

HUGO LUNDHAUG

LANCE JENOTT

The Monastic Origins
of the Nag Hammadi
Codices

*Studien und Texte zu
Antike und Christentum*

97

Mohr Siebeck

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97



Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott

The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices

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Preface

The monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices is a topic that has been at the back of our minds for a number of years while researching the Nag Hammadi texts. In light of an increasing tendency in scholarship to dismiss the monastic *Sitz im Leben* for this fascinating collection of early Christian codices, we both felt the need to examine the evidence more closely from as many angles as possible, and to assess the various alternatives. Research for this book thus began in early 2013 as an attempt to co-write an article on the topic, but the work quickly grew well beyond the boundaries of an article, and it became clear to us that it would require the kind of detailed treatment that only a book allows.

The composition of this book has taken place within the research project New Contexts for Old Texts: Unorthodox Texts and Monastic Manuscript Culture in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt (NEWCONT), a five-year endeavor funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) awarded to Hugo Lundhaug in 2011, and hosted at the University of Oslo's Faculty of Theology for the period of 2012–2016.¹ It is this generous ERC funding that has facilitated the close collaboration that resulted in this book, and for that we are deeply grateful.

There are indeed many colleagues and institutions that deserve thanks for their help and support. We would first of all like to thank the other members of the NEWCONT project, postdoctoral research fellow Christian Bull and PhD-students Kristine Toft Rosland and Paula Tutty, for their inspiring collaboration and conversations. The Faculty of Theology with its former and current deans Trygve Wyller and Aud Tønnesen, as well as its head librarian, Svein-Helge Birkeflet, also deserve gratitude for wholeheartedly supporting the project.

Special recognition is due to René Falkenberg, Michael Williams, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Christian Bull, Paula Tutty, and Christian Askeland for proof-reading, commenting upon, and improving drafts of the chapters. Each of them has significantly enhanced the quality of the book. Thanks also to Paula Tutty for putting together the index of modern authors. We would also like to thank the chief theology editor at Mohr Siebeck, Henning Ziebritzki, the series editors, Christoph Marksches, Christian Wildberg, and Martin Walraff, and the production team, Susanne Mang and Martin Fischer, for their careful, patient, and detailed efforts.

¹ The NEWCONT project is funded by the ERC under the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) / ERC Grant agreement no 283741.

We have also profited a great deal from our collaboration and conversation with our friends and colleagues who participated in the NEWCONT conferences and workshops between 2012 and 2014, especially René Falkenberg, Stephen Emmel, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Christian Askeland, Alin Suci, Dylan Burns, Christoph Marksches, Lillian Larsen, Samuel Rubenson, Louis Painchaud, Philip Sellew, Blossom Stefaniw, Richard Layton, Ulla Tervahauta, Julio Cesar Dias Chaves, Tilde Bak Halvgaard, David Tibet, Katrine Brix, Liv Ingeborg Lied, Alexandros Tsakos, Brent Nongbri, Eric Crégheur, Jesper Hyldahl, and (in absentia) James E. Goehring.

Research for this book has also benefited from our tour of archaeological sites and Coptic monasteries throughout Egypt in May 2014, in both the Eastern Desert and the Nile valley, from Luxor to Alexandria. The visit proved to be highly illuminating for our understanding of the region's geography and terrain, especially with regard to the Dishna plain and the area around the Jabal al-Tarif where the Nag Hammadi Codices were discovered. We would like to thank our traveling companions in Egypt, first and foremost Samuel Rubenson, who organized and led the trip in connection with his research project Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia (MOPAI) at Lund University, along with members of his research team, Lillian Larsen, Jesper Blid Kullberg, Bo Holmberg, Britt Dahlman, Jason Zaborowski, and Johan Åhlfeldt, as well as NEWCONT's Kristine Toft Rosland. Our guide in Egypt, Beshoy Amir, deserves special praise for his tireless efforts and endless humor.

The book has also been enhanced by the generosity of a number of individuals. We would like to thank in particular Stephen Emmel for sharing with us his excellent set of maps of the Jabal al-Tarif and its environs, as well as photographs and transcriptions of White Monastery manuscripts of texts by Shenoute; James Goehring, for his wonderful images of monastic graffiti at the Wadi Sheikh Ali; and Martin Schøyen, who provided images of papyri from his invaluable collection of manuscripts and antiquities, and generously donated samples of the leather cover and cartonnage papyri from Nag Hammadi Codex I for radiocarbon analysis. A number of institutions have also been helpful in making their materials available to us, including the Fondation Martin Bodmer, the Scheide Library, the Claremont Colleges Digital Archives, the British Library, and Google. Thanks are also due to the Beinecke Library and Brendan Haug for facilitating our research there.

Finally, we owe an indelible debt to our wives, Linn Lundhaug and Virginia Clark, for their love, support, encouragement, and toleration, not only through the process of writing this book, but throughout our lives.

Oslo, July 2015

Hugo Lundhaug
Lance Jenott

Table of Contents

Preface	V
Maps and Images	XI
Abbreviations	XIII
Chapter 1: The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics?	1
A Brief History of the Question	4
The Present Study	8
Dating the Codices	9
The Discovery	11
Chapter 2: Monastic Diversity in Upper Egypt	22
Literary Evidence	23
Travelogues	23
Hagiographies	28
Shenoute of Atripe and Archbishop Dioscorus	35
Archaeological Evidence	39
Documentary Evidence	43
Monastic Archives	44
Monastic Documents from the Nag Hammadi Covers	46
Conclusion	54
Chapter 3: Gnostics?	56
Sethian Gnostics?	56
Gnostics in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt?	64
Gnostics in Egyptian Monasteries?	69
Conclusion	73
Chapter 4: Contrasting Mentalities?	74
Anti-Biblical Books?	78
Hatred of the World and its Creator?	84
Urban Literati?	90
Conclusion	102

Chapter 5: The Cartonnage	104
Commercial Documents	111
Official Accounts and Large Quantities	117
Imperial Ordinances?	123
Recycled Scripture	126
A Coptic Homily or Epistle	128
Monks' Letters and the Pachomian Connection	129
Acquisition of Cartonnage	139
Cover-Makers and Scribes	142
Conclusion	144
Chapter 6: Apocryphal Books in Egyptian Monasteries	146
Censors and Sympathizers	146
Book Lists	152
Manuscript Discoveries	155
The Pachomian Federation	165
Shenoute and the White Monastery Federation	170
Dioscorus of Alexandria	175
Conclusion	177
Chapter 7: The Colophons	178
The Scribe and His Superior: Codex VII	178
The Scribe and His Community: Codex II	183
The Scribe and His Spiritual Name: Codex III	189
The Scribe and His Codes: Cryptography	194
The Scribe and His Network: Codex VI	197
Conclusion	206
Chapter 8: The Codices	207
Sub-Groups among the Nag Hammadi Codices	208
Traveling Texts and Migrating People	214
The Nag Hammadi Codices and Biblical Manuscripts	217
The Dishna Papers	223
Conclusion	231
Chapter 9: The Monks	234
Melitian Monks?	235
Origenist Monks?	238
Pachomian Monks?	246
Implications	256

Chapter 10: The Secret Books of the Egyptian Monastics	263
Bibliography	269
Index of Ancient Sources	301
Index of Modern Authors	316
Index of Subjects	322

Maps and Images

1. Map of Egypt	XVII
2. The Nag Hammadi Codices	XVIII
3. Jabal al-Tarif	XVIII
4. The site of the discovery	12
5. Cross-sections of the Jabal al-Tarif cliff	13
6. The site of the discovery	14
7. Map of Jabal al-Tarif	15
8. Map of Dishna Plain with modern settlements	18
9. Map of Jabal al-Tarif and environs	20
10. Abu Hinnis, near Antinoë	26
11. Map of Pachomian Monasteries by 347 CE	31
12. Inscription at the Wadi Sheikh Ali	41
13. Drawing of Apa John at the Wadi Sheikh Ali	42
14. Ruins of the Pachomian basilica at Faw Qibli	43
15. Cartonnage fragment G1 from NHC I	114
16. Cartonnage fragment C6 from NHC VII	135
17. NHC VII.127 with colophon	179
18. NHC II.145 with colophon	184
19. NHC I.B with colophon	187
20. NHC III.69 with colophon	190
21. NHC VII.118 with colophon	195
22. NHC VI.65 with scribal note	198
23. Codex Scheide	218
24. NHC IV.49 and Schøyen MS 2650	219
25. Deuteronomy and Jonah with colophon (BL Or. 7594)	221
26. Genesis (P. Nag Hamm. C2 from NHC VII)	222
27. Nag Hammadi Codex II and P. Bodmer XIV–XV	226
28. NHC III and P. Bodmer II, XV, and XVI	227
29. P. Bodmer III	229
30. NHC III and P. Bodmer XXI and XXIII	230
31. Fragment of Zostrianos (P. Bodmer XLIII)	232

Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ADAI.K	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe
AMG	Annales du Musée Guimet
<i>AnBoll</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
<i>Ap. Patr.</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i>
APF	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung</i>
<i>Apol. ad Anast.</i>	<i>Apologia ad Anastasium</i>
<i>Apol. adv. Hier.</i>	<i>Apologia contra Hieronymum</i>
ASP	American Studies in Papyrology
ASR	<i>American Sociological Review</i>
Av	<i>Arabic Life of Pachomius</i> in Vatican Ms. 172
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BBod	Bibliotheca Bodmeriana
BCNH	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi
BCNH.É	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi: Section “Études”
BCNH.T	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi: Section “Textes”
BEHE	Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Iovaniensium
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale</i>
<i>BL Or.</i>	British Library Oriental Ms.
BMus	Bibliothèque du <i>Muséon</i>
Bo	<i>Bohairic Life of Pachomius</i>
BRHE	Bibliothèque de la Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique
BSAC	<i>Bulletin de la Société d’archéologie copte</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
C1, C2, etc.	P. Nag Hamm. Coptic 1, Coptic 2, etc.
<i>C. Gent.</i>	<i>Contra gentes</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CMCL	Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari
COr	Cahiers d’orientalisme
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSML	Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>

CSStS	Variorum Collected Studies Series
DÖAW.PH	Denkschriften. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse
ECCA	Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep. Am.</i>	<i>Epistula Ammonis</i>
<i>Ep. fest.</i>	<i>Epistulae festales</i>
<i>Ep. Sin.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Sinuthium</i>
<i>EuA</i>	<i>Erbe und Auftrag</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
G ¹ , G ² , etc	<i>First Greek Life of Pachomius, Second Greek Life of Pachomius</i> , etc.
G1, G2, etc.	P. Nag Hamm. Greek 1, Greek 2, etc.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GOFH	Göttinger Orientforschung, Reihe 6, Hellenistica
<i>GöMisZ</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Hist. Laus.</i>	<i>Historia Lausiaca</i>
<i>Hist. mon.</i>	<i>Historia monachorum in Aegypto</i>
<i>Hist. mon. U.</i>	<i>Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutes</i>
<i>Instr.</i>	<i>Instructions</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCH	<i>Journal of Cognitive Historiography</i>
JCOptS	<i>Journal of Coptic Studies</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JFA	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
JJPSup	Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Kēmi</i>	<i>Kēmi: Revue de philologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes et coptes</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Leg.	<i>Praecepta ac Leges</i>
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, and Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9 th ed.
MCPL	<i>Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense</i>
MDAI	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>
MFC	Message of the Fathers of the Church
<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
MLST	Mittellateinische Studien und Texte
MONB	White Monastery manuscript
<i>MonS</i>	<i>Monastic Studies</i>
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Le Muséon: Revue d'études orientales</i>

MüSt	Münsterschwarzacher Studien
NAPSPatMS	North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series
NewDocs	New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OLA	Orientalia Iovaniensia analecta
OLP	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OrChr</i>	<i>Oriens christianus</i>
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
PatSor	Patristica Sorbonensia
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion</i>
PapyVind	Papyrologica Vindobonensia
Paral.	<i>Paralipomena</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca
<i>PGL</i>	<i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Edited by G. W. H. Lampe.
PIOL	Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain
PL	Patrologia latina
PLB	Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava
PLO	Porta Linguarum Orientalium, Neue Serie
PO	Patrologia orientalis
Pr.	<i>Praecepta</i>
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
<i>R&T</i>	<i>Religion and Theology</i>
<i>RdE</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Refutatio omnium haeresium</i>
<i>REg</i>	<i>Revue égyptologique</i>
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
<i>RThom</i>	<i>Revue Thomiste</i>
S ¹ , S ² , etc.	<i>First Sabidic Life of Pachomius, Second Sabidic Life</i> , etc.
SA	Studia Anselmiana
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBo	Recension of the <i>Life of Pachomius</i> represented by the Bo, Av, S ⁴ , S ⁵ , S ⁶ , S ⁷ , etc. (compiled and translated by Armand Veilleux, <i>Pachomian Koinonia</i> , vol. 1)
SEAug	Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SHG	Subsidia hagiographica

SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SKCO	Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SusEr	Sussidi Eruditi
TCH	Transformation of the Classical Heritage
<i>TMCB</i>	<i>Travaux et mémoires</i>
TPL	Textus Patristici et Liturgici
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>Vit. Ant.</i>	<i>Vita Antonii</i>
WdV	Weisungen der Väter
WSt	<i>Wiener Studien</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

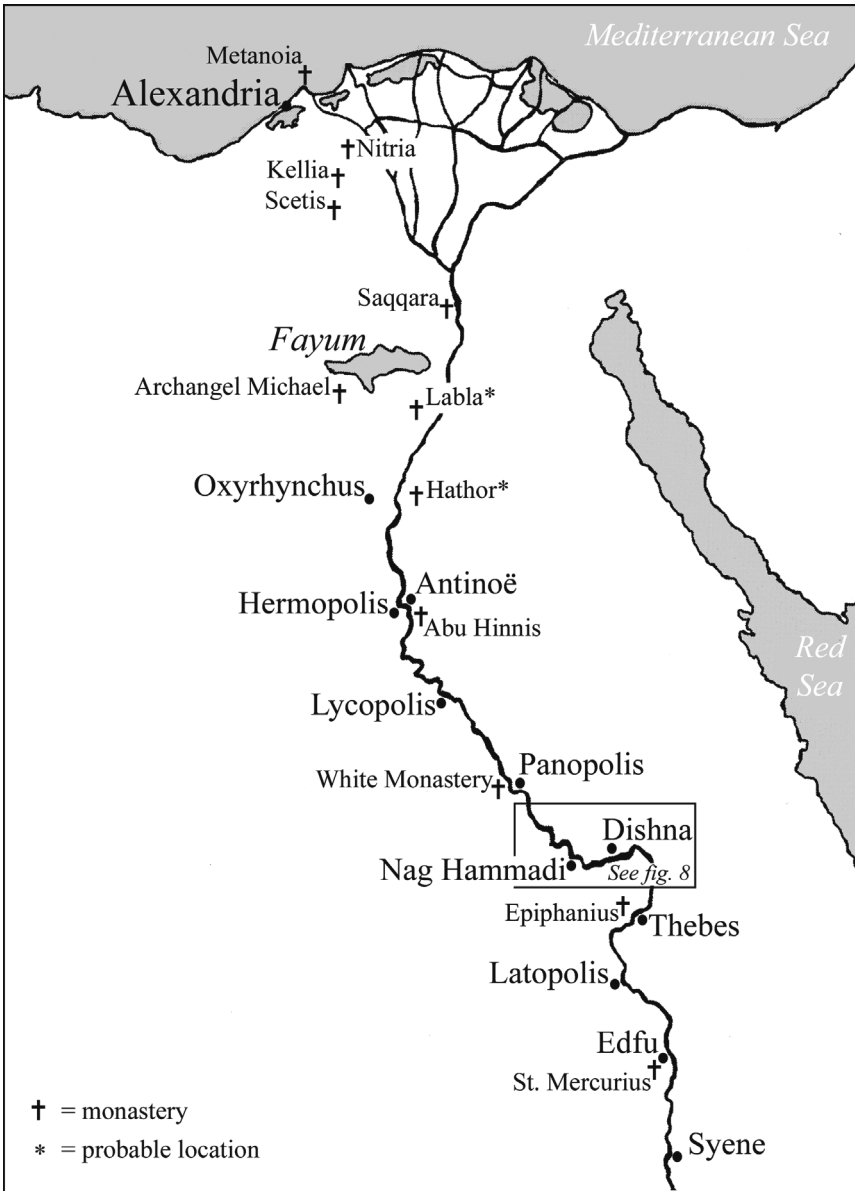


Fig. 1. Egypt.



Fig. 2. The Nag Hammadi Codices. Photograph by Jean Doresse, courtesy of Claremont Colleges Digital Archives.



Fig. 3. The cliffs of the Jabal al-Tarif. Photograph by Hugo Lundhaug, 2014.

Chapter 1

The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics?

... whoever may have possessed them, they cannot have been monks.

– Jean Doresse¹

In 1892, when the eminent Coptologist Walter Ewing Crum surveyed papyri recently acquired from the Fayum, he was able to comment that “As with all Coptic Literature, their monastic origin is evident.”² Following the discoveries of Coptic Manichaean texts in the 1920s and the Nag Hammadi Codices in 1945, many researchers would undoubtedly not share Crum’s confidence in the monastic origin of all Coptic literature. Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Crum’s observation applies quite well to the Nag Hammadi Codices, and that the available evidence concerning their provenance is best explained by a Christian monastic setting in Upper Egypt. This theory is not new, but has enjoyed popularity for decades in one form or another. After all, monasteries were important centers of book production in late antiquity,³ and the region from which the codices come is famous for being the birthplace of Christian cenobitic monasticism. Many scholars have in fact suggested that the codices originated in the Pachomian monastic federation, whose network of monasteries included multiple establishments close to where the codices were discovered, just outside the modern-day village of Hamra Dûm.⁴

¹ 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), 135.

² Walter Ewing Crum, “The Coptic Papyri,” in W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Medum* (London: David Nutt, 1892), 48.

³ Herwig Maehler, “Byzantine Egypt: Urban Élites and Book Production,” *Dialogos* 4 (1997): 130; Chrysi Kotsifou, “Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt,” in *The Early Christian Book* (ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran; CUA Studies in Early Christianity; Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 50.

⁴ Notable proponents of the Pachomian hypothesis include Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, “Gnostic and Canonical Gospel Traditions (with special reference to the Gospel of Thomas),” in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* (ed. Ugo Bianchi; SHR 12; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 552–62; Säve-Söderbergh, “Holy Scriptures or Apologetic Documentations? 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. Jacques-É. Ménard; NHS 7; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3–14; 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 Pavor Labib* (ed. Martin Krause; NHS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 9–18; James M. Robin-

However, while the theory of the codices' monastic origins has never been without its critics, it has fallen under particularly heavy criticism in recent years.⁵ The most extensive critique came in Alexandr Khosroyev's 1995 study, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, which has subsequently been cited with approval by several prominent scholars of Coptology and Egyptian Christianity.⁶ Khosroyev argues that Pachomian monks are not likely to have produced and read the Nag Hammadi Codices because, in his view, they would not have been able to reconcile such texts, which contain so many "anti-biblical concepts," with their commitment to the Bible and the tradition of the fathers.⁷ While Khosroyev argues against a Pachomian setting in particular, his broader conclusions about the likely owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices distances them from Christian monasticism generally. In his view, the eclectic variety of literature found in these codices, and what he characterizes as their "bizarre" and "philosophizing" teachings, suggest that they were owned by persons who possessed a "syncretistic mentality" and enough education in Greek philosophy to be able to read and understand them. He concludes that the persons who best fit this profile were not monks, but literati of the Greco-Egyptian cities. If these urban, semi-educated people identified themselves as Christians, he maintains, they must have been entirely "untraditional" and did not belong to the institutional Church.⁸

Subsequent endorsements of Khosroyev's conclusions have contributed to turning the tide against the theory of the codices' monastic provenance. Ewa

son, "Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (3rd rev. ed.; ed. James M. Robinson; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 1–26; Frederik Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 431–40; Henry Chadwick, "The Domestication of Gnosis," in *The School of Valentinus* (ed. Bentley Layton; vol. 1 of *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 3–16; Charles W. Hedrick, "Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius and the Sitz im Leben of the Nag Hammadi Library," *NovT* 22 (1980): 78–94; James E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring; SAC; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 236–57; Clemens Scholten, "Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer," *JAC* 31 (1988): 144–72.

⁵ Notable critics of the monastic and Pachomian hypotheses before the 1990s include Dorresse, *Secret Books*, 135; John C. Shelton, "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers* (ed. John W.B. Barns, Gerald M. Browne, and John C. Shelton; NHS 16; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–11; Armand Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring; SAC; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 271–306.

⁶ Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Probleme des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten 7; Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995). According to Robert McL. Wilson's review of Khosroyev's book, "This book should be required reading for students starting out on research into the Nag Hammadi texts" (*JTS* 47 [1996]: 268).

⁷ Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek*, 82–83.

⁸ Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek*, 62, 85, 98–102.

Wipszycka, a leading papyrologist and historian of Egyptian monasticism, cites Khosroyev's study in support of her argument that the monastic hypothesis "is a path of research with no source basis."⁹ Mark Sheridan likewise concludes "that there is no clear evidence" for an association between the Nag Hammadi texts and Pachomian monasticism and, with reference to both Khosroyev and Wipszycka, maintains that "there are better hypotheses available to account for the provenance of this very heterogeneous collection of writings."¹⁰ Alastair Logan too has been convinced by Khosroyev "to rule out the monastic hypothesis in its various forms." Instead, he posits that the codices were produced by members of a Gnostic cult community thriving in late fourth-century Egypt, perhaps one that began in an urban milieu, as Khosroyev proposes, but fled to the desert of Upper Egypt to escape persecution from the Catholic church.¹¹ More recently, Stephen Emmel, an eminent authority on Coptic manuscripts, has stated that he believes Khosroyev has "effectively demolished the edifice of the 'Pachomian monastic hypothesis,'" and that he remains unconvinced that the codices "are the direct products of a monastic milieu."¹² Emmel agrees with Khosroyev that given their "esoteric" and "philosophical" contents the codices probably stem from an urban setting. Indeed, the view that the Nag Hammadi Codices have no relationship with Christian monasticism can now be found in a recent book designed as a students' introduction to the Nag Hammadi texts. Its author, Nicola Denzey Lewis, claims that "Those who specialize in Pachomian monasticism doubt the hypothesis" of a monastic provenance, and echoes Khosroyev's theory when she concludes that "the covers of the books, if not the whole books themselves, were produced in an urban environment."¹³

⁹ Ewa Wipszycka, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist's Point of View," *JJP* 30 (2000): 183.

¹⁰ Mark Sheridan, "The Modern Historiography of Early Egyptian Monasticism," in *Il monachesimo tra eredità e aperture: Atti del simposio "Testi e temi nella tradizione del monachesimo cristiano" per il 50° anniversario dell'Institutio Monastico di Sant'Anselmo, Roma, 28 maggio – 1° giugno 2002* (ed. Maciej Bielawski and Daniël Hombergen; SA 140, *Analecta Monastica* 8; Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2004), 211.

¹¹ Alastair H. B. Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 28.

¹² Stephen Emmel, "The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Frey) Traditions," in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 36.

¹³ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism": Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8–9. We would point out, however, that prominent specialists of Pachomian monasticism have continued to support the theory of the codices' Pachomian provenance after the publication of Khosroyev's study. James Goehring, a leading authority on Pachomian monasticism, finds many of Khosroyev's arguments unpersuasive, and maintains that the Pachomian hypothesis remains viable. See Goehring, "The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More," *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1999: Ascetica, Gnostica, Liturgica, Orientalia* (ed. Maurice F. Wiles and Edward Y. Yarnold; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 234–

The purpose of the present study is to critically examine the arguments against the theory of the Nag Hammadi Codices' monastic origins, as set forth by Khosroyev and others, and to demonstrate by a thorough examination of all the available evidence, the plausibility that they were produced and read by Egyptian monks.

A Brief History of the Question

Since the first wave of publications on the Nag Hammadi Codices began to appear in the 1950s, many different theories have been proposed as to where they came from and who might have owned them in antiquity. In addition to Khosroyev's theory of urban literati, the various explanations include 1) a Gnostic community; 2) a wealthy individual; and 3) Christian monks.

The first scholar to address the question of the codices' ancient owners was Jean Doresse, who captured both public and scholarly imagination with his 1958 study *Les livres secrets des Gnostiques d'Égypte* (*The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*).¹⁴ As the title suggests, Doresse believed that the codices were owned by a Gnostic church in fourth-century Egypt, which he identified specifically as Sethian Gnostics based on the importance of Seth in some of the texts and titles (e.g., the *Three Steles of Seth* and the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*). Yet many researchers have found Doresse's theory of a specifically Sethian Gnostic community unconvincing, especially since the codices contain many texts in which Seth has little or no significance and whose theologies differ considerably from ancient reports of Sethian thought. The theory has nevertheless been revived in recent years by Alastair Logan, a prominent scholar of Gnosticism, who in his 2006 book *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* writes that

I find much in agreement with the original judgements of Doresse about the relative reliability of the heresiologists and about the codices as the library of an ascetic Sethian Gnostic community, assembled from several smaller collections, either exchanged with other related groups from elsewhere in Egypt or acquired because of their content. That community, wherever it originated – perhaps in an urban milieu, as Khosroyev has suggested – became active in the area of Chenoboskia in the mid to late fourth century.¹⁵

53; Goehring, "Some Reflections on the Nag Hammadi Codices and the Study of Early Egyptian Monasticism," *MCPL* 25 (2010): 61–70. See similarly Philip Rousseau, "The Successors of Pachomius and the Nag Hammadi Codices: Exegetical Themes and Literary Structures," in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context* (ed. James E. Goehring and Janet A. Timbie; CUA Studies in Early Christianity; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 140–57, esp. 157.

¹⁴ Jean Doresse, *Les livres secrets des Gnostiques d'Égypte* (Paris: Plon, 1958); English translation: Doresse, *Secret Books*.

¹⁵ Logan, *The Gnostics*, 29.

Although Logan acknowledges that the area around Chenoboskion (Sheneset) was the center of Pachomian monasticism, with several monasteries active already by the 330s, he finds it unlikely that Pachomians would have produced and read books with such unorthodox contents. Instead, he envisions that the codices stemmed from a community which he describes as “Gnostic”:

Although it operated in the vicinity of Pachomian monasteries, it was itself not monastic, but in all likelihood comprised both women and men.¹⁶ Its library, which contained a collection that may have had some connection with monastic circles, was in kernel and bulk essentially Gnostic, and was apparently buried in the grave of its last leader in the late fourth or early fifth century, probably because the cult was dying out.¹⁷

Logan raises a number of questions that will be dealt with in the present book, from the characterization of the Nag Hammadi texts as being “in kernel and bulk essentially Gnostic,” to theories concerning their production in an urban cultic setting. As one can see, a cornerstone of Logan’s analysis is the category of “Gnosticism,” which has greatly influenced, and in our view unnecessarily burdened, most discussions of the codices’ ancient owners.

The second theory of ownership enumerated above posits that the codices belonged to the personal library of a wealthy individual who was not necessarily a member of a specific Gnostic sect.¹⁸ This theory has appeared in various forms. One scholar has suggested that the owner might have been a civil bureaucrat or military officer stationed in the Thebaid, who was interested in a variety of Gnostic speculation.¹⁹ More recently, it has been proposed that all twelve codices might have been buried with their owner as grave goods following an ancient Egyptian “book of the dead” tradition, and that Codex II in particular might have been designed specifically for such a funerary purpose.²⁰ It is, however, difficult to reconcile the theory of an individual owner with the colophons and

¹⁶ Logan’s point that gender inclusivity somehow points away from a monastic group is surprising, since early monastic organizations in Egypt, including the Pachomians, included both men and women.

¹⁷ Logan, *The Gnostics*, 29.

¹⁸ Martin Krause, “Die Texte von Nag Hammadi,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 241–43. As Krause notes, the idea that a wealthy fourth-century Gnostic owned the codices was already suggested by Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (2nd ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 293 n. 9.

¹⁹ Veilleux, “Monasticism and Gnosis,” 282. The idea of a government official was based on the accounting documents discovered among the cartonnage of Codex V, which might be related to a government chancery. See chapter five for further discussion of the cartonnage.

²⁰ Nicola Denzey Lewis and Justine Ariel Blount, “Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *JBL* 133:2 (2014): 399–419. On Codex II, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, “Death on the Nile: Egyptian Codices, Gnosticism, and Early Christian Books of the Dead,” in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature: Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson* (ed. April D. DeConick, Gregory Shaw and John D. Turner; NHMS 85; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 161–80. This theory builds upon a suggestion made by Krause, “Die Texte,” 243. For a critical appraisal of the idea that the Nag Hammadi Codices were interred as Christian “books of the dead,” see Paula Tutty, “Books of the Dead

notes left by the scribes, which in each case imply a community setting, as for example in Codex II, where the copyist wrote “Remember me also, my brothers, in your prayers” at the end of the codex.²¹ While the theory of a wealthy individual owner is of course not impossible, we shall see that it does not effectively explain the breadth of the available evidence.

The third theory noted above, that the Nag Hammadi Codices belonged to Christian monks, has enjoyed a great deal of popularity among scholars, though it has been proposed in many different ways, including Pachomian monks, Melitian monks, Origenist monks, or other monks in Upper Egypt of whom we have little or no knowledge. Although Armand Veilleux once suggested that the codices could have belonged to Melitian monks, Pachomian monks have generally been regarded as the most attractive alternative given that the codices were discovered close to several of their monasteries, including the headquarters of their monastic federation.²²

This theory has led to much debate, however, over what the presence of such heterodox books would imply regarding the theology of the early Pachomians and their relationship to Alexandrian orthodoxy. One position maintains that the Pachomians, who are depicted as rather orthodox in the hagiographic literature, would have owned books like these only in order to study and refute heresy.²³ However, due to the pious language of the colophons and the way the codices were eventually buried in a sealed jar, this explanation has not attracted many supporters. The owners do not seem to have regarded these books with contempt.

Another version of the Pachomian hypothesis proposes that the Nag Hammadi Codices were brought to the monasteries by Gnostics who joined the Christian ascetic movement in the early fourth century. According to this view, the monks would have found the codices’ teachings on the ascetic life edifying,²⁴ and they may perhaps have found them valuable in the pursuit of visions and secret knowledge.²⁵ Thus before the consolidation of Alexandrian orthodoxy and its enforcement in Upper Egypt from the second half of the fourth century

or Books *with the Dead?*” in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott; STAC; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

²¹ NHC II 145. See chapter seven for further discussion of the colophons. Other scholars have doubted the theory of an individual owner based on the presence of duplicate tracts in the collection (e.g., three copies of *Ap. John*); see Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek*, 65.

²² Veilleux, “Monasticism and Gnosis,” 284. See chapter nine for further discussion.

²³ Säve-Söderbergh, “Gnostic and Canonical”; Säve-Söderbergh, “Holy Scriptures”; Barns, “Preliminary Report,” 16.

²⁴ Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism,” 438. Elsewhere Wisse proposes that the codices would have appealed to monks who had a “fascination with everything esoteric” (“Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism I: Cryptography,” *Enchoria* 9 [1979]: 103).

²⁵ Hedrick, “Gnostic Proclivities.”

on, the Pachomians would have been characterized by less theological rigorism than later in the movement's history. We will argue that while this theory moves in the right direction, it complicates the picture unnecessarily by presupposing that "Gnosticism" is a factor that needs to be taken into account.

A few scholars, however, have promoted versions of the Pachomian hypothesis that do not assume the conventional dichotomy between "Gnostic" and "orthodox" readers. In a seminal article, Clemens Scholten has presented an impressively comprehensive overview of the evidence for the codices' monastic origins, many details of which we elaborate upon in the present study. After surveying what is known about book culture in Pachomian monasteries, Scholten concludes that the Pachomians probably owned and read a diverse range of literature, and that the presence of the Nag Hammadi Codices in their monasteries would not necessarily imply that some of the monks were Gnostics.²⁶ James Goehring has similarly suggested that if Pachomian monks read the Nag Hammadi Codices, they need not have been completely at odds with Alexandrian orthodoxy.²⁷ Instead, they could be understood as people who, in their theological inquiries, were open to reading books with a diversity of theological perspectives (even if their openness to extra-canonical literature would not have been approved by the patriarch).

In what follows, we build upon the approaches set forth by Goehring and Scholten, taking seriously the possibility that whoever read these texts could have reconciled them with Egyptian Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries, including monasticism and Alexandrian orthodoxy. We avoid the category of Gnosticism altogether, because we do not find it helpful in clarifying the origins of the codices. In fact, as we reviewed the scholarly literature on the question, it struck us time and again how the very idea of Gnosticism continues to breed confusion. The traditional assumption among scholars has been that gnostic books imply gnostic readers: Since the books have been classified as "gnostic" according to modern taxonomies, whoever owned them in antiquity must have been gnostic people who believed in gnostic theology. And once this sleight of hand has been performed, it then becomes necessary to explain how and where gnostic people fit into the picture. The focus of the question thus shifts away from explaining the place of the codices to explaining the place of the alleged Gnostics who read them. Following the insightful work of Scholten, Goehring, and Michael Williams,²⁸ we maintain that the monks who owned the Nag Hammadi Codices need not be regarded as Gnostics.

²⁶ Scholten, "Buchbesitz," esp. 145–49, 172.

²⁷ Goehring, "New Frontiers," 246–47.

²⁸ Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

The Present Study

Although Josep Montserrat-Torrents once concluded that all hypotheses regarding the owner(s) of the Nag Hammadi Codices are “equally plausible,”²⁹ we intend to demonstrate that a monastic setting provides the most compelling explanation of the available evidence, including the location of their discovery, the scrap papyri used to stiffen their leather covers, and the terminology used by the scribes in the colophons (which cannot be dismissed as merely circumstantial evidence). Along the way, we critically examine alternative hypotheses which have been set forth in recent years, and highlight why, in our view, they remain problematic.

We set the stage for our discussion of the codices’ monastic origins in chapter two with a survey of what is known about Christian monasticism in the Thebaid during the fourth and fifth centuries, drawing on literary, documentary, and archaeological evidence. In chapters three and four we turn to a critical examination of previous theories regarding the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices which are directly related to the category of “Gnosticism.” Chapter three treats the pitfalls involved in those theories that concern a Gnostic church or “cult movement” in late antique Egypt, as set forth by Doresse and Logan, as well as explanations which posit the presence of Gnostics among Egyptian monks. Chapter four then offers an evaluation of Khosroyev’s influential argument that the codices belonged to “syncretistic” literati from the Greco-Egyptian cities.

After dispensing with the gnostic hypotheses, we turn in chapter five to a detailed examination of the cartonnage papyri from the covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices. These fragments offer a body of evidence from within the codices themselves that provides tantalizing glimpses into the specific social context in which the codices may have been produced. We discuss how these papyri have been used to support arguments both for and against the monastic hypothesis, and argue how, in our view, this evidence supports the codices’ monastic origins.

In chapter six we discuss the issue of divergent attitudes toward extra-canonical books in Egyptian Christianity as an important part of the context in which the circulation of the Nag Hammadi Codices must be understood. While some Christians were interested in reading apocryphal books, especially as interpretive supplements to Scripture, others sought to censor apocrypha and have them removed from Egyptian monasteries. Nevertheless, such books continued to be copied and read in Egyptian monasteries well into the medieval period, as indicated by literary sources which speak to ongoing controversy over them, as well as actual manuscript discoveries from monastic libraries containing such texts.

²⁹ Josep Montserrat-Torrents, “The Social and Cultural Setting of the Coptic Gnostic Library,” *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1995: Preaching, Second Century, Tertullian to Arnobius, Egypt Before Nicaea* (ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 481.

Chapters seven and eight deal with codicological evidence, the scribes, and methods of book production and circulation. In chapter seven we focus on the colophons and scribal notes recorded in the Nag Hammadi Codices, and offer a detailed analysis of how their terminology reflects one or more monastic communities. We also address the question of how such books might have been transmitted between monasteries through informal book-exchange networks. In chapter eight we discuss the likelihood that those who copied the Nag Hammadi Codices also copied biblical texts, by comparing scribal habits and codicological features shared among both groups of manuscripts. Here we also discuss the delineation of sub-groups within the larger Nag Hammadi collection, and what they might (and might not) tell us about the origins of the codices. Although it has been argued that the sub-groups indicate smaller, originally independent sub-collections, for which a monastery setting is not likely, we maintain that the similarities among them are arguably more pronounced than the differences, and show that theories of independent sub-collections are consistent with a setting of production and distribution in a monastery or network of monasteries.

Chapter nine then addresses different kinds of monasticism in Upper Egypt, including Melitians, Origenists, and Pachomians, and how the Nag Hammadi Codices might have fit into this monastic landscape. In order to encourage future studies of these texts in a monastic setting, we also offer a brief sketch of some of the ways in which the Nag Hammadi texts might have appealed to monks in the fourth and fifth centuries, based on what we know about monastic interests and culture of the time. Finally, chapter ten provides a brief conclusion and recapitulation of the book's main arguments.

At this point, before we move on to our discussion of monasticism in the Thebaid during the fourth and fifth centuries, the region and time period from which the Nag Hammadi Codices come, it is necessary to discuss briefly what we know about their dates of production and the location of their discovery.

Dating the Codices

The production of the Nag Hammadi Codices has traditionally been assigned to the middle of the fourth century based on three papyrus contracts from the cover of Codex VII, which are explicitly dated to November 341, November 346, and October 348.³⁰ While this evidence provides us with a *terminus post quem* of 348 for Codex VII's cover, nothing precludes the possibility that many years may have passed before the papyri were reused as cartonnage material. Eric Turner's study of dates recorded on the recto and verso of reused papyri indicates that as many as a hundred years, if not more, could have elapsed before

³⁰ Shelton, "Introduction," 4–5.

papyri with writing on one side were reused to write on the other.³¹ Similarly long spans of time could also pass between the writing of a document and the time it was recycled as cartonnage for a book cover.³² For example, the leather cover of Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, dated to the sixth century, yielded a letter of recommendation dated to the late third or early fourth century.³³ In this case the document may have sat in an archive or scrap heap for nearly two hundred years before it was reused.

While there is little evidence to go on for determining approximate dates for each Nag Hammadi Codex, there are a few clues in individual cases. Since the scribes who copied Codices I and XI appear to have been co-workers of the scribe who copied Codex VII³⁴ (sometime after October 348), those three codices were probably produced within the same generation. The question whether Codices I and XI, respectively, were produced before or after Codex VII is nearly impossible to determine, but a recent radiocarbon analysis of Codex I's leather cover suggests that it was probably made earlier than Codex VII, though the ex-

³¹ Eric G. Turner, "Recto and Verso," *JEA* 40 (1954): 102–6. Although Turner's study focuses on timespans that elapsed between the inscription of papyri's rectos and versos, his findings apply in principle to the reuse of papyri as cartonnage. Cf. Emmel, "Coptic Gnostic Texts," 38–39; Hugo Lundhaug, "Shenoute of Atripe and Nag Hammadi Codex II," in *Zugänge zur Gnosis: Akten zur Tagung der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft vom 02.–05.01.2011 in Berlin-Spandau* (ed. Christoph Marksches and Johannes van Oort; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 208–10.

³² On the reuse of literary parchment manuscripts as cartonnage, see Leo Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (2 vols.; Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts 4–5, Oriental Series 1–2; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 1:1 n. 30, with reference to fragments from ninth-century codices which were recycled as cartonnage in a tenth-century codex. There is also the interesting case of Chester Beatty papyrus 2554, an unbound quire constructed from a reused scroll which had been cut and pasted together into sheets. Dates of 298 and 300 are found on the original side of the papyrus, while on the other side one finds dates as late as 345. See Roger S. Bagnall, "Public Administration and the Documentation of Roman Panopolis," in *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest: Acts from an International Symposium Held in Leiden on 16, 17 and 18 December 1998* (ed. A. Egberts, B. P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet; PLB 31; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–12; 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, 2011), 74.

³³ The cover has been dated by Myriam Krutzsch and Günter Poethke on stylistic grounds, while the letter of recommendation has been dated by Kurt Treu on the basis of its genre; see Krutzsch and Poethke, "Der Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502," *Forschungen und Berichte* 24 (1984): 40; Treu, "P. Berol. 8508: Christliches Empfehlungsschreiben aus dem Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex P. 8502," *APF* 28 (1982): 53–54. On the construction of the codex, see Krutzsch, "Beobachtungen zur Herstellungstechnik früher gnostischer Kodizes," in *Zugänge zur Gnosis: Akten zur Tagung der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft vom 02.–05.01.2011 in Berlin-Spandau* (ed. Christoph Marksches and Johannes van Oort; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 285–93, 347–52. For an edition of the codex, which contains *Gos. Mary*, *Ap. John*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and *Act. Peter*, see Walter C. Till and Hans-Martin Schenke, eds., *Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502: Herausgegeben, übersetzt und bearbeitet* (2nd ed.; TUGAL 60²; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972).

³⁴ See, e.g., M. A. Williams, *Rethinking*, 242–43.

Index of Ancient Sources

Hebrew Bible

<i>Genesis</i>		<i>Psalms</i> (LXX)	
2	243	33:2–34:16	228n77
1:1–4:2	228	51–93	40
6:6	88n81		
<i>1 Kings</i>		<i>Song of Songs</i>	
19:10	148n7	6:8	66
<i>2 Chronicles</i>		<i>Isaiah</i>	
9:29	148n7	30:15	258n133
12:15	148n7	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
13:22	148n7	38:14	148n7
20:34	148n7	38:17	148n7
25:26	148n7	<i>Daniel</i>	
28:26	148n7	13:5	148n7
33:18–19	148n7		

Biblical Apocrypha

<i>Tobit</i>	
4:13	148n7

New Testament

<i>Matthew</i>		<i>Acts</i>	
2:14–15	148n7	1:21–26	185n24
<i>Mark</i>		6–7	159
10:1–12	81n41	6:5	157
<i>Luke</i>		18:25	173
11:50–51	148n7	20:35	148n7
		<i>1 Corinthians</i>	
		2:8	90
		15	256

<i>2 Corinthians</i>		<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	
1:19	81n40	1:1	81n40
<i>Galatians</i>		<i>Hebrews</i>	
1:8	172	11:5	148n7
6:1	189	12:6	53, 130
<i>Ephesians</i>		<i>1 Peter</i>	
4:13	185n27	5:12	81n40
6:12	90, 259, 259n144	<i>2 Peter</i>	
<i>Philippians</i>		2:17	82
2:15	193n55	<i>Jude</i>	
<i>Colossians</i>		14–15	148n7
4:16	148n7		
<i>1 Thessalonians</i>			
1:1	81n40		

Nag Hammadi Codices and Papyrus Berolinensis 8502

<i>Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles</i> (NHC VI,1)		<i>Apocryphon of John</i> (NHC II,1, III,1, IV,1, P. Berol. 8502,2)	
8.14–19	160n71	NHC II	
9.30–32	160n71	15–19	259n144
10.31–11.26	160n71	25	260n147
<i>(Second) Apocalypse of James</i> (NHC V,4)		30–31	259n145
58.2–8	87n74	<i>Asclepius</i> (NHC VI,8)	
<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i> (NHC V,2)		66.35–67.34	86n69
22.24–23.29	86n73	<i>Authoritative Teaching</i> (NHC VI,3)	
23.26–29	86n73	23.12–24.22	243n51
<i>Apocalypse of Peter</i> (NHC VII,3)		25.27–26.26	86n66
79.24–31	82n49	<i>Book of Thomas</i> (NHC II,7)	
82.20–25	87n76	138.1–4	185n24
<i>Apocryphon of James</i> (NHC I,2)		144.12–13	260n146
1.8–10	178n1, 236n8	145.17	183n22
1.28–31	236n8	145.17–19	183n19
15.6–34	261n153	145.18–19	183n23, 206n100
		145.20–23	183n20

- Concept of Our Great Power* (NHC VI,4) 74.1–12 86n72
 40.5–9 11n37 75.2–10 86n72
 48.9–11 87n75
- Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5)
 120.23–121.2 261n159
 120.26 47n125
 121.5–7 87n79
 121.16–18 261n158
 121.18 47n125
 127.19–131.15 86n65
 129.20–21 87n79
 144.9–10 86n65, 87n79
 146.19–20 87n79
- Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*
 (NHC VI,6)
 55.24–56.11 86n67
 56.8 86n67
 59.20–22 201n85
- Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6)
 131.9–13 259n144
 135.4–7 257n132
 136.5–8 258n133
 136.16–18 257n131
 137.22–25 257n131
- Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III,2, IV,2)
 NHC III
 56.22–58.26 86n64
 57.22–26 86n64
 69.6–17 191n47
- Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3)
 55.14–19 88n83
 56.18–20 244n58
 56.26–30 244n60
 57.12 245n61
 57.18 245n62
 58.14 246n69
 58.20–22 242n41
 61.5–10 168n104
 66.16–20 244n57
 67.17–18 242n39
 68.23–26 86n72
 71.24–27 86n72
 73.3–5 244n58
- Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II,2)
 32.12–14 261n156
 41.27–29 261n155
 46.11–13 261n157
 47.1–8 213n30
- Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3, XII,2)
 NHC I
 16.31–33 80n34
- Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4)
 88.10–12 88n84
 96.11–14 88n84
- On the Origin of the World*
 (NHC II,5, XIII,2)
 NHC II
 102.7–11 259n144
 105.26 259n145
 107.2–3 259n144
 107.14–17 259n144
 119.2–4 259n140
 125.14–23 259n145
- Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1)
 1.6–16 261n153
- Prayer of Thanksgiving* (NHC VI,7)
 63.33 201n85
 64.25 86n68
- Scribal Note* (NHC VI,7a)
 65.8–14 197n76
- Second Treatise of the Great Seth*
 (NHC VII,2)
 54.15 180n9
 61.29 180n9
 61.34–35 180n9
 66.29 180n9
 67.2–3 180n9
- Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4)
 85.19–21 256n128
 86.1–4 257n129

30	248n80	100	251n95
31	29n27, 167n98–99, 248n78, 248n80, 251n96	103 106	19n52, 39n84 136n149, 185n27
32	19n52, 39n84, 134n142, 185n27, 212n25	107 109	185n27 53n182
33	34n55	112	259n141
34	254n118	114	136n149
38	251n92	116	19n52, 39n84, 251n94
39	133n136, 140n165, 141n168	117 118	19n52, 39n84 137n155, 185n27, 188n39,
40	34n58, 51n167, 53n182		254n118
42	34n56, 251n93	119	53n182
46–48	254n116	120	185n27, 193n55, 193n58
48	261n154	121	53n182, 136n150, 251n89
49	188n39	122	254n118
54	30n29–30, 34n54, 185n27, 188n39, 212n25	124 125	136n149 253n111, 254n116,
55	251n98		261n154
56	254n113	126	185n27, 188n40
56–57	256n123	127	251n99, 252n100
58	254n115	129	185n27
59	133n136, 137n152, 137n155, 165n85, 165n90, 166n93, 167n95, 212n25, 253n109	134 135 136 139	23n7, 113n36, 134n142 261n154 185n27, 188n39 19n52, 39n84
60	137n155	146	19n52, 39n84, 39n84,
61	137n155, 254n112		252n101
64	116n45	149	19n52, 39n84
65	53n182, 136n149		
68	34n55, 53n182	G ⁴	
71	254n116, 261n154	10	116n45
75	254n118		
76	34n53	S ¹	
79	133n136, 136n149, 137n152, 167n95	10–19 14	251n91 134n139
80	34n54, 140n167		
81	30n30, 37n69	S ²	
83	30n30, 34n54, 110n28, 133n136, 137n155, 167n95, 212n25	fr. 5, § 9 S ^{3c}	116n45
84	185n27	(page numbers in Lefort's edition)	
88	254n112	309–10	248n78
91	185n27, 188n39, 251n96	334	168n102
94	49n146		
98	185n27, 188n39	S ⁵	
99	167n97, 185n27, 188n39, 188n41, 196n69, 212n25, 254n117, 261n154	(page numbers in Lefort's edition) 180	237n15

S ⁶		82	19n52, 39n84, 116n45,
(page numbers in Lefort's edition)			185n27, 188n39
264	259n141	83–84	261n154
		86–87	261n154
S ¹⁰		88	260n151
fr. 4	117n46	89	49n146
		91	49n146
SBo		103	185n27, 261n154
3	185n27, 188n39	106	189n42
10	32n36–37, 51n168, 52n171,	107	185n27, 259n141
	68n56, 116n46	114	260n151
10–11	116n45	118	108n20, 122n70
14	32n38–39	119	136n149
16	32n39	123	19n52, 39n84
17–26	29n28	125	234n2
18	32n39	128	185n27, 188n39
24	34n52	129	237n15
25	116n46, 134n144, 135n145,	130	19n52, 39n84
	236n12	132–33	193n58
27	19n52, 39n84, 134n142,	133–34	193n55
	167n96, 185n27, 188n39,	134	136n150, 185n27
	212n25	139	252n100
29	185n27, 188n39, 254n115	142	185n27, 188n39, 211n20
29–31	34n55	144	252n101
33–34	261n154	145	116n46, 133n136
37	134n142	147	111n28, 167n95
38	136n149	155	254n119
39	129n112, 133n136	181	19n52, 39n84
40	33n50, 34n53, 34n58	189	150n19, 151, 167n99,
41	134n142		169n105–6, 249n81,
42	34n56		252n102
43–44	116n45	193	185n27, 188n39
49	30n29	194	138n160, 185n27
50	30n30	196	49n146
50–51	34n54	198	19n52, 39n84
51	30n30–31	199	185n27, 188n39
54	30n30, 37n69	201	193n58
56	34n54, 140n167, 141n172	202	23n7, 185n27
59	110n28	204	185n27, 193n55
60	185n27	205	19n52, 39n84, 49n146,
63	234n2		185n27
66	261n154	207	19n52, 39n84
68	34n53		
71	110n28, 133n136, 167n95,	Pachomius	
	212n25	<i>Instructions</i>	
79	185n27	1.46	122n70
81	134n144		

<i>Letters</i>		100–1	253n109
1	196n69	101 (Copt.)	165n89
2	196n69	104	116n45
3	196n69	105	116n45
6	196n69	115	253n110
9	196n69	119	134n142
11	196n69	123	254n114
		127	19n52, 39n84
<i>Paralipomena</i>		128	19n52, 39n84
1	53n182	138	253n110, 254n114
6	19n52, 39n84	139	253n108
7	167n99, 248n79	139–40	212n24
15	116n44–45	140	166n94, 253n107
35	116n45		
<i>Praecepta</i>		<i>Praecepta ac Leges</i>	
19	254n114	7	166n93
19–20	253n110	15	140n165
20	253n110		
24–25	253n109	<i>Praecepta et Instituta</i>	
25	166n92	15	253n110
27	110n28, 167n95		
45	122n70	<i>Prophecy of Apa Charour</i>	
49	140n165	M586, 99	166n91
50–52	34n58	<i>Regulations of Horsiesios</i>	
51	34n59	16	212n24
52	134n142	29	167n95
54	122n70		
56–57	134n139	Theodore	
82	165n85, 165n87	<i>Instructions</i>	
84	134n139	3.8	193n55
86	134n139	3.29	256n123–24
90	134n139	3.37	256n123–24, 258n133
92–93	116n45	3.40	53n177
100	165n88	3.46	252n100

Other Christian Writings

Ammonas		3.5	193n56
<i>Letters</i>		5	243n49
5	193n58	5.1–2	193n57
11	193n58	5.36	234n1
		6	243n49
Antony the Great		6.78	193n57
<i>Epistulae</i>			
1.41	260n148		

- Apophthegmata Patrum*
 Antony 33 74n1
 Sisoës 48 237n15
 Sopatrus 1 146n1
- Athanasius of Alexandria
Contra gentes
 1 39n85
- Epistulae festales*
 39 146–47, 146n2, 147n3,
 147n5, 150n19, 151, 164,
 169, 172–74, 205, 235,
 236n6, 249
 39.21 147n5
 39.23 149n11
- Vita Antonii*
 3 32n35
 10 185n26
 14 49n158
 21 259n143
 65 260n152
 81 49n158
 84–87 49n158
- Augustine
Epistulae
 31.7 205n96
 31.7–8 203n91
 237 149n14
- Cyril of Alexandria
Epistulae
 81,2 243n48
 81,5 243n48
- Dioscorus of Alexandria
Epistula ad Sinuthium
 XZ 66 37n70, 237n14
 XZ 66–71 36n67
 XZ 67 37n71–72, 39n83, 176n150
 XZ 67–68 176n151
 XZ 68 37n70, 97n113, 136n146,
 170n112, 175n149
 XZ 70 38n74
 XZ 71 37n68, 38n73, 176n153
 XZ 72 37n68, 176n153
- XZ 72–73 36n67
 XZ 73 37n69, 176n152, 176n154,
 240n29
- Ps.-Dioscorus of Alexandria
Panegyric of Makarius of Tkow
 15.1 181n15
- Egeria's Travels*
 9.1 24n9
 9.6 24n9
- Epiphanius
Ancoratus
 13.6 239n22
 52–55 242n45, 255n120
 58–63 242n45, 255n120
 82–100 242n45
 82.3 238n19, 244n52, 245n63,
 247n72
 87.2–3 238n20
- Panarion*
 Proem I.4.3 66n42
 Proem I.4.8 66n39
 Proem I.5.4 66n39, 66n42
 Proem I.5.9 66n39
 Proem II.2.4 67n48
 26 66n45
 26.1.3 66n45
 26.2.5 66n45
 26.2.6 66n45
 26.3–5 66n46
 26.3.5–7 66n42
 26.8.1 66n45
 26.11.12 66n45
 26.13.2 66n45
 26.17.8–9 67n50
 26.18.1 67n48
 26.18.4 67n49
 30.15.1 69n60
 35.3.5–6 66n40
 39.1.1 66n38
 39.5.1 57n4
 39.6.1 69n60
 40 66n43
 40.1.1–7 68n52
 40.1.4 68n54, 69n58

40.1.5–6	68n53–54		<i>Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt</i>
40.1.7	68n54	5	33n46
40.2.1	69n59	7	33n48
40.2.1–2	66n45, 69n57	7a	33n41, 33n44
40.2.4	68n55	10	33n48
40.5.3–7	168n103	11b	33n44
40.6.5–9	168n103	16	33n46
40.7.4	69n60	23	33n49
40.7.4–7	69n57	25	33n45
51.3.1–2	66n39	27	33n48
63.1.4	154n38	37	33n48
63.3.4	174n141	38	33n48
63.5	239n22	38b–39b	33n43
64	65	39a	33n44
64.3.8–4.1	154n38	40	33n48
64.3.10	239n22	40b	181n15
64.4	242n45, 255n120	41b	41n95, 185n26
64.4.1	65n37, 168n101, 239n21, 247n72	42a–45b 45b–48b	33n43 33n42
64.70.5	69n60	46	33n49
64.71.10	69n60	48	33n48
Eusebius		48b–52b	33n43
<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>		49a–50a	33n42
6.12	149n11	49b	33n41
6.14.1	26n17	53b	41n95
Evagrius Ponticus		54a	33n46
<i>On Prayer</i>		54a–55b	33n42
3	260n152	56a	33n43
35	260n152	56b	32n40
Ps.-Evodius of Rome		89	33n47
<i>Homily on the Passion and the Resurrection</i>		95	33n48
40	150	106	33n48
41	150		<i>Investiture of St. Gabriel the Archangel</i> (page numbers in Müller's edition)
42	150	61	159, 159n67
44	150–51	71	160n72
Hippolytus			<i>Investiture of St. Michael the Archangel</i> (page numbers in Müller's edition)
<i>Refutatio omnium haeresium</i>		2	159, 159n68
V.22	57n4	6	160n70
		57	160n69
<i>Historia Monachorum in Aegypto</i>			
3	23n6	Jerome	
3.2	257n130	<i>Epistulae</i>	
77	234n2	5	202n89
Epilogue	23n5	5.2	203, 203n90

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 10.3 | 203n90–91 | <i>De principiis</i> | |
| 47.3 | 203n90 | 1.2.2–3 | 242n41 |
| 49.4 | 203n90 | 1.2.10 | 242n42 |
| 84 | 245n64 | 1.6.2 | 242n39 |
| <i>Preface to the Rules of Pachomius</i> | | Palladius | |
| 1 | 215n39 | <i>Lausiac History</i> | |
| <i>To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem</i> | | prol. 2 | 234n2 |
| 29 | 244n59 | prol. 5 | 27n23 |
| John Cassian | | 8.6 | 27n23 |
| <i>Conferences</i> | | 18.12 | 234n2 |
| 10.3–4 | 239n25 | 18.12–16 | 27n21 |
| <i>Institutes</i> | | 29–30 | 26n19 |
| 4.4 | 140n165 | 32 | 27n21, 28n24 |
| 4.6 | 140n165 | 32–33 | 27n22, 234n2 |
| 4.12 | 213n29 | 32–34 | 27n23 |
| 4.13 | 213n29 | 32.4–5 | 196n69 |
| John of Parollos | | 32.5 | 189n43 |
| <i>On Heretical Books</i> | | 32.6 | 257n130 |
| 47 | 161n75 | 32.7 | 189n44 |
| 48 | 161n74 | 32.9 | 113n36 |
| 49 | 161n75 | 32.9–10 | 51n168 |
| <i>Life of Apa Onnophrius</i> | | 32.9–12 | 212n26 |
| 2a | 33n49 | 32.10 | 117n46 |
| 3a | 33n49 | 32.12 | 113n36 |
| 7a | 185n27 | 35 | 24n11, 49n146 |
| 9a | 185n27, 260n149 | 58 | 25n14, 39n82, 52n171,
92n94 |
| 10b | 33n49 | 58–60 | 24n12 |
| 11b–12a | 260n150 | 59 | 25n15 |
| 15a | 33n49 | 60 | 26n17 |
| <i>Life of Apa Phib</i>
(page numbers in Vivian's translation) | | Paul of Tamma | |
| 219 | 181n15 | <i>Untitled Treatise</i> | |
| 221 | 181n15 | 109 | 257n129 |
| <i>Life of Evagrius</i> | | Philastrius of Brescia | |
| 24 | 260n152 | <i>Diversorum hereseon liber</i> | |
| Origen | | 88 | 185n28 |
| <i>Commentarii in evangelium Joannis</i> | | Priscillian of Avila | |
| 20.18 | 242n43 | <i>Book on Faith and Apocryphal Writings</i> | |
| Rufinus | | 184–89 | 148n10 |
| <i>Apologia ad Anastasium papam</i> | | 263–64 | 148n9 |
| 4 | | 245n65 | |

- Apologia adversus Hieronymum*
 1.9 245n65 381 173n133
 384 174n142
 DS 221 172n127
- Shenoute of Atripe
A Beloved Asked Me Years Ago
 XH 14 189n45 *I Have Heard about Your Wisdom*
 XH 277–78 36n65
- Ad Timotheum archiepiscopum Alexandrinum*
 HD 301 181n15 *So Listen*
 XO 35 36n65
- And It Happened One Day*
 AV 233 240n30, 246n67 *There is Another Evil that has Come Forth*
 GP 108–10 38n78
 GP 109 38n79
- Canon 1*
 XC 8 175n147 *We Will Speak in the Fear of God*
 GP 106 38n80
 YW 10 175n147
 YW 209 171n114 *Who Speaks Through the Prophet*
 DD 80 244n53
 YW 210 174n143 ZM 44 172n125
 YW 211 171n116, 172n122 ZM 60 244n54
- Canon 9*
 BV 39 113n37 *You, God the Eternal*
 XS 336 174n144
 XS 385–86 174n145, 205n98
- God Who Alone Is True*
 FM 191 237n14
- I Am Amazed*
 101 174n140
 103 173n135
 103–4 173n136
 308 172n124
 309 173n134
 311 174n139
 312 174n141
 319 151n19, 172n125
 331–32 255n120
 348 246n67
 350 246n69
 359–60 173n137
 363 173n138
 370–76 181n15
 374 186n30
 375–76 173n128
 376 173n129, 181n15
 377 173n131
 378–79 173n132
- Sokrates
Historia ecclesiastica
 6.7 239n25
- Sozomen
Historia ecclesiastica
 8.11 239n25
 8.12.12 239n23
- Stephen of Thebes
Ascetic Discourse
 43 257n129
- Theophilus of Alexandria
Epistulae festales
 14 239n25
 16 72, 172, 177n157, 239n25,
 239n27, 243n46
 17 239n25
 18 239n25
 19 239n25

Homily on the Mystical Supper
PG 1027B–C 239n26

Letter Written at Constantinople (403)
11 243n46–47

Documentary Papyri and Ostraca

Amherst Papyri (P. Amh.)		241	182n16
II 145	185n29, 186n29	243	182n16
		253	182n16
Ashmolean Museum Papyri (P. Ash.)		256	182n16
3	153n33, 153n36, 204n95	263	182n16
		266	182n16
Bala'izah Fragments		268	182n16
frg. 7	162n78	269	182n16
frg. 47	162n78	277	182n16
frg. 52	162n80	279	182n16
		281	182n16, 194n62
Berlin Papyri (P. Berol.)		296	182n16
8508	10n33, 163n82	299	182n16
10677	98n114	300	182n16
		301	182n16
Chester Beatty Papyri		312	182n16
2554	10n32	319	182n16
		323	182n16
Columbia University Papyri (P. Col.)		327	182n16
VII 127	119	328	182n16
VII 129	119–20	330	182n16
		336	182n16
Epiphanius of Thebes Monastery Ostraca (O.Mon.Epiph.)		337	182n16
		342	182n16
127	182n16	354	182n16
129	182n16	375	202n89
131	182n16	376	202n89
141	182n16	377	202n89
146	182n16	381	203n91
163	182n16	387	212n23
168	182n16	389	202n89
172	182n16	415	182n16
175	182n16–17	431	182n16
180	182n16	432	182n16
190	182n16	433	182n16
211	194n62	436	182n16
217	182n16	449	182n16
219	182n16	480	182n16
223	182n16	482	182n16
225	182n16	483	182n16
227	182n16	489	182n16

501	182n16		53n178–79, 53n181,
554	205n95		129n110–11, 129n113, 130,
577	194n62		130n118
Grenfell and Hunt, <i>New Classical Fragments</i> (P. Grenf. II)		C6	47n124, 48n129, 48n142, 105, 129n110, 130, 132, 135–38, 138n161
95	142n174	C7	130, 130n123
111	153n32, 204n95	C8	47, 47n124, 48n127, 49n147, 49n153, 129n110– 11, 129n115, 130, 261n158
Hermopolis Papyri (P. Herm.)		C15	47n126, 129n111, 131
7	46n115	C15–19	131
7–10	45	G1	105, 105n5, 105n7, 111n29, 112n35, 113–16, 117, 132n131
Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO)		G2	111n29, 112n35
13315	154n41	G3	111n29, 112n35, 113, 116
John Ryland's Library (P. Ryl. Copt.)		G4	131n128
268–76	45	G17	111n30, 121
292	46n117	G18	111n30
301	46n117	G22–23	111n30, 118n57, 119, 119n59, 120, 120n63, 141
310–14	46n117	G22a–i	118
396	46n117	G22c	22n2, 107n17, 117n49
London Papyri, British Library (P. Lond.)		G22d	118n53
VI 1913, 3	116n41	G22e	118n53
VI 1914, 20	237n15	G22f	118n51
VI 1914, 56	51n167	G22g	117n50, 118n52
VI 1914, 60	51n167	G22h	22n2, 117n48
VI 1915	49n158	G22i	117n48, 118n53
VI 1916	49n158	G23	107n17
VI 1917, 18	237n15	G23a–d	118
VI 1920	186n29, 188n36–37	G23b	107n17
VI 1921	186n29, 188n36	G23c	22n2, 107n17, 117n48, 118n53
VI 1922	52n172	G24	111n30, 118n53, 119n58
Nag Hammadi Cartonnage Papyri (P. Nag Hamm.)		G25	119n58
C2	47n123–24, 189n46, 222–23	G26	111n30, 117n50, 118n57, 119n58
C3	47n124, 128, 129n111, 189	G27	107n17, 111n30, 117n50, 118n57
C4	47n124, 47n126, 48n130, 48n138, 49n147, 52, 53n177–78, 129n110–11, 130, 131n128	G29	107n17
C5	47n124, 48n127, 48n130, 48n144, 49n147, 50n162, 51n169, 52, 52n173–74,	G31	105n7, 132n131
		G44	48n128, 107n17, 131n129
		G44a	123n74
		G44a–c	123n73
		G44b	123n74
		G44–45	47n126, 112n31, 131

G45	107n17, 131n129		50n161, 52n175–76,
G45a–c	123n73		129n110, 129n113–14,
G45b	123n74		130n119, 130n121
G45d	123n74	G73	48n133, 48n144, 49n149,
G46	111n30		49n154, 129n113, 129n115
G47	112n31	G74	47n124, 48n140, 49n155,
G48	111n30, 112n31		54n184, 130n120, 130n124,
G49	112n31, 123n74		131n128
G50	111n30	G75	47n124, 48n127, 48n134,
G51	111n30		48n144, 49n150, 51n165,
G52	112n31, 123n74		52n174, 129n110, 129n113,
G53	107n17, 122		129n115, 130n120,
G54	112n31		131n128
G55	111n30	G76	47n124, 48n127, 48n135,
G56	108n17, 122n72		48n144, 49n151, 49n155,
G58	111n30		129n110, 129n113,
G59	111n30		129n115
G62	47n120, 111n29, 112n35	G77	47n124, 48n127, 48n134,
G61	112n31		48n136, 48n144, 49n147,
G63	47n121, 111n29, 112,		49n154, 49n156, 50n161,
	112n32		52n176, 129n110–11,
G64	47n121, 111n29, 112,		129n113, 129n115–16,
	112n32		130n121
G65	47n122, 111n29, 112,	G78	47n124, 48n127, 48n136–
	112n32		37, 48n143–44, 49n154–55,
G66	47n124, 47n126, 48n139,		49n157, 129n110,
	49n155, 53, 130, 131n128		129n113–16
G67	47, 47n124, 49n147,	G79	47n124, 49n155, 129n110–
	51n164, 129, 129n110–11,		11
	130n120–21, 133n136	G82	47n119, 111n30, 123n75,
G68	47n124, 48n127, 48n129,		130, 130n125
	48n144, 49n147, 49n149,	G83	123n74
	49n150, 49n155, 50n159–	G87	123n74
	60, 52n175–76, 129n110–	G91	123n74
	11, 129n113, 129n115,	G100	47n119
	130n117, 130n119,	G143	123
	130n121–22, 136n146	G143a	124, 125n92
G69	47n124, 48n127–28,	G143b	124
	48n130–31, 48n145,	G143c–e	124
	49n149, 51n166, 51n170,	G143f	124
	52n174, 129n110–11,	G143g–l	124
	129n113, 130n120	G144	123
G70	49n155, 130n124	G144a	124–25
G71	47n124, 48n141, 49n155,	G144b–h	125
	54n184, 129n110, 130n124	G144h	125
G72	47, 47n124, 48n127,	G145	131
	48n132, 48n143–44,	G146	131n129
	49n148–49, 49n155,	G146–47	131

G147	48n126, 131n129	202	182n16
G153	47n126, 105n7, 131n128, 132n131	203 204	182n16 188n34
Nepheros Archive (P. Neph.)		221	188n34
15	186n29	223	182n16
16	186n29	227	182n16
		228	182n16
		235	182n16
Oslo Papyri, University of Oslo (P. Oslo)		238	182n16
518	119	241	182n16
		244	182n16
Oxyrhynchus Papyri (P. Oxy.)		253	182n16
2192	203n91	258	182n16
4365	153n31, 202n88, 203n91	276	182n16
		281	182n16, 188n34
Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava (P.L. Bat.)		287	182n16
25, 13	153n32, 204n95	292	182n16
		295	182n16
Prague Papyri (P. Prag.)		299	182n16
87	153n30, 153n35, 204n95	303	182n16
178	153n30, 204n95	314	182n16
		347	182n16
Vienna Ostraca (O. Vind. Copt.)		349	182n16
169	182n16	353	182n16
171	182n16, 188n34	356	182n16
184	182n16	386	182n16
189	182n16		
197	182n16		
201	182n16		
		Vienna Papyri (P. Vindob. Gr.)	
		26015	153n33–34, 204n95

Index of Modern Authors

- Alcock, Antony 186n29
Allen, Thomas W. 196n66
Amélineau, Emile 141n173
Arns, Paulo Evaristo 203n94
Attridge, Harold W. 80n34, 242n38,
244n55
- Bacht, Heinrich 165n84
Bacot, Seyna 122n70
Bagnall, Roger S. 10n32, 11n36, 22n2,
30n32, 37n69, 43n103, 50, 51n165,
91n90, 94, 96n107, 98n114, 102n125,
109n22, 116n44, 117n50, 119–20,
130n122, 140, 141n170, 141n173,
185n29, 224n67, 266
- Bainbridge, William Sims 58
Barnard, Leslie W. 169n108
Barnes, Timothy D. 147n3
Barns, John W. B. 1n4, 6n23, 22n2,
47n119, 49n112, 53n177, 53n180–81,
53n183, 54n185, 75, 104–10, 112–13,
115, 116n42, 117n47, 118–19, 121n68,
125, 128, 129n109, 130n123, 131n128–
29, 132, 136, 137n156, 138, 139n162,
142, 189n46
- Barnstone, Willis 79n25–26
Bell, H. Idris 44n107, 44n109, 46n115,
127n98, 182n16, 188n36–37, 220n55,
220n60, 238n15
- Bellet, Paulinus 58n7, 191n51
Biedenkopf-Ziehner, Anneliese 96n107
Blount, Justine Ariel 5n20
Böhlig, Alexander 90, 191n47–48,
191n50–51, 212n22
- Boon, Armand 29n27, 165n89
Boud'hors, Anne 186n29
Boulluec, Alain Le 238n18, 250n85
Bouriant, Urbain 154n41–42, 176n149
Bovon, François 147n5
- Bowman, Alan K. 91n90, 94n98
Brakke, David 57n8, 92n93, 146n2,
147n3–5, 149n11, 259n142, 260n148
Bregman, Jay 90n89
Brennecke, Hanns Christof 126n93
Britain, David 216n44
Broek, Roelof van den 241n36
Bronk Ramsey, Christopher 218n51
Brown, Peter 91n91, 258n136
Browne, Gerald M. 22n2, 44n108,
46n112, 47n119, 53n177, 53n180–81,
106, 113n38, 117n47, 119n58, 121n68,
128n105–6, 128n108, 130n123,
131n128–29, 136n147, 138n156,
139n157, 189n46
- Bucher, Paul 40
Budge, E. A. Wallis 32n40, 41n95, 126,
155n45, 158n61, 158n63, 169n65,
181n15, 183n21, 185n27, 188n32–33,
218n51, 220n55–58, 260n149–50
- Burrus, Virginia 148n7–8
Butler, Cuthbert 23n7, 24n10, 26n18,
189n43–44, 212n26
- Cain, Andrew 203n94
Cameron, Alan 97n110
Camplani, Alberto 146n2, 236, 240n31,
241n36, 242n38
- Carruthers, Mary J. 40n91
Cavallo, Guglielmo 224n67
Chadwick, Henry 2n4, 106n11, 148n6,
149n12, 183n18
Chadwick, Owen 140n165
Chambers, Jack K. 216n44
Chapman, Paul 150n15
Choat, Malcolm 22n3, 43n103, 44n105,
45n112–14, 46n115, 46n117, 48n126,
123n77, 138n161
- Clackson, Sarah J. 96, 122n70, 185n29

- Clark, Elizabeth A. 241n35
 Claude, Paul 180n6
 Clédat, M. Jean 25n13
 Coblenz, David 209n11, 213n31
 Conti, Marco 148n6–7, 148n9–10, 149n13
 Coquin, René-Georges 146n2, 154n41, 204n95
 Cribiore, Raffaella 25n14, 94n98
 Cristea, Hans-Joachim 35n61, 151n19, 172n123–26, 173n128–29, 173n131–42, 186n30, 246n67, 246n69
 Cromwell, Jennifer 122n70
 Crum, Walter Ewing 1, 40n92, 44n107, 44n109, 45n115, 46n117, 53n180, 122n70, 154n41–42, 162n79, 170n109, 173n130, 180n8, 181n16, 182n17, 185n27, 188n35, 194n62, 203n91, 205n95, 205n97, 212n23
- Davis, Stephen J. 30n32
 Dechow, Jon F. 37n69, 65, 66n40, 67n47, 108–9, 168n101, 176n151, 177n157, 238n16, 239n21, 239n25, 240n31, 247n71
 Delattre, Alain 25n13
 Denzey Lewis, Nicola 3, 5n20, 17n45
 Depuydt, Leo 10n32, 33n49, 127n99, 155n46, 157n55–61, 159n67, 178n4
 Desjardins, Michel R. 81n38, 263, 265n6, 266n11
 Dewart, Joanne E. McWilliam 245n64–65
 Dieleman, Jacco 194n62
 Dochorn, Jan 160n70
 Doresse, Jean 1–2, 4, 8, 11–12, 14, 16–17, 19, 22, 56–57, 61, 64, 74–75, 77, 194n60, 199n79, 208n5, 263
 Dubois, Jean-Daniel 242n38
 Dummer, Jürgen 216n43
 Dzierzbicka, Dorota 122n70
- Edgar, Campbell Cowan 142n174
 Ehrman, Bart D. 79n27
 Elliott, Neil 93n95
 Emmel, Stephen 3, 10n31, 11, 13, 15, 20, 35n61–62, 37n69, 42n96, 78, 94, 97n112, 98–100, 136n146, 142n174, 155n44, 155n46, 157n55, 170n109, 170n112, 171, 172n125–27, 175n145, 209n9, 209n11, 211n28, 218n51, 220n56, 239n27, 244n53, 262
 Emmenegger, Gregor 217n45
 Engberg-Pedersen, Troels 93n95
 Evans, Craig A. 83n54
 Evelyn White, Hugh G. 40n92, 155n43, 156, 182n16–17, 194n62, 203n91, 205n95, 212n23
- Falkenberg, René 84n58
 Fournet, Jean-Luc 94n100, 185n29
 Funk, Wolf-Peter 101n124, 128n103, 186n29, 209n11, 214–16, 231, 257n130
- Gamble, Harry Y. 202n87, 212n27
 Gardner, Iain 46n117, 187n29
 Gardthausen, Victor 196n66
 Gerstinger, Hans 97n109
 Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid 83n55–56
 Gindele, P. Corbinian 254n114
 Ginzberg, Louis 168n103
 Giorda, Mariachiarra 51n167, 133n138
 Godlewski, Włodzimierz 40n92
 Goehring, James E. 2n4, 3n13, 7, 28n25–27, 30n31, 30n33, 31n34–35, 36n63, 36n65, 38n76, 40n92, 41, 41n94, 42, 44n110, 70n62, 74, 88, 89n85, 91n90–91, 106n11, 108–9, 113n39, 118n56, 126n94, 133–34, 141–42, 166n91, 167n99–100, 177n157, 178n2, 189n45, 216n43, 225n70, 233n89, 235n3, 236–37, 247n75–76, 248, 250, 252, 265
- Gonis, Nikolaos 46n117
 Goodacre, Mark 17n49
 Gould, Graham 238n18
 Graham, William A. 253n106
 Greer, Rowan A. 240
 Griggs, C. Wilfred 82n49
 Grillmeier, Aloys 37n67, 240n31, 241n35
 Grossmann, Peter 42n96–97
 Guérin, Henri 38n77–80
 Guillaumont, Antoine 110n27, 241n35
- Habachi, Labib 40n86
 Hagen, Joost L. 158n61
 Haines-Eitzen, Kim 186n32, 202, 212n28
 Hainthaler, Theresia 240n31
 Halkin, François 29n27, 110n28, 116n41,

- 116n44–45, 167n95, 167n97, 185n26,
188n40–41, 212n26, 254n113, 256n123
- Hallock, Frank H. 155
- Hammond, Philip C. 16n46
- Harrauer, Hermann 97n109, 153n35–36,
154n40–41, 182n16
- Havelaar, Henriette W. 81–82
- Hays, Richard B. 83n56
- Hedrick, Charles W. 2n4, 6n25, 70–71,
106n11, 158n61
- Heil, Uta 126n93
- Heylen, F. 185n28
- Hoehne, Gerhard 248n78
- Holl, Karl 67n50, 238n19–20, 239n22,
244n52, 245n63
- Hunt, Arthur Surridge 142n174
- Hurst, André 224n67
- Hyvernat, Henri 157n55
- Jacobs, Andrew S. 149n14
- Jacobsen, Anders Lund 239n24, 242n45,
255n120
- Janz, Timothy 72n71
- Jenott, Lance 26, 28n25, 81n38, 86n64,
199n78, 199n79, 201n85, 209n11,
242n37, 258n137, 259n141, 260n151
- Joannou, Périclès-Pierre 146n2, 236n6
- Joest, Christoph 29n28, 30n31, 33n51,
169n107, 196, 225n70, 252n100,
252n103, 258n133
- Johnson, Benton 58n10
- Johnson, David W. 72n69, 72n71, 181n15
- Johnson, William A. 202n86
- Jonas, Hans 5n18
- Judge, Edwin A. 43n103, 133n138
- Kahle, Paul E. 116n41, 126n94, 155n47,
162n77–79
- Kasser, Rodolphe 16n49, 126n95, 127,
140n163, 223–24, 228–29, 233n88
- Keenan, James G. 91n90
- Kelly, John Norman Davidson 245n65
- Kennedy, George 93n95
- Kenyon, Frederic G. 220n58, 231n86
- Khosroyev, Alexandr 2–4, 6n21, 8, 58, 60,
63, 71n66, 74–79.81n39, 84–85, 90–91,
93–96, 98, 106n12, 109n24, 118n56,
131n126, 144, 180–81, 185, 191n49,
199n79, 200–1, 207n3, 208n4, 209–11,
213n30, 217–19, 231, 235n4, 249–50,
256n126, 267
- Kilpatrick, George D. 224n67
- Kim, Young Richard 242n45
- King, Karen L. 57n8, 81n38, 85
- Kiss, Zsolt 30n32
- Koch, Hal 242n40
- Koenen, Ludwig 92n93, 154n39, 235n4
- Kopecek, Thomas, A. 11n37
- Koschorke, Klaus 189n45
- Kotsifou, Chrysi 1n3, 207
- Kramer, Bärbel 44n108, 45n112
- Krause, Martin 5n18, 5n20, 16n49, 17n50,
57n7, 75, 77, 199n79, 208n4, 208n5
- Krawiec, Rebecca 35n61, 175n146
- Kruit, Nico 121
- Krutzsch, Myriam 10n33, 142n177,
163n82–83
- Kugel, James L. 168n103
- Kuhn, Karl Heinz 157n56–57
- Lampe, G. W. H. 39n85, 116n41, 124n82,
125n89, 180n8, 185n26, 239n23
- Lantschoot, Arnold van 98n115, 161n73–
75, 178n3, 180n4, 194n63
- Larsen, Lillian 51n167, 92n92
- Layton, Bentley 27n20, 32n40, 33n49,
36n63–65, 57n7–8, 79n30, 95n103,
101n123, 101n125, 108, 113n37, 117n46,
122n70, 126, 171, 174n143, 175n146–47,
180n5, 183n19–20, 193n55, 194n59,
213n30, 220n55–56, 220n60, 237n14
- Lease, Gary 42n96–97
- Lefort, Louis Théophile 14n40, 29n27,
30n31, 33n50, 101n123, 110n28,
138n160, 146n2, 165n89, 166n91,
167n95–96, 168n102, 188n38–39,
193n55, 225n71, 236n6, 237n15, 240n30,
246n67, 248n78, 254n119, 259n141
- Leipoldt, Johannes 35n61, 117n46,
174n144–45, 181n15, 205n98, 237n14
- Lewis, Naphtali 94n98, 94n100, 117n50,
119n60, 120n61, 141n170
- Llewelyn, S. R. 133n138,
- Lodge, John 94n95
- Logan, Alastair H. B. 3–5, 8, 56–70,
79n31

- Loon, Gertrud J.M. van 25n13
 López, Ariel G. 37n69
 Lucchesi, Enzo 99–100, 176n152
 Luisier, Philippe 35n62, 233n88
 Lundhaug, Hugo 10n31, 11n37, 36n67,
 38n75, 43, 72n71, 72n73, 73n75,
 81n38, 83n57, 84n58–59, 86n72,
 96n106, 100n102, 168n104, 172n123,
 212n24, 240n31, 241n33, 242n41,
 243n50, 244n56, 244n58, 244n60–62,
 245n66, 246n68–70, 253n106,
 256n124, 258n133–34, 258n138,
 265n10, 266n12
- MacCoull, Leslie S.B. 43n102, 97n111
 Maehler, Herwig 1n3, 96n109, 97n111,
 102n125, 153n35–36, 154n40–41,
 171n119
 Marksches, Christoph 199n77, 214n37
 Marrou, Henri 92n92
 Martin, Victor 224n67, 228n77
 McEnerney, John I. 126n93, 243n48
 McGing, Brian C. 45n110, 237n15
 Meyer, Marvin W. 40n92, 41n94, 79n26,
 188n35
 Meyer, Robert T. 24n10, 26n17, 27n23,
 28n24, 189n44
 Minnen, Peter van 43n103, 46, 49n158,
 141n171
 Mirecki, Paul A. 158n61
 Montserrat-Torrents, Josep 8, 200n80–81,
 235n5
 Müller, C. Detlef G. 159n67, 160n69–70,
 160n72
 Munck, Johannes 80n36
 Munier, Henri 36n67, 37n68–69, 171n114,
 172n122, 176n152–54, 240n29
- Nagel, Peter 220n56
 Nau, François 193n58
 Nongbri, Brent 127n101, 225
- Oertel, Friedrich 112n34, 117n50,
 141n170
 Orlandi, Tito 22n2, 71n69, 72, 97n109,
 97n112, 100n123, 152n25, 155n44, 156,
 157n53, 170–72, 240–41, 257n129, 262
 Otranto, Rosa 152–54, 202n88, 204n95
- Pack, Roger 96n109
 Pagels, Elaine H. 79n29, 81n38, 81n44,
 82n49, 242n37–38, 258n137
 Painchaud, Louis 41n94, 72n71, 242n38,
 242n43, 258, 259n141, 262
 Papaconstantinou, Arietta 51n167
 Parker, David C. 212
 Parrott, Douglas M. 197n76, 199n77,
 199n79, 205n99
 Parsons, Wilfrid 205n96
 Pearson, Birger 82, 267, 268
 Peel, Malcolm L. 244n55
 Perkins, Pheme 242n38
 Pestman, Pieter W. 118n51, 141
 Petrie, William Flinders 1n2, 17n50
 Pickering, Stuart R. 43n103
 Poethke, Günter 10n33, 142n177,
 163n82–83
 Preisigke, Friedrich 115n40, 117n49–50,
 124n81, 130n125
 Puech, Henri-Charles 242n38
- Quecke, Hans 36n65, 138n153, 212n25
 Quibell, James E. 122n70, 165n86
 Quispel, Gilles 242n38, 242n40
- Rasmus, Tuomas 192n54
 Rathbone, Dominic W. 30n32, 118n51,
 Rebillard, Éric 251n90, 265–66
 Rees, Brinley Roderick 46n115
 Reimer, Paula J. 218n51
 Reintges, Chris H. 101n123
 Reverdin, Olivier 224n67
 Roberts, Colin H. 153n36, 177n156,
 250n85
 Robinson, James M. 1n4, 10n32, 11n37,
 11n39, 14, 16–19, 39n85–89, 42n99–101,
 70n62, 72n72, 80, 91n90, 104, 105n4,
 106n11, 121n69, 124n78, 127, 128n108,
 131, 142, 143n180, 166n88, 169, 178n2,
 189n46, 208–11, 220n60, 224–25, 234n88
 Römer, Cornelia E. 152–54, 155n44,
 170n109, 170n112, 171n114, 200, 207
 Rose, Els 149n12, 149n14, 185n28
 Rossi, Francesco 150n15, 152n25
 Rousseau, Philip 4n13, 29n27, 91n90,
 132n134, 135n145, 250n88, 252n100,
 258n133, 265

- Rubenson, Samuel 24n4, 91n90, 92, 167, 193n56–57, 234n1, 237n15, 238, 241n36, 243n49, 247n73, 248n80, 260n148, 265n6
- Rudhardt, Jean 224n67
- Rudolph, Kurt 74n3
- Ruppert, Fidells 167n95, 253n106
- Russell, Norman 23n5, 239n26, 243n46–47, 246n67
- Rustafjaell, Robert de 155n45, 159n64
- Säve-Söderbergh, Torgny 1n4, 6n23, 39n85, 40n86, 105, 106n9, 106n11
- Schenke, Hans-Martin 11n33, 63n31, 160n72, 163n82, 180n5, 199n77, 205n99, 217n47–48, 218n52, 219
- Schmidt, Carl 163n82
- Scholer, David M. 88n81,
- Scholten, Clemens 2n4, 7, 75, 85n60, 106n11, 165n84, 165n86, 180n6, 181n13, 212n22, 212n25, 225n70, 253n109
- Schroeder, Caroline T. 35n61, 51n167
- Sharpe, John Lawrence 217n51
- Shelton, John C. 2n5, 9n30, 22n2, 44n108, 45n112, 47n119, 50n163, 51n164, 53, 54n184, 104, 106–23, 125, 126n96, 128n105–6, 128n108, 129, 130n123, 131n126, 131n128, 131n129, 134, 135n145, 136n146, 136n147, 137–39, 141, 143, 189n46, 235n3, 236
- Sheridan, Mark 3, 241n35, 247n73, 249–50, 263
- Shisha-Halevy, Ariel 100n121
- Shorrock, Robert 97n110
- Sijpesteijn, Petra J. 11n36, 119–20
- Sinkewicz, Robert E. 260n152
- Skeat, Theodore Cressy 120n63
- Smith, Geoffrey S. 65n35, 80n37
- Smith, Morton 56, 79n28
- Smith, Terence V. 82
- Sophocles, Evangelinus Apostolides 117n50, 124n82
- Sperber-Hartmann, Doris 261n152
- Stark, Rodney 58
- Starr, Raymond J. 202n87
- Stefaniw, Blossom 260n148
- Stewart, Columba 24n4, 140n165
- Stockhausen, Annette von 126n93
- Stowers, Stanley 93n95
- Stroumsa, Guy 85
- Suciu, Alin 158n61, 194n63, 218n51
- Szirmai, János A. 208n5
- Tervahauta, Ulla 243n51
- Testuz, Michel 224n67, 228n77
- Thomas, David J. 141n170
- Thomassen, Einar 242n38, 242n43
- Thompson, Herbert 36n67, 37n68, 37n70–74, 39n83, 97n113, 112n70, 136n146, 170n112, 175n149–51, 176n153, 220, 237n14
- Tibet, David 157n54
- Till, Walter C. 10n33, 163n82, 182n16, 188n34
- Tillemont, Louis-Sébastien Le Nain de 247n73
- Timbic, Janet A. 171n114, 177n157
- Timm, Stefan 37n68, 189n45
- Treu, Kurt 10n33, 108, 163n82
- Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang 199n77, 201n84
- Trudgill, Peter 216n44
- Turner, Eric G. 9–10, 105n5, 183n19–20, 203n90, 223–25, 228n79, 233n88
- Turner, John D. 90n89
- Tutty, Paula 5n20, 17n49
- Vandorpe, Katelijn 44n104, 142n171–73
- Van Elderen, Bastiaan 16n47, 17n49, 19n51, 207n3, 224n68, 225n70, 231, 233n87
- Van Nuffelen, Peter 44n106, 44n111
- Veilleux, Armand 2n5, 5n19, 6, 27n23, 29n27, 39n84, 71, 106n12, 109–10, 113n39, 117n46, 118, 126n96, 131n126, 137n155, 138, 139n162, 140n166, 142n174, 150n19, 151n23, 165n87–88, 165n90, 166n91–95, 167n97, 168, 169n105–6, 188n38, 193n55, 196n69, 215n39, 235–36, 237n15, 247n75, 248n78–80, 250n88, 252n100, 253n106–8, 253n110–11, 254n114–15, 254n117, 254n119, 256n123, 257n130, 261n157, 264n4, 266
- Vivian, Tim 32n40, 33n49, 41n95, 180n15, 257n129, 259n150, 259n152

- Vliet, Jacques van der 10n32, 39, 155n44,
158n61
- Wallis, Richard T. 90n89
- Walters, Colin Christopher 165n86
- Ward, Benedicta 74n1,
- Wasserman, Tommy 228n77
- Webb, Robert L. 83n54
- Weber, Max 74
- Wees, Jennifer 258–59, 262
- Wendel, Carl 165n86
- Wiebe, Richard A. 83n54
- Wilkinson, John 24n8–9
- Williams, Francis E. 65n37, 66, 67n50,
68n52, 69n58–60, 239n21
- Williams, Jacqueline A. 80n37
- Williams, Michael A. 7, 10n34, 57n8,
58n10, 59, 64n32–33, 66–67, 70,
77–78, 80n38, 83, 85n61–62, 88, 96n105,
132n130, 180n6, 192, 194–97, 199n78–
79, 201n85, 209–11, 213, 250n88,
260n148, 265
- Wilson, Robert McL. 2n6, 74n3, 160n72
- Winlock, Herbert E. 40n92, 154n41–42
- Wipszycka, Ewa 2–3, 27n21, 43n102,
45n114, 47, 54n185, 78n21, 91n91,
106n12, 109n24, 132–34, 135n145,
138n161, 139–40, 142–43, 210–11,
267n16
- Wisse, Frederick 2, 6n24, 70, 75, 90n87,
106n11, 151n22, 163n81, 180n6, 186n31,
189n45, 191n47–48, 191n50–51, 194n61,
194n63, 256n127
- Worp, Klaas A. 96n107, 121, 176n149
- Young, Dwight W. 71n69, 72
- Zuckerman, Constantine 45n114–15

Index of Subjects

- Aaron, Apa 33n5741, 33n44, 41, 181n15, 185n26
- Abbaton (see also *Discourse on Abbaton*) 158–59
- Abel 156n51, 162
- Abraham, biblical patriarch 148n7, 193
- Abraham of Farshut 29n26, 31, 32n34
- Abu Hinnis 25n13, 26
- Abyssinians 156
- Act of Peter* 163
- Acts of John* 157
- Acts of Paul* 233
- Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* 63n31, 91, 160, 200, 261n153
- Acts of the Apostles 220
- Adam 38, 156, 162, 243, 258–59
- apocalypses of 66n45
- transgression of 86n72
- Adamas 63
- Akulas, Pachomian accountant 111n28, 167n95
- Alexander II, Coptic patriarch 98
- Alexandria 11n37, 27, 30, 110n27, 125n93, 134, 217
- Alexandrian orthodoxy 6–7, 168, 177, 247, 248–49, 252, 267
- Allegorical exegesis 239, 242, 246, 254–56
- Allogenes* 57, 61, 66n45, 69, 98, 261n153
- Alms giving: see Charity
- Al-Mudil Codex 217–18
- Alogi 66
- Ambrosiaster 149n12
- Ammon, bishop 247–48
- Ammon, Pachomian abbot 23
- Ammonas 193, 257
- Anchorites 19, 22, 24, 32–34, 41, 49, 54–55, 68–69, 139, 235, 237n15, 251, 260
- Ancoratus*: see Epiphanius
- Andrew the apostle 157
- Angels 89, 159, 161–62, 177, 185n27, 234
- apostate angels (see also Demons) 86n64, 88n81
- Anomoeans 11n37
- Anthropomorphites 239nn23.25
- Anticosmicism 80, 84–89
- Anticomarians 66
- Antinoë 22n2, 23–26, 39, 54, 92
- Antony, Saint (see also *Life of St. Antony*) 32, 49, 54, 74, 185n26, 193, 234, 259–60
- letters of 92, 193, 238, 241, 257
- Apatheia* 260
- Aphrodisios, monk (in P. Nag Hamm. G69, C4–5) 48, 49n147, 51–53, 130
- Aphthonius, Pachomian administrator 27
- Apocalypse of Adam* 242n44, 261n154
- Apocalypse of Elijah* 156–57, 220, 233
- Apocalypse of James, First* 63n31, 261n154
- Apocalypse of James, Second* 63n31, 261n154
- Apocalypse of Paul* 63n31, 261n153
- Apocalypse of Peter* 81–83, 181, 261n154, 267
- Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 157
- Apocryphal books (see also Extra-canonical books) 8, 38, 69, 72–73, 96, 145, 146–77, 214n37, 233, 235–36, 240, 246, 249, 252, 256, 262–63, 265
- Apocryphon of Ezekiel* 69n60
- Apocryphon of Isaiah* 236
- Apocryphon of James* 178, 236n8
- Apocryphon of John* 59, 61–63, 64n32, 83, 86n64, 87, 160, 162–64, 210, 220n60, 227, 236n8, 242n44, 259–60, 261n154
- Apocryphon of Moses* 236
- Apokatastasis* 239, 242, 264
- Apollo, monastery of 122n70
- Apollonius, Pachomian abbot 251, 252n100

- Apology of Phileas* 186, 228n77
Apophthegmata Patrum 23n4, 153n35
 Apotactics 91n91
 Apotropeia 39
 Archontics 56, 65–66, 68, 168n102
 Arians 11n37, 64, 147, 264
 Aristophanes 102n125
 Aristotle 95
 Arius 38
 Army, Roman 46n115, 53, 107, 110–11, 119, 121, 142
 Arsenios, monastery of 92n93, 154
Ascension of Isaiah 66n45, 69
 Ascent to heaven 59–60, 160, 234, 253, 260–61
 Asceticism 6, 23, 25, 32–33, 41, 59–62, 68–69, 85, 89, 234, 240, 250n88, 253, 256
Asclepius 63n31, 197–201, 205n99
 Ashmunein (see also Hermopolis) 45, 220
 Assemani, Joseph Simon 155n43
 Aswan 33
 Asyut 155, 161
 Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria 27n23, 54, 64, 72, 91, 125n93, 127n101, 155, 161, 176–77, 185n26, 188, 193n55, 248n80, 250n88, 252, 264–65
 – *Festal Letter of 367* 146–51, 164, 169, 172–74, 177, 205, 235–36, 249, 252
 Athribe 26
 Atripe 26, 35n60, 64
 Augustine 149n14, 205n96
Authoritative Teaching 63n31, 243
 Autogenes/Self-Begotten 86n64

 Bala'izah, monastery of 109, 116n41, 126n94, 155, 161, 164
 Baptism 64n32, 234
 – of five seals 59n17, 60–62
 Barbelo 61, 63, 66
 Barbelo Gnostics/Barbelites 56, 65–66
 Bartholomew the apostle 156–57
 Basil of Caesarea 153n35
 Bechne, Pachomian nunnery 113
 Bedouins 16
 Bel and the Dragon, book of 231n86
 BG 8502: see Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502
 Bible, the/Scripture 2, 9, 24, 33, 62, 66, 74, 78–84, 130, 144, 146–51, 161, 163, 166, 171–74, 177, 204, 231, 236, 242, 249, 263–64, 266
 – interpretation of (see also Allegorical exegesis) 78–84, 93, 149, 154, 163, 167, 174, 177, 212n25, 234, 239, 246–47, 253, 257–58
 – manuscripts of 207–8, 216–33
 – memorization of 28, 33n49, 40n91, 54, 84, 253, 253–55
 – recycled as cartonnage 126–28
 – Sahidic translations of 215–16
 Bilingualism 24, 48, 94–101, 185
Birth of Mary 66n45
 Bishops 24, 34n53, 37, 49, 67n50, 82, 112n33, 175, 205, 248n80
 Boats 47, 50, 52, 129–30, 133n136, 140
 Bodmer, Martin 224n68
 Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex (see also Dishna Papers) 186n32, 212n28, 228
 Bodmer Papyri: see Dishna Papers
 Bohairic dialect 219, 228
 Book of the Dead 5
Book of Thomas 60, 63n31, 183, 206, 209n9, 260
 Books (see also Extra-canonical books; Apocrypha) 28, 33
 – censorship of 146–52, 164, 166, 169, 182, 239, 249
 – networks of exchange 9, 197–206, 212n28, 213–14
 – production of 207
 Booksellers 200n80
 Borborians 66
 British Library manuscripts
 – BL Or. 5000 (Psalter) 218n51
 – BL Or. 6003 257n130
 – BL Or. 6783 (Psalter) 126
 – BL Or. 6799 (Gospels) 126
 – BL Or. 7021 (biblical lectionary) 126
 – BL Or. 7025 188n33
 – BL Or. 7029 188n33
 – BL Or. 7594 (Deuteronomy Codex) 126, 183n21, 186, 220–21
 – BL Or. 7597 (Gospel of John) 126
 Cain 156n51, 162, 168
 Callimachus 102n125

- Camels 50, 130n122
 Camp, the (monastery near Panopolis) 37, 176
 Canon 146–49, 151, 169, 249, 252, 265
 Canopus 30, 215n39
 Cartonnage (of NHC: see Nag Hammadi Codices, cartonnage of) 9–10
 Catechumens 147
 Catholic Church 58, 64
 Caves 19, 25, 37, 39, 54, 68–69, 176, 251
 Cave T8 (Psalms cave) 19, 39
 Cave T65 39–40
 Cave T117 19
 Cemeteries/tombs 5, 14, 16–17, 19
 Cenobites 19, 22, 24, 32–34, 52, 54, 107, 129, 140, 208, 231, 235, 256, 261, 264, 267
 Chaff 50, 107, 117, 130
 Chalcedon, Council of 36n67, 172
 Chalcedonians 31
 Charity 32, 33n49, 51, 68, 116
 Charour, Prophecy of 166
 Chenoboskion (see also Shenaset) 4–5, 32, 46, 58, 105, 113, 115–16, 131n128, 132
 Chester Beatty Codices IX, X, and XII 231n86
 Chester Beatty papyrus 2554 10n32
 Children
 – in monasteries 51
 Christ 61–62, 66n40, 147, 159, 185n27, 243, 245, 248n80, 257–58, 261
 – descent into the underworld 156
 – incarnation of 254
 – passion of 149, 156–57, 162, 196–97, 254, 258
 – resurrection of 149, 150, 196–97
 Cities 2, 8, 22, 24–25, 33, 54, 74, 76, 90–101, 144, 176
 Clairvoyance (see also Prophecy; Visions) 33, 258–59
 Clement of Alexandria 26, 54
 – *Hypotyposesis* of 26n17
 Clergy (see also Bishops; Priests) 26n16, 129, 134, 161
 Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 10, 61, 62n25, 142, 160, 163–64
 Codex Tchacos 58
 Codicology (of NHCS: see Nag Hammadi Codices, codicology of)
 Colophons (of NHCs, see Nag Hammadi Codices, colophons of)
 Colossians, Pauline epistle to 244
Concept of Our Great Power 63n31
 Constantine I, Emperor 125
 Constantinople 238n17
 Coptology 2
 Copts 17, 75–76, 91, 95
Counsel of the Savior 161
 Crucifixion: see Christ, passion of
Crux ansata 186
 Cryptography 188, 195–97, 206, 212n25
 Cynopolite nome 45n112
 Cyril of Alexandria 36n67, 64, 97, 243, 264
 Cyrus of Panopolis 97
 Daniel, book of 127, 153n35, 220n60, 231n86
 Daniel, monk (in P. Nag Hamm. C4) 48, 49n147, 52–53, 130
 Deacons 82
 Deir al-Malak 19
 Demiurge 84–89
 Demons 39, 189, 234, 253, 258–60, 264, 266
 Demosthenes 102n125
 Deuteronomy 128, 183n21, 186n32, 220–21
 Devil, the 159, 160n70, 162, 168
 Dialect mixture 216–17, 228, 231
Dialogue of the Savior 87, 90, 261
Didache 147
 Didymus the Blind 92n93, 153n35
 Diocles, anchorite and philosopher 25, 54, 92
 Dioscorus, archbishop of Alexandria 34–38, 64, 73, 97, 136n146, 154, 164, 170n112, 175–77, 205, 237, 240, 249–50, 263–64
 Dioscorus of Aphrodito 97
 Diospolis Parva 5, 17n50, 109, 112n35, 113n39, 115
 Diospolite nome 113
Discourse on Abbaton 158–59

- Discourse on the Archangel Michael* 158n61, 188n33
- Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* 63n31, 199n79, 201n85, 205n99, 261n153
- Dishna Papers 42, 170, 210, 223–33
- Chester Beatty ac. 1486 22n69
 - Chester Beatty ac. 1494 and 1495 225n69
 - Chester Beatty ac. 2556 225n69
 - Chester Beatty Ms. W. 145 225n69
 - P. Bodmer II 127n101, 225–27, 229n85
 - P. Bodmer III 228–29
 - P. Bodmer V 228n77
 - P. Bodmer VII 228n77
 - P. Bodmer VIII 228n77
 - P. Bodmer IX 228n77
 - P. Bodmer X 228n77
 - P. Bodmer XI 228n77
 - P. Bodmer XII 228n77
 - P. Bodmer XIII 228n77
 - P. Bodmer XIV–XV 127, 223, 225–27
 - P. Bodmer XVI 226–27
 - P. Bodmer XIX 216n45
 - P. Bodmer XX 228n77
 - P. Bodmer XXI 228–30
 - P. Bodmer XXIII 228–30
 - P. Bodmer XXXIX 224n69
 - P. Bodmer XLIII 232–33
 - P. Köln 8 and 9 225n69
 - P. Köln 174 225n69
- Dishna plain 18, 22, 28, 30n31, 32–33, 35, 39–40, 55, 144, 224
- archaeological excavations of 16, 19, 39, 41–42
- Donkeys 47, 50, 53, 107, 130n122, 134, 140
- Dorotheus, anchorite and priest 25
- Drovetti, Bernardino 152n25
- Dumps: see Rubbish heaps
- Easter 23, 108, 196–97
- Eastern desert, Egypt 45
- Ebonh, Apa (in *Life of Pachomius*) 34
- Ebonh, archimandrite of White Monastery 35
- Edfu 32n40
- Education 22, 24, 25–26, 33, 54, 90–101, 106
- Egeria 23
- Egypt
- Lower 24, 101, 215n39, 247
 - Middle 22n2, 44–45, 236, 237n15
 - Upper (see also Thebaid) 1, 3, 9, 22–24, 35, 37–39, 43, 45, 54, 72n70, 77–78, 84, 88, 97, 101–2, 108, 110, 143, 150n15, 154, 163, 176–77, 181n15, 205, 208, 215–17, 219, 224n67, 231, 235, 237, 240–41, 262–63, 268
- Egypt Exploration Society 46n115
- Elephantine 33
- Eleutheropolis 66
- Elijah of Athribe 26
- Elijah of the Camp monastery 37–39, 176
- Elohim 87n76
- Encomium on the Four Living Creatures* 158n61
- Encomium on St. Gabriel the Archangel* 158n61, 160
- Encratism (see also Asceticism) 85, 89
- Enoch 148n7, 236
- Enoch, first book of 231n86
- Ephesians, Pauline epistle to 244
- Ephesus, Council of 172, 175n149
- Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis 57, 61, 64–69, 154, 168, 238–39, 243–45, 247, 250, 255
- *Ancoratus* of 65, 238
 - *Panarion* of 65–66, 238
- Epiphanius, monastery of at Thebes 39n81, 40n92, 182, 212
- Esna (see also Latopolis) 32n40, 33n49
- Esther, book of 147, 231n86
- Eucharist 25, 122n70, 134, 234, 240, 245–46, 264
- Eugnostos 191–92
- Eugnostos the Blessed* 63n31, 191–92
- Eusebius 26n17, 125
- Evagrius Ponticus 24, 71, 72n70, 238n17, 241, 250, 260
- Eve 38, 156, 168n102, 243, 258–59
- Evodius of Rome 150–51, 156–57, 164, 172, 177, 255, 263, 266
- Excommunication 67–68
- Exegesis on the Soul* 60, 63n31, 83, 90, 242n44, 243, 257–58
- Exodus, book of 226–27

- Extra-canonical books (see also Apocryphal books) 7, 37, 66–67, 71, 255, 265–66
- Ezekiel, book of 231n86, 258
- Ezra, book of 202
- Faw Qibli (see also Pbow) 16n47, 30, 41n94, 41–43, 188n35
- Fayum 1, 22n2, 33n49, 44–45, 97n109, 119, 150n15, 152, 155, 157, 158n60
- Fayumic dialect 219
- First Peter 186n32, 228n77
- Flooding 16n47
- Four Illuminators, the 63
- Galatians, Paul's epistle to 81n41
- Gebel et-Tarif: see Jabal al-Tarif
- Genesis, book of 47, 60, 62, 104, 126–29, 144, 153n31, 156, 162–68, 189n46, 220, 222–23, 228, 239, 242, 264, 266
- Gennadius, bishop 175n49
- George, Arian archbishop of Alexandria 252n105
- Glazier Codex 217–18
- Gnostics 3–8, 16, 55, 56–73, 77–78, 153, 181n15, 207, 223, 228, 231, 234, 235n4, 241, 256, 265
- Gnosticism 4, 7–8, 56–74, 78, 83, 200, 263–64, 266
- God 87n76, 130, 149, 182, 193, 234, 243, 257, 259–60
- Gongessos 191–93, 206
- Gospel of Bartholomew* 157
- Gospel of Eve* 66n45
- Gospel of Jesus the Son of God* 173
- Gospel of John* 126, 225, 226n74, 227–29, 229n85
- Gospel of Luke* 127, 225–26
- Gospel of Mary* 62n25, 163
- Gospel of Matthew* 216n45, 218–19
- Gospel of Perfection* 66n45
- Gospel of Peter* 149n11
- Gospel of Philip* 60, 63n31, 66n45, 83, 86n72, 168, 226, 242n44, 244–46
- Gospel of the Egyptians* 56n3, 59–61, 64n32, 86n64, 189, 191–92
- Gospel of the Savior* 158n61
- Gospel of Thomas* 60, 63n31, 83, 220n60, 226, 261
- Gospel of Truth* 80, 87, 98
- Government administration 107–9, 111, 117–21, 123, 139n162, 141
- Graffiti 40–41
- Grain 47, 50–51, 54n184, 111, 129n112, 133n136
- Graves: see Cemeteries / tombs
- Greater Harmony*, book of 66n45, 69
- Gregory of Nazianzus 153n35
- Hamra Dûm 1, 11, 18
- Hamuli 157
- Hathor monastery 44–45, 49, 51n167, 52, 116n41, 188, 236, 237n15
- Hebrews, epistle to the 162
- Heracléopolite nome 45n112
- Heresiologists 4, 57, 64–65, 89, 239
- Hermes Trismegistus 199n77, 205n99, 261
- Hermeticists 57
- Hermogenes, bishop 175n49
- Hermonthis 30n31
- Hermopolis (see also Ashmunein) 22n2, 23, 30, 45, 176n149, 220
- Hesiod 102n125
- High Dam 16
- Historia Lausiaca* (see also Palladius) 24, 189
- Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 22n2, 23, 45
- Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* 32–33, 41
- History of Joseph the Carpenter* 157
- History of Stephen the Protomartyr* 157
- Holy Spirit, the 88n83, 150, 173, 241, 259–60
- Homer 90, 102n125
- Horsiesios, Pachomian archimandrite 29n27, 31, 99n118, 167, 185n27, 188, 193nn55.58, 224, 251–52, 257n129, 258
- Hosea, book of 258
- Hypostasis of the Archons* 60, 90, 220n60, 242n44, 259n144
- Hypsicrates 203n90
- Imperial ordinances 104–5, 107, 110, 112, 123–26, 139

- Inflation 11, 110, 119–20
Interpretation of Knowledge 153
Introduction to the Knowledge of the Holy Resurrection 153
Investiture of St. Gabriel the Archangel 159
Investiture of St. Michael the Archangel 157, 158n61, 159, 161
 Irenaeus 64–65
 Isaac, biblical patriarch 148n7, 193
 Isaiah, book of 228–30
 Israel 128
- Jabal Abu Mana 22, 40, 42, 224–25
 Jabal al-Tarif / Gebel et-Tarif 11–18, 22, 30n31, 32n38, 39–40, 42, 54, 224, 256, 267
 – talus of 16, 19
 Jacob, biblical patriarch 148n7, 193
 James, brother of Jesus 81, 158, 261
 James, son of Alphaeus 157
 James the apostle 157
 Jeremias, monastery of at Saqqara 122n70
 Jerome 29n27, 129, 165, 203, 204, 215n39, 244–45
 Jerusalem 23, 158–59, 238n17, 258
 Jesus (see also Christ) 87–88, 149, 156, 162–63, 185, 191–92, 194, 259–61, 263
 Jews 38, 181n15
Jinn 17n49
 John, Apa, and archive of 44–46, 49, 138n161
 John Cassian 140, 212, 213n29
 John Chrysostom 158
 John the apostle 62, 81, 156–57, 159, 162–63
 John the Baptist
 – church of at Thinis 150n15, 152
 – see also *Passion of John the Baptist*
 John of Lycopolis 23–25, 45, 49n146, 138n161, 186n29
 John of Parallos 161, 177
 John Rylands Library 45n115, 46
 Jonah, book of 220–21
 Joshua, book of 228–30
Jubilees 69n60, 153n31
 Judas Iscariot 185n24
 Jude, epistle of 228n77
- Judgement Day 156
 Judith, book of 147
 Justinian, Emperor 31
- Kaior 23, 30n31
 Karanis 119
 Kellis 186n29
 Kelsey, Francis Willey 158n60
 Koddians 66
 Kurrah b. Sharik, Arab governor 126n94
- Labla monastery 44–45, 237n15
Laodiceans, Epistle to 148n7
 Latopolis (see also Esna) 30, 32n40, 33, 34n49, 214
Laughter of the Apostles 161
Lesser Harmony, book of 66n45, 69
Letter of Peter to Philip 59–60, 63n31, 261n154
 Libraries (see also Pachomians, libraries of; White Monastery, libraries of) 5, 8, 69, 151–52, 156, 204, 205, 263
 – Library of the Apostles 158–59
Life of Apa Onnophrius 33n49, 185n27, 260
Life of Apa Phib 181n15
Life of Pachomius 28, 32–33, 123, 132, 140, 154, 166, 170, 188, 196n69, 212n25, 249–51
 – *Arabic Life* 141, 260n151
 – *Bohairic Life* 29n27, 138, 141, 151, 167–69, 188
 – composition and redaction of 28, 29n27, 92, 154, 167–69, 248, 254
 – *Fifth Sahidic Life* 254
 – *First Greek Life / G¹* 29n27, 154, 167–68, 248, 253–56
 – Sahidic lives 29n27, 248n78
 – *Third Sahidic Life* 168
Life of St. Antony 27n23, 91–92, 259
Life of Stephen the Protomartyr 157
 Literacy: see Education
 Lithargoel 160
 Liturgy (see also Eucharist) 25, 214n37, 237n14
 Logos, the 87–88
 Luke the evangelist 156
 Lycopolis 22n2, 23, 161

- Macadonius, bishop and monk 33n49
- Macarius of Alexandria 27n21
- Macarius monastery at Scetis 29n27, 155, 156, 158n61, 161, 164
- Macarius the Egyptian 257n129
- Makarius of Tkow, panegyric of 181n15
- Mani 38, 235n4
- Manichaeans 1, 99, 149n14, 235n4
- Maria, sister of Pachomius 167–68
- Mark the evangelist 156–58
- Marsanes* 60, 90
- Martyrius, Pachomian archimandrite 32n34
- Matthew the evangelist 156–57, 185n24
- Melchizedek 81, 162
- Melitians 6, 9, 38, 44, 45, 61, 64, 71–72, 144, 147, 172n125, 182n16, 235–39, 264
- Melito of Sardis 186n32, 228n77, 231n86
- Memoirs of Pilate* 153
- Menander 102n125
- Mercurius Monastery at Edfu 32n40, 33n49, 155, 158n61, 159, 164, 188n33
- Metanoia, Pachomian monastery at 30, 215n39
- Micah, book of 254
- Michael the archangel (see also *Investiture of St. Michael the Archangel*; *Discourse on the Archangel Michael*) 156, 159n68, 160–62
- monastery of at Phantouou 33n49, 127, 150n15, 152, 155, 157, 158n61, 159–60
- Migration 214–17, 231
- Military: see Army, Roman
- Moses 81n41
- Mount of Olives 159
- Muhammad Ali 17n49
- Mysteries of St. John* 156
- Naasenes 56
- Nag Hammadi Codices
- bowl discovered with 41
- burial of 5–6, 19, 41, 151, 177
- cartonnage of 5n19, 8, 11, 22n2, 46–54, 62, 104–45, 236, 256, 267
- Codex I 10, 11n35, 41n94, 61, 104–5, 107, 109, 113, 114, 131, 187, 199, 208–9, 211, 213, 223, 225n73, 228n78, 242
- Codex II 5–6, 11n37, 48, 57n7, 60–61, 63, 83n55, 131, 183–89, 207, 208–9, 213, 220n60, 223, 225n73, 228, 255, 258–59
- Codex III 48, 60–63, 131n127, 189–93, 207, 208n5, 209n10, 215, 226–27, 229–30
- Codex IV 59–61, 104, 107, 109, 120–22, 191, 208–9, 211, 213, 219
- Codex V 5n19, 11, 60, 104, 107, 109, 117–121, 123, 141, 208–9, 211, 213, 226
- Codex VI 47, 57, 60, 90, 95n103, 104, 104, 107, 109, 120–22, 131, 197–206, 208–9, 211, 213–14, 223, 225n73, 226
- Codex VII 9–11, 11n37, 34, 46–48, 52–54, 56n3, 61–62, 104–5, 107, 109, 113, 123, 126, 129–31, 144–45, 178–83, 194–96, 206–9, 211, 213, 220, 226, 238, 247, 255
- Codex VIII 47, 59–62, 104, 109, 120, 125–26, 194, 206, 208–9, 211, 213, 219, 233
- Codex IX 47, 48n126, 104, 109, 131, 208–9, 211, 213, 226
- Codex X 48, 60, 131, 208, 209n10, 211, 223, 225n73
- Codex XI 10, 47, 61, 105, 109, 131, 208–9, 211, 213, 223, 225n73
- Codex XII 48, 60, 131n127, 208n5, 209n10
- Codex XIII 48, 60–61, 63, 131n127, 208n5, 209, 223, 225n73
- codicology of 9, 126–27, 207–33
- colophons of 6, 8, 5, 17n49, 53, 143–144, 178–207, 255–56, 267
- covers of 3, 10, 46, 104–5, 139, 142, 209n13
- dating of 9–11
- dimensions of 143, 225
- discovery of 11–19, 256
- jar buried in 6, 14, 17n49, 41–42, 177
- quires of 104–5, 142–43, 210–11, 225
- scribes of 6, 9, 57, 60, 104, 142, 153, 178–233
- sub-groups of 9, 131, 132n130, 208–14, 231
- Nag Hammadi texts
- dialects of 208, 214–17
- translation of 92, 94–101, 180

- transmission of 77, 92, 191, 214–17, 231, 262
- Nativity of Mary* 186n32, 228n77
- Nepheros, Apa, and archive of 44–45, 186n29
- Nestorian controversy 264
- Nestorius 38
- Nile, the 16, 17n50, 22, 26, 30n31, 39, 54, 214n36, 262
- Nitentori: see Tentyra
- Nitria 24, 247
- Noah 148n7, 162
- Nomina sacra* 48n126, 49n155, 54n184, 130, 200
- Nonnus 97
- Noria*, book of 66n45
- Noui 23, 30n31
- Nubia 22n2
- Nuns / nunneries (see also Pachomians; White Monastery) 26, 35, 54–55, 61
- Ode of Solomon* 228n77
- Oil 108, 109, 112n35, 113–16
- Olympiodorus of Thebes 97
- On the Origin of the World* 60, 90, 242n44, 258–59
- Ophites 56
- Origen 29n27, 38, 64–65, 71, 72n74, 73, 151, 153–54, 167–68, 172, 235, 238–45, 247–50, 263
- *Commentary on John* 153
- Origenist controversy 29n27, 153–54, 238–50, 255, 263–64
- Origenists 6, 9, 38, 64–65, 71–72, 92, 235, 238–50, 256
- OxCal calibration 218n51
- Oxyrhynchite dialect 217–18
- Oxyrhynchus 45, 163, 200n80, 202, 217
- P⁶⁶ (Gospel of John): see Dishna Papers, P. Bodmer II
- P⁷⁵ (Gospels of Luke and John): see Dishna Papers, P. Bodmer XIV–XV
- Pachomians 1–3, 5–7, 9, 14n40, 23, 27–36, 39, 52, 58, 64, 70, 72n70, 75–76, 79, 104–10, 116, 117n46, 127, 130, 131n128, 132–41, 145, 151, 164, 188, 206, 210–16, 224–25, 231–39, 246–56, 259n141, 261, 263–67
- administrators (*oikonomoi*) of 52, 105, 110–11, 113, 123, 133–34, 167n95, 212n25
- annual audit of 108, 110
- clergy among 134, 236–37
- conflicts among 55, 250–52
- donations of property to 120, 140–41
- education of 28, 106, 212, 253–55
- exegesis of Scripture by 254–56, 258
- later history of 30n33, 31
- libraries of 165–69, 211, 231, 253
- nunneries of 26–27, 30n31, 34, 113, 167
- occupations of 27–28, 133, 134n139
- Passover celebration of 108, 122n70
- *praecepta* / rules of 29n27, 34, 54–55, 154, 165, 189, 212, 213n39, 237, 249, 251, 253, 254
- private property among 213n29, 251
- record keeping practices of 108, 110, 123, 167
- scribes and *scriptoria* of 28, 211–13, 215–16
- Pachomius (see also *Life of Pachomius*) 19, 27n21, 29, 34–36, 55, 68, 122n70, 128, 132, 134–35, 138, 167, 185nn26.27, 189, 196–97, 237n15, 248, 250–55, 257, 260
- death of 33, 166, 235, 251
- letters of 29n27, 36n65, 188, 196, 212n25, 215n39, 224
- Pachomius / Pachome (in P. Nag Hamm. C6) 48, 105, 130, 132, 135–37, 145, 238, 247, 267
- Paieous, Apa, and archive of 44–45, 49, 51n167, 52, 116n41, 186n29
- Palamon 19, 22, 32–33, 52, 68
- Palestine 66, 68–69
- Palladius 22n2, 24–27, 45, 54, 92, 113n36, 189, 212
- Pamprepius 97
- Panarion*: see Epiphanius
- Panopolis (see also Shmin) 26–27, 30, 34, 36–37, 97, 113n36, 117n46, 136n146, 155, 176, 212, 214, 224n67, 240
- Paphnoute, Pachomian *oikonomos* 105, 132, 136, 138

- Paphnutius, Apa, and archive of 44–45
 Paphnutius, Pachomian archimandrite 32n34
Paralipomena 116, 248–50
 Parallos 161
Paraphrase of Seth 57n4, 66n45
Paraphrase of Shem 57n4, 261n153
Passion of John the Baptist 157
 Patchelphius 247
 Paul of Tamma 257
 Paul the apostle 81, 83, 93, 157, 172, 189, 193, 253, 255, 259, 261
 – apocryphal correspondence with the Corinthians 228n77, 233
 Pbow (see also Faw Qibli) 16n47, 19, 27, 30, 105, 108, 113, 132, 136, 137n155, 151, 169, 212n25, 225n71, 231, 247, 256
 – basilica of 16n47, 41–43
 – flooding of 16n
 Pcol, founder of White Monastery 35–36
 Pesterposen 30n31
 Peter the apostle 23, 81, 149, 156, 159, 261
 Peter the Archontic 68–69
 Peter IV, archbishop of Alexandria 161
 Petronius, Pachomian archimandrite 31, 34, 140–41
 Phantouu 127, 150n15, 155, 157, 158n60, 159–60
 Phibionites 66
 Philae 33
 Philastrius of Brescia 149n12, 185n27
 Philemon, Paul's epistle to 127
 Philip the apostle 81, 156–57
 Philosophy 25, 54, 60, 74–77, 90–95, 102, 235n4
 Phnoum 30n31, 33, 136
 Plato 91, 95
 – *Republic* of 63n31, 90, 95n103
 Platonism (see also Philosophy) 60
 Pontius Pilate 150, 153
 Prayer 6, 39, 52, 93, 183, 188, 207, 234, 254, 257, 260n152, 264
Prayer of Thanksgiving 63n31, 197–201, 204, 205n99
Prayer of the Apostle Paul 186, 22n78
Preaching of John 161
 Priests 48–49, 134, 136n146, 236–37
 Priscillian of Avila 148–49, 164, 172, 177, 255, 263, 266
 Priscillianists 149n14
 Prochoros the archdeacon 157
 Prophecy (see also Clairvoyance; Visions) 24, 128
 Proteria (in P. Nag Hamm. 72) 47–50, 134
 Protest exegesis 80, 83
 Psalms 19, 39–40, 153n35, 203, 228n77, 253
 Pshenthbo, father of Petronius 140–41
 Pshintbahse, Pachomian archimandrite 32n34
 Pshoi, monastery of: see Red Monastery
 Ptolemais 30n31

Questions of Mary 66n45

 Radiocarbon dating 10, 209n13
 Recycling (see also Cartonnage) 140
 Red Monastery 35n60
Remnuoth 129
 Repentance 257
 Resurrection 234, 238–39, 241–48, 254–56, 264
 Rhossus, church of 149n11
 Roman Empire 58, 70, 125
 Romans, Paul's epistle to 81n41, 93, 216n45
 Rubbish heaps 108, 139, 143–44
 Rufinus 245, 257n130

Sabakh 16
 Sabinus, bishop 175n49
 Sahidic dialect 215–16, 220, 229
 Sakla(s) 86n64, 160
 Saklatabôth 160
 Sansnos, Apa, priest and monk 44, 47–53, 104, 107, 126, 129–30, 132, 134–35, 136n146, 142, 144, 236–37
 Sansnos the shepherd 48
 Saouina, estate manager and Pachomian monk 141–42
 Saqqara 122n70
 Sarah, biblical matriarch 193
 Scetis 29n27, 32
 Scheide Codex 217–18
 Schøyen, Martin 11n35, 41n94, 114

- Schøyen MS 2650 (Gospel of Matthew) 218–19
- Scribes (of NHCs: see Nag Hammadi Codices, scribes of) 28
- Scriptoria* 28, 211–13, 217
- Scripture: see Bible
- Second Peter 82–83, 186n32, 228n77
- Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 4, 56n3, 180–81
- Secrecy 75–76, 96
- Secundians 66
- Sentences of Sextus* 60
- Septuagint 83
- Serapion, bishop of Antioch 149n11
- Seth 4, 56, 59, 69, 81, 192n53
- Sethians 4, 56–65, 72n72, 74–76
- Sheep 47n124, 51, 53–54, 130, 140
- Shem 81, 261
- Sheneset (see also Chenoboskion) 5, 19, 30n30–31, 32–33, 46, 52, 105, 116, 131n128, 237n15, 256
- Shenoute 26, 34–38, 64, 71–73, 97, 113, 117n46, 122n70, 126n93, 128, 136n146, 138, 142n174, 154, 164, 166, 170–76, 182, 189, 205, 237, 239–41, 244, 246, 249–50, 255, 263–64
- *And It Happened One Day* 240
 - canons of 171
 - *I Am Amazed* 172–74, 175, 181n15, 240, 243n46
 - rules of 36n63
 - *So Listen* 258
 - *Who Speaks Through the Prophet* 244
 - *You, God the Eternal* 175n145
- Shepherd of Hermas* 147, 153
- Shmin 30, 110n27
- Silvanus, coworker of Paul 81n40
- Simon the apostle 157–58
- Sne 34
- Socratists 66
- Sophia 61, 63
- Sophia of Jesus Christ*: see *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*
- Sophocles 102n125
- Souls 234, 239, 241–43, 246, 253, 257–58, 264
- Spiritual names 193, 206
- Spiritual progress 89, 253, 255
- Stephen the protomartyr 159
- Stephen of Thebes 257
- Stratiotics 66
- Susanna, book of 231n86
- Swine 51n168, 117n46
- Tabennesi 29–30, 34, 112n33, 132, 133n138, 167, 225, 234n2, 248
- Tabennesiots (see also Pachomians) 23, 234
- Tabula ansata* 197–98
- Talis, Amma 25–26
- Taxation / tax collection 107, 109–10, 117n50, 120–21, 123, 125, 133n138, 139n162, 141
- Teachings of Adam* 161
- Teachings of Silvanus* 61, 81n40, 88, 194, 241, 256–57
- Temples 37, 136n146, 176
- Tentyra (Nitentori) 112
- Tertullian 203
- Testament of Our Holy Fathers* 158n61
- Testimony of Truth* 63n31, 242n44
- Thaddaeus the apostle 157–58
- Thbew 30n31, 34, 140
- Thebaid 9, 22, 23, 25, 32, 36–39, 45, 107, 110n27, 117–19, 120n63, 176, 216, 237n15, 238, 244, 247
- dukes of 97
 - Lower 22n2, 33
 - Upper 22n2, 33, 111n30, 117
- Theban magical papyri 74
- Thebes 155, 224n67
- Theodore, Pachomian archimandrite 23, 30n31, 31, 34, 39, 136, 138, 150n19, 166n91, 167–69, 188, 193n55, 224, 247, 252, 254–55, 257n129, 258
- Theodosius, Emperor 24
- Theodotus of Ancyra 153n35
- Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria 30, 38, 64, 72–73, 154, 168, 238–40, 242, 247, 264
- *Festal Letter* of 401 72, 172, 239nn25.27, 243n46, 252n105
 - *Festal Letter* of 402 239n25
 - *Festal Letter* of 404 239n25
- Thinis 150n15, 152
- Thmoushons 30n30–31, 34, 251

- Thomas, monastery of at Wadi Sarga 122n70
- Thomas the apostle 81, 157, 185
- Three Steles of Seth* 4, 56n3, 61, 64n32, 98, 178, 180–81, 194
- Thunder: Perfect Mind* 63n31
- Timothy II, archbishop of Alexandria 158–59, 181n15, 188n33
- Tobit, book of 147
- Torah 81n41
- Touton monastery and scriptorium 127
- Travels of Peter* 69n60
- Treatise on the Resurrection* 83, 90, 153, 213, 244, 255–56
- Trimorphic Protennoia* 60, 88
- Trinity, the 151, 196
- Tripartite Tractate* 83, 98, 213, 242
- Triphiodorus 97
- Tse 30n31
- Tsmine 30n31
- Tura papyri 92n93, 154
- Turin 152n25
- Upper Egypt: see Egypt, Upper
- Urban intellectuals 90–101, 200, 217
- Valentinian Exposition* 88
- Valentinians 57, 61
- Vatican Library 155n43
- Victor, Pachomian archimandrite 32n34
- Victor, White Monastery scribe 194n63
- Virgin Mary 156–57, 162
- Visions (see also Clairvoyance; Prophecy) 6, 59, 70, 167n97, 234, 253–54, 261, 264, 266
- Visions of Dorotheus* 233
- Wadi Natrun 29n27
- Wadi Sarga 122n70
- Wadi Sheikh Ali 40–42, 188n35, 224n67
- Wagons 50, 52, 130, 140
- Waste-paper trade 139–40, 143–44
- Weaving 113
- White Monastery federation 26–27, 34–35, 113, 122n70, 142n174, 150n15, 152, 155–56, 1569n66, 161, 164, 193n55
- inscriptions at 170n109, 185n27, 188n35
- libraries of 29n27, 35n61, 36, 156–57, 170–75, 182
- nunnery of 35
- Wine 108, 111, 119–22
- Wisdom of Jesus Christ* 64n32, 90, 163, 261n154
- Wisdom of Solomon* 147
- Wisdom of Sirach* 147
- Wool 53, 113, 130
- World renunciation (see also Anticosmicism) 32, 68, 74, 85, 107, 133
- Yaldabaoth/Yaltabaôth 86n64, 87, 160
- Zacchaeans 66
- Zacharias, abbot 160, 164
- Zeno of Verona 149n12
- Zoroaster 194
- Zosimus the alchemist 74
- Zostrianos* 59, 64n32, 98, 194, 232–33, 261n153