2. Composition

*GPhil* is preserved only in a Coptic version, written on pages 51-86 of Nag Hammadi Codex II. Many pages are somewhat damaged at the outer corners.26 No other manuscripts, translations or quotes from *GPhil* have been preserved. The text is written in *scriptio continua* without subdivision or any other external indications of structure. The question whether the work has a structure, and if so what this actually is, must therefore be decided on the basis of content and textual markers of structure, like catchwords and repeated phrases or style forms (e.g. metaphors or etymological explanations). I note that the current division into paragraphs is based on theme and unity of thought. In this study I will give specific attention to the repetition of catchwords, phrases and styleforms.

The analysis involves three levels: micro-compositions on (and within) the level of paragraphs; textual units consisting of several paragraphs; and the macro-text of *GPhil* as a whole. On the macro-level, the issue of composition is very much connected with the issue of genre, which is the subject of chapter 3. In the present chapter, the focus is on paragraphs and textual units.

2.1 Current scholarship

2.1.1 Schenke’s division into paragraphs

In 1959 Hans-Martin Schenke presented a translation that divided the text into 127 ‘paragraphs’, as he called them. His division was so successful that even scholars holding different views on the character of *GPhil* began using the same enumeration. In the introduction to his translation in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* (2001), Schenke explains that his division was related from the start to the idea that *GPhil* is a collection of independent excerpts. In other words, the enumeration of the paragraphs tells the reader that he is reading a series of independent text units. Although Schenke recognizes that series of text units are often connected by a common theme or use of common key words, his presentation does not acknowledge the reoccurrence of strikingly similar units throughout the text.

In theory, one can argue that it is best to leave it to the reader to decide whether certain sentences are connected, as is done by Layton and Isenberg in the *Nag Hammadi Library*. But late-antique texts were consumed indirectly, as in a performance; even in private they were read aloud. Harry Gamble observes:27

> A text presented in scriptio continua is perplexing to the modern reader, but the ancient reader was accustomed to it and had developed the skills to approach it. ... good public reading required familiarity with the text. The initial reading of any text was inevitably experimental because it had to be decided, partly in retrospect, which of the possible construals of scriptio continua best rendered the sense. ... those decoding judgments had to be made in advance through rehearsals of the text.

Reading was considered an art that required training and preparation. Pauses and tonality gave structure to a text, to the benefit of the audience. Sometimes the text was merely an *aide-mémoire* or a summary of a considerably longer oration. The work

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27 Gamble (2005), *Books and Readers*, pp 203-205
could contain markers in the text itself for both orator and audience. Such markers were appreciated for esthetical reasons, as a mnemonic device for the orator and as structure markers for the audience. Readers today are not accustomed to the textual markers demanded by the oral performances of antiquity. If a translator does not allow for this by providing extra-textual structural markers familiar to modern readers, the translator runs the risk that these readers will comprehend the text far less clearly and coherently than ancient audiences would have. If the translator believes that *GPhil* is a letter or a speech, he can divide the text accordingly into an introduction, body text and conclusion. Schenke believes it is a *florilegium* or collection, and therefore presents the text as a numbered series of excerpts, which gives the reader the impression that *GPhil* is of the same genre as the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The division in paragraphs was quickly adopted by other scholars and has remained fairly stable over time, since it provided a rather convenient system of reference. But that does not mean that the division into exactly 127 paragraphs is correct. In his 1997 commentary, Schenke himself divided many paragraphs into two to five parts, through adding a, b, c, d, or e to the numbers. In total, he now discerns 208 segments. Layton, on the other hand, reduced the number to 107 ‘excerpts’. In this study, I will use Schenke’s 127 paragraphs as a convenient and accepted system of reference.

### 2.1.2 Turner’s analysis of sacramental language and style

Martha Lee Turner (1996) argues that a division of the text in ‘chapters’ is not defendable:

> The Gospel according to Philip, however, has frustrated most attempts to find any coherent progression of themes, while even subtle structural markers are simply not there to be found. (p 22)

Nevertheless, she does make some interesting observations regarding the use of sacramental language and style, which may mark one or two major divisions in *GPhil*. Turner analyzes the use of a number of key sacramental references, such as baptism, anointing, eucharist, redemption and bridal chamber. She observes that the density of such references is

...considerably greater between page 67 and page 74 than in the earlier pages of the document, and after the middle of page 77, virtually all interest disappears... (p 177)

This means that in §1-65 there are few occurrences of these sacramental references, in §66-109 far more, and in §110-127 virtually none at all. Furthermore, Turner also

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28 Aune (2003), *Dictionary*, pp 427-428 (under the heading ‘Ring Composition’). For textual markers as *aides-mémoire*, see Quintillian *Institutio Oratoria* 11.27-33. He discusses one type (30-31), which he disapproves of, but there were others including even visual markers on the notes themselves. Unfortunately, even though chiastic structures of entire passages (more popular in Jewish and Christian works) were also used in literary texts and sometimes in epideictic works, they are not discussed in the rhetorical handbooks, which—with the exception of Menander—are more geared to the arrangement of the judicial and deliberative genre. Cf also Quintillian’s brief remarks on the arrangements and style of the historical and ceremonial genres in 9.4.129-130.

29 In his 2003 popular translation, Jean-Yves Leloup acknowledges that this division has been disputed, but accepted it nevertheless because of its usefulness for the purpose of his popular translation: ‘Cette classification... fait de l’Évangile de Philippe une sorte de florilège de paroles, non moins énigmatiques que celles de l’Évangile de Thomas, ...’ (p 18).


identifies the middle of page 77 as the major *caesura* or break between the first three quarters and the last quarter of the document in, for example, the use of a number of other terms, the length and rhetorical structure of the units and an interest in moral exhortation. She suggests that the present *GPhil* may in fact consist of two collections of excerpts.

I agree with Turner that there is a major caesura between §109 and §110. Likewise, the increase in sacramental references also marks a caesura between §65 and §66. In the remainder of this chapter I will demonstrate that these two breaks are also exactly in line with the delineation of smaller textual units.

### 2.1.3 Painchaud’s rhetorical analysis

Louis Painchaud presented a paper at the 1996 annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature called *La composition de l’Evangile selon Philippe*. The first half of his article concerns textual markers in the composition. The importance of this approach lies in the fact that several attempts have been made to identify units on the basis of thematic unity without gaining acceptance among other scholars.\(^31\)

Firstly, Painchaud looks for compositions at the level of individual paragraphs. He shows that some of these are built around repetitive patterns of keywords or catchwords. Painchaud demonstrates that some sentences or paragraphs have repetitive patterns like AB-AB or ABC-ABC or concentric patterns like ABCBA or ABC-CBA. He finds these throughout the document, indicating that the work is more than a compilation of unedited or lightly edited excerpts, as Turner would have it.

Secondly, he looks for sub-composition marked by inclusions. He uses two criteria to identify such sub-compositions: (1) they have to be included by relatively rare words, and (2) there must be a certain level of homogeneity of thought within the longer unit. On the basis of these two criteria he discerns six words that mark inclusions:

- *Hebrew* in §1 and §6;
- *World* and *Aeon* in §7 and §127, and within this large section:
  - *Sow* and *Harvest* in §7 and §16 – and within this unit a concentric zABC-CBAz pattern (with ‘z’ standing for the including term)
  - [no inclusion between 17 and 58]
  - *Going down into the water* in §59 and §109 – and within this unit a repetitive zABCDEFG-G-ABCDEFGz pattern
  - *Knowledge of the truth* and *Free* in §110 and §123
  - *Truth* and *Images* in §124 and §127.

I have reviewed Painchaud’s arrangement and will propose a few modifications in the next section, for three reasons. Firstly, Painchaud uses a division that largely corresponds with the divisions of judicial and deliberative rhetoric, practised in the courts and councils of the Graeco-Roman world. Such arrangements are, in their pure form, seldom recognized in early Christian works, not even when we look specifically at Christian oratory. Sometimes the function of *exordium* or peroration was fulfilled by other elements of the Christian liturgy. If the document follows the structure of a baptismal instruction, then there were specific, frequently used structures for a series of instructions (see chapter 3 *Genre*). These instructions could be delivered over a

\(^31\) See for an overview Turner (1997), ‘Coherence’.
period of various days or weeks, and each has its own rhetorical structure (see chapter 4, *Rhetoric*).

Secondly, I disagree with the implicit idea that inclusion is the only way of marking textual units. True, in a chiastic or concentric pattern (ABC-D-CBA) the outer inclusion acts as boundary marker. But in repetitive patterns (ABC-ABC) the repetition of the first key word (A) is not used to conclude a section but to open the second half. In progressive patterns (1,2,3) there may not even be a repeated textual marker. An author could also start each new passage with the next letter of the alphabet or of a certain name or phrase. Quintillian’s *Institutio Oratoria* describes in some figures of speech that orators may use, and encourages the use of various techniques to avoid monotony. Nevertheless, as George Kennedy observed, the use of chiastic and other structures to organize larger sections is neglected in the ancient rhetorical handbooks. It seems particularly popular in Hebrew poetry and prose, as well as later Jewish and early Christian writing.

Finally, I disagree with Painchaud when he defines inclusions solely by relatively rare words. I understand that such a criterion yields fewer potential units than if one looks for more frequently occurring words. But nowhere in the ancient works on rhetoric have I found a rule stating that inclusion in units must be marked by rare words. Painchaud’s argument that the words have to stand out is not confirmed by evidence from late antiquity. Textual markers could be quite subtle, especially if their prime role was to serve as mnemonic devices for the speaker.

## 2.2 Identification of textual units

In this section, I review Painchaud’s inclusions and assess whether also other structuring techniques are discernible.

### 2.2.1 Seven units before Turner’s first caesura

**Unit (i).** Painchaud rightly takes the word Hebrew as a textual marker. This word is the keyword in the first passage (mentioned twice) and one of the two keywords in §6. But I do not believe it forms an inclusion with §16. I think a good case can be made for a repetitive pattern (catchwords are in italics):

A. §1: A Hebrew man produces Hebrews...
   B. §3: Warning against ‘inheriting from the dead’.
   C. §4b: ‘since the day that Christ came’.

A. §6: In the days that we were Hebrews, we were orphans...
   B. §7-8: Warning against ‘harvesting in the winter’.
   C. §9: ‘Christ came’.

The question now is whether this proposed pattern is reflected in the contents of the paragraphs. In an ABC-ABC pattern, the individual paragraphs not only function in a sub-unit (ABC), they also have a relationship with their counterparts in the other subunit (AA, BB, CC). Even in the middle paragraphs (BB), which have no

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32 For variation in style, see Quintillian *Institutio Oratoria* 9.4.146, and specifically regarding figures of thought in 9.2.5. See also Augustine *On Christian Doctrine* 4.22(51)-23(52).
33 Kennedy (1984), *New Testament*
catchword connection, this is the case: *Inheriting* in this *cosmos* is like *harvesting* in winter.

**Unit (ii).** If the previous unit ends at §10, then the second unit should start at §11. And indeed, even though not as tightly composed as the opening unit, §11-16 can be identified as a second unit. The unit as a whole is clearly expanding on the first unit. It clarifies the problem that Christ came to solve (in §12 and §15), and connects the theme of the harvest to the divine truth in §16. It also adds a whole new element: the powers use names like *God* and *Father* to mislead people. The unit is comparable in size to the first unit and must be discerned from the series of disputes in §17-24. A repetitive pattern can be identified:

A. §11: The *names* contain a great error.
   B. §12: The son becomes Father if he ‘clothed himself with the name of the Father’.
   C. 12b: *Truth* brought forth *many* names to teach about the One.

A. §13: The powers wanted to mislead man through the *names* of those who are good.
   B. §15: Christ came to feed man with the ‘food of Man’.
   C. §16b: *Truth* is sown in *many* places, but only few will see it harvested.

Again the middle paragraphs share no catchwords but contain two related metaphors: to be clad with the name of the father and to be fed with the bread from heaven.

**Unit (iii).** Painchaud sees no inclusions until §59. But a different structuring technique can be found in §17-24. This unit is organized as a series of disputes with other Christians regarding names and associated doctrines. *GPhil* claims that the names have deceived the others. Each dispute is introduced in a similar way:

§17: ‘Some say ... They are in error.’
§21: ‘The ones who say ... are in error.’
§23: ‘Some are afraid... They do not know...’
   ‘I find fault with the others who say... both are wrong.’

There is no repetition of catchwords or similar phrases between paragraphs §25-42. Based on their content, however, I propose two units:

**Unit (iv).** In §25-31 there is an alternation between references to rituals (baptism and eucharist), and passages about salvation (the incarnation and the regeneration).

**Unit (v).** The unit of §32-42 may have a repetitive structure: it provides an exegesis on the basis of names (§32-33 and §38-39), shows how the Holy Spirit works through the powers (§34 and §40), and discusses two types of offspring (§35-37 and §41-42).
Unit (vi). This unit is enclosed by §43 and §54. It appears that other paragraphs can be grouped in a concentric pattern as well:

A. §43: God is a dyeer;
   - remark about baptism.
B. §44: Seeing in the other aeon is becoming.
C. §45-46: Faith receives, love gives;
   - receive the Lord.
D. 47: Names of Christ.
   E. §48: A comparison of God’s children with a pearl that is anointed.
D. §49: Names of people;
   - receive the name ‘Christian’.
C. §50-51: Men are sacrificed to God.
B. §52: Some people travel and search without ever seeing.
   - Remark about eucharist (§53).
A. §54: The Son of Man came as a dyeer.

The relationship between the other catchwords is less obvious than that between §43 and §54. It is possible that the two ways of seeing connect §44 and §52. There may also be a link between the sacrifice of men in §50 and the ‘giving’ in §45, if the latter text carries the same connotation as I Corinthians 13:3: ‘…if hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing’.

Unit (vii). Finally, there may be a unit from §55 until the caesura between §65 and §66, observed by Turner. I have not identified any textual markers to support this. But there appear to be three sections on hidden differences between gnostic and mainstream Christians:

• §55-58: The differences in love for the Lord, in truly seeing him and in position between those with and without gnostis are not apparent in this world.
• §59-61a: The mystery of baptism looks the same in gnostic and mainstream Christianity, but the hidden mystery of unification is completely different,
• §61b-65: The fate after death of mainstream and gnostic Christians is different.

2.2.2 Three units between the two caesuras

Painchaud identifies ‘going down into the water’ as the term enclosing §59-109. I agree with him that ‘going down into the water’ is an important text element in §109, which may well be a textual marker to close off a section. As we saw, Martha Lee Turner identifies a caesura between §109 and §110. But §59 is not the only occurrence of this phrase before §109. It is also used in §89, §97 and §101. The question therefore is which occurrences are indeed textual markers, and in what type of pattern they occur.

In support of his identification of §59-109 as a unit, Painchaud suggests a repetitive zABCDEF-G-A(z)BCDEFG pattern. Yet there are several arguments against this. Firstly, this section, almost one third of the entire document, would be considerably longer than any of the units found so far. It is always possible to find words repeated in a long section, but the great variation of the intervals between the proposed textual markers does not support the idea that they position various paragraphs into an overall structure. Secondly, §59 falls before the change in

35 A similar contrast is found in Enneads 1.6.8b-9 of Plotinus. He contrasted seeing with the mind (becoming One) and seeing with mortal eyes (a pedestrian journey that does not lead to the One).
sacramental language that Turner points out. This minor caesura would lose its meaning if it is within a textual unit. The final reason not to take §59-109 as a unit, lies in the fact that a unit with a more convincing pattern can be discerned in §66-75.

Unit (viii). This unit is enclosed by §66 and §75 (A). The central paragraphs, §69-71, are organized concentrically (CDC). The remaining paragraphs (B) are less tightly organized, but do share a number of catchwords, like rebirth, cross and bridal chamber.

A. §66: Water, light and fire. The fire is the chrism, the light is the fire.
B. §67-68: Truth came in images; rebirth, the resurrection/cross and the bridal chamber. Remark about Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
   C. §69a: I came to make those from below like those from above and those from outside like from inside.
      - Perdition is outside, nothing else is there.
   D. §69e: Go into the inner chamber.
      - Inside is the plerôma, there is nothing else.
B. §70-71: Christ came and brought those inside out and those outside in.
A. §75: Baptism in light and water. The light is the chrism.

Unit (ix). There is no inclusion to mark §76-88 as a textual unit, but there is an alternation between passages about the bridal chamber and about Adam:

A. §76: The temple as metaphor for the bridal chamber.
B. §78-80: Adam and Eve.
A. §81: Jesus revealed the bridal chamber, the plerôma.
A. §82. Jesus revealed the great bridal chamber.
B. §83-85: Adam and the virgin.
A. §86-88: The children of the bridal chamber.

Unit (x). The remaining four occurrences of ‘going down into the water’ are found in §89, §97, §101 and §109. If all four occurrences concern textual markers, we would have a three-part textual unit. I will first consider the upper part, enclosed by the first two occurrences. It has a concentric pattern (ABC-D-CBA):

A. §89: Jesus went down into the water.
B. §90b: Baptism is great.
   C. §91-92: Joseph planted a paradise. The Tree of Life gives the chrism.
   D. §93: The world eats corpses; Jesus brought food from another place.
   C. §94: God planted a paradise with the Tree of Knowledge.
B. §95: The chrism is lord over baptism.
A. §97: Someone went down into the water.
The middle part is enclosed by the second and third occurrence. It is shorter, but closely related to the upper part: Again it refers to a sacrament, in this case the eucharist (B). There is also the comparative element we saw in the first part (baptism is ‘big’, the chrism is something ‘above’ it): there is something ‘higher’ than the eucharist. The central statement (D, like §93) is again about the world:

A. §97: Someone went down into the water.
B. §98: Bread, cup and oil. There is something higher.
   D. §99-100: The world is an inferior creation.
B. §100: The cup contains wine and water.
A. §101: Someone goes down into the water.

The final part is enclosed by the last two occurrences. Apart from this inclusion, there are no textual markers, but there are reference to union and ascent (the Bs).

A. §101: Someone goes down into the water.
B. §102-104: The union of the divine race.
   D. §105: Only those who know the all that they have will enjoy them.
A. §109: We go down into the water.

2.2.3 Two closing units after Turner’s major caesura

Unit (xi). I agree with Painchaud that knowledge of the truth in §110 is a textual marker. These are practically the opening words after the caesura following §109 and also occur in the end of §123. In inner inclusion is found in the opposition between Truth and Ignorance as mothers. Thematically, there are three sections without any kind of strict pattern:
• §110-116a concerns the function of love and its relationship with knowledge.
• §116b-122 discusses how the gnostic Christian can avoid grieving for another soul by hiding his knowledge from those who cannot bear it.
• §123a explains what should not remain hidden: the root of evil must be exposed in order to destroy evil. The example of Abraham may again refer to John 8 (Abraham saw).

Unit (xii). The final textual unit consists of §124-127. There are a few catchwords in an ABABA-pattern:

A. §124: The mysteries of truth are revealed, though in type and image.
   B. §125a: Eschatology: the collapse of the cosmos
   A. §125b: We go in by means of lowly types.
   B. §125c: Eschatology: the restoration of the plerôma
   A. §127: The initiate has received the truth in images.
2.3 Conclusion

Schenke’s enumeration of 127 paragraphs functions as a textual marker for modern readers. It suggests that there is no structure above the level of paragraphs. But GPhil is not an unstructured collection of paragraphs. My analysis of textual markers suggests that there are twelve sub-compositions, and that this division is compatible with a division into three parts on the basis of the two caesuras identified by Turner. There are seven units before the first caesura, three units in the middle part, and two units after the second caesura. This structure can be depicted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>level 1 (3)</th>
<th>level 2 (12)</th>
<th>level 3 (127)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 units</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 parts</td>
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<td>21 paragraphs</td>
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<td>4 paragraphs</td>
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</table>

The units are structured by various techniques. Six out of twelve units are marked by an inclusion. There are three units with a repetitive pattern and three with a concentric pattern. One unit contains a series of disputes; another unit contrasts two groups in various settings. Three units apply some kind of alternation. The tenth unit is not only longer than the preceding units, it also has the most sophisticated composition, with three concentric subunits. The eleventh unit has three sections and an inclusor.

In some cases the structure would have been apparent to an attentive audience, like the series of disputes or some of the more prominent inclusions. In many cases, however, the textual markers are quite subtle and may have functioned only as a mnemonic device.