Much debate has ensued over several decades regarding the legitimacy of identifying Gnosticism as a distinct socio-historical phenomenon and even of the utility of utilizing such a word to demarcate a definable and clear-cut school of thought and/or religious practice.\(^1\) While there has been a significant amount of wrangling over the question of the meaningfulness and suitability of this term, there is a greater consensus with regard to *gnōstikos*, a locution already applied by early Christian heresiologists to Christians whose views were condemned as nonorthodox. It may be the case that *gnōsis* is too broad a category to circumscribe the contours of the phenomenon of Gnosticism, insofar as many religious and philosophical movements in Late Antiquity laid claim to a special knowledge,\(^2\) but there can be no doubt that those identified as gnostics believed they possessed a special type of *gnōsis* that set them apart from others, most often construed as a wisdom of mysteries that had salvific consequences.\(^3\)

For the purposes of this study, I will avoid being entangled in the problem of taxonomy that has plagued specialists in the field. I will focus instead on a crucial aspect of that knowledge as may be culled from the Nag Hammadi treatise (*NHC II,3*) *The Gospel according to Philip*, a text that has been

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\(^1\) For two recent reviews with analysis of some of the major scholarly opinions, see Brakke 2010, 1–28; Lundhaug 2010, 16–19.

\(^2\) Brakke 2010, 30.

\(^3\) The esoteric nature of Gnostic teachings has been the subject of various studies. See, for instance, Stroumsa 1996, 46–62, and the more recent collection of essays in Bull-Lied-Turner 2012.
described as one of the finest examples of a form of writing that implements a mode of veiling that is characteristic of esoteric communication. In the ensuing analysis, I will reexamine the relation between the hidden and the revealed that reverberates in various dicta preserved in this compilation. Anticipating the conclusion I will reach on the basis of painstaking textual scrutiny, at several moments the text proffers a depiction of the secret that resonates with what I have identified as a crucial aspect of kabbalistic esotericism: the secret can be revealed as secret only to the extent that it is concealed. The hermeneutic of secrecy thus revolves about the paradox that what is most visible is the invisible, what is most manifest is the nonmanifest. It follows that there is no disclosure of truth but through the withholding of truth, no path to the ineffable and imageless but through the cloak of words and images, no way to the nameless but through the garment of the name. Gnoseologically speaking, there is no naked truth to behold, only truth exposed in the veil of untruth.

Before proceeding to the examination of specific pericopae, let me say something briefly about the provenance of the text. The precise compiler, place, and date of compilation of the Gospel of Philip are unknown. Some have traced its literary origins to Syria and have proposed that it is a work of the late second or the early third centuries. It is generally assumed, moreover, that the treatise is a compilation that contains excerpts from various other unidentified works whose theological orientation on the whole accords with the teaching of Valentinus. Martha Lee Turner has argued that there is a major disjunction between the first three quarters of the document and the final quarter, although she surmises that some passages in the former derived from the same source underlying the latter, the so-called Valentinian block.

The most serious challenge to what has become the standard classification of the Gospel of Philip is found in the work of Hugo Lundhaug, who set out to examine the text “on its own terms, that is, on the basis of an analysis of the conceptual as well as the intra- and intertextual blends it activates, the most relevant intertextual context ... being that of authoritative Scripture.”

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5 I have discussed the matter of kabbalistic esotericism in many of my publications. See, for instance, Wolfson 2009, 22, and reference to other studies cited on p. 315 n. 13.
8 Lundhaug 2010, 154.