

"You will not taste death: Jesus and Epicureanism" (Gospel of Thomas Thread)

Post by "mlinssen" of February 5, 2026 at 9:39 AM

In an attempt to ascertain whether the text of Thomas matches with Epicurean ideas, I will present what is in it.

At the current point, Thomas is unrelated to Epicurean thought at large. In addition to that, it started as a hobby of mine, so posting it here seems the least intrusive thing to do. Granted, not posting anything at all is even far less intrusive 😊

The earliest Thomas translations, those in 1958-1960 by Germans and Scandinavians, are most precise. Guillaumont has a very precise one although already harmonised with orthodoxy, and the translation by Detlev Koepke is most precise. Lambdin, Layton, Brakke, Meyer, and so forth: they strongly harmonise all of Thomas with the Christian canonicals, changing explicit singulars into plurals, providing words that aren't supported by any dictionary or lexicon, and 'emending' without comment whatever they need to see emended

My Translation ("the true words of Thomas") provides dictionary links for every single lemma and will enable everyone to verify any translation. Never take anyone's word for anything, and solely judge for yourself

A. *Coptic - the Vorlage of Thomas*

The full text, lacunose only at a few places, is in Coptic.

Coptic gets subdivided in any kind of classes but basically the Egyptians, when Alexander rolled up their country as well, were particularly enamoured by the idea to use the Greek alphabet. Until that time, hieroglyphs were sacred and reserved for the upper elite, and the plebs had to do with whatever they cooked up, among which Hieratic and "demotic" that typically sketches the problem and solution: the "demos" itself was inventing a language here, left entirely to its own. And that shows. Hieroglyphs are sounds, and so is Coptic, and we find all pretty as well as petty linguistic obscenities: R for L, EI for AI (the e is an extremely weak vowel and EI is considered to be identical to I), and we find a free exchange of labials, gutturals, and contraction and metathesis is very common. If I could be blunt (and I can, to be frank), Coptic is a bit of a creole language really. A true blessing compared to Greek, such is for sure!

A1.

Not surprisingly, Coptic is replete with **Greek loanwords**.

Most surprisingly, Thomas uses these next to native Greek words, frequently in one and the same sentence:

[Greek-Coptic word twins in GoT express various shades of meaning](#)

The Greek twin always has a higher metaphysical meaning, for instance in the so very biting anti-Judaic Logion 53:

Quote

53. his Disciples said to him: is the circumcision Useful (ⲛⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓ) Or no? he said to them: were he Useful, their father would beget them from their mother circumcised. Rather, the true circumcision in Spirit found all usefulness (ⲉⲛⲓ)

Where we could annotate the Greek with "how does it help / assist", the Coptic primarily means profitable - and do observe that the last phrase is in the past!

B. *Coptic dialects*

Given the history of Coptic, we find countless dialects and as such different forms of one and the same noun declension (Coptic is a breeze compared to Greek and knows only 4 different verb forms, which however can't be compared to regular verb declension).

What is striking in Thomas is that he uses a mix of dialects, and pretty much all of them appear - and that also is a sign of the text being very early, although Thomas certainly stresses its use

B1.

The **predominant dialects** in Thomas are Sahidic, Akhmimic and Subakhmimic, but we also find Lycopolitan, Fayyumic and Bohairic, and even dialect forms that are unattested in the main and authoritative dictionary of Coptic, the one by Crum

Thomas abuses this in order to embed ambivalence in his text: 'beginning' and 'path' both are (the feminine) ⲉⲛⲓ in the text, while (the masculine) 'death' and (feminine) 'mother' both exist as ⲛⲓ, among others - and the first decision on these has to be made in Logion 3, where the kingdom is 'of your inside' and 'of your eye / outside': ⲛⲓ can indeed be a dialect variant of ⲛⲓ

C. *Coptic is really very uncomplicated*

In Coptic **nouns and verbs often are identical**, and words are short. Frequently only the gender of a noun distinguishes between meanings, and Thomas frequently uses nouns anarthrously next to using them with the definite article

C1.

That is how 'taking taste of the death' can mean only one thing, whereas 'taking taste of mother' is grammatically possible

D. *Scriptio continua, a puzzle even before one starts*

