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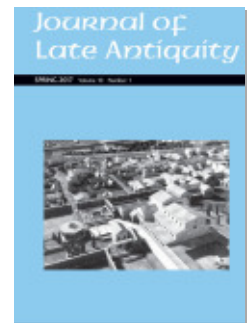
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*The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 97* by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott (review)

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Through his individual examples Johnson exposes the frameworks by which Christians and non-Christians mapped their own field of dreams, so to speak. Rather than view all this “commentary, compilation, and repackaging” as unoriginal or parasitic, Johnson claims it is profoundly creative and innovative. He suggests that, as with the codex, a technology that increasingly displaced the scroll in the later third and fourth centuries, readers could enter these narratives at random and easily compare, quote, and recombine portions. Like musical sampling today, new genres emerged from repurposed fragments. Thus, Late Antiquity, Johnson claims, constitutes a vibrant stage in the transformation of antiquity and the advent of the Middle Ages rather than an era of stagnation or rote imitation. Johnson’s astute and incisive analyses reveal how “cartographical thinking” elides the map and the library to intriguing effect. Seeing Egeria as a collector, for instance, nuances our understanding of that pilgrim. Yet, some readers may also desire some firmer distinction between map and library in places. For, as much as cartography is about accumulation, it can also result in erasure. Not all sacred sites lend themselves to “stacking,” Johnson’s term for the convergence of Jewish and Christian holy places in some pilgrims’ descriptions. As a recent study of Antioch by Shephardson reminds us, collective memory and the “politics of place” can give rise to competing sacred geographies that resist compilation or smooth synthesis.

In sum, *Literary Territories* is an important book that demonstrates handily how a “more fluid approach” to geographical literature can provide fresh insights into the astrological, astronomical, cosmographical, geographical, and

topographical texts of late antiquity. It poses new questions for the study of Christianization and urbanization in Late Antiquity. Moreover, Johnson’s insights into the dynamics and effects of cartographical thinking are likely to serve as springboards for future research. Students of pilgrims’ writings stand to benefit from the similarities Johnson detects between these works and other non-Christian travel genres. Although Johnson focuses less on the portion of Egeria’s diary describing rites in Jerusalem, historians of liturgy may detect therein additional “maps” and perhaps further insights into the development of the stationary liturgy. Although the contributions of Islamic geography are beyond the scope of this volume, Johnson’s illustration of the age’s zeal for adaptation and commentary may also provide useful points of comparison for considering the Islamic “reworking” of Greek and Roman geographical writing. And his theory of late antique literary aesthetics stands to benefit the study of visual culture in the period, particularly, in respect to the visual rhetoric of Roman maps and the significance of *spolia*, monuments, and maps in late antique art and architecture. With Johnson as navigator and fellow-traveler, the journey ahead is bound to be eye-opening.

*The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 97.*

HUGO LUNDHAUG AND LANCE JENOTT  
Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. Pp. xvii + 332. ISBN 978-3-16-154172-8

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Throughout the past half-century, the Nag Hammadi codices have fascinated

historians of early Christianity. A particular challenge, however, for analyzing their importance is the lack of information on the context of the texts themselves: who wrote, read, and copied them? This important book revisits these questions to argue that monks, most likely in the Pachomian federation, produced and read these books. Admittedly (1), this is not a new suggestion and thus the strengths of the book lie in its careful and detailed arguments, which both explore the variety of evidence and engage in meticulous debate with the extensive scholarship on the subject.

Indeed, the level of specificity of this work makes it particularly difficult to provide a summary of its many important points. Broadly speaking, the authors argue that two obstacles have prevented their theory from becoming the definitive explanation. First, they maintain that many scholars continue to rely on an “overly idealized portrait” of late antique Christian monks in Egypt as “severed from society, often illiterate, and adhering only to the Bible”; and, second, they argue that “the persistent classification of the Nag Hammadi texts as “gnostic” has led to the impression that they are somehow alien to “authentic” Christianity, and therefore beyond the pale of Christian monasticism” (247). “Gnosticism” and “Monasticism” thus function as separate categories, wherein the codices belong to the former and so are separated from the latter. Lundhaug and Jenott reject this bifurcation for several reasons. First, because, following Michael Williams and others, they avoid the category of “Gnosticism” altogether (7 and throughout the book at several key points; see the index, 321). The presence of Gnostic texts, they maintain,

indicates neither the presence of people labeled as Gnostics nor communities of such thinkers. Second, the authors instead show how the range of evidence associated with the codices is consistent with the more complex understanding of Egyptian monasticism that has emerged in the past few decades. The success, and general persuasiveness, of the book lies in the authors’ ability to break down those broad claims into specific points of evidence, each receiving its own chapter.

The book opens with an overview of the history of the debate in a chapter entitled “The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics?”, a title that has its counter-point in the last chapter, “The Secret Books of the Egyptian Monastics.” Both chapters provide succinct summaries of the authors’ position (7 and 247). Of particular importance in the opening chapter is the discussion of the date of the codices, which cannot be earlier than the mid-fourth century but which Lundhaug and Jennott place later “spanning from the fourth century well into the fifth and possibly even beyond” (11). Chapter two lays out the diversity of monasticism in late antique Upper Egypt, an argument meant to counter the “overly idealized portrait” that contributes to the separation of the Nag Hammadi codices from a monastic context. The following two chapters (“Gnostics” and “Contrasting Mentalities?”) further develop the idea that monks would be open to reading works like those in the Nag Hammadi codices. In sum, the authors conclude that the monks were sufficiently educated to be able to understand the texts (90–1)—even though a classical education is not necessary to their understanding (92–3)—and that the texts are not anti-biblical (79) but engage in extensive

biblical exegesis, a topic that would interest biblically literate monks, particularly Pachomians. Furthermore, in a later chapter, they make the case for the presence of non-canonical works in monastic contexts (Ch. 6). Thus the monks need not be “Gnostic” to have copied and read these texts, and in any case they contend that there were no Gnostics in fourth- and fifth-century Egypt (64–69). Perhaps the most intriguing part of this argument is how the authors erase the distinction between heresy (Gnostic) and orthodoxy (monks) to show the shared interest in determining the spiritual meaning of Scripture that unites these two usually distinct categories (81–84). For this argument to work, though, they also have to undermine “old clichés” of Gnosticism, such as its purported negative view of the creator God and creation (85). Finally, Lundhaug and Jenott provide an extensive argument against the claim that these texts fit best with an “urban elite” audience (see 102 for a list of the claims they argue are necessary to accept this view).

The authors then turn to the manuscripts themselves: the papyri in the cartonnage (Ch. 5), the colophons that are part of the manuscripts (Ch. 7), and the question of book production in Late Antiquity (Ch. 8). As before, each chapter engages scholarship that disputes a monastic context in order to rebut it and provide counterarguments. They deny that the documentary evidence among the papyri in the cartonnage indicates a non-monastic context, since monks were not as separated from the rest of society as the idealized portrait claims (117–23). Other papyri with references to brothers, fatherhood, and including specific names, are more readily identifiable as monastic (129–39). The authors’ arguments about

the colophons rely both on parallels with monastic evidence (178) and also on arguments that the phrases in them “resonate” with Pachomian monasticism (188) to make the case that overall the language indicates a monastic context. Finally, the authors maintain that organizing the texts into various subgroups based on scribal hand does not refute the argument for monasteries as a locus of production (231), especially since most books were produced in monasteries during this time period.

Having thus established a detailed case for the monastic context for production, Lundhaug and Jenott consider which monks would have been the most likely readers of these texts. Although allowing for a Melitian monastic context, the reference to “Pachome” in the papyri (Ch. 5) tips the scales away from this possibility. Rather they argue that the themes of the texts align with those called “Origenist,” (240–26) and further assert that Pachomian monasteries, although viewed by some scholars as fortresses of orthodoxy, would have included monks who were influenced by the teachings of Origen (249).

Near the end of the chapter on cartonnage, Lundhaug and Jenott acknowledge that scholars can never know for certain how the material was collected but that a monastic site is the “most *plausible*” explanation (143, emphasis theirs). I would extend that uncertainty to the production of the codices as a whole. In the absence of definitive evidence, the authors have made the best case yet for the argument that monks, most likely Pachomian, produced and read these texts. Although their case necessarily rests on interpretive claims that are unlikely to find universal assent, *The Monastic Origins of the*

*Nag Hammadi Codices* is now essential reading for anyone interested in the Nag Hammadi texts, Egyptian monasticism or, as they would argue, both. For those who accept the authors' arguments, the book will have succeeded in its goal of

moving the conversation from the question of "who produced and read the Nag Hammadi Codices" to that of how the ideas contained within the texts can help us to understand the complexity of monasticism in late antique Egypt (264).