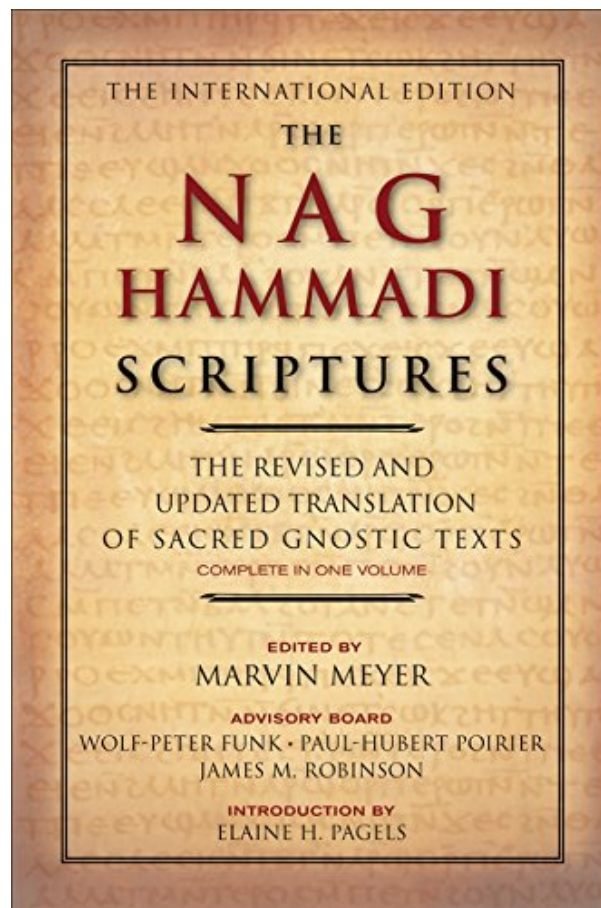
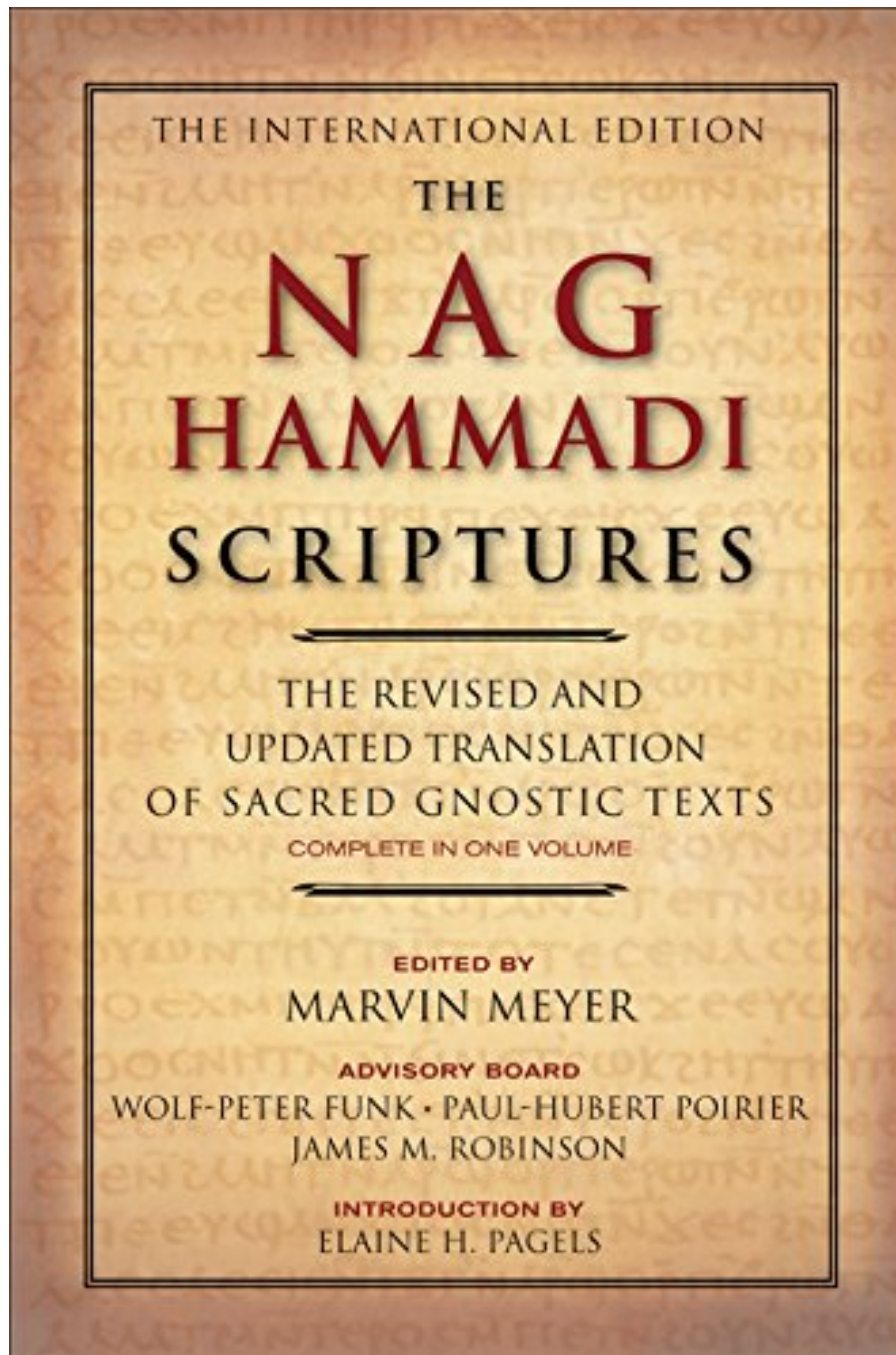


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Most helpful customer reviews

319 of 328 people found the following review helpful.

Whoever seeks life, this is their wealth. For the world's rest is false, and its gold and silver are deceptive.

By John E. Hart

For the title of this review I chose an excerpt from "The Dialogue of the Savior" which belonged to NHC III,5. On my quest to better understanding 'gnosticism' I first read Andrew Phillip Smith's book titled, "The Gnostics". His brief treatise on the overall scope of what gnosticism is really all about provided me with a more concise understanding of this exhaustive, scholarly translation of the Nag Hammadi text.

This book is by far the most complete and in-depth translation to date and will probably never be equaled. Scholars such as Marvin Meyer, Elaine Pagels, Madeleine Scopello, Einar Thomassen and John D. Turner are just a few of the names involved with the translation of the Nag Hammadi scriptures. There is an array of backgrounds involved which ultimately provide very different interpretations of the text, but this diversity only helps the reader to draw his/her own conclusions as to interpretation.

One positive aspect to this book is decision NOT to guess what the translation might have been. Quite frankly, much of the text within certain tractates were severely damaged and/or missing. Instead of guessing or including what the text may have said, Meyer and others, merely let the reader know that much of the text itself is missing. This is, of course refreshing, as many modern translations of either other Gnostic or Essene texts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, authors will simply insert modern lexicons assuming that it follows suit to what we have today. Meyer and company don't do this, instead they provide a well documented, heavily footnoted, scholarly work. On many occasions, they provide un-biased opinions of certain words and supply the several meanings to what the word could have meant, allowing for the reader themselves to feel as if they are partaking in the translation.

Many of the text can be deciphered as being either Sethian or Valentinian (the names of the two 'truly' gnostic Christian sects). In the beginning of each tractate, an in-depth analysis of the text is provided, supplying interpretation and the dating of the text as well as to the importance of each.

One such text that doesn't perceive to have an origin is the Gospel of Thomas. It has no markers of being either Sethian or Valentinian and as some scholars have suggested, could very well be the 'Q' source that the Synoptic Gospels themselves are based off of. This is by far a minority viewpoint, but nevertheless, an intriguing claim.

This is a must have treatise to any library and it is clear that the Gnostics were well ahead of their time concerning "gnosis," or knowledge, they had achieved with interpretation of the scriptures, something they felt no one else had.

117 of 120 people found the following review helpful.

Being in the gnosis...

By FrKurt Messick

This book finds an honoured place on my shelves, next to the older edition of the Nag Hammadi scriptures assembled under the direction of James M. Robinson, who provides the preface (and much underlying research). According to Robinson, 'The Nag Hammadi Scriptures is a collection of thirteen papyrus codices -

bound books, not scrolls - that were buried near the city of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt most likely in the second half of the fourth century CE.' The texts contained here are a fascinating collection, bringing to light literally dozens of texts that had previously been unknown for over a millennium, although about ten of them are in such fragmentary form that it still cannot be said that these have been recovered. It is supposed by many scholars that this is a collection that was buried by Gnostics, but this is not without controversy.

This text has as a leader over the title the phrase 'The International Edition', for good reason. There have been three different projects, one in English, one in French, and one in German, over the past generation, the fruits of which have been brought together here in one volume. The representatives from each team are James M. Robinson, Wolf-Peter Funk, and Paul-Hubert Poirier, for the English, German, and French research projects respectively. The introduction is provided by Marvin Meyer and Elaine Pagels, both names known to people who study Gnostic and early biblical texts.

In the introduction, Meyers and Pagels offer the caution that the title 'Nag Hammadi Scriptures' cannot imply a canon of scriptures similar to the Bible or Quran - these are texts that were less a sacred (and closed) collection and more of a general gathering of pieces that were considered inspired and inspirational. The original language of the texts is Coptic, although these may have been translated originally from Greek.

Coptic is the Egyptian language written with the Greek alphabet; there are different dialects of Coptic, and the Nag Hammadi library shows at least two. They were found in codex form (book form rather than scroll form), discovered in the mid 1940s, just a few years prior to the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls (another reason for the combination of the texts in the public imagination). However, even this discovery led to others - there was an earlier find that made its way to Berlin (rather like the earlier 'Dead Sea Scroll' that had been found in Cairo), and a third collection discovered in the 1970s, and passed from hand to hand until retrieved by scholars (now known as the Codex Tchacos).

Included in these texts are The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of Mary and other gospel contenders (alas, in fragmentary form--this edition carries as much of the text in translation as was recovered). The Gospel of Thomas has perhaps been the highest profile text from Nag Hammadi; it has been translated and commented upon extensively, particularly in modern scholarship which discusses gospel development. The most recent 'star' among the non-canonical gospels is the Gospel of Judas, the publication of which Meyer was involved in not long ago (taken for the first time from the Codex Tchacos discovery).

Some of the texts were known by title prior to the discovery of these manuscripts - some titles were found on heretical texts lists, and yet, the idea of heresy is a slippery one, which the authors discuss in context of the non-canonical gospels and texts found in the collection that still had a following within early Christian communities.

For purposes of scholarship, there are limitations to this volume. 'As in Nag Hammadi Deutsche, 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.' There are, however, generous notes and references that can provide much of what the average and even scholarly reader will need save for those few specialists who will no doubt know how to use this information to go further.

As an epilogue after the texts, there are four essays that discuss the different ideas within the scholarly community about the texts and Gnosticism more generally. Some have proposed abandoning the term as

inappropriate (or too vague to be useful), and others follow the lead of Ireneaus, who apparently used the terms to describe certain groups as they themselves had used it in self-reference.

This is a fascinating text, useful for those who want more insight into the kinds of spiritual writing that were circulating in addition to the canonical scriptures of the early Christians. This also provides information about what the early Christians were reacting to - and opens up new possibilities of interpretation of early Christian history and practice.

132 of 141 people found the following review helpful.

All the writings in one volume

By Aeryck S. De Sade

This is an updated release of a wonderful collection of the Gnostic writings that were found in Nag Hammadi in Egypt.

Unlike the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gnostic writings were ones that the church tried to destroy all remnants of, so as to not allow the common person to understand that a clergy class was not needed, or even meant to exist, according to the teachings of Jesus.

Over the centuries, the teachings of the Gnostics have endured through oral tradition, sometimes at great peril to those people keeping the stories, by such means of the church as damning them as heretics and killing them. No other works of early Christianity has ever been more controversial and no other writings have the early church tried so hard to dispose of, and the followers as well, as were the Gnostic writings.

When these writings were found in 1945, it brought together so many fragments from centuries of speculation and oral tradition. Obscure passages in the modern Bible that reference things unknown were finally brought to light as to their meaning, because the actual words of these texts are what was being referenced, yet hidden for so long.

This book compiles the writings in a complete volume, more complete than any other book ever has, of all the known fragments and complete works of the Gnostic scriptures. These writings are more complete in the actual first person teachings of Jesus among his disciples than even the Bible has kept, and show a picture that would have changed early Christianity forever if it would have been allowed the light of day by the church priests that sought to have them forever hidden.

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