

## Thomas A

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(21 March 2016)

Formation models have been suggested for the Gospel of Thomas.<sup>1</sup> I here propose a core comprising sayings §1-12 (my “Thomas A”), which *do not mention* Thomas, but have instead Jacob, the Brother of Jesus, as their authority figure.

**Inventory.** DeConick divides the 12 sayings into 20 passages; I subdivide further. I here give most of her Gospel parallels, and recognize a few others (in *italics*):

1 (§1)	Who finds the meaning of these will not die.	Jn
2 (§2:1)	Who seeks should seek until he finds.	
	(§2:2-4) When he finds, he will be amazed, be king, rest.	
3 (§3:1-2)	The Kingdom is not in heaven or in the sea.	Lk
	(§3:3) The Kingdom is inside you and outside you	Lk
4 (§3:4)	Who knows himself will find it.	
5 (§3:5)	You will know you are children of the Father.	
6 (§4:1)	Ask a little child about the place of life.	
7 (§4:2-3)	Many who are last will be first.	Mk Mt Lk
8 (§4:4)	And they will become single people.	
9 (§5:1)	Understand what is in front of you.	
	(§5:2) Nothing hidden will not be manifested	Mk Mt Lk
10 (§6:1)	How to fast or pray or give alms.	<i>Mk Mt Lk</i>
11 (§6:2)	Do not tell lies.	
12 (§6:3)	And what you hate, do not do.	Mt Lk
13 (§6:4)	Everything faced with truth is brought to light.	Lk
14 (§6:5)	Nothing hidden will not be manifested.	Mk Mt Lk
15 (§7:1-2)	Blessed is the lion that the man will eat.	
16 (§8:1-3)	The wise fisherman keeps the large fish.	Mt
17 (§8:4)	Who has ears to hear should listen.	Mk Mt Lk
18 (§9:1-5)	Parable of the sower.	Mk Mt Lk
19 (§10)	I have cast fire upon the world.	Lk
20 (§11:1)	Heaven will pass away.	Mk Mt Lk
21 (§11:2)	The dead are not alive; the living will not die.	
	(§11:3-4) When you were one, you became two.	
22 (§12:1)	We know you are going to leave us.	Jn
23 (§12:2)	Go to Jacob the Righteous One.	

Whatever may be the directionality between Thomas and these Gospel counterparts, we may get a better idea of the text’s own ideology by first considering those sayings which are *without* obvious Gospel counterparts.

<sup>1</sup>For a review of stratification proposals, see Plisch 15-26, Pokorný 20-25, Skinner 240-28. For DeConick’s own idea of the Thomas core (“kernel”), see **Original** 25-31.

## Thomas A Sayings Without Gospel Counterparts<sup>2</sup>

The text looks a little different for those familiar with eastern meditation tradition. Some of these non-Gospel sayings have parallels with Chinese meditation sayings in the Dào/Dǎ Jīng (DDJ), Gwǎndǎ 49, the Nèi Yè (NY) or “Inner Working,” and the Mencius (MC), all from the late 04c and early 03c:

**2 (§2:2-4).** “And when he finds, [he will be amazed. And] when he is [amazed], he will be a king. And [once he is a king], he will rest.”<sup>3</sup> For kingship, we have NY 9:6 能君萬物 “will be able to master all things.” The final goal of Chinese (and Indian) meditation is repose (níng 寧, NY 3:9) or tranquility (jìng 靜, NY 5:13).

**4 (§3:4).** Self-knowledge as the key to higher knowledge. Chinese meditation begins with the self (Nèi Yè 內業 means “The Inner Enterprise”) and ends with the universe. For the latter, see NY 19:2 萬物備存 “all things [the pleroma] will abide,” and MC 7A4 萬物皆備於我矣 “all things are complete in me.” For the former, see §5:1 below.

**5 (§3:5).** “Children of the Father” has no *Gospel* counterpart, but compare 1 Jn 3:2, “Beloved, we are God’s children now.” Exclude from consideration here.

**6 (§4:1).** “Ask a little child.” In Mk 10:14, Jesus implies that even children can understand (salvation is not a monopoly of the learned scribes), but children as *sources* of wisdom are different. For the infant as complete in virtue, and thus as a model of understanding, see DDJ 10 and DDJ 55 含德之厚，比於赤子 “He who holds virtue in its fulness, I would compare to an infant.” The infant is near to the moment of birth, and therefore is also nearer to the soul’s higher origin, and recalls it.

**8 (§4:4).** “They will become single people.” That the higher beings are ungendered is clear in Mk 12:25 (“as the angels in Heaven”), but this merging of genders is different. One way to avoid sexual *desire* is to get rid of sexual *distinctions*.

**11 (§6:2).** DeConick notes parallels in Jacob 3:14, Col 3:9, Eph 4:25. These are not Gospel sayings, but are indebted to other Christian literature. Exclude.

**15 (§7:1-2).** The lion and the human are the animal and higher aspects of man. Which will eliminate (“eat”) the other? For the danger of sexual desire to meditation, see NY 12:5, 不以官亂心 “Don’t disturb your mind with sensory input.”

**21a (§11:2).** “The dead are not alive, and the living will not die.” Those who have Life will keep it. Compare the warning in NY 6:6-7 人之所失以死，所得以生也 “when people lose it, they die; when they get it, they live,” referring to the secret Way, the path to the true self which begins with meditation.

**21b (§11:3-4).** “When you were one, you became two. When you are two, what will you do?” As in §4:4 above, the theme is the obliteration of gender distinctions, and ultimately, the elimination of the ground of sexual desire. The saying concludes with a challenge to the reader, to renounce desire and follow the Way of Life.

For analytical purposes, it turns out that the category of “Gospel saying” needs to be expanded to encompass “Christian saying.”

<sup>2</sup>Translations of Thomas (sometimes slightly adapted) are from DeConick **Original**.

<sup>3</sup>From the Greek of POxy 654:5-9. The presumably later Coptic text differs.

### The Non-Christian Sayings as the Thomas A Core

Which came first, the Gospel echoes, or the others? Is this text a Christianization of something older, or is it a heretical departure from an originally Christian position? If, as an experiment, we list only the non-Christian sayings, we get the following:

[Finding Rest]

2. Seek persistently, and you will find rest.

[The Secret]

4. The secret is within you.

6. Your child self remembers it.

[The Dangers of Sexual Desire]

8. Eliminate the dangers of attraction between the sexes.

15. Beware of carnal distractions (“the lion”), or they will consume you.

[Challenge]

21a. Those who have life will live.

21b. What will you do, since you now dwell in the realm of sexual desire?

[Conclusion].

23. Recommendation of the text patron, Jacob.

It seems that these form a reasonable progression; a small but coherent treatise on how to escape – individually, not, as with the Last Days expectation, simultaneously – from the troubles of the world. The heart of the message, avoidance of sexual desire, is now interspersed by Christian echoes which teach other things. The implication is that the non-Christian sayings are primary, and the Christian echoes are secondary.

Escaping from worldly troubles is characteristically Buddhist, as is the warning about sexual desire. It suffices to note the Eastern parallels (albeit in Chinese form), in terms of which the later identification of this text with Thomas, who was himself associated with India, the home of the meditation art, seems to make sense.

The ascent of Jesus to his divine origin in the Philippi Hymn (Php 2:6-11) may have been suggestive to the early Christians. What it may have suggested to them was that they too, if they knew how, might imitate Jesus by returning to *their* divine origin. This they would accomplish, not by following purity rules, but by self-knowledge. Philippi was the capital of Macedonia, from which Alexander had marched forth to conquer the world as far as the Indus.<sup>4</sup> Later information from the world beyond the Indus is not unlikely to have reached Alexander’s capital in the years after Alexander. The location of that hymn, in that particular town, may thus not be accidental.

<sup>4</sup>After Alexander came the Maurya Empire. Megasthenes, the Seleucid ambassador to the court of the first Maurya ruler Chandragupta (Gk “Sandrakottos,” r c0321-c0297), mentions (perhaps without understanding them very thoroughly) a group of prophets at the top of Indian society (Arrian Indica 11:1-8). By the time of Chandragupta’s grandson Asoka (r c0268-0232), full resident Buddhist monasticism existed. Asoka sought to reform some of its abuses, and also to spread Buddhism beyond his own kingdom. For 05c Chinese knowledge of Buddhism and its meditation tradition, including familiarity with the Mahâ-Parinibbâna Sutta (describing the death and ascent of the Buddha), see Brooks **Reader** 27. Ideas about meditation seem to have reached the Mediterranean world from both of these sources. Early Christianity may not be fully intelligible except from what may be called a continental perspective.

## Thomas A as the Thomas Core

There are reasons to see gThos 1-12 as a coherent text. First, the only authority mentioned is Jacob the Lord's Brother. Second, it is framed by echoes with the Gospel of John: §1 "who finds the meaning of these words will not die" ~ Jn 8:51 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death;" and §12:1 "We know you are going to leave us" ~ Jn 14:19 "Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more." This looks like a conscious literary device.

Jacob himself is plausible as the text authority; he is associated with several Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi.<sup>5</sup> A close verbal link: §2:3-4 ("rise, reign, rest") occurs in one of those texts, the 2nd Apocalypse of Jacob.<sup>6</sup> And Jacob's incessant praying ("he used to enter alone into the Temple, and be found kneeling and praying . . . so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God"),<sup>7</sup> is compatible with the meditational character of the non-Synoptic passages.

The transition to Thomas' proprietorship in §13:1-8 rejects descriptions of Jesus by Peter ("righteous angel") and Matthew ("wise philosopher), for that of Thomas: Jesus is indescribable. Thomas is told "three words;" he refuses to divulge them lest he be stoned. The "three words" motif recurs in Acts of Thomas 47. Stoning is the penalty for blasphemy, and DeConick 85 suggests a claim that Jesus is God. Jesus in the Gospel of John claimed unique *access* to God; in §13, we have *identity* with God, a claim which surely amounts to blasphemy.

Affiliation shifts occur in several texts at this time, such as the Gospels of Matthew (aligning itself with Peter in Mt 16:18-19) and of John (the same, in Jn 21).<sup>8</sup> The shift from Jacob to Thomas here may also be in part a shift from the *brother* (Jacob) to the *twin* brother (Didymus Thomas) of Jesus – clearly, a more authoritative informant.

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<sup>5</sup>DeConick 50. For discussion of all the Jacob texts, see Painter **James** 159-181.

<sup>6</sup>A faint variant ("rest and reign") also occurs in a Thomas text (Acts of Thomas 136).

<sup>7</sup>Eusebius **History** 2/23:6, quoting Hegesippus (2c; see Painter **James** 119).

<sup>8</sup>See Brooks **Alignments**.