

Class 4b

LATER CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF JESUS

Outline

- Some Early Church Sources
 - Ehrman's 8 examples
 - Theagrapha
- Apocrypha & Canon
 - "Apocrypha": definition, examples
 - The definition of the canon
- Gnostic Gospels and Gnosticism
 - The great discoveries: Oxyrhynchus and Nag Hammadi
 - Gnostic gospels: some examples
- Historical Value of the Non-canonical Evidence

SOME EARLY CHURCH SOURCES

Some Early Church Sources

The Church Fathers

- Papias
- Ignatius of Antioch
- 1 Clement

Some Early Church Sources

The Non-Pauline Books of the New Testament

- Acts of the Apostles
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 1 John

Some Early Church Sources

Paul

- Writes many letters – 7 survive in the NT
- Writes c. 50-mid-60s CE
- What does he say about Jesus? Not too much! He didn't know the historical Jesus; cares more about the risen, living Jesus.
- What is his portrait of Jesus?
- Is it reliable for reconstructing the historical Jesus? one of our earliest sources
material is second- or third-hand (but from eyewitnesses)
but it's shaped by his belief in the risen Jesus

Agrapha

- Literal meaning = unwritten things
 - that is, unwritten in the gospels, but quoted elsewhere
- “Elsewhere” includes
 - Acts 20:35 – It is more blessed to give than to receive
 - 1 Cor 7:10; 9:14; 11:24-25 – Jesus’ words at the last supper
 - variant mss of NT texts have some additional sayings
 - woman caught in adultery in John 7:53–8:11



Codex Vaticanus
ca. 350

This manuscript of the Gospel of John lacks the story of the woman caught in adultery.

Here is where you'd expect it to be – right after chapter 7.

But this manuscript goes right from the end of chapter 7 (a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees) to John 8:18 (“And Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world”).

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 - woman caught in adultery in John 7:53–8:11
 - Quotations in the “Church Fathers”
- How do we know which may be early?
 - Content
 - If they sound more like later polemics, they’re ruled out
 - So they need to sound like the gospels, but this won’t yield anything new...

APOCRYPHA & CANON

Apocryphal Texts Some Definitions

Apocrypha literally "hidden" in Greek, it refers to books judged at some point in time to be on the fringes of the canon

Apocryphal Texts Some Examples

| Canonical NT | Examples of Apocryphal Works |
|--------------|--|
| • | <i>Egerton Papyrus, Gospel of Peter, Infancy Gospel of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas</i> |
| • | <i>Epistles of Barnabas, Clement, Ignatius</i> |
| • | <i>Acts of Paul and Thecla, Acts of Andrew, Acts of Peter</i> |
| • | <i>Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul</i> |

The Definition of the Canon

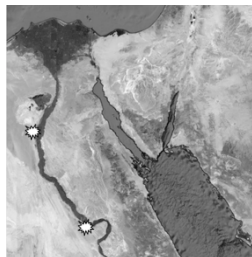
- **Definition** a Greek word for a tool of measurement; in scripture studies a list or catalogue of books that "measure up" to the standards of the church as authoritative texts
- **Time-Frame** 4-gospel limit in some communities by 180 CE; earliest canon that matches our NT's is in 367 CE (Athanasius' *Easter Letter*).
- **Criteria**

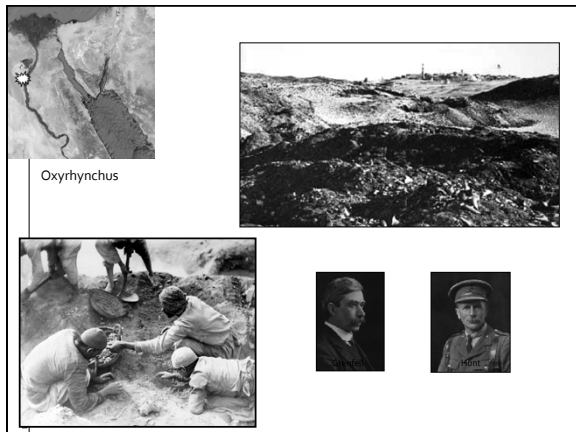
GNOSTIC GOSPELS & GNOSTICISM

The Great Discoveries

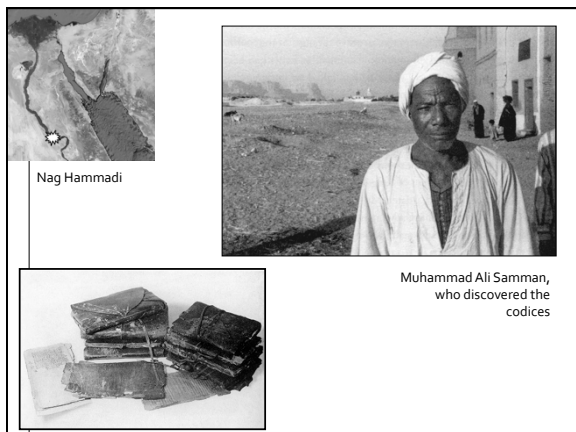
Oxyrhynchus
1895–1930
50,000+ fragmentary Greek mss,
some of them Christian

Nag Hammadi
1945
13 books with 52 separate "tractates" —
4th century copies of earlier gnostic works



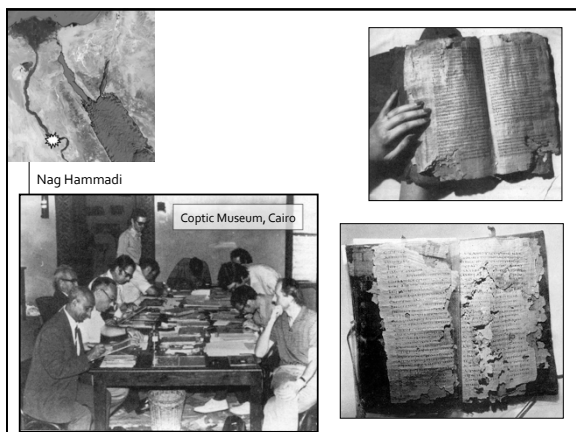


Oxyrhynchus



Nag Hammadi

Muhammad Ali Samman,
who discovered the
codices



Nag Hammadi

Coptic Museum, Cairo

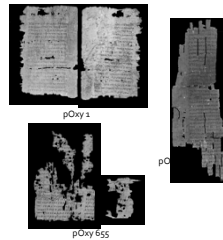


The end of the
Apocryphon of John
and the beginning
of the Coptic
Gospel of Thomas

Gospel of Thomas Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 4 witnesses

- ❖ 3 Greek fragments from separate mss found at Oxyrhynchus (100–200s CE)



- ❖ A Coptic translation found complete in Codex II from the Nag Hammadi corpus (+ XIII 2; 400 CE)



NH II 2-3

Gospel of Thomas



- **Date** Mid-100s CE, Syria, though some sayings may go back to the first century
- **Genre** Sayings gospel, like Q; almost no narrative material
- **Gospel comparison** Some sayings are very similar to Q, but there are also unusual sayings
- **Content** Jesus reveals the secret of the disciples' origin; the world and human body are viewed negatively; the kingdom is the divine self of the disciple

A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses

How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Animosity
between the gods
at creation and ongoing
(Mesopotamian mythology)

Two Gods
one good, one evil
(Zoroastrian dualism)

One Supreme God
with a lesser "demiurge"
who creates this world
(Platonic system)

A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses

How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Basic Platonic Idea

Gnostic Adaptation

Orthodox Adaptation

Supreme God



Demiurge
a lesser god who
creates this world



this world is
but a shadow of
what is in the mind
of the supreme God

For gnostics,
creation occurs without
the permission of the
Supreme God
(demiurge = OT God)

So God does a workaround,
implanting humans
with a spirit / soul / spark
of gnosis (= knowledge of
their true nature)

Salvation =
return to true root;
return of spark to light

For orthodox Christians,
the "demiurge" is Christ

While "lesser" than the Father,
he is of the same nature,
so evil does not derive
from him

Nor is the world God creates
evil. "Sin" is alienation
from our true root,
and the Savior guides us to our
true root / self / the kingdom.

Gospel of Mary

Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 3 witnesses, none of them found
at Nag Hammadi (but all of them from Egypt)

❖ Papyrus No. 463 in the John Rylands
collection at the University of Manchester
(from Oxyrhynchus; Greek, early 200s CE)

❖ POxy 3525 (Greek, 200s CE)

❖ a Coptic translation at the beginning of the Berlin
Papyrus 8502 (a.k.a. the Akhmim Codex, 400s CE)



Gospel of Mary



- **Date** 100s CE, Egypt (or Syria?)
- **Genre** Revelatory dialogue / secret instruction
- **Gospel comparison** Entirely set after the resurrection; Q & A and commissioning of disciples; but content of conversation is gnostic
- **Content** Post-resurrection dialogues with disciples about the destiny of matter and the nature of sin (which the Savior says "does not exist"); Mary then shares the special revelation

Historical Value of the Non-canonical Evidence

- Agrapha*
- a few early Jesus sayings quoted in other books
 - but random, lacking context, and how do you know they're early?
- Gos. Thomas*
- like Q, but gnosticizing
 - some early sayings but in a later context
- Gos. Mary*
- Thoroughly gnostic, thus mid-2nd to 3rd century
-
- Summary*
- The later the text, the less likely it preserves historically authentic material
 - Thomas may trace to Jesus
