

The Nag Hammadi Codices and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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Conference Abstracts

Harold W. Attridge, Yale Divinity School

“Revealers and Revelation from Qumran through the Fourth Gospel to Nag Hammadi”

Some Dead Sea Scrolls and some texts from Nag Hammadi share an interest in the phenomenon of revelation, the disclosure of divine mysteries that (re)shape human existence. Agents responsible for providing such revelation work in many, sometimes disputed ways. This paper explores the contested and complex role that “vision” of heavenly reality plays in several key “revelatory” texts.

Florentina Badalanova Gellar, Freie Universität Berlin

TBA

George Brooke, University of Manchester

“From Adam to the Prophets: Some Biblical Figures in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library”

This paper will not rehearse whether or not various Gnostic themes were anticipated in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls but will pay particular attention to how some biblical figures are portrayed and used in the two literary corpora. The paper will have four parts. In the first, there will be brief consideration of the figures involved from the creation of humanity to the accounts of the flood, noting the paucity of material on Adam in the scrolls and the various perspectives on Enoch, Noah and the flood. In the second part, particular attention will be given to the patriarchs, notably their significance in the Aramaic corpus from the Qumran caves and as ethical paradigms. The third section will work on figures from Moses to Solomon, indicating some of the issues surrounding who is in and who is out in each corpus. A final part of the paper will attempt to draw together some conclusions based on attention being given to both similarities and differences and how the juxtaposition of the two corpora is mutually illuminating with respect to the use and non-use of biblical figures.

Kelley Coblenz-Bautch, St. Edwards University

“The Visionary's View: Otherworldly Motifs and their Use/Reuse in Texts of Qumran and Nag Hammadi”

This paper examines traditional topoi that appear in the narration of visions, often that concern a seer's peering into otherworldly space. We shall consider how these key motifs appear in various apocalyptic texts from Qumran and how they reappear in writings from Nag Hammadi. Moreover, we ask whether the literature which shares imagery stems from a common tradition and whether such literature functions in comparable ways.

Dylan M. Burns, Freie Universität Berlin

“Determinism and Compatibilism at Qumran and Nag Hammadi”

While the category of ‘dualism’ is central to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their religio-historical significance, it also remains a slippery category that eludes easy definition. Consequently, although ‘dualism’ once served as a chief point of comparison between the Qumran and Nag Hammadi corpora—and ‘apocalypticism’ and ‘Gnosticism’ more widely—it has largely fallen out

of fashion in the study of Coptic Gnostic literature. This paper will examine merely one aspect of the problem of dualism at and between Qumran and Nag Hammadi, namely the issue of soteriological determinism and its relationship to dualistic schemata of salvation-history. Determinism (soteriological or otherwise) has been both identified—and disputed—widely throughout both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices, with scholars wrestling on distinguishing between competing deterministic and compatibilistic views of human responsibility and its consequences for salvation. This contribution will assess the problem of determinism vs. compatibilism in various Qumran and Nag Hammadi texts and its implications for our understanding of developing Jewish and Christian notions of salvation-history from the first to fourth centuries CE.

Lorenzo DiTommaso, Concordia University Montréal
“Epistemology and Eschatology, Apocalyptic and Gnostic”

On many levels, “apocalyptic” and “gnostic” remain problematic categories. Although biblical scholars have largely accepted the definition of the genre “apocalypse” proposed by the SBL Genres Project, the global utility of the literary-generic approach has been questioned on several fronts. As for “gnostic,” the broad-band critique of the past generation has prompted many scholars to abandon the label altogether. For these and other reasons, attempts to articulate the relationship between the categories in a manner that is both heuristically useful and sensitive to the evidence have not been persuasive.

Recently, however, the study of wisdom literature has generated a valuable collection of studies, notably on its connexions with early Jewish apocalyptic texts and traditions. “Wisdom,” considered broadly, also has proven a useful lens through which to regard some Nag Hammadi texts and related writings. Following this approach, this paper examines the epistemology of “apocalyptic” and “gnostic” speculation in light of claims regarding the nature of the universe and human destiny. It clarifies both categories and perhaps points a way to describing their relationship.

René Falkenberg, Aarhus Univesitet
“Revelation Books and Tablets in Jewish and Manichaean Contexts”

In an apologetic section of the *Cologne Mani Codex* (pp. 45-72) we are told that Mani stands in line of “the forefathers” (e.g. Adam, Enoch, Paul) who all are said to have received heavenly revelations and preserved them in books or on tablets. The specific description of these books and tablets will be analysed in relation to similar and earlier Jewish traditions where such media also were perceived as ‘divine vessels of authority’, no matter if they ever existed or not.

Jörg Frey, Universität Zürich
“The Impact of Qumran and Nag Hammadi Discoveries on New Testament Scholarship: The Examples of Dualism and Eschatology”

The paper will discuss in the perspective of the history of research the different and in some manner contradictory impacts of the two textual discoveries of Qumran and Nag Hammadi on the debate on New Testament scholarship. Enlightening paradigms for comparison are a) dualism, in particular in the Fourth Gospel and b) New Testament eschatology, with particular reference to the question of an an eschatological or non-eschatological Jesus.

Matthew Goff, Florida State University

“It Didn’t Happen the Way Moses Said it Did: Exegesis, Creativity, and Enochic Traditions in Nag Hammadi Texts”

The Watchers myth plays a significant role in the cosmogonic teachings of some Nag Hammadi texts—in particular the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and *On the Nature of the World*. Stroumsa has emphasized the importance of Jewish exegetical traditions, including the Watchers myth, for understanding key elements of cosmogonic myths found in Nag Hammadi texts and more recently Losekam has also stressed the importance of the watchers myth for understanding Nag Hammadi literature. In this paper I build on these results and explore how various Nag Hammadi texts, most importantly the *Apocryphon of John*, adapt and reformulate the Watchers myth.

Judith Hartenstein, Universität Koblenz-Landau

“Jesus as Revealer-Savior in gospels from Nag Hammadi and the human recipients of the revelation”

The paper will start with a description of the role of Jesus in post-resurrection dialogue gospels from Nag Hammadi. The term revealer-savior fits very well for this role; the concept seems to be similar to other heavenly figures like Eleleth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Parallels to messianic concepts like those of the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, are difficult to see. I will try to explicate the specific features and the somehow un-messianic character of the portrayal of Jesus in Nag Hammadi. A closer connection between Qumran and Nag Hammadi can be found in the position of the human recipients. I am especially interested in the figure of Levi who is prominent in some texts from Qumran as well as in the Gospel of Mary. At first glance, they are different persons, one is the son of Jacob and the other a disciple of Jesus. Nevertheless, it is worth examining whether some intersections between the traditions might be possible.

Claudia Losekam, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

“Enochic Literature as an Interpretative Pattern in Gnostic Texts?”

In recent years an immense increase of interest in apocalyptic literature has emerged. One of the main textual corpus that attracts scholarly interests is the Enochic literature, in particular the *Enochic Book of the Watchers* (BW). The *Book of the Watchers* focuses on the account of angels who descend from heaven to earth because of their attraction by human women. The angels sleep with women and reveal to them forbidden secrets, which provide eventually to the rise and expansion of evil on earth. In contradiction to the common view that this composition is about the origin of evil, I agree with Matthew Goff and others that the *Book of the Watchers* focuses on the rise and persistence of evil on earth. In the Epilogue of her reception-history of the *Book of the Watchers*, Annette Yoshiko Reed remains skeptical concerning the influence of BW on Gnosticism and even proclaims “the surprising lack of references to Enoch and the fallen angels in the Nag Hammadi literature.” In my paper, I will disprove this statement with reference to the Nag Hammadi scriptures *Apocryphon of John* (AJ), *Hypostasis of the Archons* (HA) and *On the Origin of the World* (OW). The first part of the paper refers to the proof of allusions to the fallen angels in the mentioned Nag Hammadi texts. In the course of this review the use of the fallen angel-theme emerges on different stages in the formation of the world of human beings on earth. The second part of my paper will discuss up to what extent these allusions function as an interpretative pattern and how this contributes to the concept of evil in the treatises under question (AJ; HA; OW).

Hugo Lundhaug, Universitet i Oslo

“Material Philology and the Nag Hammadi Codices”

How can a close focus on the material aspects of the Nag Hammadi Codices inform both our understanding of the people who produced and used them, and our reading of the Nag Hammadi texts themselves? Drawing on the methods and results of the NEWCONT-project, contextualizing the Nag Hammadi Codices in light of early Egyptian monasticism, this paper discusses the importance of paying close attention to the scribes of the codices, the codicological features of the manuscripts, the cartonnage of the covers, and monastic manuscript culture in general.

Christoph Marksches, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

“Finding Stories: A Literary Critique of Certain Themes in the Story of the Finding of the Nag Hammadi Codices”

Most of the ‘finding stories’—discovery narratives—of textual corpora have certain common themes or *topoi*. This is a sign that one should deal with them from the perspective of literary criticism before asking questions concerning their historicity. A large number of publications on the finding story of the Nag Hammadi Codices permits analysis of these narratives with recourse to the same methods used for analysis of fiction. In particular, a comparison of the tale of the Nag Hammadi discovery with the finding stories for certain Qumran texts promises to yield many insights.

Tuomas Rasimus, Université Laval

“Temple and Sacrifice in Qumran and Nag Hammadi”

This paper studies and compares temple metaphors in the Qumran and Nag Hammadi corpora. It is well known that (at least some of) the Dead Sea Sectarians considered the second temple polluted, withdrew to the desert, and set up a temporary albeit somewhat inferior substitute cult, comparing themselves to the temple and its atoning sacrifices. It is likewise well known that many early (“proto-orthodox”) Christians gave Jesus’ death a sacrificial interpretation, and that by the end of the first century a forceful and ultimately dominating supercessionist replacement theology had emerged. However, temple metaphors in the Nag Hammadi corpus are a less well-known phenomenon. In light of the common stereotypes that “the Gnostics” rejected sacrifice and ridiculed the idea that Jesus’ death on the cross had any salvific meaning, it is interesting to note the non-negligible presence of sacrificial / temple metaphors in the Nag Hammadi collection. These include positive symbolism relating to the temple’s architecture, furnishings, sacrifices, and personnel. In many ways, the use of such symbols builds upon New Testament occurrences, but often goes beyond them. What is more, the use of such symbolism in the Nag Hammadi collection is found at least in the Valentinian and Sethian-Ophite materials. If, according to the stereotypical views, the authors of these texts found no meaning in sacrificial death, why did they use sacrificial images in their mythmaking and to what ends? The purpose of this paper is to critically re-evaluate the use of sacrificial / temple metaphors in the Nag Hammadi collection, and to situate these texts in the first-to-fourth century CE debates about the temple and its sacrifices.

Jens Schröter, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

“The Biblical Canons after Qumran and Nag Hammadi: Some Preliminary Observations”

No abstract.

Eibert Tigchelaar, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

“New Approaches to the Scribes of the Dead Sea Scrolls”

This paper will describe and discuss, in conversation with work on other text corpora, including the Nag Hammadi materials different recent approaches to the copying of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The paper may include a discussion of new interpretations of the production and use of the Dead Sea Scrolls (based on the models of textual communities or scholarly communities), a reevaluation of the traditional typological palaeographic approach, a systematic differentiation between degrees of competence of hands, the use of new digital palaeographical approaches, and corpus linguistic research as applied to orthography and other scribal practices which may help to distinguish different schools or individual scribes.

Shani Tzoref, Universität Potsdam

“Wisdom, Folly, and Zion in the Qumran Corpus: Towards an Evolutionary Analysis of Feminine Conceptualizations?”

Representations of the grammatically feminine words *Hohma* and *Zion* in the Hebrew Bible reflect and generate a rich complex of abstractions and concretizations. In this paper, I examine feminized conceptualizations of Wisdom and Jerusalem in the Qumran corpus as developments of the biblical conceits. Both of these figures have been associated with goddesses in neighboring cultures of ancient Israel (Maat and Sophia; ANE consorts of patron deities), and with hypostatic entities in later Jewish and Christian tradition (the Shechinah, Torah, Knesset Israel; the Logos, Ecclesia). By examining the function of both figures in Qumran texts, I intend to gain greater understanding of the conceptual processes underlying the changing forms and functions of the feminine tropes. It is my hope that this study will shed light on the analysis of the representations of Sophia in the Nag Hammadi corpus, including the distinction noted by Rasimus between the Ophite and Sethian Gnostic texts. I will devote particular attention to an overview of scholarship on the “Wicked Woman” in 4Q184, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. In attempting to identify this figure, Qumran scholars have frequently followed the binary tendency in biblical scholarship on Lady Wisdom’s negative counterpart in Proverbs, Dame Folly/the Strange Woman—seeing either a metaphorical representation of a rejected religious ideology or a more “literal” seductress. Recent studies in cognitive linguistics demonstrate how personifications blend metaphor and metonymy. These findings are of particular interest with respect to male conceptions of the feminine that blur boundaries between self and Other, heaven and earth, body and spirit, revelation and mystery—in communities of men for whom these are matters of the highest existential and philosophical import.