The Structure of *Thomas*

The general view that *Thomas* is not a particularly carefully ordered collection or list is correct. Attempts to argue otherwise have included the following.\(^2\)

- Janssens contends that there are five blocks: GTh 1–9, 12–17, 18–38, 39–53 and the rest. One might ask, first: what about GTh 10–11? Moreover, her conclusion that GTh 54–114 were added ‘pêle-mêle’, with the author not having intended to include them at the beginning, is something of a counsel of despair.\(^3\)
- Tripp makes the case that there are ten sections in *Thomas*, beginning at GTh 1, 6, 12, 18, 20, 24, 37, 42, 43, 51, 99, 113 respectively.\(^4\) No one has been convinced of this, however: one problem is that some of Tripp’s sections are extremely short (18–19 and 113–114), while another comprises almost half the book (51–98).

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2 See further Fallon & Cameron. ‘The Gospel of Thomas: A Forschungsbericht and Analysis’, 4206–4208, for criticisms of attempts to construct thematic sections for *Thomas*.


Davies argues that *Thomas* consists of four chapters, each beginning with a “seek-and-you-shall-find” saying (GTh 2, 38, 59, 92) and then various themes in sequence. As is evident from Davies’ synopsis, however, it is rare that all the suggested themes appear, and the sequence is not consistent. Nordsieck identifies seven blocks: GTh 2–17; 19.2–35; 38–48; 51–61.1; 62–76; 77–82, and finally 85–113 (the intervening sayings are redactional transitions). The problem here again is that some of the material fits the title of the block whereas some does not; or again that some sayings would belong better in another block. Since some of his instances of Stichwort-Verbindung seem rather strained, his claims about the significance of an absence of a link lose their force.

In addition to these quests for blocks or chapters in *Thomas* are two claims to be able to identify a ‘middle’. Diebner takes the view that GTh 49–50 are the Gnostic ‘centre’ (in a theological and literary sense). With our enumeration of *Thomas’s* sayings this almost works (but not quite), but it is hard to see how an ancient reader/listener could have detected this. Puig has also proposed a quite different centre, in GTh 62–67, although the reasons for this ‘architectura’ are left quite vague. Other modest claims to structuring devices include

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5 Only two of the eleven elements (seeking-finding, and renouncing the world) are found in all four chapters; e.g. in the “Synoptic parables” section of each chapter, A has two, B has none, and C and D each have three.

6 N.b. GTh 80 and 81 appearing in reverse order.


8 To take the first block (‘Vom Suchen und Finden des Reiches Gottes’) as an example, despite the fact that this is a theme of so much of *Thomas*, it is still difficult to see how e.g. GTh 6, 9, 10 and 14 clearly fit under this heading. Nordsieck, ‘Kompositionsgeschichte’, 176–180, shows that they are linked by catchwords, but this does not strengthen the case that they belong in a thematic block.

9 To take the first discourse as an example again, despite its title (‘Vom Suchen und Finden des Reiches Gottes’), the majority of the sayings which thematize seeking and finding (e.g. GTh 76, 92, 94, 107) are elsewhere.

10 E.g. in GTh 15–16, Nordsieck, *Thomas-Evangelium*, 82, notes a connection in ‘throwing’ but this only works in his German translation, not in the Coptic; compare e.g. his comments on the significance of there being no linkage between GTh 17–18 (Thomas-Evangelium, 89); the link between GTh 31–32 consists in the the ‘assoziative Nähe’ between ‘city’ and ‘home town’.

11 Diebner, ‘Bemerkungen zur “Mitte”’, 82.