

## The Nag Hammadi Codices and their Ancient Readers

Since their discovery in 1945, the Nag Hammadi codices have generated questions and scholarly debate as to their date and function. Paul Linjamaa contributes to the discussion by offering insights into previously uncharted aspects pertinent to the materiality of the manuscripts. He explores the practical implementation of the texts in their ancient setting through analyses of codicological aspects, paratextual elements and scribal features. Linjamaa's research supports the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi texts had their origins in Pachomian monasticism. He shows how Pachomian monks used the texts for textual edification, spiritual development and pedagogical practices. He also demonstrates that the texts were used for perfecting scribal and editorial practice, and that they were used as protective artefacts containing sacred symbols in the continuous monastic warfare against evil spirits. Linjamaa's application of new material methods provides clues to the origins and use of ancient texts, and challenges preconceptions about ancient orthodoxy. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

PAUL LINJAMAA is Associate Professor at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University.

PAUL LINJAMAA  
*Lund University*

# The Nag Hammadi Codices and their Ancient Readers

## Exploring Textual Materiality and Reading Practice



Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-44146-9 — The Nag Hammadi Codices and their Ancient Readers  
Paul Linjamaa  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009441469](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009441469)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009441483

© Dr. Paul Linjamaa 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at [doi.org/10.1017/9781009441483](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009441483)  
under a Creative Commons Open Access licence CC-BY-NC 4.0 which permits  
re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes  
providing appropriate credit to the original work is given and any changes made are  
indicated. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third  
parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these  
third-parties directly. When citing this work, please include a reference to the  
DOI 10.1017/9781009441483

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library  
of Congress.*

ISBN 978-1-009-44146-9 Hardback

Digital typeface ALPHABETUM developed by Juan-José Marcos. Freely supplied  
by the author for this book.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Note on Transcription and Translation</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiii</i>
 <b>Introduction: The Provenance Controversy</b>	 <b>1</b>
The Rifts in Current Scholarship	5
The Monastic-Origin Hypothesis and the Contribution of the Present Study	9
Situating and Outlining the Study	18
 <b>1 Christian Book Culture, New Philology and Gnosticism</b>	 <b>23</b>
Religious Change in Antiquity: Christian and Gnostic Texts	23
Studies in Early Christian Book Culture	29
Hypothetical Origins and New Philology	39
The Nag Hammadi Codices as the Heretics' Bible	43
Conclusion	48
 <b>2 The Find Story and the Ethics of Postmodern Manuscript     Archaeology</b>	 <b>49</b>
Following the Evidence	49
Gnosticism and the Mystic East	63
Conclusion	66
 <b>3 The Construction of Codex I: Scribal Errors as Clues     to Context</b>	 <b>68</b>
The Material Features of Codex I	68
	 v

## CONTENTS

Approaching the Owners and Creators of the Codex	76
Inexperience or Carelessness in Copying Codex I	81
Conclusion	83
<b>4 Notes Made by Monks: The Marginal Markings in Codex I and Codex VIII</b>	85
Ancient Christian Scribal Practice and the Use of <i>Diplai</i>	85
Scribal Signs in the Nag Hammadi Codices	87
The <i>Diplai</i> in Codex I	89
Multiple <i>Diplai</i> in <i>The Tripartite Tractate</i> (NHC I,5)	93
Elucidating the Monastic Connection of the <i>Diplai</i>	
Passages in Codex I	96
The Scribal Signs in Codex VIII	104
<i>Zostrianos</i> (NHC VIII,1)	105
<i>The Letter of Peter to Philip</i> (NHC VIII,2)	110
Summarising the Markings in Codex VIII	112
<i>The Letter of Ammon</i> Read in Light of Codex I and Codex VIII	114
Conclusion	118
<b>5 Vowel Constellations and Secret Language</b>	120
An Overview of Magical Vowels in the Nag Hammadi Texts	121
<i>The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (The Gospel of the Egyptians)</i> (NHC III,2/ NHC IV,2)	122
<i>Marsanes</i> (Codex X,1)	125
<i>The Trimorphic Protennoia</i> (NHC XIII,1)	133
<i>The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth</i> (NHC VI,6)	140
Contextualising Magical Vowel Features	143
Christian Use of ‘Pagan’ Techniques of Holy Letters and Sounds	145
Divine Speech and Holy Words in a Monastic Context	158
Conclusion	165

## CONTENTS

<b>6 The Sacred Symbols in the Nag Hammadi Codices: Books as Weapons in Demonic War</b>	168
The <i>Nomina Sacra</i> in the Nag Hammadi Codices: Artefacts, Scribes and Contexts	169
The Power of the Cross in Codex I	172
Resisting Desert Demons with the Cross as a Sign of Firmness	180
The Ontology of Sacred Symbols: How a Book Becomes a Weapon in Spiritual Warfare	184
Conclusion	186
<b>7 Textual Fluidity and Multiple Versions in Monastic Textual Practice</b>	187
Initial Reflections on ‘Textual Fluidity’	187
The Nag Hammadi Duplicates and the ‘Sub-groups’ of the Codices	190
The Monastery as Training Ground for Textual Education	193
The Nag Hammadi Texts in Light of Monastic Educational Practices	199
Practising Copying and Translation	199
<i>The Gospel of Truth</i> (NHC I,3 and XII,2): Reformulating Texts in Light of New Theological Trends	206
<i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i> (NHC III,3 and V,1): Practising Editorial Work	214
Conclusion	219
<b>Conclusion: The Nag Hammadi Codices from a ‘Textual Community’ Perspective</b>	224
<i>Bibliography</i>	234
Ancient Authors and Texts	234
Secondary Literature	239
<i>Index</i>	261

Figures

Int. 1	Nag Hammadi codices	<i>page 2</i>
2.1	Photo of Jabal al-Ṭarif	51
2.2	Muhammad Ali al-Samman and his mother	52
3.1	Quire structure of Codex I	71
3.2	Codex I, pages 118 and 134	73
4.1	Codex I, pages 84 and 119	91
4.2	Codex VIII, page 44	107
5.1	Codex IV, pages 44 and 54	123
5.2	Codex X, page 31	126
5.3	Codex XIII, page 37	139
5.4	Right-sided triangle	140
5.5	Codex VI, pages 56 and 61	142
6.1	Codex I, page B (flyleaf)	172
6.2	Codex I, pages 106 and 108	174

## Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a three-year research project, generously financed by the Swedish Research Council as part of their International Postdoc Program (ID: 2018–06644). I wish to extend my thanks to Professor Ismo Dunderberg and Helsinki University for supporting my application and inviting me to conduct my research in Helsinki, Finland. Both unfortunate and happy circumstances (the pandemic followed by the birth of my two children) forced me to stay closer to home, in Lund. My thanks to Professor Thomas Hoffmann, head of the Section for Biblical Exegesis, and faculty director Torben Rytter Kristensen at the University of Copenhagen for inviting me to finish my project in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The project was primarily housed at Lund University, at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies. My deepest gratitude goes out to my wonderful colleagues there, who not only read and commented on various drafts and chapters of the book, but who brightened my day-to-day activities immensely.

I wish to acknowledge the two anonymous reviewers who read and commented upon a draft manuscript of this book. They saved me from many errors, gave important suggestions for improvements and enhanced the legibility greatly. I also wish to recognise Marie-Louise Karttunen, who tackled the gruelling task of fine-tuning the book's legibility with great professionalism and poise. My gratitude to Claremont Colleges Library, California, for providing the images of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts included in this volume. A particular thanks to Lisa L. Crane for her efforts



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

in securing publishable resolutions and provenance for each photo.

First and foremost, I am indebted to my wonderful partner, Nathalie, for enduring my absent-mindedness after long and arduous writing sessions and for her unwavering love and support. To my children, Otto and Helmi: the joy (χαρά /πρεψε) you bless me with every day would not be denied by even the most ardent Stoic.

## Note on Transcription and Translation

The list of symbols I use in the translation and transcription of Coptic texts follows the sigla from *The Coptic Gnostic Library* editions, under the general editorship of James Robinson.<sup>1</sup> These are as follows:

- ⲁ A dot placed under a letter in the transcription (as in the example here to the left under the Coptic letter *alpha*, ⲁ) indicates that the letter is visually uncertain, even though the context may make the reading certain. A dot on the line outside of brackets in the transcription indicates an uncertain letter from which some vestiges of ink remain.
- [ ] Square brackets in the transcription indicate a lacuna in the MS where writing most probably at one time existed. When the text cannot be reconstructed but the number of missing letters can reasonably be estimated, that number is indicated by a corresponding number of dots; where the number of missing letters cannot be reasonably estimated, the space between the brackets is filled with three dashes. In the translation the square brackets are used only around words which have been substantially restored.
- [ ] Double square brackets indicate letters cancelled by the scribe.
- { } Braces indicate letters unnecessarily added by the scribe.

<sup>1</sup> The above list is a slightly emended version of the one appearing in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, ed. Harold Attridge (Leiden: Brill, 1985), XXVIII.

## NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

- ` ` High strokes indicate that the letter so designated was secondarily written above the line by the scribe.
- < > Pointed brackets in the transcription indicate an editorial correction of a scribal omission. In the translation they indicate words which have been editorially emended.
- ( ) Parentheses in the transcription indicate scribal abbreviations which have been editorially explicated. In the translation they indicate material supplied by the translator for the sake of clarity.

Abbreviations

BG	Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (or Berolinensis Gnosticus 8502)
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
SVF	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>