seem to misunderstand him when they later quote him approvingly saying that “it is at least clear that the variety of monasticism displayed in the codices can be easily reconciled with Pachomian monasticism if one reads attentively past the ideals in the literary record of the *koinonia*” (Choat, “Monastic Letters on Papyrus,” 36. Cf. Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 438). This is exactly what Lundhaug and Jenott argue.

⁹⁴ See Shelton, “Introduction.”

to make books could have originated both inside and outside the monastery. As Lundhaug and Jenott put it:

why seek ‘a single source’ for the mixture of papyri in the first place? There is no reason to posit that whoever made the covers would have acquired all the papyri from one place or through one person. Far from challenging the monastic hypothesis, the diverse assemblage of documents found in the cartonnage actually makes a good deal of sense as the by-product of a cenobitic organization, which, as we have seen, generated its own documents from within (accounts, personal correspondence, literary texts), received letters, and must have acquired other documents from outside, for instance when new members joined, sometimes bringing property with them and donating it to the monastery.⁹⁵

What Lundhaug and Jenott do argue is that internal recycling in a monastic community is the most economic explanation – and thus the *most likely* one – for how a majority of the cartonnage papyri ended up in the covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

Arguably the most curious part of Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka’s criticism is their dismissal of the evidence of the letter to Pachome from Papnoute (known as cartonnage fragment C6) found in the cover of Codex VII.⁹⁶ The fact that the name Pachome has to be reconstructed *in the address line on the verso of the fragment*,⁹⁷ does not detract from what is actually clearly visible on the recto. The picture of the recto of that fragment, printed in the *Monastic Origins*, leaves no room for doubt that the letter is addressed to Pachome by a person named Papnoute.⁹⁸ The only question that remains is whether this person is the same Pachome as the one we know as the founder of the Pachomian *koinonia*. Lundhaug and Jenott acknowledge the fact that it is impossible to be sure, but add that considering the time and place, it would be quite curious if they were not, since the letter comes from the exact time and region as the famous abbot and that Papnoute addresses him with such a reverent title as “my beloved father.”⁹⁹

Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka argue that the evidence of the cartonnage letters are more consistent with “monks living in loose communities (*laura*),” but the evidence they refer to is of a significantly later date,¹⁰⁰ and does not inval-

⁹⁵ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 140.

⁹⁶ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 437–38.

⁹⁷ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 437–38, here simply repeat Shelton’s criticism of Barns’ reconstruction of the text on the *verso*. Like Shelton, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka thus completely miss the far more important point that the name “Pachome” is clear, without any reconstruction, on the *recto*.

⁹⁸ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 135. The book also includes a transcription of the Coptic text, together with Lundhaug and Jenott’s translation (*ibid.*, 136).

⁹⁹ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 136–38; see also the discussion above.

¹⁰⁰ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 438–39, and especially the evidence cited in n. 25.

idate Lundhaug and Jenott's arguments that they most likely derive from a cenobitic context,¹⁰¹ a view recently corroborated by a thorough examination of the cartonnage evidence by Paula Tutty.¹⁰²

In their book, Lundhaug and Jenott present evidence showing that fourth- and fifth-century monastics would in several respects have constituted ideal readers for many of the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices. One such argument is that the monks possessed the kind of profound knowledge of the Bible necessary to grasp the complex biblical allusions found in these texts. In relation to this, Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka claim that Lundhaug and Jenott "forget that not only monks read the Bible."¹⁰³ This is of course a misreading of the argument, which is that the complexity of the use of Scripture in these texts would presuppose as its ideal readers people who were especially knowledgeable of Scripture, and that we find evidence of such people in the monastic sources. Lundhaug and Jenott do not argue that *only* monastics could have understood these texts. When Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka claim that Lundhaug and Jenott "do not explain what the monks, immersed in the biblical language and imagery, would look for in such texts,"¹⁰⁴ they disregard the book's final two chapters,¹⁰⁵ where it is argued, *inter alia*, that "We should not dismiss the possibility that the monks who read these texts, Pachomian or otherwise, were

¹⁰¹ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 139–42. See also Dechow, "The Nag Hammadi Milieu."

¹⁰² Tutty, "The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices." It may also be noted that when Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, "A Monastic Origin," 443, argue that the use of fragments from the book of Genesis for the cartonnage of Nag Hammadi Codex VII points towards a secular rather than monastic context, they ignore the evidence, cited by Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 126–27, of such reuse in the covers of other Coptic codices produced in Egyptian monasteries. Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka here write as though the presence of the book of Genesis in the cartonnage of Codex VII is used by Lundhaug and Jenott as positive evidence of a monastic connection, whereas Lundhaug and Jenott adduce the fragment to show that the recycling of biblical manuscripts as cartonnage is not a valid argument *against* a monastic place of production. When Lundhaug and Jenott subsequently point out the similarities between the Genesis fragments and certain codices from the Dishna Papers, they do so not to argue that this in itself makes the Nag Hammadi Codices monastic, as Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka suggest, but simply to point out that both manuscript discoveries, of which it can be argued on separate grounds that they are monastic, *may* in fact derive from the same community. For a more detailed argument along these lines, see Lundhaug, "Dishna Papers." Moreover, when Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka ("A Monastic Origin," 436–37) claim that the comparisons Lundhaug and Jenott bring to the table between the Bala'izah papyri and the Nag Hammadi cartonnage documents are not valid, their quotation of the work of Joanna Wegner does not in fact support their dismissal of the validity of such a comparison – quite the contrary.

¹⁰³ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, "A Monastic Origin," 441.

¹⁰⁴ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, "A Monastic Origin," 441.

¹⁰⁵ See Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, esp. 256–68.

capable of reading selectively, finding edification in one passage while disagreeing with another.”¹⁰⁶ When Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka charge that “the universality” of such selective reading practices is “yet to be proven and not to be taken for granted,”¹⁰⁷ this is a straw man argument, for selective reading does not need to have been a universal practice for it to have been practiced by certain monastic individuals or groups at any one time.¹⁰⁸ What is important is that monastics may have read the Nag Hammadi Codices selectively, and for a number of reasons and purposes. Why and how they may have done so is the focus of the present volume.

4. Outline of the Present Volume

The following articles all engage with and further explore the avenues of research opened up by considering monks as producers, owners, and readers of the Nag Hammadi Codices. We still believe that the monastic hypothesis makes best sense of all the evidence at our disposal. The remaining hesitancy of the critics of the hypothesis has no doubt much to do with squaring how supposedly orthodox monks could have read such texts as are found in the Nag Hammadi Codices, besides those which demonstrably were read by monastics, such as the *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4) and the *Sentences of Sextus*

¹⁰⁶ Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 267. This argument was indeed already made by Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 123: “The fact that there is much in the texts that could have been regarded as edifying by intellectual monks is not disproved by the presence in the texts of speculation and mythology alien to the Pachomian tradition. We should not today deny a fourth century monastic reader the capacity of selective reading and intelligent interpretation.”

¹⁰⁷ Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 443.

¹⁰⁸ At the end of the day, it seems as if Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka are far more certain of what would or would not be possible for Christian monks in the fourth century than the sources allow for. Against the vision of Pachomian uniformity and “orthodoxy” upheld by Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka there is no lack of evidence. See, e.g., Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*. Compare furthermore the treatment of Shenoute’s *I Am Amazed* in Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka, “A Monastic Origin,” 447–49 to esp., *Monastic Origins*, 35–38, 71–73, 170–77, 234–46; Hugo Lundhaug, “Shenoute’s Heresiological Polemics and Its Context(s),” in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights Over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and David Brakke; ECCA 11; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012), 239–61; idem, “Shenoute’s Eucharistic Theology in Context,” in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (3 Vols.; ed. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger; WUNT 376; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 2:1233–51; idem, “Mystery and Authority in the Writings of Shenoute,” in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (ed. Christian H. Bull et al.; NHMS 76; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 259–85.

(NHC XII,1). Yet it is by now quite clear that early Egyptian monasticism, including the Pachomian federation, was far more diverse than is often portrayed in the later hagiographic literature, not to mention modern scholarship, and so the current volume contains contributions showing how monks in fourth- or fifth-century Egypt could profitably have read the texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices, despite the fact that such ecclesiastical or monastic authorities as Athanasius, Epiphanius, Theophilus or Shenoute vociferously opposed such engagement with dangerous texts. The contributions of this volume seek to show that monks *could* and some likely *did* read the Nag Hammadi treatises, and also to imagine how the texts would have made sense to them.

In the first essay, Lance Jenott compares the *Letter of Peter to Philip* in Nag Hammadi Codex VIII and Codex Tchacos, focusing on variant readings. The process of copying the text and translating it from Greek to Coptic have predictably yielded several variants in the two versions, and Jenott shows how some of these were probably caused by theological differences between copyists and/or translators, but also how accidental mistranslations may lead to different readings that still make sense in a fourth-century monastic milieu.

Six contributions dealing specifically with texts from Nag Hammadi Codex II follow. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus introduces this section by showing how this codex, as a whole, could have been read by monks, including Pachomians, as an aid in ascetic practice. Gilhus shows how the codex may have been read by more intellectual monks who strove to understand the roots of the passions they were combatting, before the cultural memory of Egyptian monasticism was settled as an anti-intellectual mass-phenomenon in the fifth century. Next, René Falkenberg deals with the notion of “single ones” (ΟΥΑ ΟΥΩΤ / ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ) in the *Gospel of Thomas*, suggesting that the term μοναχός, used there to designate a person, was inserted by the last readers and copyists of the text in the fourth or fifth century, to refer to themselves as monks. This underlines the fluidity of the textual transmission of the *Gospel of Thomas*, and how it was “updated” to better fit the contemporary readers of the only Coptic manuscript of the text we have. Also dealing with the *Gospel of Thomas*, André Gagné emphasizes how monks may have read the text as a spiritual exercise. Gagné proposes that the text, by insisting on the need to find its secret meaning, is in effect inviting the reader to engage in speculative hermeneutics by linking one saying to another and “participate in the meaning of the text.” Gagné identifies the *Gospel of Thomas* as a “scripture as veil,” similar to the esoteric exegesis demanded by Clement of Alexandria. Hugo Lundhaug shows how Codex II’s other Thomas-text, the *Book of Thomas*, is congenial to a Pachomian monastic reading, both in its paratextual features, its focus on asceticism, the struggle with demons, and the notion of true knowledge that grants perfection. Several parallels with monastic, in particular Pachomian, texts are adduced to show that monks would be ideal readers of the text as it appears in our manuscript. Next, Kristine Toft Rosland reads the *Apocryphon of John*’s use of Scripture not as

a “hermeneutic of revolt,” but rather as “hermeneutical problem solving,” picking out problematic passages in Scripture in order to make sense of them. Rosland reads the phrase “not as Moses said” to be a cue for the reader to interpret the Torah passages allegorically rather than literally. Like Gilhus, Kimberley A. Fowler sees Nag Hammadi Codex II as an ascetic book, but she focuses in particular on the fourth and fifth treatises of the codex, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*. She reads them as holding out the eschatological promise for the successful ascetic, which would resonate well with the Pachomian view of the afterlife.

Moving from Codex II to Codex I, Paul Linjamaa looks at the scribal markings in the text of the *Tripartite Tractate* and argues that the passages highlighted by these markings would be congenial to a monastic readership. From Codex VI, Tilde Bak Halvgaard argues that the fourth-century readers of the distinctly puzzling text entitled *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, may have been interested in the epistemological dimensions of the revelatrix as *epinoia*, reading the text in light of discussions about this term by Origen, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Eunomius. Since some of these writers, and especially Origen, had a profound impact on Egyptian monasticism, this may well explain the presence of *Thunder* in the Nag Hammadi Codices. In the next essay, Dylan Burns compares the Nag Hammadi Codices to the Graeco-Egyptian and Coptic magical papyri, many of which are in close temporal and geographical proximity to the Nag Hammadi Codices, focusing in particular on the use of *voces magicae*. Burns reminds us that the Nag Hammadi Codices are also part of an esoteric *koine* shared with the magical papyri, and that monks too engaged in practices commonly labelled as “magic.”

The final two contributions are both about the curious inclusion in Codex VI of a Coptic translation of an excerpt from Plato’s *Republic*, containing the famous image of the soul as a tripartite being, a human, a lion, and a multi-headed beast, indicating respectively the rational, spirited, and appetitive parts of the soul. Christian Askeland delves into the translation technique (or lack thereof) of the person who translated the excerpt into Coptic. By analyzing the translational choices, Askeland concludes that the translator shows no sign of being a “Gnostic,” as has been proposed, and that the translator’s lack of understanding of Plato’s Attic Greek, as well as the philosophical context of the excerpt, is consistent with “an eclectic fourth-century monastic library.” Much in tune with Askeland’s conclusion, Christian H. Bull investigates the Plato-excerpt on the background of the decline of Greek philosophy in fourth-century Egypt, evident from the dwindling Greek, and almost non-existent Coptic, manuscript attestation. Apart from the Plato fragment in Codex VI, only one other such text is known in Coptic, a collection of sayings of the philosophers. Meanwhile, as Origenism still enjoyed popularity in the monasteries, Bull argues that some of the interpolations found in the Plato fragment in Codex VI

are best understood on the hypothesis that the translator was one of those monks labelled “Origenist” by their detractors.

The readings of the Nag Hammadi texts presented in these contributions differ from traditional approaches by interpreting the texts from a monastic, rather than “gnostic” perspective, and by focusing primarily on transmission and reception, rather than on authorship. It is hoped that the present volume will provide an impetus for further work connecting the contents of the Nag Hammadi Codices to their fourth- and/or fifth-century users. The following contributions certainly provide excellent starting points for further study, representing different points of departure, trying out monastic readings of a selection of Nag Hammadi texts. At the same time, there are a good number of Nag Hammadi texts not treated here that can also be approached from this perspective, most of which have hitherto not been the focus of such enquiries.¹⁰⁹ We thus sincerely hope that the present volume will inspire many more studies along similar lines.

¹⁰⁹ Recent studies interpreting Nag Hammadi texts from a monastic perspective include (in addition to the studies by members of the NEWCONT project cited in footnote 3 above), Kimberley A. Fowler, “From the Apocryphon of John to Thomas the Contender: Nag Hammadi Codex II in its Fourth-Century Context,” (PhD diss. University of Manchester, 2013); eadem, “The Ascent of the Soul and the Pachomians: Interpreting the Exegesis on the Soul (NHC II,6) within a Fourth-Century Monastic Context,” *Gnosis* 2 (2017): 63–93; eadem, “Reading *Gospel of Thomas* 100 in the Fourth Century: From Roman Imperialism to Pachomian Concern over Wealth,” *VC* 72 (2018): 421–46; Sarit Kattan Gribetz, “Women as Readers of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *J ECS* 22 (2018): 463–94; Eduard Iricinschi, “The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II: Book Production and Monastic *Paideia* in Fourth-Century Egypt” (PhD Diss. Princeton University, 2009); Melissa Harl Sellw, “Reading Jesus in the Desert: The *Gospel of Thomas* Meets the *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 81–106; Blossom Stefaniw, “Hegemony and Homecoming in the Ascetic Imagination: Sextus, Silvanus, and Monastic Instruction in Egypt,” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 107–38. In addition, one should also take into account the earlier studies by Louis Painchaud and Timothy Janz, “The ‘Kingless Generation’ and the Polemical Rewriting of Certain Nag Hammadi Texts,” 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), 439–60; Louis Painchaud and Jennifer Wees, “Connaître la différence entre les hommes mauvais et les bons: Le charisme de clairvoyance d’Adam et Ève à Pachôme et Théodore,” 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. Hans-Gebhard Bethge et al.; NHMS 54; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 139–55.

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