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THE NAG HAMMADI SCRIPTURES

THE INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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To
HANS-MARTIN SCHENKE
1929-2002
Esteemed colleague, dear friend,
Coptologist extraordinaire



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Standard sigla are used in the present volume, though we have tried to keep sigla to a minimum for the sake of ease of reading. Within the English translations, the following signs are employed:

- [] Square brackets indicate a textual lacuna that has been restored. When the restoration entails only "a," "an," "the," or "and," such a minor restoration is usually not placed within square brackets. Ordinarily words are placed either entirely inside or outside square brackets. Exceptions to this policy are made in more fragmentary texts, in which portions of words may be placed inside square brackets.
- < > Angle brackets indicate an emendation of a scribal omission or error.
- { } Braces indicate superfluous letters that presumably were added by a scribe. Some such instances are indicated in the translation. Instances of dittography (the inadvertent copying of a passage twice) are usually indicated in a note.
- ... Ellipsis dots indicate unrestored lacunae—portions of Coptic (or Greek) text missing in the manuscripts that cannot be restored with confidence. Three dots indicate a lacuna of a Coptic line or less, that is, a short break in the flow of thought in the text. Six dots indicate a lacuna of more than a single Coptic line, that is, a major break in the flow of thought in the text. Ordinarily the extent of the longer lacuna is indicated in a note accompanying the translation. Occasionally the number of dots within a proper name indicates the number of letters missing in the name.

Within the translations, Coptic manuscript page numbers are provided for the sake of reference. In the case of the *Gospel of Thomas*, traditional sayings numbers are given, along with numbers for subdivisions of sayings.²⁶ In the case of the *Sentences of Sextus*, the system of numeration follows the standard edition of this tractate, which was composed in Greek and is known in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian versions.²⁷ As in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, here also only Coptic page numbers are given, and not line numbers from the manuscripts. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* is not presented as an edition of Coptic manuscripts but a publication of texts in English translation, and for this reason the continuation of the use of references based upon line numbers in Coptic manuscripts seems inappropriate. Thus, in the notes to the translations, the cross-references to texts in the Nag Hammadi library, the Berlin Gnostic Codex, and Codex Tchacos are given with the titles of the texts and Coptic page numbers (or the other systems of

numeration); when a particular text is preserved in more than one copy (as is the case, e.g., with the *Secret Book of John*), the codex number is also provided. Within the introductions to the tractates, however, the textual references include, in addition to the Coptic page numbers, the manuscript lines numbers as well, in case readers wish to refer directly to the Coptic manuscripts and the location of Coptic lines in the manuscripts.

Accompanying the translations in the present volume are several aids to interpretation. In addition to the volume introduction, each text is prefaced with its own introduction, which includes bibliographical suggestions for further reading and study. In the translations there are subheadings that are not in the texts themselves but have been provided by the translators as a way of indicating sections of the texts. The subheadings include references to Coptic page and line numbers in order to allow for another way of moving from the English translations to the Coptic manuscripts. Notes explain difficult passages and refer to parallel passages. In some cases, as with the Platonizing Sethian texts, the notes are somewhat more substantial, to help in the understanding of texts that may benefit from a fuller presentation. An epilogue, "Schools of Thought in the Nag Hammadi Scriptures," discusses Thomas Christianity, the Sethian and Valentinian schools of Gnostic thought, and Hermetic religion within the context of the questions surrounding the term "Gnostic," and a table of tractates provides an overview of the contents of the Nag Hammadi library, the Berlin Gnostic Codex, and Codex Tchacos. A bibliography and an index of proper names conclude the volume.

In *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* we present a series of English translations prepared and introduced by scholars with different backgrounds and different points of view. Although we have attempted to achieve a degree of stylistic uniformity throughout the volume, some variety inevitably remains, and several voices can be detected in the introductions and translations. We consider such variety to be appropriate in a collection of texts as diverse as the Nag Hammadi library, the Berlin Gnostic Codex, and Codex Tchacos. It is our hope that in reading and studying this diverse collection of religious tractates, readers may join us in a process of seeking and finding, and that for those who explore these texts, in all their diversity, new light may be shed on the world of antiquity—and modernity. As one text in the Nag Hammadi collection, the *Gospel of Thomas*, puts it, "Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed."

26. The tradition of dividing the *Gospel of Thomas* into 114 sayings is flawed, but it has become a nearly universal convention. The use of numbers for subdivisions of the sayings reflects an increasingly common means of reference.

27. See Henry Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus*.

THE DISCOURSE ON THE EIGHTH AND NINTH

NHC VI,6

*Introduced by Jean-Pierre Mahé
Translated by Marvin Meyer*

The title of the sixth tractate of Nag Hammadi Codex VI has been accidentally torn off. On the basis of 53,23–26, it can be approximately reconstructed as the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. The text is a dialogue between a “father,” sometimes called “Hermes” (58,28; 59,11; 63,24) or “Trismegistus” (59,15.24), and a “son,” addressed as “my child” without any proper name.¹

This disciple in the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is far from being a novice. Hermes has already explained to him all of his “general lectures” and his “detailed lectures” (63,1–2). There is only one thing left to be done: the disciple needs to pass through the last stage of spiritual perfection, which does not consist merely of learning but demands full personal involvement. In fact, he has to undergo an initiation into the divine mysteries of the Eighth and the Ninth, so that he may be born again and become a new person, directly inspired by God’s mind.

This goal cannot be reached by ordinary teaching. The dialogue is composed mainly of prayers and praises to God mingled with ecstatic visions. From the very beginning (52,27), the father’s guidance takes the form of instruction about prayer. Moreover, the spiritual power that brings about new birth is conveyed through a kiss (57,26), a symbol and instrument of divine love.

In both form and content, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is most similar to the *Secret Dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the Mountain: On Being Born Again and on the Promise to Be Silent* (*Corpus Hermeticum* XIII). The latter text, however, is formally less perfect. The author constantly wavers between visionary enthusiasm and scholastic discussion. In our dialogue, on the other hand, when the heavenly forces come down (57,28–29), the theoretical discussion has

1. Throughout this introduction the translation used (with minor modifications) for Hermetic writings beyond the Nag Hammadi library is that of Brian P. Copenhaver.

been over for some time, giving way to praise and gratitude, which alone can lift one up to the supreme vision.

Supposedly the dialogue of the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* takes place in Egypt, a point that is strongly emphasized in the epilogue. After giving thanks to God for his favor, the disciple is told to carve the book of his vision on turquoise steles—a color typical of Alexandrian glazed ceramics—which shall be put on the esplanade of Hermes' shrine in Diospolis. This place name is likely to be identified with Diospolis Magna, ancient Thebes, where Thoth's temple can still be found in Kasr al-Agouz.

But to what extent does the subject matter of the dialogue—the revelation of the Eighth and the Ninth—derive from ancient Egyptian beliefs? Along with the Coptic numbers “eighth” and “ninth,” our text also uses the Greek forms “Ogdoad” and “Ennead,” which to Egyptologists indicate groups of primordial deities that were worshiped mainly in Hermopolis and Heliopolis. Thoth, the Egyptian ancestor of Hermes Trismegistus, was closely associated with these deities for many centuries. Thus he could be called “the lord of the city of the Eight”—that is, Hermopolis-Ashmounein (from Coptic *šmoun*, “eight”)—or “the lord of the Ennead.” Our text explicitly names the “nine of the sun” (62,4–5) and mentions frog- and cat-faced keepers (62,8,10), which may be zoomorphic emblems of the Ogdoad and the Ennead.

Nevertheless, in the second century CE, when the Greek original of the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* was written, these terms would have evoked astrological ideas, namely, the eighth and the ninth heavenly spheres, rather than the primeval deities of Egypt. Of course, even the reinterpretation of the Ogdoad in astrological terms might have been furthered by ancient Egyptian speculation. For instance, the theologians of Heliopolis tried to work the Ogdoad into their system by assimilating it to the so-called eight Hehous, the pillars that hold up the heavens. Yet the movement of our text depends almost completely on the Hellenistic belief in astral fatalism.

Soaring up to the eighth sphere, the Ogdoad, means first of all getting rid of the influence of the seven planets and gaining access to the superior world, the abode of the highest God. In the oath that concludes our dialogue (63,16–32), Hermes sketches a vertical section of the universe. Above the ground floor, where the material elements (air, earth, fire, and water) are, dwell the seven Ousiarchs, who in this context must be identified with the seven planetary governors of *Poimandres* (*Corpus Hermeticum* I, 14,16). They constitute the Harmonia, the cosmic framework moved by fate (I, 19) or the demiurgic spirit (I, 11). Then comes the Begotten One, the rational soul of the cosmos, on the same level as the Eighth, the abode of individual souls and angels (58,17–20; 59,29–30). One step higher we meet the Self-Begotten One, divine Mind and its powers, on the same level as the Ninth. Over the heights of heavens reigns the Unbegotten God.

Why does rising again to the eighth and the ninth spheres necessarily mean being born again, or being granted regeneration? Because humanity's coming down here below is, by contrast, a degeneration. In the first nineteen paragraphs of *Poimandres* (*Corpus Hermeticum* I), which can be read as a rewriting of *Gene-*

sis 1:1–10:1, God the Almighty, the maker of everything, to whom are addressed the eighteen blessings of the Kedusha, consists of a triad of Sovereignty (*Authentia*), Mind, and Holy Word, the latter most likely being identical with the spirit of God, who according to *Genesis* 1:2 was moving upon the face of the water. The first two entities can be regarded as unbegotten and self-begotten, whereas the Holy Word is begotten, since it is “the son of God coming from his mind” (*Corpus Hermeticum* I, 6).

As to the origin of humankind, according to *Poimandres*, first the Mind gives birth, after its image, to an androgynous Human within the superior world (*Corpus Hermeticum* I, 12). By being mirrored in the watery nature of the inferior world, this first Human produces a form after his own likeness (I, 14). Thus is the begotten second androgynous human, who is twofold—mortal in his body and immortal in his essential being (I, 15). The latter in turn begets seven androgynous human beings made out of material nature (I, 16). Then the two sexes are separated, time starts its course, along with the revolutions of the heavenly spheres, and human generations like ours are brought into being (I, 19).

Poimandres teaches that salvation consists in “recognizing oneself as immortal, in knowing that love is the cause of death, and in becoming acquainted with all that exists” (*Corpus Hermeticum* I, 18). This goal can be reached by living piously (I, 22). Then, at the moment of death, when the soul is freed from the material body, “the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework” (I, 25) and “enters the eighth sphere” (I, 26). Then he “hears certain powers that exist above the eighth sphere and sing hymns to God with sweet voices.” God himself dwells on a higher level. All those who have received knowledge are bound to enter into him (I, 26).

The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth obviously takes up the same ten levels of beings. But instead of waiting for a posthumous ascent to the superior world, our Hermetic author aims at anticipating the process here below by strengthening within himself the mental faculties—soul and mind—that humanity has received from the eighth and the ninth spheres.

In order to advance in “the way of immortality” (*Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* 63,10–11) under the guidance of Trismegistus, the disciple must pass through an initiatory mystery, a rite of regeneration. The central experience of this mystery seems to be a vision of oneself: “I see myself” (58,8; 61,1; cf. *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII, 13). Not only does this vision bring about the regeneration of the initiate—“for this is rebirth, my child” (XIII, 13)—but it also enables him to recognize in the one initiating him—the father—the figure of Trismegistus himself. The name Trismegistus occurs only twice in our text, and it does so precisely between the two visions of the self.

How can we live through such an experience? We need spiritual exercise and grace. The main exercise is prayer. Prayer aims at beseeching God's free assistance (55,14–15) and complements the meditative contemplation of the beauty of the soul that was begun during the previous days. Those who pray become “a reflection of the Fullness,” the superior world surrounding God (57,8–10). By praising the divinity, the disciple first joins his brothers who live in this world, the

congregation of Hermes' spiritual sons (53,27–30). Eventually he also meets the souls and the angels of the eighth sphere as well as the power of the ninth one. True prayer is a spiritual sacrifice offered to God (57,19). It can be compared with some kind of seraphic trisagion uniting in one and the same hymn all of the souls and the spirits here below as well as in the highest of heavens. The kiss that follows the first prayer and brings about ecstatic vision is by itself an angelic liturgy.

By miming the contents of the most blessed vision—that is, the choir of angels and powers praising God with their silent mind—we become able to conceive ourselves as pure minds, released from our bodies and able to receive from above “the power that is light” (57,29–30). Thus will we change our abstract meditation and our persistent effort to concentrate on the superior world into “a clear and joyful vision” (*Corpus Hermeticum* I, 4) that is “sharper than the ray of the sun and is full of immortality” (X, 4).

No doubt, for the Hermetic writer, this luminous power is nothing but divine Mind itself. It consists in divine self-contemplation and manifestation of oneself to oneself. Whoever sees himself by the power of this Mind tends to recover his “essential” self and become assimilated to the Self-Begotten Human. Then he can also see the source of the Unbegotten One (*Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* 52,19; 55,22; 58,13).

There are three main reasons scholars have had a particular interest in the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. Unlike the other two Hermetic writings from the Nag Hammadi library (the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* and the *Excerpt from the Perfect Discourse*), this tractate was previously unknown. In addition, by describing an initiation mystery, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* shows us the religious and existential dimensions of Hermetic thought. The concern of Trismegistus is to open a path, to guide his disciples up to spiritual rest and illumination. This goal could hardly be met without the organization of communities and mystery ceremonies. Finally, the mythological basis of our tractate clearly alludes to Egyptian religion and to the same tradition as the Nag Hammadi tractate *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III,3; V,1). *Eugnostos the Blessed* offers a Jewish interpretation of *Genesis*; but from a Hermetic point of view, there is not the slightest discontinuity between Egyptian and Jewish inspiration, since Moses supposedly was a disciple of Hermes Trismegistus.

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The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth¹

Introduction to the Ceremony (52,1–55,22)

“[My father],² yesterday you promised [me you would take] my mind to the eighth stage³ and after that you would take me to the ninth. You said this is the sequence of the tradition.”

“Yes, my child,⁴ this is the sequence, but the promise was made about human nature. I told you this when I initiated the promise, and I said it on the condition that you will remember each of the stages. After I received the spirit through the power, I established the action for you. Clearly understanding resides in you. In me it is as if the power were pregnant, for when I conceived from the spring that flows to me, I gave birth.”

“Father, you have spoken every word rightly to me, but I am amazed at what you say. You said, ‘The power in me.’”

He said, “I gave birth to the power, as children are born.”

“Then, father, I have many siblings⁵ if I am to be counted among the generations.”

“Right, my child. This good thing is counted [53]⁶ always. So, my child, you must know your siblings and honor them rightly and well, since they have come from the same father. I have addressed each of the generations. I have named them, since they are offspring like these children.”

“Then, father, do they also have mothers?”⁷

1. Coptic text: NHC VI,6: 52,1–63,32. Editions: *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex VI*, 57–67; Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermès en Haute Égypte*; Douglas M. Parrott, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI, 341–73* (James Brashler, Peter A. Dirkse, and Douglas M. Parrott); Hans-Martin Schenke, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, eds., *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2.499–518 (Karl-Wolfgang Tröger). The title is construed from the contents of the text. 2. A line missing at the very opening of the text must have contained the title (“[The Eighth and Ninth]”? “[On the Eighth and Ninth]”? “[The Eighth Reveals the Ninth]”?). 3. Here the text reads simply “the eighth,” referring to the eighth stage of as-

cent to the divine. Cf. also the levels of the spheres of heaven, where beyond the seven planetary spheres are realms for the fixed stars and sometimes the demiurge, Sophia, and the divine. 4. Lit., “my son,” translated throughout the text as “my child.” 5. Lit., “brothers,” throughout the text. 6. About four lines missing or untranslatable. 7. Coptic *ou'ntau hōou 'mmau*. Cf. Mahé, ed., *Hermès en Haute Égypte*, 1.66–67; Tröger, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2.509. Brashler, Dirkse, and Parrott, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI, 348–49*, prefer to read “do they have a day?” and refer to a birthday. It may also be possible to translate “do they themselves possess something?”

from us through our praise.
 Recognize the spirit within us.
 From you the universe received soul.
 From you, one unbegotten,
 the begotten one came to be.
 The birth of the self-begotten is through you,
 the birth of all begotten things that exist.
 Accept these spiritual offerings from us,
 which we direct to you
 with all our heart, soul, and strength.
 Save what is within us,
 and grant us immortal wisdom."

Vision of the Eighth and Ninth (57,26–61,17)

"My child, let us embrace in love.²⁰ Be happy about this. Already from this, the power that is light is coming to us. I see, I see ineffable depths. How shall I tell you, [58] my child? [We now have begun to see] . . . the places.²¹ How [shall I tell you about] the All?²² I am [mind²³ and] I see another mind, one that [moves] the soul. I see the one that moves me from pure forgetfulness. You give me power. I see myself. I wish to speak. Fear seizes me. I have found the beginning of the power above all powers, without beginning. I see a spring bubbling with life. I have said, my child, that I am mind. I have seen. Language cannot reveal this. For all of the eighth, my child, and the souls in it, and the angels,²⁴ sing a hymn in silence. I, mind, understand."

"How does one sing a hymn through silence?"

"Can no one communicate with you?"

"I am silent, father. I want to sing a hymn to you while I am silent."

"Then sing it. I am mind."

"I understand mind—'Hermes,' which cannot be explained²⁵ because it stays in itself. I am happy, father, to see you smiling. The universe [59] [is happy]. No creature will lack your life, for you are lord of the inhabitants everywhere. Your forethought keeps watch. I call you father, aeon of aeons, spirit, divine being,²⁶ who through spirit sends moisture on everyone.²⁷ What do you tell me, father Hermes?"

20. Or "in truth" (*h'n oume*). 21. So it is restored, in part, by Máhe, *Hermès en Haute Égypte*, 1.76–77. Here Tröger, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2.513, reads: "How should I tell you, my child, [if you] already [have begun to see the seven] places? How [do you see] the All?" 22. Or "the universe." 23. Nous, here and below. 24. The souls and the angels are thought to dwell in the eighth. 25. This is a pun on the name

Hermes: it cannot be explained (*hermēneue*) because the *hermēneia* stays in *Hermes*. 26. Coptic, from Greek, *ppna o ntheion*. It is also possible to divide the letters as *ppna o ntheion* and translate "great divine spirit." 27. Or "sends rain on everyone." The text also refers to "a spring bubbling with life," and other Gnostic texts likewise mention water, including living

"My child, I say nothing about this. It is right before God for us to remain silent about what is hidden."

"Trismegistus, do not let my soul be deprived of the vision. O divine being,²⁸ everything is possible for you as master of the universe."

"Sing <praise> again, my child, and sing while you are silent. Ask what you want in silence."

When he finished praising, he called out, "Father Trismegistus, what shall I say? We have received this light, and I myself see this same vision in you. I see the eighth, and the souls in it, and the angels singing a hymn to the ninth²⁹ and its powers. I see the one with the power of them all, creating [60] <those> in the spirit."³⁰

"From [now on] it is good for us to remain silent, with head bowed.³¹ From now on do not speak about the vision. It is fitting to sing [a hymn] to the Father until the day we leave the body."

"What you sing, father, I also want to sing."

"I am singing a hymn in myself. While you rest, sing praise. You have found what you seek."

"But is it right, father, for me to sing praise when my heart is filled?"

"What is right is for you to sing praise to God so it may be written in this imperishable book."

"I shall offer up the praise in my heart as I invoke the end of the universe, and the beginning of the beginning, the goal of the human quest, the immortal discovery, the producer of light and truth, the sower of reason, the love of immortal life. No hidden word can speak of you, lord. My mind wants to sing a hymn to you every day. I am the instrument of your spirit, mind is your plectrum, and your guidance makes music with me. I see [61] myself. I have received power from you, for your love has reached us."

"Right, my child."

"O grace! After this, I thank you by singing a hymn to you. You gave me life when you made me wise. I praise you. I invoke your name hidden in me,

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28. Coptic *ttheōreia on theion*. It is also possible to divide the letters as *ttheōreia o ntheion* and translate "great divine vision." 29. Mind dwells in the ninth. 30. Without emendation the text reads "creating spirits"; with a slight emendation, "creating in the spirit." 31. Lit., "leaning forward" (*h'n oum*nt[pro]petēs*).

The translators in *Nag Hammadi Codices* V, 2–5 and VI, 363, suggest "in a reverent posture," while Mahé and Tröger understand the phrase to mean "from this moment"—which fits well with what follows in the text.

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You exist with spirit.

I sing to you with godliness."

Instructions for the Preservation of the Text (61,18–63,32)

"My child, copy this book for the temple at Diospolis,³³ in hieroglyphic characters, and call it the Eighth Reveals the Ninth."

"I shall do it, <father>,³⁴ as you command."

"<My child>,³⁵ copy the contents of the book on turquoise steles.³⁶ My child, it is fitting to copy this book on turquoise steles in hieroglyphic characters, for mind itself has become the supervisor [62] of these things. So I command that this discourse be carved in stone and that you put it in my sanctuary.³⁷ Eight guards watch over it with nine³⁸ of the sun:³⁹ the males on the right have faces of frogs, the females on the left have faces of cats.⁴⁰ Put a square milk-stone at the base of the turquoise tablets and copy the name on the azure stone tablet in hieroglyphic characters. My child, you must do this when I⁴¹ am in Virgo, and the sun is in the first half of the day, and fifteen degrees have passed by me."

"Father, all you say I shall gladly do."

"Copy an oath in the book, so that those who read the book may not use the wording for evil purposes or try to subvert fate. Rather, they should submit to the law of God, and not transgress at all, but in purity ask God for wisdom and knowledge.⁴² And whoever [63] is not begotten beforehand by God develops through the general and instructional discourses. Such a person will not be able to read what is written in this book, even though the person's conscience is pure within and the person does nothing shameful and does not go along with it. Such a person progresses by stages and advances in the way of immortality, and so advances in the understanding of the eighth that reveals the ninth."

"I shall do it, father."

"This is the oath: I adjure you who will read this holy book, by heaven and earth and fire and water, and seven rulers of substance and the creative spirit in them, and the <un>begotten⁴³ God and the self-begotten and the begotten, that you guard what Hermes has communicated. God will be at one with those who keep the oath and everyone we have named, but the wrath of each of them will come upon those who violate the oath. This is the perfect one who is, my child."

32. More glossolalia. The sequence of vowels seems to be imperfect. 33. Diospolis Magna is Thebes (Luxor); Diospolis Parva is Heou (near Nag Hammadi). 34. Emended; the Coptic text reads "my child." 35. Emended; the Coptic text reads "My father." Here Mâhe, *Hermès en Haute Égypte*, 1.82–83, takes "My father" as a vocative with a question from the student to the teacher: "My father, should I copy the contents of the book on turquoise steles?" 36. The *Three Steles of Seth* also assumes such monuments. 37. The

meaning of this Coptic word is uncertain (*ouôpe*). Cf. Tröger, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2.516 (with reference to a suggestion by Hans-Martin Schenke). 38. Here Tröger, in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2.516, reads "attendants." 39. Helios—the Sun. 40. Egyptian deities often are depicted with faces of animals. 41. I.e., Hermes, the planet Mercury. 42. Gnosis. 43. Here the Coptic is emended to read <a>gennētos (ge may have been crossed out in the manuscript by a scribe).

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

NHC VI,7

Introduced by Jean-Pierre Mahé

Translated by Marvin Meyer

The *Prayer of Thanksgiving*, which appears in Codex VI of the Nag Hammadi library as an epilogue to the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, was originally an independent writing destined to be recycled in different contexts. It also serves as the conclusion to both a Greek magical collection of texts (in the so-called Papyrus Mimaüt) and *Asclepius*, a Latin adaptation of the Greek *Perfect Discourse* of Hermes Trismegistus. In the latter dialogue (*Asclepius* 41), the prayer is flanked by two liturgical rubrics containing instructions for the use of the prayer. Thus, before the text of the prayer, we read, "When someone wants to entreat God at sunset, he should direct his gaze to that quarter, and likewise at sunrise toward the direction they call east." A similar instruction (*Corpus Hermeticum* XIII, 16) is also given in the *Secret Hymn* (XIII, 17–20) contained in another Hermetic writing. Similarly, the following words of recommendation bring the prayer to a conclusion: "with such hope we turn to a pure meal that includes no living thing." Although the second rubric for the use of the prayer has been preserved in Nag Hammadi Codex VI (65,2–7), the first has been replaced with a narrative introduction, "This is the prayer they offered" (63,33), which obviously echoes a previous sentence in the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*: "When he finished praising, he called out" (59,23–24).¹

The *Prayer of Thanksgiving* is particularly appropriate to conclude a dialogue describing the final stage of Hermetic initiation. Its contents may be summarized as follows:

Narrative introduction

Invocation of the divine name

1. Throughout this introduction the translation used (with minor modifications) for Hermetic writings beyond the Nag Hammadi library is that of Brian P. Copenhaver.