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The Gospel of Thomas and the Thomasine Tradition*

Introduction

Scholarship has a tendency to be fascinated with traditions due to their capacity of freezing and transmitting valuable information with the purpose of raising possible questions regarding particular cultural and religious trajectories. This is also the case of the so-called Thomasine tradition: “research on Thomasine Traditions continues and will continue for a long time. The Steering Committee of the Thomasine Traditions Group is convinced its work has improved and furthered studies in this very important aspect of early Christian movement. It has placed in focus a tradition whose accessibility has been increased immensely through the find of the Nag Hammadi Library in the year 1945. The *Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II,2), the *Book of Thomas* (NHC II,7), and the *Acts of Thomas* are a corpus of texts showing clear relations of an intertextual nature (if they are not the products of a single community) of unparalleled importance for the understanding of a small and now lost branch of Christianities”.¹

However, before asking what is or could be a ‘Thomasine tradition’ one should provide a compelling plural perspective on the main texts upon which scholars have based their assumptions, from the *Gospel according to Thomas*² to the *Acts of Thomas*³ and the *Book of Thomas the Contender*.

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¹ Jon MA. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick, and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: the social and cultural world of the Gospel of Thomas*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. viii.

² H. Koester, “Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73/1.2 (1980), pp. 105-130; H. Koester, “Introduction,” in Bentley Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7 together with XIII,2**, BRIT. LIB. OR.4926(1), and P.OXY. 1, 654, 655 with contributions by many scholars, Vol. I., col. «Nag Hammadi Studies» 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 38-48.

The research so far has shown that no one would state that there are enough or solid historical proofs in order to claim that such a scholarly construct could have a historical reality. A specific Thomasine tradition has its place only within the realm of the scholarly imagination as a construct which is meant to fill in an internal gap within the nascent conventional Christian world. This gap presents itself as an imaginary product: is a scholarly construct, a blanket concept designed to catch similarities and to freeze differences in order to connect different types of texts.

Tradition

If the general question would be “*what is a tradition?*” then this already opens an indefinite series of avenues in order to tackle the question which is at work behind the question “*what is the meaning of the Thomasine tradition?*” This question presupposes two strands. First, the Thomasine tradition was specific for a certain community, and second, this construct had and still has a strong meaning for the scholarly world involved in research of the Thomasine writings. However, this roughly implies something which is not happening in reality: there are no scholars who study *all* the supposed Thomasine documents concomitantly or at all with a view to developing a theoretical framework for the Thomasine tradition.⁴ This fact is helpful to

³ A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas. Introduction, Text and Commentary*, col. «Supplements to Novum Testamentum» 108 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003). See also Susan E. Myers, “Revisiting Preliminary Issues in the *Acts of Thomas*,” *Apocrypha* 17 (2006), pp. 95-112; Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, “A Syriac Original for the Acts of Thomas? The Theory of the Syriac Priority Revisited, Evaluated and Rejected,” in Ilaria Ramelli and Judith Perkins (eds.), *Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: The Role of Religion in Shaping Narrative Forms*, col. «WUNT» 348 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), pp. 105-133.

⁴ H.-Ch. Puech, “Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvé: L’Évangile selon Thomas,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1957), pp. 146-167; John D. Turner, “A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition,” in M. Krause (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, col. «Nag Hammadi Studies» 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 109-119; John D. Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II,7). The Coptic Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, col. «SBLDS» 23 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975); Bruce Lincoln, “Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text,” *Novum Testamentum* 19/1 (1977), pp. 65-76; H. J. W. Drijvers, “Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity,” *Second Century* 2 (1982), pp. 157-175; Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987); G. J. Riley, “Thomas Tradition and the *Acts of Thomas*,” in E.H. Lovering, Jr. (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, col. «SBLSP» 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 533-542; S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1993); S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins: Essays on the Fifth Gospel*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 84 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013); Ph. Selew, “Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community,” in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*, col. «Studies in Early Christian Apocrypha» 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 11-35; Risto Uro,

understand that the main spokesmen of a Thomasine tradition had no grasp of all textual realities proposed by such a plural textual environment.⁵

An accepted general approach on the concept of tradition such as that of Edward Shils, who in 1981 has published an important book called *Tradition*, has managed to provide some guidelines for further approaches of this multilayered concept.⁶ Shils illustrates how the concept of tradition was ‘thought of’ and ‘used.’ For Shils, one has conceived tradition as a dimension of the social structure.⁷ Tradition means anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present.⁸ Any tradition is but a sequence of variations about themes received and transmitted.⁹ And finally, tradition is the accumulated understanding of a text.¹⁰ Shils’ perspective emphasizes some of the possible lines of description for that which has generally been coined as “tradition.” Starting from this general point of inquiry and following Shils’ ideas, one can address two preliminary questions: 1. How is it possible to announce a tradition? No scholar representative of the Thomasine tradition has yet questioned if it is possible to speak about such a particular tradition. They have just spoken about it as if there are no counterarguments or as if they can create a story to match the historical reality. 2. How does one arrive at a point so as to propose a tradition? The wealth of documents which bear the name Thomas is the reason why this tradition exists. However, no hints were given on how one has arrived at such an idea as the Thomasine tradition. By building up on the name of Thomas the scholarship has succeeded in ignoring the textual realities and in promoting a ‘new’ tradition.

After several past attempts to survey the *Thomasine* research,¹¹ this new enterprise explores here how it was possible at all to accept such a hypothesis. One has to follow the tread of

Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Asgierrson *et al.* (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*.

⁵ Puech, “Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L’Évangile selon Thomas,” pp. 146-167; H-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose. II Sur l’Évangile selon Thomas. Esquisse d’une interprétation systématique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1978); Ph. Sellew, “Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community,” pp. 11-35; P.-H. Poirier, “Évangile selon Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas. Une tradition et ses transformations,” *Apocrypha* 7 (1996), pp. 9-26; P.-H. Poirier, “The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition,” In John D. Turner and Anne McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years. Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 44 (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1997), pp. 296-307.

⁶ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

⁷ Edward Shils, *Tradition*, p. 7.

⁸ Edward Shils, *Tradition*, p. 12.

⁹ Edward Shils, *Tradition*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Edward Shils, *Tradition*, p. 17.

¹¹ Ph. Sellew, “Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community,” pp. 11-35; Paul-Hubert Poirier, *L’Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas*, col. «Homo Religiosus II» 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021 [1981]), pp.

interpretation ‘from’ the *Gospel of Thomas* (hereafter *Thomas*), ‘through’ the dialogue called the *Book of Thomas the Contender*¹² ‘until / or’ the romance called *Acts of Thomas*. This approach is necessary since the understanding of *Thomas* as a text is scholarly linked with the so-called *Thomasine* tradition to which it is believed to be an incipient and trend setting component.

Scholarly works on *Thomas* have constantly employed problematic umbrella-concepts such as ‘community’ and ‘tradition’ as operational. By default, these general concepts raise complex sets of questions because instead of being means for a proper historical interpretation of the ancient texts, they were mostly used with the intention to prove or contradict various modern scholarly theories devoted to big frameworks of thought. Within these frameworks *Thomas* has its own place.¹³

Gospel of Thomas and “Tradition”

With the *Gospel of Thomas*,¹⁴ we enter abruptly within the debates about the plural and multiform *early* Christian ‘communities.’ These debates are still in a tumultuous ongoing process. However, a textual analysis convincingly illustrates the discrepancies of the *manufactured* theories about ‘community’ or ‘tradition,’ which do not describe the particular social conditions of texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas* as well as the other texts discussed here.

What strikes the reader’s attention in such scholarly works is that the combination of various ideas from specific textual realities has allowed them to shape a construct in which the same ideas are ‘understood’ as forming a special type of singularity. Within the scholarly works

144-146, 156-171; P.-H. Poirier, “Évangile selon Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas,” pp. 9-26; P.-H. Poirier, “The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition,” pp. 296-307.

¹² In Bentley Layton (ed.), *On the Origin of the World, Expository Treatise, On the Soul, Book of Thomas the Contender*. Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII, 2*, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (1), and P. Oxy 1, 654, 655, col. «Nag Hammadi Studies» 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 173-205.

¹³ By *framework of thought*, I mean the theoretical space created within the analysis of Christianities, Philosophy, Ethics, and other worlds of ideas at work within *Gospel of Thomas* and in which this textuality was already at work.

¹⁴ J.-M. Sevrin, “L’Évangile selon Thomas. Paroles de Jesus et revelation gnostique” *Revue theologique de Louvain* 8/3 (1977), pp. 265-292; T. Baarda, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Old Testament,” *The Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 26 (2003), pp. 1-28, 46-65; N. Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian. The Relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron*, col. «SBL, Academia Biblica» 5 (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2002); J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Anchor; New York: Doubleday, 1981); B. Dehandschutter, “L’Évangile de Thomas comme collection de paroles de Jesus,” in J. Delobel (ed.), *Logia: les paroles de Jesus/ The Sayings of Jesus*, col. «BETL» 59 (Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1982), pp. 507-515; H. J. W. Drijvers, “Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity,” pp. 157-175; Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

the sets of ideas present in the Thomasine textualities were analyzed from two opposite directions. On the one side, these ideas were seen as part of their understanding of these textualities, and on the other side, they were merely used as reinforcements for their frameworks of thought. Such sets of ideas were pre-molded in order to be useful for the consolidation of the frameworks of thought already at work solely within their own particular scholarly conventional spaces. In the case of the *Gospel of Thomas*, one can read how the first narratives show detailed analyses of how the name Thomas has travelled within the scholarly works from a conventional space defined by the idea of the ‘apostle’ towards the more recent theological biased space circumscribed around the idea of the ‘saint’ Thomas.

Nevertheless, scholarly work implied the use of complex sets of methodologies in order to make the historical movement of early Christianity’s ideas more convergent to a binary framework of thought which works for all accepted systems of ideas. In a repeated and one-sided narrative manner, the results have been delivered as *constructed* religious communities, several *types* of Christians, specific differences and acknowledged similarities, and eventually all these aspects converge into one wide scholarly Jesus’ tradition.¹⁵

However, in this specific case one can ask why academic research shows such a strong desire to claim that behind this text should stand a community? And why should this community further develop a tradition, a school or even a special kind of ‘Christianity,’ which appears to be different from the conventional accepted Christianity?

The conventionally accepted and promoted image can be challenged only if the following questions are acknowledged as a task by and for the scholarship. Thus, what is *a* tradition in this fluid cultural context of nascent Christianities?¹⁶ How can one speak about *a* tradition in

¹⁵ William E. Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism, and Sayings Gospels,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 88/4 (1995), pp. 471-494; William E. Arnal, “Blessed are the Solitary. Textual Practices and the Mirage of a Thomas ‘Community,’” in C. Johnson Hodge, S.M. Olyan, D. Ulluci, E. Wasserman (eds.), *The One Who Sows Bountifully. Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013), pp. 271-281; William E. Arnal, “The Collection and Synthesis of “Tradition” and the Second Century Invention of Christianity,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011), pp. 193-215; Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus. Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše (editors and translators), *The Other Gospels. Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); John D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); John D. Crossan, *Jesus. A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); John D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity. Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

¹⁶ For the expression *Christianities* see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); Jonathan Z. Smith, “Social formations of early Christianities: A response to Ron Cameron and Burton Mack,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8/3 (1996), pp. 271-278; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion*

the period of nascent 'Christianity' or Christianities? How can one speak about *one* tradition as it were a singular and pure product in such a plural world of ideas? These questions are meant to direct the general reader to the main problem that circumscribes the topic of this paper and its particular aim, namely, towards the scholarly qualification of any analysis on topics related to the early Christianities as being balanced in-between the intertwined theological and historical approaches. Therefore, one should agree that the early Christianities have been a plural set of socio-historical phenomena. Consequently, one has to read such textualities as intrinsic parts of the diverse architectures of the historical process at work within heterogeneous ideological directions. Since the process of domestication of textualities that belong to the Other Christian rather than to the Canonical Christian is still at work today, any further research should avoid the deep-rooted phenomenon of intentional misreading.

The *Gospel of Thomas*¹⁷ belongs to the beginning of what is conventionally called Late Antiquity and within which numerous interpretative processes have marked this historical period. To assess better this plural document which is the *Gospel of Thomas*, it is necessary for us to make use of a variety of perspectives which would include as many angles as possible. Due to the complexity of ideas found in *Thomas* we should undertake a rigorous reading that will emphasize the dynamics of analysis unfolding in time, instead of a never-ending static narration of these theories. Such a complex approach will fossilize from the very beginning a great deal of the general recurrent statements present in the studies dedicated to the *Gospel of Thomas* and would allow for a proper reading of such a plural textuality.¹⁸

While the reading on *Thomas*, established scholars have sought to delineate as clearly as possible some orchestrated *fixations* for the *Gospel of Thomas* (like dating of, language,

(Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Burton Mack, "On redescribing Christian origins," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8/3 (1996), pp. 247-269; Ron Cameron, "The Anatomy of a Discourse: 'eschatology' as a category for explaining Christian origins," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8/3 (1996), pp. 231-245; Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*; Richard Valantasis, *The Beliefnet guide to Gnosticism and other vanished Christianities* (Doubleday/New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), pp. xvii-xxvi, 70-79.

¹⁷ Ismo Dunderberg, "Thomas' I-Sayings and the Gospel of John," in R. Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 33-64; A. F. J. Klijn, "Das Thomasevangelium und das altsyrische Christentum," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15/3 (1961), pp. 145-159; B. D. Chilton, "Recovering Jesus' Mamzerut," in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 84-110; H. K. McArthur, "Dependence of the Gospel of Thomas on the Synoptics," *Expository Times* 71 (1960), pp. 286-287; O. Hofius, "Das koptische Thomasevangelium und die Oxyrhynchus Papyri nr 1,654 und 655," *Evangelische Theologie* 20 (1960), pp. 21-42, 182-192.

¹⁸ One can still take into consideration the re-evaluative example of Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, [1962]) or Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 31993).

relationship with New Testament, belonging to the Gnostic thinking, and provenance)¹⁹ and have preserved a continuous state of uncertainty around this plural text. The trajectories of scholarly reading have become history in themselves and have entered within the self-accepted circle of academic themes, and they have become eventually one of the most powerful contemporary academic fixations. The path which scholars followed from the Gospel of Thomas to the so-called Thomasine traditions was short but very significant from numerous methodological points of view.²⁰

The Thomasine Tradition

It was Henri-Charles Puech in 1957 who connected the *Gospel of Thomas* with other texts with which it was supposed to share common traits.²¹ Since that moment, every scholar who sought to emphasize this aspect made use of Puech's arguments and tried to strengthen his point of view. Consequently, the advancements in *Thomas* scholarship shed light upon the whole concept of the so-called *Thomasine tradition* but have remained within the narrow limits of Puech's analysis until today. This means that this concept is based on the developments of contemporary scholarship's discursive imagination and not on the intrinsic historical connections possible in-between these documents.

The process of labeling revolves and develops around the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Thomasine labeling is a scholarly construction and it is essentially a dynamic definitional practice. The main purpose of this construction is to achieve the knowledge of this textuality by using a kind of family resemblance. The scholarly work has managed to read only the exteriority of *Thomas*,

¹⁹ See April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation. With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel*, col. «Library of New Testament Studies» 287 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006); Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983, 2nd Edition, 2005); S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1993); S. J. Patterson, "Understanding the Gospel of Thomas Today," 33-75, in idem, J.M. Robinson and the Berliner Arbeitskreis fuer koptisch-gnostische Schriften, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998); H. Koester, "ΤΝΩΜΑΙ ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΙ. The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 58/3 (1965), pp. 279-318.

²⁰ H.-Ch. Puech, "Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L'Évangile selon Thomas," pp. 146-167; John D. Turner, "A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition," pp. 109-119; John D. Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II,7)*, pp. 173-205.

²¹ H.-Ch. Puech, "Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L'Évangile selon Thomas," pp. 155-156, republished in H.-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose. II Sur l'Évangile selon Thomas. Esquisse d'une interprétation systématique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1978), pp. 43-44. See also 'the official' story provided by James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 86 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014).

rather than to undertake a minute research of each text and later on to be able to bring everything together. Moreover, all the textualities under scrutiny were not read with the intention of identifying a tradition, since their understanding has not been achieved yet. The *Gospel of Thomas* has proved itself to be an extremely complex text which has not been recognized until now as a plural textuality.²² However, when it is put in relation with *Acts of Thomas* it appears to be domesticated and easier to be categorized and situated somewhere convenient for various theoretical purposes. On the other hand, when the *Gospel of Thomas*²³ is related to the *Book of Thomas* it raises different sets of questions, showing a quite different research agenda.²⁴ This is the reason why common textual relations between *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas*, or *Acts of Thomas* and *Book of Thomas* have never been part of the research agenda of the scholarship on Thomasine research.

Further questions still linger on, such as: is it possible to establish a defining process of these texts as forming a compact logical tradition? One safe answer will be no. This defining

²² V. K. Robbins, "Rhetorical Composition and Sources in the Gospel of Thomas," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 36 (1997), pp. 86-114; Claudio Gianotto, "Étude Critique: La formation de l'Évangile selon Thomas. À propos d'une étude récente," *Apocrypha* 18 (2007), pp. 297-308; Richard Valantasis, "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999), pp. 55-81; Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas. The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992; 2nd Edition 2004); Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of a New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Risto Uro, "The Social World of the Gospel of Thomas," in Jon MA. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick, and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: the social and cultural world of the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 19-38; H.-W. Bartsch, "Das Thomas-Evangelium und die synoptischen Evangelien," *New Testament Studies* 6/3 (1960), pp. 249-261.

²³ H.-M. Schenke, "On the Compositional History of the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 10 (1994), pp. 9-30; L.-W. Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries A.D.," *Vigiliae Christianae* 22/3 (1968), pp. 161-175; Gilles Quispel, "Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 18 (1964), pp. 226-235; Gilles Quispel, "Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1966), pp. 371-382; B. A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Jacques-É. Ménard, "Beziehungen des Philippus- und des Thomas-Evangeliums zur syrischen Welt," in K.W. Tröger (ed.), *Altes Testament, Frühjudentum, Gnosis* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1980), pp. 317-326; G. C. Stead, "Some Reflections on the Gospel of Thomas," in F.L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica* III, col. «TU» 88 (Berlin: Akademie, 1964), pp. 390-402; M. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); John D. Turner, "The Book of Thomas the Contender," In Bentley Layton (ed.), *On the Origin of the World, Expository Treatise, On the Soul, Book of Thomas the Contender*. Vol 2 of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII, 2*, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (1), and P. Oxy 1, 654, 655, col. «Nag Hammadi Studies» 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 173-205.

²⁴ In this case the impact relies more on the possible relationship between the gospel and the dialogue within the *Nag Hammadi Codices* and concomitantly within the theoretical framework of religious studies 'programme.' For *programme* see Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, J. Worrall and G. Currie (eds.), col. «Philosophical Papers I» (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978; reprinted 1989), pp. 8-101.

process is fluid. These textualities are not convergent towards a religious community or something similar. Why is this necessary? The necessity of such detail resides in the clarity of the historical approach. Is there an added value to the research of early Christianity, Gnosticism, or any another ‘common’ convention of current research agendas? Yes and no. The historical research is not a rhetorical exercise. Early Christianity is not a category in itself. The research agendas are fluid, stratified and theoretical reproductive organisms. Is it possible to have a totally different integrative perspective on these texts? Any integrative perspective on these textualities reflects the views of the reader. The integration is within the early Christianities. How can we escape from the danger reminded by the words of Hobsbawm who emphasized that: “Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.”²⁵ This danger will be always-already there to protect us from assuming that the process of domestication is something natural to accept.

The second aim of this paper is to identify this danger looming within the scholarship’s reading of ancient documents and to neutralize it by emphasizing new possibilities of reading the blend of discourses used by the scholarship on the *Gospel of Thomas*. In order to do so, one has to put forth a detailed overview of the assessments on the so-called *Thomasine* labeling. To begin with, one can explore below what has been constructed until now within these particular scholarly enterprises: (a) the trajectories proposed by Puech, Turner, Layton, Riley and Patterson and to identify how and why this *scholarly construct* emerges and evolves until nowadays; (b) the *Thomasine tradition* seen as a scholarly construct; (c) the internal debates around such complex concepts like tradition, community, readers, discourse, academic obsessions within the religious studies ‘programme’.

Thomasine labeling

The Thomasine labeling is an ongoing scholarly enterprise which progresses and entangles several types of theoretical constructs. This type of research shows in detail how it constantly rethinks itself, and it enables us to see how its earlier hypotheses are *reenacted* and former debates are constantly *upgraded* from different perspectives.

²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14, here 1. For a different and detailed analysis see also April D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas. A History of the Gospel and its Growth*, col. «Early Christianity in Context» 286 (London-New York: T & T Clark, 2005); April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, col. «VCSup» 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse. Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

During the definitional process of what could be called the ‘Thomasine labeling’ one can track the following logical steps implied in the definitional dynamic: (1) To identify the meaning of Thomasine labeling. An important part of the scholarly work is to become aware of what the researcher is doing, and moreover, how s/he is doing his/her work. There are more than methodologies involved in her enterprise, there are also agendas which are replicated and upgraded. (2) To detail the way in which we are able to explain the nature of Thomasine labeling. Any explanation adds details to the event under scrutiny, namely the nature of what is called Thomasine labeling. The series of details will allow the researchers to understand what they are doing when labeling these textualities together. (3) To outline the ways through which we are able to fix distinctly the Thomasine labeling. The reasons that the scholarly work puts forth allow pinning down the Thomasine labeling as a real scholarly enterprise. (4) To determine the boundaries of Thomasine labeling. These limits are within the margins of early Christianities. This aspect needs constant re-evaluations. (5) To make clear the outline of the Thomasine labeling. To be able to provide a clear description will enlarge and add value to the outline of Thomasine labeling. (6) To establish the meaning of Thomasine labeling. Only the proper historical research will offer viable reasons to the researcher of the Thomasine textualities to place his/her intention developed within the process of the Thomasine labeling. From the first step to the last one, the researcher of the early Christianities may identify his own awareness *at work* in reading textualities such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas*. The whole dynamical process takes place within actions such as identification, specifics, demarcation, shaping, illustrating, and setting up the scholarly intentions.

In order to be able to provide a proper understanding to the Thomasine research we have to de-construct all the previous perspectives on the Thomasine tradition. We have to follow their internal design. The main reason to do this is to understand why they still fit comfortably within today’s research environment of the early Christianities. And, of course, retrospectively, one has to understand how these perspectives are working when are put in front of today’s examinations. This meta-step lets the researcher with the opportunity to claim a proper evaluation of such a research enterprise dedicated to the early Christianities. However, at a second level of examination, we have to understand that today’s evaluations are helpful only if one reads them as the latest results of the intertwined scholarly opinions already at work.²⁶

The so-called *Thomasine tradition*, the theoretical construction as introduced by Henri-Charles Puech and constantly refined by other scholars until now, has gained important terrain within the research of the apocryphal literature. These developments make use of the same discursive

²⁶ This is not a critique. The basic presuppositions of any critique on the research of the *Gospel of Thomas* at work today are responsible for activating this type of deconstructive approach and for enabling new avenues for future research.

elements (the name Thomas, Edessa, the twin motif, the Syriac language)²⁷ that historically shed little light to the conversation on these three texts under examination. This enterprise exemplifies convincingly the ways in which ‘a’ tradition was put together from divergent smaller pieces, namely, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Acts of Thomas* and *Book of Thomas* (only revolving around the name of *Thomas*). However, such an endeavor is not without consequences for the research of these texts.

The theory on the *Thomasine tradition* was coined soon after the discovery of *Gospel of Thomas* when scholars established it almost as a sort of *claimed tradition*.²⁸ In this specific case ‘claimed tradition’ means: a scholarly claim that, there, within the streamed discourses which belong to the early Christianities, a tradition is discursively imagined. Scholars have stated that such a tradition was possible and has existed some-where in the Syriac linguistic geography. On the one hand, the discourse professed by scholars is deceptively an integrative one by bringing all these texts under the same umbrella. On the other hand, by employing such concepts they have distorted from the beginning the way in which these texts should be perceived bringing to life in this way a non-existent reality.²⁹

The problematic of traditions is a recurrent issue in the contemporary debates around texts, authors, and contexts. Traditions are often implied and textualities are put forth as witnesses of historical situations that remain unchallenged. Religious and non-religious figures are assigned as pivots of traditions or of similar inherited ways of reasoning. The complex multifarious set of circumstances, historical situations, social conditions, cultural mediums, religious milieus, flexible locations are significant traces in the processes of claiming traditions. One can realize, for instance, that such enterprises can be described not only departing from a religious figure

²⁷ Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Das Thomasevangelium. Originaltext mit Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007); G. Garitte, “Les ‘Logoi’ d’Oxyrhynque et l’apocryphe copte dit ‘Evangile selon Thomas’,” *Museon* 73 (1960), pp. 151-172, 335-349; A. Guillaumont, “Semitismes dans le logia de Jesus retrouves a Nag Hammadi,” *Journal Asiatique* 246 (1958), pp. 113-123; Gilles Quispel, “The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957), pp. 189-207; Gilles Quispel, “L’Evangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 13 (1959), pp. 87-117; H. J. W. Drijvers, “Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity,” pp. 157-175; Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*; N. Perrin, “NHC II,2 and the Oxyrynchus Fragments (P.Oxy 1, 654, 655): Overlooked Evidence for a Syriac Gospel of Thomas,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 58 (2004), pp. 138-151.

²⁸ Kocku von Stuckrad, “Whose Tradition? Conflicting Ideologies in Medieval and Early Modern Esotericism,” in Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve (eds), *Historicizing ‘Tradition’ in the Study of Religion*, col. «Religion and Society» 43 (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), p. 217 states that “[c]laiming tradition was always, even implicitly, directed *against* conflicting claims or other religions or other groups within one’s own religious heritage”. See also Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion. An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800-2000* (Boston-Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014).

²⁹ Their discourse is biased by the use of these concepts: by employing them the historical reality is distorted.

as Jesus to the gospel tradition(s) but also to the contemporary New Age *mise-en-scène*.³⁰ The *Gospel of Thomas* is caught from the beginning of its research into a playground of a complex web of hypotheses, namely, date, language, relationship with the New Testament, Gnostic nature,³¹ provenance. Scholars have concomitantly used in their discourse the traditions contained in the *Gospel of Thomas* and / or the traditions which contains the *Gospel of Thomas*. This type of scholarly attitude is reputedly questionable because no reading of the scholarly works on *Thomas* allows one to arrive at this dichotomy between the traditions contained within *Thomas* and those which contain *Thomas* in itself. I mean *Thomas* as it is in its Coptic form. This methodological situation establishes a puzzling position on and for *Thomas* when it is read as a double witness within the Jesus tradition(s).

One may wonder if the label of *tradition* is operational in historiography. This surfaces as one of the most challenging questions raised here. Until nowadays no scholar engaged in the study of *Thomas* has managed to demonstrate that the label tradition is useful in historiography. Such a label as the Thomasine tradition has no use in the study of early Christianities due to its fictitious character. Being an invention, it cannot fill any historical gap. As it was already argued this should not be the case: “[...] the notion of ‘tradition’ should not be taken as an analytical category in historiography.”³² The reason why ‘tradition’ should not be used as an analytical category in historiography resides in its peculiarity to generate ‘alternatives’ which are far from being what is understood to be proper history. However, in general, the ‘claimed traditions’ are always in a state of competition within their own framework and, due to their situation of identity formation, also within their ecosystemic pluralism. One may acknowledge that identity and ‘tradition’ are always bound to the discursive processes of power *at work* within the Academia. Nonetheless, identity is tied to the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization visible within the fluid cultural continuum of the early Christianities. As von Stuckrad asserts, ‘traditions’ are constantly in a process of negotiation within complex

³⁰ See Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve, *Historicizing ‘Tradition’ in the Study of Religion*; James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (eds.), *The Invention of the Sacred Tradition* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino (eds.), *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions. Sacred Creativity*, col. «Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities» (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Jens Schröter, Tobias Nicklas and Joseph Verheyden (eds.), *Gospels and Gospel Traditions in the Second Century. Experiments in Reception*, col. «Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft» 235 (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019).

³¹ J. Leitpoldt, *Das Evangelium nach Thomas: Koptisch und Deutsch* (Berlin: Akademie, 1967); H.E.W. Turner and H.W. Montefiore, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London: SCM Press, 1962); Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1960); R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960); B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*; R. Kasser, *L’Évangile selon Thomas: présentation et commentaire théologique* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1961).

³² Von Stuckrad, “Whose Tradition? Conflicting Ideologies in Medieval and Early Modern Esotericism,” p. 211.

processes of cultural exchanges and there are no descriptions of traditions that can be conceived as neutral. He understands 'tradition' as being "an emic term that can be applied scholarly in a discursive way only, describing its varying uses, functions, and contexts. It is not a candidate for an etic term in religious studies. Although there are identifiable continuities in the history of religions, these continuities do not necessarily constitute 'tradition.' Instead, 'tradition' is the *evocation* and *application*, if not the invention, of a set of continuities for certain identifiable purposes".³³

The strong positions taken around the idea of 'a' Thomasine label (tradition) contain the entangled views of Henri-Charles Puech (1957/1978), John Turner (1972, 1975), Bruce Lincoln (1977), Han Drijvers (1982), Bentley Layton (1987), Gregory Riley (1991, 1995), and Stephen Patterson (1993, 2013).

Henri-Charles Puech established 'the connection' between the *Gospel of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas* starting from the peculiar form of the apostle's name.³⁴ After Puech published his insights, the advancements of the research were in the same vein, no one offered a solid, viable, alternative position.³⁵ The theoretical puzzle of this so-called tradition was not complicated solely by the missing historical elements, but also greatly by the conventions used to create and preserve it. The scholarship developed a story around this entangled puzzle, a scholarly narrative that became *the* narrative in this specific case and about these particular texts.

The scholarship ostensibly has been playing with the space made possible by the missing element: the whole construction of the Thomasine labeling collapses 'if there is no real

³³ Von Stuckrad, "Whose Tradition? Conflicting Ideologies in Medieval and Early Modern Esotericism," p. 224. See also Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (eds.), *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 1-25; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Masumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

³⁴ H.-Ch. Puech, "Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L'Évangile selon Thomas," pp. 153-156; H.-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose I.I Sur l'Évangile selon Thomas*, pp. 40-45; P.-H. Poirier, "The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition," in John D. Turner and Anne McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years. Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 44 (Leiden-NY-Köln: Brill, 1997), pp. 296-297; John D. Turner, "A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition" and *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II,7)*; H. Koester, "ΤΝΩΜΑΙ ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΙ. The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," pp. 279-318 and "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," pp. 105-130.

³⁵ One can see the inventories of the developments and new hypotheses made by P.-H. Poirier, "Évangile selon Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas" (1996 in French), then modified in "The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition" (1997 in English) and Ph. Sellev, "Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community," in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 11-35.

historical connection between *Thomas*, *Book of Thomas*, and *Acts of Thomas*; ‘if’ *Thomas* is not from Syria, but *Acts of Thomas* is from Syria, and *Book of Thomas* is not from Syria; and finally, ‘if’ the name *Thomas* is just a co-incidence. However, these ‘if’s’ hide what appears to be the real problem: Thomasine labeling is a clear case of an indefinite basic conjecture: we have incomplete information at our disposal and no reliable proof has been yet found; or, it could be an undecidable conjecture: one, which due to the lack of proper evidence cannot be proven false by a counterexample, like, for instance, the missing historical elements.

The first moment: PUECH (1957/1978)

This research moment is the most significant one in the research of the *Gospel of Thomas* in general. By its premises it had influenced and determined the next paths which the research took. Puech’s authority as a towering scholarly figure grounded the beginning of the research on the *Gospel of Thomas* and validated the path at work at the end of 1940s. The theories of *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, the already old phenomenologies and the search for ‘origins’ expose a blanket of actions touched by the new intensities brought up by the newly discovered textualities such as those belonging to the *Nag Hammadi Codices*.

Puech connected his understanding about a tradition related to *the name* of ‘Thomas.’ From the beginning of his research on the *Gospel of Thomas*, he was careful when presenting *Thomas*. Puech analyzed and emphasized *the name*, ‘Thomas.’ He did this with some success on the market of academic ideas at the end of 1950’s. Puech expressed his view on *Thomas* before the so-called official publication of the Coptic text appeared. For him, the name Didymus Judas Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas* had to be associated with the Christianity developed in eastern Syria, somewhere around Edessa. He connects the *tradition* with Acts of Thomas §11, and for him the literary relationship is demonstrated by *connecting* Acts of Thomas § 136 with *Thomas* § 2, Acts of Thomas § 147 with *Thomas* § 22, Acts of Thomas § 170 with *Thomas* § 52, Acts of Thomas § 14 with *Thomas* § 37, and Acts of Thomas § 92 with *Thomas* § 22.³⁶ In this case, at a

³⁶ H.-Ch. Puech, “Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L’Évangile selon Thomas,” pp. 146-157; S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, pp. 118-119. See also W. Schrage, *Das Verhaeltnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienuebersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, col. «BZNW» (Berlin: Toepelmann, 1964); M. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991); C. M. Tuckett, “Thomas and the Synoptics,” *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988), pp. 132-157; C. M. Tuckett, “Q and Thomas: Evidence of a Primitive ‘Wisdom Gospel’? A Response to H. Koester,” *ETL* 67 (1991), pp. 346-360; C. M. Tuckett, “Das Thomasevangelium und die synoptischen Evangelien,” *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 12 (1995), pp. 186-200; C. M. Tuckett, “The Gospel of Thomas: Evidence for Jesus?,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 52 (1998), pp. 17-32; J. Sell, “Johannine Traditions in Logion 61 of the Gospel of Thomas,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 7 (1980), pp. 24-37; R. E.

later reading, Patterson held that Puech did not developed “these observations into a thesis concerning the provenance of the Gospel of Thomas, most have taken the preponderance of the ‘Judas Thomas’ tradition in the East as decisive for locating the Gospel of Thomas there”.³⁷ Not even a thesis!

The impact of Puech’s ideas on this aspect was tremendous, and they continue to be influential and unchallenged. One reason can be that the imagined projection used by him suits and does not disturb the accepted scenarios of the current scholarship.³⁸

Brown, “The Gospel of Thomas and St John’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962), pp. 155-177; Gilles Quispel, *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas: Studies in the History of the Western Diatessaron* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); H. Koester, “Introduction,” pp. 38-48; T. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); S. J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Forum* 8 (1992), pp. 45-97; Charles W. Hedrick, “An Anecdotal Argument for the Independence of the Gospel of Thomas from the Synoptic Gospels,” in H.-G. Bethge, S. Emmel, K.L. King and I. Schletterer (eds.), *For the Children, Perfect Instruction: Studies in Honor of Hans-Martin Schenke on the Occasion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis fuer koptisch-gnostische Schriften’s Thirtieth Year*, col. «Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies» 54 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 113-126; Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*.

³⁷ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 119. See also H.-Ch. Puech, “Une collection des paroles recemment decouverte en Egypte,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 153 (1958), pp. 129-133; Gilles Quispel, “The Latin Tatian or the Gospel of Thomas in Limburg,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969), pp. 321-330; H. J. W. Drijvers, “Edessa und das judische Christentums,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 24 (1970), pp. 4-33; H.-J. Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London-New York: T&T Clark, 2003); U.-K. Plisch, “Thomas in Babel: Verwirrung durch Sprache(n) im Thomasevangelium,” in J. Frey, J. Schröter and E.E. Popkes (eds.), *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung-Rezeption-Theologie*, col. «BZNW» 157 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 60-71; B. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*; A. Puig, *Un Jesús desconocido: las claves del evangelio gnóstico de Tomás* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2008); M. Desjardins, “Where was the Gospel of Thomas Written?,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8 (1992), pp. 121-133; P. Piovaneli, “Thomas in Edessa? Another look at the original setting of the Gospel of Thomas,” in Jitse Dijkstra, Justin Kroesen and Yme Kuiper (eds.), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity. Studies in the History of Religions in Honor of Jan N. Bremmer* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); S. J. Patterson, “The View from Across the Euphrates,” *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011), pp. 411-431; G. Garitte, “Les Paraboles du royaume dans l’Évangile de Thomas,” in L. Cerfaux (with G. Garitte), *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux: études d’exégèse et d’histoire religieuse de Monseigneur Cerfaux* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1962) III., pp. 61-80; H. K. McArthur, “Dependence of the Gospel of Thomas on the Synoptics,” pp. 286-287; K. Grobel, “How Gnostic is the Gospel of Thomas?,” *New Testament Studies* 8 (1962), pp. 367-373; Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*; B. Dehandschutter, “Le lieu d’origine de l’Évangile selon Thomas,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 6-7 (1975-1976), pp. 125-131.

³⁸ See James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story*, on the French monopoly on the Gospel of Thomas and the Nag Hammadi Codices.

The second moment: TURNER (1972, 1975)

This second scholarly landmark in the history of the Thomasine research has more to do with the research of Nag Hammadi Codices than with accommodating Thomasine research within the general research environment. Turner searched for a theoretical place for the *Book of Thomas* within the already established market of ideas. John Turner studied the *Book of Thomas* thoroughly and has published his results in 1972 and 1975. However, by starting his research from the point left by Puech, he ‘connects’ the *Book of Thomas* with the *Gospel of Thomas* and/or the *Acts of Thomas*. Turner makes his claims about the *Book of Thomas* clearly “[t]his document, in company with the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Thomas, constitutes a witness to the tradition concerning the deeds of the Apostle Judas Didymus Thomas, the twin brother of Jesus, who figures prominently in the Book of Thomas the Contender. Because that tradition, and therefore much of the Book of Thomas the Contender, probably is at home in East Syria [...]”.³⁹ He neither has any doubts nor does he provide any historical proofs about the existence of such a tradition. For him the sole missing element is the location - ‘probably’ in East Syria. This issue remains a topic animated more than ever nowadays.⁴⁰

John D. Turner also establishes their ‘common elements’ by placing them around the ascetic and syncretistic Christians with a mildly gnostic direction.⁴¹ However, at least at the discursive level, this strategy creates the picture of a group, a different one from the dominant Christianity, but nevertheless a group. Turner’s reading shows without hesitation that ‘the dialogue,’ Book of Thomas is another representative of the Apostle Thomas tradition located in the city of Edessa. He thinks that all three works ‘share’ the ascetic theme, dualistic anthropology, the twin motif, and it is possible that due to these themes he finds the proofs for such a tradition. He further restates the echo of *Thomas* in the *Acts of Thomas* by using mainly Puech’s findings.⁴²

This oblique view is only an update of Puech’s and adds nothing to the discussion. However, it remains until now the standard scholarly image of the *Thomasine* tradition

³⁹ John D. Turner, “A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition,” p. 109.

⁴⁰ See Asgierrson *et al.* (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*.

⁴¹ John D. Turner, “A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition,” p. 113.

⁴² John D. Turner, “A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition,” p. 117, follows here H. Koester, “ΤΝΩΜΑΙ ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΙ. The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity,” pp. 279-318. See also John D. Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II,7)*, p. 118 and 233; R. Kuntzmann, *Le symbolisme des jumeaux au Proche-Orient ancien. Naissance, fonction et évolution d’un symbole*, col. «Beauchesne Religions» 12 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), p. 63. For comparative details see the Prologue of *Gospel of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas* 39; *Thomas* § 13 and *ATh* § 37, § 39, § 147; *Thomas* § 2 and *ATh* § 136; *Thomas* § 22 and *ATh* § 147; *Thomas* § 52 and *ATh* § 170.

paradigm. Working on the *Book of Thomas*, Turner has placed it in-between the gospel (based of his reading of *Thomas* 13) and the romance, due to the fact that here the figure of Thomas is always at the center of the narrative. In Turner's view these aspects represent a growing tradition centered on the Apostle Thomas, twin of Jesus, recipient of his words.⁴³ One is able to identify a stratified tripartite issue which takes into account aspects such as location, direction, and setup. The scholarly work has assigned a location which gives enough strength in order to place this label in East Syria. The play in-between assumptions creates for the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas* an uncertain situation.

The third moment: LAYTON (1987)

In his book, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, Bentley Layton begins the part dedicated to *Saint Thomas* re-proposing associations, 'ancient tradition,' and deserved 'credit': "Among the most intriguing works of ancient Christian literature are those associated with St. Didymus Jude Thomas, apostle of the East. According to ancient tradition Thomas deserves credit for the conversion of northern Mesopotamia and India to Christianity, and had the signal honor of being Jesus' 'double,' i.e., identical twin".⁴⁴

However, throughout his work, Layton uses a great number of labels such as the *Thomas tradition* (p. 359), the *Thomas literature* (p. 360), and *the school of St. Thomas* (p. 360). However, he offers no explanation for these diverse labels. He also uses *Thomas scripture* (p. 361), and the *Thomas works* (p. 361). Why does he use all these labels? It appears that he is undecided about *what* this material is and *where* we should place it or in *which* order texts should be placed should follow. However, he still has a solution at hand for further use, the oldest one: Edessa.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, does this bring further clarifications compared to the work done by Puech or Turner? Hardly, since the historical proofs are still missing. It is just a re-iteration of former opinions belonging to the accepted, but not historically argued, scholarly paradigm.

The fourth moment: RILEY (1991, 1995)

In a seminal paper from 1991, Gregory J. Riley somehow opened a different path of research by connecting *Thomas* and the Gospel of John, and *imagined* a Thomas community that looked

⁴³ John D. Turner, "A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition", p. 118.

⁴⁴ B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 359.

⁴⁵ B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 361.

at the apostle Thomas for spiritual legitimacy and created the Thomas tradition.⁴⁶ Not long after Riley's paper, Paul-Hubert Poirier had presented his disagreement with Riley's interpretation on the Doubting Thomas pericope and had stressed the drawback of taking for granted the existence of pre- or extra-Johannine Thomas community.⁴⁷ The scholarship on early Christianities developed a terminology which allowed the smaller communities to form and to fit into the greater community of Christians in order to suit their aims. Using the figures of Jesus' disciples, communities such as Johannine, Petrine, Thomasine or Pauline were extrapolated from the texts and given historical reality. However, the readership of these texts only hypothetically formed such communities.⁴⁸

The fifth moment: PATTERSON (1993)

In his 1993's book *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Patterson merely reads and describes Puech's undeveloped observations and then moves on and presents the ideas of Barbara Ehlers as "the only serious challenge to this convention" and mentions, of course, the inefficient answer offered by Klijn as a reply against Barbara Ehler's opinion.⁴⁹ Patterson claims something more than his predecessors who have dealt with this issue, namely he tries to understand Thomas tradition as a historical phenomenon.⁵⁰ His imagined *Thomas Christianity* is a construct to which he wants to give some historicity. How does he accomplish this? Patterson is almost convincing when he states that the sayings from Thomas are without parallel in the synoptic tradition and stand for an argument for a history that is closely connected to the earliest phase of the Jesus movement(s).⁵¹

⁴⁶ Gregory J. Riley, "Thomas Tradition and the *Acts of Thomas*", p. 533.

⁴⁷ P.-H. Poirier, "The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition", pp. 306-307.

⁴⁸ Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered. Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 72.

⁴⁹ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 119; B. Ehlers, "Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?" *Novum Testamentum* 12/3 (1970), pp. 284-317; A. F. J. Klijn, "Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas: on Barbara Ehlers, Kann des Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?" *Novum Testamentum* 14/1 (1972), pp. 70-77.

⁵⁰ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 121.

⁵¹ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 217.

Labels

After surveying these five major opinions about the possible connections or major hypotheses on Thomasine research, a first conclusion is that these opinions are not so different from one another nor do they contradict themselves. The ideas employed are refined variations of the same algorithmic complex. Nevertheless, the scholarly discourses related to the so-called Thomasine tradition belong to a particular research paradigm which embodies the scholarly work asymmetrically dedicated to textualities like the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas*, or *Acts of Thomas*. A simple enumeration of fossilized non-historical elements is enough to acknowledge that such research is empty of content. Since nowadays there is no attempt to challenge those perspectives mentioned above (tradition, community, Christianity, or school) one may believe that the scholarly conventions, which bias the research of the beginning of Late Antiquity, are influential enough to protect themselves and not to allow anything to deconstruct them.

The process of examining the *labels* together with the differences (and similarities) is necessary if one looks for a clear picture in *Thomas* on particular and the *Thomasine* research in general. However, do we need all these labels in order to grasp the meaning of this textual paradigm? Do we really need this type of reasoning on *Thomas* and the other texts involved? Why has this fixation on the issue of trajectories even emerged? The *Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas* have entered within a particular scholarly paradigm and have not been read as diverse literary products belonging to specific time frameworks and locations. Their readings were intentionally entangled according to the research agendas (starting from Puech up to Patterson) which have emphasized only similarities and have avoided to point out differences. This type of inquiry had continuously attempted to propose a generic reading to all three textualities. However, the scholarly work has never established that only through the empty process of labeling these textualities are parts of a totality. And if such an integrative intention was on the research agendas already at work, then it has not achieved its goals until today.

Poirier (1996, 1997) and Sellew (2001) tried to provide tentative answers to the question: ‘what are we calling Thomasine tradition?’ Unfortunately, their research fails to stress the concept of community, which structurally goes hand in hand with it.⁵² Poirier has emphasized the lack of homogeneity of this so-called tradition and pinpoints strictly towards a ‘Thomas literary tradition.’ He does not take for granted a Thomas community and cannot distinguish a school of ‘saint’ Thomas. His engagement with the Thomasine tradition is encapsulated in this

⁵² Ph. Sellew, “Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community”, p. 11; P.-H. Poirier, “Évangile selon Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas. Une tradition et ses transformations”, pp. 9-26; P.-H. Poirier, “The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition”, pp. 296-307.

quote: “This inquiry into the Thomas tradition has so far been limited to a specific phase of its history, namely the portion which remains accessible through literary documents.”⁵³ Sellew is also careful when he assesses previous scholarship on the Thomasine tradition and rejects constructions such as Thomasine community or Thomasine Christianity (see above Riley’s perspectives) due to the lack of historical evidence. Moreover, Sellew believes that “this sort of evidence need not point to anything beyond the existence of a literary influence (and presumably also an ideological influence) of one or two of these books on the others. Readers and authors can recognize and encourage these similarities and allusions without such features necessarily requiring a distinct community of Thomas faithful to be understood”.⁵⁴

Thomasine tradition

To tackle the concept of Thomasine tradition, within a nascent Christian ‘tradition’ and part of the later one, is not an easy task without enough historical elements and based only on scholarly conjectures that work only within a particular scholarly paradigm. All past and present theoretical frameworks have a weak foundation. The solution, if there is such a thing, lies in what these texts offer to the reader. These textualities will be read together only if the reader will still remain, in the future, mesmerized by the non-name (as it is known ‘Thomas’ is not a proper name) ‘Thomas.’ The scholarly works on these textualities have already examined them from the perspective of the name ‘Thomas’ (an apostle/Saint) for the importance of the name ‘Thomas’ (a literary *topos* scattered in different time frameworks and geographical locations). The whole scholarly enterprise around the non-name acts like a *simulacrum* of the famous analysis given by Derrida to Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* where “He [Nietzsche] advances behind a plurality of masks or names that, like any mask and even any theory of the simulacrum, can propose and produce themselves only by returning a constant yield of protection, a surplus value in which one may still recognize the ruse of life. However, the ruse starts incurring losses as soon as the surplus value does not return again to the living, but to and in the name of names, the community of masks”.⁵⁵

⁵³ P.-H. Poirier, “The Writings ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition”, p. 305.

⁵⁴ Ph. Sellew, “Thomas Christianity: scholars in Quest of a Community”, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other. Otobiography, Transference, Translations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985. Translated by Peggy Kamuf), p. 7.

Community

The concept of community is necessary to establish the concept of tradition. Without a community, the existence of tradition, be this called ‘Christianity’ or ‘School’ is hardly possible. Everything takes the shape of a chain where one concept follows the another until nowadays. However, what exactly do we call *Thomas community* in a historical sense, and why? Patterson has emphasized the idea of having in mind a hypothesis about the Thomas community and reading texts from this perspective.⁵⁶ By taking into account the article of Bruce Lincoln (1977), as Patterson does, one can easily see how a hypothesis will be the basis for a scholarly constructed reality. Nonetheless, there is no historical evidence for such a construct.

Thomasine Christianity

The concept of the ‘Thomasine Christianity’ is the most sophisticated of the concepts explored and it defies any historical reality. It implies already the existence of a community, and an already established Christian tradition which identifies itself as Thomasine due to its particular characteristics and endeavors or challenges. However, how ‘real’ could this scenario be? What is the Thomas Christianity? Patterson concludes that Thomas Christianity is situated against the world and Thomas Christians had no respect for authority – being itinerants they protested against the world.⁵⁷ This ‘loaded’ discourse shows how the discursive practice on the Thomasine research paradigm developed and retained some of its previous ideas. It also unveils its meaning as an interplay of different accepted conventional labels currently at work in the Thomasine and early Christianities research. To Patterson “the communities of synoptic Christianity gradually settled into a more conventional style of living, Thomas Christianity did not. It continued the tradition of marginal social behavior as an expression of its negative evaluation of the world and of its hope in a salvation gained through careful attention to Jesus’ words”.⁵⁸ One can ask where lies the strength of such scholarly discourse which proposes at most an imaginative exercise.

⁵⁶ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 124. Patterson has in mind the views of B. Lincoln, “Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text,” pp. 65-76 and Karen L. King, “Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas,” *Forum* 3 (1987), pp. 48-97.

⁵⁷ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁸ S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p. 170.

Thomasine School

The concept of school was mainly employed by Bentley Layton (1987) who has accepted all the previous views on this matter. I am not implying that Layton used school as the *paideia*.⁵⁹ At least not yet. What then is the Thomas School? Why does he have to label it as a school? Layton gives no explanation regarding this issue. He only strengthens the conventional chain initiated by Puech. The whole problem revolves again around the name. Thomas, the twin, which practically is not a name then and there.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to raise several questions about the necessity of using composite types of labeling such as tradition, community, Christianity, and school. Starting with the Gospel of Thomas the scholars have constructed a paradigm in which some of the possible trajectories were argued and / or given detailed ‘descriptions.’ However, one should admit that the Thomasine tradition is but a scholarly construct available within a specific and particular paradigm. It is at work within the readings of early Christian textualities. The implied ‘apostle Thomas’ serves as a blanket-concept for very different types of texts, such as *Gospel of Thomas*, *Acts of Thomas*, or the *Book of Thomas the Contender*. Why should these texts rather form a family than none? Why is it so easy to speak about tradition starting from these weak hypotheses advanced by scholars? Throughout the years, the scholarship has managed to develop a web of interrelations between these texts as if they were real descriptions. In fact, it is only after the entrance of the *Gospel of Thomas* on the research scene that the scholarship had started to expand the complex net of the so-called Thomasine tradition.⁶⁰ One can notice that the scholarship used to employ *Gospel of Thomas* in a variety of ways (e.g. this text is at the same time a means for the understanding of the other early Christian literature or the historical Jesus, but it is also an object of study in itself) and at least on two discursive levels. This hermeneutical action disseminates a dangerous double meaning. Here the meta-discourse may

⁵⁹ Eduard Iricinschi, “The Teaching Hidden in Silence (NHC II,4): Questions, Answers, and Secrets in a Fourth-Century Egyptian Book,” in Eduard Iricinschi, Lance Jenott, Nicola Denzey Lewis and Philippa Townsend (eds.), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 297-319.

⁶⁰ This web of interrelations has a great significance for the development of this scholarly construct.

facilitate in-depth understanding of the scholarship's work regarding the Thomasine tradition.⁶¹ Thomasine tradition, within the Thomasine research paradigm, is a scholarly construct which has been recently coined. As an ideal object for research, it exists only after the Nag Hammadi discovery; this makes it one of the newest trends of scholarship on *Thomas*. The path of the so-called Thomasine tradition should be studied using a mixture of approaches and looking into different hermeneutic levels. It is also prudent to follow the approaches forged by other disciplines within the Humanities together with those of Social Sciences in order to be able to cover the whole picture of this so-called tradition. Further analysis should reveal that we can do research without using of blanket-concepts and that it can be possible to widen our perspectives starting with the texts itself.⁶²

Abstract: The debates about various early 'Christian' communities are still in an incomplete and tumultuous never-ending process. This paper illustrates that the manufactured theories about 'community' or 'tradition' do not describe the particular social conditions of textualities such as the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is very common to the mainstream scholarship of the early Christianities to put together heterogeneous ideas and to understand them as forming a special type of singularity. This is, in our case, the idea of 'apostle Thomas.' The scholarly representatives have tried to use complex sets of borrowed methodologies in order to make

Resumen: Los debates sobre varias de las primeras comunidades "cristianas" todavía se encuentran en un proceso interminable incompleto y tumultuoso. Este artículo muestra que las teorías confeccionadas sobre la "comunidad" o la "tradición" no describen las condiciones sociales particulares de textualidades como el *Evangelio de Tomás*. Es muy común en la erudición predominante de los primeros cristianos unir ideas heterogéneas y entenderlas como conformando un tipo especial de singularidad. Esta es, en nuestro caso, la idea del "apóstol Tomás". Los representantes académicos han tratado de utilizar conjuntos

⁶¹ The discourse analysis of the scholarship on Thomas is in an incipient state. Historiography could definitely help us with the *know how* in order to grasp the internal development of this scholarship and its trends.

⁶² This a difficult task because we already have the example of 'Gnosticism' which scholars continue to employ even if they know that it has been severely criticized and demonized. This is a process which develops further as a methodological vicious circle. See Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), David Brakke, *The Gnostics. Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2010), Einar Thomassen, *The Coherence of 'Gnosticism,'* col. «Hans-Lietzmann-Vorlesungen» 18 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

the historical lines of flight of early Christianity ideas more appealing and to conceal the process of domestication of textualities as the *Gospel of Thomas*. They have intentionally constructed religious communities, several types of Christians, differences, and similarities; all these aspects have the purpose to join in one wide and domesticated 'Thomasine' tradition. This paper aims to follow the lines of flight as they are programmed by the Thomas-scholars in order to deconstruct such approaches and to provide an alternative reading perspective detached by any kind of theological agendum.

Keywords: Early Christianities; *Gospel of Thomas*; Thomasine tradition; Thomasine labeling; Plural textuality.

complejos de metodologías prestadas para hacer más atractivas las líneas históricas de fuga de ideas del cristianismo primitivo y para ocultar el proceso de domesticación de textualidades como el *Evangelio de Tomás*. Han construido intencionadamente comunidades religiosas, varios tipos de cristianos, diferencias y similitudes; todos estos aspectos tienen el propósito de unirse en una amplia y domesticada tradición 'tomasina'. Este artículo tiene como objetivo seguir las líneas de fuga tal como están programadas por los estudiosos de Tomás para deconstruir tales enfoques y proporcionar una perspectiva de lectura alternativa separada de cualquier tipo de agenda teológica.

Palabras clave: Cristianismo primitivo; *Evangelio de Tomás*; Tradición tomasina; denominación tomasina; Pluralismo textual.