

DATING AND CONTEXTUALISING
THE NAG HAMMADI CODICES AND THEIR TEXTS
A MULTI-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH INCLUDING
NEW RADIOCARBON EVIDENCE

No text can interpret itself, and no interpretation is independent of context. Whether it is acknowledged or not, a context of interpretation is always operative, and determines the interpretation of the text¹. It follows from this insight that whenever a text is read in light of a different context, it will result in a different interpretation. As scholars we choose our contexts of interpretation based on our research questions and on the basis of academic traditions. There are contexts of authorship, contexts of redaction and rewriting, contexts of transmission, and contexts of use. These contexts of interpretation may be chosen deliberately or operate implicitly without the scholar even being aware of it. Such choices, whether explicit or implicit, are neither simple nor self-explanatory. While it may seem natural to approach a text primarily as the creation of an author, and to use some idea of the author's historical context and possible intentions as keys to its interpretation, such a procedure is hardly unproblematic even with modern works in printed books by known authors², and it becomes especially difficult with texts from antiquity and

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1. See esp. S. FISH, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1980.

2. See, e.g., R. BARTHES, *The Death of the Author*, in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath, London, Fontana Press, 1977, 142-148; H.W. GABLER, *The Text as Process and the Problem of Intentionality*, in *Text 3* (1987) 107-116; J. STILLINGER, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991; J. BRYANT, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Editorial Theory and Literary Criticism), Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2002; ID., *Versions of Moby-Dick: Plagiarism, Censorship, and Some Notes toward an Ethics of the Fluid Text*, in *Variants 4* (2005) 257-285; ID., *Witness and Access: The Uses of the Fluid Text*, in *Textual Cultures 2* (2007), no. 1, 16-42.

the middle ages preserved in manuscripts, due to the textual fluidity inherent in the transmission of texts in a manuscript culture³.

As we all know, our preserved manuscripts were often produced centuries after the original authorship of the texts we are studying, and each version of a text that is preserved in one of these manuscripts is certain to be different from the text as the author wrote it. Since what we have left are versions of texts preserved in manuscripts, and not the autographs, the question becomes which text we are interested in understanding and why. If we are interested in the text as composed by the author, and his or her context of authorship, we have to sift through the available witnesses and try to establish an approximation of that particular form of the text. This can be done with some success with relatively stable textual traditions with an abundance of preserved manuscripts, but it is problematic with more fluid textual traditions and with texts that are only attested in single or very few manuscripts. Especially problematic, of course, are cases where these problems are combined: highly fluid texts preserved in single or very few manuscripts⁴. With regard to the Nag Hammadi Codices, many of the texts are preserved in single copies, and we know from those texts that are preserved in two or more copies that there are significant differences between them that on the one hand do not allow us to reconstruct an original text with any degree of certainty, and on the other show us that these texts did not have stable histories of transmission⁵. The most secure context we have for these texts is thus constituted by the manuscripts in which the texts have been preserved. Someone

3. See, e.g., H. LUNDHAUG – L.I. LIED, *Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, in L.I. LIED – H. LUNDHAUG (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (TU, 175), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2017, 1-19; S.G. NICHOLS, *The New Philology: Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture*, in *Speculum* 65 (1990) 1-10; B. CERQUIGLINI, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

4. On this problem, see H. LUNDHAUG, *An Illusion of Textual Stability: Textual Fluidity, New Philology, and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in LIED – LUNDHAUG (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions* (n. 3), 20-54.

5. On the textual fluidity of the Nag Hammadi texts, see F. WISSE, *After the Synopsis: Prospects and Problems in Establishing a Critical Text of the Apocryphon of John and in Defining Its Historical Location*, in J.D. TURNER – A.M. MCGUIRE (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (NHMS, 44), Leiden, Brill, 1997, 138-153; K.L. KING, *Approaching the Variants of the Apocryphon of John*, *ibid.*, 105-137; S. EMMEL, *Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission, and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, *ibid.*, 34-43; L. JENOTT, *Reading Variants in James and the Apocalypse of James: A Perspective from New Philology*, in LIED – LUNDHAUG (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions* (n. 3), 55-84; LUNDHAUG, *An Illusion of Textual Stability* (n. 4); H. LUNDHAUG, *Textual Fluidity and Post-Nicene Rewriting in the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in E. CRÉGHEUR – L. PAINCHAUD – T. RASIMUS (eds.), *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: Qu'avons nous appris? / Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have*

produced these particular manuscripts, presumably with the intention that someone would read the texts contained in them. We may thus ask who these people were, and how and why the texts appear and were read in the form in which they are found in these manuscripts. In order to answer these questions, however, we need to know when and where the manuscripts were produced. In the present contribution I will therefore explore how the Nag Hammadi Codices may be dated and discuss why – and how – this is also important for the interpretation of the texts contained in them.

I. DATING AND CONTEXTUALISING THE NAG HAMMADI CODICES

The various methods of manuscript dating have different pros and cons, and different levels of certainty. The ideal situation is therefore to be able to compare the results of as many dating methods as possible. Let us take a look at the methods we have available for the dating of the Nag Hammadi Codices, and how they may also help us contextualise these manuscripts and their texts. Significantly I will also present new radiocarbon evidence not hitherto employed in the dating of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

1. *Archaeological Context*

Ideally one would prefer to deal with manuscripts discovered during controlled scientific excavation. In such cases, one is not only provided with a certain geographical context, but also ideally with a date range, if the discovery is made in a distinct archaeological layer. Most of the time, however, manuscripts are not discovered in controlled excavations, and the place of discovery is often at best identifiable on the basis of reports from their discoverers, whose trustworthiness may sometimes leave a lot to be desired. Such reports may nevertheless be useful for the contextualisation of manuscripts. With regard to the Nag Hammadi Codices, local reports, corroborated by later interviews, have provided useful information regarding the place and circumstances of their discovery⁶. The reported discovery of the codices by the cliffs of the Jabal al-Tarif

We Learned? Colloque international, Québec, Université Laval, 29-31 mai 2015 (BCNH.É, 10), Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT, Peeters, 2019, 47-67.

6. See esp. J.M. ROBINSON, *The Nag Hammadi Story*, 2 vols. (NHMS, 86), Leiden, Brill, 2014. See also D.M. BURNS, *Telling Nag Hammadi's Egyptian Stories*, in *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45 (2016), no. 2, 5-11.

has in this case not only been corroborated by multiple interviews, but is also supported by clues contained in the codices themselves, where names of places in the region have been found in the cartonnage of the covers. The reported discovery location is also supported by knowledge of the geographical features of the area, where the regular flooding of the plains with the yearly inundation of the Nile excludes the discovery of the codices on the Dishna plain itself, thus limiting the likely discovery location to the nearby cliffs⁷.

In addition to explaining their good state of preservation, the reported discovery of the codices in a jar sealed with a bowl may also provide us with a general timeframe for the burial of the codices based on circumstantial evidence, if the bowl currently in the Schøyen collection is in fact what it is claimed to be, namely the bowl that was used to seal the reportedly destroyed and now lost jar that contained the Nag Hammadi Codices, or even if it is simply a bowl of the same type. While it is impossible independently to verify the discoverer's claim that the Schøyen bowl, which can be dated stylistically to the period from the second half of the fourth to the middle of the sixth century, was in fact used to seal the jar that contained the codices, the discovery of a similar bowl in the controlled excavation of the basilica of the Pachomian headquarter monastery at Pbow⁸, in the modern village of Faw Qibli, is certainly consistent with a fourth- to fifth-century date of burial, as the discarding of this second bowl may be dated to shortly before 459 based on the archaeological layer in which it was found, beneath the floor of the basilica⁹.

7. See H. LUNDHAUG – L. JENOTT, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (STAC, 97), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, pp. 11-21.

8. On the Pachomian monasteries in the area, see L.T. LEFORT, *Les premiers monastères Pachômiens: Exploration topographique*, in *Le Muséon* 52 (1939) 379-407.

9. J.E. GOEHRING, *An Early Roman Bowl from the Monastery of Pachomius at Pbow and the Milieu of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in L. PAINCHAUD – P.-H. POIRIER (eds.), *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (BCNH.É, 7), Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006, 357-371. The archaeological survey of the area surrounding the basilica and the discovery site of the Nag Hammadi Codices did not yield much datable materials relevant to the codices, but did establish the monastic presence along the Jabal al-Tarif and in the Wadi Sheikh Ali. See J.M. ROBINSON, *The First Season of the Nag Hammadi Excavation: 27 November – 19 December 1975*, in *Göttinger Miszellen* 22 (1976) 71-79; B. VAN ELDEREN, *The Nag Hammadi Excavation*, in *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (1979) 225-231; P.C. HAMMOND, *Proton-Magnetometer / Resistivity Survey: Gebel et-Tarif, Egypt*, in *Journal of Field Archaeology* 3 (1976) 229-230; P. GROSSMANN, *The Basilica of Pachomius*, in *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (1979) 232-236; ID. – G. LEASE, *Faw Qibli – 1989 Excavation Report*, in *Göttinger Miszellen* 114 (1989) 9-16; M.W. MEYER, *Archaeological Survey of the Wadi Sheikh Ali December 1980*, in *Göttinger Miszellen* 64 (1983) 77-82; J.E. GOEHRING, *Exploring the Wadi Sheikh Ali: Photographic Evidence from the 1980 Survey*, in J. BIDMEAD – G.J. STEARNS (eds.), *Invest Your Humanity: Celebrating Marvin Meyer*, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 2015,

2. Colophons

Another ideal situation for manuscript dating is to have dated colophons. With Coptic manuscripts dating from after the Islamic conquest of Egypt this is not seldom the case. Unfortunately, however, the practice of providing the date of copying or donation of manuscripts did not start until centuries after the production of the Nag Hammadi Codices. What the colophons of the Nag Hammadi Codices provide us with, however, is highly useful information regarding the contextualisation of the manuscripts. Especially the colophons in Codices II and VII are important in this regard, as they furnish us with important indications of a monastic provenance for the codices¹⁰.

3. Covers: Cartonnage and Codicology

Further useful evidence for contextualising the Nag Hammadi Codices, and important evidence for dating them, is constituted by the documents and letters reused as cartonnage in their covers. Such cartonnage was found in more than half of the Nag Hammadi Codices¹¹, but it is the cartonnage of Nag Hammadi Codex VII that both provided us with the most abundant cartonnage materials, as well as the most useful information regarding their date of production. First of all, the documents included a number of monastic letters, that help connect the codices to the vibrant monastic presence in the region¹², among which were even found a letter written by a monk named Papnoute to his “beloved father Pachome”, which could very well be the famous founder of Pachomian monasticism himself, who was certainly active in this area around the time when this letter is likely to have been written¹³.

Such letters are not only indications of the context of the manuscripts’ production, but also of their date, indicating the codices production after the advent of monasticism. There are also other indirect indications of date, such as in the case of Nag Hammadi Codex V, where the high sums

69-90; S. EMMEL, *The ‘Coptic Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi’ and the Faw Qibli Excavations*, in G. GABRA – H.N. TAKLA (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*. Vol. 2: *Nag Hammadi-Esna*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2010, 33-43; LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 39-42.

10. LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 178-206.

11. Codices II, III, X, XII, and XIII did not provide any cartonnage documents.

12. See LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 46-55, 129-145; P. TUTTY, *The Monks of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Contextualising a Fourth-Century Monastic Community*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oslo, 2019.

13. LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 135-139, 144-145.

of money recorded in some of the papyri from its cartonnage would seem to make most sense in a period no earlier than the second half of the fourth century, based on what we know about rising inflation in Egypt at that time¹⁴. In addition, we have to allow for the possibility that there may have elapsed some time from the production of these documents to their reuse in the covers (more on that below).

More directly datable evidence was found in the cover of Codex VII, which not only yielded evidence of monastic activity and correspondence, but also contained the most concrete evidence for the date of the Nag Hammadi Codices, in the form of three dated papyrus fragments, from 341, 346, and 348. The latest of these dates, 348, is thus the *earliest possible* year in which the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex VII may have been produced. The *latest possible* date is a more difficult problem, which requires an answer to the abovementioned question of how long it might have taken from the date of the production of the two contracts for loans of wheat (from 341 and 346) and the deed of surety (from 348), to their eventual reuse as cartonnage in the cover of Codex VII. Comparative evidence from the reuse of papyri indicates that there could have elapsed as much as a hundred years, if not more, before papyri with writing on one side were reused on the other, blank, side¹⁵, and we know from later evidence that similarly long spans of time could elapse between the writing of a document and its reuse as cartonnage in a book cover¹⁶.

14. See, e.g., R.S. BAGNALL – P.J. SHPESTEIN, *Currency in the Fourth Century and the Date of CPR V 26*, in *ZPE* 24 (1977) 111-124. As Roger Bagnall puts it, commenting on other papyri with similar figures, “it is very unlikely that a papyrus in which amounts in the thousands and tens of thousands of talents appear as tax payments, and in which the solidus appears as worth 28,000 talents, can antedate the inflation which began in the 350’s” (*ibid.*, p. 120). See further the discussion of the cartonnage evidence in LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 46-55, 104-145; J.F. DECHOW, *The Nag Hammadi Milieu: An Assessment in the Light of the Origenist Controversies (with Appendix 2015)*, in H. LUNDHAUG – L. JENOTT (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (STAC, 110), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 11-51.

15. E.G. TURNER, *Recto and Verso*, in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 40 (1954) 102-106. Although Turner’s study is on timespans that elapsed between the inscription of papyri’s rectos and versos, his findings apply in principle to the reuse of papyri as cartonnage. Cf. S. EMMEL, *The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions*, in J. FREY – E.E. POPKES – J. SCHRÖTER (eds.), *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie* (BZNW, 157), Berlin – New York, De Gruyter, 2008, 33-49, pp. 38-39.

16. See, e.g., L. DEPUYDT, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, 2 vols. (Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts, 4-5; Oriental Series, 1-2), Leuven, Peeters, 1993, vol. 1, p. L n. 30, with reference to fragments from ninth-century codices that were used after a period of about fifty years as cartonnage in a tenth-century codex. There is also the interesting case of Chester Beatty papyrus 2554, an unbound quire constructed from a reused scroll that had been cut and pasted together into sheets. Dates of

This comparative evidence thus gives room for a possible date-range for the production of the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex VII stretching from 348 and well into the fifth century and beyond, on the basis of the reuse of the dated papyrus document alone.

With this piece of evidence provided by the dated papyri from the cartonnage of Codex VII, the obvious question to ask is how representative this evidence is with regard to the dating of the other Nag Hammadi Codices. While the three dated papyri from Codex VII have also been used as the primary basis for dating the rest of the Nag Hammadi Codices, the other codices could in principle have been produced quite some time either earlier or later. While there is little evidence for determining approximate dates for each codex individually, or even relative to each other, we do have certain additional data that at least furnishes us with closer connections between some of the codices. As James M. Robinson has shown, the covers may be divided into groups on the basis of a number of features¹⁷. While the covers of Codices XII and XIII are lost, and the cover of Codex III does not resemble any of the other extant covers, the construction, sizes and formats of Codices IV, V, and VIII are highly similar, and thus constitute the most coherent group. The second group consisting of Codices II, VI, IX, and X is distinct from the first group, but individual members of the group also share various features

298 and 300 are found on the original side of the papyrus, while on the other side we find dates as late as 345. See J.M. ROBINSON, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery's Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin*, Eugene, OR, Cascade, 2011, p. 74. Another piece of comparative evidence doubtlessly relevant to the Nag Hammadi Codices is constituted by the cartonnage of the cover of P.Berol. 8502, the codex containing *Gos. Mary*, *ApocrJn*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and *Act. Peter* (see the edition by W.C. TILL – H.-M. SCHENKE [eds.], *Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502: Herausgegeben, übersetzt und bearbeitet* [TU, 60], Berlin, Akademie Verlag, ²1972. On the construction of the codex, see M. KRUTZSCH, *Beobachtungen zur Herstellungstechnik früherer gnostischer Kodizes*, in C. MARKSCHIES – J. VAN OORT [eds.], *Zugänge zur Gnosis: Akten zur Tagung der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft vom 02.-05.01.2011 in Berlin-Spandau*, Leuven, Peeters, 2013, 285-293, 347-352), which contained a letter of recommendation dated (based on its genre) to the late third or early fourth century. This papyrus letter was then reused in a book cover that appears to be from the sixth century at the earliest (dated on stylistic grounds). See K. TREU, *P. Berol. 8508: Christliches Empfehlungsschreiben aus dem Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex P. 8502*, in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 28 (1982) 53-54; M. KRUTZSCH – G. POETHKE, *Der Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502*, in *Forschungen und Berichte* 24 (1984) 37-40, p. 40.

17. J.M. ROBINSON, *The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in M. KRAUSE (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib* (NHS, 6), Leiden, Brill, 1975, 170-190. On the covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see also J. DORESSE, *Les reliures des manuscrits gnostiques coptes découverts à Khénoboskion*, in *Revue d'Égyptologie* 13 (1961) 27-49, which includes pictures of the covers.

with other Nag Hammadi covers. As for the three remaining Codices I, VII, and XI, they are the tallest codices, albeit together with Codex II, which shares third place in this regard. Apart from this feature, they may, however, be grouped on the basis of palaeographical analysis, a point I will return to below.

4. Palaeography

While palaeography, the most common method of dating early manuscripts, is of little use as a pure dating tool for Coptic manuscripts, including the Nag Hammadi Codices¹⁸, it is still useful in a more general sense, as it helps us identify scribes and thus make connections between manuscripts¹⁹. Most importantly with respect to dating is the fact that Codex VII, from which we have our three dated cartonnage papyri, is connected via scribal overlap to Codices XI and I. Codex XI is the key here, as it was penned by two scribes who both worked on other Nag Hammadi Codices. The scribe who copied the first half of Codex XI also copied the fourth of the five texts in Codex I, while the scribe who copied the second half of Codex XI also copied the entire Codex VII²⁰. Codices I, VII, and XI are thus not only the three tallest Nag Hammadi Codices, but are also connected by shared scribes. Now, while we cannot take for granted that these three codices were therefore produced at exactly the same time, we may at least surmise that they were produced within the same generation.

The *terminus post quem* of 348 for Nag Hammadi Codex VII is thus an important piece of information that needs to be taken into consideration, also when we consider the date of production of Codices I and XI. While dates for these codices are still uncertain even when this evidence is taken into consideration, there are limits, based on the period of activity of the scribes under consideration, to how distant from each other in

18. See C. ASKELAND, *Dating Early Greek and Coptic Literary Hands*, in LUNDHAUG – JENOTT (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Codices* (n. 14), 457-489.

19. On the palaeography and scribes of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see esp. M.A. WILLIAMS, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 243; ID., *The Scribes of Nag Hammadi Codices IV, V, VI, VIII and IX*, in M. RASSART-DEBERGH – J. RIES (eds.), *Actes du IV^e congrès copte. Vol II: De la linguistique au Gnosticisme* (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 41), Louvain-la-Neuve, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1992, 334-342; S. EMMEL, *The Nag Hammadi Codices Editing Project: A Final Report*, in *Bulletin of the American Research Center in Egypt* 104 (1978) 10-32, pp. 27-28; LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 208-214.

20. See, e.g., WILLIAMS, *Rethinking* (n. 19), pp. 242-243.

time they could have been produced. To reach the widest possible time-span between their production we would have to posit that the first scribe of Codex XI worked on Codex I early in his career and on Codex XI late, while the scribe of Codex VII did his work on Codex XI early and on codex VII late in *his* career²¹. Even postulating such a scenario, however, the time span between the production of Codices I and VII could hardly be more than a 100 years, and most likely far less. A 100-year time-span requires a not impossible, but still largely unlikely, scenario where for instance the scribe who copied the *Treatise on the Resurrection* in Codex I did so at the age of 20, and the first half of Codex XI at the age of 70, while the second scribe wrote the second half of Codex XI at the age of 20 and Codex VII and the age of 70. This scenario requires both Codex I and Codex VII to have been produced 50 years before and after Codex XI respectively. While such a scenario is not completely impossible, I would propose that a maximum separation of around 20 years from Codex XI results in much more likely estimates.

Codices I, VII, and XI give us the clearest example of scribal overlap between Nag Hammadi Codices, but there are also other possible cases. The main hand of Codex II is highly similar to that of Codex XIII, to the extent that these codices could be the work of the same scribe²². Moreover, the second scribe of Codex II, who copied only a few lines of the *Gospel of Thomas*, could possibly be the one who also copied Codex X. In addition, there are several codices that are palaeographically highly similar, but probably not the work of the same scribe, namely Codices IV, V, VI, VIII, and IX. Moreover, Codices VI and XIII, while they cannot be grouped together on the basis of handwriting, are nevertheless connected, since the latter was found tucked into the front cover of the former, having most probably been put there already in antiquity²³. While the very close palaeographical similarity between Codices IV, V, VI, VIII, and IX renders it likely that these codices were inscribed in the same community at approximately the same time-period, it is important to stress that the very different hands of the scribally overlapping Codices I, VII, and XI must serve as a caution against using difference in

21. We will see below, when we take radiocarbon dating into consideration, that the opposite cannot be the case.

22. Cf., however, M.A. WILLIAMS – D. COBLENTZ, *A Reexamination of the Articulation Marks in Nag Hammadi Codices II and XIII*, in LUNDHAUG – JENOTT (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Codices* (n. 14), 427-456, who argue on statistical grounds that the two codices were probably penned by different scribes.

23. J.M. ROBINSON, *Inside the Front Cover of Codex VI*, in KRAUSE (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts* (n. 17), 74-87.

hands as an indication of an originally separate provenance. The same holds true also with regard to cover construction, as Codices IV, V, VI, VIII, and IX, which are highly similar with regard to handwriting, are distributed across the two most distinct groups of covers, while the second most distinct group of covers (II, VI, IX, X) contain codices with notably different handwriting²⁴. Such overlaps add support to the other indications of the common provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices as a group²⁵.

While there has been some debate regarding the possible relation between the monks of the Nag Hammadi cartonnage letters and the producers of the Nag Hammadi Codices²⁶, one of the strongest single pieces of evidence in support of such a connection is the very close palaeographical similarity between the hand that wrote one of the monastic letters used as cartonnage in the cover of Codex VIII, known as C16, and the hand that wrote Codex VIII itself²⁷. This piece of evidence indicates that some of the monks who wrote the letters that were later reused as cartonnage in the covers were also among the scribes who copied the texts in the codices themselves, and strongly supports the hypothesis of internal recycling as a likely source for a majority of the documents reused as cartonnage in the Nag Hammadi Codices²⁸.

5. Radiocarbon Dating

Finally, we may now add another method of manuscript dating to the evidence outlined above, and that is radiocarbon dating. While this dating method has not previously been applied to the Nag Hammadi Codices, no doubt partly due to the fact that the method used to require significantly larger samples than is now the case with considerably improved laboratory processes, we can now finally add a small piece of radiocarbon evidence to our other indications of date for the Nag Hammadi

24. For thorough discussions of subgroups of Nag Hammadi Codices based on codicological and palaeographical features, and the many overlaps between them, see LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 208-214; H. LUNDHAUG, *Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in D. BURNS – M. GOFF (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices* (forthcoming).

25. On these questions, see LUNDHAUG, *Material Philology* (n. 24).

26. For discussion and references, see LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7); TUTTY, *The Monks* (n. 12).

27. This was recently pointed out by TUTTY, *The Monks* (n. 12).

28. For recent treatments of the question of internal recycling and the connection between the monks of the cartonnage documents and the producers and users of the codices, see LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 104-145; TUTTY, *The Monks* (n. 12).

Codices. In collaboration with the DFG-ANR-project *Coranica* at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften²⁹ the ERC-project NEWCONT at the University of Oslo dated three samples from the Schøyen Collection, among them two from the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I³⁰. The owner, Martin Schøyen, generously agreed to donate a small piece of the sheepskin³¹ cover as well as one small fragment of papyrus from its cartonnage for analysis. Schøyen himself cut a piece of the leather cover (Figure 1), and selected an uninscribed papyrus fragment from the cartonnage (Figure 2). The samples were then brought to the laboratory at the ETH in Zürich, where the amount of ¹⁴C in the samples were measured using accelerator mass spectrometry³². The leather sample was divided in three, facilitating three test runs, heightening the accuracy of the measurement, while the cartonnage fragment was too small to allow for more than one test run³³.

Since understanding the results of radiocarbon measurements is not straightforward, a short explanation of the basics of the radiocarbon dating method³⁴ may be useful. Its basis is the insight that plants and animals absorb ¹⁴C from their environment while they are alive, but at the moment they die they no longer replenish their supply of ¹⁴C, and the amount of this carbon isotope in the organism starts to decrease at a constant rate. What is measured in the radiocarbon laboratory is the remaining amount of radiocarbon (¹⁴C) in the sample, and by comparing this measurement with the modern level of ¹⁴C in standard material, the organism's date of death can be calculated. In this case that would be the death of the sheep from which the leather cover was made, and the harvesting of the papyrus plant from which the papyrus fragment that

29. For details on this project, see M.J. MARX – T.J. JOCHAM, *Zu den Datierungen von Koranhandschriften durch die ¹⁴C-Methode*, in *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für islamisch-theologische Studien* 2 (2015) 9-43; IID., *Radiocarbon (¹⁴C) Dating of Qur'an Manuscripts*, in A. KAPLONY – M.J. MARX, *Qur'an Quotations Preserved on Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, 188-221.

30. The third sample was taken from Schøyen MS 193, commonly known as the Crosby-Schøyen Codex. For the results and details of the dating of this sample, see H. LUNDHAUG, *The Date of MS 193 in the Schøyen Collection: New Radiocarbon Evidence*, in *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 57 (2020) 219-234.

31. ROBINSON, *Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (n. 17), p. 172.

32. I visited the Schøyen Collection together with Lance Jenott on 9 April, 2014, when the samples were taken. I then took the samples to Berlin, from where they were taken to the lab at ETH in Zürich by Tobias J. Jocham of the *Coranica* project. The first test run was conducted in November 2014 and the second and third runs in December 2014.

33. On the test procedure, see MARX – JOCHAM, *Zu den Datierungen* (n. 29), pp. 18-20.

34. See W.F. LIBBY, *Radiocarbon Dating*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1955; M. WALKER, *Quaternary Dating Methods*, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 17-33.

ended up as cartonnage was made³⁵. The measurement result from the laboratory is commonly given as a so-called date “Before Present” (BP), where “present” is defined as 1950, with an added plus/minus number indicating the measurement accuracy. If the level of ^{14}C in the atmosphere had been stable throughout the ages, we would have gotten an accurate calendar date result by simply subtracting the BP number from 1950. Unfortunately this is not the case, and this is where the radiocarbon dating method gets complicated. The level of radiocarbon in the atmosphere has in fact fluctuated, and in order to convert the BP numbers from the laboratory into actual calendar date ranges, it is therefore necessary to *calibrate* the final measurement results based on our knowledge of historical levels of ^{14}C in the atmosphere. This is done using a calibration curve that has been generated on the basis of dendrochronology. The most up-to-date calibration curve is the so-called IntCal13 (see Figure 3)³⁶.

The calibration itself is done by running the BP result through a digital calibration tool, which produces a graphic rendering of the calibrated calendar date ranges³⁷. An example can be seen in Figure 4, where the purely hypothetical measurement result 1350 ± 15 BP, produces a simple plot where the red bell-curve represents the measurement and its accuracy in BP, read on the y-axis, the blue curve is the IntCal13 calibration curve, and the grey hump is the calibrated result, which produces the calendar date ranges, which can be read on the x-axis. The calendar date results are shown as 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ , representing different degrees of probability. The results typically given are the 2σ results, which provide us with a calendar date-range with a 95.4% likelihood. In this hypothetical case the 2σ result is the calendar date range of 650-680 CE. However, in order to capture even more of the possible calendar date range, we may sacrifice some specificity for comprehensiveness, and instead opt to use the 3σ range, which gives us a calendar date range of 642-691 CE with a likelihood of 99.7%.

35. The ^{14}C method can therefore only be used to date organic materials, and what is calculated is an organism’s time of death.

36. On the IntCal13 calibration curve, see P.J. REIMER *et al.*, *IntCal13 and Marine13 Radiocarbon Age Calibration Curves 0-50,000 Years Cal BP*, in *Radiocarbon* 55 (2013) 1869-1887. See also WALKER, *Quaternary Dating Methods* (n. 34), pp. 32-33.

37. The standard calibration tool is OxCal, developed by Christopher Bronk Ramsey *et al.* at Oxford University. On OxCal version 4.3.2, used here, see C. BRONK RAMSEY, *Methods for Summarizing Radiocarbon Datasets*, in *Radiocarbon* 59 (2017) 1809-1833. On earlier developments, see also ID. – S. LEE, *Recent and Planned Developments of the Program Oxcal*, in *Radiocarbon* 55 (2013) 720-730.

This example represents a best-case result that is uncommonly neat. The IntCal13 calibration curve does not simply descend in a straight line, as it does for the relevant BP range in this example, but at certain points it also rises or stays the same. Such areas of the calibration curve produce by necessity much less specific calendar date results. We see this well illustrated with a hypothetical measurement result of 1550 ± 15 BP (see Figure 5). Note that this example produces a calendar date range of more than a hundred years, despite the fact that the *measurement* of ^{14}C in the hypothetical sample is no less accurate than in the first example. The radiocarbon method is thus far less useful for the purpose of manuscript dating in time-periods where the calibration curve displays such problematic characteristics.

Even here the problems do not end, for there is reason to believe that the IntCal13 calibration curve, which is generated primarily on the basis of sampled trees from North America and Europe, does in fact not represent with sufficient accuracy the historical fluctuations in radiocarbon levels in the part of the world from which our Nag Hammadi samples derive. There are in fact indications that we need to reckon with a significant radiocarbon offset in samples from this part of the world. Based on recent studies of securely dated botanical materials from the Nile valley and the Southern Levant responding to indications that radiocarbon dating has yielded calendar dates that seem to be too old, I have applied an average offset of 24 ± 5 BP to the measured results before calibration, in order to arrive at calendar dates that are likely to be more accurate³⁸.

In order to clarify the significance of these recent insights I will show two alternative calculations of calendar dates for the leather sample from the cover of Codex I. First the results as they would be if the IntCal13 calibration curve had been accurate for this region of the world (Figure 6), and then the calibrated results as they appear with a 24 ± 5 BP regional offset applied (Figure 7). Based on our current knowledge the latter is likely to better represent the radiocarbon situation in the Nile valley, and therefore to give more accurate calendar dates for the sample. Due to our

38. I have explained this choice and the studies underlying it in LUNDHAUG, *The Date of MS 193* (n. 30). For the underlying studies, see M.W. DEE *et al.*, *Investigating the Likelihood of a Reservoir Offset in the Radiocarbon Record for Ancient Egypt*, in *Journal of Archaeological Science* 37 (2010) 687-693; S.W. MANNING *et al.*, *Fluctuating Radiocarbon Offsets Observed in the Southern Levant and Implications for Archaeological Chronology Debates*, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115 (2018) 6141-6146. See also D.J. KEENAN, *Why Early-Historical Radiocarbon Dates Downwind from the Mediterranean Are Too Early*, in *Radiocarbon* 44 (2002) 225-237.

lack of dendrochronological or botanical data from this particular time period of the Nile valley, however, it is important to remember the remaining uncertainties connected to the calibration of our measured BP results of the leather and papyrus from Nag Hammadi Codex I³⁹.

The measurement results, before calibration, as they emerged from the laboratory at ETH, can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. For the leather sample, the result of the three test runs combined yielded a ¹⁴C BP age of 1756±15⁴⁰. Calibrated using the OxCal calibration tool, this yields the results shown in Figure 6. When we take the average offset of 24±5 BP into account, we get the, likely more accurate, results shown in Figure 7. We see that this result is compatible with a calendar date for the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I between 241 and 387 CE with a probability of 99.7%⁴¹. The wide date-range is due to the nature of the calibration curve, not the accuracy of the laboratory measurement, which is in fact very high.

Since the calibrated results include date ranges stretching far back into the third century, it is important to note how this is connected to the nature of the IntCal13 calibration curve. We can see that the IntCal13 curve actually rises in the period c. 270-315 CE. This is why *any* measurement that yields a calibrated 2σ calendar date range that includes the first third of the fourth century (before 332) will automatically include calendar dates in the third century as well. Indeed, in order to get a 2σ calendar date range in the fourth century that excludes the third century one would need measurement values lower than 1683 BP for measurements with ±15 BP accuracy, which is thus a BP result that yields a 2σ calendar date range with 332 CE as its *lower* border value: 332-405 CE (95,4%). No results of radiocarbon dating that include calendar dates in the first third of the fourth century will exclude dates in the third century.

The laboratory test result of the papyrus fragment from the cartonnage of the cover of Codex I was a ¹⁴C BP age of 1796±27⁴², the greater uncertainty being caused by the fact that the fragment was too small to accommodate more than one test run. The calibrated result, with the

39. A 24±5 BP offset currently represents the best average estimate, but it should be noted that the radiocarbon level in the atmosphere in this part of the world fluctuated to such a degree that we may in reality be confronted with significantly larger offsets than the average offset applied here.

40. F14C 0,803663671±0,001534508.

41. Due to the remaining uncertainties with regard to the historical levels of atmospheric ¹⁴C in this region I prefer to use the full 3σ probability range. The 1σ and 2σ probability ranges are as follows: 1σ: 256-299 CE (45.9%), 318-340 CE (22.3%); 2σ: 249-357 CE (90.5%), 366-380 CE (2.1%).

42. F14C: 0.799648711±0.002681815.

24±5 BP offset applied, is shown in Figure 8. This very long calendar date range of 132–381 CE (99.7%)⁴³ is unfortunately not very helpful in determining the number of years between the production of the papyrus fragment and its re-use as cartonnage.

With regard to the leather cover, the long date range provided by radiocarbon analysis can be reduced when we take other dating methods into consideration. As we have seen, there is scribal overlap between Codices I and XI, and between XI and VII. This means that the secure *terminus post quem* of 348 CE for the production of Codex VII based on the dated papyrus fragment is relevant for the evaluation of the radiocarbon dating results of the scribally connected Codex I. First of all, the connection of Codex I to Codex VII renders a date for Codex I in the third century highly unlikely, as it is difficult to imagine Codex I having been produced more than 50 years earlier than Codex VII. As discussed above, considering the scribal connections between the three codices, a maximum time difference of 20 years for both Codices I and VII to Codex XI gives a maximum difference of 40 years between Codices I and VII. On this basis we could say that Codex I is likely to have been produced sometime between 308 (348–20–20) and 387 (the upper limit of the 3σ probability range of the calibrated ¹⁴C dating results). At the same time, the connection of Codex VII to Codex I also restricts the possible number of years elapsed between 348 and the reuse as cartonnage in the cover of Codex VII of the scrap of papyrus bearing this date, which thus gives us a plausible *terminus ante quem* for Codex VII around 427. Codex VII is thus likely to have been produced between 348 and 427 (387+20+20). It follows that the date of production for Codex XI, which was penned by scribes who worked on Codex I and Codex VII respectively, would then be between 328 (348–20) and 407 (387+20). Of course, if we were to widen or contract our estimate of the possible distance in time between the production of the Codices, these date ranges would change accordingly⁴⁴. We simply have to consider the likelihood of the various

43. 1σ: 232–261 CE (26.4%), 279–327 CE (41.8%); 2σ: 141–197 CE (8.7%), 209–340 CE (86.7%).

44. E.g., with a possible ten-year separation between the production of Codex XI to that of Codices I and VII respectively, which may be more reasonable, the date ranges would be: Codex I: 328–387; Codex VII: 348–407; Codex XI: 338–397. If we postulate a fifty-year gap, on the other hand, the ranges would be: Codex I: 248–387; Codex VII: 348–487; Codex XI: 298–437. If the codices were produced at the same time, that would thus likely be sometime between 348–387. It is clear that if Codices I and VII were produced far apart in time, the sequence of production must have been I, XI, and VII. Otherwise they may have been produced in any sequence.

scenarios, and I would think that the likelihood rises as the distance in time between the production of the codices are reduced.

Since both the *terminus post quem* of 348 for Nag Hammadi Codex VII, based on the dated cartonnage fragment, and the *terminus ante quem* in the 380s for Nag Hammadi Codex I, based on ¹⁴C, apply specifically to the covers, it is worth noting that these covers, like the other remaining Nag Hammadi covers, bear no evidence of reuse. There is also no evidence that any of the Nag Hammadi quires have been rebound⁴⁵. The dates of the covers are therefore likely to reflect the dates of the codices.

II. DATING AND CONTEXTUALISING THE NAG HAMMADI TEXTS

This leads us nicely over to the question of dating and contextualising the Nag Hammadi texts, and not just the codices. It goes without saying that it makes a significant difference whether we choose to contextualise our readings based on the dates and contexts of the hypothetical originals and their authors, or whether we choose to contextualise them in light of the date and provenance of the manuscripts. As argued above, due to the likelihood of significant textual fluidity in the transmission of each individual Nag Hammadi text, we do stand on somewhat firmer ground when we focus on the texts exactly as they appear in the manuscripts, in the form and language in which they have been preserved, than when basing our interpretations on hypothetical originals, often in a different language, in light of significantly more hypothetical dates and contexts. We may avoid that particular minefield by instead reading the texts as Coptic literature in light of other Coptic literature from the period of the manuscripts' production and use⁴⁶.

Once the choice of reading the texts in light of the manuscripts has been made, there are several options available. One may analyse each text in the context of the *other texts* in the codex, an approach first suggested by Michael Williams, and later followed by others⁴⁷. Such

45. The only exception is the removal of cartonnage from the inside of the front cover of Codex VI to make room for the pages removed from Codex XIII.

46. This was eloquently argued by EMMEL, *Religious Tradition* (n. 5). Cf. also the observations by WILLIAMS, *Rethinking* (n. 19), p. 209; LUNDHAUG, *Textual Fluidity* (n. 5).

47. See M.A. WILLIAMS, *Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as 'Collection(s)' in the History of 'Gnosticism(s)'*, in L. PAINCHAUD – A. PASQUIER (eds.), *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification: Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 Septembre 1993* (BCNH.É, 3), Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995, 3-50; ID., *Rethinking* (n. 19), pp. 247-262; ID. – L. JENOTT, *Inside the Covers of Codex VI*, in PAINCHAUD – POIRIER (eds.), *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica* (n. 9), 1025-1052;

approaches usually assume that the codices were intended by their producers to be read in their entirety and that their texts may thus mutually inform each others' interpretation. Yet, it is not necessary to assume that all texts in a codex were meant to be read together in order to read them in light of the time and place of the manuscripts in which they are found. Individual texts may simply be read in light of other texts written in the general period of the Nag Hammadi Codices' production and use. Such readings may take a purely reception-focused approach, but it may also look for echoes in the texts of the historical, religious, and social context of the codices. Echoes of fourth-century, and in some cases fifth-century, doctrinal debates may thus be the focus of enquiry⁴⁸. More specifically,

L. JENOTT – E.H. PAGELS, *Antony's Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt*, in *J ECS* 18 (2010) 557-589; L. JENOTT, *Recovering Adam's Lost Glory: Nag Hammadi Codex II in Its Egyptian Monastic Environment*, in ID. – S.K. GRIBETZ (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 155), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, 222-243; M. KALER, *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul in the Context of Nag Hammadi Codex I*, in *J ECS* 16 (2008) 319-339; L. PAINCHAUD – M. KALER, *From the Prayer of the Apostle Paul to the Three Steles of Seth: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as a Collection*, in *VigChr* 61 (2007) 445-469; E. IERICINSCHI, *The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II: Book Production and Monastic Paideia in Fourth-Century Egypt*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2009; I.S. GILHUS, *Contextualizing the Present, Manipulating the Past: Codex II from Nag Hammadi and the Challenge of Circumventing Canonicity*, in E. THOMASSEN (ed.), *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010, 91-108; K.A. FOWLER, *From the Apocryphon of John to Thomas the Contender: Nag Hammadi Codex II in Its Fourth-Century Context*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 2013; R. FALKENBERG, *The Making of a Secret Book of John: Nag Hammadi Codex III in Light of New Philology*, in LIED – LUNDHAUG (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions* (n. 3), 85-125.

48. R. MORTLEY, 'The Name of the Father Is the Son' (Gospel of Truth 38) [with Afterword by Michel Tardieu], in R.T. WALLIS – J. BREGMAN (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1992, 239-252; M.J. EDWARDS, *The Epistle to Rheginus: Valentinianism in the Fourth Century*, in *NT 37* (1995) 76-91; A. CAMPLANI, *Per la cronologia di testi valentiniani: Il Trattato Tripartito e la crisi ariana*, in *Cassiodorus* 1 (1995) 171-195, p. 176. Cf. also ID., *Sulla trasmissione di testi gnostici in copto*, in ID. (ed.), *L'Egitto cristiano: Aspetti e problemi in età tardoantica* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 56), Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1997, 121-175; H. LUNDHAUG, *Begotten, Not Made, to Arise in This Flesh: The Post-Nicene Soteriology of the Gospel of Philip*, in E. IERICINSCHI – L. JENOTT – N. DENZEY LEWIS – P. TOWNSEND (eds.), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* (STAC, 82), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, 235-271; ID., *The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Complex World of Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt*, in L. ARCARI (ed.), *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Century CE* (STAC, 103), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017, 339-358; LUNDHAUG, *Textual Fluidity* (n. 5); FOWLER, *From the Apocryphon of John to Thomas the Contender* (n. 47); J.C. DIAS CHAVES, *Nag Hammadi Codex V and Late Antique Coptic Hagiographies: A Comparative Approach*, Ph.D. dissertation, Université Laval, 2018.

the many indications that the Nag Hammadi Codices were produced and used by Egyptian monastics have spawned a number of studies reading both individual Nag Hammadi texts and whole codices in light of such a context, highlighting echoes of interests and preoccupations typical of their monastic context of use, and similarities with other monastic literature⁴⁹.

When reading the Nag Hammadi texts in light of fourth- and fifth-century contexts we may find that certain passages or features that have commonly been interpreted from the point of view of an earlier context⁵⁰, may be interpreted differently when read from the perspective of their manuscripts. In some cases we may also identify aspects of a text that make sense *only* from the perspective of a fourth- or fifth-century context. In all these cases it is important to remember that we cannot assume that the textual transmission of any of the Nag Hammadi texts has been stable. Indeed, our default assumption should rather be that they may all have been significantly adapted or rewritten during histories of transmission of different duration⁵¹.

49. LUNDHAUG – JENOTT, *Monastic Origins* (n. 7), pp. 234-262; JENOTT, *Recovering Adam's Lost Glory* (n. 47); H. LUNDHAUG, *Monastic Exegesis and the Female Soul in the Exegesis on the Soul*, in U. TERVAHAUTA – I. MIROSHNIKOV – O. LEHTIPUU – I. DUNDERBERG (eds.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* (VigChrSup, 144), Leiden, Brill, 2017, 221-233; H. LUNDHAUG, *The Dialogue of the Savior (NHC III,5) as a Monastic Text*, in M. VINZENT (ed.), *Studia Patristica 93: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2015*. Vol. 19: *The First Two Centuries; Apocrypha and Gnostica*, Leuven, Peeters, 2017, 335-346; C.H. BULL, *Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in the Apocryphon of John and Its Monastic Manuscript-Context*, in TERVAHAUTA – MIROSHNIKOV – LEHTIPUU – DUNDERBERG (eds.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, 75-107; ID., *An Origenistic Reading of Plato in Nag Hammadi Codex VI*, in M. VINZENT (ed.), *Studia Patristica 75*. Vol. 1: *Studia Patristica – Platonism and the Fathers – Maximus the Confessor*, Leuven, Peeters, 2017, 31-40; ID., *Demons of the Air in the Perfect Discourse (NHC VI,8) and Monastic Literature*, in CRÉGHEUR – PAINCHAUD – RASIMUS (eds.), *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans* (n. 5), 105-120; M.H. SELLEW, *Reading Jesus in the Desert: The Gospel of Thomas Meets the Apophthegmata Patrum*, in LUNDHAUG – JENOTT (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Codices* (n. 14), 81-106; B. STEFANIW, *Hegemony and Homecoming in the Ascetic Imagination: Sextus, Silvanus, and Monastic Instruction in Egypt*, *ibid.*, 107-138; IRICINSCHI, *The Scribes and Readers* (n. 47); K.A. FOWLER, *The Ascent of the Soul and the Pachomians: Interpreting the Exegesis on the Soul (NHC II,6) within a Fourth-Century Monastic Context*, in *Gnosis 2* (2017) 63-93; EAD., *Reading Gospel of Thomas 100 in the Fourth Century: From Roman Imperialism to Pachomian Concern over Wealth*, in *VigChr 72* (2018) 421-446; S.K. GRIBETZ, *Women as Readers of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, in *JECS 22* (2018) 463-494.

50. It is not uncommon for studies of the Nag Hammadi texts to present readings of the texts in light of a second- or third-century context, while simply taking for granted that there is a close enough similarity between the extant Coptic text and its hypothetical second-century, usually Greek, original.

51. This includes texts that have only been preserved in single copies. See LUNDHAUG, *An Illusion of Textual Stability* (n. 4).

On the one hand such studies of the Nag Hammadi texts in light of fourth- and fifth-century contexts rely upon the plausible date of the production of the manuscripts in the fourth and fifth centuries, but on the other hand such studies may also be used as evidence indicating the date of the codices themselves – evidence that may be added to the other methods of dating discussed above⁵². For instance, codices containing texts that show awareness of post-Nicene doctrinal debates can hardly have been produced prior to 325.

III. CONCLUSION

Each text in the Nag Hammadi Codices has a number of possible contexts of interpretation, and we need to choose whether to read them in their hypothetical contexts of authorship, with all the problems that entails in terms of textual fluidity, or we may read them as texts in use, in the form in which they have been preserved to us, thus shedding light on the context in which the manuscripts were produced. Analyses of their cartonnage and colophons indicate that the Nag Hammadi Codices were produced and used by monastics in the fourth and fifth centuries. Radiocarbon dating of the leather cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I is compatible with these indications when interpreted in light of Codex I's scribal connections with Codices XI and VII, the latter of which contains the only certain *terminus post quem* of any Nag Hammadi Codex. Radiocarbon dating does not, and cannot, provide us with a silver bullet for manuscript dating, but it does provide us with valuable added data that can fruitfully be used in conjunction with other dating methods. Radiocarbon dating of samples from the other Nag Hammadi Codices could no doubt contribute valuable additional evidence that may prove especially valuable with regard to those Nag Hammadi Codices that are not connected by scribal overlap to either Codices I or VII, for which our main evidence for their date of production is currently their association and general similarity with Codices I, VII, and XI.

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52. See Table 3 for an overview of the probable dates of the Nag Hammadi Codices without taking the contents of the texts into account. Once we also take into account the texts, we may add, e.g., references to doctrines and doctrinal conflicts to the evidence listed in this table, which in certain cases may further limit the plausible time spans listed here.

TABLES

Targ.	C14 age (BP)	$\pm 1\sigma$	F14C	$\pm 1\sigma$	$\delta C13$	$\pm 1\sigma$	mg C	C/N
1	1751	27	0,80400	0,00300	-20,7	1,1	0,99	6,328329137
2	1747	19	0,804579557	0,001902909	-21,37851339	1		
3	1756	15	0,803663671	0,001534508	-21,32066617	1		

Table 1: Sample results, raw data, ETH-57861 MS 1804 Cover (leather).

The first row shows the results of the first test run (one target); the second shows the results of the first two test runs combined (two targets); and the third shows the combined results from all three test runs (three targets).

Targ.	C14 age (BP)	$\pm 1\sigma$	F14C	$\pm 1\sigma$	$\delta C13$	$\pm 1\sigma$	mg C	C/N
1	1796	27	0.799648711	0.002681815	-9,8	1,1	0,99	402,0368132

Table 2: Sample results, raw data, ETH-57862 MS 1804 Cartonnage (papyrus).

NHC	Scribes	Approximate Date Range	Reason
I	1, 11 (A)	308-387	^{14}C ; shared scribe with XI, which has shared scribe with VII.
II	2, 12 (C)	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices. Possible shared scribes with XII and XIII.
III	3	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices.
IV	4 (B)	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices. Palaeographically highly similar to V, VI, VIII, IX.
V	5 (B)	c. 350-V	High values mentioned in cartonnage fragment, seems to place it post 350s inflation. Palaeographically highly similar to IV, VI, VIII, IX.
VI	6 (B)	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices. Palaeographically highly similar to IV, V, VIII, IX.
VII	7 (A)	348-427	Cartonnage fragment dated 348; shared scribe with XI, which has shared scribe with I (dated by ^{14}C).
VIII	8 (B)	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices. Palaeographically highly similar to IV, V, VI, IX.
IX	9 (B)	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices. Palaeographically highly similar to IV, V, VI, VIII.
X	10	IV-V	General similarity with dated Nag Hammadi Codices.
XI	11, 7 (A)	328-407	Shared scribes with I and VII.
XII	12	IV-V	Possible shared scribe with II.
XIII	2 (C)	IV-V	Possible shared scribe with II.

Table 3: Probable Dates of Production of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Sample cut from the leather cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I (Schøyen MS 1804).



Figure 2: Unscripted papyrus fragment from the cartonnage of the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I after removal from plexiglass frame (Schøyen MS 1804).

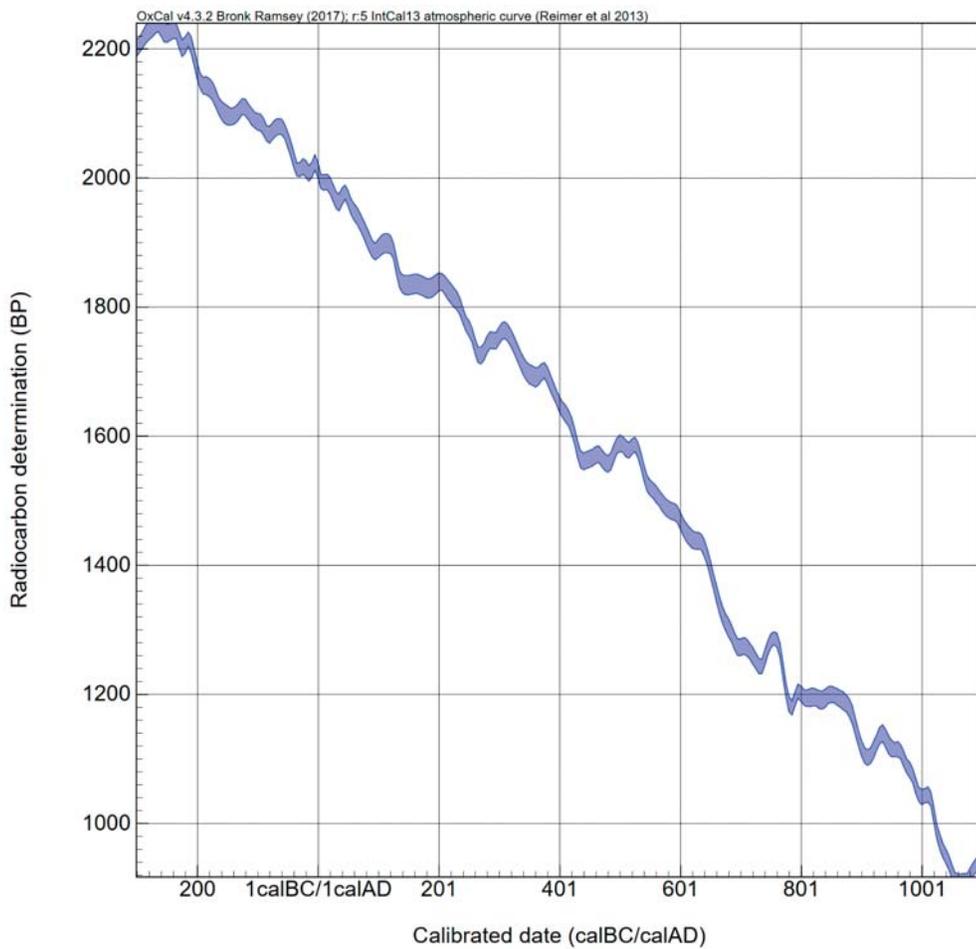


Figure 3: The IntCal13 atmospheric calibration curve.

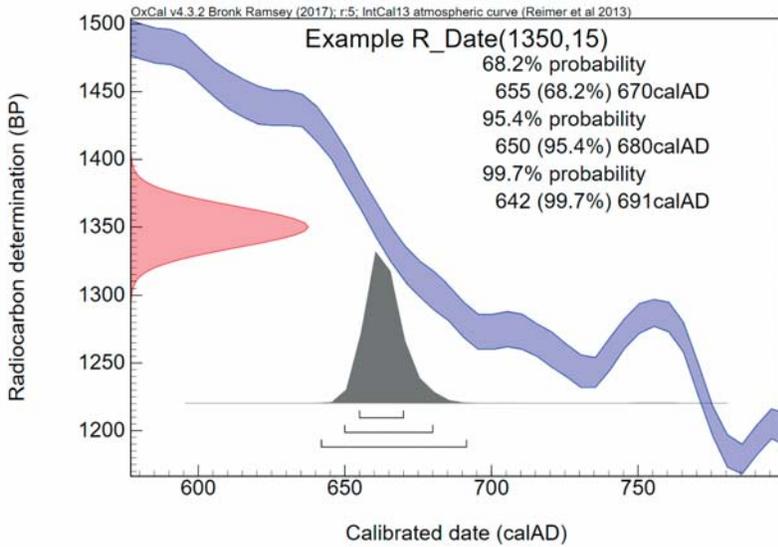


Figure 4: Calibrated radiocarbon results based on the hypothetical measurement result 1350±15 BP, generated by the OxCal v.4.3.2 calibration tool using IntCal13 atmospheric curve. The red bell curve shows the ¹⁴C measurement result in BP; the IntCal13 atmospheric curve is shown in blue; and the calibrated calendar date range in gray. 1σ, 2σ, and 3σ ranges are given.

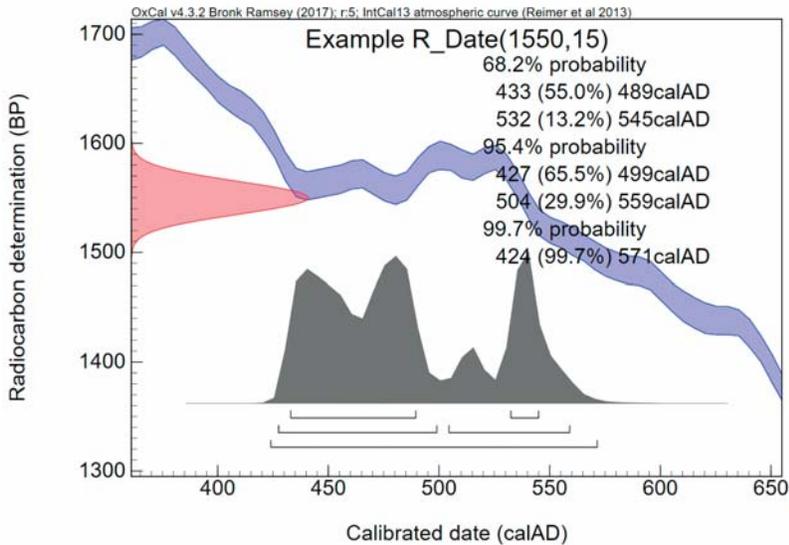


Figure 5: Calibrated radiocarbon results based on the hypothetical measurement result 1550±15 BP, generated by the OxCal v.4.3.2 calibration tool using IntCal13 atmospheric curve. The red bell curve shows the ¹⁴C measurement result in BP; the IntCal13 atmospheric curve is shown in blue; and the calibrated calendar date range in gray. 1σ, 2σ, and 3σ ranges are given.

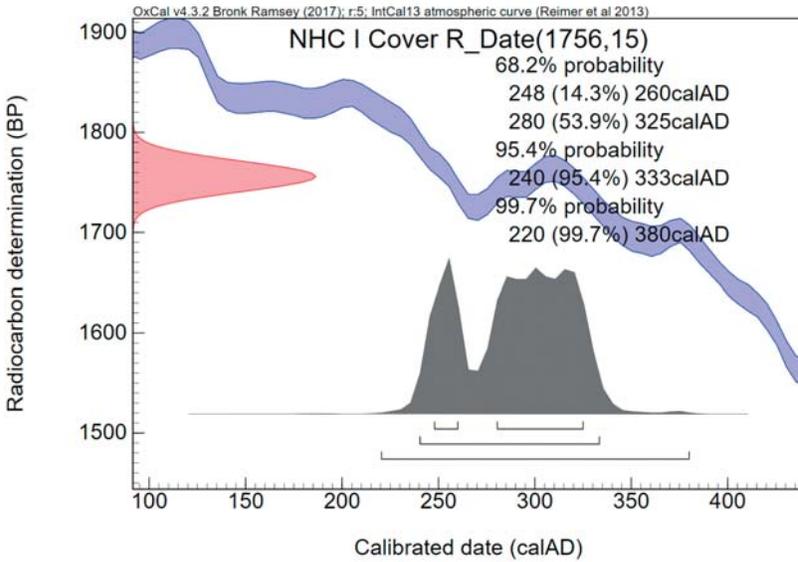


Figure 6: Calibrated radiocarbon results of the leather sample from the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I, based on the combined measurement results of all three test runs, 1756 ± 15 BP (see Table 1), generated by the OxCal v.4.3.2 calibration tool using IntCal13 atmospheric curve. The red bell curve shows the ^{14}C measurement result in BP; the IntCal13 atmospheric curve is shown in blue; and the calibrated calendar date range in gray. 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ ranges are given.

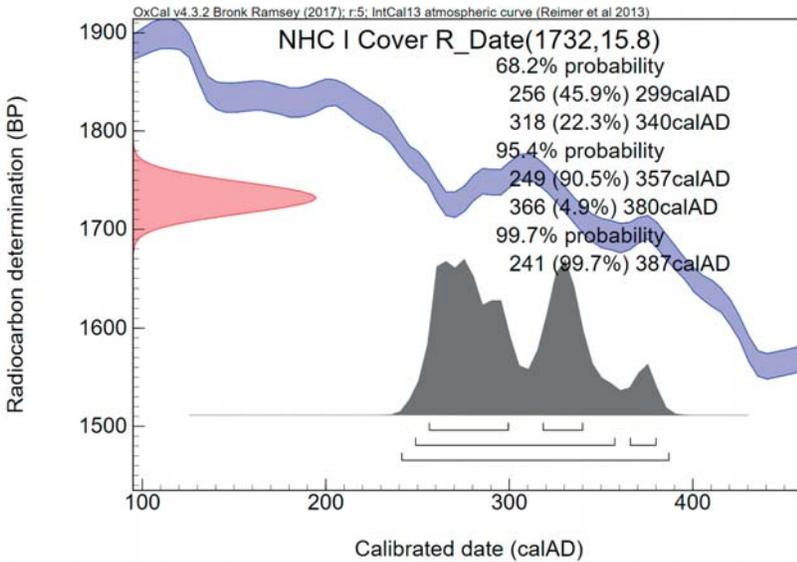


Figure 7: Calibrated radiocarbon results of the leather sample from the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I, based on the combined measurement results of all three test runs (1756 ± 15 BP, see Table 1), with an offset of 24 ± 5 BP applied, generated by the OxCal v.4.3.2 calibration tool using IntCal13 atmospheric curve. The red bell curve shows the ^{14}C measurement result in BP with offset applied (1732 ± 15.8); the IntCal13 atmospheric curve is shown in blue; and the calibrated calendar date range in gray. 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ ranges are given.

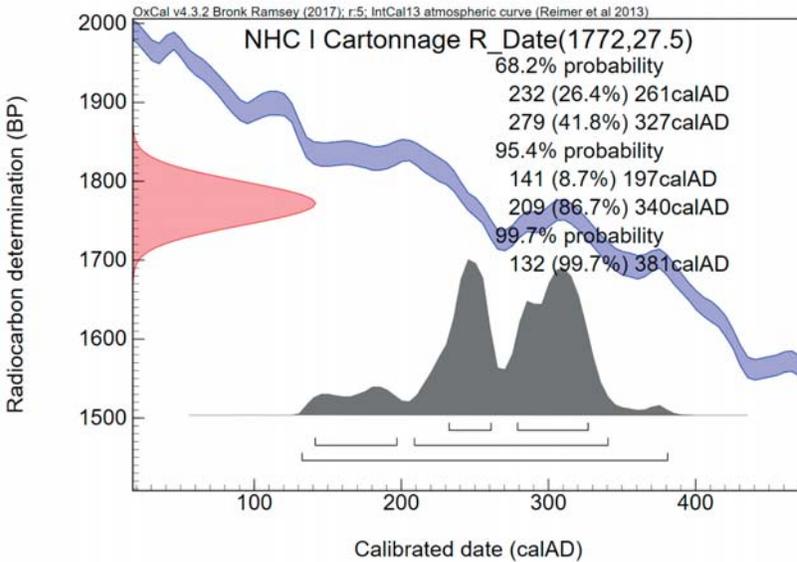


Figure 8: Calibrated radiocarbon results of the papyrus sample from the cartonage of the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex I, based on the measurement result of one test run (1796 ± 27 BP, see Table 1), with an offset of 24 ± 5 BP applied, generated by the OxCal v.4.3.2 calibration tool using IntCal13 atmospheric curve. The red bell curve shows the ^{14}C measurement result in BP with offset applied (1772 ± 27.5); the IntCal13 atmospheric curve is shown in blue; and the calibrated calendar date range in gray. 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ ranges are given.

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CCCXIX

TEXTS IN CONTEXT

ESSAYS ON DATING AND CONTEXTUALISING CHRISTIAN WRITINGS FROM THE SECOND AND EARLY THIRD CENTURIES

EDITED BY

JOSEPH VERHEYDEN – JENS SCHRÖTER – TOBIAS NICKLAS

PEETERS
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