

The *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*: Constructing a Context*

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It has been proposed that references to Jesus' relationship to Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Philip* represent a possible context for an early gospel fragment in which Jesus refers to her as 'My wife'. It will be argued here that Mary's relationship to Jesus in *Philip* is determined by her role as privileged recipient of revelation, not by her marital status. More significant in accounting for the Jesus' Wife fragment is the *Gospel of Thomas*, which the author appears to have known in precisely the text-form represented by the one surviving Coptic exemplar.

Keywords: *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*, Mary Magdalene

Introduction

There has already been a good deal of doubt cast on the antiquity of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* (henceforth, *GJW*) on a number of grounds, with a decisive blow being dealt by Christian Askeland in his comparison of *GJW* with the clearly forged John fragment accompanying it.¹ The present article raises further questions about how easy it is to contextualise *GJW*, from two angles in particular, treating both the hypothetical original composition of *GJW*, and the historical plausibility of the Coptic text of *GJW* in the form in which we now possess it.

The first half of this article, then, will examine whether *GJW* in its hypothetical original historical context has any real parallels, specifically whether there are

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1 C. Askeland, 'A Fake Coptic John and its Implications for the "Gospel of Jesus's Wife"', *TynB* 65 (2014) 1–10, now reinforced further by S. Emmel, 'The Codicology of the New Coptic (Lycopolitan) Gospel of John Fragment (and its Relevance for Assessing the Genuineness of the Recently Published Coptic "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" Fragment)', <http://alinsuciu.com/2014/06/22/guest-post-stephen-emmel-the-codicology-of-the-new-coptic-lycopolitan-gospel-of-john-fragment-and-its-relevance-for-assessing-the-genuineness-of-the-recently-published-coptic-go-2/>.

parallels to Jesus being said to have a wife. This takes us in particular into discussion of the *Gospel of Philip*. Contrary to King's argument that *Philip* provides a parallel for *GJW*'s reference to Jesus as married, a more nuanced treatment of *Philip* is needed, one which avoids both jumping to the conclusion of a marriage, and diluting what the *Gospel of Philip* says in the interests of apologetics.

The second half of the article will examine the language of the artefact as we have it, to see if a plausible pre-modern context might be found for the production of the text on this eighth-century scrap of papyrus.² Here the focus of interest will be on the parallels between *GJW* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Many have observed the close similarities between the two works, but there has not yet been a demonstration of how damaging those similarities are to the case for the text's authenticity.

1. A Thematic Context: Discussion of Jesus' Marital Status

It appears that the main point of our *GJW* fragment is to reject a view which excludes a Mary (probably Mary Magdalene) from discipleship, perhaps with a wider application to the discipleship of women in general: line 2 ('the disciples said to Jesus') perhaps introduces the disciples' objection, as in Peter's opening remark in *GTh* 114.1: 'Let Mary come out from us, because women are not worthy of life.' In line 3, someone says that 'Mary is worthy of it' or 'Mary is not worthy of it',³ depending on how one restores the lacuna at the end.⁴ Jesus' declaration in line 5 ('she will be able to be a disciple to me') and perhaps also the statement that Jesus is 'with her' in line 7 both appear to relate to the topic of Mary's status. In terms of the theme of *GJW in toto*, then, the obvious parallel is, as King notes, *GTh* 114. One could add to this the more loose comparanda of the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Pistis Sophia*, though in these latter cases the issue is not Mary's discipleship per se, but rather her special status as a revealer or favourite disciple or speaker.⁵ The allusion to *Thomas* here in *GJW* is similar to what we see in a possible allusion to *GTh* 114 in Shenoute: 'Is the kingdom of heaven prepared for males alone? Is it not prepared for women that they may enter it?'⁶ *GJW* is, as King rightly recognises, a

2 See N. Tuross, 'Accelerated Mass Spectrometry Radiocarbon Determination of Papyrus Samples', *HTR* 107 (2014) 170–1.

3 K. L. King, "'Jesus said to them, 'My wife . . .': A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment', *HTR* 107 (2014) 131–59 (151), suggests 'discipleship' (τῆντῆμαθῆνς) as an antecedent, although there are other possibilities.

4 It is possible that the final alpha at the end of the line (3) might be part of ἀν ('not'), which would indicate that Mary is *not* worthy (noted by King, 'Jesus said to them', 140).

5 *Gos. Mary* 17.18–22; *Gos. Phil.* 64.1–13; *PS* 36 and 146.

6 J. Leipoldt, *Sinuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, vol. iv (Paris: Gabalda, 1913) 38 ll. 21–4 (trans. Young; see reference below). The parallel between Shenoute and *Thomas* here

similar reaffirmation of the worthiness of women, or of Mary in particular, to claim discipleship. King goes further, however, and speculates that the issue might not only be the discipleship of women in general, but specifically that of *married* women.⁷ It is when we venture into the sphere of marriage that King's observations become more controversial.

1.1 *King's Proposal of Philip as a Parallel to GJW*

In the fragment under discussion, Jesus of course has a wife.⁸ Although this might appear anomalous, and itself may give rise to some suspicion that *GJW* is a product of our post-Da-Vinci-Code age, King aims in her *HTR* article to give the wife a historical context, namely 'the broader context of what early Christians said about Jesus' marital status'.⁹ As King notes, there is nothing (extant) said explicitly about this until the late-second/early-third century when we find Clement's criticisms of those who use Jesus' celibacy as an argument for the illegitimacy of marriage (*Strom.* 3.6.49.1) and Tertullian's use of Jesus' celibacy in his recommendation of Christian abstinence from marriage, though if that is too demanding there is Christ's spiritual, monogamous marriage to the church which is a pattern for the Christian (*On Monogamy* 5.5–7). Despite the relative silence early on, from the late second century, King comments, 'the position that Jesus was a virgin came to be dominant'.¹⁰

King maintains, however, that alongside this dominant view there was a minority report which is captured in the *Gospel of Philip* and also, as we can now see, in *GJW*. Thus, *Philip* is an important precedent for *GJW* in this 'broader context of what early Christians said about Jesus' marital status', since *Philip* also, King argues, depicts Jesus as married to Mary: 'Arguably, however, *Gos. Phil.* does portray Mary Magdalene as the spousal partner of the fleshly (incarnate) Jesus, as part of its complex theological articulation of Jesus's

is suggested in C. C. Richardson, 'The Gospel of Thomas: Gnostic or Encratite?', *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Georges Vasilievich Florovsky* (ed. D. Neiman and M. A. Schatkin; Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973) 65–76 (65 n. 1), and D. W. Young, 'The Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Some Historical Considerations', *VC* 24 (1970) 127–37, at 135; cf. 130.

7 King's hypothesis extends also to child-bearing, in connection with Mary the mother of Jesus. Overall, 'The dialogue may be representing Jesus's mother and his wife as paradigms for married, child-bearing Christian women and affirming that they are worthy and able to be his disciples' (King, 'Jesus said to them', 152).

8 It is of course possible that, if the text is ancient, the reference to 'wife' might in any case be a symbolic reference to the church, but I take it here that the reference is to a literal wife, and that this wife is *probably* Mary Magdalene (or some kind of composite Mary).

9 King, 'Jesus said to them', 149.

10 King, 'Jesus said to them', 150.

incarnation and Christian salvation.¹¹ The basis for this lies in an earlier article, published in this journal, specifically on this theme in the *Gospel of Philip*.¹²

This article on *Philip* aimed to give a robust scholarly basis to the theory that according to *Philip* Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. King stops short of saying that this is a historically accurate claim, since the truth about whether Jesus was married or not cannot be known as the most important historical sources are 'silent on the issue'.¹³

The first step in King's argument is a general one, namely that when depicting Jesus as acting in a certain way, *Philip* sees these actions of Jesus not as merely taking place in an ethereal realm, but as historical events in the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, because events in the world betoken – even if at a distance – aspects of the truth: 'The truth did not come into the cosmos naked, but it came in types and images. It [sc. the world] will not receive it [sc. the truth] in any other way' (*Gos. Phil.* 67.9–12).¹⁴ Thomassen (whose study King follows) comments on this passage that although earthly names and images are at one level deceptive, 'such names, and also images created in the world, nonetheless "point towards" ... the transcendent reality – they are the forms through which Truth manifests itself under the conditions of temporal relativity and corporeal division'.¹⁵ Literal bridal chambers, for example, point towards the transcendent bridal chamber. As far as the acts of Jesus are concerned, each of those acts betoken the single whole action of salvation as well as mapping at the same time onto the complex of Valentinian rituals. In terms of method, I fully agree with this approach to *Philip*.

Where King goes further is in pressing the point that one of the features of *Philip's* construction of the historical life of Jesus is his marriage to Mary Magdalene, which is not just a symbol, but a symbol rooted (for *Philip*) in Jesus' earthly life. There are two notorious passages that are important for the argument for Jesus' marriage to Mary.¹⁶

11 King, 'Jesus said to them', 150. She also suggests, admittedly in a tentative manner, that there may be further theological connections between *Gos. Phil.* and *GJW* arising out of a possibly shared Valentinian context ('Jesus said to them', 150 n. 92).

12 K. L. King, 'The Place of the Gospel of Philip in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus's Marital Status', *NTS* 59 (2013) 565–87.

13 King, 'Place of the Gospel of Philip', 565.

14 King, 'Place of the Gospel of Philip', 572. The translation is hers.

15 E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 469.

16 Translations here and henceforth are, with minor modifications, from W. W. Isenberg, 'The Gospel of Philip', *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2–7. *Together with XIII*, 2*, *Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1)*, and *P. Oxy.* 1, 654, 655, vol. 1: *Gospel according to Thomas, Gospel according to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes* (ed. B. Layton; NHS 20; The Coptic Gnostic Library; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 143–215. The text is primarily from B. Layton, 'The Gospel of Philip', in *idem*, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2–7, 142–214, with consultation of H.-M. Schenke, ed.,

Three always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother, her sister and (Mary) Magdalene, who was called *his partner* (τεφκοινωνος). For a Mary was his sister, his mother and *his companion* (τεφζωτρε) (*Gos. Phil.* 59.6–11).¹⁷

As for the Wisdom who is called ‘the barren’, she is the mother [of the] angels. And the *partner* (κοινωνος) of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [... loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] *kiss* (αφιαζε) her [often] on her [...]. The rest [of the disciples ...]. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’ The saviour answered and said to them, ‘Why do I not love you like her?’ (*Gos. Phil.* 63.30–64.5).

The latter is probably the best-known passage in the Christian apocrypha, because it is quoted by Dan Brown, and explained by the character Leigh Teabing: ‘As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse.’¹⁸ These are the two passages that are the basis of King’s argument for a married Jesus, though of course without the fatuous reference to Aramaic.

1.2 *Evaluation of King’s Interpretation of Philip*

A maximalist reading of this passage, like that of King, will note the (frequent?) kissing as suggestive. The main argument, however, lies in the potential marital and sexual connotations of the roles attributed to Mary: the words κοινωνος and ζωτρε both can be used to refer to a ‘wife’. Elsewhere in *Philip* these words and their cognates are used in sexual contexts, or in places where clearly sexual language is being used metaphorically:

The children a woman bears resemble the man who loves her. If her husband loves her, then they resemble her husband. If it is an adulterer, then they resemble the adulterer. Frequently, if a woman sleeps with her husband out of necessity, while her heart is with the adulterer with whom she usually has intercourse (ῥκοινωνει), the child she will bear is born resembling the adulterer. (78.12–20)

No-one can know when the husband and the wife have intercourse (ῥκοινωνει) with one another except they themselves. (81.34–82.2)

Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II, 3) (TU 143; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997) and J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex II* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

¹⁷ On the relationship between this passage and John, see H.-J. Klauck, ‘Die dreifache Maria: Zur Rezeption von Joh 19,25 in EvPhil 32’, *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, vol. III (ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al.; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992) 2343–58, though he perhaps too readily collapses the three Marys into a single figure.

¹⁸ D. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2003) 331.

If the woman had not separated from the man, she would not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this, Christ came to repair the separation, which was from the beginning, and again unite (ζωτῆ) the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation, and unite (ζωτῆ) them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed, those who have united (ζωτῆ) in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united (ζωτῆ) with him. (70.9–22)

Whereas in this world, the union (ζωτῆ) is one of husband and wife – a case of strength complemented by weakness(?) – in the eternal realm (aeon) the form of the union (ζωτῆ) is different, although we refer to them by the same names. (76.6–9)

Against this background, it seems sensible to some to read Mary's status as Jesus' κοινῶνος and ζωτῆ to mean that she was his wife.

On the other hand, a minimalist reading might highlight the lacunose nature of the second passage about Jesus and Mary at some crucial points, the ambiguity of ἀπάζε ('kiss', or merely 'greet'), as well as the ambiguous syntax at the beginning of the second passage above: in addition to the translation, 'As for the Wisdom who is called "the barren", she is the mother [of the] angels. And the *companion* ...' equally possible is 'As for the Wisdom who is called "the barren", she is the mother [of the] angels and the *companion*.' On this second interpretation, taken by Schenke, Sophia then becomes the companion of the saviour.¹⁹

Secondly, while κοινῶνος might well be used to refer to a wife, the word would not itself convey this relationship, and would probably only work as a reference to a wife in a context where the relationship was already clear. If one takes the New Testament as an example, one finds a wide range of ways in which κοινῶνος is employed. It can refer to James and John as Simon's partners in his fishing business (Luke 5.10). It can be used of participants in what goes on at an altar (κοινῶνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) in 1 Cor 10.18 and of some kind of co-operation with demons later in the same passage (1 Cor 10.20). Participation, though of a more passive kind, is in view in Paul's reference to those who share in sufferings in 2 Cor 1.7 (κοινῶνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων). Just as it can refer to a business partner, Paul also uses the word to refer to those who share with him in ministry, as where κοινῶνος appears in parallel with συνεργός (2 Cor 8.23). Similarly Paul appeals to Philemon's partnership, having earlier described him as a co-worker (συνεργός, Phlm 1; κοινῶνος, Phlm 17). In Hebrews it can mean those who identify with a particular group of people (Heb 10.33), while in the Petrine epistles it refers to those who share in the divine glory in salvation (τῆς μελλούσης ... δόξης κοινῶνος, 1 Pet 5.1; θείας κοινῶνοὶ φύσεως, 2 Pet 1.4). Studies of κοινῶνα/

19 Schenke, *Philippus-Evangelium*, 36. See further King, 'Place of the Gospel of Philip', 578 n. 64.

κοινωνός have struggled to give it a clear definition precisely because it appears in such a wide variety of contexts.²⁰

The same is true of ζωτῖρ or ζωτρε, which has a semantic field slightly different from κοινωνος. Crum's dictionary is not very helpful for our purposes: he has an abstract noun ζωτ(ε)ρ, to which he assigns the sense of 'joint yoke', 'union', and there is also a concrete noun ζατρε, glossed as 'doubled-thing' or 'twin'.²¹ In *Philip*, however, κοινωνος and ζωτῖρ/ζωτρε seem very similar: the noun ζωτῖρ appears in a reference to the spirit as the 'partner' of the soul (70.23–4), which seems to be picked up in the fragmentary remains of the same paragraph in a reference to a 'spiritual partner' (70.29–30). Overall, King is of course correct that it can be used in contexts of marriage, but then again it can also be used in other contexts as well.

Such a minimalist reading would certainly be an over-reaction to the excesses of the maximalist account. It is clearly the case that Mary has a special status as a 'beloved disciple' of sorts. It should also be obvious that the usage elsewhere in *Philip* suggests that there are sexual undertones in the terms κοινωνος and ζωτρε as applied to Mary. In addition to the passages cited *in extenso* above, there are others.²² On the other hand, there is also a certain reticence in the language, which means that it would be overstating the truth to talk of Mary as Jesus' wife in the text.

The first, obvious, point is the author's reluctance to use the language of 'wife'. If the author of the *Gospel of Philip* thought and meant to say that the historical Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, why is the reference so oblique? The language of husbands, wives, marriage and bridal-chambers abounds in *Philip*, and of course it is a very easy matter to refer to a wife – as indeed *Philip* does elsewhere (cf. ζυγε in 65.20; 82.3–4). If the author had written, 'His sister and his mother and his ζυγε were each a Mary', there would be no ambiguity. To make the argument for Jesus and Mary being married in *Philip* stand, it would help considerably to come up with a reason for this reticence on the assumption of a marriage. On King's reading, however, *Philip* is not being at all reticent, as the idea of Mary and Jesus being married is integral to the text's theology.

Secondly, there is the peculiar reference, in the passage where Mary is first introduced, to 'the Magdalene, this one *who is called* his companion' (μαγδαληνη ται ετογμογτε ερος δε τεεκοινωνος). This suggests that the term κοινωνος is some kind of special designation or title for her. It is not

20 Compare, for example, J. Hainz, *Koinonia: 'Kirche' als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982) with H. Seesemann, *Der Begriff 'KOINONIA' im Neuen Testament* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933).

21 On both, see Crum 726b.

22 In 61.10 κοινωνια seems to refer to sex, while in 63.35–6 it probably refers to marriage which has just been mentioned. There are also sexual connotations in the use of the verb ᾤ-κοινωνει in 65.3–4 and arguably also in 78.30–1. The context is more abstract in 79.2.

simply that she is *μαγδαληνῆ τέτοκινῶνος*, 'the Magdalene, his companion', which would be more straightforward. Such a circumlocution might well be thought to be a very odd way of talking about Mary as Jesus' wife: it is, for example, hard to imagine – even ridiculous – that one could refer to 'Michelle, who is called the companion of Barack'. The meaning appears rather to be that Mary Magdalene was known to others by a special convention as 'Jesus' companion'.

Thirdly, another important dimension of the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene is expressed in the relatively neglected dialogue between Jesus and the disciples immediately following the second passage about Mary:

They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The saviour answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness.' (*Gos. Phil.* 64.1–9)

A marriage relationship would be strange against the backdrop of this dialogue. The disciples take Mary's public position to be that of a female disciple, which is what lies behind their question. If Jesus and Mary were actually married in *Philip's* retrospective historical construction then it would be silly for the disciples to ask, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' Similarly, Jesus' response is not a very marital one. He explains that he loves Mary more than the other disciples because she is one who has the true vision that can respond to revelation. If one leaves revelation out of account, the disciples and Mary might appear to occupy the same plane ('when a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another'). When revelation comes into the picture, however, the fundamental difference between the true disciple (Mary) and the inadequate disciples (the twelve) comes out into the open: 'When the light comes, then he who sees (i.e. a disciple like Mary) will see the light, and he who is blind (i.e. a disciple like the twelve) will remain in darkness.' This seems to add another dimension to the partnership. It is not just that Mary is a partner of Jesus in the sense that she is one who has a close relationship to him. She is also a partner of him in the sense that they partake of a similar identity. As one who has accepted Jesus' revelation, she is, to borrow a phrase from elsewhere in *Philip*, 'no longer a Christian but a Christ' (67.26–7).

The language of partnership, union and kissing is all designed in *Philip* to convey the kind of intimacy of the true disciple who has received revelation from Jesus, without calling Mary Jesus' spouse: this specific language is conspicuous by its absence. King is right to emphasise that *Philip* is not just talking about some sort of spiritual Mary here, but is construing the relationship as a feature of the historical ministry of Jesus. This relationship is even described in terms that

have sexual undertones. From the point of view of *Philip's* retrospective construction of the historical ministry of Jesus, however, Mary's public identity is clearly that of a disciple of Jesus. The revelatory context, which emerges in the discussion between Jesus and the disciples about his relationship with Mary, is crucial, and is interestingly paralleled in a number of comparable places.²³

In this vignette in *Thomas*, Salome initially confronts Jesus, accusing him of uninvited advances.²⁴

Salome said, 'Who are you, man, that you have come up as from one onto my couch and eaten from my table?'

Jesus said to her, 'I am he who is from the equal. I have been given some of what belongs to my Father.'

(Salome said,) 'I am your disciple.'

(Jesus said,) 'For this reason I say, "When he becomes equal, he will be filled with light. But when he becomes divided, he will be filled with darkness."' (61.2–5)

In *Thomas* here, there is perhaps more innuendo than is the case in *Philip*. The scene is quite a shocking one. Jesus has apparently clambered uninvited onto Salome's couch, making this a scene of intimacy,²⁵ even a scene with sexual connotations.²⁶ (Compare the surprise expressed by the disciples in John 4.27 at Jesus merely *speaking* alone with a woman.) Sharing a couch was commonly an action of lovers or a married couple, either with the man reclining and the woman seated, or with both reclining.²⁷

In fact, the posture of Jesus and Salome on the couch may suggest that she, like Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Philip*, is portrayed here as a kind of 'beloved' or ideal disciple: just as Mary's special intimacy with Jesus in *Philip* is marked by

23 I pass over the pornographic *Greater Questions of Mary* here because, although there is both sex and revelation in this work, the same people are not involved in both. See Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.8.2–3.

24 On this saying, see S. J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* (TENT 11; Leiden: Brill, 2014) 442–7.

25 R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997) 140.

26 Rightly, A. Reinhartz, 'Reflections on Table Fellowship and Community Identity', *Semeia* 86 (1999) 227–33, at 231; C. Losekam, 'Einssein statt Getrenntsein (Zwei auf dem Bett)—EvThom 61', *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu* (ed. R. Zimmermann et al.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007) 899–903, at 901.

27 See the various passages and images discussed in M. Roller, 'Horizontal Women: Posture and Sex in the Roman Convivium', *AJP* 124 (2003) 377–422. Corley's contrast between Jesus dining with Salome in the Roman manner on same couch in *Thomas* and women sitting or kneeling in the Gospels is something of a false antithesis, as a woman might also sit on a couch, but the overall point is a useful one: see K. Corley, 'Salome and Jesus at Table in the *Gospel of Thomas*', *Semeia* 86 (1999) 85–97, at 86; similarly, Losekam, 'Einssein statt Getrenntsein (Zwei auf dem Bett)', 901. Cf. esp. Luke 7.38 (the sinful woman 'standing') and 10.39 (Mary of Bethany 'seated at the Lord's feet').

(probably) kissing, so the connotations of Salome's sharing a couch with Jesus might similarly indicate the unity or equality of Jesus with his true disciple. There is some obscurity in this dialogue. What does seem clear, however, is that after her initially frosty reception of Jesus, Salome responds to his declaration of his identity, and so becomes Jesus' intimate disciple as a result of revelation. As in *Philip*, there is a contrast, in Jesus' closing statement, between the true disciple in the light and falsehood in the darkness.

Among the so-called Montanist oracles is one cited by Epiphanius in his treatment of a group that he distinguishes from the Montanists, and labels 'Quintillianists' or 'Pepuzians' or 'Priscillianists':²⁸

For these 'Quintillians' or 'Priscillians' say that in Pepuza either Quintilla or Priscilla – I do not know for certain; one of them – fell asleep in the aforementioned Pepuza and that Christ came to her and slept with her in the following manner, as that deceived woman said: 'Changed into the form of a woman, in a bright robe, Christ came to me and placed wisdom in me, and revealed to me that this place was holy, and that here Jerusalem would come down from heaven.' (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.1.2–3)

This mildly salacious testimonium consists of a dream-vision in which Jesus in female form apparently spent the night with Quintilla (a more likely candidate for the oracle than Priscilla).²⁹ As in *Thomas*, here too Jesus initiates the intimacy in order to impart revelation.

1.3 Conclusion

In these passages, then, we have Jesus depicted as having an intimate relationship, with undertones of sexual intimacy, which is the occasion for revelation. In none of these (or indeed in any other ancient text, Christian or non-Christian) is there any clear reference to marriage. Against this background, early Christian discussions of Jesus' marital status do not really constitute a shared context for the *Gospel of Philip* and *GJW*. The intimacy of Jesus and Mary in *Philip* is a function of Mary's reception of revelation, such that she is publicly identifiable as a follower of Jesus (as recognised by the twelve), but also a true disciple who inhabits the

28 On this oracle, see the recent treatments and bibliography in W. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism* (VCSupps 84; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 117–18 and C. Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2007) 114–16.

29 Tabbernee rightly avers that it is more likely that the oracle would be transferred from the obscure Quintilla to the more renowned Priscilla than vice versa (Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 118).

light—in contrast to the twelve, who at least in the dialogue about their status relative to Mary are much more benighted.³⁰

2. A Linguistic and Text-Historical Context for the Influence of *Thomas* on *GJW*

My aim in this second section is to show how difficult it is to construct a context for *Thomas*' influence upon *GJW* in antiquity. As soon as photographs of *GJW* were posted on the internet, I and a number of others immediately documented the close linguistic parallels between Coptic *Thomas* and *GJW*.³¹ From the beginning, there has been a general sense that *GJW* – whether ancient or modern – is influenced by *Thomas*. King appears to accept '*GJW*'s literary dependence upon *Gos. Thom.*',³² though without regarding it as definitively proven. (She has in the past dated *Thomas* to the 'first or second centuries CE',³³ and more recently *GJW* – with varying degrees of confidence – to the second half of the second century.³⁴) Even so, there appears to be a broad consensus that *GJW* post-dates the composition of the *Gospel of Thomas*, and is influenced by it.

On the other hand, there has been disagreement over what that shows, resulting in a kind of stalemate between (on the one hand) those who have maintained that *GJW*, as a 'patchwork' composed of parts of *Thomas*, must therefore have been a forgery (Watson, Depuydt),³⁵ and those who have argued conversely that it need not imply that (Peppard, Paananen, King).³⁶ The latter have argued

30 M. L. Turner, *The Gospel of Philip: The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection* (NHMS 38; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 154 regards the passages in *Philip* that are negative about the disciples and the passages that are more positive as stemming from different sources.

31 My own was written on 20 September 2012, and posted on the Tyndale House website (<http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/ReJesusWife>).

32 King, 'Jesus said to them', 157.

33 K. L. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003) 214. Also, cf. *eadem*, 'Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas', *Forum* 3 (1987) 48–97, at 49, where King has made it clear that she thinks *Thomas* is a witness, independent of the Synoptics, to a body of sayings of Jesus going back to the mid first century CE.

34 King's initial draft of the *HTR* article confidently identified on the first page 'the probable date of original composition' as 'in the second half of the second century', K. L. King with contributions by AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Jesus said to them, 'My wife...'" A New Coptic Gospel Papyrus', 1, with 'probably already in the second century' appearing in the conclusion to the article. By contrast, the article subsequently published in *HTR* is much more modest, remarking, 'it is possible that the dialogue of the *GJW* fragment may also have been composed as early as the second half of the second century in Greek' ('Jesus said to them', 158).

35 For L. Depuydt, 'The Alleged *Gospel of Jesus's Wife*: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity', *HTR* 107 (2014) 172–89, at 187, the similarities constituting the patchwork alone are sufficient evidence of forgery; the 'blunders' offer damning confirmation.

36 K. L. King, 'Response to Leo Depuydt, "The Alleged *Gospel of Jesus's Wife*: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity"', *HTR* 107 (2014) 190–3, at 193: 'Even if *GJW* could be proved to

that such a compositional practice might well have been in operation in antiquity. In the middle stands Bernhard, who concludes from the data that if *GJW* were forged (which he already in 2012 regarded as the most likely scenario), then copying and pasting from *Thomas* was almost certainly the way it was done. I intend to show here *why* it is that *GJW*, as a patchwork composed of parts of *Thomas*, is extremely unlikely to have been a composition from antiquity.³⁷ The argument will proceed in two stages, first considering the likelihood of an influence in Greek, and secondly, building upon the same evidence, examining the plausibility of influence in the Coptic phases of the two works' transmission histories.

2.1 *The Influence of Thomas upon GJW at a Greek Stage?*

The first avenue of exploration, then, is to consider whether it is plausible to imagine that *GJW* was influenced by *Thomas* at its putative composition in Greek, or at some other point later in its post-composition phase of transmission in Greek, prior to the translation into Coptic that initiated its transmission in Coptic, culminating in the fragment that is still extant today.

The way in which we will test the plausibility of such a historical scenario is by examining the language of *GJW* to see whether it is likely that Greek *Thomas* and a hypothetical Greek *GJW* might have independently led to the Coptic *Thomas* and the Coptic *GJW* that we have before us today. What we will see is that this is highly unlikely, because Coptic *Thomas* and Coptic *GJW* are so similar. The reason why this similarity jeopardises the possibility of Greek *Thomas* influencing a Greek *GJW* is that there would doubtless have been numerous divergences arising in the two separate translation processes, and yet on comparing the two texts we find not so much divergence but astonishing verbal agreement.

I intend here to go a stage beyond mere observation of the similarities, then, and not only discuss the fact that there are strong verbal agreements between *Thomas* and *GJW*, but also attempt to show how improbable these similarities are. The aim here is to demonstrate that both the Coptic translator of *Thomas* and the (hypothetical) translator of *GJW* had a considerable range of options for how they might have expressed the sense of their Greek originals. It will be seen here that, given the variety of possibilities available, it would be simply astonishing if the supposed Coptic translator of *GJW* 'coincidentally' made, in a very

be literarily dependent upon *Gos. Thom.* (and/or other texts), this would not necessarily indicate fabrication in the modern period. The similarities and differences between them can be accounted for with regard to literary practices that are well-documented in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity where streams of communication and modes of composition included both oral and literary aspects.' So also King, 'Jesus said to them', 157.

³⁷ The observation of Bauckham (followed by Watson), that *Thomas* has influenced *GJW* at a Coptic stage, pointed in the right direction at an early phase.

small amount of text, a number of linguistic choices (out of the many possible choices) identical to those selected by the Coptic translator of *Thomas*, rather than choosing potential alternatives.³⁸ We can examine briefly the relevant data line by line (confining the treatment to the recto side of the fragment).

Line 1

ⲓⲉ ⲁⲛ ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲁϣ ⲁϥⲧ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲱⲛⲓ. Cf. *GTh* 101.2–3: ⲁϣⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲁⲙⲣⲣⲉ ⲡⲉϥⲓⲙⲱⲧ ⲁⲛ ⲙⲓⲛⲓ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲁⲁϣ ⲛⲧⲁⲣⲉ ϥⲛⲁⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲓⲁⲑⲛⲧⲥ ⲛⲁⲓⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ. ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲁϣ ⲓⲁⲣ ⲛⲧⲁϥ[...]ⲟⲕ [ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲁϣ] ⲁⲉ ⲛⲙⲉ ⲁϥⲧ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲙⲡⲱⲛⲓ.

We can note in passing, first, that, just as in our Coptic manuscript of *Thomas*, the manuscript here has ‘coincidentally’ the very same fragmentary ending of the previous sentence, ⲓⲉ ⲁⲛ. As Watson and others have noted, this reproduces the line division of the Coptic manuscript of *Thomas*.

Thereafter, secondly, while the word order is perfectly standard (subject + ⲧ + indirect pronominal object + direct object),³⁹ there are other options for the syntax that might have been selected in a translation from a hypothetical Greek original, such as a version involving ⲛⲥⲓ. Or again, ⲁϥⲧ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲛⲟϥⲱⲛⲓ is a possibility, this syntactic pattern being common in the Sahidic New Testament.⁴⁰ In that light, the verbal agreement between *GJW* and Coptic *Thomas* becomes more significant. In both their syntax, then, and in the way the direct object is expressed, *GJW* and *Thomas* coincide.

A related point, thirdly, is that the one place in this line with a form diverging from *Thomas* is at the end in the reference to ‘life’: ⲡⲱⲛⲓ in *GJW* omits the object marker ⲙⲓ-. This is a grammatical rarity, though it is not unknown.⁴¹ As noted in the previous paragraph, the word order (subject–verb–IO–DO) on its own is common, but the absence of the object marker ⲙⲓ- is not.⁴² This is a very striking

38 A few scholars have already noted some of the potential alternatives. For example, (a) Gesine Schenke has noted the various ways of expressing ‘he/Jesus said’ in Coptic; (b) Bernhard and others have discussed the possible combinations available for ‘giving life’ in line 1, and (c) again on line 1, many have noted the more standard ⲛⲁⲓ for ⲛⲁⲉⲓ. See further pp. 344–51 in Andrew Bernhard’s article in this issue.

39 The reversed order of the indirect pronominal and the direct nominal object is possible, but rare, at least in Sahidic. See the statistics in S. Emmel, ‘Proclitic Forms of the Verb ⲧ in Coptic’, *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (ed. D. W. Young; East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle and Polson, 1981) 131–46, at 140.

40 See Horner’s text of Sahidic John 6.33; 10.28; 17.2, as seen for example in the text of H. Thompson, *The Gospel of John according to the Earliest Coptic Manuscript* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1923). Cf. also 1 John 5.11, 16.

41 See Emmel, ‘Proclitic’, esp. 134, 139–41.

42 Andrew Bernhard’s article in this issue (p. 344) helpfully refers to B. Layton, *A Coptic Grammar: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004) §173 (p. 135) on this point. Layton there comments on ‘the much more usual phrase ⲧⲓ ⲛⲓ-/ⲙⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲓ-/ⲛⲁⲥ’.

divergence, because, as Andrew Bernhard has noted, it corresponds to an older web-based transcription of *Thomas* by Mike Grondin. Thus an error in an earlier web-based edition of *Thomas* remarkably enough corresponds to *GJW* here.

Fourthly, *GJW* shares with Coptic *Thomas* the orthographic variant $\text{na}\epsilon\text{i}$ for $\text{na}\iota$. $\text{na}\epsilon\text{i}$ is found consistently throughout *Thomas* for the indirect object marker + 1st sing. suffix ('to me').⁴³ The same form appears in line 5 of *GJW* below. In particular, $\text{na}\epsilon\text{i}$ appears in the parallel to *GJW* line 1 in *GTh* 101 cited above.

Line 2

$\text{]}\epsilon\text{ } \text{pe}\chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{c[}$. Of the various ways which might have been chosen to write the phrase 'the disciples said to Jesus (that)', *GJW* selects the very same as is found in the *Gospel of Thomas*:

GTh 12.1: $\text{pe}\chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ }$

GTh 18.1: $\text{pe}\chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ }$

GTh 20.1: $\text{pe}\chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ }$

GJW l. 2: $\text{pe}\chi\epsilon\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ }$.

GJW's language here is perfectly natural Coptic, but there is at least one other possibility: $\text{pe}\chi\alpha\gamma\text{ } \text{nt}\epsilon\text{i } \text{fm}\alpha\theta\eta\text{thc } \text{ntc } \chi\epsilon\text{ }$ (not found in *Thomas*).⁴⁴ The agreement between *GJW* and *Thomas* is interesting, but this is not a case that one should treat as any sort of definitive proof.

Line 3

$\text{].}\alpha\text{pna } \text{m}\alpha\text{p}\iota\alpha\text{m } \text{mp}\omega\alpha\text{ } \text{fm}\alpha\text{c } \alpha\text{[}$. We have the coincidence of the collocation of 'Mary' and 'worthiness', as in *GTh* 114, which has $\text{m}\alpha\text{p}\iota\alpha\text{m}$ and $\text{mp}\omega\alpha$. A very minor coincidence of a similar, non-decisive kind is that between *GJW* and *Thomas* in the use of the form αpna . This is a common Greco-Coptic form of the Greek $\acute{\alpha}\rho\eta\acute{\nu}\epsilon\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$. However, probably because the Coptic form is irregular (one expects forms that 'resemble the Greek *active imperative singular*', i.e. $\alpha\text{p}\eta\epsilon\iota$ ⁴⁵), one finds other forms, such as $\text{p-}\alpha\text{p}\eta\text{c}\alpha\epsilon$ and $\text{p-}\alpha\text{p}\eta\text{c}\alpha\iota$, though certainly αpna is the most common.⁴⁶

43 *GTh* 13.1; 19.2; 55.1–2; 61.3 as well as 101.3. Exceptionally, $\text{na}\iota$ appears in 43.1, but with a different meaning.

44 Cf. John 21.15: $\text{pe}\chi\alpha\gamma\text{ } \text{nt}\epsilon\text{i } \text{tc } \text{nc}\alpha\text{wn } \text{petroc}$.

45 Layton, *Coptic Grammar*, §192 (p. 155).

46 For these two other forms, see 2 *Apoc. James* 63.21 and *Treat. Seth* 53.2 respectively.

Line 4

] ̄ⲙⲁⲓⲥ ⲡⲉⲕⲉ ⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲧⲁⲗⲓⲙⲉ ⲙⲏ̄]. *GJW* here parallels *Thomas* again, which in three places has ⲡⲉⲕⲉ ⲧⲉ/ⲓⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ.⁴⁷ Here the phraseology is perfectly acceptable, but as in line 2, other options are available for ‘Jesus said to them’ (ⲡⲉⲕⲉ ⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ), such as ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ.⁴⁸ This latter phrase does not appear in *Thomas*; *GJW* has selected the expression that does.⁴⁹

Line 5

]ⲉⲓ ⲥⲏⲁⲱⲡ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲓⲱ. On a minor note, as in line 1, *GJW* with *Thomas* employs the spelling ⲛⲁⲉⲓ. Very much more significant, though, is the coincidence between *GJW* and *Thomas* of the language of the woman’s possibility of being, or the woman’s ability to be, a disciple to Jesus. The idea of ability or inability to be a disciple is familiar from the New Testament, specifically Luke. Jesus says that the person in Luke 14 who is unwilling to give up family, possessions and even life, ‘cannot be my disciple’, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής. This Greek phrase goes into Sahidic Coptic with some, though not complete, consistency as follows:

Luke 14.26 ... ⲙⲙⲏⲱⲥⲟⲙ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲓⲣⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲁⲓ

Luke 14.27 ... ⲙⲙⲏⲱⲥⲟⲙ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲓⲣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲙⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ

Luke 14.33 ... ⲙⲙⲏⲱⲥⲟⲙ ⲙⲙⲟⲓ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲓⲣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲙⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ.

There are two different constructions involved here, the first using the verb ⲉⲓⲣⲉ, the second and third using the verb ⲱⲡⲉ. The ‘literal’ sense of these statements is ‘it is not possible for him to be(come) a disciple to me’. We can consider the parallel phrases in *Thomas*:

GTh 55.1: ⲡⲏⲁⲱⲡ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ

GTh 101.1: ⲡⲏⲁⲱⲡ̄ ⲙ[ⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏ]ⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁ(ⲛ)

GTh 101.2: ⲡⲏⲁⲱⲡ̄ ⲙ[ⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲁ]ⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ.

In Coptic *Thomas*, there is of course no reason why the Coptic translator should opt for this particular phraseology, as opposed to that of the construction in Luke. Granted, there are strong similarities between Luke’s formulation and that of *Thomas*: (1) the use of -ⲱ-; (2) the phrase ⲡ̄-ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ (at least in Luke 14.26); and (3) ⲛⲁ(ⲉ)ⲓ. There are also several differences, principally Luke’s use of ⲥⲟⲙ

47 *GTh* 12.1; *GTh* 14.1; (with ⲓⲧⲉ) *GTh* 22.4.

48 Cf. e.g. *Thom. Cont.* 139.21: ⲡⲁⲕⲉⲓ ⲛⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲉ... and, again, as cited above, John 21.15: ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲡⲉⲧⲣⲟⲥ.

49 *GTh* 12.2; 14.1.

with the infinitive, and *Thomas'* future tense form (-*na-*). Luke also varies the verbs *ειπε* (14.26) and *ωπιε* (14.27, 33).

It is striking that *GJW's* *σναωϣ̅ μαθητης ναει* conforms so closely to *Thomas'* phraseology in the parallel. It should be noted that there is an obvious difference between *GJW* and these other statements in that the reference to the woman's discipleship is positive not negative, but this does not affect the point. The language is identical to that in *Thomas* except for the modifications necessary to the sense: (1) a feminine rather than a masculine subject: *σναωϣ̅ μαθητης* instead of *φναωϣ̅ μαθητης*, and (2) the omission of *Thomas'* negative *αν*.

In conclusion, of the various ways in which one might express the ability to become a disciple, *GJW* has selected the precise one found in Coptic *Thomas*. They share both (1) the future modifier -*na-*, against Luke, and (2) *ειπε*, with *Thomas* and Luke 14.26 against Luke 14.27 and 14.33, which have *ωπιε*; and (3) unlike Luke, neither *GJW* nor *Thomas* uses a form with *σom*.

It is also worth noting that in two of the three instances in *Thomas* (55.1 and 101.1), the phrase (in *Thomas* in its negative form) is followed by *αχω*, as in *GJW* here.

In sum, it is not just one coincidence that *GJW* and *Thomas* share the same phraseology; there is a collocation of several similarities. This line alone would be strongly suggestive of literary dependence.

Line 6

] *μαρε ρωμε εσοογ φαϥενε*[...This line has a very natural source in Coptic *Thomas*: *ογκα[κος] ρρωμε φαϥενε π̅ρ̅π̅πονηρον εβολ ρ̅μ̅ πεϥεζο εσοογ...* (*GTh* 45.3).⁵⁰ There are, however, three linguistic oddities in *GJW*, some of which might better be described as 'blunders'.⁵¹

(1) As King (with others) notes, *ρωμε εσοογ* here is unusual, since it 'apparently contradicts the well-established pattern in which the attributive clause after a definite (specific) antecedent takes the relative form, while after a non-definite (non-specific) antecedent it takes the circumstantial form'.⁵² While not unattested, it is very rare, and the examples that have been discussed are principally in Bohairic, not Sahidic.⁵³ The phraseology in *GJW* here is better explained as arising out of *GTh* 45.3.

(2) *φαϥενε* is almost certainly a misspelling of *φαϥενε* found in the parallel in *GTh* 45.3 cited above. The fact that *Thomas* is so obviously the source of this line

50 'An evil man brings forth wickedness from his evil store which is in his heart, and he speaks wickedness.'

51 Thus Depuydt, 'The Alleged Gospel of Jesus's Wife', 173, 186.

52 King, 'Jesus said to them', 142; also Depuydt, 'The Alleged Gospel of Jesus's Wife', 186.

53 See A. Shisha-Halevy, *Topics in Coptic Syntax: Structural Studies in the Bohairic Dialect* (OLA 160; Louvain: Peeters, 2007) 351–2 and 489 n. 19, where he notes that it is 'well established esp. in Nitrian Bohairic'. I owe these references to Prof. King.

ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ in the *Tripartite Tractate*, and in an inscription cited by Förster.⁶¹ The Nag Hammadi texts of the *First Apocalypse of James*, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* and the *Concept of our Great Power* have ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ.⁶² ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ is, however, the spelling in Coptic *Thomas*, a work in which 'image' is a prominent theme,⁶³ and indeed in the rest of NHC II. ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ in *GTh* 50.1 may be the source for *GJW* here (cf. *GTh* 22.6: ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲕⲱ̅, with a supralinear stroke substituting for the ⲛ).

Lines 1–8: Implications

From this analysis it can be concluded that the influence of *Thomas* upon *GJW* is not a matter of *GJW*'s dependence upon Greek *Thomas* but upon Coptic *Thomas*, as the similarities are not just general, but specific. If there were a Greek original of *GJW*, then there would be a number of different ways in which the Greek could be translated into Coptic, but there is an extraordinary quantity of similarities between Coptic *GJW* and Coptic *Thomas*. The differences between the Nag Hammadi *Thomas* and *GJW* in lines 4, 5 and 7 arise from different meanings, rather than hypothetical divergent translations (and perhaps in the case of line 1, from reproducing an online *Thomas* with an error). The literary influence here seems undeniably to have taken place at the Coptic stage. We can therefore turn to examining what plausible historical scenarios there may be for Coptic *Thomas* influencing Coptic *GJW*.

2.2 The Influence of *Thomas* upon *GJW* at a Coptic Stage?

If we can rule out the influence of Greek *Thomas* on a Greek *GJW*, then, is it still possible to maintain, as King does, the idea of an influence of *Thomas* upon *GJW* in antiquity?⁶⁴ This would leave as the other most likely scenario the influence taking place at the Coptic stage.⁶⁵ What, then, are the options for the influence of *Thomas* upon *GJW* at a Coptic stage?

The first point to note here is that one cannot posit a general, undefined Coptic stage in *Thomas*' transmission as sufficient to explain the influence upon *GJW*. The specifics of verbal overlap between Coptic *Thomas* and *GJW* are too substantial for that. Rather, there are certain conditions that must be in place to produce the kind of overlap that we have seen between the two texts. The first

61 Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter*, 229.

62 1 *Apoc. James* v,3 25.1–2; *Acts Pet. 12 Apost.* vi,1 2.24; *Conc.* vi,4 38.8.

63 *GTh* 22.6; 50.1; 83.1–2; 84.2.

64 So King, 'Jesus said to them', 157.

65 It is of course just possible that one might talk about a primary influence at the Greek stage, and then secondary influence at the Coptic stage. Usually hypotheses like these are rather desperate solutions. In fact, such a hypothesis is in any case no solution at all, and actually multiplies, rather than reduces, the problems, as (a) the extent of the influence of Coptic *Thomas* would then probably mean that any sense of the Greek of *GJW* was irrecoverable, and (b) the points made below about the influence coming from something almost identical to our NHC II would still apply.

condition that needs to be recognised, then, is that one must posit a source for *GJW* that is almost identical with NHC II,2 (our Nag Hammadi manuscript of *Thomas*).

With that in mind, the individuality of NHC II,2 must be recognised. The Nag Hammadi text of *Thomas* is the product, ultimately, of three stages:⁶⁶

(a) The initial stage is that which resulted in the particular Greek *Vorlage* of Coptic *Thomas*. This *Vorlage* would have consisted of the particularities resulting from the textual transmission of that Greek manuscript. We know that Greek *Thomas* had been copied numerous times already in the third century, the rough date of the Oxyrhynchus fragments.⁶⁷ In this process, it was doubtless subject to various stages of editing, though scholars disagree about the extent of the changes.⁶⁸ Even on a conservative assessment of the stability of *Thomas*' text, there would certainly have been changes to the text, whether minor 'additions, omissions, leaps, transpositions, substitutions, conflations, harmonisations and theological changes',⁶⁹ or perhaps more substantial changes, such as are evident from the differences between the Greek and Coptic texts in *GTh* 30/77 and *GTh* 36.⁷⁰

(b) The next important stage is the translation from that Greek *Vorlage* into Coptic, with all the hundreds of translational decisions that that would involve. We have considered some of the possible options that might have formed the pool of choices from which the translator made his selections in the parallel *Thomas*/*GJW* passages above.

(c) After the translation into Coptic (which did not of course put an end to *Thomas*' transmission in Greek), there is a subsequent stage of Coptic transmission, one snapshot of which is our NHC II,2. (At a certain, unknown, point, NHC II becomes a dead-end in the textual transmission of *Thomas*, when it was probably buried in a jar.)⁷¹ Some of the same kinds of changes that took place in the

66 For a survey of this process in relation to Nag Hammadi works in general, see S. Emmel, 'The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions', *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie* (ed. J. Frey, E. E. Popkes, J. Schröter; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008) 33–49.

67 See the survey of different scholars' datings of the Greek fragments in Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 8.

68 For different understandings of the stability of the text of *Thomas*, see Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 14–24.

69 Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 23, citing the scribal changes identified as characteristic of the early papyri of the New Testament in J. R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2008).

70 The Greek text of *GTh* 30 is split into two sayings in the Coptic, the first half being retained in its original place, the second being moved to a position much later in *Thomas*, in *GTh* 77. See further Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 27–9 on the substantive differences between the Greek fragments and the Coptic text.

71 Thus e.g. J. M. Robinson, 'Introduction', *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. J. M. Robinson; Leiden: Brill, 1988³) 1–25, at 20. I owe this language of 'dead-ends' in transmission history to P. M. Head, 'Additional Greek Witnesses to the New Testament (Ostraca, Amulets,

transmission of *Thomas* in Greek probably took place at this stage as well. It is of course impossible to know whether the observable differences between Greek and Coptic *Thomas*, noted under (a) above, took place at a Greek or Coptic stage.

In other words, *one can imagine many different possible forms in which Coptic Thomases could have emerged, but it is impossible that numbers of these might have served equally well as a source for our GJW*. Rather, *GJW* is inescapably a product of *our* Coptic *Thomas*, or something almost identical to it – such as a copy of it, or, conversely, the exemplar from which NHC II,2 itself was copied. (It would further be necessary if *GJW* were a descendant of NHC II,2 itself that the codex had not yet been hidden or buried or lost by the time *GJW* or its Thomasine source came into existence!) Unless one accepts this, one is forced to assume that *GJW* might have been influenced by a separate branch of *Thomas*' Coptic transmission, or by a Coptic text deriving from a different translation process, or even by a Coptic text which stems ultimately from a different Greek *Vorlage*. Even on a cautious assessment of the amount of variation in *Thomas*' textual history, this is simply incredible. The source for *GJW* must be NHC II,2 or something almost identical to it. (An implication of this that can be drawn at this stage is that, since the 'Thomas content' of *GJW* is hardly marginal to the text as we know it, we must already conclude that the putative original of *GJW* cannot really have been composed before the fourth century.)

Secondly, what if the author of *GJW* did have NHC II,2 (or something very much like it) before him? In that case we would have to suppose that the new author preserved lots of identical wording to that Coptic text. Having worked extensively on the influence of *Thomas* in antiquity, however, I know of no parallel to this kind of verbatim use of Coptic *Thomas*.⁷²

Finally, if we suppose that *GJW* had done something unusual and unparalleled in its use of Coptic *Thomas*, one would next have to suppose that in the transmission from the putative Coptic original of *GJW* to the eighth-century manuscript that we have today there was a process of very accurate copying.

Inscriptions and Other Sources'), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes; Leiden: Brill, 2013²) 429–60, at 430.

⁷² Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 62–90 (section 4 of the Introduction, 'Early References to the Gospel of Thomas'). See further M. Grosso, 'Λόγοι Ἀποκρυφῶν: aspetti della ricezione del Vangelo secondo Tommaso nel cristianesimo antico' (PhD thesis, University of Turin, 2007) and P. Nagel, 'Apokryphe Jesusworte in der koptischen Überlieferung', *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferung* (ed. J. Frey and J. Schröter; WUNT 254; Tübingen: Mohr, 2010) 495–526, which has a particularly helpful series of parallel Coptic texts. A brief glance at the synopses in Nagel's article illustrates the point clearly.

2.3 Conclusion

It is impossible that these similarities are simply coincidence, since we are dealing with a series of similarities that have all converged upon a tiny amount of text. There is little doubt among scholars about the overwhelming evidence for dependence of *GJW* upon *Thomas*. The dramatis personae, themes and language all point in this direction. What is not sufficiently appreciated is *why* this is such a problem for the authenticity of the fragment. First, the close similarity of the Coptic texts means that influence at an early Greek stage is a plain impossibility. Secondly, given the degree of variability in the translation and transmission of *Thomas* (even if that variability has sometimes been exaggerated), it is striking that the agreement is so close to *our particular manuscript of Thomas*. The selections made by the Coptic translator of *Thomas*, and which have found their way into Nag Hammadi Codex II, are by no means automatic, but a function of a great many decisions. The scenario that (a) the author of *GJW* might have had before him our particular Nag Hammadi text of *Thomas* (or something almost identical to it) and (b) copied it in the manner required, and (c) that the text of *GJW* was copied accurately enough to preserve these similarities is, in my judgement at least, not an easy one to envisage.

3. General conclusions

We have considered here the two putative ancient contexts for *GJW*, namely a second-century Greek literary context (that of *GJW*'s supposed origins), and an eighth-century Coptic context (that of our *GJW* papyrus). One of the main planks in the argument for *GJW* having an ancient context, namely the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Philip*, is unfortunately a rather unsteady piece of timber, as we saw in section 1 of this article. In section 2, it has also been seen that the closeness of language between *Thomas* and *GJW* not only rules out a Greek original of *GJW*, but also makes it extremely difficult to imagine a scenario in which influence was exerted in antiquity at the Coptic stage. Overall, then, on both of these fronts *GJW* must be regarded as at best an outlier, or at worst extremely improbable.

As a postscript, it can be noted that *GJW* has itself already been used to provide a plausible context for an even more outlandish thesis, namely that *Joseph and Aseneth* gives us the true history of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene.⁷³ The authors of the 2014 book *The Lost Gospel* comment that one potential objection to their view is that there is no other evidence for it, 'until now': 'Then, on September 18, 2012, everything changed. At the 10th International Congress of

73 S. Jacobovici & B. Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text that Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary the Magdalene* (New York: Pegasus, 2014).

Coptic Studies ...' etc. etc.⁷⁴ Of course Karen King cannot be held responsible for misuse of her arguments (though the authors do repeat her premature dating of the fragment to the fourth century), but this clearly illustrates the fact that as soon as a manuscript gains acceptance, it is not only evidence for itself. If a fake manuscript does, however, come to be inserted erroneously into the world of early Christianity and then used as support for other hypotheses, the result is, to borrow a phrase from another context, 'only jelly propped up with jelly'.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jacobovici and Wilson, *Lost Gospel*, 294.

⁷⁵ P. J. Parsons, Review of G. Cavallo, *Libri Scritture Scribi in Ercolaneo*, *CRNS* 39 (1989) 358–60, at 360, on dating one undated papyrus by another undated papyrus. I owe this reference to Dr Brent Nongbri.