9. Provenance

In this chapter I evaluate indications of provenance to see how GPhil describes its own time and place. A preliminary remark applies. If the work consists of notes for a series of baptismal instructions, the essence of catechesis is that the teacher transmits the tradition that he himself received at his own baptism. Most baptismal ideas and concepts preceded the teacher by many years, although he, as the instructor, was responsible for the final composition and wording.

9.1 Current scholarship

GPhil is usually dated, often tentatively, to the late second or third century. Most scholars, beginning with Eric Segelberg, have argued for a Syrian provenance of GPhil – or for a number of its excerpts in the case of those who argue that it is an anthology.\(^{454}\) Most scholars take the Syriac etymologies as a strong indicator of its background. Isenberg argued that (1) the etymologies, (2) the similarities with ‘Eastern sacramental practice and catecheses’ and (3) ascetic tendencies all point to Syria. Einar Thomassen, however, notes in a footnote:\(^{455}\)

> ‘[O]nly the first [point] carries any weight, though discussions of the meaning of Semitic words do not themselves necessarily indicate a Syrian-Palestinian geographical environment....
> The second point is wrong as far as the eastern sacramental practices are concerned...
> The last point about ascetic ethics ... is highly debatable.’

On the basis of my analyses regarding the ritual behind GPhil (chapters 4 and 5) and its social setting (chapter 7), I agree with Thomassen. GPhil is not highly ascetic, as it uses wine in the eucharist (§100) and displays a relatively positive attitude towards marriage (§103 and §122). The sacramental practice follows a western mainstream Christian pattern. Isenberg and Ménard note that the bridal imagery shows affinity with the Syrian Odes of Salomon and the writings of the later Ephrem of Edessa. This does not prove, however, that the document came from these areas. Valentinus himself came from Egypt and in that same period the Syrian Cerdo taught in Rome. Valentinians described by Irenaeus used the same imagery and even the fourth-century Ambrose of Milan used bridal imagery in his mystagogy. The remaining point, which Thomassen credits with some weight, is the matter of the etymologies. Bentley Layton writes in the introduction to GPhil:\(^{456}\)

> [Other excerpts] refer to etymologies in Syriac, the Semitic language (a dialect of Aramaic) used in Edessa and western Mesopotamia; these must be the work of a Valentinian theologian of the East, writing in a bilingual milieu such as Edessa.

There are several problems with this statement:

- Currently the term ‘Syriac’ is often understood as referring to Aramaic spoken in late antiquity in Edessa. However GPhil uses a Greek-Egyptian word, *ment-Syros*, that could also be translated as ‘Syrian’. This Greek and Egyptian word was used


\(^{455}\) Thomassen (2005), Spiritual Seed, p 400.

\(^{456}\) Layton (1987), Gnostic Scriptures, p 325.
for all of Syria, and could also include Palestine. The language group referred to by this name was Aramaic, of which Hebrew is a close relative. Josephus and the Talmud Yerushalmi also use Syrian as an equivalent to Aramaic in general. Sometimes the word referred to all Semitic languages in the region (including Hebrew and Arabic).

- A theologian does not have to work in a bilingual milieu in order to use an etymology. Philo in Egypt, and Plutarch in Greece, often used etymologies, seemingly without full command of the source languages. Augustine in North Africa encouraged preachers to make use of lists of etymological explanations, such as for the Hebrew word ‘Siloam’. One such list is P.Oxy. 2745 with Aramaic and Hebrew etymologies; another list with Hebrew and Aramaic etymologies is Hieronymus’ *Onomastica Sacra*.

- A bilingual milieu does not require a theologian to produce etymologies. This would rather require entire translations of difficult passages for those not perfectly fluent in Greek. See, for example, Egeria’s account of the catecheses in bilingual Jerusalem (4th century CE):

  ‘The bishop ... interprets all that takes place in baptism. ... He always speaks in Greek, and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac so that everyone can understand what he says.’ (47.1-2)

The question is whether a critical review of the passages concerned supports the consensus view that *GPhil* was written in a place like Antioch or Edessa. If not, other indicators in the text should be reviewed.

### 9.2 Analysis

#### 9.2.1 The etymologies

The etymologies are found in §19, 47, and 53:

§19 ‘Jesus’ is a name that is hidden; ‘Christ’ is a name that is revealed - therefore, indeed, Jesus does not exist not in any language, but his name is ‘Jesus’, just as he was called. Also ‘Christ’ is his name: in the Syrian language it is ‘Messiah’, but in Greek it is ‘Christ’. Surely all the others have it according to everyone’s own language. The ‘Nazarene’ is the revealed of the hidden one.

In §19, the teacher shows how a crucial title of Jesus, *Messiah*, is translated into everyone’s language. The word ‘Messiah’ is of course not specifically Edessan, but rather the Aramaic title that the first Jewish believers gave to Jesus. This title was then translated into the languages of later believers. The language of the speaker and his audience is Greek, they speak of the *Christos*; the ‘others’ have their own languages. The speaker says that ‘Jesus’ is a hidden name; the name is used without translation in other languages (unlike Messiah/Christ). Every nation calls him ‘Jesus’.

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460 *On Christian Doctrine*, 16.
This point works only if his audience is not bilingual in Greek and Aramaic/Hebrew. For an Aramaic-speaker, it would not be a ‘hidden’ name.

§47 The apostles before us called out this way: ‘Jesus, the Nazoraean, Messiah’, which is ‘Jesus, the Nazoraean, Christ’. The last name is ‘Christ’; the first is ‘Jesus’. The one in the middle is ‘the Nazarene’. ‘Messiah’ has two meanings: both ‘the christ (=the anointed)’ and ‘the measured one’. ‘Jesus’ in Hebrew is ‘Salvation’, ‘Nazara’ is ‘Truth’, The Nazarene, then is (the one from) the Truth. It is Christ who was measured. The Nazarene and Jesus are the ones who were measured.

In §47, the word Messiah is given explicitly on the authority of the apostles. The apostles handed down the correct names and rituals (§95). The meaning of ‘Syriac’ in §19, when referring to the Messiah, is therefore not meant in the narrow sense, but rather in the broad sense of ‘Aramaic’, i.e. the language of the apostles.

Next, the speaker gives the ‘Hebrew’ meaning of the words Jesus and, it seems, Nazara. In late antiquity the words ‘Hebrew’ and Syriac/Aramaic often overlapped in meaning and it is unclear whether the speaker makes a conscious distinction:

• The etymology of Messiah works in both Aramaic and Hebrew. The second meaning conveys a Christian paradox: the immeasurable God has been ‘measured’ in Jesus. Jesus is in Truth, and Truth is in the visible Christ. This earthly Christ has a measured body, in terms of §26 a ‘small’ body.

• The etymology for Jesus is based on the Hebrew language. Although the strict meaning would be ‘Yahweh redeems’, the rendering ‘redemption’ is already present in Matthew 1:21 and not uncommon in Jewish and Christian writers.

• The etymology for Nazara, which Schenke takes to refer to Nazareth, seems incorrect. We know of no such word with the meaning of ‘truth’ in Hebrew or Aramaic. In fact, the remark in §19 is linguistically more accurate: ‘the Nazarene ... reveals what is hidden’. In Hebrew, the verbal form can mean ‘to hide’ or ‘to keep secret’. As Ménard explains in his commentary, the word is used in this sense by the Mandaeans, who also speak a form of Aramaic. The nasuraia is the one initiated in the ‘secrets [or hidden things] of the truth’ (nasirutha).

Ignatius, a church leader in Antioch (circa 69-107 CE), calls Jesus the High Priest ‘who alone is entrusted with the secret things of God’. Conceivably in bilingual Antioch, the link between Nazarene and this title had already been made. In GPhil, it seems that the etymology travelled through the hands of people who did not have a full command of Hebrew and Aramaic. It seems that our speaker and his audience did not know that §19 contains the translation and §47 only the conclusion that these things are ‘the hidden truth of God’. This again argues against a bilingual setting of this passage in GPhil.

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462 As Schenke notes in his commentary, this was first pointed out by Van Unnik in 1963, on the basis of the parallel in Irenaeus’ Against Heresies 4.4.2.
463 Werner Foerster notes that this etymology is also given in Jesus Sirach 46:1, Philo On the Changes of Names 121, Clement of Alexandria, Instructor 3.12.98, Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystical Catecheses. 10.13 (‘according to the Hebrews: “savior”), and Chrysostom Homily on Matthew 2.2; Eusebius Demonstration of the Gospel 4.17.23 has the full and correct etymology. See Foerster ‘“Inpouoî” in: Kittel (ed.) and Bromiley (trans.) (1965), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament vol. III, p. 284-293.
464 Schenke (1997), Philippus, p. 223.
466 Letter to Philadelphia (8-9).
The text, as it stands, suggests that §47 refers to something like a liturgical formula. In connection to the Aramaic title Messiah, the form Nazorean is used. Elsewhere in §19 and §47 the form Nazarene is used, as if this is the term more familiar to the audience. This would give some support to a non-oriental provenance of these passages. It may well be that our teacher explains an Aramaic liturgical formula, as some Valentinians did in Rome or Gaul. According to Irenaeus, they used ‘Hebrew’ names in their baptismal rites. The use of the ‘correct’ language is important in any ritual, not the least in late antiquity. For many, the divine names needed to be pronounced correctly in order to be effective. The use of Aramaic would support the claim that the rituals go back to the first apostles and, ultimately, to Jesus and the Father, who anointed Jesus (§95). In Against Heresies 1.21.3, the expression ‘Jesus Nazaria’ is interpreted by these Valentinians to mean ‘Savior of Truth’. But the translation ‘truth’, as we saw above, is secondary. In fact, Nazaria in Irenaeus is very close to the Syriac: نازريا. Likewise, Nazara in §47, does not have to refer to a Greek form of Nazareth, but may simply mean Nazarene. This is also suggested by the sentence that follows in §47: ‘Truth then is the Nazarene,’ the latter being the term familiar to the audience.

Finally, we have a reference to a name in §53, again in the context of a ritual:

§53 The *eucharist* is Jesus, for he is called in the Syrian language ‘Pharisatha’, which is ‘the one spread out’. For Jesus came to be crucified to the *cosmos*.

As Ménard pointed out (see chapter 5.3.4 above), Syriac Christians called a piece of bread, that was ‘broken’ off a eucharistic bread, ‘prista’ (singular). The plural ‘perisata’ underlies this passage in the *Gospel of Philip*. It is probably the Aramaic equivalent for the Greek ‘klasmata’ (broken pieces), but the language is not specifically Syriac. There is indeed a play of words between the Aramaic verbs for breaking and spreading. But the speaker’s ‘translation’ in the singular (‘the one who is …’) is wrong. Again we see that the teacher transmits genuine information, but without having a full command of the original language.

I conclude that, in these excerpts from the *Gospel of Philip*, the word ‘Syrian language’ denotes Aramaic as the language of the apostles, rather than the Syriac of

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467 Most translators, however, prefer to correct the text and translate ‘... called ‹him› this way: ...’, or ‘... called ‹the Lord› this way: ...’.
468 Cf Mimouni “Les Nazoréens. Recherche étymologique et historique,” in: *Revue Biblique* vol. 105, Paris 1998, p. 208-68. The (single) Aramaic word that is used to translate both forms, is closest to Nazorean; the Greek Nazorean (13 times in the NT and never in Mark) is derived from the Aramaic, whereas the form Nazarene (6 times in the NT, mostly in Marc and twice in Luke) derives from the Greek text for Nazareth (p. 217-222). In the Latin NT, as in Latin church fathers, the form Nazarene is preferred. I disagree with Mimouni, where he tries to see a distinction in meaning between Nazorean and Nazarene in the *Gospel of Philip* (p. 229). Following Ménard (*op. cit.* p. 139), he believes that Nazorean refers to Jesus’ hidden divinity and Nazarene to his revealed humanity. But §19 identifies ‘Jesus’ as the hidden one and ‘Christ’ as the revealed one. The Nazarene is the middle term that connects the revealed Christ and the hidden Jesus. Also, if Nazarene would refer to his humanity only, it is strange that §47 equates Nazarene to Truth, which is a divine concept in the *Gospel of Philip* (*cf* §12, 16, 67, 110, 123, and 127).
469 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1.21. Note that they too use the form Nazarene in their Greek ritual text.
470 Cf the use of Egyptian in rituals by Isis-worshippers around the Mediterranean, Burkert (1987), *Ancient Mystery Cults*, p 38-40.
471 It finds a parallel in the Palestinian Aramaic Nazorah for Nazarene. See Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff (1998), *Corpus*, p 251. I suggest that the translation from the Greek text of Matthew and Mark may have led to the use of zayn instead of tsadé.
473 The verb is also used for the breaking of the bread by Jesus in Mark 6:41; see Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff (1998), *Corpus*, p 100.
some later Christians. The speaker used Aramaic and Hebrew etymologies just like other Jewish, and Christian teachers did.\textsuperscript{474} For them, etymology was a means to find learned interpretations, with the authority of the original language. Some Valentinians used Hebrew or Aramaic in their liturgical formulae (or words that they thought to be Hebrew and Aramaic), and this may well have been the case here as well. Contrary to scholarly consensus, these etymologies are not at all evidence of a Syrian or bilingual provenance. They are ‘second-hand’, and neither speaker nor audience had enough knowledge of Aramaic and Hebrew to correct minor mistakes. Their language, as is explicitly stated in §19, was Greek.

Greek was also spoken in Egypt, Libya, Cyprus, Asia Minor, the Rhône valley, Southern Italy and, of course, Greece. Judging from the inscriptions discussed by Lampe, Valentinians in Rome still used Greek in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century CE.

\subsection*{9.2.2 Indications from previous analyses}

For this discussion of the provenance of \textit{GPhil}, I will briefly summarize the implications derived from previous chapters. In chapter 3 (genre), I demonstrated that the length and three-part structure of \textit{GPhil} fits well with second and third century mainstream and gnostic Christian practice. The catecheses are more developed than those of the first century and the entire series is shorter than those of the fifth century. It seems these developments took place throughout the Mediterranean, but our sources are scarce.

In chapters 5 and 6 (ritual), we saw that the form of the initiation rite is western, with chrismation following baptism. There is even a minor rite involving the ‘salt of Sophia’ that is attested only by a Roman source. From the chapters on rhetoric and social setting (4 and 7), it appears that \textit{GPhil} shares this rite with its direct mainstream Christian environment. With Thomassen, I believe that it is unlikely that both mainstream and Valentinian Christianity would consider post-baptismal chrismation an apostolic tradition, unless its adoption preceded the dispute between the two in the mid-second century. The current scholarly consensus is that post-baptismal chrismation started in the west and migrated to the east. However, until the 7\textsuperscript{th} century CE, eastern Syria did not adopt post-baptismal chrismation.\textsuperscript{475} \textit{GPhil} claims that chrismation is an apostolic tradition. In other words, the rite is considerably older than \textit{GPhil} and there seems to be no debate about this within the mainstream Christian environment. This clearly rules out eastern Syria as the place of origin.

Chapter 7 also indicates that from a social perspective we should be looking for a Graeco-Roman city with a significantly united Christian presence in the period before Valentinians were cut off from mainstream Christianity. The community was probably urban and may have counted among its members some relatively well-to-do and educated people, but also family members, slaves and clients. Some members may have owned country estates. For \textit{GPhil}, mainstream Christianity is the reference environment. It seems that one or more gnostic Christian communities recruited initiates from the larger mainstream Christian community. Despite the polemics, the teacher does not include references to major differences within mainstream Christianity such as those that occurred with Ebonites towards 100 CE in Palestine.

\footnote{Compare the use of Hebrew and Greek etymologies in sermons today. Most of the times, the audience does not speak those languages and often the preacher, too, is not fluent in them. Nevertheless, the use of these languages gives the preacher a certain authority and allows him/her to emphasize points that were not immediately clear in the (translated) texts.}

\footnote{Murray (2006/1975), \textit{Symbols}, p 21.}
with Montanists in the late second century in Asia Minor, or during the Novatian
schism in the west in 250 CE. Both gnostic and mainstream Christians claimed
descent from apostles and apostolic men. This claim became generally used in
discussions with Marcionites and gnostic Christians from Hegesippus onward (155
CE). We have also seen that Christianity was already detached from Judaism, as was
generally the case after the three Jewish wars, with the exception of Syria and
Palestine, where it seems that Jewish Christianity remained significant until the end of
the second century. I also concluded that the group still functioned as far as possible
inside the larger Christian community, even though tensions were already present.
The situation seems comparable to the one that Tertullian described (circa 200 CE in
North Africa). This situation seems to have ended in some major cities like Rome
around the end of the second century, but in many other cities in the first half of the
third century. In some areas in the East and Egypt, it may have lasted considerably
longer. This indicates that we should date the document before the early third century
if we position it in the west, or before the later third century if we position it in the
east.

In chapter 7.1.1 and 7.2.2 above, we saw that, in line with Tertullian’s account of
the Valentinians he knew, *GPhil* seems to accept a number of the writings that belong
to what we now call the New Testament, as authoritative scripture. The majority of
New Testament writings were accepted as authoritative from about the middle of the
second century (in the west) or from the early third century (in the east). The idea of a
canon seems to have been stimulated by the shorter canon that Marcion proposed in
the mid-second century. At the same time, apocryphal notions have also been
preserved, most notably the tradition ascribed to Philip about the cross in the garden
of Joseph. Of particular interest is the possible reference to a mainstream Christian
apocalypse that described torments in hell. According to Moreschini and Norelli, such
writings developed out of ‘Orphic Pythagorean and Jewish apocalypses’. The
picture of hell is clearly Hellenistic. The earliest specimen we know of is the
*Apocalypse of Peter*, which is dated before 135 CE and is assumed to have come from
Palestine or Syria. According to the *Canon Muratori* (Italy, ca 200 CE), its authority
was as much debated as that of the *Apocalypse of John*. Clement (Egypt, 200 CE)
accepted it as authentic. The closest parallel to the torments of Christian clergy in hell
(§65) is found in the mainstream *Apocalypse of Paul*, dated to ca 400 CE. The
rhetoric in §65 against mainstream Christians on the basis of an apostolic apocalypse
is understandable in the light of the references by Clement and Origen. The above
observations correspond with the dating in recent decades of the second century
onward.

Finally, there is the theological context, assessed in chapter 8. If *GPhil* belongs to
the Italian school and stands in the tradition of Heracleon, then we can imagine a
trajectory from Rome (in the 160s CE) to Alexandria, where Heracleon may have
moved and where his writings were preserved by gnostic Christians and quoted by
Clement and Origen. The presence of another gnostic Christian group, possibly
Oriental Valentinians, also points to Alexandria, where the same Clement preserved
excerpts from Theodotus, a teacher in the Oriental School.

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476 Metzger (1987), *Canon*, chapters 4-6.
479 I also note that there is no explicit quotation from other Nag Hammadi texts, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*,
although the document frequently refers to texts from the New Testament and apocrypha.
480 It seems that most of the Valentinians in Carthage known to Tertullian had affinity with the followers of
Ptolemy.
9.2.3 Other evidence

As we saw in 7.2.4, the objective of the restrictions on sharing *gnosis* in §117-119 was to avoid tension with mainstream Christians. There is no indication that it was to avoid persecution by the authorities. In the first century, there were persecutions under Nero (in Rome) and Domitian. In the first half of the second century persecutions were irregular and local. We see an increase in persecutions, especially in the west, in the 170s CE. Another series of persecutions follows between 200 and 203 CE, now mostly in North Africa and Egypt. After this, there is a period with little or no persecution until 235 CE (Rome, Palestine and Cappadocia). In 247 CE, persecutions start in Alexandria and spread across the empire under Decian (250 CE).  

Interestingly, we find a reference to persecutions in a fragment of Heracleon, where he comments on Matthew 10:32-33. Heracleon seems to be reacting to the emphasis in mainstream Christianity on confessing before the authorities in the sense of witnessing on pain of death. In *GPhil*, however, the confession in §49 is in front of the archons, not the authorities. The question is not ‘Are you a Christian?’ as in the acts of the martyrs, but rather ‘Who are you?’ as in the interrogation after death in Egyptian religion. Only those who know who they are and who their true father and mother are, will reach the other Aeon. The absence in *GPhil* of references to persecutions by the authorities is no decisive argument for its dating. Nevertheless, the absence is better understood if the document comes from a time with relatively few persecutions.

The same passage also sheds light on the ethnic or cultural self-perception of the audience: it speaks of Jews, Romans, barbarians and Greeks, slaves and free men. Greeks, including those who had assimilated in Hellenistic culture, contrasted themselves with ‘barbarians’ who could not speak proper Greek and had a different (lower) civilization. Jewish writers like Philo, Paul and Josephus spoke of Jews, Greeks and Barbarians. Here the word ‘Roman’ is added, which is to be expected in a Roman environment, or in later second and early third century, when Roman citizenship was acquired by more and more people. In 212 CE, Caracalla granted all his subjects Roman citizenship. The word ‘barbarian’ is not normally a self-designation; nor is the word ‘Jew’ in the context of *GPhil*. It is likely that the audience did not regard themselves as native Egyptians or Syrians. They probably saw themselves as Greeks who had become true Christians and who did not worship the God of the Jews. §102 speaks of only three categories: Jews, Greeks and Christians.

The mainstream Christian environment of *GPhil* comes across as a community significant in size and relatively uniform in beliefs and practices, a situation that does not fit well with our understanding of Egypt for a large part of the second century, nor of Edessa until the later third century.

We have few sources on the character of the earliest churches in and around Alexandria. They all point, however, to a Hellenistic Jewish type of early

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481 Cf. Grant (1970, 2004), Augusutus to Constantine, chapters 6 and 11. For a collection of sources, see Musurillo (1972), Martyrs.
482 In: Clement, Miscellanies 4.9 (4.71-72).
Christianity.\textsuperscript{485} In 115-117 CE there was a messianic war between the Jews in Libya and Egypt against the Romans and the non-Jewish populace in general.\textsuperscript{486} The Jewish Christians would have been heavily affected by the resulting massacres of Jews. From 120 CE onward, our fragmented sources speak of the rise of gnostic types of Christianity, some with anti-Jewish elements. The teachers of this generation tried to reconcile Christian beliefs with the late Hellenistic thinking that in itself was considerably developed in Alexandria. Anti-Jewish elements may have come from philosophical and political considerations, in combination with the changed composition of the Christian community (no longer dominated by Jews). From about 180 CE onward, it seems that orthodoxy is on the rise with the establishment of a mainstream Christian philosophical school. Under the leadership of Clement of Alexandria (200 CE), this resulted in a philosophical Hellenistic Christianity that reconciled late Hellenistic thinking with a positive appreciation of the God of the Jews. In his polemic against the followers of Basilides and Valentinus,\textsuperscript{487} as well as in his non-polemic writings for (new) Christians, Clement has to an extent reclaimed ‘gnosis’ for mainstream Christianity.\textsuperscript{488} I also noted in chapter 6.3.3 above that the baptism practice behind Clement's writings may well have had a similar outline as the western initiation rites.

There are three remaining remarks in \textit{GPhil} that can make a modest contribution, however imprecise, to the assessment of its provenance. The first regards the blowing of glass forms (§51). This technique was discovered by Phoenicians in the first century BC and spread across the Mediterranean in the first century CE.\textsuperscript{489}

Another remark regards the storing of a fortune in a cheap vessel, worth no more than an \textit{assarion} (§22). This is the Greek name for the Roman \textit{as}, a bronze or copper coin.\textsuperscript{490} A simple piece of pottery fetched one \textit{as}. Augustus introduced Roman coinage as the standard for the empire. Cities minted their own bronze coins. The \textit{as} or \textit{assarion} was soon adopted throughout the west, including North Africa, as well as in Libya and Syria. In the second century CE, more and more cities in Greece and Asia Minor adopted the coin. But it was never introduced in Egypt, which had a closed monetary system in the first centuries CE (foreign coinage was forbidden). Outside Egypt, Roman money derived its value from the gold standard. Because there were fixed exchange rates between gold and silver coins, emperors could mint silver coins with less and less actual silver content. But all that changed in the middle of the third century, when the continuous debasement of silver coins was paired to the abandonment of the gold standard. The purchase power of silver coins collapsed. As a result, the intrinsic value of bronze coins came to exceed their nominal value; the value of bronze itself was higher than the value of the ‘silver’ coins you could exchange them for. As a result of this inflation, bronze coins were hoarded for the value of their metal. They were no longer minted. In Egypt, people had only second-hand knowledge of the \textit{assarion}. Greek gospels (Matthew and Luke) contained the word. In later Sahidic translations, the (Greek) word \textit{obol} was used to transcribe \textit{assarion}, even though it is twice the value of an \textit{assarion}. Nevertheless, the word is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{485} Cf. Pearson (1990), \textit{Gnosticism}, chapter 13; (2004), \textit{Early Egyptian Christianity}, chapters 1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{488} Cf. Roukema (1997) in the introduction to his Dutch translation of Clement’s 'Prayer of the Gnostic'.
\item \textsuperscript{489} Alexandria, for instance, was renowned for its glass manufacturing and as a major export centre. Green (1985), \textit{Origins of Gnosticism}, pp 37, 131.
\item \textsuperscript{490} Cf. Harl (1996), \textit{Coinage in the Roman Economy} pp 115-117, 134-136.
\end{itemize}
found in the Greek papyri in a standard legal expression of a negligible value which resembles §22: μεχρὶ ‘ασσαριου ἐνος.

Finally there is the idea that wild animals live alone in desolate places or deserts (§40). This image is readily understood south and east of the Mediterranean, but not in the forests of for instance Italy.

9.3 Conclusion

Clearly no single unambiguous indicator sets GPhil in a particular place and time. But the available indicators do tell us a great deal about its time and environment. They reveal that the community stands in a Christian tradition. It is conscious of its Palestinian origins but uses the word ‘Hebrew’ pejoratively, as a negative description of mainstream Christians – not because of their ethnicity but because they worship the Jewish creator. The community functioned to a large extent inside this Christian environment, from which it drew its recruits, but it kept its own cultic celebrations. There is no indication of persecutions on the part of the authorities. The community and its mainstream Christian environment both practised a western type of baptism.

The combined evidence makes it clear that GPhil fits within the period between 160 and 240 CE, in a Graeco-Roman city where the teacher and (most of) his audience saw themselves as Greeks. They did not speak Aramaic. They, and their mainstream Christian environment, practised a western form of baptism. By the time the notes were taken down in writing, there seems to have been little persecution, as was the case in most of the first half of the third century. Alexandria, where Heracleon’s writings were known in that period, is a good option, but other Graeco-Roman cities cannot be ruled out.

9.4 Excursus: A likely scenario

Under the instruction hypothesis, the GPhil is evidence of a structured and repeated programme of baptismal instructions of groups of candidates for baptism, coming from a mainstream Christian background. In theory this could have been the case in any city, provided the Valentinian presence was large enough for such a program.

In the absence of clear indications of provenance, I want to introduce the element of likelihood in this excursus. This concerns both the presence of Valentinians and the number of candidates for baptism.

9.4.1 Christian presence

As in the case of GPhil (see 7.2 above), the presence of Valentinians seems correlated to that of Christians in general. This observation is confirmed statistically by Rodney Stark. He finds that, sociologically, the spread of gnostic Christian communities followed the spread of Christian communities. On the basis of a regression analysis, he concludes:

Whereas Jewish presence has a very substantial impact on the spread of Christianity, only Christianity seems to have any impact on the rise of Gnosticism.


Stark (1996), Rise, p 142. For a review of the discussion of his work as well as further demographic modelling, see Van Os (2006), ‘Mathematics’.
As Valentinian groups arose within the Christian movement at large, the size of the Valentinian community is to a substantial degree dependent on the size of the entire Christian community in a city. Stark has demonstrated that the relative size of the movement in a city is dependent on the time that Christianity reached the city and the characteristics of the city. He estimates, for example, that the Christian population in 200 CE amounted to 0.5% of the population of the Roman Empire as a whole, and to 1% of Rome. Larger cities in general were more prone to accommodate religious diversity, likewise larger Christian communities were more likely to see diversity within the Christian movement, especially if variant groups dependent on the Christian community as a whole. The first proposition therefore, is that we need not look for large Valentinian communities like that of GPhil in cities where there was no sizeable Christian community.

9.4.2 Valentinian presence

The second proposition is that a substantial Valentinian presence is more likely in cities for which such presence is attested than in cities where such presence did not enter the historical record.

For the period 160-240 CE, Layton gives the following cities for which the presence of Valentinians is attested:

- Marcosians: Rome, Asia (Smyrna?) and Lyons;
- Eastern school: Antioch, Alexandria, Edessa;
- Italian school: Rome, Carthage and Alexandria.

All cities given by Layton are also known for a strong Christian presence. The second proposition therefore confirms the first proposition and brings the number of likely candidates down to a handful.

9.4.3 Candidates for baptism

Candidates for baptism in a city came from conversion and from natural growth. Stark pointed out that an exponential curve is the best approximation of growth, although specific local and historical factors must have led to deviations from the theoretical curve. On average a 3-4% growth per year matches the historical evidence for the second and third century CE. Combined with mortality and apostacy, we must assume that each year candidates for baptism numbered circa 5-10% of the total community.

If Stark’s estimate for the percentage of Christians in Rome is correct, the city would have had ca 8,000 Christians around 200 CE, and some 400-800 baptism candidates. It is easily conceivable that within this number we also find a great number of candidates within various ‘heretical’ groups, such as the Gnostics, the Marcionites, the Marcosians and other Valentinians.

493 Stark (1996), Rise, pp 129-140. The most important factors seem to be (1) the distance of the city from Jerusalem, (2) the size of the Jewish community in the city, (3) the absolute size of the city, (4) historical events.
495 Clement’s excerpts from the probably eastern Valentinian Theodotus suggests that his writings were available in Alexandria. The rather questionable references to Tatianus and Bardesanes as Valentinians suggest Edessa as a city with an early ‘Valentinian’ presence. See Petersen (2005) ‘Tatian’ and Denzey (2005) ‘Bardaisan’.
497 I suggest that the experience of being a minority in view of ‘apostolic’ Christianity is behind the literary topos of the single gnostic apostles versus the others: Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of Mary, Thomas in the Gospel of Thomas, Judas in the Gospel of Judas, etc. In logion 23 of the Gospel of Judas, Jesus says that none of the
The situation is very different when we look at a city like Carthage in the late second century. As the city was so much smaller than Rome, the total number of Christians also must have been far smaller, numbering several hundreds rather than thousands.\(^{498}\) It is not surprising that Tertullian claims that most heretical groups were not numerous enough to have their own churches.\(^{499}\) Using the same calculation, the mainstream Christian community in Carthage had only 30 to 60 baptism candidates per year. It seems that in smaller communities, the candidates from several churches were grouped together for baptism and, probably, for catechetical instruction.\(^{500}\) It is likely that the smaller groups of ‘heretics’ had an irregular influx of far less new recruits, which were not grouped together with candidates from other communities. In such a situation it is likely that instructions were either improvised or copied from larger communities.

The third proposition, then, is that structured series of baptism instructions first developed orally in larger Valentinian communities and were then noted down for use in smaller communities.

9.4.3 A scenario

A plausible conjecture, then, is that the Valentinian catechetical tradition behind \textit{GPhil} developed at the earliest in Rome in the second half of the second century; it acquired its present form in Alexandria and was recorded in the form of notes in the first half of the third century CE for use in the same or another Hellenistic Egyptian city. This scenario is consistent with all the indicators discussed in chapter 9.2 and 9.3.

As discussed in chapter 3.3 above, notes of baptismal instructions were initially kept for internal use only, as baptismal instructions were supposed to remain secret. They may have been stored in the library of a gnostic Christian teacher or the patron of the house-church where the community convened and practised their sacraments. In time, such a library passed into the hands of heirs, probably several times. Somewhere around 300 CE, outside the context of a specifically Valentinian community, the work emerged again and was translated into Coptic as a mystical text in its own right, which was then included in a collection of various Valentinian and other (gnostic) Christian writings.

\(^{498}\) As Christianity doubled approximately every 20 years, the chances to find larger Valentinian congregations in cities other than Rome and Alexandria in 200-220 CE. But note that when Valentinians were driven out of the church in the third century (first in the West, later also in the East) their growth rate probably decreased (see also chapter 8.3).

\(^{499}\) \textit{On Prescription against Heretics} 42 he says about \textit{inter alia} Valentinians and Marcionites: ‘The majority of them don’t even have churches.’

\(^{500}\) Archeological remains suggest that mainstream churches in mid-sized cities in North Africa used only one baptistery per city. This must have started for numerical reasons but came to be regarded as a sign of unity as it testifies to a uniform baptismal practice. Cf Luyks (1975), \textit{Baptisterium}, p 163.