

The Gospel of Thomas and Early Christian Monasticism in Egypt

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This article tackles the issue of the possible Egyptian provenance of the *Gospel of Thomas* (*GTh*). By the beginning of the third century, *GTh* already circulated in the Christian circles of Alexandria. Furthermore, at least one version of this document had been transmitted to Oxyrhynchus before 200 C.E., that is, prior to the *terminus ad quem* for one of the Greek manuscripts of *Thomas*. In order to reassess this hypothesis, the author delves into the problem of origin of Egyptian monasticism and examines the earliest attestations about the use of *GTh* in Alexandria (Origen) and Asia Minor (Hippolytus). This inquiry leads to a negative result concerning the possible Egyptian birthplace of *Thomas*, and allows for the existence of an earlier stratum of sayings in *GTh* deriving from a first-century source. Due to the paucity of historical data, such a hypothesis would hardly be tenable in the Egyptian context. Therefore, the most one could suggest at this point of research is that the *GTh* reached Alexandria from Palestine or Asia Minor, where it had already been known in the first half of the second century.

Keywords: Gospel of Thomas, Early Christianity, monasticism, Egypt

Introduction

It is difficult, indeed, to estimate if any broad scholarly consensus has been reached in the area of Thomasine studies. I am inclined to believe that in this case such an agreement depends on the types of questions that have been asked in the still growing literature on the *Gospel of Thomas* (*GTh*). Even a brief survey of this literature indicates that the more comprehensive of those studies usually address the general issues as to *Thomas*' possible dependence upon the synoptic tradition, or its Gnostic vs. non-Gnostic origin, whereas some of the more specialized essays and articles tackle various parallels of the *GTh* with other pieces of early Christian literature. Some very detailed examinations of the composition and redaction of this document, as well as the analyses of particular logia in *Thomas*, pertain to that second major group of studies.

The issues of *Thomas'* possible dependence upon the synoptic gospels¹ and its parallels with the works of Syrian and Egyptian Christianity are meaningful starting points of any inquiry into the origin and transmission of this document. For, in this context, one is dealing with the theories of the two major groups of scholars who support two seemingly irreconcilable positions as to the origin and character of this gospel.

The advocates of the pro-independence school² generally maintain that the *GTh* is not a Gnostic composition, but an early Jewish-Christian document that had a development independent of the canonical, particularly synoptic, gospels. According to some of these authors,³ such a hypothesis may be confirmed by the redactional, compositional as well as terminological features of the whole series of logia and their parallels in other Jewish-Christian writings (especially those pertaining to the eastern Syrian milieu).

The major challenge to the thesis concerning the independent origin of the *GTh* is to be found in works of the scholars who unambiguously argue for the Gnostic character of this work. Robert Grant's book *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (1960) represents an exemplar of this type of analysis. I agree with Grant's theory insofar as it brings *Thomas* in connection with the Naassene source quoted in Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (5.7.20). This source reads as follows:

[And] they (the Naassenes – MV) say that not only the mysteries of the Assyrians and the Phrygians [but those of the Egyptians as well] bear witness to their discourse regarding the blessed nature, hidden and yet revealed, of the things that were, and are, and will be, which, he says, is [the] kingdom of heaven sought for within man. Concerning this, they expressly deliver their tradition in the gospel entitled according to

1 For the more recent discussion of this problem, see, for example, Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

2 See, for example: Oscar Cullmann, *The Gospel of Thomas and the Problem of the Age of the Tradition Contained Therein*, *Interpretation* 16 (1962), 418–38; Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1983; John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985; Charles Hedrick, *Thomas and the Synoptics: Aiming at a Consensus*, *Second Century* 7 (1989/90), 39–56; Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development*, London: SCM Press, 1990; Stephen Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas Within the Development of Early Christianity*, Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1988.

3 Koester, *Ancient*; Davies, *The Gospel*.

Thomas, saying: “The one who seeks shall find me in children from seven years; for there, hidden in the fourteenth aeon, I am revealed.”⁴

However, a redaction-critical analysis of the *GTh*, which can demonstrate that in the case of this writing one is concerned with a multi-layered document that passed through at least two major and distinct phases of transmission, should certainly allow the possibility of a later, secondary recension of this document in a more or less apparent Gnostic key. Nevertheless, the possibility that the *GTh* may, indeed, represent a “secondary” gospel, does not conflict with the very persuasive form-critical evidence indicating that it contains, as one of its earlier strata, a Jewish-Christian collection of Jesus’ sayings developed independently of the synoptic gospels.

Let me, therefore, develop an alternative set of arguments that are commensurate with the first intuitions of Grenfell and Hunt,⁵ the scholars who discovered and edited the Greek manuscripts of the *GTh* at the time when the title of this work was yet unknown to the academic world. On the basis of the provenance of the papyri themselves, as well as on the reasonable assumption that the extant parallels with the *Gospel of the Egyptians* could indicate the probable locus of the *logia Iêsou*, these two authors were inclined to believe that the entire collection originated in Egypt.⁶ Indeed, the *material evidence* from Oxyrhynchus and Chenoboskion (Nag Hammadi), the circumstance that the only extant texts of *Thomas* were discovered in the Nile valley, and not in Syria, lead to one of the most effective arguments against *Thomas*’ eastern Syrian background.⁷ Additionally, the bilingual environment in which this document was found is Greek/Coptic and not Greek/Syriac, as the promoters of the “Edessan consensus” would have it.⁸

4 Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, M. Marcovich (ed.), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986, 147. The translation of this fragment into English is mine.

5 Bernard P. Grenfell – Arthur S. Hunt, *Logia Iêsou: Sayings of Our Lord*, London: Frowde, 1897 and *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Pt. 4, London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904.

6 Grenfell – Hunt, *Logia Iêsou*.

7 I have already tackled, in much more detail, the issue of the Syrian provenance of the *GTh* in: Milan Vukomanović, The Provenance of the Gospel of Thomas: Assessing the Syrian Hypothesis, *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 38 (2021/1), 79–107.

8 For a more recent discussion of the Syrian provenance of the *GTh*, see: Pierluigi Piovaneli, Thomas in Edessa? Another Look at the Original Setting of the Gospel of

Moreover, *linguistic evidence*, the fact that the Greek manuscripts belong to the second- and the third-century (whereas the Coptic codex should be dated later in the fourth-century) suggests that the most probable course of transmission and translation of the *GTh* should be located within this period. That is to say, the Coptic version is, most likely, a translation and an adaptation of the original Greek text.

Even if the hypothetical Aramaic substratum of *Thomas* originated in Palestine, it is not necessary to seek for a Syrian mediation in the process of transmission of this work. Close connections between the Jews of Palestine and Alexandria existed in the first century. In addition, there is strong evidence of independent and very original *ascetic traditions* of Jewish origin that flourished in the Alexandrian region in the middle of that century. On the other hand, it would be very hard, indeed, to establish such early Christian connections between Jerusalem and the eastern Syrian (Edessan) diaspora. All the evidence that we possess in favor of the Syrian context is the spurious tradition recorded in the so-called *Doctrine of Addai*, an unreliable guide regarding the Jewish-Christian origins of Edessan Christianity.

Furthermore, one could analyze, from the standpoint of their attestation and relevance, the Thomasine parallels with the two Alexandrian gospels (i.e., the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*). The similarities between these works and the *GTh* are at least as relevant as the Syriac parallels of *Thomas*. As far as attestations are concerned, one should bear in mind that one of the earliest *testimonia* about the *GTh* is furnished by an Alexandrian Christian author (Origen, ca. 233 C.E.).⁹ No such testimony – be it earlier, contemporary or later – is present in the works of the Syrian writers. In the Syrian chronicles, there is a complete silence about this document.

Thomas, in: J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen, Y. Kuiper (eds.), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 443–461; Ian Ph. Brown, Where indeed Was the Gospel of Thomas Written? Thomas in Alexandria, *JBL* 138 (2019/2), 451–472; Paul-Hubert Poirier, Évangile de Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas. Une tradition et ses transformations, *Apocrypha* 7 (1996), 9–26.

9 In his *First Homily on Luke* (1, 2), Origen reports that in his time there was “in circulation also the Gospel According to Thomas and the Gospel According to Matthias and many others”. See Bentley Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Together with III, 2*, Leiden: Brill, 1989, 104.

Besides Origen's attestation, a number of *testimonia* refer to the *GTh* along with the two other heterodox gospels that probably originated in Egypt.¹⁰ They are the already mentioned *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the so-called *Gospel of Matthias*, which (one may have reasons to believe) represents an original version of the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, a previously unknown manuscript discovered with the rest of the Nag Hammadi Library.

Finally, a hermeneutical as well as redaction-critical analysis of the *GTh* indicates that one is dealing here with a composite, multi-layered,¹¹ document that strongly reflects not only a variety of sources of tradition, but also a *syncretistic* religious-philosophical milieu. This type of syncretism (which comprises both Jewish-Christian features and Gnostic, Hellenistic mythemes and mysteries) is more at home in first- and second-century Alexandria than in the eastern Syria, Edessa.

Despite all these intriguing assumptions, which certainly can contest the alternative hypothesis regarding the Syrian provenance of the *GTh*, the idea about the Egyptian origin of *Thomas* is susceptible to some serious objections as well.

First of all, accepting the results of form-critical analysis of the *GTh* and pursuing the theory concerning an early and independent substratum of this document (containing an original collection of Jesus' sayings), we would have to be able to elucidate the course of transmission of such a collection from Palestine to Egypt as late as the end of the first-, beginning of the second-century C.E. This is because one should allow a reasonable period of time between such a hypothetical transmission and the composition of this gospel in Greek before, or about, 140 C.E. Regrettably, there is no firm historical evidence that such a collection of logia could have reached Egypt at such an early period of its Christian history. As

10 Jerome, *Comm. in evang. Matth.*, Prologue (PL 26. 17A); Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii Lucae* 1.2. See Layton, *Nag Hammadi*, 106.

11 In his book *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas: From Interpretations to the Interpreted* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009, 20–25), Petr Pokorný identified even five layers in the transmission history of the *GTh*. Pokorný argued that *GTh* was later than the synoptic gospels and that the latest Coptic version “represents a theological stream that originated in the early second century” (*Commentary*, 19), but that it “originated at a time when some of the earlier Gospels had already attained canonical status” (*Commentary*, 13).

a matter of fact, there is no extant evidence whatsoever about first-century Christianity in Egypt. As in the early Syrian context, a chronic lack of historical data hinders any plausible conclusions concerning the transmission of the *GTh* prior to its appearance in Oxyrhynchus in the late second century. The most one could guess is that *Thomas* may have reached Alexandria as early as the mid-second century, but before this very tentative date, scholars find themselves in an almost complete darkness.

Second, if one accepts the assumption of some scholars that the *GTh* could have been composed as early as the first century,¹² the applicability of this hypothesis to the Egyptian context would mean that *Thomas* is the earliest available witness to the development of Christianity in this geographic area. Attractive though it is, such a hypothesis does not seem to be grounded on any extant historical facts.

Third, if *Thomas* was truly composed in Egypt before 140 C.E., one could at least expect that this document reflected social-historical conditions characteristic of that period,¹³ or at least to contain some literary parallels with contemporary works such as the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Unfortunately, the picture of early Alexandrian Christianity reflected in *Barnabas* is incomparably different from the ideological world of the *GTh*.

Finally, Hippolytus bears witness to the use of this document by the Naassenes as early as the beginning of the second century.¹⁴ However, the Naassenes were originally a Phrygian, and not an Egyptian religious sect. It is almost impossible to demonstrate that this group used or compiled *GTh* so early in *Egypt*, rather than in their original homeland in Asia Minor.

The Beginnings of Christian Asceticism in Egypt

In the 20th century, the view of the earliest Christian history in Egypt was subjected to two quite radical reformulations. Adolf von Harnack's authoritative study on primitive Church history, written at the turn of the cen-

12 Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1983.

13 For example, the annihilation of the Egyptian Jews under Trajan, at the beginning of the second century.

14 This approximation is based upon the fact that the song to Attis quoted in Hippolytus' "Naassene chapter" is generally dated in the reign of Hadrian (117–38 C.E.). I take this first date as a tentative terminus a quo for the Hippolytus Naassene source.

ture, proclaimed “our almost total ignorance” of Christianity in Egypt and Alexandria until the episcopate of Demetrius (ca. 189–231 C.E.).¹⁵

In 1934, Walter Bauer was the first scholar to challenge this rather discouraging awareness.¹⁶ He put forward an original thesis about the *heretical* pre-history of orthodox Christianity in Egypt. According to Bauer, it is not the case that scholars do not possess enough evidence as to the origins of Christianity in the land of the Nile; the problem is that they do not take into consideration Gnostic sources that widely circulated there in the second century C.E.

The problem of Bauer’s theory is, however, that he put into the same Gnostic basket works such as the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* or the *Gospel of the Hebrews* along with the treatises of the Valentinians, Carpocratians and Basilides. If these works are “heretical” by definition, then the history of Egyptian Christianity cannot be other than Gnostic. Bauer believed that this was the main reason why the ecclesiastical sources had been so silent about Christian origins in this country.

If we set aside the problem of Egyptian Gnosticism, one may contend that Bauer’s challenge has been progressive for at least two reasons:

1. He encouraged scholars to look into a whole variety of available sources in order to advance their knowledge of Egyptian Christianity.
2. He drew our attention to the existence of two different groups of Christians – Gentile and Jewish – who were, according to Bauer, definitely present on the Alexandrian scene at the very beginning of the second century (and, presumably, some time before that). He also maintained that they used two different gospels: the *Gospel according to the Egyptians* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.¹⁷

Bauer’s investigations paved the way to the second, even more significant, breakthrough in the studies of early Christianity in Egypt. After the publication of C. H. Roberts’ *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christi-*

15 Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, Vols. 1–2, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908, 158.

16 Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

17 Bauer, *Orthodoxy*, 54.

an Egypt,¹⁸ a growing number of scholars (including Pearson, Klijn, Koester, Green and others)¹⁹ have contributed to the consensus on the Jewish-Christian origins of the earliest Christianity in Egypt.

What kind of evidence exists for the presence of the Jewish-Christian movement in Egypt that scholars like Harnack could not take into consideration?

To begin with, entire corpora of manuscripts were found and studied in the 20th century that shed light on the generally obscure periods of Christian history in Egypt. Besides the Coptic Christian sources, including the Nag Hammadi Library, one is now in possession of a certain number of Greek and Latin literary papyri (both biblical and non-biblical), as well as letters and other manuscripts and inscriptions. Although none of those papyri represents a manuscript evidence for the first century, they at least testify to the very early Christian contacts that existed between Alexandria and Middle and Upper Egypt. Furthermore, C. H. Roberts called our attention to the occurrence of the *nomina sacra*, a silent mark of the earliest Christian presence in this country. Based on these investigations and some other papyri evidence, Roberts concluded that Christianity must have reached Egypt from Jerusalem and Palestine “in a form strongly influenced by Judaism.”²⁰ According to this scholar, the low profile of the first Christians at that early period of Church history, as well as the extinction of Egyptian Jewry at the outset of the second century (the revolt under Trajan in 115–17), contributed very much to the significant lack of available documents from the first two centuries of the common era.²¹ In any case, contemporary events such as wars, riots and massacres, rather than

18 C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, London: Oxford University Press, 1979.

19 See, for example, Birger Pearson, *Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria*, in: G. W. E. Nickelsburg – G. W. MacRae (eds.), *Christians Among Jews and Gentiles*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 206–16; Birger Pearson, *Gnosticism in Early Egyptian Christianity*, in: B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, 194–213; Birger Pearson – J. E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986 (especially chapters 6, 8 and 9); Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, Vol. 2, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, 219; H. A. Green, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

20 Roberts, *Manuscript*, 49.

21 *Ibid.*, 54.

the heterodox character of Egyptian Christianity, contributed to the fact that we still have a very fragmentary picture of that earliest period.

However, in the light of these discoveries and theories, modern scholars express more readiness to re-examine, or at least differently accentuate, the traditional sources such as Eusebius, Philo, Josephus, Clement of Alexandria or Luke-Acts. As a result of this increasing scholarly interest, a whole series of significant studies and monographs began to cope with the different aspects of Egyptian Christianity, such as: the social and economic background of Christianity in Egypt;²² social history and ecology of Early Christianity in North Africa;²³ Jewish-Christian relations in the first-century Alexandria and Egypt;²⁴ the connections between Gnosticism and early monasticism in Egypt,²⁵ etc.

In addition, a vast number of studies on the Nag Hammadi documents have provided further knowledge about the doctrines and ideologies of some Christian Gnostic groups in second- and third-century Egypt.

Such being the case, scholars are now in a better position to reappraise the importance of the *GTh* as one of the most original early Christian documents that had somehow been introduced in this very obscure period of Egyptian Church history. One should bear in mind that this document incorporates some of the significant features that early Egyptian Christianity could have acquired in its transitional period of development. In the late second-century Egyptian context, *Thomas* could certainly provide an important link between the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the more developed religious doctrines expressed in the *Teaching of Silvanus* or in the monastic teachings of the desert fathers. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to reflect upon these specific features of the *GTh* that could have made an impact on some early trends in Egyptian Christianity.

22 Green, *The Economic*.

23 W. H. C. Frend, *Town and Countryside in the Early Christian Centuries*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1980.

24 Pearson, *Christians and Jews* and Pearson – Goehring, *The Roots*.

25 Frederick Wisse, Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt, in: B. Aland (ed.), *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978; Armand Veilleux, Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt, in: Pearson – Goehring, *The Roots*, 1986, 271–306.

First, *GTh* is a document found at two different locations in the Nile valley – Oxyrhynchus and Chenoboskion. The manuscript evidence from this area indicates that these two places had frequent and very close contacts with the city of Alexandria.²⁶ In the light of the aforementioned sources and theories, it is not difficult to suppose that the early Christians from Alexandria may have had transmitted this document deeper into the land of Egypt. As noted by Puech, Quispel and some other scholars, the *GTh* does have very distinctive Jewish-Christian features. These are, for example, the prominent position of James, “the righteous one” (log. 12); an understanding of the Pharisees as the legitimate recipients of the Mosaic tradition (log. 39); various other logia that either reflect the life-situation of the Jewish-Christian community (log. 16 and 64) or may be distinguished as typically Semitic modes of expression (e.g. log. 12B, 25).

Furthermore, the *GTh* is a text with apparent wisdom proclivities.²⁷ The Jewish and Jewish-Christian sapiential tradition had flourished in Egypt between the time of Philo, on the one hand, and the Alexandrian theologians and desert fathers, on the other (i.e. between the first- and the fourth-century). The fact that *Thomas* could be very easily embedded in the course of development of various sapiential ideas may additionally speak in favor of its early acceptance in Egypt. It is, in fact, very easy to understand *Thomas*’ wisdom proclivities if they are placed on the same line of thought leading from Philo and the Alexandrian gospels to the *Teaching of Silvanus* and the theological-philosophical wisdom of the Church fathers.

Finally, this gospel is marked by the typical characteristics of an ascetic attitude. *Thomas*’ Jesus recommends literal as well as spiritual fasting (“fasting to the world”); he glorifies virginity, singleness and celibacy; he expresses a negative attitude toward wealth and instructs renunciation of all possessions. These distinctive features of ascetic and monastic ideologies and practices prompt us to consider the idea of *Thomas*’ inherent proto-monasticism as an ideological trend characteristic of the Christian missionaries in Egypt even before the time of Antony.

As far as this proto-monasticism is concerned, we may primarily refer to Philo of Alexandria and his understanding of the male/female cate-

²⁶ Roberts, *Manuscript*, 3.

²⁷ Davies, *The Gospel*.

gories²⁸ as well as his valuable description of the ascetic community of Therapeutae.²⁹ In this context *Thomas* would perhaps pertain to an important stage in the development of the wisdom and ascetic ideas, the stage that links *bios theoretikos* of Philo and the Therapeutae with the *bios praktikos* of the desert monks from the third or fourth century.

Given these presuppositions, I am inclined to believe that the emergence of Christian asceticism in Egypt was a very gradual and natural process: it had been, in some way, already prepared by the works and ideas of Philo, the Jewish Platonists, as well as by the numerous, but nameless, philosophic and ascetic groups that either lived in the Alexandrian metropolis or spread their doctrines to some other cultural centers along the Nile valley.

One course of this inquiry into the Egyptian trajectory of *Thomas* could perhaps lead from the earliest stages of consolidation of Jewish Christianity in Egypt, to the monastic asceticism of the desert fathers as the culminating point of such a development. In historical terms, this course is, however, very hypothetical and related to the more obscure periods of the Egyptian Christian history. Therefore, I think that it would be methodologically justified to trace one more, reversed line of inquiry in order to see if the presence of the *GTh* in this ancient country could be observed in the light of some more familiar phases of the Egyptian Church history.

What I have in mind here, in the first place, is a brief consideration of the developed forms of monasticism in Egypt in the late third and fourth centuries.³⁰

28 Richard Baer Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female*, Leiden: Brill, 1970.

29 Philo of Alexandria, *The Contemplative Life*, New York: Paulist Press, 1981, 41–57.

30 For this particular period, see, for example: David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010; Gawdat Gabra – Hany N. Takla (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, Vol. 2 (Nag Hammadi-Esna), Cairo-New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010; Blake Leyerle – Robin Darling (eds.), *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013; Daniel F. Caner, “Not of This World”: The Invention of Monasticism, in: Philip Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 588–600.

Monasticism in Egypt

Several historical figures and movements need to be considered in this context: 1) the figure of St. Antony as portrayed by Athanasius; 2) the figure of St. Paul of Thebes; 3) the Pachomian coenobitic community, whose work has been often associated with the preservation of the Nag Ham-madi manuscripts.

Sources such as the *Vita Antonii*, *Vita Pachomiii*, *Apophthegmata Patrum* or the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* provide a closer look at the life and doctrines of the Egyptian monks who were either the immediate predecessors or the contemporaries of the Coptic editor of the *GTh*. After a brief examination of these anchoritic, coenobitic and monastic movements and trends, one could probably be able to provide the missing link that connects our gospel with the official history of Coptic Christianity.

In the third- and fourth-centuries, two major forms of asceticism were developed in Christianized Egypt: the *anchoritism* of the Antonian type and the Pachomian *cenobitism* (or the monasticism proper).

Although regarded as “the father of the monks,” St. Antony (251–356) was certainly not the first Christian hermit to withdraw from his village and begin to live an ascetic life. What is so unique about Antony, however, is that he (owing primarily to Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*) has been praised for centuries as a paradigm or a prototype of ascetic religiosity. Despite its clearly propagandizing character, Athanasius’ work on Antony provides some valuable historical information as to the beginnings of Christian anchoritism in Egypt. For example, at the time when Antony was still a youth, there existed some monasteries in Egypt, as well as ascetics who used to withdraw from the villages.³¹

The act of *anachoresis* (literary ‘withdrawal,’ ‘separation’) was in those earliest times of Egyptian Christianity closely associated with the practice of tax-evasion as well.³² As a form of group protest, *anachoresis* originally meant an act of flight or ‘going up’ to the desolate areas of Thebaid or Upper Egypt.

31 St. Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony*, Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1950, 20.

32 James Goehring, *The World Engaged: The Social and Economic World of Early Egyptian Monasticism*, in: J. E. Goehring et al., *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World*, Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990, 138–39.

Besides Athanasius' work, there are few other sources of information as to the Antonian form of anchoritism in Egypt: the letters of Saint Antony (seven of which are considered to be authentic) as well as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, in which we find a collection of 38 apophthegms ascribed to Antony.³³

Some aspects of Antony's teachings, scattered both in the *Vita Antonii* and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, may perhaps be summarized as follows:

1. a strong, almost literalist attachment to the precepts of the Scriptures and the deeds of the saints;³⁴
2. constant prayer as well as meditation upon the thoughts of the apostle Paul, such as: "I die daily" or "Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath";³⁵
3. an "interiorization" of the symbol of the kingdom of God (an attitude already expressed in Luke and the *GTh*);³⁶
4. an anti-Arianism of Antony, augmented by Athanasius' own polemic/apologetic design;³⁷
5. the simplicity of life corresponds to the simplicity of mind and intellect, etc.

Antony's ascetic practices included the well-known acts of fasting, constant prayer and almsgiving; reduced sleep (on the ground), manual labor as well as disregard for dress and bodily needs.³⁸ Moreover, according to Athanasius, Antony was a healer and a wonder-worker, able not only to predict various events,³⁹ but to fall into deep contemplation as well.⁴⁰ He was not a *philosophos*, but he was indeed a *sophos*, a wise man, encountered as an archetype in many other Hellenistic and Oriental cultures.

33 Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers (Apophthegmata Patrum)*, New York: Macmillan, 1980, 1–9.

34 Athanasius, *The Life*, 33–57; Ward, *The Desert*, 5–9 (sayings 19, 22, 32, 37).

35 Athanasius, *The Life*, 36, 67.

36 *Ibid.*, 37–38.

37 *Ibid.*, 78–79, 87–89.

38 *Ibid.*, 21.

39 Athanasius, *The Life*, 87–93. Also Ward, *The Desert*, 3–4.

40 Athanasius, *The Life*, 74.

The paradigmatic function of Antony's biography is clearly and explicitly emphasized even at the very beginning of Athanasius' work.⁴¹ Indeed, owing primarily to Athanasius' literary skills, including different techniques of embellishing, Antony has been celebrated for centuries as an archetype of ascetic religiosity. The propagandizing and programmatic aspects of the *Vita Antonii* were perhaps some of the main reasons which, at the end of the last century, prompted several historians to contest the authenticity of this biography.⁴² Moreover, some authors have characterized it as a pure romance or, at best, a literary classic pertaining to the same genre as, say, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*.

The existence of some other sources of knowledge about Antony (such as the Greek "Life of Saint Pachomius," *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or Rufinus', Palladius' and Jerome's *testimonia*) aids in understanding Athanasius' own work as a genuine piece of historical literature that obviously had an additional, persuading purpose, especially in the context of the Arian controversy. This fact alone, however, does not prevent from examining some historical-biographical facts that apparently lurk beneath the surface of this celebrated work. Besides, one should constantly bear in mind that the notion of history, as developed in Late Antiquity, was quite different from our own concept of history or historiography. It included, among other things, various angelologies as are to be found, for example, in some works of Josephus Flavius.

The *Life of Antony* supplies some very important historical information: despite the fact that no man before Antony knew the great desert, there were indeed some monasteries in Egypt, as well as ascetics who used to withdraw from the villages. If *Vita Antonii* were a pure romance designed to praise Antony's "orthodoxy," anti-Arianism or, most importantly, an unprecedented status of a monk, its author would not have any particular need to stress this fact. Furthermore, Jerome bears an independent witness to Paul of Thebes' withdrawal into the Arabian Desert in order to avoid Decian persecutions.⁴³ Although Paul's biography was modeled under the influence of *Vita Antonii*, it seems that he was an authentic ascetic

41 Ibid., 17.

42 Armitage Robinson (ed.), *The Lausiatic History of Palladius* (Texts and Studies, 6), Cambridge: University Press, 1904, 215.

43 Saint Jerome, *Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit*, Willits: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1976, 81-2.

of Alexandrian origin who presumably met St. Antony shortly before his own death.⁴⁴

At any rate, I am inclined to support an earlier date for the origins of Christian asceticism in Egypt and hence to accept some valuable hints provided by Athanasius' own account.

Eusebius' source Dionysius of Alexandria also corroborated the information that Christians withdrew into the desert under the persecution of Decius (249–51).⁴⁵ *The Life of Antony* has confirmed the same practice of *anachoresis*. It was possible, at least (albeit hardly provable), that these Christian withdrawals, prompted either by taxation or severe persecutions, could not have occurred at the beginning of the second century as well, that is, at the time when Egyptian Jewry (including probably some Jewish-Christians) was exposed to tragic extermination caused by Trajan's armies (115–17 C.E.).

Nevertheless, the monastic *anachoresis* of Egyptian Christians in the third- and fourth-centuries was primarily motivated by religious reasons. The renunciation of the world is certainly a major aspect of Christian *ascesis*. In this sense, again, Athanasius appears to be a rather reliable witness.⁴⁶

The Antonian type of ascetic *anachoresis* was later developed among those monks who first followed Antony. By the end of the fourth century this practice prevailed north from Lycopolis, especially in Nitria and Scetis (Wadi Natrun). Among other historical sources that supply information concerning this particular form of ascetic monasticism one may include John Cassian, the *Lausiatic History of Palladius* as well as the so-called *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*.⁴⁷

We learn, for example, that a great number of monks lived in Nitria, Scetis and Celia in the "inner desert" of the cells. On Saturdays and Sundays, these monks used to share *agape*, the common meal. In addition,

44 *Ibid.*, 85.

45 Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989, 211.

46 According to his account, these religious motives prompted St. Antony to start his anchorite life as a youth, soon after the death of his Christian parents (Athanasius, *The Life*, 19).

47 Joannes Cassianus, *Institutions cenobitiques* (Sources chrétiennes, 109), Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1965; Norman, Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*), London: Mowbray, 1980; Robinson, *The Lausiatic*, 1904.

they committed themselves to manual work and residence in cells. “Sit in your cell” was one of the major precepts for this kind of monastic life.⁴⁸ The monks also practiced meditation and a silent prayer or the prayer of the heart (*hesychia*).⁴⁹

Here, therefore, one encounters the forms of purely eremitical life, without any regulated monastic system. This is one of the basic features that clearly contrast anchoritism of the Antonian type from the Pachomian *koinonia*. Such a form of anchoritic *ascesis* could perhaps be labeled as a “spiritual” democracy of sorts. It should be noted in this context that only the oldest ascetics *served* as the spiritual leaders and nobody was subordinated to anyone else.

This tradition is still alive in the Eastern Orthodox Church, in some forms of eremitism encountered on Mount Atos, or among the Russian “holy men” (the so-called *starec*). Even nowadays a *starec* lives an eremitical, solitary life, but, on the other hand, he is highly venerated both by the official church and the common folk.

The communal or coenobitic asceticism was developed in the fourth century, south of Lycopolis. It was established by Antony’s contemporary Pachomius (292–346). In contrast to Antony, whose parents were already Christians, Pachomius was born of non-Christian parents in the Thebaid.⁵⁰ At the age of twenty, while he was a recruit of the Roman Army, Pachomius came under the influence of Christianity.⁵¹ Soon after being discharged, he went to the Upper Thebaid where he was baptized in a Christian community at Chenoboskion (Nag Hammadi).⁵²

Pachomius started his own monastic career under the guidance of the hermit Palamon,⁵³ who himself lived near Chenoboskion. He spent seven years with this experienced anchorite who taught him how to practice the “hard asceticism.” About 322 C.E. Pachomius settled in a village called Tabennesi,⁵⁴ in order to commit himself to the ascetic practices. Soon after,

48 See, for example, Ward, *The Desert*, 63, 139.

49 *Ibid.*, 13, 57, 179.

50 The First Greek Life of Pachomius, in: *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. 1, trans. A. Veilleux, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1980, 299.

51 *Ibid.*, 300.

52 *Ibid.*, 301.

53 *Ibid.*, 301.

54 *Ibid.*, 305.

a whole community gathered around him. There he established the rules of common labor, common meals and prayer. According to these rules, each member of the *koinonia* was responsible for all the others. It is striking indeed that, in the case of the Pachomian community, a completely new monastic system, resembling the military form of organization,⁵⁵ had been established by an ex-soldier.

According to Veilleux's systematization,⁵⁶ such a form of desert monasticism was characterized by the following features:

1. "an integral sharing and mutual service under a monastic rule" (in contrast to the 'spiritual democracy' of the anchorites);
2. the monastic community was, as a rule, accompanied by a secular Christian congregation;⁵⁷
3. a separate church was usually formed for this secular community;⁵⁸
4. monasteries for women were established side by side with nine Pachomian monasteries.⁵⁹

As far as the internal organization is concerned, we should emphasize that an *Abba* ("the father") was at the head of the monastic community of the Pachomian type.⁶⁰ He was normally accompanied by a second (*ho deuterios*).⁶¹ A great steward (*ho oikonomos*) was responsible for the material organization of the monasteries.⁶² According to the Greek *Life of Pachomius*, which is the main source about this coenobitic *koinonia*, the whole community participated in the morning and evening prayers.

Without going into further detail, it is important to notice at this point that the Pachomian *koinonia* represented the type of monastic community that could have composed the Coptic version (translation) of the *GTh*. In-

55 Namely, it was fully organized in both the material and "ideological" aspects.

56 Armand Veilleux, Pachomius, Saint, in: Atiya Aziz (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol 6, New York: Macmillan, 1991, 1860.

57 Athanasius reports that Antony was sometimes visited by the common folk, but he also tended to withdraw deeper into the desert in order to avoid major crowds.

58 This was certainly not the case with the anchorite monasticism.

59 This was apparently not the case with the hermits in Nitria or Cellia. Even today, women are not allowed to visit monasteries on Mount Atos.

60 *Pachomian Koinonia*, 316.

61 *Ibid.*, 315–16.

62 *Ibid.*, 315.

deed, several scholars have already associated this community with the compilation of the Nag Hammadi codices.⁶³ Some of the reasons supporting this hypothesis have been summarized as follows:

- The codices themselves were found in close proximity to the *Nag Hammadi* village (Chenoboskion) where the Pachomian *koinonia* had one of its monasteries.
- On an internal basis, most of the documents from the Nag Hammadi Library are dated in the fourth century, the time framework corresponding to the period of an enormous literary activity of this monastic community.⁶⁴
- There are some indications that the cartonnage used for the binding of these codices contained letters and other documents with the names of the people who might have been the Pachomian monks. It is, however, impossible, at the present state of research, to conclusively prove or disprove such an intriguing idea.⁶⁵
- The colophon of the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, the work belonging to the same codex as the *GTh*, is an extraneous part of the document itself. The text reads: “Remember me also, my brethren [in] your prayers: Peace to the saints and those who are spiritual,”⁶⁶

63 James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Codices*, Claremont: The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1974, 3; John Barns, Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices, in: M. Krause (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts*, Leiden: Brill, 1975, 9–17; Charles Hedrick, Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the Sitz im Leben of the Nag Hammadi Library, *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 78–94; James Goehring, New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies, in: Pearson – Goehring, *The Roots*, 1986, 236–57. Also, Wisse, *Gnosticism and Early Monasticism* and Goehring, *The World Engaged*. For a more recent and different view, see Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount, Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices, *JBL* 133 (2014/2), 397–417; Mark Goodacre, How Reliable is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (2013/4), 303–322.

64 See Goehring, *New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies*, 237.

65 See Barns, *Greek and Coptic Papyri*, 9–17. Also, the critique of Barns’ proposal in J. C. Shelton, Introduction, in: J. W. B. Barns – G. M. Browne – J. C. Shelton, *Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*, Leiden: Brill, 1981, 1–11; Villeux, *Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt*, 278.

66 *The Book of Thomas the Contender* 145: 20–23 (John Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, University of Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

and thus suggests that the scribe himself could easily have been a monk.

- Some scholars have detected Gnostic proclivities in the Greek *Vita Pachomii* and hence have challenged the belief in the absolute “orthodoxy” of the Pachomian movement.⁶⁷ At least some gnosticizing factions of this monastic community could have preserved the documents contained in the Nag Hammadi Library.
- An “internal purge” of heterodox books, which was probably prompted by Athanasius’ paschal letter (367 C.E.), could have provided a sufficient reason for the removal of these documents from the Pachomian monasteries.

Not all of these interesting coincidences, of course, conclusively confirm that the Pachomian *koinonia* produced the Coptic manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945/46.⁶⁸ However, as far as the transmission of the *GTh* is concerned, this monastic community may indeed provide a sufficiently authentic *Sitz im Leben* for the Coptic version of *Thomas*. Even if the Meletian monks,⁶⁹ or some other contemporary ascetic group had (for whatever reason) preserved our document for posterity, in terms of the provenance of the *GTh* they represented only the last, however important, link in the chain of its transmission.

It is, therefore, quite probable that some of these *monachoi* used and, most likely, translated the *GTh* from Greek into Coptic. Nevertheless, in my view, the *Sitz im Leben* for the original, Greek document should be sought elsewhere in the early Christian world.

The Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas

Three different Greek recensions of the *GTh*, found in Oxyrhynchus, indicate that the course of transmission of this work led from Lower and Middle to Upper Egypt, and not vice versa. Indeed, the Greek *Thomas* arrived at Oxyrhynchus already in the second century, that is, before 200 C.E. Re-

⁶⁷ Hedrick, *Gnostic*.

⁶⁸ See the objections raised by Veilleux, *Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt*, 277. Cf. Lewis – Blount, *Rethinking*.

⁶⁹ Pearson – Goehring, *The Roots*, 284.

grettably, very little is known about the scribal and scholarly activity of the Oxyrhynchus Christians from this period.⁷⁰ It is striking, however, that a copy of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*, written in Lyons about 180 C.E., found its way to Oxyrhynchus "not long after the ink was dry on the author's manuscript."⁷¹ If this were the case with an anti-heretical treatise, one could just imagine how fast the circulation of the heterodox literature would have been.

In any event, at the present state of research and evidence, it is most likely that the Oxyrhynchus scriptoria represented only a later transitory stop for the original version of the *GTh*.⁷² In order to be able to pursue the earlier course of transmission any further, we have to rely on the available attestations supplied by early Christian authors. The two earliest and the most reliable attestations regarding the *GTh* come from Hippolytus (222–35 C.E.) and Origen (233 C.E.).

In his *First Homily on Luke*, Origen reports that in his time there was "in circulation also the Gospel According to Thomas and the Gospel According to Matthias and many others."⁷³ Origen's attestation is important in the present context because it provides a historical link in terms of the

70 Eric Gardner Turner, *Scribes and Scholars of Oxyrhynchus*, MPER n. s., 5.

71 Roberts, *Manuscript*, 53.

72 Back in 1955, French scholar Henri Charles Puech identified the text on a linen shroud from Oxyrhynchus as part of the Greek version of Gospel of Thomas (P. Oxy. 654, 27–31). Namely, Puech recognized that the sentence on the shroud (Jesus says: "There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised") had a parallel with the aforementioned Oxyrhynchus papyrus fragment ([For there is nothing] hidden that will not become mani[fest] Nor buried that [will] no[t be raised]). For this finding, see Henri-Charles Puech, Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire, *Bulletin de la société Ernest Renan* 3 (1955), 126–129. Pokorný refers to this parallel in his *Commentary* (2009, 42). AnneMarie Luijendijk from Princeton has also argued that this parallel between the *Thomas* Greek version of the gospel and the funerary shroud "hints that the Gospel of Thomas was still in use and considered ritually effective in the Oxyrhynchite community well into Late Antiquity" (AnneMarie Luijendijk, Jesus says: "There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised": A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of *Thomas* Logion 5 in Context, *ZAC* 15 (2011), 389–410). In the context of the current discussion regarding various layers of the *GTh*, this textual fragment bears an important witness to the living tradition of this gospel in Oxyrhynchus. Luijendijk contends that it even "allows us to make a larger trajectory of the use of the Gospel of Thomas in Oxyrhynchus, beyond the three third-century Greek fragments" (Luijendijk, Jesus says, 410).

73 Layton, *Nag Hammadi*, 104.

transmission of the *GTh* in Egypt. More precisely, circa 233, Origen bears an Alexandrian witness to the distribution of works such as the *GTh*, the *Gospel according to Matthias* (an original version of the *Book of Thomas the Contender?*), and “many others” (*kai alla pleiona*).⁷⁴ It is apparent, therefore, that by the beginning of the third century *GTh* was known in the Christian circles of Alexandria. However, at least one version of *Thomas* had been transmitted to Oxyrhynchus before 200 C.E., that is, prior to the *terminus ad quem* for one of the Greek manuscripts of *Thomas*. Due to the fact that this version was composed in Greek language, as well as that the academic connections between Alexandria and Oxyrhynchus were surprisingly frequent at that time,⁷⁵ one might expect that *Thomas* had been read in Alexandria already in the second half of the second century. In any case, it circulated there during Origen’s lifetime (185–255) and presumably represented a relatively recent literary phenomenon for the early Christian circles of this city. Unfortunately, there is no other extant evidence that could corroborate the existence of this document in Egypt earlier than the late second century.

Hippolytus, on the other hand, unambiguously points to the Naassenes as a sect that played prominent role in the transmission of the *GTh*.⁷⁶ Even if the Naassenes were not the redactors of the Greek version discovered in Oxyrhynchus, it could be inferred, based on Hippolytus’ account, that they used this gospel in the second-century.⁷⁷ However, as I have argued elsewhere, they were the religious sect related to Hierapolis, Phrygia, and not

74 *Ibid.*, 104.

75 Roberts, *Manuscript*, 23–4, 53.

76 The possible Naassene authorship of the *GTh* was initially proposed, back in the early 1960s, by the following authors: Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, New York: The Viking Press, 1960; Robert Grant, Notes on the Gospel of Thomas, *Vigiliae Christianae* 3 (1959), 170–80; Robert Grant and D. N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, New York: Doubleday, 1960; W. R. Schoedel, Naassene Themes in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, *Vigiliae Christianae* 14 (1960), 225–34; E. M. J. M. Cornelis, Quelques éléments pour une comparaison entre l’Evangile de Thomas et la notice de Hippolyte sur les Naasènes, *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961), 83–104.

77 Hippolytus’ testimonium (*Refutatio* 5.7.20) was recorded between 222 and 235 C.E., but the song to Attis, quoted in *Refutatio* 5.9.9, is dated in the time of Hadrian (i.e. 117–38); see Ulrich Wilamowitz-Mollendorf, *Lesefruechte, Hermes* 37 (1902), 329. Wilamowitz is very confident not only regarding this date, but the provenance of the Attis-hymn in Asia Minor as well.

Alexandria, Egypt.⁷⁸ Therefore, if the *GTh* circulated in Phrygia before or at the time when it was known in Alexandria, it would be reasonable to assume that it could have been composed in Asia Minor, or perhaps in some other location, from where it was delivered to both Phrygia and Alexandria. As far as Alexandria is concerned, one does not possess any evidence that document of this type could have reached this city directly from Palestine prior to 140 C.E. On the other hand, such a collection of sayings would be at home in Asia Minor, and Papias of Hierapolis himself provides testimony as to the *Logia Iêsou* composed in the Aramaic language, and interpreted (translated) by various other compilers.

Furthermore, if the Naassenes were indeed the redactors of the *GTh*, then the tentative *terminus a quo* determined by the hymn to Attis may be extended back to the reign of Trajan (98–117) when, according to the *Acts of Philip*, “many [Ophites] were converted” to Christianity by Philip and his sister Mariamne.⁷⁹ One could certainly expect that the earlier missionaries such as Epaphras, who had ‘worked hard’ in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4: 12–13), succeeded, as early as the mid-first century, in converting some adherents of pagan religious-mystical groups.

Nevertheless, it would be safe to assume that some of the Ophite converts – known to their Jewish and Jewish-Christian contemporaries under the Hebrew variant of their name⁸⁰ – were indeed able to produce a document such as the *GTh* between 100 and 138 C.E.⁸¹ This assumption is, of course, commensurate with the form-critical analysis of this gospel. In other words, it allows for the existence of an earlier stratum of sayings in

78 Vukomanović, *The Provenance*.

79 Acts of Philip, in: Richard Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*, Vol. II. 2. Braunschweig: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1884, 107–13.

80 *Hoi Naassenoï* is, most likely, a secondary Greek transliteration of the Hebrew designation for the Ophites.

81 This time-framework is determined by the aforementioned evidence (Acts of Philip, Hymn to Attis) related to the reigns of the two Roman emperors – Trajan and Hadrian. In any case, the Platonist Celsus, who himself lived in the time of Hadrian, had been familiar with a rather complex metaphysical diagram which Origen unambiguously ascribes to the Ophites (see *Contra Celsum* 6.24ff.). Based on this information, one may rightly contend that at least some of the Ophites developed their religious-philosophical system (under the influence of Judeo-Christianity) no later than the beginning of the second century. In the middle of the third century, when Origen completed the critique of his philosophical opponent, the Ophites were already an insignificant sect (*Contra Celsum*, 6.24).

Thomas deriving from a first-century Palestinian source. Due to the lack of any relevant historical information, such a hypothesis would be hardly tenable in the Egyptian context. Therefore, the most we could suggest at this point is that the *GTh* reached Alexandria from Palestine or Asia Minor, where it had already been in circulation in the first half of the second century.

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