

## Le Tonnerre, Intellect parfait (NH VI,2)

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Presses de l'Université Laval (Quebec City)

«Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi [section «Textes»]», 22

1995

xviii + 372 p.

ISBN: 2-7637-7419-9

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Among the Nag Hammadi writings, this text—also known as *Brontè*—is unique in its literary structure. It stands out in the midst of this collection, distinct among more frequently attested forms such as didactic treatises, apocalypses, apocryphal writings, and hymns. Rather, *Brontè* presents the reader with the self-declaration of a female emissary from the Great Power.

*Thunder, Perfect Intellect* is the second text in Nag Hammadi codex VI, taking up pages 13 to 21. Preceded in the codex by the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, it is followed by the *Concept of Our Great Power*, a fragment of Plato's *Republic*, the *Ogdoad and the Ennead*, a *Prayer of Thanksgiving*, a scribal note, and a fragment of the Hermetic *Asclepius*. Despite several gaps in the text, it remains comprehensible as a whole. Although the original would have been composed in Greek, the text as we possess it is preserved in the Sahidic dialect of Coptic and probably (according to Paul-Hubert Poirier) represents a copy of an earlier Coptic version, rather than a direct translation from the Greek. Wolf-Peter Funk has argued that it could well come from the region between Thebes and Hermopolis, and possibly even from the vicinity of Nag Hammadi.

*Brontè* is made up of three sorts of declarations: self-proclamations, exhortations, and reproaches. These three categories can also be reduced to two, as the work can be divided into passages in the first person singular (“I”) and in the second plural (“you”). The prologue (13,12-16) presents the text as a revelation of *Brontè* to those to whom she has been sent, a revelation that serves both to introduce and to legitimize her. She presents herself as an emissary, as one who has been given a mission to carry out by another, and legitimizes herself through her refusal to accept the titles and honours that properly apply to the one who sent her (13,2-4). However, she is no mere spokesperson. Rather, she has her own divine aspects, and while it is the Great Power who has sent her, it is *Brontè* herself who is the final goal of those to whom she is sent (21,29b-32).

The first section of self-declarations deal with the totalizing and unifying nature of her personality, which simultaneously includes and thereby abolishes in itself all social and familial oppositions (13,16b-32), as well as discussing her identity and the identity of the one who has sent her (13,33-14, 9a) and the message that she must deliver (14,9b-15a). The general sense of these approximately 24 declarations is summed up by the first of them: “I am the first and the last.” This statement joins up with the very last declaration of this sort to be found in the text: “(because) I alone exist and I have no one who will judge me” (21,18b-20a).

The other series of self-declarations are intended to legitimate or justify her message, which is to recognize *Brontè*, to recover from drunkenness and to find repose in her. The antithetical and contradictory nature of these statements eloquently expresses the radical and absolute nature of this message, a message delivered by one who expressly claims a universal audience, addressing herself to Greeks, barbarians, and Egyptians, all of whom she seeks to liberate from drunkenness and ignorance of the divine (16,1-9).

In his introduction and commentary, Paul-Hubert Poirier identifies a number of elements which allow him to situate *Brontè* relatively precisely in its historical and cultural context. With regard to its form and literary genre, he shows that it is an example of *Botenselbstbericht*, that is, a discourse given by an envoy and addressed to those to whom the envoy has been sent, and by which the envoy presents him or herself, and legitimates and communicates his or her message. This sort of discourse seeks to

persuade, and in the case of *Bronté* has both protreptic and paranetic aspects.

As regards the literary history of the text, its distinctiveness in the Nag Hammadi collection derives from the fact that it includes a great deal of material drawn from an earlier source also employed by the *Writing without title* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*.

In terms of its ethnic and cultural identifications, the text emphasizes the triad Barbarian-Greek-Egyptian, and clearly identifies the narrator as a Barbarian—and one who, furthermore, seems to have strong ties to Egypt, as this is the only country named in the text. In his commentary, P-H. Poirier shows that the term “Barbarian” can be read as a coded designation for “Jew.”

As far as the religious context presupposed by *Bronté*, many elements of the text argue that it belongs to a missionary milieu marked by apocalypticism and an eschatological orientation. This is brought out most sharply in the text's epilogue, particularly in its mention of the accomplishment of the “words” and “scriptures” (21,12-13) and in the designation of the reader's ultimate destination as a “place of repose” (21,28-29). In examining the prologue, on the other hand, it becomes apparent that *Bronté* can be linked to the sort of prophecy practiced—according to Celsus—by the Phoenicians and Palestinians. Also, in addition to passages dealing with the opposition between Greeks and Barbarians (16,1-29), *Bronté* contains many terms and phrases that indicate that it derives from a milieu that is either Jewish, or at least familiar with Jewish religious practices (17,24; 19,7; 19,29-30).

On the other hand, there are no specifically Christian elements in the text, with the possible exception of the phrase, “who have arisen from the dead” (21,17-18). But while many of its elements point to a Jewish context of origin, or one close to Judaism, the singularity of the work's form and the diversity of its influences—its links both to the *Hermetica* and to such gnostic texts as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Writing without title*—suggest that this Jewish or near-Jewish milieu must have been a marginal one, one that could accept the sort of literary and doctrinal diversity that we find, for example, in codex VI of Nag Hammadi itself.

*This volume contains the following contributions:*

- «L'orthographe du manuscrit» [Funk, Wolf-Peter] (p. 13–53)
- «La langue du traité» [Funk, Wolf-Peter] (p. 53–97)