CHAPTER TEN
THE COPTIC GNOSTIC LIBRARY PROJECT


The beginnings of the American involvement in Nag Hammadi studies were very modest indeed:

I was motivated to get into Nag Hammadi studies by two factors important to me at the time: the new access to Jesus provided by *The Gospel of Thomas*,¹ and the possibility of documenting pre-Christian Gnosticism provided by *The Apocalypse of Adam*:²

This section has as its subject matter the mission and suffering of the light prophet. At first one might think of a play on the suffering of Jesus. Yet that would be the sole mention of Jesus in our text, and even then, after all, the name does not occur a single time. So the assumption of a pre-Christian concept is closer at hand. ... In our text, which first of all is not to be regarded as under Christian influence, there is apparently a balancing of Jewish Gnosticism with Iranian ideas.

Böhlig later explained to me that he meant pre-Christian not chronologically, but only to indicate the absence of Christian influence.

I organized a very small group of faculty and students at Claremont Graduate University and the Claremont School of Theology to learn Coptic.

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Dieser Abschnitt hat die Mission und das Leiden des Lichtpropheten zum Gegenstand. Zunächst möchte man an eine Anspielung auf das Leiden Jesu denken. Doch wäre das die einzige Erwähnung Jesu in unserem Text und selbst dabei wäre der Name ja nicht einmal genannt. Also liegt die Annahme einer vorchristlichen Vorstellung näher. ... [91] In unserem Text, der zunächst nicht als christlich beeinflusst anzusehen ist, liegt wahrscheinlich ein Ausgleich jüdischer Gnosis mit iranischen Gedanken vor.
We were led by the two among us who had at least an elementary knowledge of Coptic, Loren Fisher and Ernest Tune.

Otto Meinardus, pastor of the German Lutheran Church of Cairo and the American community church in the Cairo suburb of Maadi, himself an amateur collector of Coptic manuscripts, visited us in Claremont as part of an itinerary seeking to market his collection. I told him of my forthcoming sabbatic year, which I would spend in Jerusalem, on the side of Jerusalem that was then part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. On hearing of my interest in the Nag Hammadi codices, Meinardus offered to introduce me to the relevant people if I would come to Cairo. I of course took him up on the offer.

I was Annual Professor at the American Schools of Oriental Research (soon to be renamed the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research) in Jerusalem, Jordan for 1965–1966. I with my family left Claremont on 1 August 1965 and arrived via the Far East in Jerusalem on 5 September 1965. We returned, leaving Jerusalem on 16 May 1966 for Cairo, then going on 17 May 1966 to Athens, on 19 May 1966 to Rome, on 21 May 1966 to Venice, on 23 May 1966 to Nice, on 3 June 1966 to Zürich, on 7 June 1966 to Frankfurt, on 9 June 1966 to Paris, on 16 June 66 to New York; then, via the South to visit relatives, we arrived on 24 vi 66 back in Claremont.

I went to Cairo from Jerusalem via Amman on 24 February 1966 and stayed at the American Mission there, until going to Luxor on 27 February 1966, and then returned to Cairo on 4 March 1966, after spending the day in Nag Hammadi. I returned to Jerusalem on 9 March 1966.

I mailed from Jerusalem detailed memoranda on my trips to Egypt to Tune. Since they not only document our floundering efforts to get involved, but also give a flavor for the situation at that time, I reproduce them here, with only occasional deletion of irrelevant material and very minor stylistic editing:

Dr. Meinardus on 25 February drove me first to the Imprimerie de l’ Institut Français d’ Archéologie. It was closed (Friday!), but he would not take no for an answer. We drove around to the street on the other side, where the Institut Français d’ Archéologie backs onto the Imprimerie. From this angle we were automatically inside the gates of the Imprimerie and found the people at work. A receptionist took my questions to a superior and reported to me his answers: The continuation of the Koptische Reihe of the Abhandlungen des Deutschen