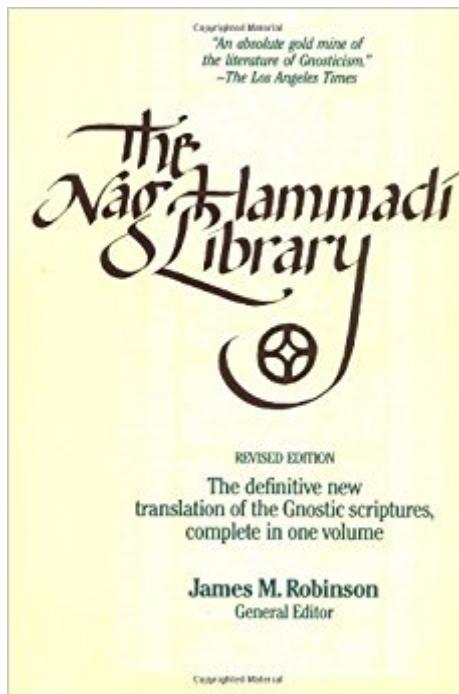


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# The Nag Hammadi Library



## **Synopsis**

This revised, expanded, and updated edition of The Nag Hammadi Library is the only complete, one-volume, modern language version of the renowned library of fourth-century manuscripts discovered in Egypt in 1945. First published in 1978, The Nag Hammadi Library launched modern Gnostic studies and exposed a movement whose teachings are in many ways as relevant today as they were sixteen centuries ago. James M. Robinson's updated introduction reflects ten years of additional research and editorial and critical work. An afterword by Richard Smith discusses the modern relevance of Gnosticism and its influence on such writers as Voltaire, Blake, Melville, Yeats, Kerouac, and Philip K. Dick. Acclaimed by scholars and general readers alike, The Nag Hammadi Library is a work of major importance to everyone interested in the evolution of Christianity, the Bible, archaeology, and the story of Western civilization.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The Nag Hammadi Library was discovered in 1945 buried in a large stone jar in the desert outside the modern Egyptian city of Nag Hammadi. It is a collection of religious and philosophic texts gathered and translated into Coptic by fourth-century Gnostic Christians and translated into English by dozens of highly reputable experts. First published in 1978, this is the revised 1988 edition supported by illuminating introductions to each document. The library itself is a diverse collection of texts that the Gnostics considered to be related to their heretical philosophy in some way. There are 45 separate titles, including a Coptic translation from the Greek of two well-known works: the Gospel of Thomas, attributed to Jesus' brother Judas, and Plato's Republic. The word gnosis is

defined as "the immediate knowledge of spiritual truth." This doomed radical sect believed in being here now--withdrawing from the contamination of society and materiality--and that heaven is an internal state, not some place above the clouds. That this collection has resurfaced at this historical juncture is more than likely no coincidence. --P. Randall Cohan

James M. Robinson, consultant for this collection, is widely known for his groundbreaking contribution as the permanent secretary of UNESCO's International Committee for the Nag Hammadi codices, and his many published works on Gnostic texts and the Sayings Gospel Q.

Hi, just purchased a hard bound copy of The Nag Hammadi Library. It is a beautiful book and will be well used for a church class. It arrived in perfect condition and has been interesting so far as I have read. The language and spaces will be challenging but that is as much information as we have found to be transcribed. The print is rather small on some pages and takes more concentration while reading. Exactly the item I was looking for. JB

Excellent shape, unbeatable price. A comprehensive translation of the Nag Hammadi gospels, without any of the usual "opinions" or "expert ideas on meaning" that accompany many of my other books. This book is just a thorough translation, letting the reader decide for themselves the meaning just like any other religious text. For anyone who is curious in studying any and all Theological texts, a must read.

Interesting read, and book arrived in great condition.

#### My 2nd copy

The Nag Hammadi texts and the Dead Sea Scrolls are two of the most important literary finds regarding religion in the 20th Century. They make remarkable corrections to some of the texts already known, gives us a wealth of historical consideration and is the most nearly contemporary writing from the time of Christ. What a welcome addition to religious literature!

Formidable. Not an easy read. For almost 2000 years, people have prepared us for the New Testament. There's been many books about it, many sermons, even many movies. Some of it may still seem unusual to us but it's familiar. The scriptures within it were carefully selected and ordered.

Many of the writers seem to have gone to great care to make their messages accessible. We've had little if any preparation for the scriptures in the Nag Hammadi library. They weren't supposed to be around any longer. They may not be a random collection but they seem as if they were. They aren't even all Christian Gnostic. There are some non-Christian Gnostic works, some Hermetic works, even a modified excerpt from Plato's Republic. It seems unlikely that they would have been judged readily understandable even when they were first written. We know little if anything about the people who wrote them, of the people who read them, of how they played a part. They may represent a poor subset of Gnostic works: we may never know whether some powerful, clearer, more accessible Gnostic works existed but were lost to us. But even such as they are, it is a gift that these works were saved and found. One reading seems hardly enough. Jumping into these works unprepared may leave you baffled. But, even if you do just jump in, you may well recognize something there's something special about these scriptures. As preparation (or after an initial reading) some works that may help you with these scriptures are: \* Elaine Pagel's "The Gnostic Gospels". It's an exceptional presentation of relevant early Christian history and a good overview of what mattered to the Gnostics. \* The "Hermetica", also written in the first few centuries A.D. This Hermetic work is much longer but also much better presented than the Hermetic works in the "Nag Hammadi Library". The Hermetic writings generally have a more positive view of material existence but in many ways feel similar to the Gnostic works, both being quite philosophical religious writings with plenty of mythologizing. \* The "Enneads" by the Neoplatonist Plotinus. Long, but a very clear presentation some of whose terminology and themes can be found in the "Nag Hammadi Library". The introduction to the library by James Robinson, the general editor, will provide some helpful context. The afterward by Richard Smith on "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism" is exceptional and may well be worth reading before you read the scriptures themselves. This afterward doesn't depend on the scriptures and introduces many modern writers whose work has been shaped by an interest in Gnosticism. One nit: there are "textual signs" throughout the scriptures which are undoubtedly useful to scholars but which seemed a distraction. Each scripture is short. Each has its own introduction, often done by the translator of that scripture but sometimes not. Elaine Pagels ("The Gnostic Gospels") wrote some of the introductions. These introductions provide some helpful context and summary, but not as much as I could have used. An annotated "Nag Hammadi Library" would be useful. I'm afraid I missed a lot of references, although the introductions often helped. The historical Jesus is not to be found in the Christian Gnostic texts: just the resurrection and, to a lesser extent, the crucifixion, are referenced. You can wonder why, in these scriptures, as in Paul, the historical Jesus seems of such little interest. Most of the works seem quite abstract, quite philosophical, with

free myth-making. I found it very hard to imagine who would have used these texts; it seems unlikely they could have had a mass appeal. They all seem quite serious, quite heavy. Many of the texts are noted to have come from Alexandria, seeming not very Egyptian but very Greek. It must have been quite a place. It's seems remarkable that religious thinking was so intense. Do many of us today think so deeply about our condition? I had some "favorites" among these scriptures after this first reading. These works may have seemed more accessible. There seems to be no benefit to reading all the scriptures in this library in the order they appear. My favorites may not at all be yours but they may also seem more accessible to you: \* The Gospel Of Truth \* The Treatise on the Resurrection \* The Gospel of Phillip \* On the Origin of the World \* The Exegesis of the Soul \* The Letter of Peter to Phillip Although philosophical, these works are religious and hence often emotional. I was struck most by the power of "The Exegesis of the Soul". Don't be surprised if, on first reading, these scriptures make little if any connection or sense. They are indeed quite foreign. But the power of the effort at myth-making may reach you, in which case you may want to do some background reading (either what I suggested or other) and then return to these scriptures. Richard Smith's afterword may convince you that such writings describe a compelling alternative. The Gnostic view as shared here need not be an academic interest, but suggest ways of living in this world quite unlike what orthodox religion offers. If they didn't have a significant power, it seems unlikely the orthodox Church would have been so aggressive in trying to remove all trace of these scriptures.

The book provides translations and brief introductions. It is somewhat more for scholars -- the format of the translations (with marks showing breaks and so forth) is not great for simple reading, but one can get past that. But, it's comprehensive and the introductions to each work were useful.

Arrived today in great shape

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