In the next section, we are going to undertake a historical analysis in order to know more about *The Gospel of Thomas*. In this introduction, we are going to call it *Thomas*.

**Thomas in its Historical Context**

*Thomas* is a collection of words and teachings that interpret what Jesus said. *Thomas* reflects a number of intellectual, philosophical and spiritual currents in the ancient world. As with the books that make up *The New Testament* in *The Bible*, *Thomas* was originally written in the Greek language, thus it is shaped by that culture. *Thomas* came out in an epoch when the Roman Empire dominated the Mediterranean world, thus it also bears the mark of that empire.

Most of the established biblical scholars believe *Thomas* appeared in the years 60 to 100 in the first century, which means 30 to 70 years after Jesus died (Patterson 1998; Riley 1995; Pagels 2003). There are also other scholars who say *Thomas* appeared around 140. We stand with the former; we think *Thomas* came out in the first century because of the way it is linked to the canonical *Gospel of John*, as we will discuss later. In that sense, when we say “canonical,” we are talking about a movement that appeared in the fourth century. At that time, the Catholic Church began to choose a few books it considered to be sacred, meaning the words of those books are believed to be inspired by God.

*Thomas* stands upon the shoulders of the entire Jewish tradition, especially *Genesis* in *The Bible* and the *Hekalot* and *Merkabah* literature (Pagels 2003: 101; *Thomas* 85). *Thomas* also has a Gnostic dimension. Gnosticism was a spiritual movement that believed humans are able to find God within themselves (Pagels 2003: 121; *Thomas* 70). During the epoch *Thomas* came out in, great philosophers such as Epicurus and Epictetus had their words and teachings collected in little books of their own. Those books were circulating from anywhere books were sold. (Recall that since books were made by hand, they were extremely expensive). Hebrew, Egyptian and Persian cultures, among many others in the region around the Mediterranean Sea, had the practice of writing down words of wisdom and proverbs on sheets of papyrus (Patterson 1998: 37).