

MONASTICISM AND GNOSIS IN EGYPT

It was near the site of the first Pachomian foundations, in an abandoned cemetery, near Kasr es-Sayyad,¹ that the Coptic manuscripts -- most of them gnostic² -- known as the Nag Hammadi Library were discovered. That proximity, as well as the dates discovered on the fragments of papyri used to strengthen the leather covers of the *codices*,³ seemed to confirm that the decline of gnosticism in Egypt coincided with the growth of Christian monasticism.⁴ The question of the relationship between gnosticism and Christian monasticism, especially Pachomian cenobitism, was then raised.⁵

The question acquired a greater importance when John Barns claimed he could demonstrate that at least some of those *codices* had been made in a Pachomian monastery or, in any case, by Pachomian monks.⁶ Although it was soon proved that Barns, in his precipitation, had stated more than the paleographical data permitted,⁷ the close relationship between the Nag Hammadi Library and Pachomian cenobitism has been taken for granted ever since.⁸ On that fragile basis many hypotheses were put forward concerning the reasons for which the monks would have assembled those documents in the first place and later on got rid of them. It seems that the time has come to analyze and evaluate each one of those theories.

¹ - James M. Robinson has treated all the questions concerning the place and the date of the discoveries of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts in several publications. His most detailed presentation is probably: "From the Cliff to Cairo. The Story of the Discoverers and the Middlemen of the Nag Hammadi Codices".

² - Several of the texts from the Nag Hammadi Library are not gnostic. See the list given by G. Quispel, "The *Gospel of Thomas* Revisited", pp. 254-255.

³ - See *Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*; et James M. Robinson, "The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices".

⁴ - See F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", p. 433. The connection had already been mentioned by J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypte*, pp. 135-138 and by R. McL Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament*, p. 87.

⁵ - According to Epiphanius' testimony, some gnostic sects were still active in Egypt in the middle of the IVth century. See Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion*, 1977, p. 23.

⁶ - J. Barns, "Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices" (1975). His findings had already been presented in 1972 in "The International Committee for the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Progress Report", *New Testament Studies* 18 (1972), p. 240 and *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex VII*, Leyden, 1972, p. ix (in J. M. Robinson' Introduction).

⁷ - See E.G. Turner's commentary, in Appendix to J. Barns' posthumous article: "Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices", pp. 17-18; and J. C. Shelton, in the Introduction to *Nag Hammadi codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*, pp. 1-11.

⁸ - Säve-Söderbergh, in "The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism", p. 74, speaks of "the established connection between the library and the Pachomians"; and still more recently R. van den Broek, in "The Present State of Gnostic Studies", p. 47, affirms that: "The books were bound in a Pachomian monastery in the middle of the fourth century"

Three series of questions can be distinguished, each one requiring the elaboration of a good methodology.⁹

- The first series concerns the historical contacts that may or may not have existed between Pachomian monks and the manuscripts discovered near Nag Hammadi at the end of 1945.

- The second series concerns the literary contacts that can or cannot be demonstrated between documents known through the Nag Hammadi Library and the early monastic literature in general.

- Finally a third series will deal with the points of contact of a historical and doctrinal character between the two great universal human archetypes, monasticism and gnosticism.

I : The Nag Hammadi Library and Pachomian cenobitism

Before analyzing the various hypotheses concerning the possible relationship between Pachomian monasticism and the Nag Hammadi documents, it might be useful to make a quick survey of the origin and first development of Pachomian cenobitism.¹⁰

Origin of Pachomian Cenobitism

Pachomius was born in Egypt, in the diocese of Sne¹¹ (a little to the South of Shenaset, in the diocese of Diospolis Parva) in 292. After becoming a Christian in 312-313, he settled down at Tabennesi about ten years later in order to live monastic life there. Before coming to that place he had been initiated into monastic life by the old man Palamon near Shenaset, where he had lived for three years after his baptism.¹²

It was in 324 that Pachomius began to receive disciples, and their number increased so rapidly that he had to make a foundation in Phbow as early as 329. That was the beginning of a long series of foundations. Some of them were, as in the case of Phbow, simply an offshoot of a too populated monastery. But in other cases, for example in Shmin, the foundation was a response to a request made by a bishop who wanted a monastery in his diocese. And there were cases, as in Thmoushons and Thbew, where existing communities asked to be incorporated in the Pachomian *Koinonia* so as to live according to Pachomius rules and under his authority.¹³

We can divide the foundations into two groups, geographically and probably also chronologically -- although the chronological data of the Lives are not absolutely consistent.¹⁴

⁹ - The only general study of the whole question is that of G.G. Stroumsa, "Ascèse et gnose. Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique"; A. Guillaumont also gave good methodological orientation in "Gnose et Monachisme" (in *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique*).

¹⁰ - For an easy access to all the Pachomian sources I dare to refer to my English translation of the whole *corpus*: *Pachomian Koinonia. The Lives, Rules and other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, 3 vol. (1980-1982). In the introduction to each one of the volumes the reader will find all the technical information concerning each document and the mention of all the existing editions. I had already presented the whole Pachomian *corpus* in *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle* (1968), pp. 1-158. The first volume of my French translation of the *corpus* has just appeared in the collection *Spiritualité orientale* of the Abbey of Bellefontaine (France): *La Vie de saint Pachôme selon la tradition copte (= Spiritualité orientale -- 38)*, Bellefontaine 1984. I will use the sigla that are now generally accepted: Bo = the Bohairic *Life* of Pachomius; S¹, S², etc. = the first Sahidic *Life*, the second Sahidic *Life*, etc.; SBo = the standard Coptic *Life* known through the various Sahidic fragments (S⁴, S⁵, etc.), the Bohairic translation (Bo) and the Arabic translation of the Vatican (Av); G¹, G², etc = the first Greek *Life*, the second Greek *Life*, etc.; Paral. = the *Paralipomena*; EpAm = the *Letter of Bishop Ammon*.

¹¹ - SBo 3; and not in Shenaset, as Sève-Söderbergh says in "Holy Scriptures or Apostolic Documentations", p. 6.

¹² - S¹ 1-9; SBo 3-22; G¹ 3-23.

¹³ - SBo 23-58; G¹ 24-54 and 80-83.

¹⁴ - See D.J. Chitty, "A Note on the Chronology of Pachomian Foundations", *Studia Patristica* Vol. II (*Texte und Untersuchungen*, 64), Berlin, 1957, pp. 379-385.

The first four foundations, made in 329 and in the following years, were very close to one another in time and space, and Pachomius seems to have kept an immediate personal authority over all of them during the first years. It was, after Tabennesi and Phbow, Shenaset (a little to the west of Phbow) and Thmoushons (a little further on the other shore of the Nile, but always in the same diocese). With Thbew a second series of foundations was initiated, made probably towards the end of Pachomius' life, between 340 and 345. The first three ones of that group were near one another in the region of Shmin, and a fourth and last one was in a completely different direction, rather far down south from the first group, at Phnoum. At a rather early date Pachomius gave to Petronios, (who had founded and administered the monastery of Thbew before it was integrated into the Pachomian *Koinonia* , a general responsibility over all the monasteries of the region of Shmin.¹⁵

Petronios succeeded Pachomius at the head of the *Koinonia* in 346, but for only a few months. He was replaced by Horsiesius who, after a serious crisis of authority, was obliged to hand the government over to Theodore five years later. At Theodore's death, in 368, Horsiesius assumed again the direction of the *Koinonia* till his own death around 380.¹⁶

I mentioned that crisis in order to stress the fact that according to what the sources say very clearly, it was a crisis of authority and not -- as was claimed at times -- a crisis of orthodoxy.¹⁷ The "ancients" (*oi archaioi*) of the community were the initiators of that crisis. Who were they? The study of the various contexts where that expression is used reveals that it is a question here of "ancients" in the obvious meaning of the word, that is, those who were the first to come to the *Koinonia*. There is no justification for assimilating them to a group of "perfectones" in the community.¹⁸ On the contrary, the *Lives* seem to enjoy depicting them as not so perfect! They leaned towards murmur and they did not like too much to be governed by someone younger than themselves.¹⁹

At the time of Pachomius' death, the *Koinonia* was composed of nine monasteries of men and two of women. The number of the monks may have reached the figure of a few thousands.²⁰ But it would be an exaggeration to say that the Pachomians dominated the whole monastic world of the region. As a matter of fact, the growth of Pachomian monasticism slowed down precisely at that time. No foundation was made during Horsiesius' first superior ship, from 346 to 350, and only two foundations of monks and one of nuns during the eighteen years of Theodore's mandate, from 350 to 368.²¹ The period that followed is less well known but we have no indication of foundations made during the twelve years or so of Horsiesius' second mandate.

¹⁵ - SBo 56-57; G¹ 80.

¹⁶ - SBo 123-end; G¹ 116-end.

¹⁷ - That crisis was studied at length, although from the limited point of view of the concept of poverty, by B. Bückler, *Die Armut der Armen. Ueber den ursprünglichen Sinn der mönchischen Armut*.

¹⁸ - As does J. Dechow in "The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies", pp. 13-14.

¹⁹ - See, for example, SBo 69 and G¹ 77 (cf. Paral. I) ; SBo 92 and G¹ 100.

²⁰ - Jerome, in the preface to his translation of the Rule of Pachomius speaks of 50,000 monks. That obviously is an exaggeration. Palladius, who certainly does not tend to use small figures, speaks in his *Historia Lausiaca* of 1,300 monks (according to chap. 32,8; or of 1,400 according to chap. 18,13) living in Phbow during his time, the other monasteries having between 200 and 300 monks each.

²¹ - SBo 134.

At the very time when the development of Pachomian cenobitism was considerably slowing down, after the founder's death, monasticism developed rapidly in some other places in Egypt. Amoun retired to Nitria in 325, and by the end of the century, his disciples had reached the figure of five thousand monks. In 330 Macarius the Egyptian withdrew to Scethis, followed by several disciples. The Kellia were founded in 338, and Paladius spoke of six hundred monks there in 390.²²

Even in Upper Egypt there were not only Pachomian monasteries. Palamon, Pachomius' master, had several disciples, and there is no reason to think that they followed Pachomius.²³ The latter's first disciples were Coptic peasants without any previous monastic background.²⁴ There were probably in the region several monastic groups similar to that of Palamon; an example would be the community where Theodore lived before he came to Tabennesi.²⁵ While a few of those groups joined Pachomius' *Koinonia*,²⁶ most did not. The *Lives of Pachomius* often show him and his monks in contact with non-pachomian monastic groups -- some orthodox, some not.²⁷ We also know the existence of communities of Meletian monks in Upper Egypt as early as 334, and they continued in existence for a long time.²⁸ And Epiphanius affirms that he met gnostic groups there in the middle of the fourth century, therefore at the same time.

One should not forget either that some monasteries followed the regulations of Pachomius (or of the Tabennesiots) -- often modifying them -- without, for all that, belonging to the Pachomian *Koinonia* or Congregation. That was the case of the monastery of Canopos near Alexandria²⁹ and also of the great White Monastery of Atripe, near Shmin, where Pjöl, the great Shenoute's uncle,

²² - See A. Guillaumont, "Histoire des moines aux Kellia".

²³ - SBo 10.16.18.

²⁴ - S¹ 10-14; SBo 23 and G¹ 24.

²⁵ - SBo 31 and G¹ 33.

²⁶ - SBo 50.51.56; G¹ 54.80.83.

²⁷ - See for example SBo 28 and G¹ 30 (the bishop of Nitentori wants to have Pachomius ordained by Athanasius so as to be able to establish him over all the monks of his diocese, but Pachomius runs away); SBo 29-30 and G¹ 33-35 (monastery of the region of Sne where Theodore lived before coming to Tabennesi); SBo 40 and G¹ 40 (on the reception of visiting monks -- cf. *Præcepta* 51-52 of the Rule of Pachomius); SBo 42 and G¹ 42 (a non-pachomian monastery only three kilometers away from Tabennesi); SBo 68 and G¹ 76 (a bishop sends a monk of his diocese to Pachomius to be judged by him); etc. In his book, *Die Armut der Armen...*, B. Büchler has a section on the question of the encounter of Pachomius with heterodox currents: *Pachomius und heterodoxe Strömungen*, pp. 138-145; he says, for example: "Uebereinstimmend geben die Texte Zeugnis davon, dass im unmittelbaren Umkreis des *Pachomius* heterodoxe Strömungen hervortraten und heterodoxe Mönche lebten" (p. 138); and: "Als gesichert will uns darum mindestens folgende Auffassung scheinen: es gab schon zur Zeit des *Pachomius* "fremde Mönche", mit denen *Pachomius* und die mit *Pachomius* keine Gemeinschaft hatte(n)" (p. 141).

²⁸ - In SBo 129 Antony's disciples express their displeasure for being asked whether they are Meletians, when they visit the monasteries of the Pachomian *Koinonia*. EpAm 12 tells us that Pachomius was bothered by them, as well as by the Marcionites during his first few years as a Christian. These Meletians were the followers of Meletios, bishop of Lycopolis in Egypt, not to be confused with the other Meletians, followers of Meletios of Antioch, a half century later. This early Meletian schism seems to have originated with Meletios' disagreement with Peter, archbishop of Alexandria (+311), over the treatment of the *lapsi* during the Decian persecution. Later on they went into the camp of the Arians and were bitter enemies of Athanasius. In fact it is mostly with them and their apocryphal books that Athanasius is preoccupied in his famous Festal Letter of 367, of which we will speak here below. The papyri published by H. Idris Bell in *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, British Museum, 1924, inform us about Meletian monks who lived in the vicinity of Antony around 330. There were still Meletian monks in Egypt in the VIth century, as is witnessed by two contracts signed in 512 and 513 by a certain Eulogios, son of Joseph, who introduces himself as "a former Meletian monk, now orthodox"; see A. H. Sayce, "Deux contrats grecs du Fayoum", dans *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 3 (1890), pp. 131-144.

²⁹ - Around 390, the patriarch Theophilus, Cyril's uncle and great anti-origenist, destroyed the temple of Serapis in Canopos, about 20 miles to the north-east of Alexandria and established there a monastery where he invited Pachomian monks. See P. Ladeuze, *Etude sur le cénobitisme pachômien pendant le IV^e siècle et la première moitié du V^e*, p. 202 and A. Favale, *Teofilo d'Alessandria (345-412): Scritti, Vita e Dottrina*, Turin, 1958, pp. 61-71; see also H. Bacht, *Das Vermächtnis des Ursprungs. Studien zum frühen Mönchtum I*, Würzburg, 1972, pp. 9-10.

had introduced a Pachomian rule.³⁰ That the White Monastery did not belong to the Pachomian *Koinonia* is proved by the fact that it is never numbered among the Pachomian foundations in the *Lives*, which were written at a time when the White Monastery was certainly already in existence.

At that time the name of *Tabennesiots* is attributed not only to all the Pachomian monks, but also to all those who lived according to Pachomius' rules. And therefore, when a chronicler tells us that he has visited Tabennesiot monks, one should not necessarily conclude that he went as far South as Tabennesi. Cassian probably never saw a monastery of the Pachomian *Koinonia*;³¹ and Palladius did not go further than Shmin in Upper Egypt.³² There is therefore no conclusion to be drawn from the fact that the origenist Palladius was well received by Tabennesiot monks!³³

This may be the occasion to mention that Palladius, in his Pachomian chronicle, in chapters 32-34 of the *Lausiaca History*, used a written source originating from a non-pachomian milieu, as René Draguet has demonstrated.³⁴ The famous *Regula Angeli*, that was to become so popular during all the Middle Ages, is in clear contradiction with the *Life* and the authentic *Rules* of Pachomius on so many points that it can absolutely not come from a Pachomian milieu.³⁵ It must be used with extreme caution. And one should not forget that it is in the Palladian chronicle and not in any authentic Pachomian document that we find a list of crafts exercised in the Pachomian monasteries, in which "tanners" are mentioned.

It was said during the last few years that the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library will oblige us to do a new evaluation of what we know of the Pachomian origins.³⁶ If by this one means that it is still more necessary than before to bring as much light as possible on the various problems of textual, literary and historical criticism of the Pachomian sources, everyone will agree. But it would be wrong to think that such light can come-- barring an exception or two -- from documents of the Nag Hammadi Library. One cannot elucidate what is clearer by what is more obscure. Now, it is a fact that a good deal of the critical problems concerning the Pachomian sources have been solved --although much still remains to be done³⁷ -- while the question of the

³⁰ - Shenoute became a monk at the White Monastery in 370 or 371. (see J. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national-ägyptischen Christentums*, Leipzig 1903, pp. 42-44). That monastery must therefore have been founded by Pjoi around the middle of the century; certainly before the time when the *Life* of Pachomius and Theodore (+ 368) received its definitive form in Coptic and in Greek. But the White Monastery is never mentioned in it among the monasteries of the Pachomian *Koinonia*.

³¹ - See A. Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle*, pp. 146-154.

³² - *Ibidem*, pp. 138-146.

³³ - As does T. Säve-Söderbergh, "Holy Scriptures or Apostolic Documentations?", p. 11.

³⁴ - See R. Draguet, "Le chapitre de HL sur les Tabennésites dérive-t-il d'une source copte?", in *Le Muséon* 57 (1944), pp. 53-145; 58 (1945), pp. 15-95.

³⁵ - On the evolution of modern criticism about Palladius, especially concerning the *Regula Angeli*, see A. Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle*, pp. 138-146.

³⁶ - For example, recently, C. Kannengiesser, in his review of the Acts of the *Colloque international sur les textes de Nag Hammadi* tenu à Québec en août 1978, in *Recherches de science religieuse* 70 (1982), p. 619.

³⁷ - For a good, succinct, and up-to-date presentation of the scientific criticism of the Pachomian sources, see B. Büchler, *Die Armut der Armen...*, pp.14-19 (*Ueberblick über den Forschungsstand*). Concerning the *Lives*, see J. Vergote, "La valeur des Vies grecques et coptes de S. Pakhôme", in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 8 (1977), pp. 175-186.

origin of the Nag Hammadi Library and of the circumstances in which those documents were buried is still surrounded by a deep mystery.³⁸

The cartonnages of some of the *codices* may help to solve part of the mystery.

The cartonnage of the codices from the Nag Hammadi Library

The *codices* of the Nag Hammadi Library were found in 1945 on the side of the Jabal al-Tarif cliff, near Kasr es-Sayyad, a few kilometers from the site of the first three Pachomian foundations (Tabennesi, Phbow and Shenaset). The question was then raised of possible contacts between those documents and Pachomian monasticism.³⁹ The geographical proximity, however, does not prove anything, for we know that other monastic groups -- orthodox as well as heterodox -- existed in the area, to say nothing of the existence of monks leading an eremitical form of life, a fact to which the *Life of Pachomius* bears witness.

But there is something more to it. The leather bindings of eight of these *codices* were strengthened with pieces of used papyrus; and their examination has revealed very interesting information. First of all, the fact that some of these fragments bear dates ranging from 333 to 348 gives us a date *postquam* for the fabrication of these books. It must have taken place somewhat right after Pachomius' death.⁴⁰

After a study of these fragments, most of which are very small and extremely difficult to interpret, John Barns had rapidly concluded -- not without some degree of enthusiasm -- to the Pachomian origin of the *codices*.⁴¹ Since the publication of Barns' first provisional report, most of the scholars seem to have taken that conclusion as definitively demonstrated, although J.C. Shelton and others, re-evaluating Barns' own arguments, have clearly shown that things were not that evident.⁴²

Without here going over all the aspects of that problem which other scholars have studied more in detail, let us review rapidly the main aspects of the question.⁴³

From the point of view of possible Pachomian contacts, the only documents that are clearly relevant are those found in the cartonnage of *codex VII*. The documents found in the cartonnage of other *codices* (I, IV, V, VI, VIII, IX and XI) are mostly fragments of accounts of taxation, of contracts, etc. Nothing there has any specifically monastic flavor. Certainly not, for example, that contract from the cartonnage of *codex I*, signed between a guild of oil-workers and the city of Diospolis Parva. Barns, it is true, saw a monastic background precisely in that fragment; but it was because he read the Greek word *monè* where we must read *kômè*, and because he took for a

³⁸ - On the present state of the research on this question, see R. van den Broek, "The Present State of Gnostic Studies".

³⁹ - According to the figures given by W.C. Unnik, *Evangelien aus dem Nilsand*, Frankfurt, 1960, p. 13, the site of the discovery is 12 km from Tabennesi, 8 km from Phbow, and 9 km from Shenaset. The distances given by J. Robinson in his Introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, pp. 21sq are slightly different (Phbow : 5,3 km and Shenaset 8,7 km), but that slight difference is without importance.

⁴⁰ - Photographic edition of all those fragments in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Cartonnage*, Leiden, 1979; English translation in *Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*, Edited by J.W.B. Barns+, G.M. Browne et J.C. Shelton, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1981.

⁴¹ - Cf. *supra*, note 6.

⁴² - Cf. *supra*, notes 7 and 8.

⁴³ - For a succinct presentation of the various theories, see G.G. Stroumsa, "Ascèse et gnose. Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique", p. 558, and R. van den Broek, "The Present State of Gnostic Studies", pp. 47-49.

monastic superior the *proestôs* mentioned there and who was the chairman of the guild of oil-workers.

While Barns tended to see too easily a monastic background in these texts, it is possible that Shelton rejected that possibility too systematically, as Dechow has showed.⁴⁴ For example, one cannot exclude the possibility of some accounts coming from a monastery simply because the figures are so high that they invite us to think of the accounts of a civilian or military administration.⁴⁵ For, if the Pachomian monasteries were as populated as they are told to have been, to supply them must have required a considerable quantity of some products. But, when all is said, it remains that some of those documents clearly come from a civilian administration, as, for example, the taxation accounts; and one wonders how they came into the hands of the monks. The hypothesis of the Pachomian origin of those documents is not ruled out; but it is not confirmed by any thing really positive.

There remains the cartonnage of *codex VII*. It is the most important of all, for it is there that Barns found the largest number of indications of a Pachomian origin. In any case, we find in them some documents of an unquestionably religious character and a few explicit mentions of "monks".

The religious documents in question are a few fragments of the Book of Genesis⁴⁶ and an exhortation to virtue that may come either from a homily or from a letter. Barns made the suggestion that its author could have been Pachomius. That is not impossible; but there is no positive reason whatsoever to attribute it to Pachomius rather than to anybody else. Would it not be surprising, however, that Pachomian monks (if they are those who made the cartonnage) would have used papyri containing writings of their father Abba Pachomius to strengthen the leather cover of a book, barely a few years after the founder's death? In the same line, I think that Shelton is right when he writes: "I do not know whether a fourth-century monastery would be more or less likely than other groups or individuals to use bits of Holy Scripture to strengthen a book cover".⁴⁷

The same cartonnage of *codex VII* contains also some fragments of contracts from which not much can be learned, except that they can be dated between 336 and 348. Finally, we find there also an important collection of private letters, most of them in Greek, in which, for the first time, one can read clear references to monks. Every time the religious orientation of the writers can be discerned, they always appear to be Christians, and one cannot perceive any suggestion either of orthodoxy or heterodoxy.

In reality, there are only two letters in the cover of *codex VII* that unquestionably were either written to or by monks: nos.72 and C8. The first is a letter written by a woman to two monks named Sansnos and Psatos. She asks them to try to find some chaff for her asses and let her know how much it costs per wagonload. All these details, according to Shelton, would suppose a context quite different from the Pachomian one. Jon Dechow reacted rather forcefully to that position, which he considers based upon a preconceived and too narrow idea of the practice of separation from the world in the Pachomian monasteries. I agree with Dechow in saying that Shelton refuses too easily the possibility of the monks in question being Pachomian. But, on the

⁴⁴ - Jon F. Dechow, "The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies".

⁴⁵ - However that hypothesis should not be excluded, as we will see below.

⁴⁶ - These fragments were published by R. Kasser, "Fragments du livre biblique de la Genèse cachés dans la reliure d'un codex gnostique", in *Le Muséon* 85 (1972), pp. 65-89.

⁴⁷ - J.C. Shelton, *Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*, Introduction, p. 4

other hand, I would insist on saying that nothing indicates, even indirectly, that they were. Moreover, I cannot but find it a little difficult to reconcile that kind of request made by a woman to two monks with the image of a Pachomian monastery that we can gather from the Pachomian sources. Of course I am ready to admit that the sources may be giving us an edited image of reality; but here again, this would have to be proved. And in any case, nothing allows us to know what the unedited image would have been! The situation of free association between individuals looking after their own needs, to which J. Dechow makes a reference, is clearly presented in the *Life of Pachomius* as a situation of transition that came to an end very soon after the beginnings, around 328.⁴⁸ The cartonnage that can be dated are from 336-348, well after that date.

The possibility of a monastic context is present in many other letters, although no monk is mentioned by name. Many of the letters concern a certain Sansnos, who is said at times to be a priest and who is probably not always the same person. No detail constitute a positive Pachomian indication. One should not give too much attention to the mention of very common names of persons, like that of Sourous.

There is a Coptic fragment however that must retain our attention, since it is a letter written by a certain Paphnoute to a certain Pachomius. Is there question here of Paphnoute who was the brother of Theodore and for many years the great steward of the *Koinonia* residing in Pbbow, and of the great Pachomius himself?⁴⁹ That is not impossible. But one must not forget that "Paphnoute" and "Pachomius" were among the most common Coptic names. The *Life of Pachomius* mentions two Pachomius and at least two Paphnoutes if not three.⁵⁰ In the above-mentioned letter, our Paphnoute speaks to his Pachomius and addresses him by the title : "my prophet and father Pachomius". The title "prophet" is never used in the whole Pachomian literature in an address to Pachomius or to anybody else. Such title however will often be given to Shenoute, a little later. As it was also noted, since Pachomius and Paphnoute lived in the same monastery of Phbow, and since Pachomius' absences for the visit of the monasteries were short and rapid -- although frequent -- it is rather improbable that they would have communicated with one another by letters. But, evidently, that is not impossible.

What to conclude from all this? From all the cartonnages in which fragments of papyri can be found, there is only one where some of these fragments have an undeniable relationship with monks: it is the cartonnage of *codex VII*. Were these monks Pachomian? It is not impossible, but no positive evidence permits us to affirm it. The presence of some letters written neither by or to monks in the cartonnage of one *codex* does not permit us to affirm that such a cartonnage has been made by monks. All the suppositions are possible concerning the manner in which the person who made the cover has been able to get hold of these papyri. Shelton's remark concerning *codex VII* seems to me valid for all the cartonnages: "It is hard to think of a satisfactory single source for such a variety of documents except a town rubbish heap -- which may indeed have been the direct source of all the papyri the bookbinders used."⁵¹

⁴⁸ - Cf. S¹, Coptic text: L. Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii Vitae sahidice scriptae*, p. 4 (=S³, *ibid.*, pp. 112-113); English translation in A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, T.I, pp.430-431; French translation in L. Th. Lefort, *Les Vies coptes...*, p. 3 and p. 65.

⁴⁹ - Paphnoute, Theodore's brother, came to join him at Tabennesi shortly after Theodore's arrival (SBo 38 and G¹ 65). He died in 346 during the plague that carried away Pachomius and several of the ancient brothers (SBo 119 and G¹ 114).

⁵⁰ - Pachomius junior belonged to the second group of disciples that came to Pachomius at Tabennesi, at the beginning of the foundation (SBo 24 and G¹26). He was still alive in 368, at the time of Theodore's death (SBo 208). On the name "Pachôme", there is an interesting note by Oscar von Lemm, in his *Kleine Koptische Studien I - LVIII*, Petersburg 1899-1910; réimpression: Leipzig, 1972, pp. 44-45. Besides Theodore's brother, mentioned in the last note, the Coptic *Life* speaks of another Paphnoute who died during the plague of 366 or 367, at the end of Theodore's superiorship (SBo 181). The monk called Paphnoute who was for a while superior of Phbow according to the Greek *Life* (G¹ 124) is distinct from the two we just mentioned, unless it is simply a question here of a confusion of the last redactor by G¹ (see A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, T. I, p. 291, n. l).

⁵¹ - J.C. Shelton, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

An hypothesis proposed by J. Barns for the fragments having an administrative character should have received more attention than it has so far. It is the suggestion that the origin of these materials could be sought in the direction of a public administration, civilian or -- more probably -- military.⁵² The important number of documents having a clearly administrative character -- as the accounts of taxes and the copies of imperial ordinances -- invite us to look in that direction. And the extracts of accounts bearing extremely large figures would find an explanation in that hypothesis at least as well as in that of a monastic origin.⁵³

If, as Guillaumont recently noted, the gnostic speculations were not of a nature to interest beyond measure the monks of Egypt, most of them illiterate,⁵⁴ they could easily interest an officer of the civilian or military administration coming from the educated circles of Alexandria or of Shmin who had been relegated for a time to the Thebaid.

A text from Shenoute used by Young in a quite different context is very interesting in this regard.⁵⁵ Shenoute relates that he has met in town the son of a *stratèlatès* who expressed erroneous opinions, in particular that the body does not rise: "Some began manifesting their error in that town, and when I discussed with them what is right, they ceased from their verbosity, knowing that it was the truth I was telling them from the Scriptures. Then the son of the *stratèlatès* who was in the town in those days ventured these confusing opinions, as he had argued against another just man, saying, "This body will not rise."⁵⁶

Of course one cannot deduce anything definite from such a text, but the fact that in Shenoute's time the son of a *stratèlatès* expressed in public doctrines that were similar to those of certain gnostics must be added to the *dossier* that we are studying. Perhaps we must also add to the evidence a curious Greek fragment that speaks of the presence of a detachment of roman soldiers *in* the monastery of Phbow, although that must have been in the VIth century.⁵⁷ After all, it is not impossible that our manuscripts were buried at a much later date than we have believed up to now, since all the indications that we have inform us only of a date *post quam*.

When we study the various hypotheses concerning the circumstances in which the *codices* were gathered and buried, we must not forget that most of those hypotheses were elaborated from the postulate that the "Pachomian connection" of these documents had been solidly established, while, in fact, it is only one possibility to be considered among many others.

Why was the Nag Hammadi Library gathered?

The various theories concerning the gathering and the burying of the manuscripts of the Nag Hammadi Library have already been described in detail, in particular by T. Säve Söderbergh and

⁵² - Cf. *Nag Hammadi Codices. Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*, p. 26.

⁵³ - Cf. J.C. Shelton, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ - A. Guillaumont, "Gnose et monachisme", p. 97.

⁵⁵ - D.W. Young, "The Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Some Historical Considerations", p.130.

⁵⁶ - Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national-ägyptischen Christentums*, Leipzig, 1903, III 32,23-33,5. English translation from D.W. Young (see note 55).

⁵⁷ - "Paid by the church of Apollonopolis on account of supplies for the most noble Scythians quartered in the monastery of Bau..." Cf. *The Loeb Classical Library, Select Papyri II: Non Literary Papyri; Public Documents*, by A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, 1966. This text was kindly communicated to me by James M. Robinson.

by G.G. Stroumsa.⁵⁸ We will mention them here only in the measure in which they have something to do with our topic. First of all it is important to mention the very great variety of the documents contained in the thirteen *codices* of Nag Hammadi, as it was described in particular by M. Krause, and which makes some authors hesitate to speak of a "library".⁵⁹ Moreover, since some of the documents mentioned do not show any gnostic character --as, obviously, for example, the fragment of the Republic of Plato-- other authors refuse to speak of a "gnostic" library.⁶⁰

The content of the documents cannot tell us much concerning the motives for their gathering, since they were written – at least most of them -- in Greek, and since they came from other places, probably Syria in many cases.

J. Doresse had suggested that our texts came from a gnostic community of the region.⁶¹ Since the "discovery" by J. Barns of their Pachomian origin that hypothesis seems to have been put aside. Maybe it should not be totally discarded, since according to Epiphanius' testimony, gnostic communities still existed in Egypt at the time when our documents were bound, that is towards the middle of the IVth century.⁶²

Nobody so far has expressed the hypothesis that our documents may have belonged to a community of Meletian monks. Such communities are known to have existed in Upper Egypt at the time that interests us.⁶³ And that hypothesis, as gratuitous as it is, is as worth considering as the other ones that were proposed. What we know about the Meletians makes the thing quite plausible.

Two reasons have been proposed to support the hypothesis that our manuscripts have been assembled by orthodox Christian monks, Pachomians or others: the first one is that these texts were assembled to serve as matter for pious reading, their heterodox character not being perceived or not creating problems; the second is that they were assembled for heresiological purposes.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ - T. Säve-Söderbergh, "Holy Scriptures or Apostolic Documentations?", pp. 3-5; *Idem*, "The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism", pp. 71-72. See also *supra*, note 45.

⁵⁹ - See M. Krause, "Zur Bedeutung des gnostisch-hermetischen Handschriftenfundes von Nag Hammadi", in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts. In Honour of Pahor Labib (= 14 Nag Hammadi Studies 6)*, Leiden 1975, pp. 65-89; *Idem*, "Die Texte von Nag Hammadi", in *Gnosis. Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, Göttingen, 1978, pp. 216-243, especially pages 242-243. See also George W. MacRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament", *ibidem*, pp. 151-152.

⁶⁰ - See F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", p. 432.

⁶¹ - J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte*. Paris 1958, p. 155.

⁶² - Cf. *supra*, note 5.

⁶³ - Cf. *supra*, note 30.

⁶⁴ - The first of these two hypotheses is defended, with different nuances, by F. Wisse, in "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt"; by J. M. Robinson in his Introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (pp. 14-21); by C. Hedrick, "Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek *Life of Pachomius* and the *Sitz im Leben* of the Nag Hammadi Library"; and by H. Chadwick, "The Domestication of Gnosis", in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978, Vol I: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. by Bentley Layton (*Studies in the History of Religion*, XLI), pp. 14-16. The second hypothesis was put forward by T. Säve-Söderbergh, first at the Congress of Messina, in "Gnostic and Canonical Gospel Traditions", and then in a more elaborate form in "Holy Scriptures or Apostolic Documentations". F. Wisse has questioned that position in "Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism", pp. 101-119; and Säve-Söderbergh in "The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism" seem to come closer to the first hypothesis, although with much hesitation and nuances.

F. Wisse, who situates himself more in the line of the first explanation, thinks that the Gnostics who still existed in Egypt at the time of early monasticism withdrew to the monastic communities into which they were gradually assimilated.⁶⁵ This hypothesis is not lacking in attractiveness, but so far has not been confirmed in any way. Wisse also claims that Pachomian monasticism was not, in its origin, as orthodox as it is generally believed to have been.⁶⁶ This is possible but also remains to be proved. The examples of heterodoxy that he gives-- the use by Pachomius of a mystical alphabet, the visions, the angelology and the demonology -- are not very convincing.⁶⁷ Angelology, demonology and visions were quite common in the literature of the time, throughout the whole Christian world, even in circles totally protected from gnostic influences.⁶⁸ The explanation of that phenomenon should be rather sought in the direction of influences of late Judaism on primitive Christianity. As for the mystical alphabet, its use by Pachomius is very different from the one found in the writings of Nag Hammadi. The liking of Egyptians for cryptograms would be enough to explain the use of cryptograms by orthodox Christians as well as by Gnostics in Egypt, without necessarily any contact between the two groups.⁶⁹

The efforts of C. Hedrick to find gnostic proclivities in the Pachomian writings did not have convincing results.⁷⁰ What he succeeded in finding were tendencies vaguely identical to what can be found not only in gnostic documents but also in most of the authors of the same period. What makes an author or a book gnostic is the presence of a certain system of thought as well as a certain explanation of the universe and of human destiny. Many elements of that system, taken individually, can be found in authors and milieus that are not gnostic in any way.

Against that first explanation (i.e. collection of works used by the monks themselves), T. Säve-Söderbergh put forth arguments that are not without some weight. Even granting that the orthodoxy of our monks may have been less strict than we use to suppose, there are certain

⁶⁵ - See "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", especially page 440.

⁶⁶ - "There is good reason to believe that concern about heresy was much less deeply and concretely felt by the Pachomian monks than by the church hierarchy in Alexandria. It is very questionable whether Pachomius and Theodore knew what they were talking about when they anathematized the writings of Origin (sic)" (*ibidem*, p. 437).

⁶⁷ - "One clear example of unorthodox views sponsored by Pachomius himself did survive. I am referring to the famous alphabet mysticism and enigmatic speech in the letters of the founder of monasticism" (*ibidem*, p. 437-438); "Further- more, these texts have much material that is relevant to angelology and demonology, subjects of prime interest to Coptic monks" (*ibidem*, p. 438.).

⁶⁸ - To angelology is connected the very important theme of the *bios angelikos* that we find in all the sectors of the great monastic tradition. Among the abundant literature on the subject, see S. Frank, *Angelicos Bios. Begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum "Engelgleichen Leben" im frühen Mönchtum*, Münster, 1964. On demonology, see the article of A. and C. Guillaumont, "Le démon dans la plus ancienne littérature monastique" in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* III, Paris 1954, col. 190-191; a very good study by L. Bouyer also, in *La vie de saint Antoine, Saint-Wandrille*, 1950, pp. 99-112. K. Heussi had already studied that theme in *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Tübingen 1936, pp. 108-115. Concerning visions, see A. Guillaumont, "Les visions mystiques dans le monachisme oriental chrétien", in *Les visions mystiques* (colloque organisé par le Secrétariat d'Etat à la Culture, Paris, 17-18 mars 1976) = *Nouvelles de l'Institut Catholique de Paris*, février 1977, p. 147 (reprinted in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, pp. 136-147).

⁶⁹ - Hans Quecke has studied at length the use of a coded language by Pachomius in some of his letters, in *Die Briefe Pachoms. Griechischer Text der Handschrift W. 145 der Chester Beatty Library eingeleitet und herausgegeben von Hans Quecke*, Regensburg, 1975, pp. 18-40. Nothing in that long and careful analysis indicates any connection with the gnostic writings. A certain connection with the ancient Egyptian traditions is more probable: "Die altägyptische Hieroglyphenschrift lud geradezu zu Schriftspielereien ein, und die alten Aegypter haben immer und in vielfältiger Weise von solchen Möglichkeiten Gebrauch gemacht. Das gilt bis in die Spätzeit der altägyptischen Kultur... Nun ist natürlich mit dem Uebergang zur griechischen Schrift in koptischer Zeit eine Kryptographie der alten Art nicht mehr möglich. Aber die Mentalität ändert sich nicht schlagartig..." (pp. 34-35). G.G. Stroumsa, for his part, notes that "Les vertus mystiques ou théurgiques de l'alphabet se retrouvent dans des milieux aussi variés que chez les pythagoriciens ou dans des spéculations juives qui n'ont rien de gnostique" ("Ascèse et gnose. Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique", p. 559); and he refers to F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, dans *Stoicheia*, 7, Leipzig, 1922.

⁷⁰ - C. Hedrick, "Gnostic Proclivities in the Greek Life of Pachomius"; see the remark of G.G. Stroumsa: "Hedrick ne réussit à glaner qu'une bien maigre récolte qui n'emporte pas vraiment la conviction" ("Ascèse et gnose. Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique", p. 559).

books of the Nag Hammadi Library that do not have any religious character and others that contain explicitly pagan elements which one does not expect to find in the bedside books of Pachomian monks. Even making abstraction of these clearly pagan elements, there are gnostic doctrines in other books that are so clearly in opposition to Christian monastic asceticism that it is difficult to imagine Christian monks using them for their spiritual reading.⁷¹

T. Sävje-Söderbergh's hypothesis is that our documents may have been assembled for heresiological purposes, somewhat like Epiphanius' assembly of his *Panarion*. That is certainly not impossible. But the Pachomian texts do not show in Pachomius and in his disciples an eagerness to hunt heresies and to exterminate heresiarchs so great as to justify such a collection of writings. Pachomius was certainly concerned with preserving the orthodoxy of his monks, and he knew how to refute heretics when they came to bother him; but we never see him going out on a crusade after the manner of an Epiphanius or of a Shenoute.⁷² Furthermore, the heretics mentioned in the *Lives of Pachomius* are generally rather the Arians, and the Meletians who joined the Arians in the time of Athanasius and who were the explicit target of his Festal Letter of 367.⁷³

Some anti-origenist texts found in the Pachomian documents have been more than once mentioned as signs of the anti-heretical militancy of the Pachomian monks at least at a certain period.⁷⁴ It will be interesting to study that question a little more in detail, since it is one of the points where the progress already achieved by the critique of the Pachomian sources may bring some useful light.

Two texts deserve our attention. They are the §31 of the First Greek *Life* and the §7 (chap. 4) of the *Paralipomena*.

The anti-origenist passage that can be read in G¹ is absent from the parallel story of the Coptic *Life*. Let us recall in a few words the relationship between G¹ and SBo. It is now admitted by all that neither G¹ nor SBo can be considered as the translation of the other. They are two parallel witnesses. But their relationship is such that their respective authors must have had a common written source. In the several cases where the Coptic *Life* has stories absent from G¹, it is possible to find their source in other Coptic documents, in particular in the tradition S¹⁰, S²⁰, etc. (document that had been used by the common source of SBo-G¹); but when G¹ has narratives that are absent from SBo, with the exception of the case of the famous Council of Latopolis, the particularities of G¹ always manifestly appear as posterior additions. The particular vocabulary of these additions demonstrates that they are additions made to the primitive Greek text by a copyist who was not conversant with the terminology and the customs of the Pachomian monks and who, therefore, was not a Pachomian monk himself. That copyist to whom we owe the late form in which we know G¹ wrote at a date posterior to Athanasius' death.⁷⁵ All this is important, because G¹ 31 as well as the last sentence of G¹ 30 is one of these additions made at a later date to the primitive text of G¹ by a copyist who was not a Pachomian monk.

⁷¹ - "The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism", especially pp. 75-78.

⁷² - It is well known that the zeal of Shenoute against paganism was as great as his hatred of Nestorius. For a succinct and well documented presentation of the person and the work of Shenoute, see David Bell in the introduction to his English translation of the *Life of Shenoute: Besa, The Life of Shenoute, Introduction, translation, and Notes by David N. Bell, (Cistercian Publications, 73), Kalamazoo 1983*. D.W. Young, has shown that some of Shenoute's teachings could have been in reaction to positions found in some gnostic texts of Nag Hammadi, particularly the *Gospel of Thomas*. See "The Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Some Historical Considerations".

⁷³ - On the Arians, see SBo 96 and G¹ 113; SBo 185 and G¹ 137; EpAm 6.11.18.31. On the Meletians see above, note 28. Note that in EpAm 12 the Marcionites are mentioned with the Meletians.

⁷⁴ - On that question see B. Bückler, *Die Armut der Armen*, pp. 139-140.

⁷⁵ - I have studied that question in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. I, pp. 4-6

That text shows an anti-heretic preoccupation posterior to the period in which the original *Life of Pachomius* was written, and probably a preoccupation coming from a non-pachomian milieu.⁷⁶

What about the text of the *Paralipomena*? Here we have two reasons for being cautious. The first one comes from the very nature of the *Paralipomena*. Although these stories belong to the authentic Pachomian sources, the redactor of the version that we have of them is probably not a Pachomian monk. His terminology is different from that of either the Greek or the Coptic *Lives of Pachomius*, and he seems not to know many of the Pachomian customs.⁷⁷ The text of the *Paralipomena* is extant in two Greek manuscripts (and fragments of a third one) and in a Syriac translation.⁷⁸ It is in chapter 4, §7 of these *Paralipomena* that we find a story in which Pachomius receives foreign monks who give off a strong stench. It is only after their departure that an angel reveals to him that they were heretics who read Origen's books.

But here we must be cautious. As I said before, there are two complete manuscripts of the *Paralipomena* in Greek, the *Florentinus* (=F) and the *Atheniensis* (=B), as well as a fragmentary one, the *Ambrosianus* (=A), that fortunately has the story we are presently studying. The two manuscripts A and B have simply a mention of "heretics", not that of Origen. Usually the text of F is safer, the one of B being a stylistic reworking of it. But there are cases where B gives us the primitive version while the text of F is corrupt. And usually the editing of B is purely of a stylistic character. The various late Greek *Lives* that have incorporated the *Paralipomena* have an inconsistent tradition as far as the present story is concerned. We would have to study in detail all the various versions in order to arrive at a more certain conclusion. But it seems to me more probable that the anti-origenist note is a late addition to the primitive text of the *Paralipomena*. If it had been in the original version, it would be difficult to imagine why it would have been suppressed later on, at the time of a virulent anti-origenism. Here again, as in G¹ 31, the anti-origenist note seems to respond to a preoccupation posterior to the first redaction of the Pachomian texts.

There is another Coptic text where one may legitimately think that there is question of Origen, although his name is not explicitly mentioned. But the Pachomian character of that text is altogether hypothetical. It is a Coptic fragment from the Berlin Museum, first published by G. Hoehne and then reproduced by L. Th. Lefort in his *Sancti Pachomii Vitae sahidice scriptae* only because that folio seemed to him to come from the same scriptorium, if not the same hand from which came other fragments that he had related to the Third Sahidic *Life*.⁷⁹

The Pachomian sources as a whole are anterior to the origenist controversies of the end of the century, and the only traces of anti-origenism that can be found in them are later additions, made quite probably by non-pachomian scribes.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ - F. Halkin, in *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, p. 103*, had already expressed the opinion that this anti-origenist passage was not in the *Life of Pachomius* at the time when Palladius wrote his *Historia Lausiaca*, at the end of the century. A.J. Festugière, in *Les moines d'Orient, IV/2: La première Vie grecque de saint Pachôme*, Paris, 1965, p. 22, writes: "Ce couplet sur la haine de Pachôme à l'égard d'Origène, ayant été amené par les derniers mots relatifs à la foi d'Athanase... pourrait sembler n'être qu'un développement propre à l'auteur de G¹, mais en fait il paraît dans l'arabe (Am. 599s)". Unfortunately, Festugière did not realize that the Arabic text is here a translation of G³, and therefore an indirect witness of G¹ (on this point see my article: "Le problème des Vies de Saint Pachôme", *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 42 [1966] 287-305).

⁷⁷ - See *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁸ - In his *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, Halkin has published the *Paralipomena* according to ms. F and the few short fragments of ms. A, since he did not have access to ms. B. It is only recently that he produced a superb edition of the Athenian manuscript (=B), along with a French translation by A.-J. Festugière: *Le corpus athénien de saint Pachôme (Cahiers d'Orientalisme, II)*, Genève, 1982. The text of the *Paralipomena* is found on pages 73-93, and the translation on pages 123-145.

⁷⁹ - Coptic text by Hoehne, in *Zeitschrift für ägypt. Sprache*, t. 52, pp. 124-126 and by L. Th. Lefort, in *S. Pachomii Vitae sahidice scriptae*, pp. 309-310. French translation in L. Th. Lefort, "Les Vies coptes de Saint Pachôme et de ses premiers successeurs", pp. 352-253.

⁸⁰ - It is therefore exaggerated to say that "Several anecdotes in the Vitae show the great monk to be most vigilant at least in keeping out the forbidden works of Origen(sic)" (F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", p. 437).

Why was the Nag Hammadi Library buried?

Influenced by the studies on Qumran and a little obsessed by the conviction that the *codices* of Nag Hammadi had been buried by Pachomian monks -- or because of them -- scholars have easily taken for granted that those *codices* had been "hidden".⁸¹ But were they really hidden? An hypothesis put forward by M. Krause certainly deserves consideration. According to him, it would not been uncommon even for Christians, in the period under study, to bury such documents beside their owner, at the time of his death. The fact that they were found in a cemetery (which was almost certainly other than the cemetery of the Pachomian monks) makes that hypothesis all the more plausible.⁸² More study on the spot could give more light on the question.

The most commonly proposed hypothesis is that the manuscripts-- whether they had been the property of gnostic monks (in or outside Pachomian monasteries) or the property of Pachomian monks(at a time when their heterodoxy was not perceived or did not create a problem) were buried on the occasion of an anti heretical purge.

The problem with this is that although we have testimonies about an anti-origenist purge at the end of the century among the monks of Egypt, especially after Evagrius' death in 399,⁸³ we do not have witnesses permitting us to speak of an antignostic purge among them.

Athanasius' Festal Letter for 367, received in the Pachomian monasteries like those of every year⁸⁴ -- since this was how the monks knew when to start the fast of the forty days and the fast of the Pascha, and therefore when to gather together at Phbow for the great assembly of all the monks of the *Koinonia* -- has often been mentioned as a possible occasion for such a purge. In fact it is said in one passage of the *Life of Pachomius* that Theodore had that letter translated and placed in the monastery.⁸⁵ I would agree with Jon Dechow that the connection between that letter and the burying of the Nag Hammadi Library is one of those scientific hypotheses that are put forward without any real proof, and then are repeated by everyone as if they had been demonstrated.⁸⁶ But my own explanation would differ from his. It seems to me that to state that

⁸¹ - "It seems to be a common assumption that growing pressure exerted by orthodox monastic figures led to the interment around A.D. 400 of these writings" (D.W. Young, "The Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Some Historical Considerations", p. 127.

⁸² - "Das Auffinden der Bibliothek in einem Grabe spricht für eine, und zwar wohl reiche, Einzelperson als Besitzer... Es ist ein auch in christlicher Zeit noch nachweisbarer altägyptischer Brauch, dem Toten heilige bücher ins Grab beizugeben" : M. Krause, "Die Texte von Nag Hammadi", p. 243. On the presence of two distinct cemeteries, see J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte*, p. 155. See also aussi T. Säve-Söderbergh, "The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism", p. 78.

⁸³ - The year 399 is the year when, shortly after Evagrius' death, Theophilus of Alexandria, who had been an admirer of Origen, became -- for reasons that were not at all metaphysical -- an implacable adversary of the Alexandrian master, and unleashed a persecution of the origenist monks of Nitria. For a brief presentation of the origenist controversies of the IVth century, see A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens (Patristica Sorbonensia, 5)*, Paris, 1962; bibliographical notes *ibidem*, p. 63, note 67.

⁸⁴ - For good bibliographical indications on the various versions of Athanasius' Festal Letters, see L. Th. Lefort in the Introduction to his *S. Athanase. Lettres Festales et Pastorales en copte (= Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium - 150)*, pp. I-XVIII. Athanasius obviously wrote his Letters in Greek. Their translation into Coptic for the Egyptian peasants seems to have been left to private initiatives, and we have an example of this in the translation of the Letter of 367 procured by Theodore for the monks of Phbow.

⁸⁵ - SBo 189.

⁸⁶ - "A purge of apocrypha throughout Egypt, or even in Pachomianism, about 367-370 seems to me to be one of those scholarly myths that someone starts, others pick it up, some with notable names, and finally it becomes widely quoted and is taken as the 'informed consensus' or the 'assured results' of modern scholarship. Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence for it", J. Dechow, "The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies", p. 12.

all that Athanasius does here is to warn the "simple" (*akaraoi*) against books that the perfect one could (seemingly) continue to read, is to venture on very unsafe ground, especially if one claims to establish an equation between the "ancients" of the Pachomian monasteries and the "perfect ones" of the Palladian chronicle, which in fact is not a reliable Pachomian source.⁸⁷ Moreover, all through his Letter Athanasius is clearly preoccupied by heterics, and very specifically by the Meletians.

It is time to conclude that long enquiry. Were there any historical links between Pachomian monasticism on one part and the Nag Hammadi Library (the gathering of the documents, their binding, their burying) on the other? It is possible; but nothing permits us to affirm it with any degree of certitude. Other explanations are just as legitimate.

II: Literary and doctrinal contacts between monasticism and gnosis.

One would be on a firmer basis to elaborate theories about the relations between Egyptian monasticism and gnosticism if real literary contacts between the two could be found, that is, if quotations of Nag Hammadi texts were found in monastic sources or vice versa. In fact, as we will see, the harvest is rather meager. No text of Nag Hammadi uses a source that is monastic in the strict sense, Egyptian or not; and no monastic source quotes a Coptic document from Nag Hammadi.

We have the impression of being in the presence of two universes of thought that have evolved on parallel courses. There are certainly points of contact, and probably mutual influences; but they did not leave traces in the known literary sources.

One of the major differences between these two "worlds" is certainly the manner in which the Scripture is used in each one of them. It would be worth making a detailed and exhaustive study of that point. For example, there is nothing in the gnostic documents that is comparable to the extremely frequent and altogether orthodox use of all the documents of the Scripture in the Pachomian sources.⁸⁸ One may, of course, speak of a late correction of these monastic writings in a more orthodox direction; but, apart from the fact that until further proof is give, such a work of correction is a pure hypothesis, it seems very unlikely that at a period without concordances or computer, an editor could have so well succeeded in expurgating the whole of Pachomian literature of any trace of an heterodox or "gnosticizing" use of the Scripture.

There are however a few documents of which a translation is found in the Nag Hammadi Library and with which the monastic literature has some contacts. These are the *Sentences of Sextus*, the *Teachings of Silvanus* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Each one of the three deserves a special treatment.

The Sentences of Sextus and Monasticism

The book of the *Sentences of Sextus*, of which fragments of a Coptic translation are found in *codex XII* of Hag Hammadi can certainly not be considered as a typically gnostic document. It is in fact a very ancient gnomic collection, quite probably of a non-Christian origin but "christianized" at a very early stage, and largely used in the East as well as in the West. Witness to this are the numerous translations in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopian, as well as our Coptic version in the Nag Hammadi Library, and of course the Greek text that was already known to Origen. Quotations of these *Sentences* in monastic and non-monastic sources are listed

⁸⁷ - See above, the observations concerning the *ancients* in the pachomian monasteries.

⁸⁸ - One has a good idea of the place of Scripture in the life of the Pachomian monks when one realizes that the table of biblical quotations, at the end of the third volume of *Pachomian Koinonia* covers 60 pages and includes more than 2,500 entries. Practically all the books of the Old and New Testament are quoted. A very interesting study of the use of Scripture by the Pachomian monks could be done.

in Chadwick's edition.⁸⁹ One must add a quotation in the Rule of Saint Columban, pointed out by Adalbert de Vogüé.⁹⁰

According to A. Guillaumont, one should study "quels rapports l'éthique qui s'y exprime a (...) avec l'éthique gnostique, d'une part, avec l'éthique monastique d'autre part".⁹¹ F. Wisse made such a study concerning gnosticism,⁹² but nobody has made any as yet concerning monasticism. Guillaumont adds: "L'utilisation de ce même manuel par les moines et par les gnostiques conduit naturellement à se poser la question des rapports entre gnose et monachisme sur le plan doctrinal".⁹³ But can we speak of "utilisation" of the *Sentences of Sextus* by Gnostics on the sole basis that we find a Coptic translation of them in the manuscripts of Nag Hammadi? Certainly not as long as we don't know more about the reasons for the assembling of these various writings.

Furthermore, the fact that some monastic authors have quoted these *Sentences* does not necessarily mean that these were their daily reading -- not even that they ever knew the collection itself. Such a gnomic genre easily lends itself to partial quotations. When Columban, for example, quotes one of the *Sentences of Sextus* in his Rule, one must not conclude that the collection was his bedside reading. It is highly probable that he did not know the collection itself but quoted that particular sentence from one of those *florilegia* that were so popular in his time.

The Teachings of Silvanus and Monasticism

The second text of Nag Hammadi that has some contact with monastic literature is the document known under the name of *Teachings of Silvanus*, found in *codex VII*. And here we have a textual contact in a stricter sense, since one passage of the *Teachings of Silvanus* is found substantially identical in a text attributed to Antony. But that point of contact has to be interpreted. And in order to do so, one must first of all take into consideration the exact nature of the *Teachings of Silvanus* on the one hand and that of the text attributed to Antony on the other hand.

The *Teachings of Silvanus* is a text that belongs to the sapiential genre, often used at a very early date and quite favored by monastic authors. As for the format, it has great affinities with the biblical book of Proverbs, particularly with Prov. 1-9. The Silvanus to whom the document is attributed is probably the one mentioned as companion of Paul in the Pauline letters (II Cor. 1:19; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1), and then as companion of Peter in I Peter 5:12 and whom we find again in chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles as a prophet of Jerusalem with the name of Silas, having exercised his apostolic mission in the region of Antioch. That attribution to a biblical figure seems artificial, all the more since it is found only in the title and nothing in the

⁸⁹ - An indispensable work about the *Sentences of Sextus* is obviously H. Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus. A Contribution to the History of Early Christian Ethics* (Texts and Studies, New Series, 5), Cambridge, 1959. Concerning the Coptic version see Paul-Hubert Poirier, *Le texte de la version copte des Sentences de Sextus*. P.-H. Poirier has recently given a critical edition of that Coptic version, *Les Sentences de Sextus (NH XII,1). Fragments (NH XII,3)*, *Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi*, Section "Textes", 11), Québec 1983. F. Wisse gave an English translation in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, pp. 454-459.

⁹⁰ - A. de Vogüé, "'Ne juger de rien par soi-même'. Deux emprunts de la Règle colombanienne aux Sentences de Sextus et à saint Jérôme." Before it was mentioned by de Vogüé, that quotation from the *Sentences of Sextus* by saint Columban was unknown to the modern editors of the *Sentences* (O. Seebass et G.S.W. Walker, and even H. Chadwick) although it had been pointed out as early as 1638 by Dom Hugues Ménard in his *Concordia Regularum*.

⁹¹ - See A. Guillaumont, "Gnose et monachisme", p. 98.

⁹² - F. Wisse, "Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik".

⁹³ - See A. Guillaumont, "Gnose et monachisme", p.98.

text itself corroborates it. The only purpose of such an attribution was probably to give some authority to the book.⁹⁴

Here again, as in the case of the *Sentences of Sextus*, we are not in the presence of a typically gnostic document. Besides elements of Judaic origin, we are in the presence of other elements coming from hellenism, especially from stoicism. At most we can find a few gnostic elements in its anthropology, which bases its distinction of the three states of man (pneumatic, psychic and carnal) on a gnosticizing interpretation of the two narratives of creation in Genesis.

The origin of the document is not known for certain, but it is quite probably posterior to the first century. A possible Egyptian origin, near Alexandria, at the end of the second or beginning of the third century, was mentioned; but that theory is based on the point of contact with Antony that still needs clarification.

On the other hand, the problem of the various writings attributed to Antony is far from being solved.⁹⁵ According to Athanasius, Antony was illiterate; but that is not certain, and, in any case, nothing prevents an illiterate person for dictating letters or other types of writings. As a matter of fact the paternity of seven letters is attributed to him. These have the characteristics of manifesting decisive signs of a form of origenism before its time.

These letters of Antony are perhaps, among all the writings of Egyptian monasticism of the first centuries, the texts where some clear doctrinal contacts of a general nature with gnosticism can be found! But no study has been made in this area. First of all a more accurate study of the various versions of these letters is still needed.⁹⁶ Saint Jerome knew of seven letters of Antony written in Coptic, similar to those of Paul by content and style, and addressed to various monasteries. He knew them in a Greek translation which existed in his time. After that, they seemed not to have left any trace in written sources either in the East or in the West. But they continued to be copied and translated. In the West they reappear in the XVIth century in a Latin translation made by Valerius of Sarasio on a Greek text that is now lost, and in the XVIIth century in another Latin version made by Abraham Echellensis on an Arabic text also lost.⁹⁷

Although not entirely unknown to a few erudites⁹⁸ who however did not perceive their importance, it was only in 1938 that they were rehabilitated by A. Klejna.⁹⁹ Since the beginning of this century partial remnants in Coptic and Syriac have been published.¹⁰⁰ Finally the edition of the Georgian version with a Latin translation by Garitte in 1955 made the whole dossier more

⁹⁴ - See A. Guillaumont, in *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, 84 (1976-1977), pp. 327-330.

⁹⁵ - See Vit. Ant., § 1.

⁹⁶ - See G. Garitte, "A propos des lettres de S. Antoine l'Ermite", in *Le Muséon* 52 (1939), p. 11-31. See also the study of G. Couilleau in *Commandements du Seigneur et Libération évangélique (Studia Anselmiana - 70)* Rome, 1977.

⁹⁷ - Valerius de Sarasio's translation was published in Paris in 1516; the text is published in *PG* 40, 977-1000. That of Abraham Echellensis, published in Paris in 1641 is also found in *PG*, 999-1019. On the late Arabic compilation used by Abraham Echellensis, see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur I (Studi e Testi, 118)*, Città del Vaticano, 1944, 456-459.

⁹⁸ - See, for example, A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922, p. 84 et O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchliche Literatur III*, Fribourg, 1923, pp. 80-82.

⁹⁹ - A. Klejna, "Antonius und Ammonas, Eine Untersuchung über Herkunft und Eigenart der ältesten Mönchsbriefe", in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 72 (1938), pp. 309-348.

¹⁰⁰ - O. Winstedt, "The Original Text of One of St Antony's Letters", in *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1906), pp. 540-545 (Coptic text of the seventh letter); F. Nau, "La version syriaque de la première Lettre de saint Antoine, dans *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 14 (1909), pp. 282-297 (it is the only letter existing in Syriac).

accessible,¹⁰¹ and an English translation by D.J. Chitty was published after his death by Kallistos Ware.¹⁰² More recently a French translation was also published, based essentially on Garitte's Latin version of the Georgian text.¹⁰³

The various ancient versions are not simply translations. The austere spirituality of Antony's text and some startling doctrinal expressions were probably the reasons for the little popularity these writings enjoyed throughout the centuries.¹⁰⁴ The same reasons probably prevailed in the pruning and correction of the original text by the various translators. It is not by chance that the Syriac translation has preserved only one letter, the first one, and not without doctrinal modifications. The Latin version of Sarasio and the Georgian version are rather obscure, but that obscurity itself should inspire more confidence.

The Latin version of Abraham Echellensis, translated from an Arabic manuscript of the VIIIth or IXth century, does not only offer a Latin text more difficult and often impossible to understand, but offer an amplified collection where, besides the seven letters already known by Jerome and attested by the Georgian corpus, thirteen other letters are introduced, the origin of which was then unknown. It was discovered later on that at least some of them are from Ammonas.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, they are followed, in that collection, by a brief text having a rather exact parallel in the *Teachings of Silvanus* and bearing the name of *Spiritualia documenta regulis adjuncta*.¹⁰⁶

The very presence of that text in the collection of Abraham Echellensis, after Antony's letters and among Ammonas' letters falsely attributed to Antony should not be a very strong guarantee of their Antonian authenticity. But it happens that on the recto of a parchment in the British Library bearing the number *Or 6003* (BL 979 according to Crum's numbering) we find a short text explicitly attributed to Apa Andònios where that brief passage translated by Abraham Echellensis is found.¹⁰⁷ That parchment, a palimpsest, seems to be from the Xth or the XIth century. It seems to be an isolated folio on which a reader has written down a text that interested him.

W.P. Funk was the first to draw attention to that doublet and to make an extensive study of it.¹⁰⁸ From the comparison between the two Coptic texts (the one of the BL and that of the

¹⁰¹ - G. Garitte, *Lettres de saint Antoine. Version géorgienne et fragments coptes* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 148-149), 1955 (original text and Latin translation).

¹⁰² - *The Letters of St Antony the Great*, Translated by D.J. Chitty (*Fairacres Publication*, 50), Oxford, 1975.

¹⁰³ - *Saint Antoine. Lettres*. Traduction par les Moines du Mont des Cats (*Spiritualité orientale*, 19), Abbey of Bellefontaine, 1976.

¹⁰⁴ - See the review made by Gueric Couilleau of the book quoted in the last note, in the *Bulletin monastique of Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 1977, n° 337, pp. [189]-[191].

¹⁰⁵ - See *The Letters of Ammonas, Successor of Saint Antony*. Translated by Derwas Chitty. Oxford, 1979. See also an older French translation by F. Nau in *PO XI*, fasc. 4, 1915.

¹⁰⁶ - Latin text of Abraham Echellensis in *PG* 40, 1073 C-1080 A. The passage that interests us here is found in col. 1077 A¹ - B⁵. On this point see G. Graf, *op. cit.*, p. 457sq. and J.-M. Sauget, "La double recension arabe des 'Préceptes aux novices' de l'abbé Isai e de Scété", in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, t. III (*Studi e Testi*, 233), Città del Vaticano, 1964, pp. 304-307.

¹⁰⁷ - W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Londres, 1905, p. 407.

¹⁰⁸ - That parallel was first mentioned in the German translation of the *Teachings of Silvanus* by the team of Berlin: W.P. Funk, "Die Lehren des Silvanus: Die vierte Schrift aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex VII eingeleitet und übersetzt vom Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften", *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 100 (1975), pp. 7-23; Funk later gave a more elaborated study in "Ein doppelt überliefertes Stück spätägyptischer Weisheit".

Teachings of Silvanus), we must conclude that although they have practically the same content, the several variants at the level of the syntax and most of all of the vocabulary, along with an almost complete semantic identity, lead to but one explanation: these are two independent translations of the same text, which was probably in Greek. If one of the two versions was a Coptic original, the other would have been an independent retroversion from a translation of it. It is also to be noted that in the case where the two Coptic versions offer different nuances, the Arabic version (i.e. that of the *Spiritualia*) always follows Antony as the *Teachings of Silvanus*. That makes one think that the Coptic text of the manuscript of the BL depends directly on the Coptic original of the Arabic text translated by Abraham Echellensis, both witnessing to the same tradition.¹⁰⁹

According to W.P. Funk, the *Teachings of Silvanus* do not have any trace of a monastic ideal and must therefore be anterior to the beginnings of Egyptian monasticism. If that hypothesis is confirmed Antony may have known the *Teachings of Silvanus* and may have taken his inspiration from them. The text of the *Teachings of Silvanus* has an introduction and two passages that manifest a more marked pessimism than the rest of the piece, and those parts do not appear in Antony's text. According to Funk, those lines could have been added in the Coptic version of the *Teachings of Silvanus* preserved in *codex VII* of Hag Hammadi. The text of the *Teachings of Silvanus* and that of the palimpsest would both go back to an anonymous wisdom writing which he dates from around the IInd century, taking into account the link with the tradition of Antony. Between that anonymous writing and Antony some editing would have taken place. The *Spiritualia* would go back to that reworked version, and that would explain the divergences touching the substance of the text.¹¹⁰

According to Guillaumont's analysis, however, an attentive study of the contexts -- that of the *Teachings of Silvanus* and that of Antony -- leads to the conclusion that the passage in question appears as an interpolation in the Latin text and that it finds a more natural place in the context of the *Teachings of Silvanus* text.¹¹¹

Things are certainly not clear. On the one hand we have a text connected with Antony's letters in an Arabic compilation of the VIIIth or IXth century, where writings belonging to Ammonas are also attributed to Antony. In the Xth or XIth century that same document is copied in Coptic as an isolated text on a piece of parchment, where it is attributed to Antony. Those two texts have enough points of contact to allow us to speak of two absolutely distinct witnesses of the same source. The second is probably a translation, either of the first one or, more probably of the same source. The rather late date of the Arabic version the value of which is very poor, make the attribution of that text to Antony very hypothetical. Fictitious attributions were very frequent in that period.

Three explanations are possible: a) Antony may have known the *Teachings of Silvanus* and may have quoted that passage in one of his writings, if one admits the Antonian authenticity of that writing. b) Again, if one admits the authenticity of that document of Antony, one may suppose that a quotation from that text was introduced at a later period in the text of the *Teachings of Silvanus* where it did not belong originally. c) Finally -- and this is the hypothesis that seems to me more plausible -- the author or the translator of late writings attributed to Antony -- falsely in most of the cases -- knew the *Teachings of Silvanus* and introduced a quotation from them in the text that he attributed to Antony. The Coptic text of the British Museum would depend directly - or more probably indirectly -- on that pseudo-antonian document.

¹⁰⁹ - See a good summary of Funk's position in Y. Janssens, "Les *Leçons de Silvanos* et le monachisme", pp. 352-353.

¹¹⁰ - The passages of *Silvanus* showing a more accentuated pessimism are: p. 97,3-8; 97,21-30; 97,35-98,2.

¹¹¹ - A. Guillaumont, article quoted in note 94.

Yvonne Janssens tried to bring more light on the question by a comparison between the Coptic terminology of the *Teachings of Silvanus* and that of the Coptic translation of the *Life of Antony*.¹¹² This seems to me hardly acceptable from a methodological point of view. A comparison with Antony's letters of which we have the Coptic text or at least fragments of it, would have made more sense. It is true that Janssens selected chapters of the *Life* where Athanasius claims to relate a long ascetical discourse that sums up Antony's thought. But even if Athanasius may have had a direct access to Antony's thought, it is clear that the discourse as we find it in the *Life* is Athanasius' own composition. As for the Coptic translation of that *Life*, it reveals not the Coptic terminology of Antony but that of the person who made the translation at an uncertain date.

Janssens also establishes a comparison with a catechesis attributed to Pachomius. This choice is as problematic as the first one, since the Pachomian authenticity of that catechesis is extremely dubious. Even if one recognizes in it a Pachomian character in the broad sense of the word, it is very unlikely that it is from Pachomius himself. It integrates a long section taken from a Coptic text of Athanasius.¹¹³

In any case, the few conclusions to which Janssens arrive are rather meager and are expressed with much prudence. She finds probable that Antony and Pachomius knew and perhaps used, if not the *Teachings of Silvanus* as we know them, at least a rather similar collection. Even that seems to me a dubious conclusion if one takes into account the very vague character of the similarities that she found between the texts.

As one can see the harvest is not in any way richer with the *Teachings of Silvanus* than it was with the *Sentences of Sextus*.

The Gospel of Thomas and the monastic tradition

Of all the writings of the Nag Hammadi Library, the *Gospel of Thomas* is certainly the one that has more contacts -- at least indirect ones -- with the ascetic -- if not the monastic -- tradition. The study of that text, however, cannot be separated from that of the Syriac ascetic tradition.

The thesis, generally admitted some decades ago, that saw Egypt as the cradle of Christian monasticism has now been abandoned.¹¹⁴ We now know that the monastic phenomenon appeared more or less at the same time in Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Cappadocia and also in the West. It appeared not as a mushroom unexpectedly sprouting up overnight, but in continuity with the various ascetic currents that marked the life of the Church during the few first centuries, particularly in areas under Judeo-Christian influence.¹¹⁵

¹¹² - Y. Janssens, "Les *Leçons de Silvanos* et le monachisme".

¹¹³ - That catechesis (or "instruction") is probably Pachomian in a broad sense, that is, coming from a Pachomian milieu. But its attribution to Pachomius himself is much less certain. (About this see *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. III, pp.2-3). The Coptic text, already published by E.A. Budge in 1913, was published again by L. Th. Lefort in *Oeuvres de s. Pachôme et de ses disciples* (= CSCO - 159 (text), pp. 1-24; 160 (French translation), pp. 1-26. Various Arabic manuscripts are also extant; see K. Samir, "Témoins arabes de la catéchèse de Pachôme 'A propos d'un moine rancunier'", in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 42 (1976), pp. 494-508.

¹¹⁴ - For example J. Vergote, "Egypte als bakermat van het christelijke monnikendom", in *Nieuwe Theologische Studien* 24 (1941); French translation: "L'Égypte, berceau du monachisme chrétien", in *Chronique d'Égypte* 34 (1942), pp. 329-345.

¹¹⁵ - There are several studies on the origin of monasticism, especially in Syria. The studies of A. Vööbus remain a priceless source of information although they should be read in the context of later studies that have somewhat qualified Vööbus' findings. The essential elements of Vööbus' studies is found in his two big volumes *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*. See also G. Kretschmar, "Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese"; P. Nagel *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums*. A good synthesis of the present scholarship on this subject can be found in A. Guillaumont, "Perspectives actuelles sur les origines du monachisme" and "Esquisse d'une phénoménologie du monachisme". As an example of the older criticism, one may still read H. Koch, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Askese und des Mönchtums in der alten Kirche*, Tübingen, 1933.

The origins and early developments of Christian asceticism in Egypt are still obscure, as is the history of the origins of Egyptian Christianity.¹¹⁶ But several indications lead us to think that the development of ascesis in Egypt is not without relationship with that of asceticism in Syria and in Mesopotamia. During the last few decades a good deal of new light has been brought on that aspect.¹¹⁷ So much so that if one wants to study the problem of the origins of monasticism in Egypt and its relationship with gnosis, it is not possible to do so without taking into account the general context of the evolution of Christian asceticism during the first four centuries of the Church, particularly in Syria.

The *Gospel of Thomas*, originating from Mesopotamia, perhaps from Edessa, around 140,¹¹⁸ has close links with Syrian Christianasceticism.¹¹⁹ Passages borrowed from the *Gospel of Thomas*, or at least having some kinship with it have been found in several Syriac authors. The *Liber Graduum* and *Pseudo-Macarius*, as well as the *Acts of Thomas* borrowed elements from the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, although they do not show traces of gnosticism.¹²⁰ But, on the other hand, other important authors of Syria seem not to have used at all the *Gospel of Thomas*, which must have been well known in their times; for example Ephrem and Aphraat.¹²¹

The study of those facts led Quispel to distinguish in Syria, already around 140, two ascetic currents. One came from the type of Judaism developed in the diaspora, in particular by Philo, that is from the Alexandrian tradition.¹²² Aelred Baker also showed that the *Gospel of Thomas* was submitted to Alexandrian influences. The other current was influenced by Judeo-Christianity and Judaism in Syria. Without any doubt, it was the second of these two traditions that most influenced Christian monasticism, including the Egyptian one.

In any case, according to Quispel, the first of these two traditions was at the origin of Messalianism (either in its mitigated form as in Pseudo-Macarius, or in its radical one).¹²³ The second tradition, found in Ephrem, Aphraat and the *Didascalia*, and which finds its expression in the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant as well as in various ascetic groups living either within

¹¹⁶ - See A. Veilleux, "The Origins of Egyptian Monasticism", dans *The Continuing Quest for God. Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition*. Ed. William Skudlarek, Collegeville 1982, pp.44-50. In spite of several scientific studies on various sources of Egyptian monasticism (*Life of Antony, Apophthegmata, Lives of Pachomius*, etc.), little has been done concerning the *origins* of Egyptian monasticism.

¹¹⁷ - To the studies mentioned above, in note 115, we can add, for Syria, the excellent study of Gabriele Winkler, "The Origins and Idiosyncrasies of the Earliest Form of Asceticism".

¹¹⁸ - No text of Nag Hammadi has occasioned as many studies and commentaries as the *Gospel of Thomas*. The time seems right for an evaluation of all the theories and a synthesis of the findings.

¹¹⁹ - See G. Quispel, "L'Evangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne".

¹²⁰ - See H.-Ch. Puech, "Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée, L'Evangile selon Thomas", *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, (Institut de France), Séance du 24 mai 1957, p. 155 (utilisation of the *Gospel of Thomas* by the *Acts of Thomas*); A. Baker, "Pseudo-Macarius and the Gospel of Thomas"; *Idem*, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron"; *Idem*, "The 'Gospel of Thomas' and the Syriac 'Liber Graduum'". D.W. Young, in "The Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Some Historical Considerations", p. 131, suggests that Shenoute, in some of his exhortations, may have reacted against positions of the *Gospel of Thomas*. The argumentation does not seem convincing, the positions mentioned being in no way exclusive to the *Gospel of Thomas*.

¹²¹ - See G. Quispel, "The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius", p. 234.

¹²² - See G. Quispel, "L'Evangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne", p. 109.

¹²³ - On the relationship of Pseudo-Macarius with Messalianism, see A. Kemmer, "Messalianismus bei Gregor von Nyssa und Pseudo-Makarius", in *Revue Bénédictine* 72 (1962), pp. 278-306; J. Meyendorff, "Messalianism or Anti-messalianism? A Fresh Look at the Macarian Problem" in *Kyriakon, Festschrift J. Quasten*, t. 2, Münster, 1971, pp. 585-590. For an excellent bibliography on Messalianism, see the article *Messaliens* in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, by A. Guillaumont, col. 1074-1083.

the local Christian communities or in solitude, remained impermeable to the type of radical Encratism that we find in the *Gospel of Thomas*. And here we are already at the point where the distinction between pre-monasticism and monasticism has become almost imperceptible. The passage from one to the other was quite natural. And nothing in the texts that we know allows us to suppose a foreign element as a catalyst for that passage.¹²⁴

III : Origin of Christian asceticism and gnosis

Concerning Egypt, although the history of the origins of Christianity in that part of the Empire are still obscure,¹²⁵ it seems clear that there were innumerable points of contact between Egyptian asceticism and Judeo-Christian asceticism. Before making too many general statements on the orientation of Egyptian asceticism and Egyptian monasticism, it would be important to study more systematically each one of the sources in order to see their connection with the various currents of primitive Syrian asceticism, now better known than a few decades ago. Although literary contacts are not to be excluded a priori, what will be found will probably be in most of the cases parallel evolutions, due to the simple fact of their being rooted in the same spiritual soil.

The presence in Egypt of Hieracas, mentioned by Epiphanius of Salamis, witnesses to the fact that the most radical branch of Encratism manifested itself in that area. Of course, one cannot simply reject Epiphanius' testimony, claiming that many monks followed Hieracas. However, since Hieracas and his disciples are very rarely mentioned in the contemporary sources, it is certainly exaggerated to say, as did Wisse, that Hieracas was one of the most important figures of Egyptian monasticism.¹²⁶ D.J. Chitty, one of the best authorities on that period of monasticism, is certainly right when he considers Hieracas as marginal and not representing in any way the common position of Egyptian monasticism.¹²⁷

The tradition of lay anachoresis in Egypt was also mentioned as one of the sources of Christian anachoresis.¹²⁸ But I think that an historical link between the two still needs to be proved. If -- as it seems clear to me -- Egyptian Christianity was in its origins strongly Judeo-Christian, it seems more plausible to see in the Syrian tradition of *xeniteia* the model imitated by Egyptian monks.¹²⁹ In any case, the latter always refer explicitly to that model and to the example of the Apostles, and never to the pagan model.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ - As does G.G. Stroumsa, "Monachisme et Marranisme chez les Manichéens d'Egypte".

¹²⁵ - See J. Helderman, "Anachorese zum Heil", p. 42.

¹²⁶ - See F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt", pp. 439-449. His efforts to establish a connection between the *Testimony of Truth* and Hieracas are certainly very suggestive, but the evidence is meager.

¹²⁷ - See J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 4 : "A dualism which regards matter as evil has been typical of most ascetic religions, and has been a besetting temptation also to the Christian. Hints of it will be constantly turning up in our path. About this very time, at Leontopolis in the Delta, Hierax was treating marriage as an Old Testament condition, and denying the resurrection of the body. But the central teaching of the monks is free from this, even in the extremes of ascetic practice."

¹²⁸ - On this phenomenon, see H. Braunert, *Die Binnen-wanderung: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Aegyptens in der Ptolemäer- und Kaiserzeit*, Bonn, 1964, pp. 165-167 and 328-333. But see also the study of A. Guillaumont, "La conception du désert chez les moines d'Egypte", who shows how the theme of the desert is rooted in biblical tradition.

¹²⁹ - See A. Guillaumont, "Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien".

¹³⁰ - In the West, the practice of *peregrinatio* remained alive through the Middle Ages, even when the Rule of Benedict -- with its ideal of *stabilitas loci* -- had imposed itself. See the two studies of Jean Leclercq, "Mönchtum und Peregrinatio im Frühmittelalter", in *Römische Quartalschrift* 55 (1960), pp. 212-225; "Monachisme et pérégrination du IXth au XIIth siècle", in *Studia Monastica*, 3 (1961), pp. 33-52; these studies were published again in J. Leclercq, *Aux Sources de la spiritualité occidentale*, Paris, 1964, pp. 35-90 ("Monachisme et pérégrination").

The literary sources of Egyptian monasticism, the *Life of Antony* and the *Life of Pachomius* in particular, reveal the presence in Upper and Lower Egypt -- before Antony and Pachomius-- of monks living a life of asceticism either in their local community or in the nearby desert, near their village. Urban monastic communities, including clerical ones, are also found. Antony entrusted his sister to a community of virgins;¹³¹ and the *Lives of Pachomius* often mention non-pachomian communities near the Pachomian monasteries. It would be interesting for example, to examine how some Pachomian documents in Coptic usually reserve the word "monastery" to those non-pachomian communities, using the Coptic words "*soouhs*" and "*heneete*" for the communities or monasteries of Pachomius. In the same manner, the most ancient Pachomian documents in Coptic speak of "brothers" rather than "monks" when they refer to members of the Pachomian *Koinonia*, the name "monks" being given to all the others, including to the members of the clerical community living around the Patriarch of Alexandria.¹³²

Recently G.G. Stroumsa proposed to find in Manichaeism the catalyst that produced the passage from pre-monasticism to monasticism in Egypt.¹³³ This thesis, it is true, was presented with much prudence and nuances. In fact all that can be said is that Manichaeans were present in Egypt before the spectacular development of Christian monasticism. Since they did live in communities elsewhere, one is entitled to suppose that such Manichaean communities existed in Egypt at the time of the origins of Christian monasticism. It is also possible to suppose that those Manichaeans continued to exist in Egypt under a "*marran*" i.e. a hidden form. All of this is possible, but all remain unproved for lack of sufficient documentation. Moreover we must not forget that Manichaeism owes much to Judeo-Christian tendencies, and these were present in Egypt. The similarity is therefore in no way surprising.

Once the origins and the development of Christian asceticism in general and in Egypt in particular are better known,¹³⁴ it will be possible to compare each one of the aspects of that ascesis with the gnostic ascesis.¹³⁵

In elaborating such a comparison, many pitfalls should be avoided. The first one would be to stick to a purely phenomenological description of ascetical practices. These can be understood only if they are seen in their immediate and their general contexts, and if their motivations are perceived.¹³⁶

¹³¹ - Vit. Ant. 3; whether one adopts the reading *eis parthenona* or the reading *eis parthenian*, the meaning is not fundamentally different, since the second reading, which seems better attested, implies the existence of groups of virgins. See G. Garitte, "Un couvent de femmes au III^{ème} siècle? Note sur un passage de la Vie Grecque de S. Antoine", in *Mélanges historiques E. van Cauwenberg*, Louvain 1961, pp. 150-159.

¹³² - For a study of Pachomian terminology, see F. Ruppert, *Das pachomianische Mönchtum und die Anfänge klösterlichen Gehorsams*, Münsterschwarzach, 1971, pp. 60-84.

¹³³ - See the article mentioned *supra*, note 124.

¹³⁴ - See the methodological notes of A. Guillaumont in "Gnose et monachisme", p.98-99. The only comparative study of some importance is the excellent article of G.G. Stroumsa, "Ascèse et gnose. Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique." On the basis of our present knowledge, he recognizes the existence of fundamental differences between gnostic ascesis and Christian monastic ascesis, at the level of motivations as well as at the level of the spirit in which asceticism is practised.

¹³⁵ - Several aspects of monastic asceticism have been studied in depth during the last half-century. But very little has been done concerning gnostic asceticism. See, however, concerning the ascetical character of the Nag Hammadi Library, the article of F. Wisse, F. Wisse, "Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik".

¹³⁶ - It is this pitfall that A.-J. Festugière did not avoid in the tendencious introduction to his otherwise excellent edition of ancient monastic text: *Les moines d'Orient. I: Culture ou sainteté. Introduction au monachisme oriental*, Paris, 1961. See the pertinent critique of A. de Vogüé in "Le procès des moines d'autrefois", *Christus* n° 45, 12 (1965), pp. 113-128.

Right from the start it should be remembered that in the whole of primitive Christian spirituality, asceticism occupies a central place, while in gnosticism it occupies only a peripheral one, and even this only in a few of the gnostic systems. Moreover, one must remember that asceticism is but one aspect of monastic spirituality. It is a means used in order to arrive at something else considered superior to it. The doctrine attributed by Cassian to Abba Moses, in his first *Conference* expresses rather well the whole Eastern monastic tradition of that time: the ultimate end of monastic life is the Kingdom of God, that is, contemplative union with God in prayer. The immediate goal -- and the means to arrive at that ultimate end -- is the conversion of the heart which is realized under the action of the Holy Spirit and through asceticism.¹³⁷

Once this is clearly perceived, one may study each one of the aspects of monastic asceticism, as, for example, continence, fasting, night watches, silence, continuous prayer, *xeniteia*, etc., trying to discern what were their motivations.¹³⁸ Of course, each author and each writing will have to be studied in themselves, since monastic tradition, even within a limited geographical area, was far from being monolithic. It is only after having done all that preparation, that it will be possible to make a serious comparison between monastic asceticism and gnostic asceticism, and this on the condition that as serious a study be done analyzing the ascetical tendencies that can or cannot be found in each one of the gnostic texts known to us. No comparison done at a lower price will bring any valuable light to the subject.

Two universal human archetypes

Finally, to set such a study in a much larger context, an analysis should be made of the points of contact between monasticism and gnosticism, considered as two great archetypes of human existence, both transcending their cultural boundaries.¹³⁹

Monasticism is not a purely Christian phenomenon, indeed, and is not reserved to religious groups having contacts with Christianity. It is rather a transcultural and universal human phenomenon found in most of the great cultures and great religions of the world since the most ancient of times. It is legitimate therefore to speak of a universal monastic archetype, to use an expression of Raimundo Panikkar.¹⁴⁰

No more than monasticism is gnosticism a phenomenon easy to circumscribe in time and space. Not only do we know several gnostic sects, especially through the writings of Christian heresiologists, but we know that the rather structured form of gnosticism of the second century C.E. had a pre-history. The efforts made at the Congress of Messina and after in order to clarify the concepts of gnosis and gnosticism and arrive at some consensus on the origins of gnosticism have occasioned several discussions, and the question is still open.¹⁴¹ But one thing is certain: All

¹³⁷ - Edition by E. Pichery, (*Sources chrétiennes*, 42), pp. 78-108.

¹³⁸ - One only has to look through the *Monastic Bulletin* published every year since 1959 in *Collectanea Cisterciensia* (with an English translation in *Cistercian Studies*) in order to realize how many of these questions have been studied scientifically and in depth. It is unfortunate that these studies are often unknown to those who elaborate theories on the origins of monasticism and its relationship with gnosticism.

¹³⁹ - I have treated that aspect more at length in another version, in French, of the present study: "Monachisme et Gnose" in *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 1984.

¹⁴⁰ - See *Blessed Simplicity. The Monk as Universal Archetype*, by Raimundo Panikkar, in dialogue with Ewert Cousins, Cornelius Tholens, Myriam Dardenne, Armand Veilleux, M. Basil Pennington and Paolo Soleri. New York 1982. See also Jean Leclercq, "Le monachisme comme phénomène mondial", in *Le Supplément* 107 (1973), pp. 461-478; 108 (1974), pp. 93-119. As a basic work on this question, although not explicitly dedicated to the monastic phenomenon, see: *Homo Religiosus. 1. L'expression du sacré dans les grandes religions. I. Proche-Orient ancien et Traditions bibliques*, by Julien Ries, Herbert Sauren, Guy Kestemont, René Lebrun, Maurice Gilbert. Centre d'Histoire des Religions, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1978.

¹⁴¹ - See the Acts of the Congress of Messina, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, pp. 552-562. See also Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis*, pp. 291-312.

the various gnostic schools know to us tried to respond to an innate searching of the human heart, of which we find echoes in all the periods of history -- in the cultures of Asia thousands of years before Christ, as well as in the modern world. We can say that there is a universal gnostic archetype that assumes various forms and expressions in various times and places.¹⁴²

A very interesting study would consist in comparing the basic aspects of these two archetypes in order to see what they have in common, and what distinguishes them from one another. After such a comparison is done, I think we will discover that when a large number of Coptic Christians chose the ascetical life and went to the desert, they conformed to an archetype, an aspiration firmly rooted in the human soul and in the collective psychè of mankind. External influences may have played a role, of course; but these influences did nothing else than put them in touch with that archetype, or -- to use a language closer to theirs -- with their *heart*. What were their explicit motivations? All the motivations that they themselves revealed to us in their writings came from the Scripture. Do we have any right to pretend that we know their secret motivations better than they did?...§ If some day it could be proved that the Nag Hammadi Library was assembled by Pachomian monks, I would like to think that they did it not out of ignorance or because they did not care for orthodoxy, but because, beyond all that separated them from the gnostic *Weltanschauung*, they perceived in those writings the same spiritual thirst and the same search for the primordial Unity that animated their whole life.

Armand Veilleux

¹⁴² - Cf. the very suggestive title of the work of vulgarization by H. Cornelis and A. Léonard, *La gnose éternelle*, Paris, 1961. There are several good studies about gnosis as a universal phenomenon. See, for example, Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, 1963; G. Quispel, *Gnosis als Weltreligion*, Zürich, 1951. Quispel has also studied the presence of a gnostic current in contemporary literature, under the influence of Jung: see his "Herman Hesse and Gnosis", in *Gnosis. Festschrift Hans Jonas*, pp. 492-507. On the contemporary gnostic currents see R. Abellio, *Approches de la nouvelle gnose*, Paris, 1981.

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