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# Rosetta

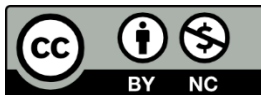
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**Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno, and Daniele Tripaldi, eds. (2024). *I Codici di Nag Hammadi: Prima Traduzione Italiana Integrale* [The Nag Hammadi Codices: First Complete Italian Translation]. Rome: Carocci. ISBN 9788829023776**

*Reviewed by Maria Eugenia Leoni*

The volume under review, *I codici di Nag Hammadi. Prima traduzione italiana integrale*, represents a significant contribution to the study of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi in December 1945. This publication is of particular interest to both specialists and enthusiasts of disciplines such as ancient Christian literature and Coptology. Spanning 711 pages, it is structured into 49 chapters and includes a general introduction, individual chapters for each of the 46 treatises, a section on notes and colophons edited by Marta Addessi, and an essay by Paola Buzi titled *I codici di Nag Hammadi e lo sviluppo della letteratura copta: brevi note su una relazione complessa* (*The Nag Hammadi Codices and the Development of Coptic Literature: Short Notes on a Complex Relationship*). A concise bibliography follows, compiling studies on Gnosticism in general, as well as on individual works, accompanied by an index of ancient and modern names, including deities and mythological figures.

The texts of the 46 treatises are presented in the order that they appear in the manuscripts, with precise indications of their position in the codices. For works found in multiple manuscripts, all corresponding attestations are clearly referenced. Each treatise is preceded by an introduction providing essential information on dating, textual transmission, structure, and content, as well as comparisons with other extant versions of the text discovered in additional papyri. The accompanying notes are particularly useful in elucidating complex passages, especially those involving textual lacunae or challenging interpretations. Many key terms are transliterated from Coptic in parentheses, allowing readers to recognize expressions or concepts that are difficult to translate.

The translation, carried out by a team of experts—including Francesco Berno, Claudio Giannotto, Daniele Tripaldi, Fernando Bermejo Rubio, Andrea Annese, Emiliano Fiori, Giuliano Chiapparini, Luca Arcari, GianMarco Schiersaro, Marta Addessi, Andrea Nicolotti, Francesco Valerio, Alberto Camplani, Vittorio Secco, Eduard Iricinschi, Silvia

Pellegrini, Luca de Curtis, and Ennio Sanzi—faithfully reproduces the layout of the original manuscripts, preserving line and page breaks and clearly marking textual lacunae. This fidelity enables precise citation of the translations, aligning with standard scholarly practices for quoting Nag Hammadi texts. Additionally, key terms are transliterated in brackets, facilitating cross-referencing for further study.

Among the numerous texts included in this collection, three stand out for their particular significance: *The Gospel of Thomas*, renowned as the most famous apocryphal gospel, comprising 114 sayings attributed to Jesus; *the Apocryphon of John*, considered the foundational text of Sethian Gnosticism, as evidenced by its multiple copies within the Nag Hammadi collection, and *The Gospel of Philip*, which has garnered significant modern scholarly attention due to its ambiguous passages suggesting a special relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

The chapter dedicated to notes and colophons highlights the distinctive nature of the annotations found in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts compared to those typically present in later Coptic texts (10th–11th centuries). In contrast to these later texts—where paratextual notes frequently provide information about the scribe, the recipient of the codex, or the date of copying—the annotations in the Nag Hammadi codices exhibit unique characteristics that merit further study. Marta Addessi, in this section, invites deeper exploration of these underexamined aspects.

In the general introduction, the editors emphasise the significance of the Nag Hammadi discovery, describing it as ‘one of the greatest manuscript finds of the last century.’ The 46 treatises, discovered in December 1945 near a 4th-century Cenobitic monastery, encompass a diverse array of texts, including apocryphal gospels, Gnostic writings, Hermetic texts (*Corpus Hermeticum*), collections of wisdom sayings, and even a fragment of Plato's *Republic*. These texts are Coptic translations, produced between the 4th and 5th centuries, of works originally composed in Greek. The introduction also addresses the complex issue of defining Gnosticism and its variations, providing a bibliography to assist readers in navigating this vast field. The editors carefully distinguish between *Gnosis*, a term used in antiquity, and *Gnosticism*, a modern scholarly construct referring to philosophical-religious movements of the 2nd and 3rd centuries characterised by a dualistic cosmology, a negative view of the material world, and the belief in salvific esoteric knowledge reserved for a select

group<sup>1</sup>. The Nag Hammadi texts, along with indirect quotations from Gnostic writings found in authors such as Irenaeus and Porphyry, contribute to a more coherent understanding of Gnosticism, as it was developed in a Christian context, incorporating elements of Judaism, early Christianity, and Greek philosophy.

The volume concludes with Paola Buzi's essay, which contextualises the Nag Hammadi codices within the broader tradition of Coptic literature, emphasising their peculiarities and unique characteristics. The study of Coptic literature as an independent field only gained momentum in the 1970s. Prior to that, the Nag Hammadi texts were often regarded merely as translations of Greek works, without intrinsic originality. A key figure in this paradigm shift was Tito Orlandi, who argued that the term 'library' is a misnomer for the Nag Hammadi collection. This perspective is shared by Frederik Wisse<sup>2</sup>, who views the codices as a heterogeneous assemblage of books produced and used by diverse groups rather than a coherent library.

Classifying the Nag Hammadi texts remains challenging due to several factors:

- These texts were copied in the 4th century, long after the peak of Gnostic movements in Alexandria.
- The religious and philosophical landscape of 4th-century Egypt was highly diverse, making it difficult to categorise the texts under a single doctrinal label such as 'Gnosticism.'

Another unresolved question is the original ownership of the codices. While definitive answers may never be found, scholars have speculated that they could have belonged to a monastery or a philosophical school that eventually abandoned their use in favour of other texts.

This edition is a valuable contribution to the study of Gnosticism and Coptic literature. The translation's accuracy, the richness of the critical apparatus, and the editorial rigor make it an essential reference for both specialists and general readers interested in these texts. However, the bibliography only includes a small number, the most

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<sup>1</sup> Williams 1996; King 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Wisse 1978: 435.

important and recent, of titles for each of the texts presented, because it is impossible to add in a volume like this a complete bibliography for each of the Nag Hammadi texts. Despite these minor points, the volume stands out for its scholarly precision and clarity, establishing itself as an indispensable resource for advancing the study of the Nag Hammadi collection.

## **Bibliography**

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