CORRECTIONS TO THE CRITICAL READING OF THE
GOSPEL OF THOMAS

BY

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I have visited recently the Houghton, Bodleian, and British Libraries where I examined P. Oxy. 1, 654, and 655 in preparation for the publication of new companion monographs on the Gospel of Thomas.1 I also ventured to the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo where I studied the full Coptic manuscript. My examination of these manuscripts has led to several critical notes and corrected readings of the Gospel.

1. P. Oxy. 1.24

My direct examination of P. Oxy. 1 (= MS Gr. th. e. 7 [P]) at the Bodleian Library has led me to a corrected reading of line 24 on the verso of the fragment. In the standard critical edition of the Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas by H. Attridge, he offers the reading, E[ISIS] N. A. YEOI.2 He
states that the first letter to the left of the Θ appears to be one that consisted “of a line sloping from the upper left to the lower right portions of the letter space.” He also sees below and to the left of this line the bare trace of a curved stroke. He imagines that this curved stroke could have continued on a diagonal upwards, until it intersected the sloping line. Thus he concludes that this letter is A. This opinion is in conformity with B. Grenfell and A. Hunt’s statement that this letter could be A, X, or Λ, although A was preferred.

To the immediate left of this letter, Attridge describes a vertical stroke consistent with H, I, N, Π, Γ, Τ and Ψ. Attridge favors N. Scholars have agreed, including Attridge, that the letter space to the left of this letter has room for two letters. Attridge’s reconstruction, however, shows three letters, although two of them are iotas. Thus, Attridge’s reconstruction of the last segment of line 24 follows F. Blass which Grenfell and Hunt accepted:

E[Σ]N AΘEOI.

But Blass and Grenfell and Hunt did not have the Coptic in front of them to aid in their reconstruction. If they had, they would have been concerned that their reconstruction disparages the Greek and Coptic texts since the Coptic reads, ΤΗΝΟΥΤΕ ΗC. Why did Attridge, who had the Coptic, render the Greek in such a way that would perpetuate opposite and contentious readings in these manuscripts? The reason for continuing this disparate reconstruction appears to be because the Coptic is nonsense, “Where there are three gods, they are gods.” Clearly the Coptic is a corrupted text. Attridge’s reconstruction of the Greek makes a case for corruption at the level of Coptic translation where the A-privative was accidentally lost. The problem with this line of reasoning is that the Greek reconstruction is not any more sensible than the Coptic, “Where there are three, they are without gods” or “Where there are three, they are godless.” It is noteworthy that even Attridge struggles with this fact, rendering the plural ΘΕΟΙ in the singular, “Where there are three, they are without God.”

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