

# Introduction

## *The Provenance Controversy*

In the year 1945, near the town Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, a farmer found a collection of very old books as he was, purportedly, digging for fertiliser. By the end of the 1940s, the books had ended up on the Egyptian black market for ancient texts. When scholars finally got their hands on them, it was quickly discovered that the books were fourth-century papyrus codices. Unofficially named after the town near where they were discovered, the collection comprised twelve individual codices containing a total of fifty-two texts,<sup>1</sup> all written in the last of the ancient Egyptian languages: Coptic (see Fig. Int. 1). Most of the texts were Christian in nature, with a few philosophical and Hermetic tractates, and most were Coptic translations of earlier Greek versions; some had never been heard of before. Early Christian scholars had received a very welcome influx of sources from a period which had left few original manuscripts behind. But ever since the discovery, their background has caused debate. Many conflicting suggestions as to their provenance have been proposed over the years; however, there is still no broad consensus about what sort of fourth-century people had actually produced and owned the Nag Hammadi codices and how they had been used.

<sup>1</sup> At the end of the chapter the contents of each codex are presented. The number fifty-two should be viewed as an estimate, although probably the most commonly adduced figure for the number of texts the collection includes in total. Yet one can easily end up with a different sum, depending on the principles applied when distinguishing one individual text from another.



**Figure Int. 1** The Nag Hammadi codices in the home of Maria Dattari, a private antiquities collector in Cairo, Egypt. On the left, leaves from Codex I, with page 50 on the top. Beneath on the right are leaves from Codex XII, with page 28 furthest to the right. The extant leaves of Codex XIII are in the centre beneath the bound codices, with page 50 on top. The cover between the two stacks is that of Codex XI. The stack of bound codices on the left includes, from top to bottom, Codices II, VII, VIII and III (from which the leaves had already been removed; the cover is padded with newspaper to provide the appropriate thickness for the photograph). The stack of bound codices on the right includes, from top to bottom, Codices V, IX, VI, IV and X. Absent are the cover and most of the leaves of Codex I, which were at the time in the possession of Albert Eid (description by Claremont Colleges Library, modified).

This photograph was reproduced with the caption 'Les manuscrits de Khénoboskion' between pages 14 and 15 in Jean Doresse, *L'Évangile selon Thomas ou les paroles de Jésus: Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959), and with the caption 'The manuscripts of Chenoboskion' facing page 238 in Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Leonard Johnston (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960 [1952]). Photo by Jean Doresse. Image courtesy of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Records, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California.

This study approaches the background and ancient use of the Nag Hammadi texts from several understudied perspectives: namely, the manuscripts' paratextual, visual and material aspects. By studying how the makers and readers of the texts actually handled them, the reading aids and editorial features they used, and how they were put together and relate to each other, we can gain important clues about who the owners really were and how they were actually read. The scholars who first worked with them in order to facilitate transcriptions and translations of the manuscripts noted many of these features, sometimes offering explanations as to their use. These comments are, however, few and far between, and no studies have hitherto been devoted to analysing the texts' paratextual, visual and material aspects in light of the texts as a collection. Nag Hammadi scholarship has chiefly focused on the individual texts and seldom refers to their material features, something most likely partly due to the way modern editions of ancient texts are produced. In the laudable effort to present accessible translations and transcriptions, material features, such as scribal signs and visual effects, are often 'lost in transcription'. The aim of the present study is to trace the uncharted aspects of the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts and map the context which they reflect.<sup>2</sup>

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, they have been associated with various Christian heresies, chiefly with the somewhat elusive concept of 'Gnosticism'. By approaching previously understudied aspects of the materiality of early Christian texts that

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Nag Hammadi codices', 'Nag Hammadi library/collection' and 'Nag Hammadi texts' are used interchangeably throughout this chapter. There are, however, important nuances to these terms and we shall have occasion to revisit the usage of them in later chapters. These have to do with the fact that the different texts within the codices – in almost all cases – had a *Sitz im Leben* before they became part of the collection associated with the name 'Nag Hammadi'. What I explore in this book is the context and textual setting pertaining to the texts within the codices and not their 'original' or previous background before they were copied into the fourth-century manuscripts we possess today.

have been viewed as containing questionable teachings, we stand to gain important insights into the formative period of early Christian history when the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy were slowly becoming established.

Some studies have problematised the assumption that early Christian manuscripts were generally copied by Christians, rather than professional scribes uninterested in what they copied.<sup>3</sup> This is a focal topic of scholarly disagreement over the Nag Hammadi texts. In this study their ancient background(s) is approached by looking at what their material and visual features can say about how they were read and by whom. Previous studies have explored some of these material features, such as the texts' codicology, cartonnage and colophons,<sup>4</sup> but the present study aims to fill in some of the gaps provided by previously uncharted aspects of their palaeography and codicology. These include paratextual elements and scribal features such as *diplai* (>) and *diple obelismene* signs (>—), *nomina sacra*, copying techniques, visual features including symbols, and material comparison of the texts. While previous studies of the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts have often focused on what these features can say about who owned the texts and when and where they were copied, this study will also approach the question of what the material features can tell us about *how* the

<sup>3</sup> The assumption is questioned by, for example, Alan Muggidge, *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016). For the argument that early Christian texts were mainly produced by Christians for their own use, see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> These studies will be discussed below. A pioneer in applying material research perspectives to the Nag Hammadi codices is Hugo Lundhaug, whose work has inspired and is closely related to my own. For example, see Hugo Lundhaug, 'Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. Dylan M. Burns and Matthew J. Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 107–143. Lundhaug himself credits Karen King and Stephen Emmel with being the first to advocate approaching the Nag Hammadi texts from the perspective of manuscript culture (Lundhaug, 'Material Philology', 109 n. 8).

texts were used and for what purpose. This includes exploring the everyday utility of the texts in light of their material features.

## The Rifts in Current Scholarship

At the time of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, it was argued that they could have been related to the Egyptian monastic movement, which had its beginning, both chronologically and geographically,<sup>5</sup> in the area where the texts were found.<sup>6</sup> Developed by Pachomius the Great – often identified as the founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism – the movement would give rise to a handful of monasteries, datable to the same time as the approximate production of the Nag Hammadi texts, and within a day's walk of the general area of their discovery.<sup>7</sup> Thus, there is

<sup>5</sup> For a brief overview of the history of scholarship, see Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 4–7; for an updated and highly pedagogical overview of how the Nag Hammadi texts can be dated and contextualised, see Hugo Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts: A Multi-Methodological Approach Including New Radiocarbon Evidence', in *Texts in Context: Essays on Dating and Contextualising Christian Writings of the Second and Early Third Century*, ed. Jos Verheyden, Jens Schröter and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 117–142.

<sup>6</sup> There has recently been some debate concerning the validity of the find story. For an overview of the debate and a much-needed argument against the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts were Christian Books of the Dead, used as grave goods among Christians, see Paula Tutty, 'Books of the Dead or Books with the Dead?', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 287–326. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent overview of the evidence, see Christian Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices', in Bull, Christian. 'The Panopolis Connection: The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Coptic Literature in Context (4th–13th Cent.): Cultural Landscape, Literary Production and Manuscript Archaeology*, ed. Paola Buzi (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020), 133–147. For a study of the geography of early Pachomian monasticism, see Louis Théophile Lefort, 'Les premiers monasteres Pachomiens: Exploration topographique', *Le Museon* 52: 379–407; and for a discussion of how Pachomian monasteries relate to the find site of the Nag Hammadi codices, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 22–55.

nothing strange about the fact that one of the first provenances suggested for the texts was that they were somehow connected with Pachomian monks. The Swedish Egyptologist Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, who was involved in the UNESCO project cataloguing the codices (led by James Robinson), suggested that the Nag Hammadi collection could have been used by monks to familiarise themselves with their theological opponents, that is, ‘Gnostic’ groups.<sup>8</sup> The texts constituted a reference library of heresy, he argued. Some scholars, including Clement Scholten, Michael Wallenstein and Frederik Wisse, among others, even suggested that the monks could have produced the texts, and not only that, they could have studied and drawn inspiration from them.<sup>9</sup> The monastic hypothesis has been promoted by many scholars over the years, a Pachomian setting being a frequently proposed scenario.<sup>10</sup> But other suggestions have also been made.

Another early view was that the Nag Hammadi texts, since they include considerable apocryphal material, had begun to lose their relevance and, after Athanasius’ thirty-ninth festal letter was sent to Christians in Egypt banning apocryphal writings in 367, the texts

<sup>8</sup> Torgny Säve-Söderberg, ‘Holy Scripture or Apologetic Documentation? The “Sitz im Leben” of the Nag Hammadi Library’, in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque du Centre d’Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23–25 octobre 1974)*, ed. J. E. Menard (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3–14.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse (eds.), *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1 and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–11; Frederik Wisse, ‘Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt’, in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 431–440.

<sup>10</sup> John W. B. Barns, ‘Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Preliminary Report’, in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 9–18; Charles W. Hedrick, ‘Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the “Sitz im Leben” of the Nag Hammadi Library’, *Novum Testamentum* 22:1 (1980): 78–96; Clemens Scholten, ‘Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 31 (1988): 144–172. For a more detailed history of the scholarship on the Nag Hammadi codices, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 1.

were ultimately hidden away by their (possibly monastic) owners.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the relation between Athanasius' letter and the subsequent preservation of the Nag Hammadi texts, many have found it difficult to believe that monks owned them, much less read them for edification. Some have suggested instead that they belonged to one or a few wealthy, learned individuals or that a heretical 'Gnostic' group lay behind them.<sup>12</sup> Jean Doresse, the French archaeologist who was commissioned by the Coptic Museum in Cairo to investigate the discovery of the texts, made the suggestion that they must have belonged to religious fringe groups who treated them as their sacred text collection.<sup>13</sup> This view soon gained traction and has often been repeated since the texts were discovered.<sup>14</sup> The scholars supporting the view that they could not have belonged to proponents of the mainstream Christian Church are perhaps most clearly

<sup>11</sup> Armand Veilleux, 'Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 271–306. Athanasius indicates several texts by name which are to be viewed as apocrypha and thus banned, such as those attributed to Moses, Enoch and Isaiah. Alberto Camplani has argued against the notion that Athanasius referred to the texts found in the Nag Hammadi directly in 'In margine alla storia dei Meliziani', *Augustinianum* 30:2 (1990): 313–351. However, it is not a far stretch to imagine that other texts would also have been included in the ban, texts such as those in the Nag Hammadi collection also termed 'apocrypha'. See James E. Goehring, 'New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies', in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Pearson and Goehring, 236–257.

<sup>12</sup> This hypothesis has one central drawback: it does not explain how the texts ended up in Upper Egypt. Its proponents have suggested that these 'Gnostic' individuals or groups could at some point have visited the monasteries around the area of Nag Hammadi and brought their texts with them. For a survey of the early suggestions as to the background of the texts, see Wisse, 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt', 431–440.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Leonard Johnston (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960 [1952]).

<sup>14</sup> It was, for example, repeated by Martin Krause, one of the early members of the UNESCO team commissioned to preserve and translate the texts. See Martin Krause, 'Der Erlassbrief des Theodore', in *Studies Presented to Hans Jacob Polotsky*, ed. Dwight W. Young (East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981), 220–238.

represented by Russian scholar Alexandr Khosroyev. He argued that most of the evidence, including codicological evidence, indicated a heretical urban intelligentsia behind the codices, chiefly due to the ‘anti-biblical’, ‘esoteric’ and philosophically laden material they contain.<sup>15</sup> The manuscripts were commercial products, Khosroyev argued, made by professional booksellers, commissioned by urban religious group(s) with syncretistic tendencies, and they would not have interested monks.<sup>16</sup> Khosroyev advanced these ideas in his book *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, which had wide impact, in which he claimed that the Nag Hammadi texts were ‘non-canonical’, ‘bizarre’, ‘philosophical’, full of ‘anti-biblical concepts’ and therefore not attractive material for the monasteries. After Khosroyev, the ‘Gnostic’ hypothesis seemed to gain the upper hand. Several prominent scholars on early Christianity as well as specialists on Egyptian Christianity – like Stephen Emmel, Alastair Logan, Ewa Wipszycka and Nicola Denzey Lewis – have at times presented Khosroyev’s argument as having ‘effectively demolished the edifice of the “Pachomian monastic hypothesis”’.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Problem des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995). Khosroyev’s perspective has, over the years, gained the support of many, including Alastair Logan, in *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), and Ewa Wipszycka, ‘The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist Point of View’, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 30 (2000): 179–191.

<sup>16</sup> Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, 10–13. This is mostly drawn from his analysis of Codex VI where we find a scribal note. Khosroyev is not alone in his view of the Nag Hammadi codices as commercial products; this is also the conclusion drawn by Eva Cornelia Römer in ‘Manichaeism and Gnosticism in the Papyri’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. R. Bagnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 623–643; as well as Joseph Montserrat-Torrents, ‘The Social and Cultural Setting of the Coptic Gnostic Library’, in *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 464–481.

<sup>17</sup> The quote is from Stephen Emmel’s, ‘The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions’, in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 36. The sentiment



More recently, however, Khosroyev's hypothesis has received considerable critique, with the monastic-origin hypothesis being reformulated by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, who have criticised Khosroyev's thesis on several grounds and suggested that the codices were produced in monastic book-exchange networks and owned and read by monks.<sup>18</sup> They based their argument on, among other things, studies of the material aspects of the texts, and analysis of the cartonnage, scribal notes, colophons and content of the texts in light of monastic documentary material which, they argue, shows that monks did indeed read texts such as those found in the Nag Hammadi collection. Since Lundhaug and Jenott's book is a work which offers detailed analyses of topics that are of central importance for many of the arguments presented in this study, it is useful to introduce their work in greater detail and discuss how their arguments have been received in the wider scholarship on the Nag Hammadi codices. As my own study and its contributions are so clearly located on one side of the rift in scholarship, transparency is key if the arguments put forward here are to carry any weight.

### **The Monastic-Origin Hypothesis and the Contribution of the Present Study**

The number of followers being gained by Khosroyev's work prompted Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott to reformulate the monastic-origin hypothesis.<sup>19</sup> In their study *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Lundhaug and Jenott present the

has been repeated by Logan, *The Gnostics*; Wipszycka, 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks'; Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to 'Gnosticism': Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8–9. Nevertheless, Emmel has of late been more inclined to support a monastic reading.

<sup>18</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*.

<sup>19</sup> Part of this section is based on my Swedish review of Lundhaug and Jenott's book, published in *Patristica Nordica Annularia* 31 (2016): 143–147.

most detailed argument to date for the monastic origins of the library. Their book was structured with the overall aim of refuting Khosroyev's argument.<sup>20</sup> Almost half the study, the first four out of a total of ten chapters, is devoted to introducing Egyptian monasticism in the late fourth and early fifth centuries and refuting Khosroyev's arguments rejecting the monastic hypothesis.<sup>21</sup>

What makes Lundhaug and Jenott's study of particular relevance to this one is the fact that it explores previously unstudied material aspects of the texts, analysing the colophons and also fragments found in the codices' cartonnage identified as documentary material, such as correspondence between the monks – among them a letter from one Pappoute addressed to “my beloved Father

<sup>20</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 1 is a brief history of Nag Hammadi research, followed (in chapter 2) by discussion of the Christian monastic movement in Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries (based on documentary, literary and archaeological sources). In the two subsequent chapters, assumptions previously made about the Nag Hammadi texts are deconstructed. Chapter 3, dubbed ‘Gnostics?’, presents one hypothesis that there were Gnostic groups behind the texts, and another that the texts were owned by a Gnostic group within the incipient monastic system. Lundhaug and Jenott, however, show that there is not much basis for either hypothesis and suggest they have emerged in the wake of incorrect connotations of ‘Gnosticism’, which is a modern term associated with the ancient polemical term ‘Gnostic’ which was used to smear theological opponents. The latter refers to a loose ‘world view’ or mentality but is not a good analytical tool for addressing specific groups or movements, especially not some that can be convincingly linked to the Nag Hammadi codices. Chapter 4 shows the arguments that Khosroyev used for his hypothesis that the texts originated from a syncretistic Gnostic metropolitan environment, that they were owned by semi-intellectual elite groups and that they contain ideas contrasting with those found in monastic literature. Some of the claims that Lundhaug and Jenott explore are that the Nag Hammadi texts (1) contain contrasting material to what can be found in Christian monasteries; (2) are anti-biblical; (3) are philosophical and can only be understood by an intellectual elite; (4) may not have been read by Egyptian monks who were mostly uneducated or outright illiterate. Lundhaug and Jenott show that these assumptions, and many more, are either simply incorrect or very loosely based. They then move on to argue why the hypothesis of a monastic context for the production of the Nag Hammadi texts is in fact the most probable.

Pachome” (ἡπαμηνριτ ἡωτ παρωμμε).<sup>22</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott show that Egyptian Christians continued to copy and read apocryphal material, despite Athanasius’ decree forbidding the practice, mentioning the defence by theologians such as Priscillian and Ps.-Evodius that the reading of apocrypha was an exercise in the hermeneutics of biblical texts.<sup>23</sup> The monastic connection, they argue, is strengthened by looking at the colophons and terminology used in the texts. In Codex VII, for example, there are notes dedicated to what is termed the ‘Fatherhood’ (τῆς πατρειωτ), a common Coptic term for ‘abbot’ also occurring in several other places in the Nag Hammadi library. Further codices refer to what can be regarded as monastic terms, such as ‘brothers’, ‘the holy’, ‘spiritual’, ‘the perfect’.<sup>24</sup>

Referencing several letters written by abbots and monks, Lundhaug and Jenott show that book circles were active in Egyptian monasteries, reaching the conclusion that the Nag Hammadi texts were produced within the framework of something of the kind.<sup>25</sup> This is indicated by, for example, a colophon in Codex VI where a copyist apologises to the recipient for copying texts that the correspondent did not request. Comparing the writing techniques and codex design, Lundhaug and Jenott argue that

<sup>22</sup> Cartonnage fragment C6, Nag Hammadi Codex VII. For more, see John W. B. Barns, Gerald M. Browne and John C. Shelton (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 141; Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 5. The cartonnage has been further studied by Paula Tutty in her 2019 dissertation in which she has argued, for example, that some letters found in one codex cartonnage may have been written by the scribe of another, indicating close ties between the production of the different codices. Paula Tutty, ‘The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Contextualising a Fourth Century Monastic Community’ (PhD diss., Faculty of Theology, Oslo, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Hugo Lundhaug’s current ERC-project, ‘APOCHRYPHA: Storyworlds in Transition: Coptic Apocrypha in Changing Contexts in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods’, promises to develop our understanding of the role played by apocryphal material in the development of Christianity.

<sup>24</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapters 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, chapter 8.

those who copied the Nag Hammadi texts probably also copied Bible texts. They conclude that the Nag Hammadi texts would have fitted into various kinds of monastic groups that existed in Egypt during the 300s and 400s, and that the most likely context is Pachomian, although others have also made convincing arguments for the monastic settings of Melitian and ‘Origenist’ monasteries.<sup>26</sup>

To date, Lundhaug and Jenott’s book contains by far the most detailed argument presented to support the suggestion that the Nag Hammadi codices were produced for and in a monastic environment, and many scholars have recently contributed to strengthening this perspective.<sup>27</sup> It is also, in my estimation, without doubt the most convincing hypothesis presented so far. The arguments undergirding their monastic-origin position will be made clear and developed throughout this book. However, their work, although convincing and far-reaching, has not gone unchallenged. Ewa Wipszycka is one of their most vocal opponents, arguing that the documentary evidence found inside the covers, as well as the colophons and scribal notes in the texts, do not provide a solid enough

<sup>26</sup> For the Melitian hypothesis, see James Goehring, ‘The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More’, in *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1999*, ed. Maurice F. Wiles and Edward Y. Yarold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 234–253. For the Origenist hypothesis, see Rowan Greer, ‘The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus’ View on the Valentinians Assessed’, in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol I: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 146–175; Tito Orlandi, ‘A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenoute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi’, *Harvard Theological Review* 75:1 (1982): 85–95.

<sup>27</sup> These include those who have gathered at conferences hosted by Lundhaug’s team and subsequently published papers in conference proceedings that contain findings on different aspects of the texts which support a monastic hypothesis, for example, René Falkenberg, Ulla Tervahauta, Michael A. Williams, Louis Painchaud, James A. Goehring, Blossom Stefaniw, Stephen Emmel, Dylan Burns, Christian Askeland and others. See the following anthologies, based on conference proceedings: Lundhaug and Jenott (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*; Hugo Lundhaug and Christian Bull (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023).

basis for making a monastic connection. Apocryphal texts were read by many people other than monks, Wipszycka writes, claiming that the context that makes most sense is one of a group of ‘urban literati’ who were explicitly absorbed in matters discussed in the Nag Hammadi texts, that is, ‘Gnostic stuff’.<sup>28</sup> According to her, Lundhaug and Jenott are under the influence of a narrow trend within scholarship that favours a particular view of Egyptian Christianity in which ‘Gnostics’ are restricted to Sethians, and, since there is no evidence of Sethians in Egypt at this time, the Gnostic origin hypothesis may be erased. Even though Wipszycka’s representation of Lundhaug and Jenott’s methodological approach could be interpreted as ungenerous, it nevertheless lays bare one of the key obstacles that has haunted scholarship on the Nag Hammadi texts since it began: namely, the way the texts relate to the phenomenon of Gnosticism and the scholarly understandings of the nature of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in early Christianity. If the texts are indeed from a monastic setting, how would monks have used them?

Following Lundhaug and Jenott’s book in 2015, many studies have further explored the Nag Hammadi texts’ monastic connection. Some of these have been (or are about to be) published as the proceedings of a series of conferences organised by Professor Lundhaug and his team (of which Jenott was a part), exploring the monastic context (as well as its surrounding milieu) of the Nag Hammadi codices.<sup>29</sup> These have been important for developing the work presented in this book.

<sup>28</sup> However, as Bull points out, it is unclear where there would have been space large enough to house such a group of urban literati in the area where the texts were found (Bull, ‘The Panopolis Connection’, 135–140).

<sup>29</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*; Lundhaug and Bull (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices as Monastic Books*. Another collected volume includes several case studies of Nag Hammadi-related material, exploring, among other things, the material aspects of the texts as well as the monastic contexts (although not necessarily jointly), in Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

The Nag Hammadi codices are not the only seminal papyri find from the area. The Dishna Papers, also known as the Bodmer Papyri,<sup>30</sup> were discovered only seven years after the Nag Hammadi texts.<sup>31</sup> There is no consensus as to exactly which texts should be included in this particular ‘collection’, where they were found and which of them actually derived from other places around Upper Egypt and only later became associated with the collection by other means. There is, however, rather good evidence for concluding that a large part of the Dishna Papers can be traced to the area where the Nag Hammadi texts were also discovered.<sup>32</sup> The Pachomian provenance of this text collection has not been as controversial as the Nag Hammadi texts, most likely due to their content being more in line with what is generally conceived of as orthodox.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>30</sup> Not all the texts in this find are kept in the Bodmer Library in Geneva; rather, they have been dispersed around the world (Oslo, Vatican, Barcelona and other places). Thus, it is more correct to use the term Dishna Papers for this text collection, which is also the term used here.

<sup>31</sup> Also worth mentioning are the seven Manichaean Medinet Madi codices, found in 1929. For an excellent overview of the codices’ background, both ancient and modern, see James M. Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013). For similarities between the Nag Hammadi codices and these Manichaean texts, see Paul Van Lindt, ‘The Religious Terminology in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Manichaean Literature’, in *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions: Proceedings of the International Conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, September 19–24, 1995, on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery*, ed. Søren Giversen, Tage Petersen and Jørgen Podemann Sørensen (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2002), 191–198; and René Falkenberg, ‘What Has Nag Hammadi to Do with Medinet Madi? The Case of Eugnostos and Manichaeism’, in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 261–286.

<sup>32</sup> For example, some of the codices can be traced to the area and period of the early fourth century through fragments of documentary papyri, like tax registers, found in them. P.Bodmer XXIII is one such example. See Hugo Lundhaug, ‘The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices: The Remains of a Single Monastic Library?’, in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 329.

<sup>33</sup> The Pachomian origin of the Dishna Papers has been suggested by, only to name a few, James M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery’s Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011),

Dishna Papers contain biblical texts and writings by both church and monastic Fathers, as well as classical texts. The Nag Hammadi texts, on the other hand, constitute a much more streamlined form: almost solely 'Gnostic' or 'demiurgical' texts.<sup>34</sup> Brent Nongbri has pointed out that several of the Nag Hammadi codices bear a striking material resemblance to some of the Dishna codices when it comes to format. Indeed, there are so many codicological parallels that Hugo Lundhaug has argued that the Nag Hammadi codices and Dishna Papers once belonged to one and the same monastic library.<sup>35</sup> This is a bold hypothesis, particularly since there are striking differences between the two collections, a matter which speaks against it.<sup>36</sup> The relation between the two collections is a question which goes beyond the scope of this study, but in the concluding chapter we have reason to revisit it in light of the presented findings. What is explored in the following chapters is the controversial question of the Nag Hammadi texts' Pachomian connection. Would orthodox monks really have read Gnostic and demiurgical texts? For what purpose? And in what way?

130–184; James E. Goehring, 'Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5:1 (1997): 78–80.

<sup>34</sup> This is Brent Nongbri's classification of the type of texts contained within the Nag Hammadi collection, a group of texts, he writes, that is 'remarkable for its overall uniformity' compared to other text collections from this period. Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 212.

<sup>35</sup> As Lundhaug has shown, these include the somewhat particular tall and narrow dimensions of the codices, the use of single rather than double columns and similar paratextual features and scribal practices. Lundhaug, 'The Dishna Papers and the Nag Hammadi Codices', 340–346.

<sup>36</sup> This is exemplified by the difference in language and genre. The Nag Hammadi codices contain the more uniform topical spread (mostly Gnostic texts) and uniform dialect of Coptic texts, while the Dishna Papers contain all sorts of Christian texts and are also much more varied in language, with Latin and Greek texts, bilingual codices and Coptic texts in a broader array of dialects. If these two collections really were from one and the same library, the Nag Hammadi texts would then reasonably have been a specific section of a more varied library.

Lundhaug and Jenott are not the only scholars who have promoted a Pachomian connection for the Nag Hammadi codices. A recent study worth mentioning is Christian Bull's exploration of the possibility of tracing the different codex groups within the Nag Hammadi collection to specific Pachomian monasteries.<sup>37</sup> Bull points out that in the area where the Nag Hammadi texts were found there is not much evidence for any established monastic groups, apart from Pachomian – for which evidence abounds. He argues that after the death of Pachomius in 346,<sup>38</sup> there are indications that a period of disarray in the leadership of the Pachomian monasteries followed, as testified by the Pachomian monk Apa Charour.<sup>39</sup> The Nag Hammadi texts could have been produced and used during this period, a time when Pachomian monasteries were fragmented. However, as pointed out by Lundhaug in several studies, the use of apocrypha was not uncommon in Pachomian monasteries (or other Egyptian monastic contexts, for that matter). A ban is not likely to have changed long-lasting structures overnight, as Theodore of Tabennese (c. 314–368), Pachomius' successor, had Athanasius' letter explicitly translated into Coptic and disseminated throughout the monasteries under his control in 367.<sup>40</sup> So, apart from what has been pointed out by Lundhaug, Jenott and those who have followed them – scholars who have

<sup>37</sup> Bull, 'The Panopolis Connection', 133–148. See Louis Painchaud, 'The Production and Destination of the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 387–426.

<sup>38</sup> Some argue that the year of Pachomius' death was rather 347; see Christoph Joest, 'Erneute Erwägungen zur Chronologie Pachoms (287–347)', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 13 (2011): 157–181.

<sup>39</sup> Apa Charour writes that only one monk in a hundred stayed true to the archimandrite's rules. *Prophecy of Apa Charour*, in *Oeuvres de S. Pachome et de ses disciples*, ed. Louis Théophile Lefort, vol. I (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956), 100–104.

<sup>40</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, 'The Fluid Transmission of Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries', in *Coptic Literature in Context*, ed. Buzi, 213–227; Hugo Lundhaug, 'The Dissemination of Religious Knowledge through Apocrypha in Egyptian Monasteries', in *The Use and Dissemination of Religious Knowledge in Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser and Diana V. Edelman (Sheffield: Equinox, 2021), 212–233.



argued that monks would have been interested in the theological themes discussed throughout the Nag Hammadi texts, such as rejection of the body, demonology and striving for salvation through spiritual development – what can be said specifically about how the texts were read and handled by monks? What are the arguments that support a Pachomian origin in particular? What kind of practical implementations can be discerned from the materiality of the texts? These are the guiding questions throughout the following study.

The contribution offered here pertains to the material aspects of a Christian text collection which has been seen as heterodox in nature, read within a Christian environment often associated with orthodoxy. I aim to provide the reader with new contextualisation regarding the activities of Pachomian monks, as well as new perspectives on how texts with long histories retained their significance in new contexts. The Nag Hammadi collection contains an array of different texts from a variety of religious and historical backgrounds, and I demonstrate how these texts could be engaged, brought together and reused for the purpose of developing the spiritual acumen of one and the same group of people: Pachomian monks from the latter half of the fourth century.

The reading and handling of texts played an important role in the negotiation of Christian identity. This has been made clear by many previous scholars.<sup>41</sup> The present study contributes to perceptions of the negotiation of early Christian identities by bringing the use of texts that have been deemed ‘heterodox’ into our understanding of the creation of orthodox identities, not only as texts used to define oneself against, but also as a source of inspiration. I demonstrate how a monastic context and particularly a Pachomian one – invoking key factors in the creation of a strong sense of group identity – would have been ideal for reading and handling

<sup>41</sup> This topic is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

texts that could be problematised due to heterodoxy, without risking the sense of one's own orthodoxy. The study develops elements of scribal practices that went into the production of the Nag Hammadi codices, the monastic uses of textual duplicates and how their editorial processes reflect changes taking place in the theological climate of fourth-century Pachomian monasteries. I show how a Pachomian monk could use a text with potentially objectionable content as a protective shield against demonic attack or as inspiration for developing interests in the power of secret languages and letter magic. In short, this book could be said to offer a brief look into the material history of texts that have been perceived as heretical, read in light of Pachomian textual practices.

### **Situating and Outlining the Study**

It should be noted that neither the latter subject matter nor the monastic-origin hypothesis put forward by Lundhaug and Jenott lend themselves to discussion of the issue of the texts' hypothetical original context(s) before they became part of the Nag Hammadi codices. Several, if not most, of the now extant Nag Hammadi texts were once composed in contexts other than fourth- to fifth-century Upper Egypt. In most cases, we are unable to say in what way the manuscripts we possess today differ from these 'original' texts. Those to which we now have access are in most cases Coptic translations from Greek, first created by both Christian and non-Christian groups (like the Hermetic texts in Codex VI, for example) in several kinds of situations. I suspect that much of the continual disagreement among scholars regarding the nature of the Nag Hammadi texts stems from the inability to distinguish between these two perspectives: the texts' hypothetical 'original' context in their Greek *Vorlagen*, on the one hand, and their translation, production and use as they exist today, on the other. Lundhaug and Jenott have made an important point regarding the second of

these two perspectives: it is easier to discuss the texts we have than the ones we do not have. They go further, however, and argue that scholars' focus should primarily be on the Nag Hammadi texts as we have them today – and their contexts – rather than the hypothetical originals, which are often harder to access.<sup>42</sup> I am not in full agreement with this last point. The internal scholarly discourse regarding the best way to approach the Nag Hammadi texts will be discussed in the next chapter, which also situates them within the broad and growing scholarship on early Christian reading and scribal habits. The aim of Chapter 1 is to contextualise the materiality of the Nag Hammadi texts from a theoretical and methodological point of view, to cast light on various paradigms and ideological frames that threaten to obscure studies of them. The term 'Gnosticism' as an analytic category is discussed, along with other ideological preconceptions that have of late determined understandings of the texts' background. In Chapter 2, the story of the find is revisited from post-colonial perspectives and the growing trend among scholars to utilise the ancient sources' modern history in studies of their ancient past. The Nag Hammadi find story has recently generated considerable scholarly discussion. This chapter examines what we actually can and cannot know about the discovery of the texts and problematises the recent cries of Orientalism, charges levelled at some of the early scholars.

Nag Hammadi scholars have not ignored the recent surge and new findings generated by the growing scholarship on early Christian book culture – on the contrary.<sup>43</sup> Still, there are material features of the Nag Hammadi texts that remain to be explored, efforts to which this study contributes with Chapters 3 to 6, which

<sup>42</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*. This view has been reiterated recently by Hugo Lundhaug, 'An Illusion of Textual Stability', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*, ed. Lied and Lundhaug, 21; and Lundhaug, 'Dating and Contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices and Their Texts', 117–118.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see part IV: 'Scribes and Manuscripts', in *The Nag Hammadi Library and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Lundhaug and Jenott, 329–490; Nongbri, *God's Library*.

are devoted to understudied aspects of these features. Chapter 3 analyses some of the more peculiar elements of the codicology of Nag Hammadi Codex I. Here I argue that its production corresponds to monastic practices and that Codex I – a very early multi-quire codex – may have come about by accident due to the inexperience of a novice monastic scribe. Chapter 4 analyses the previously neglected marginal markings found in Codex I and VIII, and it is argued that a Pachomian monastic setting best explains their use, reflecting the study habits of a monk developing his spiritual maturity. Chapter 5 studies the many references to the alphabetical and magical features of letters and sounds within the Nag Hammadi texts, which, it is argued, would have fitted particularly well within a Pachomian monastic context, reflecting mystic practices going as far back as Pachomius himself. Chapter 6 explores the recurrence of *nomina sacra* and the sacred symbol of the cross, arguing that the cross in particular was an important symbol in monks' continuous war against demonic oppression and that the physical books themselves would have functioned as protective artefacts in the fight against demons. Chapter 7 widens the scope to approach those Nag Hammadi texts that have been preserved in more than one version. As recent studies have shown, following a text's many changes and variants is an important step in reaching a more complete picture of texts as 'living' things, as opposed to viewing ancient texts as more or less corrupted versions of idealised originals. In this chapter the doublets and triplets are read in light of monastic pedagogical methods, and it is argued that the texts reflect a community with a high level of textual practice that used the handling of texts as a response to theological challenges and with the aim of spiritual development.

The argument put forward throughout this volume, as it shifts through the various perspectives relating to the material features of the texts, is that the Nag Hammadi codices in all likelihood belonged to a Pachomian monastery of the late fourth or early fifth century and that they were used in a number of different ways to further the

spiritual and intellectual growth of the monks of the community. Thus, the texts were read for the purposes of edification, spiritual development and pedagogical practice while also functioning as protective artefacts in the continuous monastic warfare against evil spirits. These are strong claims to make at the outset, but they are not made lightly; rather, they will be advocated subsequently and repeatedly, chapter by chapter. This study is meant to concretise and solidify a provenance formulated at the discovery of the manuscripts, one which has been emphatically supported by Lundhaug, Jenott and other scholars ever since. Through references to actual practical implementation of the texts within a monastic context, and particularly a Pachomian one, the present study has the ambition not only to contribute to the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts had their origin in Pachomian monasticism, but also to show what kind of Pachomian monks would have used them and in what way.

*Overview of the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi codices*

<b>Codex I</b>	<b>Codex V</b>	<b>Codex IX</b>
1 <i>The Prayer of the Apostle Paul</i>	1 <i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>	1 <i>Melchizedek</i>
2 <i>The Apocryphon of James</i>	2 <i>The Apocalypse of Paul</i>	2 <i>The Thought of Norea</i>
3 <i>The Gospel of Truth</i>	3 <i>The First Apocalypse of James</i>	3 <i>The Testimony of Truth</i>
4 <i>The Treatise on the Resurrection</i>	4 <i>The Second Apocalypse of James</i>	
5 <i>The Tripartite Tractate</i>	5 <i>The Apocalypse of Adam</i>	<b>Codex X</b>
		1 <i>Marsanes</i>
<b>Codex II</b>	<b>Codex VI</b>	<b>Codex XI</b>
1 <i>The Apocryphon of John</i>	1 <i>The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles</i>	1 <i>The Interpretation of Knowledge</i>
2 <i>The Gospel of Thomas</i>	2 <i>Thunder – Perfect Mind</i>	2 <i>A Valentinian Exposition</i>
3 <i>The Gospel of Philip</i>	3 <i>The Authoritative Teaching</i>	2a <i>On the Anointing</i>
	4 <i>The Concept of Our Great Power</i>	2b <i>On Baptism A</i>
		2c <i>On Baptism B</i>

(cont.)

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4 <i>The Hypostasis of the Rulers</i>	5 <i>Plato's Republic</i> (588a–589b)	2d On the Eucharist A
5 <i>On the Origin of the World</i>	6 <i>The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth</i>	2e On the Eucharist B
6 <i>The Exegesis on the Soul</i>	7 <i>The Prayer of Thanksgiving</i>	3 <i>Allogenes</i>
7 <i>The Book of Thomas</i>	8 <i>Asclepius</i> 21–9	4 <i>Hypsiphronē</i>
<b>Codex III</b>	<b>Codex VII</b>	<b>Codex XII</b>
1 <i>Apocryphon of John</i>	1 <i>The Paraphrase of Shem</i>	1 <i>Sentences of Sextus</i>
2 <i>The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit</i>	2 <i>The Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>	2 <i>The Gospel of Truth</i>
3 <i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>	3 <i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>	3 Fragments
4 <i>The Wisdom of Jesus Christ</i>	4 <i>The Teachings of Silvanus</i>	<b>Codex XIII (leaves found in the cover of Codex VII)</b>
5 <i>The Dialogue of the Saviour</i>	5 <i>The Three Steles of Seth</i>	1 <i>The Trimorphic Protonoia</i>
<b>Codex IV</b>	<b>Codex VIII</b>	2 <i>On the Origin of the World</i>
1 <i>Apocryphon of John</i>	1 <i>Zostrianos</i>	
2 <i>Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit</i>	2 <i>The Letter of Peter to Philip</i>	

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