

Matthew Dillon:
Unearthed Rituals, Recollected Theologies, Mnemohistory and the
Role of Scholarship in Contemporary “Gnosticism(s)”

This paper argues that contemporary “Gnosticisms” evidenced by distinct receptions of the texts of the Nag Hammadi Library – codices discovered near Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945 – are best interpreted from the perspective of mnemohistory, the variety of memories surrounding a person, place or text. To wit, discourses pertaining to ancient “Gnosticism” – from the pre-NHL emic, Theosophical model of Helena Blavatsky, to the academic, etic constructions of Prof. Birger Pearson (UC Santa Barbara) – provide the hermeneutic lenses through which the NHL is read by modern, self-described “Gnostics.” I demonstrate this thesis via comparison of distinct, contemporary “Gnostic” approaches to the Nag Hammadi Library: one, by a representative of the Apostolic Johannite Church, and one by an “internet Gnostic” (i. e., participant in online networks of self-described Gnostics with a strong presence in new media). Deeply indebted to the French Gnostic revival of Jules Doinel, the AJC’s teachings presents an invented tradition of nominally Catholic Gnostics (including Valentinus, the Cathars, and Knights Templar), a weak-this-worldly holist cosmology and rituals that center on the four Biblical archangels. Consequently, the NHL reception within the AJC has primarily emphasized Valentinian texts, the organization’s worldview lacks dualism, and the published rituals show no NHL influence. By contrast, the “internet Gnostics,” such as author Jeremy Puma, have broken from organized Gnostic churches to construct a spiritual model that goes straight back to the primary sources themselves. Puma champions an interpretation of the NHL texts in their *Sitz im Leben* as understood through secondary scholarship. In *How to Think Like a Gnostic*, Puma’s cosmology contains a stronger sense of dualism, the reality of archontic rulers, and genuine revelations. His re-constructed rituals in *A Gnostic Prayerbook* presume this more “classically Gnostic” worldview, drawing on the work of professional, academic historians on the “Sethian” Gnostic literature, such as John D. Turner (U. Nebraska) and Alaistar Logan (U. Exeter).

Keywords:

[Neo-Gnosticism](#), [New Media](#), [Reception of Scholarship](#)

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