

"The Gospel of Thomas as a Source for Early Christian History"

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Introduction

The *Gospel of Thomas* clearly proved to be a rather adaptable entity. As is well known, it only survives in its entirety in Nag Hammadi Codex II, a fourth-century Coptic codex. It appears here in the company of the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and other works such as the *Book of Thomas the Contender*. This curious collection of works has a colophon, which pronounces a blessing upon "the Spirituals", implying, as Bentley Layton is almost certainly right to note, that Codex II was expected to be amenable to a Valentinian audience. While none of the attempts to show that the *Gospel of Thomas* is itself a Valentinian work has been successful, in this fourth century codex it was clearly envisaged as being - at the very least - compatible with Valentinian thought.

Moving back a century, we encounter the Greek fragments. Here, we meet a great deal in common with the Coptic text. The differences between the two versions are, to my mind, relatively minor. One of the only significant divergences consists in the use of god-language: to repeat what is entirely common knowledge, whereas we encounter in the Coptic text a studious avoidance of the phrase "kingdom of God" and any unambiguously positive use of "god" ([p]noute), we in fact have in *P. Oxy.* 1 an instance of the phrase, suggesting a theology in some ways more traditional than what we find in the Coptic. Unfortunately of course, given that we only have approximately one-sixth of the work in Greek, it is very difficult really to be sure of the contents of the Coptic version going back to the beginning. It is also tantalising, as I think Stephen Patterson mentioned in discussion in the Eisenach *Thomastagung* (2006), that we only have fragments from the first third of the work: certainly some of the more juicily developed thought - the material which scholars have sometimes classified as "Gnostic" - appears in the middle and latter sections of *Thomas* (e.g. §§83-84).

The earliest of the Greek fragments is *P. Oxy.* 655 down the road in Harvard, and dates to the beginning of the third century, which means that on external grounds we can move GTh back into the second century. In my view, the *incipit* of the *Gospel of Judas* is also influenced by GTh, which takes us to the middle of the second century. For reasons which will become clear, I am less convinced that one can take GTh much further back than that.

1. The *Gospel of Thomas* as the source for an early Jesus movement

We have, then, a movement which operated at least between (roughly) the mid-second and mid-third centuries. What can be said about this movement in its early form, as reflected in the *Gospel of Thomas*? Here we need to be cautious in our "mirror-reading" of the work: GTh is not simply a "transparent" text behind which one can simply read off information about eine thomasinische Gemeinde. This is even more apparent in the polemical elements of the work: naturally, no-one thinks that GTh is really attacking opponents who believe that the kingdom of God is in the sea (cf. §3). Nevertheless, with due caution, we can reconstruct certain aspects of the movement.

I use the word "movement" because it seems to me that "community" suggests a collective unit which is in danger of being misleading for the interpretation of GTh. Rather, the movement consists of solitaires (*monachoi*) who are said to stand as single ones (§§16, 23, 75; cf. §§4, 30). This is tempered a little by the call to love and guard one's brother (§§25-26), but only a little, in terms of the overall tenor of the work.

Consonant with this is the self-perception of the community as a tiny minority in the midst of a *massa perditionis*. The members of the movement considered themselves as chosen "one out of a thousand, two out of ten thousand" (§23). This sense of being hugely outnumbered is reflected again in a later trio of sayings, in which the many outside and the few inside are contrasted: the harvest is great, the workers are few; there are many around the trough, but few in it; there are many at the door, but only the single people (in a nice irony) in the bridal chamber (§§73-75).

Those who have mistaken GTh for a Gnostic work have consequently interpreted this information about solitariness and minority as indicative of an introverted group which has simply battened down its religious hatches. This does not do justice, however, to the missionary motifs in GTh - which have tended to be recognised better by those who see GTh as an early document. Even though I do not share this view of GTh's origins, it is much more satisfactory nevertheless to see GTh as a product of a reasonably outward-looking group. GTh 14 shares with Luke's mission discourse (in Lk. 10.8) the saying about eating whatever is set before you on your travels. GTh 33 commands preaching from the roofs, even if there is the rather odd qualification that the message is to be preached in your other ear! Finally, the reference to the great harvest and the few labourers almost certainly presupposes mission like its Matthean and Lukan parallels (Matt. 9.37-38/Lk 10.2).

Concomitantly, the work also presumes persecution - or at least, there is a constructed situation of persecution. Again, GTh shares with Luke and Matthew the material about Jesus casting fire, sword and war upon the earth (§16). There is also repetition of the Synoptic material about alienation from one's family because of attachment to the revelation of Jesus (§§16 and 31). Often missed, however, is the note of persecution in the saying about those who claim the kingdom is in the sky or in the sea. Although the Coptic version describes these opponents as *netsōk hēt tēutn* ("those who lead you"), the Greek fragment *P. Oxy. 654* has *hoi helkontes hēmas* (= poss. *bumas*). *helko* has a slightly different sense from *sōk hēt*, and is most likely to refer to a disciple being hauled before a court of some kind. Attridge's translation of the Greek fragments renders *hoi helkontes hēmas* as having the same sense as the Coptic: however, while it is very difficult to prove a negative, I am not aware of *helkō* being able to bear the sense of "lead". A form of persecution, perhaps even of a semi-official kind involving judicial processes, is much more likely to be in view.

This situation of persecution was no doubt exacerbated by the uncompromising stance of the movement *vis-à-vis* outsiders. GTh consistently appears to warn against any assimilation to competing movements or to wider culture. This is particularly evident in the *impossibilia*, sayings about the actual impossibility of, or which forbid, certain actions: "it is impossible for a man to mount two horses or to stretch two bows. And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters; otherwise he will honour the one and treat the other contemptuously, etc." (§47). In addition to the set of *impossibilia* in GTh 47, there is a series of them perhaps in GTh 31-35. There are fairly stiffly defined boundaries between the Thomas movement and the world, which is drunk (§28), and consists of pigs and dogs (§93). Singled out in particular are the Jews who love the fruit and hate the tree or hate the fruit and love the tree (§43). Furthermore, Christians of the "magna ecclesia" are correlated with those Jews and also additionally benighted (e.g. §13, and the position of the disciples in GTh in general).

The stance in relation to the wider Christian movement is developed in §§12 and 13. Here, James is a kind of patron saint of the community. This is not because the Thomas movement has any real historical connection with James: in §12, James is given a kind of papal status - he is the archbishop to whom all the other disciples have to report, as in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. Furthermore, he is given the title he is distinguished by in second-century, rather than first-century literature - James the just (e.g. *G. Heb.* and Hegesippus, in contrast to Paul and Josephus). To suppose a real connection with James requires not only mirror reading but also a

retrojection back some distance into the past. James is made use of because he represents a path to Jesus independent of the conventionally venerated apostles.

This independence from the apostles usually regarded as dominant is reinforced in the following saying. In GTh 13, in a variation on the Caesarea Philippi episode, Matthew's and Peter's views of Christ are rejected, and Thomas alone receives secret revelation from Jesus. The choice of Matthew and Peter is intriguing: after §12, which ascribes to James the same kind of role that Matthew 16 assigns to Peter, the Thomasine Jesus explicitly rejects the christological views first of Matthew and then of Peter. One is tempted to conclude that GTh 13 first names and shames the evangelist in question, and then the Peter who is given such prominence in Matt 16.¹

In addition to James, then, Thomas receives veneration as a patron saint. Although he does not quite give a proper response to Jesus' question, he is given secret revelation by Jesus just as he is described as receiving in the *incipit*. He, like James, is an unconventional choice of apostle.²

What is clear is that whatever importance is attached to Thomas and James, it is Jesus who is the focus of attention. He is the unique source of revelation (§17), and is stressed in the structure of the Gospel, with its repeated "Jesus said", "Jesus said", "Jesus said". He also has a kind of supremacy: he is the source of the all in GTh 77 and the agent in election (§23), as well as having various other exalted features. The activity of the Thomas movement is summed up, as it is in other Jesus movements, as following Jesus and taking up one's cross as he did (§55).

2a. The *Gospel of Thomas* as a source for intra-Christian debates

This focus on Jesus in GTh, and the work's similarities with other Christian literature, identifies the work clearly as an attempt to define true Jesus-discipleship over against competing positions. There is not space here to cover every theological area in which GTh takes a view different from another view articulated elsewhere in the first two centuries AD. This would mean treating virtually every saying: for example, the reference to the fall and unworthiness of Adam taps into early Christian discussion of whether Adam was/will be saved or not (as in Irenaeus vs Tatian, noted in *AH* 28.1.3; cf. §85). Discussion here will be restricted to those topics in GTh which are actually raised as disputed questions. Again this calls for caution, because we are engaged in the practice of reading what is indirectly reflected in the work.

We can be reasonably confident of what were perceived by the author(s) of GTh to be *quaestiones disputatae*, however, because many points of controversy are consistently introduced through the disciples' questions. The first of these, for example, comes in GTh 6: "His disciples questioned him and said to him, 'Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe?'" The first three elements, the traditional Jewish triad of fasting, prayer and almsgiving (e.g. Tob. 12.8 Vaticanus; Matt. 6.1-18; cf. *1 Keph.* 80), appears not to have been questioned by any of the earliest Christians, though the fourth was a source of debate. GTh appears to have a negative view of all four (§14), thus representing - by comparison with other first- and second-century Christian movements - a radically untraditional approach to piety: even prayer seems to be questioned. The criticism of fasting, prayer and almsgiving might merely be criticism of these as they are practised by Jews or Christians (e.g. in opposition to the *times* of prayer). However, the understanding of the immanence of the Kingdom within might offer a

¹ It is very unlikely that - as per Helmut Koester's suggestion - that Matthew and Peter represent Q and *G. Pet.* respectively.

² Perhaps John 20.24 suggested to the author of GTh an opportunity for Thomas to receive secret revelation when the other disciples were not present: so what was in John a narrative device to make Thomas's confession come later suggests to a later reader the possibility for Thomas to have received revelation *earlier*. This remains speculation, however!

rationale for a lack of necessity for prayer, because there would be no need to commune with an *external* reality: Clement of Alexandria reports a heresy of the followers of Prodicus who rejected prayer (*Strom.* 7.7).³

A further area to be mentioned at this point is that of eschatology. This can be seen in the variety of questions about the coming of the kingdom, or the end more generally conceived. GTh 18 deals with the "how" question: *Tell us how our end will be*, the disciples ask. GTh 20 deals with the "what" question: *Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like*. Sayings 51 and 113 ask the "when" question: *When will the repose of the dead come about, and when will the new world come?* or again, *When will the kingdom come?* Characteristically, however, it is more common for GTh to cast doubt on the validity of these questions than to give a straightforward answer which can be situated on the spectrum of early Christian beliefs.

The same is true with the question of the identity of Jesus. The emphasis in much Thomas scholarship on the work's low christology, or the scepticism as to whether there is a christology at all is to my mind too extreme - as already noted, there is a remarkably exalted status assigned to Jesus which is not shared by his disciples. Nevertheless, there is not a clearly drawn doctrine of Christ as there is elsewhere, indeed there is a deliberate attempt in some places to make it unclear. When Jesus asks the disciples to define him by comparisons in saying 13, it is chiefly with the aim of negating them, and no alternative is put in place: the truth about the identity of Jesus is ineffable, at least as far as this saying goes. There are two occasions where disciples ask Jesus directly who he is. In the first case, no answer is given (§43); in the second, Jesus tells Salome that he is the one who exists from the undivided (§61). So there are christological conclusions that can be drawn, though the process is by no means straightforward.

While GTh and other movements were in agreement that divine revelation came from Jesus, there is still a question of authority, the question of wherein that revelation is located, or how it can be received. GTh sets out its own stance very confidently at the outset: *These* are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said, "Whoever finds the interpretation of *these* sayings will not experience death." So GTh clearly sets out its stall as a rival written text to those which already existed, a point to which we will return later.

2b. The *Gospel of Thomas* as evidence of debate between Jews and Christians

This section moves to discussion of the critical comments about Jewish practices in GTh, and yet it is at the same time an extension of the previous section: this is because almost all positions taken on Jewish practice by early Christians were taken, at the same time, in debate with other Christians - who were either more traditionally Jewish in their approach to a particular topic, or more radically critical of the Jewish practice in question, or merely nuanced in other ways.

Christians and the Jewish Scriptures (GTh 52)

In the middle block of material in which the disciples raise questions about traditional Jewish piety (§§51-53), they mention that "24 prophets spoke in Israel". As has been widely recognised, this reflects the enumeration of the biblical books in 4 Ezra and in Numbers Rabbah. As such, it probably provides the first example in a Christian-influenced work of this numbering. There are potential difficulties here, because we are not aware of the extent of the christianizing of 4 Ezra, especially in specific cases, but there is a good probability that this goes back to the non-Christian Jewish author, and that GTh 52 is our first example in a Gospel.

More directly relevant to questions of Jewish vs Christian controversy is Jesus' reply: 'His disciples said to him, "Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel, and all them spoke about you."

³ GTh 51-53 are treated below.

Jesus said, "You have neglected the living one in your presence, and you have spoken about the dead." This feeds into the wider area of early Christian assessments of the OT. Many early writers, for example, considered the OT to be essential testimony to Jesus, and that Jesus could only be understood within OT categories. Even the NT book which goes furthest to question the old covenant, Hebrews, refers to the word of God (i.e. the OT) as "living and active... judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4.12). Or again, the Stephen of Acts, despite his radical view of the temple, still makes reference to the λογία ζῶντα which Moses received (Acts 7.38).

This designation of the OT word and words as "living" in Hebrews and Acts stands in stark contrast to the Thomasine Jesus's assessment of the prophets: they are dead. As has been much discussed, the second century saw an enormous developing diversity of various negative responses to Jewish prophets and scripture. Some maintained a quite traditional stance: for 2 Clement, for example, the oracles of God are καλὰ καὶ μεγάλα (2 Clem 13). On the other hand, the *Epistle of Ptolemy to Flora* takes the view that the Law is a mix of the legislation of the just god, of Moses and of the elders: Moses' own teaching may have been well-intentioned, but was actually contrary to the Law of the demiurge (*Ep. Ptol. Fl. in Pan.* 33.4). At the far end of the spectrum is the position in works such as the *Apocryphon of John*, which not only four times identifies Moses' words as mistaken (*Ap. Jn* II 13,18-23; 22,22-25; 23,3-4; 29.6-10) but identifies the OT God with the weak archon 'Yaltabaoth-Saklas-Samael', the second and third names characterising him as foolish and blind (*Ap. Jn* II 11,16-18). Similarly, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* identifies the prophets as counterfeit, and fit only to be mocked (62,27-64,1).

It is difficult precisely to identify where GTh 52 fits on this spectrum. DeConick has argued that the closest parallel comes in the Pseudo-Clementines, in which the Law must be seen to receive its authority from Christ, rather than the other way around (DeConick 2006, 184-185, noting *Recogn.* 1.59). This is an interesting suggestion, though I doubt that it does justice to the negative tone of Jesus' reply. In fact, I think GTh adds a new ingredient into this second-century mix. It is not necessarily a view worked out with theological precision, but it is a strong view: the OT prophets are a dangerous distraction from Jesus ("You have neglected...") and in fact belong to the dead realm, which is clearly opposed to Jesus, "the living one in your midst". This is pushing in the direction of the view in *Ap. Jn*, though it is probably not quite as strong.

Christian Assessments of Circumcision (GTh 53)

A similar dialogue to that about the prophets comes in the very next part of GTh:

His disciples said to him, 'Is circumcision an advantage or not?'

He said to them, 'If it were an advantage, fathers would beget (children) by their mothers (already) circumcised. Rather, true circumcision in the Spirit is entirely profitable.'

Again, we have the question of where this view about circumcision belongs on the spectrum of different views. In some ways, it is quite Pauline - indeed I have argued elsewhere that the whole dialogue is influenced by Rom. 2.25-3.2. What is not so common, however, is GTh 53's argument from nature: viz. that if circumcision were useful men would not have been born with foreskins in the first place. This has a loose parallel in the Jewish tradition about Noah being born circumcised. More to the point, however, is again a comment made by Justin: that if circumcision were necessary, God would have made Adam uncircumcised (*Dial.* 19).

Interestingly, a nice riposte to this is attributed to a contemporary of Justin, Rabbi Akiba, who asks why then God brings babies into the world with an umbilical cord: doesn't that have to be cut as well? (*Tanhuma B 7 (18a)*).⁴ The argument in GTh 53 is similar, though, not the same as Justin's: Justin's focus is on the divine work of creation; GTh 53 is interested in the natural process of birth, and so represents again a new view in the range of views between the traditional

⁴ I am not suggesting by this that the saying must go back to Rabbi Akiba.

Jewish position at one end, and the interpretation of circumcision as of demonic origin in the Epistle of Barnabas.

The Destruction of the Temple and Early Christian History (GTh 71)

In GTh 71, Jesus says, "I will dest[roy thi]s house, and no-one will be able to build it [...]". Despite the lacunae, the wording of this sentence is fairly clear. There has been some dispute about which "house" Jesus is going to destroy. Gregory Riley, for example, identifies it as the "house" of the physical body, and so the saying then would be a denial of bodily resurrection. It is difficult to see, however, that a reader would have picked this up from the saying alone, even in the surrounding context of the GTh. As well as the numerous statements in GTh about the negativity of the flesh, there are of course also a number of what might loosely be termed "anti-Jewish" statements, as we have noted. So the wider context of the GTh does not push us in one direction or the other. As such, the more readily comprehensible sense of the phrase (cf. a very close parallel in Ezra 6.12), as well as the numerous parallels in other Gospels, point to a reference here to the destruction of the temple. Only a parallel with John would assist a bodily interpretation (cf. Jn 2.21).

It is not particularly striking, however, that we have a reference to the destruction of the temple. Certainly, it is rare in GTh to have references to geographical locations, though there are two or three. Again, it is unusual to have a statement in which Jesus himself claims responsibility for the destruction. But what is really striking about this saying is the second half of what survives: "I will dest[roy thi]s house, *and no-one will be able to build it [...]*". What we have here is not only a statement about destruction, but a high level of confidence that the Temple will never be restored.

It is noteworthy, as Geoffrey Lampe argued some time ago, that in the first century we do not find the destruction of the temple being used for polemical purposes - as perhaps we might expect to find, especially if a dating of the Gospels after 70 is taken. The evidence from the Epistle of Barnabas is ambiguous: some, such as Marcel Simon, have seen it as announcing - like Thomas - a smugness about there being no prospect of a temple again; but others such as James Carleton Paget - there are problems with the text of Barnabas at the key point - have seen *Barn.* taking a completely different view, viz. that the Romans are going to help the Jews rebuild. On the other hand, it is around the middle of the second century that we suddenly find Christian apologists making use of the desolation of the temple for theological purposes. It is Justin whom we first find making similar noises to those made by GTh 71 here. He sees the desolation of the temple and the city as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (1 Apol. 47) and as punishment for the Jews' part in the death of Christ (Dial. 16-17).

The reason why Justin can express such confidence here is clear, and he states the reason himself. It is Hadrian's decree that Jews not be permitted to enter the city which for Justin fulfils the prophecy and seals the fate of the temple. These events are also reflected on by Ariston of Pella (Eusebius, *HE* 4.6.4), and especially by Origen:

Accordingly, one of the facts which show that Jesus was some divine and sacred person is just that on his account such great and fearful calamities have now for a long time befallen the Jews. We will go so far as to say that *they will not be restored again* (οὐδ' ἀποκατασταθήσονται). For they committed the most impious crime of all... Therefore that city where Jesus suffered these indignities had to be *utterly destroyed* (ἄρδην ἀπολωλένα). (tr. Chadwick)

As such, what we have in GTh 71 is an important instance in the maelstrom of Christian responses to the destruction of the temple, one which - to my knowledge - has not yet been incorporated into the discussion: it is not mentioned, for example, in the classic study of Sgherri (*Chiesa e Sinagoga nelle opere di Origene*), or in R.L. Wilcken's book on *John Chrysostom and the Jews*,

both of which discuss the whole area extensively. GTh 71 provides an early instance of Christian use, for polemical purposes, of the destruction of the temple, and - with Justin and Ariston - one of the earliest expressions of confidence in its perpetual desolation as a result of Hadrian's edict.

This sort of date - that is, *c.* AD 140 - fits well not only with the confidence about the temple expressed here in GTh 71, but also with the other material discussing Jewish themes. As we have noted, GTh 53 in its use of the argument from nature finds its closest parallel in Justin. The attitude to Jewish scripture in GTh 52 may perhaps be closest to that of the *Apocryphon of John*, but even if this is not a very exact parallel, GTh 52 is a part of the surge of debate in evidence in the second quarter of the second century (the probable date of *Ep. Barn.*) and beyond.

3. The *Gospel of Thomas* and Early Christian Literary History

In addition to the sphere of the history of ideas and controversies, we can also examine GTh within the context of early Christian *literary* history. There is a good deal of literary history "in front of" GTh. As Klimkeit, Peter Nagel and Wolf-Peter Funk have documented, GTh influenced a good deal of Manichaean literature from the *Epistula Fundamenti* in the Latin west to the *Kephalaia* to the *Manichaean Psalm Book* to hymns which have turned up as far afield as Turfan in China. It has also probably left its mark on the *Pistis Sophia*, and on the Diatessaron (although this is a minority view), as well as - more widely accepted - the Sermons of Symeon/Macarius and the *Liber Graduum*.

But can we say that GTh is itself evidence for something? In what sense is GTh a source for early Christian literary history? Here, we enter the minefield of the relationship of GTh to the Synoptics. First of all, I will set out what I regard as two extreme views - those of DeConick on the one hand and of Wood on the other. I will then be able to present my own position as the sober, sensible *via media*!

DeConick

First, April DeConick has argued strongly that the *Gospel of Thomas* displays consistently the pattern of features which arise from oral performance, with variations that are characteristic of oral transmission - as such, the circumstances of orality mean that one does not need to resort to a theory of literary dependence:

'... most, if not all, of the Thomasine-Synoptic parallels represent orally transmitted material rather than material copied from literary sources. The oral residue becomes even more apparent to me when I observe the commonalities across the Synoptic versions - that is across the triple tradition and the Quelle material - and compare them with the commonalities between *Thomas* and the Synoptics. The exact verbal agreement, lengthy sequences of words, and secondary features shared between the Triple Tradition versions and the Quelle versions *far* exceed anything we find in the *Gospel of Thomas*. This observation appears to provide support for the traditional view that *there is a literary connection between the Synoptic Gospels*. But *this does not hold true for Thomas which instead displays the strong features of oral transmission*.⁵

As she puts it later: 'the Thomasine-Synoptic parallels derive from the oral sphere'.⁶

However, there are various phenomena which cast doubt on this conclusion.⁷ The best "control" that we can have is that of comparison of the text of the Greek fragments of GTh with

⁵ A.D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (London/New York, Continuum, 2006), 23.

⁶ DeConick, *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 24.

the Greek texts of the Synoptic Gospels: there is a place for other comparisons, but this should be the starting point. Here we have five sayings where there is significant overlap with Synoptic material, that is, GTh sayings which survive sufficiently in Greek for the purposes of comparison: the relevant sayings are 4, 5, 26, 31, and 32: the material is found in the Appendix. In the first case, saying 4, we have in Mark, Matthew and GTh identical sequences of 8 Greek words apart from the omission of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$, which is the consequence of GTh's introduction of $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$. In the next case, saying 5, the overlap where the text survives corresponds exactly to the text of Luke. Thirdly, in the first visible text in *P. Oxy.* 1, we have the last thirteen words of saying 26: these thirteen words correspond exactly both in their forms and in their sequence to that in the Sinaiticus/Alexandrinus (*et al.*) text of Luke. This is not the text of Luke printed in the Nestle-Aland editions, but it is a very well attested form of the saying, and is clearly the result of *scribal* variation. In saying 31, there is no exact overlap with another Gospel, but in fact none of the versions agrees exactly with another, and the variations in GTh's version are of exactly the same kind as that found in the other versions. In saying 32, there is looser correspondence, but with presence of some of the same Greek forms.

There are of course no heaven-sent criteria for detecting literary influence, but it seems that three out these five cases point strongly in this direction: eight words (give or take a $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$), then five words, then thirteen words - with these last two cases representing the entirety of what is available for comparison in a particular saying. The other two cases are by no means negligible either. As such, these five sayings, which are the only cases where any kind of *secure* comparisons can be drawn, point strongly in the direction of a *literary* dependence of some kind. This does not mean that GTh has straightforwardly *copied* from a text of Matthew or Luke on his desk. Nor does it mean that oral tradition should be excluded from playing any part (though one of the problems here is that, by the very nature of oral material, we know so little about oral transmission in this period). It does mean, however, that literary influence has been exerted at some stage in the transmission process.⁸

Wood

At the opposite end of the spectrum from April DeConick's approach, John Wood has argued that GTh displays exactly the same kinds of "redaction, adaptation, and harmonization" as one also finds in second century works such as the Longer Ending of Mark, the writings of Justin, and Tatian's *Diatessaron* which are clearly dependent upon Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.⁹ As such, according to Wood, GTh is actually evidence for the reception of all four Gospels.

While this is a remarkably maximalist conclusion, some of Wood's arguments do have an important negative function. First, he is right that Koester is far too stringent in his requirements for evidence of dependence: one does not need a "concrete and consistent pattern... of dependence" for dependence to be present. Second, he also criticises Patterson (rightly in my view) for insisting, in addition to Koester's requirement, that one be able to detect commonality in the order of sayings to draw conclusions about literary influence.

Wood's article seems to me to make an argument that is just as plausible as DeConick's. *A priori*, when one encounters material in two different forms, one *could* be the result of scribal/literary "redaction, adaptation, and harmonization" of the other. Equally, it is an *a priori* possibility that when one encounters material in two different forms, the differences *could* have arisen from oral performance. Wood's and DeConick's views are both *approaches* to the material, however, not conclusions drawn from it. As such, they might very easily just cancel one another out: both remain theoretical possibilities, options which one can mention in one's introduction to the question of influence, but not "results" which one can mention in a conclusion.

⁷ One might note, for example, that while Synoptic parallels sometimes exhibit "exact verbal agreement" and "lengthy sequences of words" which correspond, this is by no means always or even generally the case.

⁸ This is likely to be at the level of secondary orality, as has been expounded by Risto Uro.

⁹ J.H. Wood, 'The New Testament Gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas*: A New Direction', *NTS* 51 (2005), 579-595.

Redactional Material from Matthew and Luke in GTh

In the early days of Thomas scholarship, indeed already with the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri, it was assumed by many that John influenced GTh (Grenfell-Hunt, R.E. Brown). Now, however, it tends to be assumed that the similarities are too weak to get this sort of argument very far. Indeed, probably more scholars now argue for the influence of John upon GTh, but this is fraught with difficulties, such as the frequent assumption (wholly unfounded) of a negative portrait of the figure of Thomas in John. With Mark's Gospel, the case for influence is almost impossible to make in either direction: because Mark is the earliest of the Gospels, where GTh and Mark agree, we may in each case be dealing with a common source. The same is also the case with GTh and John.

As such, scholars have tended to argue that GTh is dependent upon the Synoptics where *redactional* features are evident, and in practice that means that Matthew and Luke are the only real contenders. So those who have made the best cases for dependence have made it on the basis of GTh's incorporation of Matthean and/or Lukan redactional material (e.g. Tuckett); those who have rejected dependence have rejected it on the basis of an absence of such material (e.g. Koester). It seems to me that the Koester approach is much too sceptical.

The more influential of the two NT Gospels upon GTh, it seems to me, is the Gospel of Luke. Interestingly, this runs counter to the general tendency elsewhere in the second century, viz. the dominant influence of Matthew on both orthodox (E. Massaux) and Nag Hammadi literature (Tuckett). Origen noted, however, that *innumerabiles quippe haereses sunt, quae evangelium secundum Lucam recipiunt*, and he certainly located the GTh among the these *haereses*, even if his memory failed him at times (as in his quotation of GTh 82).

Thomas incorporates Lukan redactional features in a wide spread of its material such as GTh 5 (Tuckett), 31 (many scholars), 47, 65 (Snodgrass) and 104 (Patterson). We have already noted the overlap in Greek text between GTh 5 and Luke 8.17, where - although the amount of text is not great - there is evidence that Lukan redaction is incorporated. Again, a number of scholars have pointed out that GTh 31 shares with Luke (against Mark and Matthew) both its structure and the moderately rare word *dektos*. In the case of saying 47, despite the ingenious attempt of Gregory Riley to argue for GTh influencing Luke, the more economical solution by far is that GTh has incorporated the Lukan plus, and then reversed the order of the Lukan material in Luke 5.36-39. Next, in the parable of the wicked tenants, GTh 65 shares in common with Luke a lack of reference to Isaiah 5 as a theological backdrop to the parable, in contrast to Mark and Matthew. In the sending of the servants, Mark and Matthew have the servants seized, beaten, insulted and killed. Luke and *Thomas*, however, have the servants beaten and sent back, but reserve the killing for the son alone. In Luke 20.13, the owner of the vineyard says to himself, "*Perhaps* they will respect my son". Mark and Matthew on the other hand have no mention of "perhaps". But Luke has one - which is interesting because ἰσως is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. Then *Thomas* actually has "perhaps" (ΜΕΩΔΚ) twice. Finally, in saying 104, GTh shares with Lk 5.33-35 a reference to prayer, in addition to the fasting which alone is mentioned in the Markan and Matthean versions. These five sayings, then, illustrate GTh's incorporation of Lukan redaction.

The influence of Matthew is probably also present, but not with the same frequency. So for example the parable of the sower in saying 8 has plural "seeds" all the way through, just as Matthew (against Mark and Luke) does (plural *ha men, alla de, alla de* etc. (vv. 4, 5, 7, 8), and *auta* (v.4)). Matthew also has ἐπί in verse 7, corresponding to Thomas's ΕΧΝ. In §57, the parable of the weeds, the meaning is very similar to the version in Matthew. However, GTh 57 is a substantial abbreviation of Matthew's version, and is in fact reduced to incoherence as a result. GTh tells the story that a man had some good seed, and his enemy came and sowed weeds - so far, so good. But then the first, good sower did not allow *them* to do any weeding. Who are the "them"? We could guess, but there is no antecedent in Thomas' parable. This is a strong

indication of an abbreviation from an earlier form, and Matthew's version makes good sense as that earlier form. In §57 here, you need Matthew to make sense of GTh. These, then indicate Matthean redaction, but this cannot be said to amount to a consistent reliance on Matthew in the parables (*pace* Carrez): GTh 63-65, for example, is a block of Lukan parables just as GTh 8-9 are Matthean.

The other instance of influence, as I have argued elsewhere, is that of Paul, specifically of the epistle to the Romans on §53 most clearly and probably on §3. Perhaps §17 is influenced by 1 Cor. 2.9, though this is more speculative. One could also mount an argument for the influence of Hebrews 11 on §§56, 80 and 111, though I am not aware that this has yet been done.

Leaving Hebrews to one side, however, evidence of the influence upon GTh of Luke, Matthew and Romans suggests a period when these had circulated widely enough to exert influence together. This tallies well with a period a little way into the second century: Ignatius is probably the first author to show knowledge of Paul in conjunction with more than one Gospel.

Conclusion

It merely remains to draw these strands together. In the first place, GTh provides fascinating evidence for a movement which, to my mind, cannot be identified with any movement which was already known to scholars on the basis of the evidence we have. As such, it certainly represents a contribution to our knowledge of early Christianity. And as mentioned at the beginning, it is a peculiarly adaptable contribution: with light editing, the more traditional Greek version then became in Coptic a work used probably as a Valentinian text in Nag Hammadi Codex II. It was then employed by Manichaeans, and various others as well (e.g. the *Pistis Sophia*), in addition to being rebuked by the church fathers. GTh also sheds further light on the debates that went on in early Christian movements, especially on subjects connected with the identity of Christians *vis-à-vis* Jewish practices. Moreover, it provides an instance in the earliest reception of books which later went on to form the "New Testament". All these factors, however, combine as we have seen to conspire against a first-century date for GTh, and to push it a fair way into the second century - to a period roughly contemporaneous with the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin. This means that it is extremely unlikely that the *Gospel of Thomas* lives up to the claims made by some of its fans: that it gives us a *Jesus Untouched by the Church*, perhaps, or a wisdom Jesus who at last can be stripped of the apocalyptic baggage which has been foisted upon him, or that it provides real new evidence for Jesus. I fear that those who advocate such exalted claims for *Thomas* have become intoxicated by the bubbling spring which *Thomas*, not Jesus, has measured out.

Appendix

Overlap in Greek between the Synoptics and Oxyrhynchus fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, where a substantial amount of the Thomas text survives:

SAYING 4

Sequence of 8 words apart from the omission of *δέ*, which is the consequence of the introduction of *ὅτι*:

Mk 10:31		πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ [οἱ] ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι.
Matt. 19:30		πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι.
GTh 4:	ὅτι	πολλοὶ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι.

SAYING 5

Overlap where the text survives corresponds exactly to Luke:

Mk 4.22:	οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα φανερωθῇ
Lk. 8.17:	οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ὃ οὐ φανερόν γενήσεται
GTh 5:	[οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ὃ οὐ φανε[ρόν] γενήσεται]

SAYING 26

In the first visible text in *P. Oxy.* 1, there are thirteen words in sequence identical to that in Sinaiticus/Alexandrinus (et al.) text of Luke:

Lk. 6.42 P ⁷⁵ W:	καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου ἐκβαλεῖν.
Lk. 6.42 NA C:	καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις ἐκβαλεῖν τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.
GTh 26:	καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις ἐκβαλεῖν τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.

SAYING 31

No exact overlap with another Gospel, but in fact none of the versions agrees exactly with another, and the variations in Thomas's version are of exactly the same kind as that found in the other versions:

Mk 6.4:	οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ.
Matt. 13.57:	οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι...
Lk. 4.24:	οὐδεὶς προφήτης δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ.
Jn 4.44:	προφήτης ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ πατρίδι τιμὴν οὐκ ἔχει.
GTh 31:	οὐκ ἔστιν δεκτὸς προφήτης ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτ[ο]ῦ.

SAYING 32

Looser correspondence, but with presence of some of the same Greek forms:

Matt. 5.14:	οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη.
GTh 32:	πόλις οἰκοδομημένη ἐπ' ἄκρον [ὄ]ρους ὑψηλοῦ {ς} καὶ ἐστηριγμένη οὔτε περ[ι]εῖν δύναται οὔτε κρυβ[η]ῖναι.