Lion Within: Plato's *Republic* in Roman Upper Egypt

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Abstract

The discovery, at Nag Hammadi in 1945, of a sealed jar filled with religious manuscripts reinvigorated the study of Gnosticism. One of the more confounding elements, found within the sixth codex, is a Coptic-language excerpt of the ninth book of Plato's *Republic.* Building upon previous scholarship, this paper will contend that the excerpt was included as a necessary reference for understanding the seventh logion of *The Gospel of Thomas*, a non-canonical early Christian wisdom-text. Plato *Rep.* IX 588a-589b relates a parable that solves this difficult saying of the risen Jesus. When, in the 4th century, an audience member could not be guaranteed a background in classical Greek philosophy, the Coptic excerpt of *Rep.* IX could fill in the gap. It is not a perfect translation, however, with shifted emphasis and tone. This study's additional goal is to demonstrate that this shift is explicable within the history of Roman Egypt, and analogous to broader changes in Christian hermeneutics and canonicity between the 2nd and 4th centuries.

Introduction

Books XIII and IX of Plato's *Republic* are concerned chiefly with the decline of his ideal city from injustice, mirroring the rising action of books II through IV.[1] The Nag Hammadi Codex (NHC) VI excerpt begins right when (588a) Plato's dialectical figure Socrates has just finished evaluating different forms of governance and reprises the motivating question first raised in Book II: Is it more profitable for a man to be thoroughly just, unjust, or to do unjust things while appearing just to his peers? As answer and also summary, he presents a parable of man as a soul in three parts: the many-headed beast (appetitive), the lion (spirited), and the human being (rational).

"Fashioning an image of the soul in words" (εἰκόνα πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ)[2] may not be familiar to a modern reader, nor might this moment of the ninth book seem a crucial turning-point in the dialogue. The motif carried weight in ancient metaphysics, though, especially among the Middle and Neo-Platonists. The tripartite soul, divided passions, or animal spirits appear to varying degrees in Philo, Alcinous, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Eusebius, and Paul. Each one of these thinkers warrants his own lengthy treatment, and his debt to the broader Platonic tradition would be a crucial piece. This study's interest is rather in *The Gospel of Thomas*, which includes in its seventh logion an apparent reference to the lion-man Platonic motif.

The Gospel of Thomas was a non-canonical Christian tractate and, in modern times, one of the most influential texts found in Coptic, in its entirety, near Nag Hammadi, Egypt. *Thomas* does not read like a canonical Christian gospel. It is structured into clustered sayings ('logia'), thus sharing a genre with wisdom-texts of the 2nd century, such as the *Chaldean Oracles* and the

[1] Kenneth Dorter, *The Transformation of Plato's Republic* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 7.
[2] Plat. *Rep.* 588b. Translations of Plato are my own or in consultation of G.M.A. Grube's *Republic*, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1992).

Hermetica. These works are contemporaries of *Thomas*, too, as the majority of scholars place its composition in Greek or Syriac between 40 and 140 AD, the latest being Porter's claim at 250 AD.[3] The *Thomas* sayings are declarations of the risen savior-figure Jesus, and the stakes of the tractate are established in its opening invocation: "Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not taste death." There is much debate, discussed below at some length, as to why *Thomas* was excluded from the synoptic canon: Was this a function primarily of its content (world-denying in places), its emphasis (soteriological instead of historical), or its style (discursive instead of narrative)? The question is certainly relevant for scholars of the Early Church, interested in relating *Thomas* to a proposed sayings-gospel precursor 'Q' for Matthew and Luke. This study's focal point, however, is in an apparent reference to the Platonic lion-man motif within the work's seventh logion:

> Jesus said: Blessed is the lion whom the man shall eat and the lion becomes man; but foul is the man whom the lion shall eat and the lion shall become man.

The stakes for understanding are high; per the incipit, each *Thomas* saying has within it the key to eternal salvation. If the *Thomas* logia are intentionally confounding or obscure, then the seventh would seem one of the most difficult. Why does the lion become man in both cases, whether eating or being eaten? The man is cursed when the lion eats him. Why, if the man eats the lion and humanizes it, does the lion still receive the blessing? For decades after the Nag Hammadi discovery, several scholars maintained that the second half of the logion was

[3] J. R. Porter, *The Lost Bible* (New York: Metro Books, 2010), 9. Greek fragments of *Thomas*, found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, are dated to between 130 and 250 AD.

corrupted, switching the subject and object to achieve *chiasmus.*[4] Without compelling evidence of scribal error, though, the Coptic text calls for treatment verbatim.

Logion 7 has no obvious parallels with synoptic Christian sources, unlike those sayings (nearly half of *Thomas*) that do overlap with dialogue in Luke or Matthew.[5] Nor does familiarity with the wider Judeo-Christian milieu solve this puzzle. There is a lion-deity trope found more generally outside the canonical Christian tradition, in some Jewish and Gnostic sources. Israel and Yahweh are identified with or compared to a lion.[6] Cosmogenic works, such as the *Pistis Sophia* (discovered in late 18th century) and *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II), imagine the Old Testament demiurge Yaldabaoth to have the face of a lion (*leontoeides*).[7] Yet these negative portrayals of the lion as an Old Testament, devilish, and Earth-bound figure do not agree with the balanced (if confusing) portrayal in *Thomas* 7. Why would one bless the Hebrew deity or false creator-demigod for being eaten by man? Working through these possibilities, Howard M. Jackson shows convincingly that Plato *Rep.* IX 588a-589b is *the* necessary point of reference for

[4] Jean Doresse's translation in *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (1960): "Jesus says: Blessed is the lion which a man eats so that the lion becomes a man. But cursed is the man whom a lion eats so that the man becomes a lion!" Doresse agrees with the general reading, however: "No doubt the lion here represents human passions, or more precisely, the lying spirit of evil." (p. 371). He later makes explicit appeal to "Platonic origin", e.g. for logion 83 (p. 377).

[5] E.g. "For many of the first will be last" (*Thomas* 4); "If a blind person leads a blind person, both of them will fall into a hole" (34); "Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine" (100)

[6] As noted by Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man* (1985), there are several such expressions in the Old Testament (p. 13): "He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee" (Num 24:9). "Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain" (Num 23:24). "For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me" (Job 10:16). "I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me" (Isa 38:13). "For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him" (Hos 5:14). "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them" (Hos 13:7). "They shall walk after the Lord: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west" (Hos 11:10). "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). This image is reflected occasionally in the New Testament: "And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices." (Rev 10:3).

[7] *P. Sophia* 31; *A. John* 10.

one wishing to unravel the mystery of *Thomas* 7. If the lion represents the spirited passion (θυμοειδές) within a human being, and 'the man within' represents his reason (λογιστικὸν), one can 'rewrite' *Thomas* 7 as follows:

> Jesus said: Blessed (harmonious) is the leonine passion which the inner-man reason shall eat, and the passion becomes (subset of) outer man; but foul (disharmonious) is the reason which the passion shall eat and the passion shall become (ruler over) outer man.

There is now a compelling case to make that the excerpt of Plato in NH Codex VI is related significantly to the seventh logion of *Thomas* in NH Codex II. This is an argument advanced by both Jackson (1985) and Lanzillotta (2013), the two most thorough investigators. Stances taken by other scholars will receive more discussion below, but their offerings are not as much alternative hypotheses as healthy skepticism. Would the 4th-century Coptic-writer have known the excerpt to be Plato? Could they have unknowingly copied down the *Republic* fragment, thinking it a Hermetic text or just an interesting passage? It is impossible to disprove these scenarios entirely, but the specificity of inclusion suggests an intentionality. The excerpt begins with Socrates' question and ends with the conclusion of the relevant parable, at a significant moment.[8] Also, some choices of redaction and shifts of emphasis, verbal mood, and interrogative syntax can be linked to purposive work—perhaps a 'gnosticizing' agenda of the translator, but almost certainly not idle commonplace copying. It is also worth remembering the expense of papyrus, the immense time and effort of scribal work. On these bases, this paper proceeds from the premise that the *Republic* excerpt's inclusion was not an accident or coincidence.

This paper's second major argument, and its departure from previous scholarship, requires firm grounding in the historical playing-field. As mentioned above, the evidence and

[8] I use the word "excerpt", not "fragment", for the intentionality it connotes.

scholarly consensus put *Thomas'* original composition in Greek or Syriac between 40 and 140 AD, and certainly no later than 250. The full version of *Thomas* available to modern readers is in Coptic, from Nag Hammadi. The entire NH collection is dated no earlier than the middle of the 4th century. The manuscripts may have been buried after Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, condemned heretical religious texts in 367,[9] although scholars are careful to note that this is "mere speculation."[10] This means that at least one century, and perhaps two or more, separated (1) the original cluster-composition of *Thomas* and (2) the translation, revision, and collection of Coptic texts that were eventually buried near this Pachomian monastery in Upper Egypt.

The geopolitical and socioeconomic differences between 2nd-century Alexandria and 4th-century Upper Egypt are considerable. In the larger empire, E.R. Dodds saw in the Marcus Aurelius' reign (161-180) the start of an 'Age of Anxiety', a Rome obsessed by peripheral wars and backward-looking classicism. Speaking broadly about the latter centuries, so-called 'Late Antiquity', Peter Brown saw in the overtaxed and culturally relegated colonies of Egypt, the Levant, and North Africa the foment of Christianity. During and after the reign of Augustus, Naphtali Lewis describes, Roman Egypt was under the direct command of the emperor's personal representative. It was a codified apartheid state, where "the touchstone of status was Hellenism", with top-down legal designations accompanying ethnic ones: Roman citizens ranking above Jews and Greek dwellers of the major cities, and they in turn above 'Egyptians' (all others). Caste mobility was nearly impossible, and while "the lot of the humble and the poor was not enviable anywhere in the Roman Empire… the population of Egypt appears to have

[9] James M. Robinson, "Introduction", in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* 4th ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 16-19.
[10] David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter'", *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4 (1994): 518.

been singled out for exceptionally harsh treatment."[11] Even the enfranchisement in 212 AD of all inhabitants as Roman citizens did little to change the social structure and class stratifications, which remained *de facto* if not *de jure*. The privileged position of educated, literate, and urban Greeks was enforced by law and then by norm, and the claim to the Hellenistic purisms of the Second Sophistic was as strong in Alexandria as in Athens. The separateness of Egyptian-speakers in southern country towns was enforced, even as such villages would become strong bases of support for Christian traditions, canonical and otherwise.

Having postulated that the Platonic motif contained in Book IX of the *Republic* is crucial to understanding *Thomas* 7, it bears acknowledging that the Nag Hammadi corpus is only one static window onto a dynamic entity. Why is there a Coptic translation of these religious tractates, and the *Republic* excerpt in particular? Why does the excerpt begin and end in such (philosophically) precise moments? There is a story in the background: Greek-language works, those of the relatively privileged, had to be rendered comprehensible for Egyptian-speakers, outside the well-educated urban sphere. The first version of *Thomas* likely originated in a Hellenized population of the Levant—Meyer's best guess is Edessa, Syria[12]—and circulated in Greek-speaking cultural hubs like Alexandria. Some Greek fragments of *Thomas* were found at Oxyrhynchus, in Middle Egypt, 260 miles south. The full Coptic version comes from Nag Hammadi, another 240 miles along the Nile and, in many respects, another world entirely.

This difference in milieu between original tractate composition and the NHC version goes relatively unmentioned in the scholarship, by Jackson and especially by Lanzillotta. Jackson assumes that the Plato translator, contributing to the Nag Hammadi corpus, must very well have

[11] Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 32-5.
[12] Marvin Meyer, "Thomas Christianity," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures,* ed. Marvin Meyer (HarperOne 2007), 780.

been from the same 'school' as the original *Thomas* writers, since there is an undeniable relationship. Lanzillotta's aim is the application of intertextual theory, de-emphasizing historical and social background (at best speculative) in favor of the words on the page. For him, *Thomas* and Plato exist in a flat universe, with a linear transformation between them. His conclusion is that *Thomas*, in its 'gnosticizing' zeal, insufficiently appreciates the philosophical intricacy of the *Republic*. This paper's alternative proposal is to draw the following contrast:

The original readers of *The Gospel of Thomas* were classically-educated speakers of Greek in Egypt (or Syriac in the Levant), fluent in Hellenistic philosophy (including the lion-man motif) and embracing a multifaceted appreciation for its seventh logion. This first group would not require a Coptic translation of a Platonic commonplace. Instead, the Coptic *Republic* fragment makes sense for a second audience: semi-literate readers and hearers in 4th-century Upper Egypt, *de facto* excluded from the wealth, learning, and Hellenism of the Roman Near East. For them, perhaps practicing semi-canonical Christianity, the codices of Nag Hammadi could be an anthologized compendium of apocryphal knowledge, delivered as oral ministry.

What is the implication of this distinction? The third thrust of the paper includes an analogy to the hermeneutical divergence between Origen and Augustine: various versus linear, multifaceted versus straightforward, textual versus rhetorical, literary versus liturgical. In the first case, if *The Gospel of Thomas* existed within a broad Greco-Christian philosophical frame and was read by hermeneutical circles of 2nd- and 3rd-century Alexandrians not unlike those of Philo and Origen, Plato can be allegorized into *Thomas* 7 with layers of literal, metaphorical, and spiritual meaning. In the second case, if *Thomas* existed as apocryphal scripture for a semi-heretical, quasi-Christian movement of semi-literate persons, then the *Rep.* IX motif existed necessarily and sufficiently as a precise allegorical tool. The goal was linear progression, from

fixed words to final revelation: ‘Apply directly to logion 7.’ This second interpretive frame is analogous to (and contemporaneous with) Augustine’s method in the 4th and 5th centuries, whereby an all-encompassing and omniscient Word solves itself by moving from ‘signs’ to ‘things’. Perhaps working from the notes of his forebears several generations earlier, the translator-redactor of Coptic Plato considered the *Republic* excerpt a necessary reference—a semiotic ‘thing’—in the quest for Gnostic salvation. Neither Origen nor Augustine endorsed a Gnostic agenda or *The Gospel of Thomas*, but they offer a useful comparative basis when thinking about biblical hermeneutics writ large.

Section 2 of this paper offers an answer to the first question: What has been said convincingly in previous scholarship about the Platonic motif, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the nature of their relationship? Section 3 critiques that scholarship and provides social-historical grounding in Roman Upper Egypt, working toward a deeper explanation for the Coptic translation. Section 4 extends the boundaries of significance to allegorical practice and canonicity, musing on potential connections and implications. This three-part, five-act study offers explanatory power for the ultimate mystery—why *Rep.* IX 588a-589b, why in Coptic, why in Nag Hammadi?—by distinguishing between the two literary-historical contexts: (1) 2nd-century Greek-readers, with a broad hermeneutical frame that relies on fluency in Greek philosophy; (2) 4th-century pseudo-Christians, reading or hearing in Coptic, with a hermeneutic that privileges verbatim truth and linear progression toward revelation.

Texts

The deeper dive begins with discussion of the three principal texts, as philosophical works and historical documents: Plato’s *Republic* (Greek, Athens, 380 BC), *The Gospel of Thomas* (Greek

or Syriac, maybe Edessa, ca. 40–140 AD), and the Nag Hammadi Codices (Coptic, Thebaid region of Upper Egypt, ca. 4th century AD).

Rep. IX 588a-589b

Is it more profitable to be just or unjust? The original answer, proposed in *Republic* II, was that the man who acts without limits but appears righteous to his peers will reap the greatest reward. Of course, Plato's conclusion to the question, reached after a long comparison of the just soul and the just city, is that there is always more profit in the just and harmonious arrangement. As his answer, Socrates instructs his fellow conversationalists to construct in their minds a representation of the tripartite soul, formed out of discourse and mental wax. The answer, Dorter notes, "adds nothing substantive to what has already been said, but the answers so far have been either in terms of intelligible reality (Book 7) or *pistis*."[13] The wax-figurine parable, while lesser known than the Allegory of the Cave or of the Ideal City, is nevertheless intuitive for a reader versed in Platonic argument. The human soul contains three parts: the man (rational), the lion (spirited)[14], and the many-headed beast (appetitive).

The trichotomy slips into duality, as Socrates also tends to set apart the rational and human, on one hand, from the irrational and bestial on the other (589c ff.). There is also the binary matter of presenting two human beings: the holistic 'outer' (seeming) and component 'inner' (true) man, with harmony achieved by the inner man (ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος) taking complete domination over (ἐγκρατέστατος) the entire man (589b). Socrates does not actually describe the composite whole as a human being, but rather that surrounding the wax animals there is an

[13] Dorter, *Transformation*, 300.
[14] The word for 'lion' occurs only two other times in the *Republic*, once in each of the first and tenth books. "Do you think I'm crazy enough to try to shave a lion or to bear false witness against Thrasymachus?" (I 341c). "The twentieth soul chose the life of a lion. This was the soul of Ajax, son of Telemon. He avoided human life because he remembered the judgment about the armor" (Myth of Er, X 620b).

exterior (ἔξωθεν) sheath in the likeness (εἰκόνα) of a single entity, a human being (τὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), so that to anyone unable to look within (μὴ δυναμένῳ τὰ ἐντὸς ὁρᾶν) but able only to see the external covering (ἔξω μόνον ἔλυτρον ὁρῶντι) it appears to be one living creature (ἓν ζῷον φαίνεσθαι), the man (ἄνθρωπον) (588d11-e1).

The inconsistency between di- and trichotomy is endemic to the larger Platonic tradition, in T. M. Robinson's estimation.[15] Indeed, many of Plato's works, while reliant on the separateness of reason and impulse, do not require a more complicated structure than this simple binary. Why then does Plato make Socrates argue, repeatedly, for a more intricate psychology? Was it a trope of current discourse, or a seriously held belief? It certainly helps with the parallels Plato draws to the tripartite city, the three classes of his republic mirroring the rational, spirited, and appetitive parts of the psyche. But it is harder to reconcile with more declarative and bifurcative statements: "in a man's soul one element is better, one worse" (431a).[16] Robinson finds that "such language is somewhat unfortunate", seeming to prefer the complex, "developed psychology" based in Republic IX (586e4-587a1 specifically), granting each part its own worthwhile status and establishing harmonious union as their ideal.[17] Dorter's solution is to upend the trichotomy as another instance of Plato's artifice, seeing a "recurring theme in the dialogues that our truest self is not tripartite but only appears so in comparison with our body."[18] The average person, in Socrates' explanation, subordinates what is human (perhaps even divine) to what is beastlike, fomenting conflict among the three components. By contrast, the person advocating justice and harmony would tend to the many-headed beast as to crops or livestock, cultivating its tame emanations while hindering its brutish ones. All the more important, the

[15] T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 42.
[16] Plato offers evaluative binaries later in book X too (603a ff), giving IX a unique (if contrarian) tonal weight.
[17] T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology,* 42.
[18] Dorter, *Transformation*, 301. His comparison is with *Timaeus* (90b–c) and *Phaedo* (68b–c, 82b–c).

harmonious soul, led by its inner man, would make allegiance with the lion's nature (σύμμαχον ποιησάμενος τὴν τοῦ λέοντος φύσιν), and would seek to bring all three into friendly concord (588e–589b). The disharmonious soul is one deprived of allegiance and balance, and Socrates goes on to offer examples (590a–c). Stubbornness (αὐθάδεια) and irritability (δυσκολία) excessively strengthen the spirited third, making the lion serpentine (λεοντῶδές τε καὶ ὀφεῶδες αὔξηται, 590a). Luxury (τρυφὴ) and softness (μαλθακία) weaken the spirit into un-leonine cowardice (δειλίαν, 590b). Flattery (κολακεία) and slavishness (ἀνελευθερία) subject the passions to the mob-like beast (τῷ ὀχλώδει θηρίῳ), rendering the spirit apelike instead of leonine (λέοντος πίθηκον γίγνεσθαι). Dorter draws the logical conclusion that serpent and ape are excess and deficiency of spiritedness, respectively, whereas the allied lion is 'just right'.[19]

Motif in Middle Platonism and Late Antiquity

The equivalence between 'inner man' and 'mind' or 'soul' is borne out through the prominent Neo-Platonists. Philo's 'true man' (ὁ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἄνθρωπος or ὁ ἀληθινός ἄνθρωπος) is nearly identical to Plotinus' term (ὁ ἀληθινός ἄνθρωπος) in *Enneads* 1.1.7 and 1.1.10, synonymous with 'the man inside'.[20] Plotinus drives the distinction to general purpose: "Here in the events of our life, it is not the soul within (ἡ ἔνδον ψυχή) but the outside shadow of man (ἡ ἔξω ἀνθρώπου σκιὰ) which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way, on a stage which is the whole earth, where men have in many places set up their own stages" *(Enn.* 3.2.15). Van Kooten reads this tradition into Paul's phrase ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος in 2 Cor 4:216 and

[19] Dorter, *Transformation*, 306 (n20).
[20] George H. Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 362–366. Philo uses the terminology in *Fuga* 131, *Det.* 10, and *Plant.* 42 ("God established the real man in us, that is the mind").

Rom 7:22, in opposition to scholars who deemphasize his connection to the Greco-Roman world and deprive the term of philosophical weight.[21]

The other crucial piece of *Rep.* IX to carry through the Middle Platonists is the division of passions into 'wild' and 'tame' (589b). The conceit "must have been popular in the first century B.C.", since it appears also in chapter 32 of the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous (once thought Albinus), another contemporary teaching in Athens, Alexandria, or Asia Minor.[22] Philo, in Stoic fashion, prefers the eradication of the passions to their sublimation or control. He praises pity, however, and the irrational natures of plants and animals throughout *Virtues* (125-59). Dillon sees this break, as well as a more nuanced treatment of the passions *(apatheia)* and equilibria *(eupatheiai)* in *QG* II 57, as significant bridges between traditions that "may most reasonably be credited to the Stoicizing Platonists of Alexandria."[23]

In Late Antiquity, a remarkable reference comes from Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*, a 4th-century work of Christian apologetics. Eusebius of Caesarea, prominent in the major Christian events of his day (Arian controversy and Council of Nicaea), aims to prove at one point that all of the Greek philosophers, chief among them Plato, offer only material derivative of 'the Hebrew Oracles'. In the 46th chapter of the work's 12th book, he offers selected lines from Ezekiel 1:3–10 declaring four living creatures, in the likeness of men, each with four faces: that of man, lion, calf, and eagle. Immediately subsequent, Eusebius implores the reader to 'Hear now what Plato also says in like manner', and he offers a lengthy quotation from *Republic* IX.

In sum, Greek-language philosophy, both Hellenistic and Christian, continued to make use of the soul-image motif introduced in *Rep.* IX. For Neoplatonists, the distinction between

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[21] Ibid.
[22] John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 302-3; 445-6 (for revised discussion of Alcinous/Albinus in Afterword).
[23] Ibid. 151-2.

'outer' (false) and 'inner' (true) man held especial weight; for Eusebius, the lion-man contrast had strong biblical parallels; and for Philo, breaking somewhat with his Stoic tendencies, the positive treatment of the passions ("making an ally of the lion's nature") influenced his own thinking about *apatheia.* The greatest conclusion drawn from Eusebius is that Plato's motif existed in the 4th century and was accessible verbatim, with all its original intricacy, in Greek.

Nag Hammadi Codices

The sealed jar, found across the river from modern-day Nag Hammadi, included twelve leather-bound papyrus manuscripts written in the Coptic language, Sahidic dialect, almost all likely translations of Greek originals. The discovery was in 1945 but, given geopolitical turmoil in Egypt and around the world, full scholastic access and publication dragged on for years, with the first English versions appearing in the 1970s. Throughout the intervening decades, most Anglophone efforts were led by James M. Robinson, his students and fellow faculty, and those otherwise affiliated with the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont. The original manuscripts now reside in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, inaccessible to the public due to their fragility and light damage.

Few tractates are complete, both in the sense that the Coptic writers excerpted several and in that many manuscripts suffered significant damage. The brothers who discovered the jar dismembered and sold piecemeal several of them as they are understood today.[24] Codex I was sold by a Belgian antiquities dealer to the Carl Jung Institute in 1951, meant as a gift for the psychologist's birthday, and so its original leather binding was retained. Scholars were unable to view it, however, and the only codex outside the political turmoil of Nasser's Egypt remained inaccessible for decades. After donation by the C.J. Institute, the IAC had the so-called Jung

[24] This to the credit of their economic ingenuity, if also to the detriment human knowledge.

Codex binding in its care for several years, acquired officially with permission of Egyptian authorities in 1973. An exhibition at the RISD Museum of Art, "Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries A.D.", borrowed the Codex cover with insurance of $20,000.[25]

Codex II is arguably the meatiest for textual content, including the fullest versions of *Apocryphon John* (Gnostic cosmogony) and *Gospel of Thomas.* The manuscript of NHC II also survived in nearly perfect condition, with 74 inscribed leaves measuring 254 mm by 158 mm. The text is in uncial letters, with no punctuation or divisions, and includes staugrammata (the tau-rho ligature that doubles as a Christian symbol for the cross).[26]

By comparison, Codex VI is a mishmash of shorter works that are highly metaphorical or allegorical. *The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* includes a parable (similar to one in *Matthew*) and Gnostic explanation; *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* a poetic series of identity riddles; *Authoratative Teaching* an exploration of the soul through abstract concepts and symbolic objects; *The Concept of Our Great Power* an apocalyptic text with a deeply negative, mistrustful portrayal of the Old Testament deity. Following this assortment comes the excerpt from the ninth book of Plato's *Republic* and three Hermetic treatises (*Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, The Prayer of Thanksgiving,* and an excerpt from *Asclepius*). These are four non-Christian, non-Gnostic works amidst an already diverse array that spans metaphysical scope and literary style. The sixth codex might serve an ancillary function—anthologized sourcebook, commonplace, or perhaps collection of appendices—for the longer, more substantial, and repeated tractates of the earlier codices.

[25] IAC Archives, Claremont Graduate Library, Folder 4.21
[26] Bentley Layton, "Introduction", in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7.1: Gospel according to Thomas, gospel according to Philip, hypostasis of the archons, and indexes* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 3–5.

Was everything in the Nag Hammadi Codices a 'Gnostic' text? This is a difficult question from its very definitional premise. Not precisely a religion, not quite a religious movement, and not with certainty a discrete social-historical group, 'Gnosticism' receives mention almost exclusively from without, by Christian apologists in the 2nd secondary and students of the Early Church in the 20th. Even with the offerings of Nag Hammadi, 'Gnostics' contradict each other, by emphasis as well as details, and the myriad allusions to Mediterranean and Near Eastern religious culture confuse any hard boundaries scholars seek to draw. It is odd to consolidate, for instance, the world-denying aesthetic of some Greek-speaking Neoplatonists with the ultimate East-West syncretism of Mani, a 'prophet' in the tradition of Christ and Buddha and Zarathustra, put to death at the command of a Sassanid Persian king.[27] Michael A. Williams contests that modern treatments offer only "clichés… and the continual references to what '*the* Gnostics' believed about this or that, or what featured characterized 'the Gnostic religion,' have created the impression of a generalized historical and social unity for which there is no evidence and against which there is much."[28]

Nor does it help that, at a time when Neoplatonic philosophy, early medieval literature, and the history of Late Antiquity returned fervently to the vogue, Gnosticism fared rather poorly. Peter Brown and E. R. Dodds are seminal voices in the 1960s and 70s, regarding the matter respectively as "Black Gnostic speculations"[29] and the odd marriage of pagan and Christian monasticisms. In Brown's striking prose, he celebrates the moment when "Augustine was delivered from Manichaeism, a Gnostic doctrine similar to those under whose shadow Plotinus had begun his intellectual odyssey."[30] The subsequent decades also saw ample popularity for the

[27] Al-Biruni 190.
[28] Williams 5.
[29] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 75.
[30] Ibid. 78.

work of Eric Voegelin, a conservative political scientist who took seriously his heritage from Plato but saw in Gnosticism the same diachronic, antiestablishment demon as in Freemasonry and Marxism.

Ultimately, it is nearly impossible to know whether an individual text does or does not qualify, especially one as (potentially) widely-known as *Thomas*.

The Gospel of Thomas Logia 1, 7

Although *The Gospel of Thomas* is unlike the canonical, narrative Christian gospels in structure, it still fit into a long tradition of works with similar generic thrust. The Greek word 'logia' ('sayings') could mean either 'oracles' or 'Scripture', for pagan and apocryphal Judeo-Christian works respectively. For Brown, the former were the castings of pagan "disquietudes into the form of little treatises of edification,"[31] and indeed *Thomas* has a didactic tone similar to the Sermon on the Mount. The sayings are of post-resurrection Jesus, related by ('Doubting') Thomas the Apostle, identified as 'Didymus' ('Twin'). Half of Jesus' logia qualify as conventional, exactly replicating or roughly in line with Matthew or Luke; the other half are either Thomasine additions or canonical exclusions. Whether the divergences qualify *Thomas* as 'Gnostic', however, instead of merely a kind of Proto-Christian, is an open question for modern scholarship. Eusebius counted it among works "which, although not canonical but disputed… are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas…"[32] While it may have been heretical, *Thomas* resurged in the opinion of many 20th-century scholars, who thought it received the 'Gnostic' label unfairly by association with Nag Hammadi. Davies defends one version of this view:

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[31] Brown 50. His general attitude was that 'wisdom texts' summarized complex classical philosophy and culture into digestible chunks, even by the untrained and (if delivered aloud) the illiterate.
[32] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastica* 3.25

> Certainly Thomas can be read as a gnostic text, but so can any religious literature if you tacitly assume beforehand that it is 'gnostic'. Gnostic exegetical texts have (both those long known and those newly discovered) covered the range of scripture from Genesis to the Psalms to Homer, from the Synoptics to John to the letters of Paul… Deriving from Jewish wisdom thinking, Thomas contains significant similarities to conceptions found in Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and, in some of the gospel's clearly inauthentic sayings, to the speculative writings of Philo.[33]

The text keeps Jesus' historical identity ambiguous, other than vague allusion to his death, without a clear stance on crucifixion, resurrection, final judgment, or (Trinitarian) divinity. Some modern scholars, including J. Robinson, find *Thomas* productive when thinking about a theoretical Q source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the structure of which may also have been a compendium of logia suggestive of an earlier oral tradition. It is helpful insofar as it offers one approach to dating: *Thomas* does not use any of the Christological titles used as epitaphs by synoptic (and some gnostic) authors: Christ, Savior, Messiah, Son of God, Son of David, Son of Man. If the dating for *Thomas* should parallel that of *Q*, it would be in the range of 45–70 AD.[34]

Worth addressing are the first and seventh logia themselves. *Thomas* is known to scholars in its Coptic entirety (Nag Hammadi Codex II) but only fragments of Greek (Oxyrrhyncus papyrus fragments 1, 654, and 655).

Logion 1 (Incipit)

(1) ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲧⲛⲉ ⲉⲑⲏⲡ̀ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲓ̈ⲧ̄ ⲉⲧⲟⲛϩ ϫⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲫⲥϩⲁ̈ⲓ̈ⲥⲟⲩ
ⲛ̄ⲑⲓ̀ ⲇⲓⲇⲩⲙⲟⲥ ⲓ̈ⲟⲩⲇⲁⲥ ⲑⲱⲙⲁⲥ
(2) ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉϫⲁϥ ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲁϩⲉ ⲉⲑⲉⲣⲙⲏⲛⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲉⲓⲥⲱⲧⲛⲉ ϥⲛⲁϫⲓ
ⲧ̀ⲡⲉ ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲟⲩ̀

NHC II, 32: 10-14. (1) These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke. And Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down. (2) And he said, "Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death."[35]

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[33] Stevan Davies, "Thomas: The Fourth Synoptic Gospel," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 1 (1983): 7; 12.
[34] Ibid. 14.
[35] Coptic-letter images and translations of NHC II are from Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. Gesine Schenke Robinson (Berlin: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008).

ⲟⲓ ⲧⲟⲓⲟⲓ ⲟⲓ ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲓ ⲟⲓ
ⲗⲏⲥⲉⲛ ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ⲟ ⲍⲱⲛ ⲕ
ⲁⲛ ⲧⲱⲛ ⲗⲟⲅⲱⲛ ⲧⲟⲩⲧ
ⲟⲩ ⲙⲏ ⲅⲉⲩⲥⲏⲧⲁⲓ ⲥ̅

P.Oxy. 654, 1-5: These are the [secret] words [which] the living Jesus [sp]oke, an[d Judas, who is] (called) Thomas, [wrote down]. And he said, ["Whoever finds the interpre]tation of th[ese] words will not taste [death]."[36]

Logion 7

(1) ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ⲟⲩⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲙⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲟⲙϥ
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉ ⲡⲙⲟⲩⲉⲓ ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲣ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ (2) ⲁⲩⲱ ϥⲃⲏⲧ' ⲛ̅ⲑⲓ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ
ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲙⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲟⲙϥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲙⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲣ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ

NHC II, 33: 23-28. (1) Jesus says, "Blessed is the lion that a person will eat, and the lion will become human. (2) And cursed is the person whom a lion will eat, and the lion will become human."

ⲔⲀⲢⲒ . ⲈⲤⲦⲒⲚ
Ⳋ ⲈⲤⲦ
ⲒⲚ

P.Oxy. 654, 40-42. [... "Blessed] is [the lion that a human eats, so that the lion] will be [human. And cursed is the human] that [a lion eats ...]."

P.Oxy. 654 offers nearly full concordance for logia 1–6, corroborating the material meaning (if not exact phrasing) for these statements. Unfortunately, the papyrus cuts off right at the start of the seventh logion. It is intriguing to note that a linen funerary fragment was found at Oxyrrhunchus (Middle Egypt) with a Greek inscription matching *Thomas* 5 and dated to the 5th or 6th century by H-Ch. Puech. The logion was, in Puech's view, "visibly reproduced here in order to attest to the belief of the deceased in the Christian dogma of the resurrection of the body *(corps)* and the protection of the corpse *(cadavre)*."[37] *Thomas* was well-received in Egyptian communities, even as it was rejected by the 4th-century Christian establishment.

[36] Greek-letter images and translations of P.Oxy. fragments are courtesy of Sytze van der Laan, www.agraphos.com/thomas.
[37] H-Ch. Puech, « Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 147 (1955): 127. « *visiblement reproduit ici afin d'attester la croyance du défunt au dogme chrétien de la résurrection des corps et deprotéger son cadavre* »

Indeed, unlike the previous six logia, *Thomas* 7 has no obvious parallels in the synpotic gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Funk et al. put it simply: "This saying is obscure." Their explanatory attempt hinges on the symbols of the Four Evangelists (Rev 4:7), in which the winged lion represents Mark (associated with the Church Alexandria), and they speculate that the lion may symbolize human passions.[38] Jean Doresse is more certain, comparing to a Coptic-language Manichaean (Gnostic) psalm: "No doubt the lion here represents human passions, or more precisely, the lying spirit of evil."[39] This would not seem to solve the more-nuanced issue, though, whereby the *blessing* is upon the lion consumed by man and the *curse* upon the man consumed by lion, with the lion becoming human in both cases. Doresse resolved the matter by simply switching the last line of his translation from "and the lion will become man" to "so that the man becomes a lion". Gerd Lüdemann does the same, waving away the interpretive conundrum. Jackson argues convincingly, "Scholars who restore the Greek for this line in such a way as to demonstrate a translational mistake in the Coptic version do so with a predisposition to read it there."[40] While the hermeneutical justification for a verbatim reading is complicated it is also compelling.

In Marvin Meyer's book-length treatment, he spends some time on the seventh logion, hinting at possibilities: the lion-like Gnostic demiurge, Yaldabaoth in *Apocryphon John*, and the possibility of a Platonic influence.[41] The fullest expounding of these arguments comes in Jackson's adapted dissertation, *The Lion Becomes Man*. He spends hundreds of pages on careful explication of the lion-godhead trope, implicit in the sayings of the Old Testament God *(Psalms)*

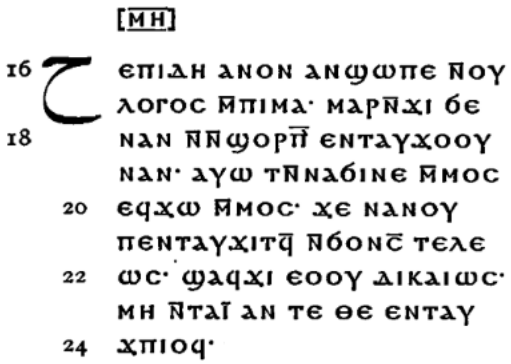
[38] Robert W. Funk et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. New Translation and Commentary by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 477.
[39] Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), 371.
[40] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 12.
[41] Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 71-2.

or metaphors for Israel and made explicit by the images of the demiurge in *A. John* or *Pistis Sophia.* But *The Gospel of Thomas* poses a particular difficulty, and to resolve it Jackson sees it necessary to include the Platonic motif. Proceeding carefully, he sets down "that the Gnostic lion-headed creator is uniformly a hateful character, and his passions mean only defilement for the soul," but also that the blessing is "pronounced, not upon the man, who would seem to be the one to deserve it, but upon the lion," and the inverse for the curse.[42] After disconfirming the plausibility of manuscript error, Jackson emphasizes the discrepancy as an intentional choice:

> The answer is that in logion 7 of *Gos. Thom.* the influence of another, more optimistic tradition that has not yet been discussed is to be traced. That influence played a major role in the development of high Gnostic anthropology during the second century and in the psychological and soteriological applications of the essentially inhuman mythologeme of the lion and polycephalic serpent as cosmic agents of passion and desire. That tradition is Platonic, and the passage from which it ultimately stems is the famous parable in the ninth book of the *Republic* (588B-589B) where the human soul is likened to a trichotomous hybrid of different natural forces.[43]

Thus enters a Coptic-language version of the Platonic motif, the second half of an undeniable relationship.

Coptic Plato: NHC VI, 5



[42] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 183.
[43] Ibid. 184.

> NHC VI, 5: 48.16-24. "Since (ἐπειδή) we have come to this point in a discussion (λόγος), let us again take up the first things that were said to us. And we will find that he says, 'Good is he who has been done injustice completely (τελέως). He is glorified justly (δικαίως).' Is not (μή) this how he was reproached?"[44]
>
> Plat. *Rep.* IX 588b. "Since (ἐπειδὴ) we have come to this point in the discussion (λόγου), let us take up again the first things that were said, by which we have come to this point. Was it not somehow stated that to do injustice is profitable (λυσιτελεῖν) for the completely (τελέως) unjust man who is reputed (δοξαζομένῳ) to be just? Or was it not (οὐχ) so stated?"

There is, right from the outset, a point of significant departure between the Greek original and Coptic version. The initial question is, by Plato's words, whether the just-seeming but completely unjust man can benefit in a tangible and technical sense from doing injustice.[45] The Coptic is phrased in a simpler and perhaps moralizing sense, with an unexpectedly passive voice. It states the controversial opinion: "Good is he who has *been* done injustice completely. He is glorified justly." Of course, the opinion is incorrect, and the unjust man is shown to be unstable, imbalanced through-and-through, by means of the wax-figurine parable. Jumping to the conclusion of the motif, the fate of the just-seeming offender is to be devoured:

[44] Coptic-letter images and translations for NHC VI are from Douglas M. Parrott, ed., *The Coptic Gnostic Library: Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4,* Nag Hammadi Studies XI (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979).

[45] The word is λυσιτελεῖν, meaning both 'to pay what is due' and to 'profit, gain, advantage'. The irony of the present meaning is that the secretly unjust man hopes to profit in reputation without paying the cost of right action.

ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲉϣⲁϥⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ̅[
ⲃⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲛ̅ⲧ̀ϫⲁϫⲉ ϩⲣⲁï ⲛ̅ϩ[
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲙⲓϣⲉ ⲉⲩⲟⲩ
ⲱⲙ· ⲙⲛ̅ ⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲟⲩ ϩⲣⲁï
ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧⲟⲩ· ⲛⲁï ⲅⲁⲣ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ
ⲁϥϫⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲧⲣ̅
ⲉⲡⲁⲓⲛⲟⲩ ⲙ̅ⲡϫⲓ ⲛϭⲟⲛⲥ̅·
ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲛ ϭⲉ ⲡⲉⲧ̀ϣⲁϫⲉ
ϩⲱⲱϥ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲛ ⲥⲣ̅
ⲛⲟϥⲣⲉ ⲛⲁϥ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉϥϣⲁⲛ
ⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁï ⲛ̅ϥϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧⲟⲩ
ⲙ̅ⲫⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲥⲉⲁ
ⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲧⲁϫⲣⲟ· ⲉⲧⲃⲉ
ⲡⲁï ⲛ̅ϩⲟⲩⲟ ϣⲁϥϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁ
ϥⲓ ⲡⲉⲩⲣⲟⲟⲩϣ ⲛ̅ϥⲥⲁⲛⲟⲩ
ϣⲟⲩ· ⲛ̅ⲑⲉ ϩⲱⲱϥ ⲙ̅ⲡⲅⲉ
ⲱⲣⲅⲟⲥ ⲉϣⲁϥⲥⲁⲁⲛϣ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡⲉϥ
ⲅⲉⲛⲏⲙⲁ ⲙ̅ⲙⲏⲛⲉ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅
ⲧⲉⲛ̅ⲑⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲛ̅ⲁⲅⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲣ̅
ⲕⲱⲗⲩⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟϥ ⲉⲧⲣⲉϥⲣⲱⲧ̀:

NHC VI, 5: 51.4-23. “But (ἀλλά) he brings about… enmity… And with strife they devour each other among themselves. Yes (γάρ), all these things he said to everyone who praises the doing of injustice.” “Then (οὐκοῦν) is it not profitable for him who speaks justly (δίκαιον)?” “And if he does these things and speaks in them, within the man they take hold firmly. Therefore especially he strives to take care of them and he nourishes them, just as the farmer (γεωργός) nourishes his produce (γέννημα) daily. And the wild (ἄγριον) beasts (θήριον) keep (κωλύειν) it from growing.”[46]

Plat. *Rep.* IX 588e. “But he allows them to bite each other and to **devour** each other as they fight (ἀλλ᾽ ἐᾶν αὐτὰ ἐν αὑτοῖς δάκνεσθαί τε καὶ μαχόμενα **ἐσθίειν** ἄλληλα).” (589a) “Yes, by all means,” he said, “he who praises the doing of injustice would say these things.” “And on the other hand he who says that justice is more profitable affirms that all our actions and words should tend to give **the inner man** (589b) complete domination over the entire man (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου **ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος** ἔσται ἐγκρατέστατος) and make him take charge of (ἐπιμελήσεται) the many-headed beast—like the farmer (γεωργός) who cherishes and trains his cultivated plants but checks the growth of the wild (ἄγρια)—*and he will make an ally (σύμμαχον) of the lion’s nature, and caring for all the beasts alike will first make them friendly to one another and to himself, and so foster their growth”* [italics omitted].

[46] Coptic-language image and text from ibid., 339.

Yet the Coptic version ends abruptly, intentionally excluding the moment when Socrates implores alliance with the irrational elements of the soul. For all the lion's faults, Plato's great contribution to the tradition of Neoplatonic passions is to say that they are beneficial when in harmonious union with the rational mind-soul. Copticized Plato still distinguishes between productive and wild beasts, so the benefit is there by implication, but the strength of positive connotation from the Greek original is lost.

Conclusions from the translational act are uncertain, and immediate scholarly responses to the NHC VI excerpt were restrained. That *any* slice of the *Republic* should be present—and that it should be a moment of such gravity—is "something of a surprise," as James Brashler mentions in the preface to the first English translation.[47] Tito Orlandi, speaking for all scholars familiar with Coptic literature, said "the existence of a text of Plato is something of a miracle."[48] The delight is more obvious for some than others. Jackson takes the fragment as an "astounding confirmation of the importance that Socrates' parable had for Gnostic mythology and anthropology."[49] The more-reserved Hans-Martin Schenke, the same man who realized in 1974 that it was an excerpt of Plato and not merely "titellose Schrift", calls it "an inadequate (ungenügende) Coptic translation" of a treatise already well-known in antiquity, and even better-known by Neoplatonists.[50]

Brashler agrees with Schenke's assessment of the translation as technically mediocre. The Coptic writer misses, glosses, switches verb agency, and otherwise corrupts the original.

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[47] James Brashler, Preface to *Republic* IX, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* 1st ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 290
[48] "L'esistenza di un testo di Platone ha del miracoloso." Orlandi, "La traduzione copta di Platone, *Resp.* IX, 588b–589b: Problema critici ed esegetici," *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Rendiconti: Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 32 (1977): 46.

[49] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 204.
[50] Schenke, Hans-Martin, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, ed. *Nag Hammadi Deutsch 2. Band: NHC V,2–XIII,1, BG 1 und 4* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 495.

Orlandi sees this stemming more from initiative than ignorance, explaining "the conceptual diversity of content" between the Coptic version and the Greek original. In his view, this was a very strong effort ("un intervento molto deciso") not on the part of a *traduttore* but a *redattore*, who took the Platonic passage as a *pretesto* for writing his own, distinctively Gnostic variant.[51] Jackson and Painchaud hold a mixture of the two opinions, finding the (probably Gnostic, probably Greek-reading) Coptic translator to be somewhere between ingenious and *ungenügende*.[52] If intentionality is assumed, as this paper's Introduction makes clear, then it is worth asking questions about the translator's identity, motivation, and social-historical context—knowing that any conclusions are reached cautiously.

Contexts

Who wrote, read, spoke, heard, translated, redacted, interpreted, and lived adjacent to the superimposition of *Republic* IX upon *Thomas* 7? What can be said that is worth saying, even if asterisked as speculative plausibility? The theories of two thorough scholars will be debated before working toward larger histories of religious consciousness in Late Antiquity and social relations in Roman Egypt.

Previous Scholarship: Jackson and Lanzillotta

Howard Jackson and F. L. Lanzillotta both offer methods of approaching the plausible relationship between the *Republic* fragment and *Thomas* 7. Both agree that logion 7 must be read as-is; both offer compelling methods for doing so. The reasonable assumption is that a similar group would have written, collected, or owned every component of the compendium. Even if

[51] Orlandi, "La traduzione copta," 54.
[52] Howard M. Jackson, Preface to *Republic* IX, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* 4th ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 320.

they did not subscribe to every belief, the works are mutually informed. Jackson's argument greatly informs this paper's reasoning, and it is ultimately more compelling. This section will consider Lanzillotta's alternative method, as well as the proposed shortcomings of both.

Starting from the premise of coexistence—in the same papyrus scrolls in the same jar—Lanzillotta says with confidence that there is some undeniable relationship between *Republic* IX and *Thomas* 7, which can be understood as the lion-motif. Lanzillotta, who provides a compelling synthesis between the Platonic motif and a logion in *The Gospel of Thomas,* declares the fragment plainly in his article's opening, later mentioning that "Socrates' memorable simile" was "relatively well-known in Late Antiquity… so much so that even the Nag Hammadi codices include a Coptic version… demonstrating the interest that it created in Gnostic circles."[53] His evidence is John M. Dillon's work on Philo, Alcinous, Eusebius, and Plotinus, but his motivation goes far broader, reaching beyond mere literary influence to "not only the rich and multicultural intellectual world of Late Antiquity but also, and especially, the deep rupture in the value system that characterizes this 'age of anxiety', in the words of Eric R. Dodds."[54]

Without any further information, Lanzillotta's approach takes a 'hypertextual' approach, equivalent to asking: What changes occur between Plato and *Thomas,* broadly conceived, if the underlying representation must be of similitude? Lacking the texts in their original form and without definite knowledge of readers and writers, the intertextual method precludes problems about which it can only speculate by declaring them irrelevant.

This 'hypertextual' relationship is complicated but basically linear, asking: What steps occur to change Text A into Text B? This could be visualized as a linear map, to borrow the language of higher-order mathematics, whereby an input object (our Greek original) and output

[53] Lanzillotta, "Logion 7 Unravelled," 116.
[54] Ibid. 130.

object (Coptic version) are related by an entire matrix of transformations. In Lanzillotta's view, the transformations enacted are translation, condensation, a switch from dialogic structure to preaching (blessings and curses), a change of subject matter from the just state and harmonious soul to eating or being eaten, and a major tonal shift away from a prescription for the happy *polis* to a riddle whose stakes are found in *Thomas'* promise of eternal life.

Some of the shifts are probably unintentional or unavoidable, such as misaligned meanings resulting from translation. What conceptual transformations must occur in order for the 'transformation' to work? Plato's tripartite soul transforms into a dichotomous one (lion and man), but as the previous section detailed, this is a common inconsistency in Platonic psychology. Still, there is an intricate power structure developed in Plato's *Republic,* giving way to the mutually-devouring stakes of *Thomas.* In the seventh logion, reason must not only exist in harmony with leonine passion but fully dominate the lesser parts of the soul. Lanzillotta sees this in line with "Platonic-Peripatetic ethics in Late Antiquity, a period in which the old views of Plato and Aristotle with regards to the ideal of *krasis* have to a certain extent radicalized."[55] Original (Greek) Plato does give the sense of one element taking complete domination (ἐγκρατέστατος) over the composite being, but it seems that this overtaking is the emphatic focus of the Coptic-Greek *Thomas* 7. The collapsed binary is in line with other *Thomas* logia requiring part-to-whole reconciliation: make the two one (22); make the female male (114).

Lanzillotta's 'hypertextual' attempt does simplify Jackson's hundreds of pages spanning Jewish, Gnostic, and Platonic dogmata. The linear transformation is instead syllogistic: Socrates relies on a sense of interior-exterior harmony, microcosm-macrocosm, where there is an 'inner' man by soul (substance) and a man by form (appearance). The lion becoming man, even after

[55] Ibid. 125.

consuming 'inner' man, results in exactly the disharmonious state Plato would curse. This is the crucial theme carried through from *Republic* IX into *Thomas* 7. But in Lanzillotta's mind, this transmutation is of poor quality and highly condensed, leaving behind the nuance—trichotomy, divided passions, words versus image—of the original Platonic motif. Taking his lead from Dodds' *Age of Anxiety* (discussed below), while also taking both the *Thomas* writer and *Republic* translator to be Gnostic representatives, Lanzillotta saw the move "from the eudaimonistic context of the polis to the pessimistic and pressing world of Late Antiquity." The world of Plato's *Republic*, so acutely concerned with justice and injustice, harmony and disharmony, appearance and truth, "has been reduced to the minimum." Only falsehood/truth is compelling to "the Gnostic worldview," as Lanzillotta chooses now to construct it, since this is the difference between the appearance of a man and the Gnostic 'true man' within.[56] His conclusion is that the 'gnosticizing' act necessarily condenses the nuance of Greek philosophy into something pragmatic, straightforward, and world-denying. He takes a descriptive methodology (what is the relationship between two undeniably related texts?) and draws prescriptive conclusions about the relationship's enactors, the Gnostic transformers. This intertextual approach assumes too much and yields, on the whole, an unsatisfying conclusion.[57]

Even if it means speculating on the identity and historical milieu of original *Thomas* and the Nag Hammadi Codices, then, it is worth doing, in order to fully appreciate the scope of their impact. What does Jackson have to offer concerning the identities and historical milieu in Nag

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[56] Ibid. 132.

[57] Writing on the related subject of synoptic gospel origination, Werner Kelber (1990) takes up Occam's razor: "Yet the principle of intertextuality, far from being simply a matter of hard evidence, is also a presupposition of our method. Trained to interpret texts, impressed by the ubiquity of texts, and working single-mindedly with texts, we are bound to discover intertextuality. But how is one to imagine—technically, psychologically, religiously—[the] skillful juggling of a number of texts, using them, revising them, deconstructing them, while all along composing an impressively coherent narrative?... At any rate, the larger the number of traditions we find… the less persuasive or imaginable the principle of intertextuality becomes."

Hammadi? Siding more with the 'redaction' than 'translation' contingent, he sees the choice to exclude the positive spin of Plato's argument—that the man ought to ally himself to the lion's nature—as a repudiation of the more-optimistic connotation in *Thomas* 7. (Still, the Coptic excerpt of Plato does include the preceding line, about cultivating those productive emanations of the many-headed beast.) All things considered, Jackson speculates that the document's redactor was "an ascetic of precisely the same mold as, and possibly indeed a member of, the 2nd-century encratites who fashioned logion seven of *Gos. Thom.* and treasured the whole collection."[58] If not created so early, then the redaction may be the work of Manichaeans, Hermeticists, or any eccentric and talented individual from Egypt's many "world deniers who counted Plato among their number and who read each other's literature." Jackson's choice is Hierakas, a native Egyptian born around 275 AD and early Origenist anchorite who wrote Greek and Coptic.[59] Orlandi thinks Hierakas to be an 'obvious candidate' but a doubtful one, given chronological considerations, throwing his weight instead behind Evagrius and his Origenistic-Gnosticizing followers. [60] (More on that designation later.) The problem encountered is still the 'exclusively Greek' nature of their intellectual culture. That there were such eccentric and charismatic individuals in Upper Egypt is demonstrable; that they would translate and redact Plato's *Republic* into Coptic, and then send it to fellow-believers at a Pachomian monastery near Nag Hammadi hundreds of miles south, is not implausible. The question remains, though: Why was it needed in Coptic?

[58] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 213.
[59] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 206-207. The only evidence of the man's existence is brief mention by Epiphanius, since the two once met.
[60] Orlandi, "A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi", *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 1 (1982): 94. His primary source on Evagrius is A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique* (Paris, 1962), esp. 51-61.

Even if it cannot be known *who* transformed (translated, redacted) the *Republic* into Coptic, this paper is going to work from a different point of entry: *For whom* was Plato transformed into Coptic? What can be said, in good probability, about their social milieu and educative background? And, in Section 4: What changed in *how* it was read?

Religion in Late Antiquity

In defense of his pessimistic and absolutist reading, Lanzillotta stakes his claim on the seminal work *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* of E.R. Dodds, who plainly states in the book's opening that his interest in religion was Jamesian, centered on "the personal experience of individuals."[61] External worship practices received limited attention, least of all mystery-cult religions, on the basis of their limited evidence. Dodds' contribution is otherwise immense, illuminating a religious landscape in the hazier Roman centuries with an eye toward the reflective individual with a complex psyche. This is not an oversimplified view, but it is one of many, and perhaps liable to oversimplifications. As a confessed agnostic[62], Dodds takes no side in the centuries-long struggle between pagan Hellenism and Christianity: "I stand outside this particular battle, though not above it: I am interested less in the issues which separated the combatants than in the attitudes and experiences which bound them together."[63] This mental frame, while refreshing and uplifting for a world marred by interfaith conflict, risks skipping over serious social and political divisions between religious thinkers and participants, in an increasingly disparate Late Antique world.

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[61] E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in the Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: Norton, 1965), 2-3.
[62] Noting that many scholars of Late Antiquity and Early Christianity are themselves committed Christians, Dodds felt the full disclosure proper. This principle has held since 1965: Most scholars and donors contributing to the Claremont IAC's work on Nag Hammadi were otherwise committed or affiliated with religious organizations.
[63] Ibid. 5.

At one point, on the matter of mystical experiences, Dodds does discuss interpersonal religious experience. The phenomenon of sudden conversion, an epiphany offering both *tabula rasa* and newfound direction, must change fundamentally one's self-understanding as contextualized by the community, as with Plotinus' imperative for self-denial. Dodds considers the potential crisis of introversion, finally in a broader historical frame, within a single footnote: "In the vast melting-pot of the later Empire, which flung together men of the most diverse racial, religious and social origins, we should expect the question, 'What am I?' to assume unusual importance for the same reasons which make it important in modern America."[64] 'What am I?' might equally be a question answered by, within, and with reference to larger society. (Certainly this is the case in modern America!) Personal identity and sociopolitical identity diverge in several ways, but they inform each other enough that they cannot be separated entirely.

Indeed, the Roman Empire of the 3rd–5th centuries experienced rapid decline in both material wealth[65] and political stability. Dodds places this *volta* at the reign of Marcus Aurelius, though he rightly observes that "no bell rang to warn the world that the *pax Romana* was about to end" and lead to an age of "extreme personal insecurity".[66] This is the pivotal moment, and he grants Longinus, Epictetus, Plutarch, and some Gnostics the foresight of impending doom. But "the majority of individuals", who "continued to think and feel as they had always thought and felt"—certainly they too factored into the dynamic religious paradigms of a unified-though-fracturing, centralized-though-provincializing, in-every-way-heterogeneous Mediterranean. Can this paper still hope to discuss the climactic trends Dodds mentions, if its subjects are to be the

[64] Ibid. 77 (n3), 78 (n1).
[65] Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, includes an appendix with prices of goods and services, detailing the doubling or tripling of basic foodstuffs (alongside some wages) between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD (p. 208). Inflation was in a positive feedback loop with higher taxes, disproportionately assessed on the grain powerhouses of Egypt and North Africa.
[66] Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 3–4.

half-literate and the bilingual, at the peripheries of the empire and the middle grounds of its colonies? Brown lends a poetic description of mystery-cults to that effect:

> The spread of the oriental cults in western Europe, for instance, is a notorious feature of the first and second centuries. These cults spread because they gave the immigrant, and later the local adherent, a sense of belonging, a sense of loyalty that he lacked in the civic functions of his town. There is touching evidence of the spontaneous growth of little clubs of the well-to-do poor. One would dine with fellow members when living, and be buried and remembered by them when dead. In a more sinister way, a proliferation of manuals of astrology, of dream-books, of books of sorcery, show with how much anxiety a new public of half-educated men needed to feel in control of a life whose pace had quickened.[67]

What was the new public of half-educated men in Roman Upper Egypt? Could *The Gospel of Thomas*, contained as it was within apocryphal Christianity and linked as it was to pagan philosophy, offer the same sense of belonging, or demonstrate a similar anxiety?

Revisiting Roman Egypt

Upper Egypt—source of countless papyri, ostraca, and the Nag Hammadi Codices—was "in general the poorer part of the country," Lewis observes.[68] Educated Greeks and Jews inhabited the northern cities, close to Near Eastern riches, Hellenistic culture, and Rome's thriving maritime trade. Granted, the superiority of Lower Egypt is an imperialist, classist cliché; Jackson makes a point of noting that, as the work of Zosimos and Nannos from Panopolis (Akhmim) attests, "Upper Egypt was not the cultural backwater it is commonly supposed to have been at this time."[69] While this is perhaps true, and productive to dispel unhelpful (or insidious) scholarly truisms, actual 'on-the-ground' disparities in legal, ethnic, and linguistic status cannot be ignored.

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[67] Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 61.
[68] Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 4.
[69] Jackson, *Lion Becomes Man*, 205 (n35).

As mentioned in the Introduction, Naphtali Lewis' study of papyri and ostraca from the Roman period shows a virtual apartheid state, with Hellenism as its gradient. Any matter of status was directly tied to linguo-ethnic identity, with numerous fines enforced by prerogative of the emperor's Privy Purse. Augustus and his successors kept classes separate and discrete for two hundred years, including codified provisions such as "If a Roman man or woman is joined in marriage with an urban Greek or an Egyptian, their children follow the inferior status" and "Those who style themselves improperly are punished with confiscation of a fourth [of their estate]."[70] The matter of names was especially fraught: While anyone not a Roman citizen, Jew, or Urban Greek (e.g. Alexandrinian) was labeled 'Egyptian' and taxed like one, registration as 'metropolite' with the local (Greek) gymnasium secured a reduced rate. Registry was a complicated process, requiring an applicant to demonstrate decades or centuries of (Greek) family membership.[71] Roger Bagnall is right to point out that many families were assortments of Hellenistic, Egyptian, Semitic, pseudo-Biblical (Jewish), and eventually Christian names; he gives the example of Marcus Aurelius *Apion*, son of Philippos, married to *Apias* but previously to *Tisois*, daughter of *Sarapammon* (son of Eutychides alias *Sarapion*) and *Thatoes*.[72] Some individuals with mixed ancestry and Egyptian names did wish them changed, and they needed to seek written permission from relevant Roman authorities: "I desire my lord, from now on to have my designation changed and style myself Eudaimon son of Heron and Didyme instead of son of Psois and Tiathres, as no public or private interest will thereby be injured but I will be benefited."[73] Of course, Caracalla's famous edict in 212 granted theoretical Roman citizenship to

[70] *BGU* 1210, qtd. in Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33.
[71] Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 41–42.
[72] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 233. Italicized names are probably Egyptian or Semitic in origin, while unstyled names are Greco-Roman.
[73] *W. Chr.* 52 = *Select Papyri* 301, qtd. in Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 32.

all male inhabitants of the empire, but the hierarchy was by then firmly established across social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

Bagnall maintains that the matter of ethnicity in Roman Egypt was complex. He puts Lewis in the camp more interested by colonial juxtaposition, noting that there have also been scholars for whom total admixture is the fundamental property of Hellenization. Neither were not distinct groups of 'Greeks' and 'Copts' (a later Arabic term for Egyptian Christians after Islamizaton), nor was there a perfect melting pot giving way over the centuries to a syncretic 'Greco-Aegypto-Roman' identity.[74] Bagnall's emphasis on nuance is valuable. Still, it does not erase an undeniable and long-lived history separating 'legally Greek' and 'legally Egyptian', privilege and disenfranchisement, at the background of the most pertinent question: language.

Of the three languages current in Late Antiquity, Latin was used least, only by Roman soldiers and at the highest levels of governance. Greek had been and remained the sanctioned *lingua juris* within Egypt, and for a long time also the *lingua commercii*. Egyptian was widely spoken but, except for declining pagan cults, its unwieldy written form of Demotic (modified hieroglyphs) was hardly used.[75] Instead, most writing—legal contracts, business ledgers, interpersonal correspondence—was done in Greek, either by those who could manage the education or those who could afford the scribes. There were some attempts to write Egyptian with Greek-letter transliteration, and certainly the names of prominent Egyptians had been rendered in alpha-beta for centuries of diplomacy and commerce. Yet it was not until the Greek-alphabet (and heavily Greek-influenced) 'Coptic' was "invented, in the third century, with

[74] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 230.
[75] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 235–240.

deliberateness" that the native speech corresponded to a native writing system—the deliberateness of translating Christian scripture into native Egyptian.[76]

Since earlier attempts at written Egyptian (late Demotic, 'Old Coptic') lacked the Greek elements in Coptic, Bagnall takes the acceptance of Greek to be "in itself a religious statement and a rejection of the old Egyptian cults." Further, since he doubts that Greek loanwords had infiltrated so greatly the rank-and-file of Egyptian hinterlands, Coptic must have been the project of the educated and fluently bilingual. The scripture had been translated into Coptic, "certainly intended for reading aloud in church"; congregants may have been illiterate but they must have known some Greek, lest they miss every fourth or fifth word.[77] This leads to his later summation:

> Christianity was neither Greek nor Egyptian in any adversarial sense, and it has already become clear that the invention and use of Coptic itself is in no sense anti-hellenic. Religion cut across class and language, although the particular use of Coptic to express Egyptian is distinctively Christian.[78]

Coptic was distinctively Christian in that it rejected Hellenistic (pagan) religion, but by the same token it was also distinctively Egyptian. On this point Bagnall's interpretation is less compelling. He offers that even Saint Shenute, opponent of classical Greek culture, wrote in Greek; that even into the 8th century, after the decline of Byzantium and Arab Conquest, some Coptic Christians wrote in Greek. "Greek culture, theological and otherwise, came to be seen as the oppressors' culture," Bagnall says. "But even after the break culture, not language, was opposed."[79] This is hard to believe. Greek language and Greek culture—Ptolemaic rule, Roman rule, centuries of Hellenized apartheid—could not have been so easily separated.

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[76] Ibid. 238.
[77] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 253.
[78] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 253.
[79] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 254 (n133).

Certainly illiterate Egyptians would need to know enough Greek vocabulary and rudimentary grammar (prepositions, word order tendencies) to comprehend written Coptic spoken aloud. But the bilingualism of Coptic, Egyptian-spoken and Greek-written, is not a practical and unemotional fact of history. Perhaps the first mixes of Greek and Egyptian comprised a pidgin language, a rudimentary and pragmatic structure developed in the middle grounds of trade or early colonialism. But Coptic came about after centuries of multilingual, multicultural contact and cohabitation. It is closer to a Hellenized dialect of Egyptian or a Creole language, with fully developed grammar and vocabulary replete with loanwords. A historian of more-modern mixtures—Haitian, Yiddish, Spanglish—would be hard-pressed to call them apolitical.

This broader context provides a satisfying, if speculative, approach to understanding why a Coptic-language Platonic text should exist in Upper Egypt. *Republic* IX was the crucial point of reference for demystifying a difficult logion of *The Gospel of Thomas,* a disseminated work of some currency in Roman Egypt. Egyptians in the underprivileged south, whether cult-members or churchgoers, lacked the philosophical background (and associated wealth, time, status) of Alexandrinians. A combined, Coptic-language edition of gospel and reference would have allowed a half-educated, illiterate-yet-quasi-bilingual congregation to seek the eternal life promised by *Thomas'* incipit. For such was the aim of many in the Age of Anxiety, not just the well-read and coastal few.

Extensions

This is the most ambitious section of the present study. Having answered the first motivating question and supplemented with historical background, the second and broader one is tackled: What are the implications of a distinction in readership? Having answered *who* (plus

when and *where*), this section endeavors to consider *how* the two groups were reading differently.

Mainstream Christians did not read *The Gospel of Thomas* as a religious text, if at all, and yet the best analogue would be how contemporary Christians interpreted canonical scripture. Very little is known about Gnostic hermeneutics *per se*, except a few fragments of commentary within NH and the external criticism of Christian apologists. Having already discussed the difficulty of defining 'Gnostic' theology, and 'Gnostics' as a religious community, it comes as little surprise that almost anything could be designated a 'Gnostic' text. Irenaeus attacked just this flexibility, calling the Gnostics "poor translators of that which has been well said."[80] More broadly, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Athanasius all criticized extra-canonical works as 'apocryphal', opposite to 'common' (or 'mainstream'). The opponents of Athanasius, among them Gnostics, would certainly consider this quality a good one, books facilitating the revelation of hidden ('apocryphal') truths.[81] Interpretive tools were necessary, however, in order to achieve those hidden truths, both in accepted and apocryphal works.

Biblical hermeneutics were a major concern for early Christians; and while its sphere was vast, translation and allegorical interpretation featured significantly, just as they have in this study. Given the size of the arena, this paper's theoretical exploration must be performed in miniature, sketching the border-pieces of a puzzle circumscribing Plato and *Thomas*. The picture takes as its focal point an examination of allegory in Origen and Augustine, where they agree but especially how they differ.

[80] ἐξηγηταὶ κακοὶ τῶν καλῶς εἰρημένων γινόμενοι (Iren. *Adv. Haer.* I, *Praef.* 1.9-10)
[81] Brakke, "Canon Formation", 414.

Origen and Augustine

Why jump to Origen and Augustine? They were major figures in the Early Church and the intellectual circles of Late Antiquity, but they also serve as convenient shorthand for a divergence in allegorical methods. All scriptural interpretation required a distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, the word of the letter and the Word of God, but just how to draw these fine lines was a point of significant disagreement.

This is most true in the difficult cases where, as Origen explains in *De principiis,* "these statements are made by Scripture in the form of a type by which they point toward certain mysteries."[82] Augustine agrees at the outset, devoting lengthy sections of *De doctrina christiana* to those passages that "are all figurative, and their secrets are to be removed as kernels from the husk as nourishment for charity,"[83] anticipating the commonplace medieval notion that texts are hard surfaces concealing simple truths.

Having set down the necessity of action, Origen implored the prospective biblical interpreter: "One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul."[84] The 'flesh' or letter of the scripture is the straightforward, obvious, literal interpretation; the interpretation beyond the letter allows for deeper, metaphorical significance; and the perfected, spiritual law, which has 'a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb 10:1). "For just a man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."[85] When something is absurd or impossible, it may only signify as metaphor or foreshadowing of the advent, but

[82] Origen, *De principiis,* 3.1. Translation from *On First Principles,* trans. .W. Butterworth (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).
[83] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana,* 3.12.18. Translation from *Teaching Christianity,* trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).
[84] Origen, *De principiis,* 4.2.4
[85] Ibid.

Origen warns against doing this too often. "For the passages which are historically true are far more numerous than those which are composed with purely spiritual meanings."[86] The literal-bodily meaning of a text cannot be thrown away, save for especially needy circumstances.

Within his brand of figurative interpretation, Augustine sees a process and a goal. On the one hand, "no one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitudes and that what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure"[87]; on the other, "Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men."[88] The Christian revelation must solve through similitudes, always with the pedagogical aim of charity—and it can be the only such interpretative benchmark. "To the extent that the wealth of gold and silver and clothing," one of Augustine's more famous metaphors begins, "which that people took with them from Egypt was less than that they afterwards acquired at Jerusalem, especially during the reign of King Solomon, the knowledge collected from the books of the pagans, although some of it is useful, is also little as compared with that derived from the Holy Scriptures."[89] The 'books of the pagans' surely include Plato's *Republic*. In the process of demonstrating the uniqueness and universality of Christian hermeneutics, Augustine does not share Origen's aversion to throwing away the primary, lowest-level meaning.

Still, Origen seems to offer similar imagery in defense of the Christian revelation's exclusive claim to truth. Yet he allows the books of the pagans a more positive role in the advent:

> When, however, a man *shall be converted to the Lord*, and *the veil shall be taken away* from him (c.f. 2 Cor. 3:16), then he will see the true gold. Before that God came and offered Himself to be known, His friends made likenesses of Him for the Bride, so that

[86] Origen, *De principiis*, 4.3.4
[87] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.6.8
[88] Ibid., 3.10.15
[89] Ibid., 2.42.63

> she, being warned and aroused by these similitudes, might conceive a longing for the true Gold.[90]

Plato may qualify, for Origen, as one of His friends, offering a likeness insofar as one can allegorize Greek philosophical tropes into scripture and achieve novel, fruitful readings. This required a more open, multidimensional approach to (and thus understanding of) biblical truth.

Peter Martens finds the nuance in a recasting of Origen's critique of 'Jewish literalism', which also serves to criticize some mainstream Christian interpretation.[91] Origen's case was helped, historically and culturally, by his residence in a diverse Alexandria with an established Jewish tradition. Moreover, Origen's nativity in Greek gave him access to the Septuagint and more esoteric classical works. There is debate concerning his knowledge of Hebrew: Dawson notes the vital etymology of *pesach* in Origen's *Treatise on the Passover,*[92]and he references his "Hebrew master" in *On First Principles*[93]*;* but most scholars regard his Hebrew as "slender," at best.[94] Still, for an early Christian exegete, he approached philological endeavors with an impressive skillset. In *Contra Celsus,* Origen is sufficiently knowledgeable to critique the author's fictional Jewish character for having beliefs inconsistent with the contemporary Alexandrian religious milieu. Furthermore, he *defends* Judaism against Celsus' attack, which was aimed at Christianity via its Jewish heritage, and sympathizes as a loyal, if revisionist heir to its traditions.[95] It seems odd, then, that he is frequently cited as criticizing the absolute literalism of Jewish interpretation, and indeed the most common quotations follow particularized critiques of

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[90] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies,* trans. R.P. Lawson (New York: Newman Press, 1957), 153.
[91] Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 134.
[92] David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 66.
[93] Origen, *De principiis,* 1.3.4
[94] See Martens, *Origen and Scripture,* 43 (n9).
[95] Ibid., 136.

specifically problematic Jewish exegeses, often supporting literal adherence to ceremonial law. "Faced with these competing voices within his own congregation," between the exact adherence to Jewish customs or the complete rejection of the Old Testament, "Origen adroitly positioned himself between them. Neither embracing these legal stipulations literally, nor rejecting them unreservedly, he argued for a mediating position: that such precepts in the law be interpreted allegorically."[96] Origen feels compelled to maintain all of the Old Testament in its literal-historical sense, but he aims to fulfill its prescriptions via Christian interpretation. The Passover rituals continue to be celebrated, substituting the seder and paschal lamb for allegorical reading of scripture itself, which is "not a disembodiment through interpretation but instead a consumption of a body through reading. Obtaining meaning from the text is like removing flesh from bones."[97] By taking upon himself the mantle of Jesus (principal faith) and Paul (exegetical discernment), Origen could engage in both literal and allegorical interpretation, as well as critique, on a case-by-case basis, the over-allegorizing of Neoplatonic Gnostics and the over-literalizing of old-covenant Jews, without risking hypocrisy. Additionally, using both the text and its signified, "we see in a human way the Word of God on earth, since he became a human being, for the Word has continually been becoming flesh in the Scriptures in order that he might tabernacle with us."[98] Origin endeavors toward presence with Christ via a nuanced heuristic which accepts a multiplicity of literal, metaphorical and allegorical readings for difficult passages. The available evidence overwhelmingly supports Dawson's assessment of Origen's well-educated, multifaceted, and even contradictory method. "To read this text properly is not, as

[96] Ibid., 141-42.
[97] Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading,* 71.
[98] Ibid.

Boyarin claims, to replace one thing (shell) with another (kernel), but to be brought into direct relation with the way reality, in its fullest sense, *is*."[99]

Here the Augustinian approach fully diverges. He develops his theory of signs in *De doctrina christiana:* "There are two reasons," he begins, "why things written are not understood: they are obscured either by unknown or by ambiguous signs. For signs are either literal or figurative."[100] In Augustine's conception of scripture, the figuration is not a relationship of verbal signs to things, but of one thing to another thing. The word 'ox' (sign) points to the animal (thing), and in turn the animal (thing) points to the evangelist (thing), with Deut. 25:4 glossed by 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18. "Among figurative signs, if any impede the reader, he should study them partly with reference to a knowledge of languages and partly with reference to a knowledge of things… Ignorance of things makes figurative expressions obscure."[101] The pointing, thing-to-thing correspondence, ends only upon reaching a proper end-state. Arriving at his logical conclusion, Augustine prepares the ultimatum of his heuristic:

> Therefore a method of determining whether a locution is literal or figurative must be established. And generally this method consists in this: that whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative… For the hope of everyone lies in his own conscience in so far as he knows himself to be becoming more proficient in the love of God and of his neighbor.[102]

In reading scripture, the basis of judgment can be only one's own consciousness—ironically, risking an experiential, subjective interpretation with a non-ideal reader. Under Augustine's principle, necessitating every biblical text to figure into "virtuous behavior" or to the "truth of faith," only such self-evident passages as the Ten Commandments or Sermon on the Mount can

[99] Ibid., 61.
[100] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.10.15
[101] Augustine, *De doctrina Christinia*, 2.16.23-24, (Robertson, p. 50).
[102] Ibid., 3.10.14

retain their literal reading. "Obviously, this law maximizes the amount of Scripture that has a figurative sense, for a vast amount of Scripture does not in its proper or literal sense deal directly with matters of faith or of moral conduct."[103]

Origen, as shown in his treatment of the Jewish tradition and the evidential consensus, aimed for holistic readings which included both literal and allegorical senses. He consistently endeavored to remove his own biases and opinions, as in the "correction of septuagintal manuscripts, as well as those of New Testament writings," which was "a pressing concern for Origen":

> While Origen was certainly alert to variant reading in the manuscript traditions before him, it is striking that we sometimes observe him *not* making a decision about which variant to adopt, but rather simply alerting his audience to multiple readings. Indeed, there are also times when Origen has a clear preference for a particular reading, yet still offers an interpretation of the unfavorable reading."[104]

Instead of replacing words with *things* which signify other *things,* the literal text is a valuable component, offering up several paths to salvation.

Augustine is careful to allow for tropes and idioms, and to qualify (in a much earlier work, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*) that the goal of figurative interpretation is creating an acceptable text devoid of "blasphemy, impiety, or absurdity in speaking about God."[105] In practice, though, his significations are automatic. The figurative language is used and thrown away, cleverly but also completely. If a reader of intelligence can proceed from sign to thing, linearly and exhaustively, his aim is always and entirely the final state; for Augustine, these sum up to charity, virtuous behavior, and truth of faith.

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[103] Teske, "Criteria for Figurative Interpretation," in *De doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 110.
[104] Martens, *Origen and Scripture,* 49.
[105] Teske, "Criteria for Figurative Interpretation," 109.

Theory in Practice

Of course, *The Gospel of Thomas* is not in the New or Old Testament; it is doubtful that would have received the same scriptural treatment in Origen's school or Augustine's ministry. The two do seem to have known *Thomas*. Augustine's reference is straightforward and its conclusion unsurprising. Quoting logion 52, he dismissed it as an apocryphal invention outside the true gospels.[106] Origen's case is more intriguing. Carlson compiled an extensive list of indirect references to *Thomas* within Origen's work, in few of which he mentions 'Thomas' by name, illuminating an attitude that "was more nuanced than his explicit statements about it would seem to permit."[107] Indeed, in spite of placing a work called *According to Thomas* outside the four-gospel canon, there are surprising moments when Origen says he has 'read somewhere' a statement of the Savior, at which point he paraphrases almost verbatim a logion of *Thomas*. Toward a similar end, Grosso argues that specific wording in Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* 14.14 must rely on the wording of *Thomas* 62.1.[108]

Regardless of their actual interaction with *Thomas*, as an intellectual exercise the *Thomas–Republic* relation can be performed in the allegorical manners set down by each. In the Augustinian fashion, the linear progression has the lion-man 'sign' point to the tripartite man 'thing', and so on to either 'virtuous behavior' or 'truth in faith':

> Jesus said: Blessed is the lion whom the man shall eat and the lion becomes man; but foul is the man whom the lion shall eat and the lion shall become man.

[106] Augustine, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum,* 2.14
[107] S. Carlson, "Origen's Use of the Gospel of Thomas" (Paper presented to the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, New Orleans, November 20-24, 2009), 18. His list: *In Luc. hom.* 1,1 (title of the Gospel of Thomas) Contra Celsum 8,15 (Gos. Thom. 74), In Ier. hom. lat. 1,3 (Gos. Thom. 82), In Jesu Nave hom. 4,3 (Gos. Thom. 82), On the Passover 46 (Gos. Thom. 23), and, remarkably, Comm. on John frg. 106, where he found similarities with Gos. Thom. 1.
[108] Matteo Grosso, "A New Link between Origen and the *Gospel of Thomas*: *Commentary on Matthew* 14,14," *Vigilae Christianae* 65 (2011): 255–256.

> Jesus said: Worthy of heaven is the passion which the mind shall conquer, and the passion is subsumed by the man; but worthy of hell is the mind which the passion shall conquer and the passion shall rule over the man.
>
> ↓
>
> Jesus said: He who rules his passions over by the mind, his shall be the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who is ruled by passion only has no stake in the world to come.
>
> ↓
>
> Christ said: Salvation comes through the mind, not the passions.

Origen's method grants greater agency to the pagan author himself. The well-educated reader thinks immediately of *Republic* IX when reading *Thomas* 7, and thus he proceeds to read further along in Plato. Only a few moments later in the conversation. Glaucon posits that the man with sufficient understanding would never take part in politics, since this (almost necessarily) creates perverse incentives, public-private life, and disharmony in the soul. Socrates thinks that this is true of cities as they exist in Greece, "in his fatherland, unless some divine good luck chances to be his." Glaucon: "I understand. You mean that he'll be willing to take part in the politics of the city we were founding and describing, the one that exists in **theory** (τῇ ἐν **λόγοις** κειμένῃ), for I don't think it exists anywhere on earth." Socrates: "But perhaps there is a model of it in **heaven** (ἐν **οὐρανῷ** ἴσως παράδειγμα)…" For Dorter, this is a significant moment: "When Socrates says that there is a pattern not only in words but in heaven, he is emphasizing that its primary realm is not that of *eikasia* (only in words) but *noesis*."[109] So too the image of the soul fashioned out of words (εἰκόνα πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ), explicated by *Rep.* IX and invoked by *Thomas* 7, rightfully extends its pattern to a higher plane in heaven. The mysterious statement of Jesus in *Thomas* 7 is allowed to exist simultaneously on the several levels of literal, metaphorical, and spiritual meaning.

[109] Dorter, *Transformation*, 302.

Having set down the literary, historical, and procedural background, this paper posits that the Origenist method would be contemporaneous and associated with the well-educated Hellenistic philosophers of Syria and Lower Egypt, the original milieu and interpretive community for the original-language *Gospel of Thomas.* For them, the Platonic motif carried down by Neoplatonists and Christian academics (and available in its Greek entirety) would be the learned reference for reading and appreciating the multilevel operations of *Thomas* 7. The Augustinian method, by contrast, would be contemporaneous and associated with the half-educated speakers of Egyptian and some Greek—that is, Coptic—who were devotees of a semi-canonical Christianity. For them, the Copticized *Republic* IX contained within NHC VI is the exact, authoritative source (though not identified as Plato), the 'thing' to which the 'sign' of *Thomas* 7 points, a linear progression that leads toward charity and against cupidity, toward virtuous behavior and perhaps even truth in faith.

Canonicity and History

Among many claims the paper has not yet explored, one stands out as crucial to the argument: What was the nature of Upper Egyptian Christianity, allowing some to read *The Gospel of Thomas* as scripture? Discussion returns now to the question of *Thomas* within the larger Christian canon. As previously mentioned, there are several unanswered questions about its place within contemporary Gnostic and Christian movements, as much as anything 'Gnostic' can be defined or anything 'mainstream Christian' was truly so before Nicaea in 325. Did *Thomas* have an overt 'gnosticizing' aim? Was it on this account that it was excluded from the Christian canon? It may have been an honest collection of Christ's attributed sayings, both standard and eccentric, current at the time of its publication.

Starting from the known, there is without question the dissimilarity of *Thomas'* generic structure, and literary genre bears a nontrivial relation to religious canonicity. Thomassen observes that thinking 'canon' to mean 'list (of works)' is anachronistic and does disservice to the normative weight of inclusion. There is another ancient sense of the 'canonical' as the 'rule-abiding', where a text must have authority from one of two sources: (1) the longevity of its tradition, or (2) the divinity of its revelation.[110] Brakke agrees with this realignment for religious purposes: "Scripture is itself essentially a social phenomenon, the creation not of literature but of com- munities that grant authority to certain works of literature and to certain persons."[111] Christians entering the second century possessed the Hebrew Bible (mostly old, though also divinely revealed), the attested oracular sayings of risen Christ (*Thomas,* exclusively revealed), Jesus' indirect teachings through the Church-building epistles of Paul (expositional revelation made servant to young traditions), and the human narratives reporting the life and acts of the living Jesus (Four Gospels, almost exclusively instantiated into and stemming from tradition). Most contemporaneous Christians, however—both those now regarded as Gnostics and those as Church Fathers—distinguished between the truth-value of the Savior's actual words and His witnessed deeds. That is, there was a difference between the words of the four gospels and the Word. For whatever reason, the early Church picked the former; only the Book of Revelation comes close to the kind of straight-from-the-mouth riddling found, most notably, in *Thomas*.[112]

Why that choice? It is scholarly consensus that the narrative gospels were a later fabrication. Between sayings-gospel and its narrative counterpart, Kelber claims the former as

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[110] Einar Thomassen, "Some Notes on the Development of Christian Ideas about a Canon", in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture,* ed. Einar Thomassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculum Press, 2010): 9.
[111] Brakke, "Canon Formation", 417.
[112] Einar Thomassen, "Development of Christian Ideas", 13-18.

the more organic of the two, developing an oral tradition with an "aphoristic tendency" toward clustering, dialogue, and discourse that imprinted on both orthodox and Gnostic generic conventions. In Kelber's view, there must be a more compelling reason to require narrative form.[113] Robinson provides one answer in the 'gnosticizing' emphasis upon the resurrection, where "Easter is on principle the time of a new hermeneutic as the time of the Spirit." The pre-Easter Jesus speaks in riddling parables and the post-Easter Christ speaks "openly"—for those who have 'gnosis'. Of course, the non-parabolic meaning is inaccessible to and rejected by "average persons", "unenlightened", who see only "the superficial statement any reader sees (the literal meaning)," for "God has revealed his to the sectarians his true, esoteric meaning (the higher, deeper, fuller, spiritual meaning)."[114] The canonical gospels fall largely into the first camp, Mark almost exclusively; *Thomas* belongs to the second, promising infinite life to those who have flipped the switch of comprehension. Boring proceeded from the discursive modes of early Christian prophecy, noting their role as speakers inspired by and operating on behalf of a risen Christ. The prophetic tradition does not demarcate a Jesus of a historical past but instead allows the resurrected Lord to operate in the contemporary community. Mark, however, has only about half as many sayings as Matthew and Luke, only five of which qualify as prophetic (per Boring's definition) on subjects other than the end-time. Mark includes no sayings whatsoever from the risen Christ himself.[115] The narrative genre therefore operates within, or is privileged by, an interpretive framework that prefers the living, historical Jesus—for Kelber, privileging

[113] Werner H. Kelber, "Narrative as Interpretation and Interpretation of Narrative: Hermeneutical Reflections on the Gospels," in *The Interpretation of Dialogue*, ed. Tullio Maranhão (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 78-81.
[114] James M. Robinson, "Jesus: From Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles' Creed)", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101, no. 1 (1982): 26-30, 49.
[115] Eugene Boring, "The Paucity of Sayings in Mark: A Hypothesis", in SBL *Seminar Papers*, 371-77 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press), 377; *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition* SNTS MS 46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 183-203.

'historical' actions over discursive knowledge; for Robinson, emphasis on the pre-Easter life and death over a post-Easter revelation; for Boring, a rejection of prophetic and 'gnostic' sayings in favor of contained prefiguration. In any case, working from independent methods, the narrative gospel is a later iteration of an antecedent stage, one which may have included *Thomas.* Kelber proposes a tripartite model to the development of early Christian literature: "orality, the sayings genre, and the narrative gospel", enacted by "the recycling of texts into speech, the transformation of speech into writing, and an oral remembering and dismembering of texts, all processes little or not at all understood in biblical scholarship."[116] First in the model are aphorisms and parables, reflecting actual recorded speech acts, recited without a 'binding text' (cf. Homer, *Hadith*). Second is the clustering of aphorisms and parables, written down into organized collections (wisdom-texts) or wrapped in sparse narrative frames (philosophical dialogues). Third is the narrative gospel, in necessary conflict with the first two because it deprives both aphorism and parable of their directness, making them subservient to the diegetic task of a literary and historical work. The last is the most text-reliant, the greatest emphasis upon form.

Pheme Perkins, working within an 'orality' framework, thinks the revelation dialogue has irrevocable oral elements as well, and that many of the Nag Hammadi writings' individual subunits reflect "the liturgy, teaching, preaching and polemic of their respective communities" more directly than the narrative heirs, bent by generic conventions. But the clustering act is a written act, not an oral one; the compiled final product, "a textually contrived arrangement, invites reflection and analysis, further heightening the sense of interpretation. In this second order of operation interpretation becomes a self-conscious activity. This is evident from the first

[116] Kelber, "Narrative as Interpretation", 83.

saying of the Gospel of Thomas." Yet, for Perkins, the sub-current of speech-to-text is still understood: "Truth is not definitively embodied in an inspired text. Gnostic interpretation is still the hermeneutic of an oral tradition."[117] The more 'oral' something is, in a sense, the less 'textual' it must be. Orality was ever-present and a constant influence upon manuscript practices. Canonicity then is also a form of control, since it artificially limits the material available to the cycle of oral-rhetorical and textual-interpretive acts. By establishing fixed and highly structured texts, the truth of which is contained verbatim, a canon also divests agency from minister or teacher—academic discourse, improvisational worship—in favor of clergy and doctrine.

Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, issued his thirty-ninth *Festal Letter* for Easter 367, the first listing the 27 books of accepted Christianity and the first use of 'canonized' (κανονιζόμενα). Brakke notes that most studies have focused on the lists and criteria of canonicity, "although the surviving fragments provide rich material for broader social questions"[118]—the who, when, where, and how. Athanasius rejected all other quasi-scripture, singling out the heresies of 'teacher' and 'Melitian' movements. The 'teachers' are the (Arian) Christian academics who operated like Hellenistic philosophers, and indeed "the story of Christianity in Alexandria in the second and third centuries is essentially one of teachers and their competing independent schools: the Gnostics, Valentinus, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, and so on." They "tolerated and even encouraged philosophical speculation and diversity of opinion"; looked for truth "wherever it might manifest itself literarily, including pagan literature, Jewish writings of all kinds, and Christian books that their fellow Christians may have considered suspect"; their method was allegorical interpretation, working pet theories into

[117] Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 201-2.
[118] Brakke, "Canon Formation," 397.

accepted Christian scripture; and thus they opposed canon closure.[119] The Melitians were more of a geopolitical group that was "strongest in Upper Egypt," since the movement "included elements of protest against Hellenistic Alexandria." Brakke grants that in their opposition to Athanasius and Alexandria, the Melitians may have especially encouraged the use of apocryphal books among Egyptian Christians.[120]

The Gospel of Thomas may have lost favor within establishment Christianity because its style was out of fashion, for nontrivial reasons: too great a focus on spiritual (post-resurrection) rather than historical (living) Jesus; too appropriated or enmeshed in Gnostic dogma; or too close to the orality of older cult ritual. Within the traditions of Origenist teaching and Melitian (Upper Egyptian) Christianity, there was a greater openness to unconventional or apocryphal works outside the authoritative canon. Indeed, when imagining someone to have brought *Thomas* to a Pachomian Monastery in the south, latter-day Origenists (Hierakis and Evagrius) fill the ranks of proposed candidates. There, the quasi-scripture and its classical allusion could be translated and received in Coptic, interpretable in the (Augustinian) manner of the day.

Conclusion

It really is a mystery why a seemingly arbitrary fragment of Plato's *Republic* should appear in a sealed jar, in a different language, five hundred miles down the Nile. Among the handful of scholars who have investigated the relationship between *Rep.* IX and the other Coptic manuscripts present, the consensus establishes a relationship to *Thomas* 7 and all its attendant (Gnostic, Christian, wisdom-text) features. This paper's approach, through Sections 2 and 3, favored historical methods over pure literary or philosophical ones. This was a conscious choice,

[119] Ibid. 400–401.
[120] Ibid. 411.

since the driving questions were less concerned with theological principles than with practitioners, believers, ministers and cult-members—the later Empire's new public of half-educated men, of the most diverse racial, religious, and social origins.

Having distinguished between two interpretive communities, Section 4 proposes ways to push the dichotomy further. Analogy to Christian hermeneutics, an examination of canon through generic and geopolitical lens—these are only the seeds of hypothetical arguments, someday to be wielded more forcefully. The distinction between Origenist and Augustinian allegorical methods, while granular, offers a compelling reading of how the two hypothetical groups read differently. Those who know and love Hellenistic philosophy are more likely to include it as superstructure, as a meaningful accoutrement. Those who approach scripture from a fixed text, with only oral-rhetorical access, would prefer an efficient gloss between sign and signifier. It is a contradiction of the analysis or an irony of the historical evolution that Plato, loved by the *Thomas* composers, was culturally separate from Upper Egyptian Thomasines, even despised by metonymy, though the unlabeled *Republic* motif figured prominently in their path to salvation.

Of course, this has been only one of countless investigations into the countless archaeological, philosophical, and religious enigmas of the Nag Hammadi discovery. For almost the entire latter half of the 20th century, graduate students and faculty at the Claremont Graduate University's Institute for Antiquity and Christianity made English-language NHC publication and early Christianity research their primary initiatives. It is a fascinating story, told piece by piece in the IAC Archives. As with any papyrology, much of the best scholarship is in Western European languages, but these are relatively accessible or available indirectly. The biggest challenge is the lack of unbiased or corroborating evidence available from antiquity. Most

scholars, wishing to say something worth saying, are forced to bring their own backgrounds, interests, and interpretive lenses to principal standing. The IAC and its affiliates was weighted somewhat toward the disciplines of religion and ancient philosophy, especially Early Christianity. Only in recent years have social and intellectual historians made direct attempts at *who* the readers, hearers, and congregants might have been, putting lives and faces to minority religious movements at the peripheries of the Roman world. Proof is hard to come by, and plausible speculation can be discouraging. To paraphrase Howard Jackson, though, the presumption of ignorance regarding the ancients can be just as dangerous as the presumption of knowledge. This paper could well be conceived in error. Or, a community of southern Egyptians knew a *Republic* excerpt to be Plato's, knew *Thomas* to be outside Christian canon, and so developed a complex response to the Greek-language culture of the oppressor.

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