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134



# The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	V
Abbreviations.....	IX
<i>Christian H. Bull and Hugo Lundhaug</i> Monastic Readings of the Nag Hammadi Codices.....	1
<i>Lance Jenott</i> <i>Peter's Letter to Philip:</i> Textual Fluidity in a New Testament Apocryphon.....	37
<i>Ingvild Sælid Gilhus</i> Ascetic Readings in Codex II from Nag Hammadi.....	67
<i>René Falkenberg</i> The "Single Ones" in the <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> : A Monastic Perspective.....	87
<i>André Gagné</i> The <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> in a Monastic Context: Reading the Text as a Spiritual Exercise.....	121
<i>Hugo Lundhaug</i> "This is the Teaching of the Perfect Ones": The <i>Book of Thomas</i> and Early Egyptian Monasticism.....	135
<i>Kristine Toft Rosland</i> "Not as Moses said" Revisited: Christ as Interpreter of Scripture in the <i>Apocryphon of John</i> .....	157
<i>Kimberley A. Fowler</i> Eschatology in Nag Hammadi Codex II: A Monastic Reading of the <i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i> (NHC II,4) and <i>On the Origin of the World</i> (NHC II,5).....	185

<i>Paul Linjamaa</i>	
Why Monks Would Have Read the <i>Tripartite Tractate</i> : A New Look at the Codicology of Nag Hammadi Codex I.....	223
<i>Tilde Bak Halvgaard</i>	
The <i>Thunder: Perfect Mind</i> and the Notion of Epinoia in Early Christianity.....	255
<i>Dylan M. Burns</i>	
The Nag Hammadi Codices and Graeco-Egyptian Magical and Occult Literature.....	279
<i>Christian Askeland</i>	
Translation Technique in the Coptic Version of Plato's <i>Republic</i> (NHC VI,5).....	317
<i>Christian H. Bull</i>	
Plato in Upper Egypt: Greek Philosophy and Monastic Origenism in the Coptic Excerpt from Plato's <i>Republic</i> (NHC VI,5).....	333
Contributors.....	367
Index of Modern Authors.....	369
Index of Subjects.....	376

# “This is the Teaching of the Perfect Ones”: The *Book of Thomas* and Early Egyptian Monasticism\*

Hugo Lundhaug

In the *Book of Thomas*, preserved to us as the last of seven texts in Nag Hammadi Codex II, Jesus urges Thomas and the rest of his apostles to listen to him, for he has important things to tell. Indeed, he lets them know that it is nothing less than “the teaching of the perfect ones” (ⲧⲉⲥⲄⲱ ⲛ̅ⲏⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ),<sup>1</sup> which is to be understood as required knowledge in order to achieve perfection. But who exactly are these perfect ones, and what do the apostles, and others looking to attain perfection, need to know? As it turns out, Jesus sets out to explain to his apostles how they may free themselves from their captivity to bodily passions and attain rest among the holy ones in heaven – in short, he will provide them with ascetic instruction. The *Book of Thomas* is a fascinating discourse on the challenges and goals of the ascetic life that, in stark contrast to the *Gospel of Thomas* found in the same codex, has received surprisingly scant attention in scholarship, especially in recent years after the publication of the English, French, and German critical editions.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, this lack of attention may be ascribed to the fact that it has no claim to having been composed as early as the *Gospel of Thomas*, and on the other hand, unlike another famous text in this codex, the *Apocryphon of John*, the text does not conform well to many of the clichés associated with the category of “Gnosticism,” nor does it contain any reference to a “Gnostic myth.” There is good reason, however, to return to this text armed with different scholarly perspectives, as its ascetic focus certainly appears to lend itself well to a reading in light of its manuscript

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<sup>1</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.10–11 (Coptic text ed. Bentley Layton, and trans. John D. Turner. “The Book of Thomas the Contender,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 Together with XIII, 2\**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. I, 654, 655* [ed. Bentley Layton; 2 vols.; NHS 20–21; Leiden: Brill, 1989], 2:186). All translations of Coptic texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Kuntzmann, *Le Livre de Thomas (NH II, 7): Texte établi et présenté* (BCNH.T 16; Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1986); Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Thomas-Buch (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II, 7): Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (TUGAL 138; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989); Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender.”

context, i.e., a reading from the point of view of the monastics who copied and read the Coptic text as we have it at the end of Nag Hammadi Codex II.<sup>3</sup> Not in order to argue that the *Book of Thomas* has necessarily influenced monastic literature, but in order to understand how, and why, the monastics who owned this copy of the text may have read it.

The *Book of Thomas* is probably one of those Nag Hammadi texts that is easiest to imagine being read by monks. Certainly, its heavy ascetic emphasis, not least its strong stance against women and sexuality, with its exclamation of “Woe unto you who love intimacy (ϣϥⲛⲏⲉⲓⲁ) with womankind (ⲧⲙⲏⲧϣⲓⲙⲉ) and its polluted intercourse (ⲡⲉϣⲟⲩⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲏⲙⲁϣ ⲉⲧϣⲟⲟϥ),”<sup>4</sup> makes it highly amenable to such a context. But it is not simply the general ascetic stance of the text that brings it into the orbit of late-antique Egyptian monasticism. As we shall see, numerous motifs, metaphors, biblical allusions, and turns of phrase found in it are paralleled in monastic literature, making the inclusion of the *Book of Thomas* in an early monastic library in Upper Egypt, even a Pachomian one, easily understandable.

Most previous scholarship on the *Book of Thomas* has had a rather different perspective, focusing primarily on the text’s authorship, sources, and redaction. Hans-Martin Schenke, for instance, characterized the *Book of Thomas* as a collection of sayings gathered around the keyword of light/fire, which was only secondarily, and artificially, forced into the framework of a dialogue between Jesus and Thomas,<sup>5</sup> and he presented a highly imaginative suggestion as to how it might have developed from an original composition, which he proposed may have been a pseudepigraphical *Epistle of James the Contender*.<sup>6</sup> A similarly creative hypothesis has been presented by John Turner. Suggesting that the text

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<sup>3</sup> On the monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices and the interests of the monastics who copied and read them, see esp. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC 97; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) and the introduction to the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> *Book Thom.* 144.8–10 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 200).

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Martin Schenke, “Sprachliche und exegetische Probleme in den beiden letzten Schriften des Codex II von Nag Hammadi,” *OLZ* 70 (1975): 9; cf. Martin Krause, “The Christianization of Gnostic Texts,” in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (ed. Alastair H. B. Logan and Alexander J. M. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 191, also describing the dialogue as artificial.

<sup>6</sup> See Hans-Martin Schenke, “The Book of Thomas (NHC II,7): A Revision of a Pseudepigraphical Epistle of Jacob the Contender,” in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (ed. Alastair H. B. Logan and Alexander J. M. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 213–28. Cf. also 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), 226, 336, who speculated that the text might perhaps be identical with the *Gospel of Matthias* referred to by Origen and Eusebius, or the *Traditions of Matthias* mentioned by Clement of Alexandria.

in its current form can be said to consist of two rather distinct parts, the first being a *dialogue* between Thomas and Jesus, with questions and answers, and the second part consisting of a *monologue* by Jesus with warnings and beatitudes, Turner presents an elaborate redactional theory, the gist of which is that these two parts originally existed separately before being combined into what now constitutes the *Book of Thomas* as it has been preserved to us at the end of Nag Hammadi Codex II.<sup>7</sup>

Whether these redactional theories come close to actual historical reality is, however, impossible to know, as the single surviving witness cannot provide us with any answers to this question. Nor does it furnish us with any solid indications as to the date of authorship of the text’s hypothetical constituent parts or the time when it was brought into a form close to the present one. What we may say with greater certainty is that the transmission of the text up to its presently preserved version was probably fluid, although to what degree we do not know.<sup>8</sup> Much may have changed from its initial composition, from small details to larger chunks of text added or subtracted, but without additional attestation we are left largely in the dark as to the exact nature of such changes. We may thus do well to stick to what we do know, namely that someone in the

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<sup>7</sup> John D. Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II,7): The Coptic Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (SBLDS 23; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 215–39.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 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), 1–19; 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, 29–31 mai 2015* (ed. Eric Créghœur, Louis Painchaud, and Tuomas Rasimus; BCNH.É 10; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 47–67; idem, “The Fluid Transmission of Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries,” in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology* (ed. Paola Buzi; PaST Percorsi di Archeologia 5; Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020), 213–27; 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; 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), 34–43.



late fourth or early fifth century copied this Coptic text into this particular codex, presumably with the intention that someone should read it.<sup>9</sup>

## 1. Quest for Perfection

Rather than focusing on the compositional and redactional history of the text, I will instead concentrate on its likely reception in the community represented by the scribe of the codex, who after having copied the end of the *Book of Thomas*, added a colophon asking the readers to “Remember me too, my brothers, [in] your prayers” (ἀριπαμῆεγε ζω νασνηη ζ[ἡ]νετῆπρσευχῆ), before adding the final blessing “Peace to the holy ones and the spiritual ones” (ε[ἰ]ρηνη τοις ἁγιοις μῆνιπνευματικος).<sup>10</sup> Those intended readers, who were almost certainly monks, and most likely Pachomian monks,<sup>11</sup> would not have been confronted with an earlier version of the text, but with the text as we have it in Codex II as its seventh and final text, with its current dialogue frame and paratextual matter, followed by the abovementioned scribal colophon, and carrying the title the *Book of Thomas*.

When we look closer at the paratextual frame of the *Book of Thomas* in Codex II we find that this title is closely followed by what may perhaps be another reference to the scribe of the codex, but which is more likely a reference to the apostle Matthias,<sup>12</sup> the pseudepigraphical scribe of the dialogue between Jesus and his apostles. At the beginning of the *Book of Thomas* we are told that it was Matthias (μαθαιας) who wrote down this text, having listened to Jesus and Thomas speaking with each other.<sup>13</sup> In the line directly following the title at the end of the text, we read that “The athlete writes to the perfect ones” (παθλητης εφρζαῖ ἡπτελειος). That this “athlete” is not to be equated with Thomas, despite the common designation of the text in English-language

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<sup>9</sup> On the date of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see now Hugo Lundhaug, “Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts: A Multi-Methodological Approach Including New Radiocarbon Evidence,” in *Texts in Context: Essays on Dating and Contextualising Christian Writings of the Second and Early Third Century* (ed. Joseph Verheyden, Jens Schröter, and Tobias Nicklas; BETL 319; Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 117–42.

<sup>10</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.20–23 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 204).

<sup>11</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*; Lundhaug and Jenott, “Production, Distribution and Ownership of Books in the Monasteries of Upper Egypt: The Evidence of the Nag Hammadi Colophons,” in *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical Paideia* (ed. Lillian Larsen and Samuel Rubenson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 306–25.

<sup>12</sup> This character should probably be identified with the apostle who is described in Acts 1:23–26 as having taken Judas’ place among the twelve.

<sup>13</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.1–4 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 180).

scholarship as the *Book of Thomas the Contender*,<sup>14</sup> was already pointed out by Hans-Martin Schenke in 1975.<sup>15</sup> That the two parts of the title should be read separately is indeed made clear by the text itself, when it states that it was Matthias who wrote down Thomas’ dialogue with Jesus. It is thus Matthias who “writes to the perfect ones,” and not Thomas.<sup>16</sup> For monastic readers of the *Book of Thomas*, Matthias the athlete is also an ideal identification figure, as they listen to Jesus’ ascetic teachings through him. That the entire text is written specifically to those who are perfect is also something that is made clear elsewhere in the text, where Jesus states that the reason why it is important for him to speak with his disciples is the fact that he is telling them “the teaching of the perfect ones” (τεσβω ν̄ν̄τελειος).<sup>17</sup> And in order to become perfect, he says, they will have to “observe” (αρεε) these teachings.<sup>18</sup> If they do not do so, Jesus warns, they will be called “ignorant” (ατςβω).<sup>19</sup> Jesus also chastises those who lack such knowledge, exclaiming: “Woe unto you, for you have not received the teaching (τςβω)!”<sup>20</sup>

The teachings contained in the *Book of Thomas* are thus the ones that are necessary in order to *become* perfect, but at the same time, these teachings are intended *for* the perfect. The designation “the perfect ones” (ν̄ν̄τελειος) is indeed an apt description of the intended readers or hearers of the *Book of Thomas* in its present form, as is indicated by the statement following the title of the text proper, namely that it is written “to the perfect ones” (ν̄ν̄τελειος).<sup>21</sup> And one may surmise that the scribe of Codex II would also include those he

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., Turner, *Book of Thomas the Contender*; idem, “The Book of Thomas the Contender (II,7): Introduction and Translation.” Pages 199–207 in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. James M. Robinson; 3rd rev. ed.; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 199–207; Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender”; Jesse Sell, *The Knowledge of the Truth – Two Doctrines: The Book of Thomas the Contender (CG II,7) and the False Teachers in the Pastoral Epistles* (EUS Series 23, Theology 194; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Schenke, “Sprachliche und exegetische Probleme,” 12; cf. also Paul-Hubert Poirier, “The Writings Ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition,” 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), 296 n. 6, stating that this common translation of the title “is a mistranslation and should be avoided.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Schenke, “Sprachliche und exegetische Probleme,” 11. Schenke, however, would later go on to argue that the contender in question was originally Jacob. See Schenke, “Book of Thomas,” 213–28. If we simply read the text as it has been preserved, however, the contender in question must be Matthias, or possibly the scribe of this codex or an earlier codex in the chain of transmission.

<sup>17</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.10–11 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>18</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.11–12 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186); cf. 1 Tim 5:21.

<sup>19</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.13 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>20</sup> *Book Thom.* 144.37–38 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 202).

<sup>21</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.18–19 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 204).

refers to in the colophon as his “brothers” (σὺνἡ) and “the holy ones and the spiritual ones” (τοῖς ἁγίοις μῆνιπνευματικός), in this category.<sup>22</sup> These are common designations used of monks in the Pachomian writings, where references to perfect monks, and to monks on their way to attaining perfection, abound.<sup>23</sup> As we shall see, perfection and its attainment is connected to the notion of perfect knowledge in the *Book of Thomas* and Pachomian literature alike.

## 2. Knowledge and Ignorance

A pervasive feature of the *Book of Thomas* is its emphasis on the necessity for the righteous Christian ascetic of acquiring knowledge in order to enable him to avoid the traps and stumbling blocks that may hinder his progress towards eternal rest in the heavenly realms. As the risen Jesus states in one of his beatitudes at the end of the text, “Blessed are you who have foreknowledge of the stumbling blocks (ἄκανθᾶλλον) and who flee before the unnatural things (ἄλλοτριον).”<sup>24</sup> The importance of this beatitude is indicated by the fact that it recalls a statement in Jesus’ opening address to Thomas, where he proclaims that Thomas has “seen what is hidden from men (περὶ ἐβόλ ἡρρωμε), namely what they stumble against in ignorance (εἰσὺ χιτροπ ἐροῦ ἐνεσεοῦν ἄν).”<sup>25</sup> How has Thomas gained this ability to detect what ignorant people stumble against? We are told that the key is to know the true identity of Christ, and that Thomas has acquired this by knowing himself, since, after all, he is called Jesus’ brother.<sup>26</sup> He will also be called “he who knows himself” (περσεοῦνε ἐροῦ ἴμιν ἴμοῦ).<sup>27</sup> This is important, for we are told that “he who has known himself has also already acquired knowledge of the depth of everything” (πενταρσοῦνῳ δε οὔλατῳ ἄφοῦω οἷ ἐχισοῦνε ἀπβαθός ἴπτηρῳ).<sup>28</sup> While it was common in the early phases of research on the Nag Hammadi texts to connect such statements on the importance of knowledge and self-knowledge to “Gnosticism,” I aim to show how the treatment of knowledge in the *Book of Thomas* is by no means out of place in the context

<sup>22</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.20–23 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 204).

<sup>23</sup> SBo 3, 27, 29, 60, 79, 82, 107, 128, 134, 142, 193, 194, 199, 202, 204, 205; G<sup>1</sup> 2, 32, 54, 98, 91, 99, 106, 118, 120, 126, 129, 136; Hors., *Test.* 20; cf. Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 185–89.

<sup>24</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.1–3 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 202).

<sup>25</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.19–21 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 180).

<sup>26</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.10. Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 180, here erroneously has σεναμοῦτε, while the manuscript reads σεμοῦτε. Kuntzmann, *Le Livre de Thomas*, 26, and Schenke, *Das Thomas-Buch*, 24, both have the correct reading.

<sup>27</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.15–16 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 180).

<sup>28</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.17–18 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 180).

where Nag Hammadi Codex II was most likely produced and used. As we shall see, it has especially close parallels in monastic writings of the fourth and fifth centuries, making recourse to the category of “Gnosticism” unnecessary for the interpretation of the text as it appears in this codex.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius*, for instance, Apa Palamon teaches Pachomius early on in his career that getting to know oneself is at the heart of the monastic life, and he speaks to him about the time it takes “until you get to know yourself” (ⲁⲛⲦⲀⲦⲈⲔⲔⲐⲒⲐⲒⲐⲔ ⲛⲓⲙⲓⲛ ⲛⲓⲙⲐⲕ).<sup>30</sup> Palamon tells Pachomius in no uncertain terms that in order to understand “the measure of the monastic life” (ⲡⲠⲱ ⲛⲦⲓⲙⲈⲦⲘⲠⲠⲠⲔⲐⲔⲐⲔⲐⲔ), he first has to go away and examine himself.<sup>31</sup> Pachomius too, in one of his letters (Letter 3), speaks of those who did not follow Joshua’s commands in the Old Testament as “stupid men” (ⲁ̀ⲛⲧⲏⲣⲱⲡⲱⲓ ⲁ̀ⲡⲣⲟⲛⲉⲥ) who were ignorant of “the place of wealth and the dwelling place of wisdom,” and who “called light darkness”; but most importantly, “they did not find their own heart,” despite the fact that Joshua had given them “directives by which they should walk.”<sup>32</sup>

Jesus in the *Book of Thomas* does not suffer fools lightly, going so far as to state that “it is impossible for a wise man to dwell with a fool” (ⲙⲏⲱⲐⲐⲐⲛ ⲛⲦⲈⲠⲠⲠⲛⲓⲛⲧⲏⲣⲱⲡⲱⲓ ⲟⲩⲱⲗ ⲙⲏⲠⲠⲠⲐⲔⲐⲔ),<sup>33</sup> a statement that also serves as an answer to one of the questions posed by Thomas, namely: “Is it profitable for us, Lord, to rest ourselves amongst our own?” (ⲥⲣⲛⲠⲠⲠⲣⲈ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲡⲔⲔⲐⲔⲐⲔ ⲁ̀ⲙⲦⲠⲠⲠ ⲛⲓⲙⲠⲠⲠ ⲗⲛⲛⲈⲦⲠⲈⲦⲠⲠⲠⲠ ⲛⲈ)<sup>34</sup> This question, which is one that would doubtlessly have resonated with the Upper Egyptian monastic owners of Codex II, is answered by

<sup>29</sup> For general critiques of the use of “Gnosticism” as a heuristic category, see Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: 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).

<sup>30</sup> SBo 10; Louis-Théophile Lefort, ed., *S. Pachomii Vita Bohairice Scripta* (CSCO 89, *Scriptores Coptici* 7; Leuven: Durbecq, 1953), 8. Armand Veilleux, a monk himself, found this to be “a beautiful expression of the aim of monastic *ascesis*” (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, 1980–82], 1:268 [SBo 10 n. 2]).

<sup>31</sup> SBo 10: ⲛⲦⲈⲔⲔⲐⲔ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛⲦⲈⲔⲔⲐⲔⲐⲔⲁⲒⲠⲓⲛⲁⲒⲓⲛ ⲛⲓⲙⲐⲕ ⲛⲱⲣⲣⲓ (Lefort, *Vita Bohairice Scripta*, 9).

<sup>32</sup> Pachomius, *Letter* 3.8; cf. Num 14:6; Isa 5:20 (Hans Quecke, *Die Briefe Pachoms: Griechischer Text der Handschrift W. 145 der Chester Beatty Library* [Textus Patristici et Liturgici 2; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1975], 103; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3:56).

<sup>33</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.13–14 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>34</sup> *Book Thom.* 141.3–4 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 190).

Jesus in the affirmative, and thus serves nicely to buttress a communal monastic lifestyle – away from common, ignorant, people, but together with other good people on their way to, or having already attained, a state of perfection.

The “teaching of the perfect ones” given by Jesus to Thomas was also intended for further distribution by the apostles and their successors through preaching. As Jesus puts it, those who seek the truth from a wise person “will provide wings (ζεντιῆζ) for himself in order to fly, fleeing from the desire (τεπιουμια) that burns the spirits of men (ἡπιῆδ ἡἡρωμε). And he will provide wings for himself, fleeing from every visible spirit (πιῆδ νιμ ετογονζ εβολ).”<sup>35</sup> By gaining true knowledge, the true Christian ascetic also comes to know the difference between the good and the bad, which is the opposite of the fool, who sees no distinction between these things.<sup>36</sup> Likewise it is said about the good monks in the tenth Sahidic *Life* that “those who shall purify their hearts greatly from every evil thought shall discern between good and evil.”<sup>37</sup> The use of the imagery of acquiring wings is also notable. The true Christian ascetic will acquire wings by gaining knowledge of the truth by way of true teaching. While this imagery may recall the wings of the soul as described by Plato,<sup>38</sup> acquiring wings could also be seen as an elegantly evocative way for the *Book of Thomas* to describe both the process and gains of becoming like the angels, which in this context is equal to becoming a perfect monk.<sup>39</sup> Or, as Pachomius states in the Bohairic *Life*, if someone is “zealous for perfection ... he will live in the purity of the angels. Then the Holy Spirit will dwell in him and sanctify him; he will go and become a monk and serve the Lord in all purity and uprightness.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.1–5 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>36</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.15–16 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186, 188); cf. 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.

<sup>37</sup> S<sup>10</sup> 5 (Louis-Théophile Lefort, ed., *S. Pachonii Vitae Sahidice Scriptae* [CSCO 99–100, Scriptorum Coptici 9–10; Leuven: Durbecq, 1952] 72–73; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 1:455).

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., D. D. McGibbon, “The Fall of the Soul in Plato’s Phaedrus,” *CQ* 14 (1964): 56–63.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., *Historia Monachorum*, prologue 5; *Life of Onnophrios* (BL Or. 7027, 13); Karl Suso Frank, *ΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΣ ΒΙΟΣ: Begriffsanalytische und Begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum “engelgleichen Leben” im frühen Mönchtum* (BGAM 26; Münster: Aschendorff, 1964); Ellen Muehlberger, “Ambivalence about the Angelic Life: The Promise and Perils of an Early Christian Discourse of Asceticism,” *J ECS* 16 (2008): 447–78.

<sup>40</sup> SBo 107: ερωπ δε ον αφρανηοζ εφμεττελιος (...) φναφωπι ζωφ ζενιπτογβο ἡτεν-αγγελοζ ογοζ τοτε πιῆδ εσογαν φναφωπι ἡἡητῆ ἡτεφτογβοφ ογοζ ἡτεφμε ναφ ἡτεφ-

In the *Book of Thomas*, as we have seen, self-knowledge is also closely related to knowledge of Christ. Thomas is described as Jesus' brother, and the process of getting to know oneself should ideally make the ascetic as Christ-like as possible.<sup>41</sup> We see this aspect also in the Pachomian literature, where abbot Theodore quotes 1 Cor 11:1 in his description of the importance of Christ-likeness in the Pachomian monks' quest for eternal rest: "Be like me as I have been like Christ, which is this single manner of all the holy ones and the fathers of the *Koinonia* who have nobly completed their struggle and rested themselves from their sufferings by entering their place of everlasting rest."<sup>42</sup> Like the *Book of Thomas*, Theodore presents the denial of bodily passions as an *imitatio Christi*.<sup>43</sup> And as in the *Book of Thomas*, Theodore also highlights the importance of knowledge, referred to by Theodore as "the perfect knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and the manner in which God taught the holy ones and the fathers of the *Koinonia*."<sup>44</sup> In the *Book of Thomas*, Christ is also said to incorporate true knowledge: "I am the knowledge of the Truth" (ἀνοκ πῆ προοῦν ἢτμηῆ), as he puts it.<sup>45</sup> And knowledge versus ignorance is furthermore connected to metaphors of light and darkness, with Jesus being identified as the light, who shines the light that hides the darkness of ignorance.<sup>46</sup>

The positive effects on the ascetic of gaining knowledge of the truth can also be described using botanical metaphors. The *Book of Thomas* quotes from the Book of Psalms, promising that "the wise man (πσοφoc) will be nourished by the truth (τμηῆ), and 'he will become like the tree that grows by the running water'."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in Pachomius' *First Instruction* we are told that the monks should "progress like young plants" (προκοπτεῖ ἡcε ἡνῖτωcσε ἡβῆρε).<sup>48</sup>

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ερμοναχοc οὐροῦ ἡτεφερβακ ἡπoc̄c̄ ἕνοῦτοῦβο немнеоһни нивен (Lefort, *Vita Bohairice Scripta*, 143; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 1:154).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Rom 8:29.

<sup>42</sup> Theodore, *Instr.* 3.6: τῆτῆτῆτῆτῆ εροῖ καταcε εптаῖтпгτωнт еπεc̄c̄ ететеиπῆρc̄ωв ἡοῦωт те ἡнетоc̄аав тпrou ἡἡἡεiote ἡткoiнonia naῖ ептаxкeπeγaгωн евол рῆоῦнἡт-геннаиос еаῡἡтton ἡнооῦ евол рῆнеγῆсе рῆπтpeγωк ероῦн еπεγῆна ἡἡтton цaeneῗ (Louis-Théophile Lefort, ed., *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples* [CSCO 159, *Scriptores Coptici* 23; Leuven: Durbecq, 1956], 43).

<sup>43</sup> I.e., "in the distress of our bodily needs" (рῆἡpξoξp̄ḅ ἡнатехриῗ ἡπc̄ωна), as he puts it (Theodore, *Instr.* 3.6; Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 43).

<sup>44</sup> Theodore, *Instr.* 3.6: пc̄ооῦн етоῦоx ἡтенеграῡн етоc̄аав ἡтc̄iπῆρc̄ωв ἡтаппоῦте пaдeγe ἡнетоc̄аав ἡpῆтc̄ ἡἡἡεiote ἡткoiнonia (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 42).

<sup>45</sup> *Book Thom.* 138.13 (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 180).

<sup>46</sup> *Book Thom.* 139.18–20 (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 184).

<sup>47</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.16–18, quoting Ps 1:3 LXX (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 188).

<sup>48</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.55 (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 22).

### 3. Burning Passions

One of the main lessons of Jesus' teaching in the *Book of Thomas* is that it is necessary to break away from the influence of the passions of the material world. Just like the *Life of Pachomius* points out the dangers of having a "carnal mind" (σαρκικὸν φρόνημα),<sup>49</sup> and Pachomius admonishes a spiteful monk to "flee from desire (ἐπιθυμία), for that is what makes the mind dark and prevents it from knowing the mystery of God (πνευματικὸν μυστήριον ἴπνογε),"<sup>50</sup> the *Book of Thomas* admonishes its readers to flee from "the desire that burns the spirits of men" (τρεπθυμία εἶρωκ κήπνῶ ἡνῶμε).<sup>51</sup> The importance of staying away from the carnal is indeed a major theme in the *Book of Thomas*, which warns its readers in no uncertain terms against the passions of the body, described metaphorically both as a burning fire within people's bodies, as well as something that either leads people astray or restrains them from doing or thinking what is proper. Jesus utters multiple warnings against being in the grip of the burning passions, proclaiming: "Woe unto you who are in the fire that burns within you, for it is insatiable!"<sup>52</sup> And: "Woe unto you in the grip of the burning that is in you, for it will visibly consume your flesh, and it will secretly break your souls."<sup>53</sup>

Similar use of the metaphor of burning is found in the writings of Shenoute. When describing the problems arising among the monks of the White Monastery owing to the undue influence of bodily desire, he uses the metaphor of a fire burning within an orchard, threatening to destroy it if it is not put out.<sup>54</sup> Shenoute talks about "an evil fire" (οὐκωστ εἰρωσ) burning within it and states that the trees "have desired and they have burned, and the greater part of all the trees in the orchard have withered in the burning fire that burns the trees that the fire has ruled."<sup>55</sup> In terms close to what we see in the *Book of Thomas*,

<sup>49</sup> G<sup>1</sup> 126 (François Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae* [Subsidia hagiographica 19; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932], 80; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 1:386).

<sup>50</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.19: πῶτ εβολ ἡτεπιθυμία, χεῖτος τετεωασῖπνογς ἡκακε μεσκααχ εσογπνευματικὸν ἡπνογε (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 6).

<sup>51</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.3–4 (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 186).

<sup>52</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.15–16: οὐοει ηητῆ ῥραῖ ῥῆπκωστ εἶρωκῥ ῥραῖ ῥῆτῆνε (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 198).

<sup>53</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.18–21: οὐοει ηητῆ ἡτοοτῆ ἡπνογῥ εἶρῥῆτῆνε χεφναγωη ἡνετῆ-σαρῥ ῥῆογωηῥ εβολ αγω φναπωῥ ἡνετῆψγχοογῥ ῥῆογῥωπ (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 198).

<sup>54</sup> See Shenoute, *Canon 1*, MONB.YW 81–82.

<sup>55</sup> Shenoute, *Canon 1*, MONB.YW 81–82: αγογωφε αγω αγρωκῥ αγω περογῆ ἡῆωηη τηρω εἶρῥῆπῆῆ ἡωηη αγωωβῥ εβολ ἡπωαῥ εἶχερο εἶρωκῥ ἡῆωηη ενταφῥχοῖς εροογ ἡσοπκωστ (Coptic text from unpublished transcription made by Stephen Emmel. I am grateful to Emmel for sharing it with me).

where Jesus utters a “Woe unto you who are in the fire that burns within you,”<sup>56</sup> Shenoute exclaims: “Woe unto us all, those who have sinned among us, whether male or female, but especially woe unto this one in whom a fire has burned like a tree that a flame has come out of, and it ran like lightning, and slithered itself into storehouses and burned youths and children, like wooden branches.”<sup>57</sup>

The *Book of Thomas* frequently uses the metaphor of the passions as a fire burning within, and warnings against “the desire that burns the spirits of men” (τεπιουμια ετρωκ νηπηα νηρωμε)<sup>58</sup> are voiced by Jesus himself: “O bitterness of the fire that burns in the bodies of men and (in) their marrow, burning within them night and day, and which burns the members of men and [causes] their hearts to become drunk, and their souls to become deranged.”<sup>59</sup> He castigates those who give in to the bodily passions: “you are drunk on the fire and you are [filled] with bitterness while your minds are deranged due to the burning that is within you.”<sup>60</sup> Here Jesus also describes the burning of desire in terms of the effects of alcohol, in a way that is highly reminiscent of Pachomius’ invectives against the consumption of wine in his *First Instruction*,<sup>61</sup> where he admonishes the monks not to become “deranged with pleasure” (πωδ̄ς ρ̄νωγ̄ρ̄γ̄Δ̄ονη).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.15–16: ογοει νητη̄ν ρ̄ραῑ ρ̄η̄π̄κω̄ρ̄τ̄ ετρω̄κ̄ρ̄ ρ̄ραῑ ρ̄η̄τ̄η̄νε (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 198).

<sup>57</sup> Shenoute, *Canon* 1, MONB.XC 121–22: ογοει ναν̄ τη̄ρη̄ν̄ νενταγ̄ρ̄νω̄βε ρ̄ραῑ ν̄ρη̄τη̄ν̄ εῑτε ρ̄σογ̄τ̄ εῑτε ρ̄σῑμε̄ ν̄ρογ̄ο̄ Δ̄ε ογοεῑ ν̄πᾱῑ εν̄ταογ̄κω̄ρ̄τ̄̄ χ̄ερ̄ο̄ ρ̄ραῑ ν̄ρη̄τ̄γ̄ ν̄θε̄ ν̄ογ̄ω̄νη̄ εᾱφ̄εῑ ε̄βολ̄ ν̄μο̄ῡ ν̄σο̄ῑογ̄ω̄Δ̄ρ̄ Δ̄φ̄ω̄τ̄ ν̄θε̄ ν̄ογ̄ε̄ν̄ρη̄σε̄ Δ̄φο̄ω̄γ̄ ε̄ρογ̄η̄ ε̄ρε̄ν̄τᾱμε̄ιον̄ Δ̄φογ̄ω̄φ̄ε̄ ν̄ρη̄ε̄ρ̄ρ̄ω̄ῑρε̄ ν̄ρη̄ε̄ν̄ω̄ῑρε̄ ω̄νη̄ ν̄θε̄ ν̄ρη̄εν̄κ̄λ̄Δ̄ο̄ς̄ ν̄ω̄ε̄ (Coptic text from unpublished transcription made by Stephen Emmel. I am grateful to Emmel for sharing it with me).

<sup>58</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.3–4 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>59</sup> *Book Thom.* 139.33–37: ω̄ π̄σῑω̄ε̄ ν̄π̄κω̄ρ̄τ̄ ε̄τ̄χε̄ρο̄ ρ̄ραῑ ρ̄η̄ν̄σο̄νᾱ ν̄η̄ρω̄με̄ ν̄η̄νεγ̄-ᾱτ̄κᾱς̄ ε̄φ̄χε̄ρο̄ ρ̄ραῑ ν̄ρη̄ν̄τογ̄ ν̄τογ̄ω̄νη̄ ν̄η̄φ̄[ο̄ογ̄] Δ̄γ̄ω̄ ε̄τρω̄χ̄ρ̄ ν̄η̄με̄λο̄ς̄ ν̄η̄ρω̄με̄ Δ̄γ̄ω̄ ε̄[τ̄-τ̄ρη̄ν̄]εγ̄ρη̄τ̄̄ †̄ρε̄ Δ̄γ̄ω̄ ν̄εγ̄γ̄χη̄ ε̄στ̄ρογ̄π̄ω̄δ̄ς̄ (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 184, 186).

<sup>60</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.27–29: ε̄τε̄γ̄η̄τᾱρε̄ ρ̄η̄π̄κω̄ρ̄τ̄ Δ̄γ̄ω̄ τε̄τ̄η̄[με̄ρ̄] ν̄σῑω̄ε̄ ε̄ρε̄πε̄τ̄η̄ρη̄τ̄ πο̄ω̄ς̄ ε̄ρω̄τ̄η̄ ε̄τ̄βε̄π̄[μ̄]ογ̄ρ̄ ε̄τ̄[ρ̄]η̄ν̄η̄νε̄ (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 198).

<sup>61</sup> See Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.45–46. See also Ps-Athanasius, *On Charity and Continence*, a text that overlaps major parts of Pachomius’ *First Instruction*, and which may also have a Pachomian origin, as has recently been suggested by Carolyn M. Schneider, *The Text of a Coptic Monastic Discourse, On Love and Self-Control: Its Story from the Fourth Century to the Twenty-First* (CS 72; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017). Schneider argues that the text was likely not authored by Athanasius, but by the Pachomian abbot Horsiesios. In this context is also noteworthy that Christoph Joest has similarly argued that Horsiesios may indeed have edited Pachomius’ *First Instruction*. See Christoph Joest, “Horsiese als Redaktor von Pachoms Katechese 1 ‘An einen grollenden Mönch’: Eine stilkritische Untersuchung,” *JCoptS* 9 (2007): 61–94.

<sup>62</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.45 (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 18).



The *Book of Thomas* argues that bodily desire, like wine, causes people to become drunk and crazy, and to do things they would not otherwise do. And like wine it causes people to see apparitions, and to regard illusions as truth: “For that which guides them, which is the fire, will give them an illusion (φαντασία) of truth.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, “it will illuminate them with perishing beauty, and it will capture them in dark sweetness and seize them with fragrant pleasure. And it will make them blind with insatiable desire, and it will cook their souls.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, it will lead people astray, “like a bridle (χαλινος) in the mouth” drawing them “according to its own wish.”<sup>65</sup>

But not only will the bodily passions lead people to do what they should not, but they also restrain people from doing what they should. The *Book of Thomas* describes this using the metaphor of captivity: “it has tied them with its chains, and it has bound all their members with the bitterness of the chain of the desire of these visible things that will perish and change and turn according to the flow. They have always been drawn down from heaven. Being killed, they are drawn upon all the beasts of pollution.”<sup>66</sup> Captivity to the bodily passions is also described with an allusion to Plato’s parable of the cave: “Woe unto you, captives, for you are bound in the caves!”<sup>67</sup> Thus captivity to the passions is again associated with a lack of knowledge and insufficient focus on what is truly important: “You do not think about your destruction. Neither do you think about where you are, nor have you understood that you exist in darkness and death. But you are drunk on the fire and you are [filled] with bitterness while your minds are deranged due to the burning that is within you.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.20–21: πετχιμοειτ γαρ ρητοϋ ε[τ]εικωρτ πε φνα† ναϋ νουφαντα-  
αγια νμνε (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 188).

<sup>64</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.22–26: φναροϋειν εροϋ ρηουσαειε εφνατε[κο] αϋω φναραικμα-  
λωτιζε νμοϋ ρηουρλεε νκακε νφτορποϋ ρηουρηλωνη εφ†στοει αϋω φνααϋ νβλλε ρραϊ  
ρνητεμϋνια νατσει αϋω φναχαϋαϋ ννεϋγγχοϋε (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas  
the Contender,” 188).

<sup>65</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.28–30: νθε νουχαλινος ρηουταπρο εφωκ νμοϋ απεφουωϋε νμν  
νμοϋ (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 188).

<sup>66</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.30–37: αφνοροϋ ρηνεφαλϋσις αϋω νεϋμελος τηροϋ αφσονροϋ νρραϊ  
ρνηπσιϋε ντημρε ντεμϋνεια νναει ετοϋονρ εβολ ετνατεκο αϋω ετναϋιβε αϋω  
ετναϋωνε καταπωκ νταϋσοκοϋ ντηπε απτη νουοειϋ νμ εϋρωτβ νμοϋ εϋωκ νμοϋ  
ρηννητβνοϋε τηροϋ νραωρβ (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 188).

<sup>67</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.21–23: οϋρι νητη ναιχναλωτος δετετνμηρ ρηνσπηλ[αι]ον (Lay-  
ton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 198).

<sup>68</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.24–29: τετηρνοει αν νπετητακο οϋτε τ[ε]τηρνοει αν ρηνετετη-  
<ν>ρητοϋ οϋτε νη[ετ]νημνε δετετηνωοπ ρηπκακε νηπμο[ϋ] αλλα ετετηταρε ρηπκωρτ  
αϋω τετη[μερ] νσιϋε ερεπετηρητ ποϋϋ ερωτη ετβειν[μ]οϋρ ετ[ρ]ηνηνε (Layton and  
Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 198).

#### 4. Struggle and Adversity

In the *Book of Thomas*, Jesus utters numerous stark warnings to those who are led by bodily desire, proclaiming “woe unto you who are in the grip of the powers of your body, for they will afflict you.”<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, and in a way highly similar to what we see in monastic writings, he goes on to connect this situation directly to the struggle with demons: “Woe unto you who are in the grip of the powers of the wicked demons!”<sup>70</sup> These demons can be equated with the so-called “visible spirits,” which the perfect ascetic, described as an angel, can escape using his wings, which, as we saw above, the ascetic gains by acquiring true knowledge.<sup>71</sup>

Pachomius similarly talks about demons as spirits, speaking of having been attacked by them since childhood, but when, as he puts it, “I flee to God weeping and humble with fasting and nightly vigils, the enemy grows weak before me with all his spirits.”<sup>72</sup> Like the *Book of Thomas*, Pachomius warns against demons in the context of bodily passions, admonishing a monk he is chastising to “Guard yourself, O my son, against fornication. Do not destroy the members of Christ. Do not obey demons.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, just like the *Book of Thomas*, Pachomius adds the threat of post-mortem punishment: “Remember the anguish of the punishments,” and “remember the anguish of the moment when you will leave the body.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Book Thom.* 144.10–12: οὐοει νητῆ ἵτοοτοῦ ἡἡεζοῦσια ἡπετῆσωνα χενετῆμο γαρ σεναθῆκε τῆνε (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 200). Cf. Horsiesios, *Test.* 25.

<sup>70</sup> *Book Thom.* 144.12–13: οὐοῖ νητῆ ἵτοοτοῦ ἡἡενεργεια ἡἡλαιδων ἡπονηρον (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 200). Cf., e.g., Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.30, 55; Paral. 6a, 12, 24, 39; *Ep. Am.* 21, 24; Horsiesios, *Test.* 25; SBo 102.

<sup>71</sup> *Book Thom.* 140.1–5 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 186).

<sup>72</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.11: ειωδνπωτ δε ερατῆ ἡπνοῦτε εἰῆοῦρῖνε ἡἡοῦθῆβῖο ἡἡοῦ-  
νнс†а ἡἡενοῦωη ἡῖοεῖσ ωαρεπχαχε ρῶσв ἡἡαεραῖ ἡἡεεκεπνεῦμα τηροῦ (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 3).

<sup>73</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.30: εαρεε εрок ω παωηре εвол εἰῆππορῖα ἡἡῖῖтакеἡμεлос ἡἡεχρισтос ἡἡῖсωтῖ ἡсἡἡлаидонῖон (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 12).

<sup>74</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.30: εριπνεεῦε ἡῖтἡаηгкн ἡἡколасис (...) εριπνεεῦε ἡῖтἡаηгкн ἡἡпἡаῦ εῖεκнἡῦ εвол εἰсῶна (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 12); cf. also SBo 82. Indeed, the references to post-mortem punishments in *Book Thom.* has clear parallels in both the Pachomian literature and in later Coptic apocrypha, such as the *Investiture of the Archangel Michael*, Ps-Timothy, *On Abbaton the Angel of Death*, and Ps-Timothy, *On the Feast of the Archangel Michael*, to mention but a few. See also Christian H. Bull, “The Great Demon of the Air and the Punishment of Souls: The *Perfect Discourse* (NHC VI,8) and Hermetic and Monastic Demonologies,” in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu’avons nous appris? Colloque international, Québec, Université Laval, 2931 mai 2015* (ed. Eric Crêgheur, Louis Painchaud, and Tuomas Rasimus; BCNH.É 10; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 105–20.

This emphasis on demons goes hand in hand with imagery of struggle and fighting. The centrality of the struggle against the passions of the flesh in the monastic life is vividly described by Pachomius himself. While admitting that he is himself tormented by desire, and asking for prayers on his own behalf, he tells the monk he is castigating in his *First Instruction* to “be sober in everything, labor, do the work of a preacher, stand firm against temptation” (μηφε ἴμοκ εἰζῶβ νιμ ὠπῆϊσε ἀπῆζῶβ ἡπρεφταῶεοειῶ εἰπῆρασμος) and to “complete the struggle of the monastic life” (ἄωκ εβολ ἡπαγων ἡτμηῆτμονοχος), which among other things include “guarding your virginity” (εκζαρεε ετεκπαρῶεῖα) as well as “withdrawing yourself from your lack of moderation and these strange polluted voices” (εκζερε ἴμοκ ετεκπαραμετρον μῆνεϊσμη ἡῶῆμο ετβητ).<sup>75</sup> This is the kind of struggle that puts the metaphor of the athlete in the *Book of Thomas* in its proper context. And just like the *Book of Thomas* makes clear that one should imitate the apostles, and ultimately Christ, we find the Pachomian *Paralipomena* stating that being a good ascetic athlete involves the imitation of other good Christian athletes, asserting that “the noble athlete does not see the one among (the Christians) who is defeated, but he emulates those who conquer, in order to imitate them in a good manner, worthy of the same crown.”<sup>76</sup> It is also worthy of note, in light of the *Book of Thomas*’ use of the designation “athlete” for the apostle Matthias, that in addition to archbishop Athanasius and Antony the Great, the Pachomian writings generally apply the term “athlete” to leaders of the Pachomian *koinonia*.<sup>77</sup>

A metaphor that is related to that of struggle is that of being on guard, watching against the influence of desire and demons. In the *Book of Thomas*, Jesus tells Thomas, the apostles, and ultimately the readers of the text in Codex II, to “watch and pray that you will not remain in the flesh, but that you will leave the bond of the bitterness of life, and praying, you will find rest.”<sup>78</sup> Likewise, Pachomius *First Instruction* abounds with reminders to his monastic readers to be watchful and on guard against various passions and evil spirits.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.61 (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 24).

<sup>76</sup> Paral. 40 (Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, 164; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:65)

<sup>77</sup> See SBo 133, 134, 136, G<sup>1</sup> 136 (Athanasius); G<sup>1</sup> 12 (Palamon); G<sup>1</sup> 22 (Antony and Pachomius); G<sup>1</sup> 79 (the ancient brothers in the Pachomian *koinonia*, Cornelios, Psentaesios, Souros, Psoi, Pecos, another Pachomius, Paul, John, Paphnutius, and many others, most of whom were appointed by Pachomius as leaders and fathers of the monasteries); G<sup>1</sup> 84 (Titoue, housemaster of the stewards in Pbow).

<sup>78</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.8–11: ροεῖ ετετῆσοπῆ ἄεεετῆναῶῶηε αν εἰτσαρζ αλλα ἄεεετῆναεῖ εβολ εἰτῆρρε ἡπῆῶε ἡτεπβιος αἰῶ ετετῆσοπῆ τετῆναεσῆε ἡοῦῆτον (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 204).

<sup>79</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.10, 13, 20, 26, 36, 41, 43, 51, 55, 61.

Metaphors of struggle can also be combined with imagery of cleansing. We see this reflected in the *Testament* of the Pachomian abbot Horsiesios, who freely adapts the letter of Jude and an extended quotation from Ephesians to make this point:

Jude says in his letter, “snatching them from the fire and hating the soiled garment of the flesh” (cf. Jude 23). Let us beware of this kind of garment and “put on instead God’s armor so as to be able to resist the devil’s snares. For our fight is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness, and against the spirits of wickedness in the heavens” (Eph 6:11–12).<sup>80</sup>

The metaphor of the material body and its desires as a bad garment also seems to be reflected in the *Book of Thomas*, although the passage in question is unfortunately badly damaged.<sup>81</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The burning question underlying the *Book of Thomas* is thus how to quench the insatiable fire of the bodily passions and attain rest. Or, as the *Book of Thomas* puts it, “Who will rain dew of rest on you so that it will extinguish many fires from you and your burning? Who will give you the sun to shine upon you to dissolve the darkness that is in you and to hide the darkness and the defiled water?”<sup>82</sup> The answer, of course, is the Savior, who provides both the blueprint of the perfect ascetic and the instructions on how to become one and live like one. And, importantly, they are also instructed to pass on the knowledge they have received, thus enabling others to reach the same state.

In the Pachomian literature we find that the abbot Theodore similarly describes the monastic life as “the life of the apostles,” when he in his *Second Instruction* describes the virtues and way of life of the Pachomian *koinonia* with the following words: “[the holy] *Koinonia*, by which (God) [has shown]

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<sup>80</sup> Horsiesios, *Test. 25: Et Iudas in epistula sua loquitur: Et hos quidem de igne rapientes, et odio habentes carnis commaculatam tunicam. Caueamus huiuscemodi uestimentum, et induamur potius armatura Dei, ut possimus resistere contra insidias diaboli. Non est enim nobis pugna contra carnem et sanguinem; sed aduersus principatus et potestates, aduersus rectores tenebrarum, aduersus spiritalia nequitiae in caelestibus* (Amand Boon, *Pachomiana Latina: Règle et épîtres de S. Pachôme, épître de S. Théodore et “Liber” de S. Orsiesius: Texte latin de S. Jérôme* [Bibliothèque de la Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 7; Leuven: Bureaux de la Revue, 1932], 126; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3:190).

<sup>81</sup> *Book Thom.* 143.37–38 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 198).

<sup>82</sup> *Book Thom.* 144.15–19: *ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲗⲱⲟⲩ ⲛⲏⲧⲏ̅̅̅ ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲓⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲏⲧⲟⲛ ⲕⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲉⲥⲛⲁⲗⲱⲧⲏ̅̅̅ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲗⲁⲗ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲕⲱⲗⲉⲧ ⲉⲅⲟⲗ ⲗⲏⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲡⲉⲧⲏ̅̅̅ⲣⲱⲕⲗ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲗⲏ̅̅̅ ⲛⲏⲧⲏ̅̅̅ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲡⲏⲣⲏ ⲁⲡⲏ̅̅̅ⲣⲓⲉ ⲁⲕⲕⲏⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲁⲅⲱⲗ ⲉⲅⲟⲗ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲡⲓⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲉⲧⲗⲏⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲁⲗⲱ ⲁⲗⲱⲡ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲡⲓⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲛ̅̅̅ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩ* (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 200).

forth the life [of the] apostle[s] to those who wish to [become like] them [before] the Lord of all forever.”<sup>83</sup> The same Theodore also describes the goal of this life in terms very close to what we find at the end of the *Book of Thomas*, where Jesus tells the apostles that they will “reign with the king” (ῥῥο μῆπῥο) if only they “leave the toils and the passions of the body” (εἰ εβολ εῖνῆρισε μῆῖπαθος ἢτρεπσωμα).<sup>84</sup> Theodore similarly points out, with a reference to Matt 19:28/Luke 22:30, that the apostles “were worthy to sit [on] the twelve glorious [thrones] and [judge the] twelve [tribes] of Israel.”<sup>85</sup> The *Book of Thomas* in fact comes very close to describing the goal of the monastic life in the same way as it is articulated by Pachomius in his *First Instruction*: “Let us struggle, O my beloved, so that we may receive the crown that is prepared. The throne is spread out. The door of the kingdom is open. To the one who is victorious shall I give from the secret manna. If we struggle and are victorious against the passions, we shall reign forever.”<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, just like the *Book of Thomas* is a text that presents perfect teaching intended for the perfect, in order to provide ascetics with perfect knowledge enabling them to act in accordance with proper ascetic behavior, keeping watch against the desires of the flesh, Pachomian abbot Horsiesios states in his so-called *Testament*, that “you who fear the Lord, arm yourselves with chastity, that you may deserve to hear, you are not in the flesh but in the spirit. And know that perfect things are given to the perfect, and that useless things are given to the useless.”<sup>87</sup>

With all these parallels with the Pachomian literature in mind, it is not difficult to imagine how and why Pachomian monks would have been interested in copying and reading the *Book of Thomas*. At the same time it should also be pointed out that this text is by no means alone among the Nag Hammadi texts in having close affinities with Pachomian literature or other texts associated with early Egyptian monasticism, including not only such texts as the *Gospel*

<sup>83</sup> Theodore, *Instr.* 2.1: [τκοι]νωμια [ετο]γα[αβ ταῖ ἡ]ταφογ[ενη]πβιος [ἡῖα]ποστο[λος] εβολ εἰτοοτῆ ἡῖ[ρω]με ετογεω[ωω]πε εῖπε[εσμοτ] ἡνετῖμαγ [εαε]τῖπῆε ἡ[ογο]η νη ωαεεε (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 38).

<sup>84</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.12–14 (Layton and Turner, “Book of Thomas the Contender,” 204).

<sup>85</sup> Theodore, *Instr.* 2.1: εγῥῖπωα ἡεμο[ος εἰ]πῖῖτсноуε [ἡ]ρο[нос] ἡεωγ ἡ[εκρине] ἡτ[ῖ]ῖтсн[ооусε ἡφγλн] ἡπῖῖ (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 38).

<sup>86</sup> Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.50: μαρῖαγωνιζε ω ναμεραατε εεεεεχῖ ἡπεκλον ετсε̄тωт πεερονос πορω προ ἡтῖῖтero оγωη πεтῖαεро †на† наε εвол εῖπῖмаηна εонп енωан-аεωиζε ἡтῖεро енпаεос тῖῖаεῥῥо εαεεεε (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 20).

<sup>87</sup> Horsiesios, *Test.* 20: *Qui timetis Dominum armate uos castitate, ut audire mereamini: Vos autem non estis in carne, sed in spiritu. Et scitote quod perfectis perfecta tribuantur, et inanibus reddantur inania* (Boon, *Pachomiana Latina*, 122; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3:185).

of *Thomas*<sup>88</sup> and the *Exegesis on the Soul*,<sup>89</sup> and even the *Apocryphon of John*,<sup>90</sup> all found in the same codex as the *Book of Thomas*,<sup>91</sup> but also such texts as the *Dialogue of the Savior*,<sup>92</sup> the *Sentences of Sextus*, and the *Teachings of Silvanus*,<sup>93</sup> just to mention the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, as Christian Bull has convincingly shown, even the eclectic Nag Hammadi Codex VI as a whole, including its heavily rewritten excerpt from Plato’s *Republic*, seems highly amenable to a monastic context.<sup>94</sup>

Pachomius ends his *First Instruction* with the following words:

Now then, my brother, make peace with your brother and pray for me, too, for I cannot do anything, but I am afflicted by my desires. But you, be sober in everything, labor, do the work of the preacher, stand firm against temptation. Complete the struggle of the monastic

<sup>88</sup> Melissa Harl Sellow, “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; Kimberley A. Fowler, “Reading *Gospel of Thomas* 100 in the Fourth Century: From Roman Imperialism to Pachomian Concern over Wealth,” *VC* 72 (2018): 421–46; René Falkenberg and André Gagné in this volume.

<sup>89</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, “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; Kimberley A. Fowler, “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.

<sup>90</sup> 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; and Rosland in this volume.

<sup>91</sup> On Codex II as a whole, see 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 Gribetz; TSAJ 155; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 222–43; Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, “Historiography as Anti-History: Reading Nag Hammadi Codex II,” *ARG* 20 (2018): 77–90; 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); and Fowler in this volume.

<sup>92</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, “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.

<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> Christian H. Bull, “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, “Great Demon of the Air”; and Bull in this volume.

life, being humble, being gentle, trembling at the words you have heard, guarding your virginity, and withdrawing yourself from your lack of moderation and these strange polluted voices. And do not be outside the Scriptures of the holy ones, but be firm in the faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom be glory to him and his good Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever! Amen! Bless us! (Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.61)<sup>95</sup>

This passage shows clearly how Pachomius' advice to the "spiteful monk" comes very close to what we see in the *Book of Thomas*. Both talk about the need to be watchful and struggle against material desires, and they both highlight the importance of preaching. Moreover, Pachomius' references to the "brothers," "peace," "prayer," and "the holy ones" resonate with the colophon following the *Book of Thomas*, with its call to the readers to "remember me, too, my brothers, in your prayers. Peace to the holy ones and the spiritual ones!"<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> ΤΕΝΟΥ ΘΕ ΠΑΣΟΝ ΔΡΙΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΜΗΠΕΚΣΟΝ ΔΥΩ ΝΤΕΤΗΩΛΗΛ ΕΧΩΪ ΖΩ ΧΕΪΤΕΩΡΛΑΔΥ ΔΝ ΝΖΩΒ ΑΛΛΑ ΤΘΗΚΗΥ ΕΤΒΕΝΔΟΥΩΩ ΝΤΟΚ ΔΕ ΝΗΦΕ ΜΟΚ ΖΗΖΩΒ ΝΗΝ ΩΠΡΙΣΕ ΑΡΙΠΖΩΒ ΝΠΡΕΥΤΑΩΘΕΟΙΩ ΖΥΠΟΝΕΙΝΕ ΕΠΠΙΡΑΣΜΟΣ ΧΩΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΑΓΩΝ ΝΤΗΝΗΤΗΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΕΚΘΒΗΝΗΥ ΕΚΘ ΝΡΗΡΑΩ ΕΚΣΤΩΤ ΖΗΤΟΥ ΝΗΩΔΑΧΕ ΝΤΑΚΣΟΤΜΟΥ ΕΚΖΑΡΕΖ ΕΤΕΚΠΑΡΘΕΝΙΑ ΔΥΩ ΕΚΣΙΖΕ ΜΟΚ ΕΤΕΚΠΑΡΑΜΕΤΡΟΝ ΜΗΝΕΙΣΗΝ ΝΩΠΜΟ ΕΤΒΗΤ ΝΓΗΠΒΟΛ ΔΝ ΜΗΝΕΓΡΑΦΗ ΜΗΝΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΑΛΛΑ ΕΚΤΑΧΡΗΥ ΖΗΤΠΙΣΤΕ ΜΠΕΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΠΕΝΧΟΕΙΣ ΠΑΪ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΙΓΟΟΤΪ ΠΕΟΟΥ ΝΑΥ ΜΗΠΪΕΙΩΤ ΝΑΓΑΘΩΣ ΜΗΠΠΕΠΕΥΜΑ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΩΔΕΝΕΖ ΝΕΖΕΖ ΖΑΜΗΝ ΣΜΟΥ ΕΡΟΝ (Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme*, 24).

<sup>96</sup> *Book Thom.* 145.20–23: ἀρχανέετε ζω νασνήυ ε[ν]νετ[η]προσευχη ε[ι]ρηνη τοις αγιοις μ[η]μ[η]νεματικος; cf. also the colophon at the end of Codex VII (*Stiles Seth* 127.28–32) with its call for blessings: πεϊχωμνε πατ[η]ν[η]τειωτ πε πωρηε πενταψαεψ[ω] σμου εροϊ πωτ[η] σμου εροκ πωτ[η] εβουγερηνην εαμην (Layton and Turner, "Book of Thomas the Contender," 204).

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