Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 85

Practicing Gnosis

Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson

Edited by
April D. DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner

BRILL

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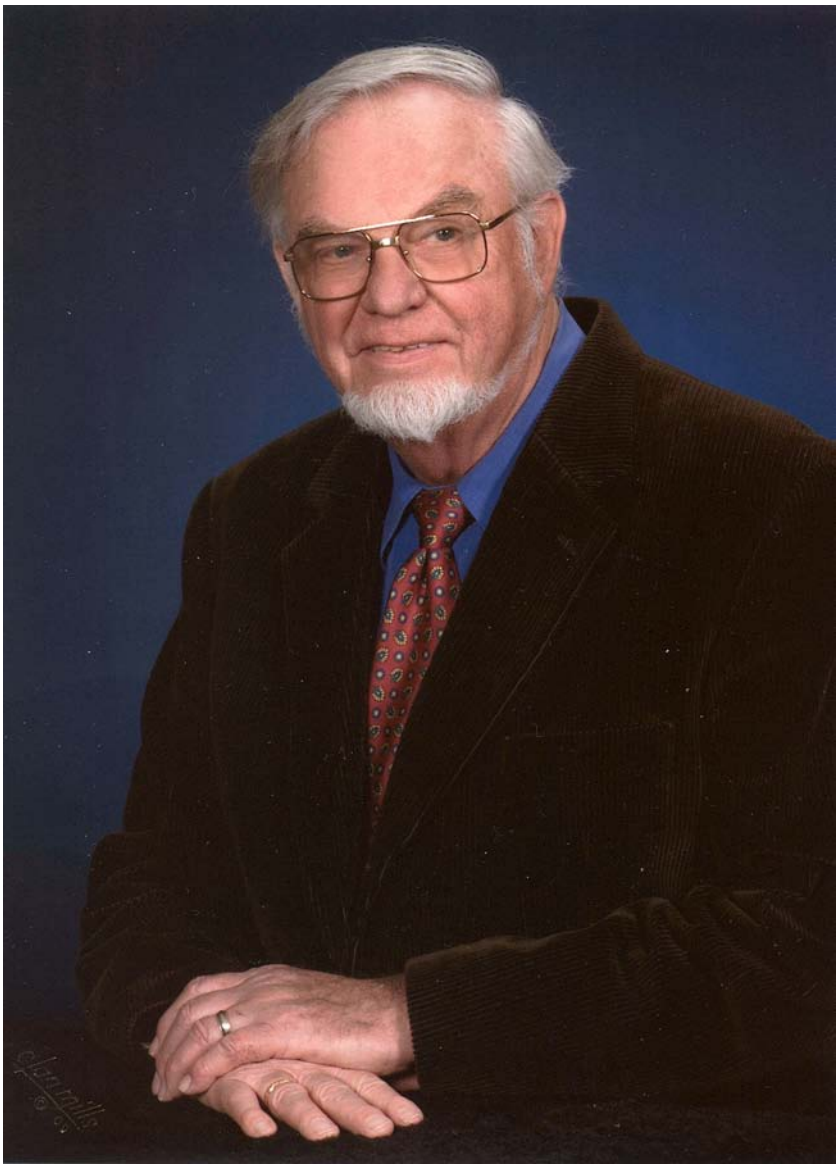

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INTRODUCTION

April D. DeConick

The ancient Gnostics did not reveal their mysteries to the public. They kept them private, for the initiates and the initiated. For centuries, what we knew about the Gnostics and their practices, we had gathered from secondhand reports written by people who saw the Gnostics as transgressors. Whatever rites they had practiced were kept secret, first hidden within the walls of their conventicles and then swept away by the course of a religious and political history that did not favor them. However, with the fantastic modern discoveries of Gnostic literature like the *Books of Jeu*, *Pistis Sophia*, the Nag Hammadi codices, the Berlin codex, the Tchacos codex, the *Cologne Mani Codex*, the *Kephalaia*, and Mandaean texts, the voices of the Gnostics have reemerged in the modern world and their message is being reimagined again.

Birger A. Pearson, whom we honor with this book, is one of the most influential scholars in the last century to reintroduce the Gnostics into our history. By this I mean that he not only developed a persuasive historical narrative about them, but he also reintroduced into actual history some of their literature in his role as the editor for *The Coptic Gnostic Library* of Nag Hammadi codices 7, 9 and 10.

His interpretative work has shaped a distinctive and prominent view of the Gnostics as religious people originating in the first century CE, who combined elements from ancient Platonism and Judaism to create a religion of salvation based on Gnosis or knowledge. By the second century CE, Christians were utilizing these established Gnostic traditions as they devised their own versions of Christianity.

While much of Pearson's work has focused on the metaphysical and mythological systems of the Gnostics, Pearson has always been keenly aware of the need to consider the Gnostics beyond their philosophical moorings. In March 1984, Pearson addressed the members of the Sixth International Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies with this insight:

> While much of the discussion [about Gnosticism] has focused on setting up comparisons between various platonic systems of thought and language and the metaphysical-mythological systems of the Gnostic texts, relatively little

> attention has been given in this comparative enterprise to the problem of religious ritual.[1]

He went on to treat three Gnostic texts—the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*—as conveyors of ritual that could be compared to Iamblichus' understanding and practice of theurgy. While the Gnostic rituals have their own distinctive content, the ascension rituals share a commonality worth exploring, Pearson argued. This does not make Iamblichus a Gnostic or the Gnostics Iamblichian. Rather it suggests that the Gnostics shared with Iamblichus a particular view of religious ritual, while maintaining their own distinctive metaphysical and philosophical perspectives.

Later in his career, Pearson continued to pursue his interest in Gnostic ritual, especially baptism as it relates to Sethianism, which he discusses at length in a prominent article in a collection of essays about abulation and baptism in early Judaism and Christianity.[2] Pearson observes that, while Sethian texts reveal that Sethian baptismal practices were not standardized, it can be determined that their rite originated as a Jewish initiation ceremony, performed only once, in real (not metaphorical) water. As an initiation rite, it had a definitive relationship to their mythology of transcendence. In some cases, it effected an ecstatic ascent experience. His study of Sethian ritual provides him with confirmation that Gnosticism originated in a Jewish context, not a Christian one, in the first century CE.[3]

The present volume is meant to reorient our study of Gnosticism to focus on Gnostic practices. What were the Gnostics doing? The essays in this book are meant to begin to fill in the gap that Pearson noted thirty years ago, that Gnostic ritual is understudied. While there have been a number of excellent studies on Gnostic rites of baptism and eucharist that have been published since Pearson's observation in 1984, the totality of Gnostic practice still remains a mystery to us.[4] While we have continued to study the Gnostics as intellectuals in pursuit of metaphysical knowledge, we have done much less to understand the Gnostics as ecstatics striving after religious experience, or prophets seeking revelation, or mystics questing after the ultimate God, or healers attempting to care for the sick and diseased. We have reimagined the

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[1] Pearson 1992, 253.

[2] Pearson 2011, 119–143.

[3] Pearson 2011, 141.

[4] Cf. Sevrin 1986; Turner 2000, 83–139; 2001; 2006, 941–992; Costentino 2007, 107–128; Schmid 2007; Lundhaug 2010.

Gnostics as philosophers and intellectual religious teachers, at the expense of other identities. What their literature shows us is that the Gnostics, while trendy intellectuals, were not after epistemological certainties. They were after religious experiences that relied on ritual, liturgy, magic, theurgy, and the like.

The contributions to this book are organized comparatively in a history-of-religions approach favored by Pearson, rather than siloed into local types of Gnostic groups. Section 1 examines INITIATORY PRACTICES, the ways in which different esoteric groups in antiquity brought converts into their conventicles and initiated them into their mysteries. The essays in section 2, RECURRENT PRACTICES, explore rites and practices that are iterant or repeated daily, weekly, monthly or annually in the conventicles. The third section, THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES, is devoted to practices with utilitarian purposes like healing and exorcism. Section 4, ECSTATIC PRACTICES, covers practices associated with charismatic and ecstatic experiences, including prophetic activities and ascent ceremonies. The final section, PHILOSOPHIC PRACTICES, contains papers that reflect on the relationship between ancient philosophy and religious practice.

There has been no attempt in this book to restrict the word Gnosis to a particular group in antiquity, nor has there been any attempt to capture and define it in some exclusive sense. Rather, the comparative arrangement adopted here challenges us to consider for ourselves what is Gnostic and what is not. Who sought Gnosis? For what purpose? How was it done? The essays are organized in this kaleidoscopic manner to allow the reader to view Gnostic practices within a broader Greco-Roman comparative context, so that common frameworks, as well as discontinuities can be readily seen. Mithraic caves, Jewish mystical bowls, and Hermetic scripts are explored alongside more standardly conceived Gnostic materials like the Ophite diagram, Manichaean prayers, the *Gospel of Philip*, and Sethian literature.

There is an old teaching that when the names of the gods change, the rituals remain the same. While I am certain that we might find a case or two where this is not true, the old teaching still has much merit. It is what Pearson understood years ago when he observed that religious rituals can be shared by groups with very different metaphysical orientations and mythological scripts. Why is this so? It is something worth exploring.

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A TRIBUTE TO BIRGER A. PEARSON

FOR BIRGER PEARSON: A SCHOLAR WHO BOTH STUDIES AND EMBODIES SYNCRETISM

George W.E. Nickelsburg

First and foremost, Birger Pearson was, is, and will be—I think for the foreseeable future—a historian of religions. Inextricably bound up with this, he was, is, and will be—we all hope for a long foreseeable future—a Swede. The course of Birger's scholarly life was affected by a number of vectors. I'll start with his Swedish DNA since he was born a Swede before he was reborn as a scholar.

Swedishness is, or at least used to be, closely connected with Lutheranism, although Birger's first post-primary religious education was at Concordia High School, a Missouri Synod Lutheran institution in Oakland California. He naturally moved on from German Concordia to Swedish Uppsala College in New Jersey, where he received his B.A. not in Religion, but in the Classics. That grounding in Greek language and culture would affect his academic career over the decades. And lest we forget, it was there that he met and married Karen Lee Heurlin—who also affected his life.

Upon his graduation from Uppsala he returned to the West Coast and took an M.A. in Greek at the University of California in Berkeley. During his two years there he was enrolled in a seminar that introduced him to the Gospel of Thomas. This nudged him into the "proto-gnostic" world, and he would never be the same. Yet he skittered in a new direction. He moved up the hill to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, and three years later he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree (we call that an M.Div. these days). Might Birger Pearson become a parish pastor? No, this was not to be. Nonetheless, this theological education would affect him, if only to sensitize him to the issues with which he would have to deal later as a scholar, a theoretician, and an administrator.

I have slipped from Birger the Swede to Birger the scholar, but not altogether. Having completed his formal West Coast education, in 1962 he and Karen, Ingrid, and David set off for the Ivy League, where he would receive his Ph.D. in the Study of Religion, and specifically in New Testament and Christian Origins. Now the nudge toward the history of religions and the ongoing direction of his career. Although his *Doktortvater* would be Helmut Koester, he began a close decades-long relationship with Krister Stendahl,

who had received his doctorate from the original Swedish Uppsala. From this point on, in one way or another, Birger's scholarship and his Swedish heritage and identity would interact with one another, just as his interest in classical philosophy and religion and Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic religion would interact and become integral components in his scholarly persona. Learned, wise, and prolific historian of religions that he was in the process of becoming, he understood that a careful and appropriate comparison of these religious phenomena (and sometimes systems) made it possible for him to see where they maintained their own identity (more or less) and where they blended and re-blended.

A few significant personae populated this Harvard stratum of his Curriculum Vitae. Among his teachers were Arthur Darby Nock, the British-taught historian of classical religions; Frank Moore Cross, the Albrightian historian of Israelite and other ancient Near Eastern religions, Helmut Koester, whose German teacher was a historian of the Synoptic Gospels plus John and Paul in the mix, and, of course, Krister Stendahl, who had been educated in the Scandinavian History of Religions school. Additionally, Birger was fortunate to be at Harvard when Gilles Quispel, a pioneer Dutch scholar of Gnosticism was leading a seminar. Adding to his philological toolbox, Birger took two semesters of Coptic with Tom Lambdin, the nonpareil teacher of Semitic and Hamitic languages.

From the start Birger's publications were exercises in the history of religions. His dissertation compared Paul's terminology in 1 Corinthians with its parallels in the religious philosophy of Philo of Judea and "its relationship to Gnosticism." His next two books were an English translation of a work on Gnosticism by Geo Widengren, the great Swedish historian of religions and an edited volume, *Religious Syncretism: Essay in Conversation with Geo Widengren*. His second published article treated Second Peter, classical myth, and the myth of the Watchers in 1 Enoch. His list of publications is much too long of a scholarly trajectory to pursue here. It ranges over editions of Coptic Gnostic texts, an edited volume on "*The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*," and a must-use introductory (classroom) textbook on the Gnostic corpus. Although Birger has written many exegetical pieces on early Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic texts, I think it is fair to say that these were always exercises in, or were informed by his scholarly persona as a historian of religions.

But we turn back now to the Swedish sociology of Birger's knowledge. He has published in Swedish and abstracted articles published in Swedish (and Norwegian) journals. For two years he was the director of the University of California Study Center at Lund University in Sweden. In 1993 and 1996

respectively he was visiting professor at the University of Uppsala and the University of Lund. In 2002 he was the Sigmund Mowinckel Lecturer at Oslo University. Then, appropriately, to recognize his many achievements as a historian of religions and a credit to the land of his forebears, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Theology *honoris causa* from the University of Uppsala—the one in Sweden.

In 1994 in grateful celebration of his Swedish heritage, Birger erected a large granite runestone at the foot of his driveway with the philologically and paleologically correct inscription, "Birkir * lit * raisa * stain * dhina * at * sik * kuikuan * tauit * risti *** ("Birger had this stone set up for himself while he was still alive. David carved"). I'm sure that Ingrid, David, Daniel, Sven, and Anders smile every time they come for a visit.

On that personal note, here are a few comments about a longtime close friend. Over four decades, I have had the pleasure of rooming at Society Biblical Literature meetings with Birger and Norman Petersen, his Scandinavian bred colleague of Danish extraction (but especially of German—and American—scholarly inclination). Our informal seminars have run into the wee hours of the morning and occasionally have picked up a few hours later. From Birger and Norman I have learned more than I can ever acknowledge. We have broadened our SBL education with a couple of trips to the San Francisco Opera and Birger has helped me with the Coptic I have forgotten. For me he combines deep friendship with a kind, gracious, and humorous approach to scholarship even when he digs in on issues where he is certain he is right and his dialogue partner is wrong. That he is a friend to others as well has been evidenced by the many times that of the three of us, he is usually the one who is stopped in the hall—sometimes by friends whom he has met in Sweden and with whom he prefers to have dinner.

And so, Birger, my thanks and appreciation for all the good things *min-ʿālmāʾ* and my best wishes for all those yet to come *ʿad-ʿālmā*.

RELIGIONSGESCHICHTLICHE SCHULE, RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT, PIANO, OBOE AND BOURBON

Gerald James Larson

I am something of an interloper in this collection of learned discourses about the intricacies of Gnosticism in the Mediterranean of Late Antiquity, although my own scholarly work in the dualist systems of Sāṃkhya and Yoga in the classical Sanskrit philosophy of India makes me something of a fellow traveler with the Gnostics of the world. After all, to paraphrase a line of the great American poet, something there is that doesn't love a dualist!

In any case, Birger A. Pearson and I were colleagues together for over quarter of a century (approximately 1970 through 1995) in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of California, Santa Barbara. We had something to do, perhaps even a good deal to do, with shaping the long-term trajectory of graduate study in the academic study of religion at Santa Barbara, and I want to comment on Birger's important contribution to this effort.

Bob Michaelsen was the first chair of religious studies at UCSB and established the undergraduate program and the incipient graduate program. I was the second chair (1971 through 1976), and Birger was the third chair (1977 through 1981). The main tasks during our years as chairs was to put into place a full graduate faculty to support graduate work in religious studies and to fashion a programmatic curriculum for rigorous graduate training appropriate for the modern secular state university.

Both Birger and I were products of traditional seminary-based graduate education (Birger via Harvard Divinity School and me via Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Columbia University). We were both persuaded that while our training had been excellent in the best traditions of first-rate Protestant graduate education, fundamental changes had to occur in re-visioning the academic study of religion in an institution such as the University of California. The academic study of religion, at least in our shop, had to be cross-cultural and interdisciplinary both in theory and in method and without a confessional orientation.

In many ways it was easier for me to re-vision my own training, since I had specialized in South Asian traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, South Asian Islamic traditions and the manner in which these traditions later developed

in the Indo-Tibetan region, Southeast Asia and finally into China, Korea and Japan). It was relatively easy for me to develop a South Asian emphasis with work in Classical Sanskrit and other appropriate South Asian languages, and to encourage colleagues in related areas to develop parallel work in East Asian traditions with requisite work in Chinese and Japanese.

For Birger the task was more demanding, since obviously traditional biblical studies had to be recast in the multi-religious and secular environment of the public university. From the very beginning of our collegial work together at UCSB, however, Birger always saw his work in the larger framework of Christian origins, Mediterranean religious traditions, Classics, Coptic studies, the Nag Hammadi texts, Gnostic studies, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* methodologies from the nineteenth and early twentieth century traditions of biblical studies, and, finally, of course, the *Religionswissenschaft* orientation of contemporary history of religions, together with requisite work in Greek, Latin, and, of course, Coptic. In addition, Birger also developed work in an area of his own personal interest, namely, Nordic religions.

Over the years other areas were also developed on the graduate level, for example, the social scientific study of religion, religion in America, Native American religious traditions, and Islamic religious traditions. Throughout the graduate curriculum, however, there has always been a distinctive focus on serious language training both in classical textual languages and in modern scholarly languages (French, German, Japanese, and so forth) together with a strong focus on history and historiography, not so much in the Eliadean motif-research sense but more in the older *Religionsgeschictliche Schule* sense of deep immersion in specific religious traditions. In this regard, the graduate program in religious studies at Santa Barbara has become a model for the academic study of religion throughout the United States, and outside the US as well. I say all of this to highlight an aspect of Birger's career that may not be as well known as his work with the Nag Hammadi materials and Gnosticism, namely, his significant role in helping to shape the contours of graduate training in religious studies in the modern secular university.

Of course, our time together for a quarter of a century in Santa Barbara was not entirely given over to *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* matters and the profundities of *Religionswissenschaft*. Birger is an accomplished pianist and organist, and I am, to put the matter in the best possible light, an aspiring, amateur oboist. Be that as it may, we did get together regularly over the years, usually once a week to explore the mysteries of classical music. In the early years, we did reasonably well with Handel, Telemann, Mozart, Bach,

et al. The usual routine was to play for about an hour, sometimes an hour and a half, and then kick back with a few bourbon and waters. As the years progressed, alas, the routine gradually changed to less Handel, Telemann and Bach, and more and more to bourbon and water.

Let me just say in conclusion that it has been an honor for me to have Birger A. Pearson as a close friend and learned colleague for most of my career, and I extend my warm best wishes to him on this occasion of the publication of this *Festschrift* in his honor.

BIRGER PEARSON: SCHOLAR, PROFESSOR AND MENTOR

Gregory Shaw

I don't remember the first time I met Birger Pearson, but I do recall, quite clearly, my initial impression: here is a *serious* man. It was 1977. Pearson was the chair of the Religious Studies Department at UC Santa Barbara, and I had just been admitted to the MA program. I was 26, had been a college drop-out, a hippy, spiritual seeker, and had spent years meditating several hours a day. I was hungry for wisdom, for spiritual depth and guidance. I was raw and very green. Pearson was definitely *cooked* but not in any culture with which I was familiar!

Initially I remember his burnt-orange leisure suit that he seemed to wear *every* day (or maybe he had several of them), his pipe, and the fact that he possessed a Nordic distance and ambled down the halls like a character in a Bergman movie. Then I began to notice how seriously he took the scholarly enterprise. I found him intimidating. Pearson seemed exacting, almost humorless, severe. In our weekly colloquia on more than one occasion I recall Pearson challenging his faculty colleagues in the department with blunt questions: Where is the evidence for this? *What does the text say*? And the vapors seemed to dissipate. Sometimes, honestly, I preferred the vapors, the wild explorations and word play espoused by the other faculty and graduate students in the department. *The text … the text*. I could see why Pearson frightened me, and them. He was ready to challenge the validity of *anyone's* ideas, even those of his colleagues.

At that time the Religious Studies Department included talented and richly imaginative thinkers: Raimundo Panikkar, Ninian Smart, Gerry Larson, Walter Capps, each of them powerful, spell-binding, speakers, and all of them regarded Pearson with healthy respect, if not a touch of fear. They knew he would speak honestly and directly about the subject at hand regardless of whose opinion was being discussed.

That was before I discovered Birger Pearson was the Department's expert on religions of late antiquity in the Mediterranean. I began to take classes from Pearson and discovered that he possessed a very healthy, and *earthy*, sense of humor. Even more, I was taken in by the rich material Pearson clearly laid before us: the mystery religions, the Hermetic writings, the cults

of the late antique world, and his well-known class on the New Testament. In that class I had the privilege to experience what many undergraduates described as the "Devil himself," Professor Pearson, initiating their delicate souls into the historical critical method (Devil's work indeed!). There was something so honest and so rigorous about his scholarship and teaching that I knew he would honor the coin if I passed it back to him, and he did. I found myself thinking creatively, and deeply, risked sharing this with him in my papers, and found that it was precisely the kind of work he wanted.

I began my Ph.D. work with the help of Birger's colleague, Richard Hecht, and had the privilege of learning Coptic from Marvin Meyer in a Goleta bar, aptly named *The English Department*, while Birger was on leave in Sweden. When he returned, I asked to work with him on my thesis: Iamblichus and theurgy. He graciously accepted me as his student. I had taken seminars with Pearson. I knew he could be searing and blunt in his criticism. I knew that if your work was not solidly based on historical evidence and the texts he would dismiss it with a kind of cold severity I had seen and did not want to experience! Needless to say, this inspired me to engage in *careful* research.

I worked hard, the quality of my research improved, and I was not alone in developing my skills under his direction. Pearson's previous student, Ruth Majercik, completed her thesis with a text, translation, and commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*, the "Bible" of the later Platonists. It was published by Brill in 1989 and is now the standard English translation and commentary used by scholars. Another student, Robert Petty, translated and wrote a commentary on the fragments of Numenius who initiated the trajectory of philosophic reflection followed by Plotinus; his *Fragments of Numenius* has just been published as the only scholarly English translation. My own thesis, situating the theurgy of Iamblichus in its Platonic and Pythagorean context, *Theurgy and the Soul*, received positive reviews and (I like to believe) helped to shift our understanding of theurgy among later Platonists. So, Birger Pearson, who is highly regarded for his research on Paul and even more for his work on Gnostics, was the father and guide to significant scholarship on the later Platonists. Pearson was not interested in creating clones but in encouraging excellent scholarship, whatever the subject, as long as it was grounded on careful research and *the texts*.

In 1984 I was deeply honored that Birger Pearson cited one of my papers in his presentation at the ground-breaking conference on Neoplatonism and Gnosticism convened by R.T. Wallis in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Pearson explored how Gnostic rituals could be compared to the theurgic rites of the Platonists, and how they might have had a similar function among Gnostics. I think he was as delighted to be citing one of his student's papers as he

was in pursuing the interpretation himself. I discovered increasingly as I worked with Pearson that he not only gave excellent advice on my research and writing but was also generous to a fault; I could always count on him for a timely letter of recommendation or anything else. No small thing, as graduate students look for jobs! Pearson also supported and encouraged me to spend a semester of study in Paris working with Frs. Jean Trouillard and Henri Dominic Saffrey, highly regarded scholars of Plotinus and Proclus. Birger Pearson was, in truth, a *true* doctor father. He guided me, nurtured me, and was exacting; at the same time he encouraged me always to think deeply, for myself, and in my own way. Perhaps this, more than any other quality, is what I found to be Professor Pearson's gift: he encouraged me to find *my voice*. He was confident enough as a man and as a scholar to support different approaches and interests in his students, and by challenging and supporting us he was able to bring out our best scholarship. For that I am deeply grateful, and I know I speak for many who were fortunate enough to be the students of Birger Pearson.

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A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Academic Degrees

Bachelor of Arts, Upsala College (East Orange, NJ), 1957. Classical Languages.
Master of Arts, University of California, Berkeley, 1959. Greek.
Bachelor of Divinity (= M. Div.), Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Berkeley, CA), 1962. Biblical Studies and Theology.
Doctor of Philosophy, Harvard University, 1968. Study of Religion: New Testament and Christian Origins.
Doctor of Theology *honoris causa*, Uppsala University, Sweden, 2002.

Academic Appointments

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary: Instructor in Greek, 1959–1962.
Harvard University: Teaching Fellow, 1964–1965.
Episcopal Theological School (Cambridge, MA): Lecturer, 1965–1966.
Harvard Divinity School: Teaching Fellow in Greek, Summer Language Program, 1966, 1967.
Duke University, Department of Religion: Instructor, 1966–1968; Assistant Professor, 1968–1969.
University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Religious Studies: Assistant Professor, 1969–1971; Associate Professor, 1971–1975; Professor, 1975–; Emeritus, 1994–; on recall, Winter, 1995, 1996.
Uppsala University, Sweden: Visiting Professor, Spring, 1993.
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary/Graduate Theological Union: Adjunct Professor, Fall, 1994, 1995.
University of California, Berkeley, Religious Studies Program: Professor (on recall), Fall, 1994, 1995, 1999, Spring, 2001; Professor and Interim Director, 1996–1999.
Lund University, Sweden: Visiting Professor, Spring, 1996.
Oslo University, Norway: Sigmund Mowinckel Lecturer, Fall, 2000.
University of California, Davis, Religious Studies Program: Professor (on recall), Summer, 2004.

Memberships

Society of Biblical Literature
Archeological Institute of America
Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas

International Association for Coptic Studies
Société d'Archéologie Copte
Catholic Biblical Association of America
American Schools of Oriental Research
The American Research Center in Egypt
Archeological Society of Alexandria
American Society for the Study of Religion
International Association of Manichaean Studies (member of advisory board)

Participation in International Congresses

XIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Stockholm, 1970.
The International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, 1973.
Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas meeting, Aberdeen, 1975
The World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1977.
The International Conference on Gnosticism, Yale, 1978.
The International Conference on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, 1979.
IInd International Congress of Coptic Studies, Rome, 1980.
Symposium on Philosophy and Religion in Late Antiquity, Jerusalem, 1981.
Working Seminar on Gnosticism and Early Christianity, Springfield, MO, 1983.
Conference on "The Roots of Egyptian Christianity," Claremont and Santa Barbara, 1983 (Organizer).
International Conference on Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, Norman, OK, 1984.
IIIrd International Congress of Coptic Studies, Warsaw, 1984.
Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas meeting, Trondheim, 1985.
First International Conference on Manichaeism, Lund, Sweden, 1987.
IVe Congrès International d'Études Coptes, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988.
XVIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Rome, 1990.
XIth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1991.
Vth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington DC, 1992.
IVe Nordiska Patristikermöte, Lund, Sweden, 1993.
IIIrd International Conference on Manichaean Studies, Calabria, Italy, 1993.
The Copenhagen International Conference on the Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions, Copenhagen, 1995.
VIth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Muenster, Germany, 1996.
Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas meeting, Birmingham, England, 1997.
International Seminar on the Ancient Library of Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt, 2004.

Books, Monographs, Pamphlets

1973

The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 12. Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature. Reprinted, 1976. Missoula: Scholars Press.

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Catalog entries: magical texts, Old Testament apocryphon, Life of Shenoute, Coptic codex of biblical and other texts, ostrakon with Psalm verses, Biblical text: Psalms, book-bindings. Pages 197–200, 219, 235–236, 238–241 in *Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries A.D.* Edited by Florence Friedman. Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

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1991

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1992

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Nag Hammadi Codices. Pages 984–993 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Volume 4.
Marsanes (NHC X,*1*). Pages 572–573 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4.
Melchizedek (NHC IX,*1*). Page 688 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4.
Norea, Thought of (NHC IX,*2*). Page 1135 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4.
Truth, Testimony of (NHC IX,*3*). Pages 668–669 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Volume 6.
Theurgic Tendencies in Gnosticism and Iamblichus's Conception of Theurgy. Pages 253–275 in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*. Edited by R.T. Wallis and J. Bregman. Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern 6. Albany: SUNY Press.
Eusebius and Gnosticism. Pages 291–310 in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*. Edited by H.W. Attridge and G. Hata. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
EUSEBIOSU TO GUNOUSHISU-KYO ("Eusebius and Gnosticism"). Pages 7–38 in *KIRISUTOKYO NO SEITO TO IHAN: EUSEBIOSU KENKYU*. Edited by G. Hata and H.W. Attridge. Volume 2. Tokyo: Lithon.
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1993

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SECTION ONE

INITIATORY PRACTICES

THE ROAD FOR THE SOUL IS THROUGH THE PLANETS: THE MYSTERIES OF THE OPHIANS MAPPED

April D. DeConick

In 178 CE, Celsus, a Greek philosopher, wrote a scathing criticism of Christianity called *Logos Alēthēs* or *The True Doctrine*. Origen, seventy years later, wrote a massive eight-volume reply called *Against Celsus*. In these volumes, Origen cites Celsus' book at length, which he then analyzes and refutes. Among the many fascinating things that Celsus claims to know about Christianity is the use of a certain diagram during Christian initiation. Origen wishes to distance Christian initiation from the diagram and so refutes Celsus' claims.

Descriptions of the diagram run throughout Origen's refutation: the description that Celsus made of the diagram in *The True Doctrine* alongside the description of a copy of the diagram that Origen possessed. From the description of the contents of the diagram, it is clear that Celsus and Origen were working from very similar copies of the same diagram, but not necessarily identical copies.[1] Origen appears to be giving us more information about the contents of the diagram than does Celsus' extant description in *Against Celsus*. The diagram consisted of a series of ten circles and other geometric illustrations, the names and images of the archons who ruled the heavens, and seven related prayers with a separate set of archontic names.

The history of analysis of the diagram has been difficult due to the fact that Origen's text is extremely complex. We have at least four levels of information that need to be handled: 1) quotations from Celsus; 2) Origen's own interpretations of these quotations; 3) descriptions of source materials Origen knows; and 4) Origen's own understandings of these source materials.[2] Although previous scholarship has been aware of this

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[1] Chadwick 1965, 337 n. 3; Witte 1993, 23; Denzey 2005, 89; Rasimus 2009, 244; Ledegang 2011, 53–63.

[2] To assist with the identification of the embedded source material, Grant 1961, presents a *split translation*, dividing Celsus' material from Origen's. Chadwick 1965, presents Celsus' material in italics, while leaving Origen's in regular type.

complexity and has tried to handle it in a variety of ways including attempts to reproduce the diagram itself, success has been mixed.[3] The discussion of the diagram has been made even more complex by a scholarly discourse that has overwhelmed the diagram with indiscriminate references to other ancient sources and emendations that force the material to fit the logic of the modern scholarly discourse and its assumptions. After almost two hundred years of academic analyses of Origen on the diagram, we remain trapped in the complexities of the narrative on the most basic levels.

We know that the diagram consisted of a series of circles inscribed with the names and images of the archontic rulers of the heavens, but what was it? Was this a cosmic and supracelestial map or a kabbalistic tree?[4] We know that the diagram was connected to liturgy, but what liturgy?[5] Was it an initiatory ascent, a meditative descent, or last rites performed as the body lay dying?[6] The planets were involved, but what was their sequence? Was it the conventional Ptolemaic order, or not?[7] Origen records a series of prayers

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[3] Reproductions of the diagram have been presented by Matter 1843; Giraud 1884; Arendzen 1909; Hopfner 1930; Leisegang 1941; Welburn 1981; Witte 1993; Mastrocinque 2005; Logan 2006. These diagrams ought to be approached with caution since they are most often derivative of earlier renderings, reproducing earlier errors and adding idiosyncratic material from other Gnostic sources not mentioned in Origen's account. Other scholars have studied the diagram without producing a pictorial: Gruber 1864; Lipsius 1864; Hilgenfeld 1884; Culianu 1983; Denzey 2005; Rasimus 2009; Ledegang 2011.

[4] Those scholars who argue that it is a cosmic map of the planets include: Lipsius 1864, 37–57; Bousset 1901, 272; Chadwick 1965, 340 n. 1; Collins 1995, 83–84; Hopfner 1930, 87–88; Leisegang 1941, 168–173; Foerster 1972, 94; Grant 1961, 89; Welburn 1981, 263; Flamant 1982, 231; Culianu 1983, 48–49; Witte 1993, 31–39; Logan 2006, 41–42; Rasimus 2009, 244, 248. Those scholars who think that diagram included a map of the transcosmic world include: Mastrocinque 2005, 96–101; Logan 2006, 43; Rasimus 2009, 244. Mastrocinque 2005, 118, reconstructs the diagram as a kabbalistic tree of eight circles.

[5] Arendzen 1909, 597b writes, "How far these sacred diagrams were used as symbols in their liturgy, we do not know."

[6] Ascent is preferred by: Hopfner 1930, 265; Welburn 1981, 263; Rasimus 2009, 247–248; Ledegang 2011, 76–82. Descent is argued by: Witte 1993, 31–39, 101–102, 113, 125–128. Last rites or a mortuary context is suggested by: Denzey 2005, 115–116 (Celsus' diagram); Logan 2006, 41–42; Rasimus 2009, 249–255; Ledegang 2011, 54–55. Initiatory context is favored by: Witte 1993; Rasimus 2009, 249–255. Anz 1897, 12–13, and Culianu 1983, 48–49, suggested that the diagram referred to the words of the descending Savior.

[7] Conventional order, but in reverse, and with some adjustments: Wendland 1972, 174–175 n. 4; Culianu 1983, 48–49; Welburn 1981, 263; Collins 1995, 83–84; Logan 2006, 42; Rasimus 2009, 112; Ledegang 2011, 76–82. Denzey 2005, 99–103, does not think the order of the names reflects the conventional order of the planets, but instead reflects the seven day week and represents a chronological ascent rather than a planetary one, again with some adjustments.

addressed to various archons and inscribed on the diagram. We know that the prayers functioned as passwords for the soul journey.[8] But their order is odd. Not only are they presented in a descent order, but the reference to the Sun and its ruler Adonaios is missing. Did Origen render the Ophian liturgy in reverse order? Are we dealing with a mistake? Should we flip around the order of the prayers? Should we assume that a prayer to Adonaios was on the diagram too?[9]

The standard historical-critical approach has not been sufficient to answer these questions because it has not been able to account for the creativity of individual authors like Celsus or Origen, nor the cognitive innovations of architects of material items like the diagram. When textual testimony about the diagram has not fit our standardly conceived historical categories, it has been adjusted or emended to reflect our categories, so that we end up with an interpretation of a diagram that never existed except in the minds of modern scholars.[10]

The standard historical-critical approach has not known how to envision a cultural production like the diagram described by Origen outside a linear model of origin, causation, and consequence. We have snagged what we can from the ancient sources to construct our own system for the diagram, a system based on backgrounds, influences, and linear causal developments that likely never existed in history. To do this, the historical-critical approach has had to slice and dice the material so that we end up privileging a text's single authorial meaning as early, accurate and relevant, isolated from its consequent interpretation as late, inaccurate and irrelevant. As a result, the historical enterprise has understood the message of the text to be separate from the extended conversation that the text was part of and fueled. While this model is problematic for any text we might study, it is particularly problematic for a testimony like Origen's, which contains multiple conversations about the diagram. Which conversation do we privilege? The testimony of Celsus? Origen? The original architect of the diagram? The prime users? Our own?

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[8] Bousset 1901, 272; Hopfner 1930, 87; Leisegang 1941, 32, 168–173; Foerster 1972, 94; Welburn 1981, 263; Flamant 1982, 231; Logan 2006, 42–43; Rasimus 2009; Ledegang 2011, 76–82.

[9] Origen transcribed them in reverse order and left out the sun: Anz 1897, 12–13; Foerster 1972, 94; Welburn 1981, 263–264; Fossum 1985, 324; Denzey 2005, 109; Rasimus 2009, 247–248; Ledegang 2011, 76.

[10] On the contamination of our reconstruction of history with the prejudices and ideologies of the interpreter, see Smith 1990.

I propose to start fresh with a revisionist historical approach—what I am calling Network Historicism.[11] First, this approach understands the physical embodiment of human beings to be essential to the creation and interpretation of cultural productions like the diagram discussed by Origen, so that knowledge is not treated as something separate from the human bodies that produce and communicate it, as some hazy intertextual discourse or floating intangible ideal.[12]

Second, this approach abandons the construction of linear analyses, in favor of a kaleidoscopic description that explains the embeddedness of a production, like the diagram, within extended networks of knowledge and social matrices. The humans who conceived the diagram, and those who used it or consequently referenced it, were situated cognitively within a number of dynamic webs of knowledge. Furthermore, they physically inhabited certain social matrices where these webs of knowledge were in play.[13] Their individual minds actively integrated and compressed vast amounts of knowledge into their own personal cognitive networks in order to produce the diagram, to talk about it and to use it. Consequently, information about the diagram was susceptible to the conditions of human memory, both in terms of personal memory and socio-cultural memory, not to mention the dynamics of cognition and creativity itself.[14]

One of the main values of the Network Historical approach is the equal weight given the composition as its own production with its own architect, and the composition as it was used consequently by others. In the case of the diagram, this is paramount. On the one hand, we have reference to a diagram that was produced by a particular architect within a particular social matrix for a particular audience of users. But this diagram has emerged within new contexts, having a life that extends beyond its architect and primer users. Subsequent users of the diagram—in this case, Celsus and Origen—may or may not be affiliated with the same domains of knowledge and social matrices that were familiar to the diagram's architect and prime users. In fact, it is arguable that they were quite divergent. Nonetheless, both Celsus and Origen have a version of the diagram, which they work to interpret by retrofitting it to their own cognitive maps and mental spaces, as well as social matrices.

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[11] For a programmatic description of Network Historicism, see the statement published online by April D. DeConick, at the website www.aprildeconick.com.

[12] Slingerland 2008, 210–212.

[13] Cf. Lakoff-Johnson 1980; Fauconnier 1994, 1997; Coulson 2001; Fauconnier-Turner 2002.

[14] Halbwachs 1952/1992; Carruthers 1990; Zelizer 1995, 214–239; Schwartz 1996, 908–927.

I will start to map the diagram by first tracing what can be known about Celsus' knowledge and interpretation of the diagram, as it has been censored by Origen. What does Origen reveal about Celsus' knowledge of the diagram and his interpretation of it? Second, I will turn to Origen's knowledge of the diagram. What did he think it represented and how does he see himself as correcting Celsus' impressions of it?

Once this extended network has been charted, the diagram itself can be considered, as the production and property of people other than Celsus and Origen. The diagram itself reflects the mental map of the person who initially produced it for a particular set of users or clients. The traces of this person's mental map reflected in descriptions of the diagram represent the selective projection, integration and compression of information for a particular application within a particular social matrix. What can we know about it?

In this final stage of analysis, it will be necessary for me to examine comparable productions, cultural data, and resources that may have been unavailable to the architect of the diagram, or those like Celsus and Origen who subsequently interpreted it. When I overlay this global network of knowledge onto the local networks of Celsus and Origen, a kaleidoscopic vista will emerge, allowing us to view the deep architecture of the diagram, its uses, and its explanations.

What Does Celsus Think about the Diagram?

Among the many criticisms of the Christians that Celsus voices in *The True Doctrine* is the point that the Christians offer nothing to intellectuals. Celsus says that Plato and the other philosophers had already expressed the ideas found in the Christian scriptures, without needing to assert, as the Christians do, that they were revealed by a god or a son of a god. He says that the scriptures used by the Christians are a far cry from the aesthetically pleasing and intellectually sophisticated writings of the philosophers. The scriptures are crude at best. At worst, they were invented to dupe uneducated yokels in the language of the folk.[15] Celsus thinks that Christians operate as "sorcerers" whose audience is not people of culture. Rather Christians prey on those who are easily deceived, seeking to "trap illiterate folk" in their churches.[16]

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[15] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.1–2: Borret 1969a, 178–183.
[16] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.12, 14: Borret 1969a, 206–209.

To prove his point, Celsus calls into play a number of examples where he finds the Christian discourse plagiarizing the Platonic. By examining these, we are able to highlight a number of traces of Celsus' own mental map of the Christian landscape. One of the traces concerns the concept of the soul. Celsus discusses Plato's view of the soul as an entity whose ultimate aim is to leave behind the "troubles and strivings" of embodiment, to mount and ascend to the "topmost heaven" where it flies around "the circumference of the heaven" engaged in the "contemplation" of the invisible things.[17] He identifies the route of embodiment and the route of escape with a Platonic journey through the celestial spheres of the seven planets, saying that "the way for the souls to and from the earth passes through the planets."[18]

Celsus goes on to relate his understanding that the Platonic route through the planetary spheres was known to the Mithraic initiates. They use a ladder to symbolize the two orbits of heaven—the orbit of the fixed stars in the Zodiac and the orbit of the planets—and the soul's ascent through these. The rungs of the ladder represent seven gates, and at the top is an eighth. The gates are associated with the planets, the gods, and certain metals.[19] This arrangement of the planets does not follow the traditional arrangement, which was based on the perceived distance of each planet from the earth: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. Celsus tracks this unconventional arrangement of the planets by the day of the week to Mithraism's reliance on a musical theory, a theory which may have reflected ancient speculations about the harmony of the spheres.[20]

Table 1. Mithraic arrangement of planets and their associations

Gate	Planet	God	Metal	Characteristic
1	Saturn	Kronos	Lead	slowness of the star
2	Venus	Aphrodite	Tin	brightness and softness of tin
3	Jupiter	Zeus	Bronze	firm base
4	Mercury	Hermes	Iron	reliable for work/money
5	Mars	Aries	Alloy	uneven mixture and quality
6	Moon		Silver	resembles moon's color
7	Sun		Gold	resembles sun's color

[17] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.20; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247B–C.
[18] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.21; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 248 C–E; *Timaeus* 41D–42E.
[19] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.21: Borret 1969a, 230, 232.
[20] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.22: Borret 1969a, 232–237.

Having established that Mithraic initiation is derivative of Plato, Celsus moves on to criticize Christian initiation (τελετή), which he argues plagiarizes both Plato and Mithraism for its own take on the planetary journey of the soul.[21] To prove his point and lay bare what is uniquely Christian and ultimately silly about Christian initiation, Celsus goes on to compare what he considers analogous systems: Christian initiation through the spheres and Mithraic initiation. He does so by referring to a diagram that he identifies as "Christian."[22]

Celsus is making these connections because, in his mind, what he has learned about Christian initiation and the use of a particular diagram during that initiation, fits what he already knows about Platonic views of the planetary journey of the soul and Mithraism. This is not a point that should be dismissed because we think Celsus might have been mistaken or was acting out of polemics. Traces of Celsus' own mental map are reflected in his composition, and these traces suggest that he recognized a fit between his local web of knowledge—what he knew about Plato's view on the planetary ascent of the soul and Mithraism—and what he had learned about Christian initiation and the use of a particular diagram. In addition, Celsus, as a writer, understood that his audience would be capable of recognizing this fit too. In other words, the coordination of these nodes of information was local and reasonable given the shared web of knowledge available to the ancient people in his society.

What did Celsus' diagram look like? He describes a drawing of ten circles, separate from each other, but held together by a single circle, which was the soul of the universe, labeled Leviathan.[23] He continues that the diagram was "marked with" a black line (μελαίνῃ γραμμῇ παχείᾳ διειλημμένον εἶναι τὸ διάγραμμα).[24] The people from whom he got the diagram told him that this marked off area was Gehenna or Tartarus.[25]

At this point in his discussion of the diagram, Celsus mentions a ceremony called "The Seal" and gives an account of it, describing a formulaic exchange between the one who confers the seal and whose title is Father (πατήρ) and the one who receives the seal and whose title is Youth (νέος)

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[21] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.24: Borret 1969a, 238, 240.

[22] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.24: Borret 1969a, 238, 240.

[23] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.25: Borret 1969a, 242.

[24] This is commonly translated "divided" even though the passive form means "to mark off or distinguish" (MLS: 190a). This has caused previous commentators to think that the diagram itself was divided in half with Gehenna located below the circles and the dark line.

[25] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.25: Borret 1969a, 242.

and Son (ὑιός).[26] The Youth answers the Father, "I have been anointed with a white oil from the tree of life."[27] Celsus says that the people who were responsible for anointing the body told him that during the ceremony "there are seven angels standing on each side of the body as the soul leaves it" (ἀγγέλων ἑπτά, ἑκατέρωθεν τῇ ψυχῇ τοῦ ἀπαλλαττομένου σώματος ἐφισταμένων).[28] I read the Greek in its most simple terms to indicate that seven angels were collected on the right side of the body, while another seven were collected on the left. Celsus says that he was told by those who perform the ceremony that one group of these angels is comprised of angels of light, while the other group of angels is called, "the archontic angels." The chief of the archontic angels, they called "a god who has been cursed."[29] This cursed god, Celsus said, they identify with the God of the Jews, the storm god who is described by Moses in his writings as the god who created this world.[30] They further told Celsus that this god deserves to be cursed because it was he who cursed the serpent that gave the first humans knowledge of good and evil.[31] Celsus again identifies these religious practitioners as "Christians."[32]

Celsus remarks that their views of the Jewish god amounts to something along the order of schizophrenia. First he wants to know why the Jewish god would have made a mistake. Perhaps the Jewish god did not make a mistake when he promised the Jews everything from progeny to immortality as resurrected beings. Perhaps the Jewish god really did inspire the Jewish prophets. Celsus criticizes the Christians for holding stock in the Jewish scriptures and laws, while abusing the god who gave them in the first place. If you believe that Jesus laid down laws that contradict the laws of the Jewish god, Celsus reasons, why give the Jewish laws any credence at all? Celsus wants to know why the Christians who curse the god responsible for creation and the law, accept the cosmogony laid out by Moses, and hold enough stock in the Jewish law to even bother reinterpreting it allegorically. Celsus thinks that this kind of reasoning makes the Christians crazy or stupid. On the one hand, they say that they respect the same god as the Jews, while on the other hand, they posit the existence of another god who is the genuine Father God.[33]

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[26] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 244, 246.
[27] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 246.
[28] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 246.
[29] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 246.
[30] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 246.
[31] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.28: Borret 1969a, 248.
[32] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.28: Borret 1969a, 248.
[33] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.29: Borret 1969a, 250.

After this aside, Celsus returns to describe the seven archontic demons named by the Christians with whom he had conversed about the diagram. He lists them in order from first to seventh: the first is lion-shaped; the second is a bull; the third is some kind of amphibian hissing horribly; the fourth has the form of an eagle; the fifth has the face of a bear; the sixth has the face of a dog; the seventh has the face of an ass and is called "Thaphabaoth" or "Onoel."[34] Then Celsus says that when the practitioners "go up into" (ἐπανέρχομαι) the archontic realms, some of them become lions, some bulls, and others serpents or eagles or bears or dogs.[35]

Celsus mentions a rectangle on the diagram, which the practitioners associated with the gates of paradise.[36] He tells us that there were circles drawn above the heavens and labeled. He says that there were two among them, a larger and smaller circle, which were labeled "Father" and "Son."[37]

He lists out a number of themes and images that he appears to have learned from the practitioners with whom he had been conversing. He says that

> they add one thing on top of another—words of prophets, and circles on circles, and an outpouring of the Church upon the earth and (an outpouring) of the Circumcised, and a power flowing from a certain virgin harlot, and a living soul, and heaven sacrificed that it may have life, and, with a knife, earth sacrificed and many people sacrificed that they may have life, and death in the world ceasing when the sin of the world dies, and a narrow descent again, and gates that open spontaneously.[38]

Celsus comments that they made constant references to "the tree of life" and ἀνάστασιν σαρκὸς, "by means of the tree." He imagines that these references were being used because their teacher had been nailed to a cross and was a carpenter.[39]

Celsus even reports how the Christians he spoke to were using their diagram. He says that they professed to use magical enchantment, invoking the foreign names of the demons. In a later chapter of *Against Celsus*, Origen quotes another passage in which Celsus explains that "the enchantments addressed to the lion, the amphibian, the ass-shaped, and the other superhuman gatekeepers were names" of the Archons that had to be "memorized"

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[34] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.30: Borret 1969a, 252, 254.
[35] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.33: Borret 1969a, 260.
[36] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.33: Borret 1969a, 260.
[37] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.38: Borret 1969a, 270.
[38] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.34: Borret 1969a, 260, 262.
[39] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.34: Borret 1969a, 262.

by the initiate.[40] In this way, Celsus felt they bamboozled converts who did not know that these pronunciations were ordinary demon names in an unfamiliar language like Scythian.[41] He mentions that they practiced rites of purification (καθαρμοὺς), songs of redemption (λυτηρίους ᾠδὰς), sounds to get rid of illness (ἀποπομπίμους φωνάς), echoes (κτύπους), appropriation of demon forms (δαιμονίους σχηματισμούς) and various remedies of vestments (ἐσθήτων παντοῖα ἀλεξιφάρμακα) and numbers (ἀριθμῶν) and stones (λίθων) and plants (φυτῶν) and roots (ῥιζῶν) and all kinds of other things (ὅλως παντοδαπῶν χρημάτων).[42] He affirms that he has seen with his own eyes the books of the Christian Elders in which the foreign names of the demons and the knowledge of portents (τερατεία) were written.[43] Celsus considers their pronouncements to be harmful rather than beneficial as they claimed.[44]

What Does Origen Think about the Diagram?

In order to refute Celsus, Origen says that he searched around and found a copy of the diagram Celsus had. He explains that he was unable to find anyone who used the diagram, including gullible women and stupid yokels.[45] Although he appears to have discussed the diagram he found with a number of other "learned" Christians, by his own admission, he was not in contact with the diagram's prime users.

To defuse Celsus' argument, his main strategy is to distance Christians and Christianity from the diagram as far as he possibly can, repeating serially that Celsus has misidentified the users. Origen wants to make clear that Christians do not use this diagram. Instead Christians understand the passage of the soul into the divine realm with reference to Ezekiel, "where different gates are described, intimating in veiled form certain notions about the various ways in which the more divine souls enter into the higher (realm)".[46] According to Origen, these twelve gates are referenced too in Revelation when John of Patmos discusses the gates and foundations of

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[40] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.40: Borret 1969b, 104–109.
[41] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.38–39: Borret 1969a, 270, 272.
[42] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.39: Borret 1969a, 274.
[43] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.40: Borret 1969a, 274.
[44] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.40: Borret 1969a, 274.
[45] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.24: Borret 1969a, 238, 240.
[46] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.23: Borret 1969a, 236. English translation: mine. Cf. Ezek 48: 30–35.

heavenly Jerusalem.[47] Origen references also the book of Numbers where he suggests that Christians who ask are initiated (μυσταγωγέω) into what has been written about the encampments of the children of Israel. This is done so that they can "learn through symbols the road which has been revealed to those who will journey to the divine realm".[48]

So although Origen wishes to distance Christianity from the diagram that he and Celsus have in hand, he does not argue that Christians are uninvolved in soul journeys. Rather he maintains that Christians have a form of initiation associated with the journey of the soul to the divine realm, but insists that it is different from the one represented by the diagram.

Origen goes on to make an even more extreme claim than this. Not only don't Christians use the diagram, he says, but the diagram belongs to a religious sect that is both non-Christian and anti-Christian. He identifies the prime uses as heretics called Ophians, or snake worshipers, who "blasphemed Jesus' Name" and who maintained that the Jewish god is cursed.[49] In order to prove this point, he contrasts Christian doctrines with Ophian. He insists that Christians believe that the Creator of this world is good rather than cursed.[50] He says that Christians and Jews worship "one and the same God."[51] He also insists that Christians do not understand the serpent in Eden to have done right by conspiring with the first humans.[52] In typical Origenist fashion, he tries to distance Christians from the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, saying that Christians do not maintain that the natural body will be raised. He quotes Paul to support this position.[53] Paradoxically, as we will see later in this essay, the Christians who drew the diagram would have agreed with Origen on this latter point.

As for the diagram itself, Origen provides us with more details about the copy he has in hand, while also exposing the perceived errors in the Ophian teachings. He recounts that the diagram says that Leviathan is the

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47 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.23: Borret 1969a, 236. Cf. Rev 21:12–21.

48 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.23: Borret 1969a, 236, 238. English translation: mine.

49 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.13; 6.24, 27–28; Catena fragm. 47 in 1Cor 12:3 (ed. Jenkins, *JTS* 10 [1908]: 30): "There is a certain sect which does not admit a convert unless he pronounces anathemas on Jesus; and that sect is worthy of the name which it has chosen; for it is the sect of the so-called Ophians, who utter blasphemous words in praise of the serpent." Cf. Iren., Adv. Haer. 1.30.1–15; Ps.-Tert., *Adv. Omn. Haer*. 2; Epiph, *Pan.* 37.3.1; Filastrius, *Haer*. 1; Theodoret, *Haer. fab*. 1.14.

50 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.27: Borret 1969a, 246.

51 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.29: Borret 1969a, 250.

52 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.28: Borret 1969a, 248, 250.

53 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.28: Borret 1969a, 250, 252. Cf. 1Cor 15:42–44.

soul permeating the universe. Origen connects the Leviathan reference to the Psalms (while quoting a version of Joshua 18:16). He understands the scriptural reference to Leviathan to have negative connotations that undo the Ophian association of Leviathan with the universal soul—that Leviathan was created by God to be a playmate, not the soul of the universe.

He also mentions that the lowest circle in the diagram is labeled. "Behemoth" is written in the middle of the lowest circle (μετὰ τὸν κατωτάτω κύκλον). Thus Leviathan, Origen says, is both upon the circumference of the circle and at its center.[54] It is unclear to me from Origen's testimony if Leviathan is identified on the diagram as the ouroborus and a figure in the middle of the lowest circle, or if in Origen's mind Leviathan and Behemoth are identical entities so that the reference to Behemoth in the center of the lowest circle is understood by Origen to be a second reference to Leviathan.

He agrees that there is a thick black line on the diagram, but disagrees that this line actually indicates the location of Gehenna or Tartarus. Through a scriptural study of the word Gehenna, Origen locates this place of torment "in heavenly Jerusalem" with the Chasm of Ennom owned by the tribe of Benjamin.[55] Origen's argument suggests that the thick black line around Gehenna on the diagram, located Tartarus somewhere outside of the heavenly realms where he himself seems to place Gehenna. In his discussion of Gehenna, Origen refers to a doctrine of the purification of the soul: since the soul has taken into its very essence the works caused by evil, the soul is in need of refinement. He refuses to say any more on the subject because he thinks that the masses do not require any more instruction than "sinners will be punished."[56]

Origen provides more information about the seven archons mentioned by Celsus. Origen says that his copy of the diagram included the scriptural or angel names of the archons, along with their animal forms: Michael is the lion-like archon; Suriel is bull-shaped; Raphael is the hissing amphibian; Gabriel is shaped like an eagle; Thauthabaoth is bear-like; Erathaoth is dog-faced; Onoel or Thartharoath has the head of an ass.

Origen's copy of the diagram also contained a number of prayers. Origen understands them to be certain initiatory secrets (ἀπόρρητά τινα) invented by sorcerers. The initiates were taught to say these prayers "as they went through the middle of what they call 'the fortification of evil', the gates

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[54] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.25: Borret 1969a, 240, 242.
[55] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.25: Borret 1969a, 240, 242.
[56] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.26: Borret 1969a, 242, 244.

of the Archons which had been bound shut forever" (μετὰ τὸ διελθεῖν ὃν ὀνομάζουσι "φραγμὸν κακίας", πύλας ἀρχόντων αἰῶνι δεδεμένας). We are very fortunate that Origen quotes the prayers inscribed on the diagram, preserving for us the liturgical words of some of the prime users of the diagram.[57]

Origen says that the first prayer is addressed to the Archon from whom the Powers of the Ogdoad originate.

> Βασιλέα μονότροπον, δεσμὸν ἀβλεψίας, λήθην ἀπερίσκεπτον ἀσπάζομαι, πρώτην δύναμιν, πνεύματι προνοίας καὶ σοφίᾳ τηρουμένην· ἔνθεν εἰλικρινὴς πέμπομαι, φωτὸς ἤδη μέρος υἱοῦ καὶ πατρός · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, ναὶ πάτερ, συνέστω.[58]
>
> I greet the Solitary King, the bond of blindness, the reckless forgetting, the First Power, guarded by the Spirit of Pronoia and by Sophia. Thence I am sent forth pure, already a part of the light of the Son and the Father. May Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be with me.[59]

Next they approach the gate of Ialdabaoth. Origen remarks that the initiates think Ialdabaoth, the lion-like Archon, is in sympathy with the planet Saturn. As they pass through the gate of Ialdabaoth, the initiates are taught to say:

> Σὺ δὲ μετὰ πεποιθήσεως πρῶτε καὶ ἕβδομε γεγονὼς κρατεῖν Ἰαλδαβαώθ, ἄρχων λόγος ὑπάρχων νοὸς εἰλικρινοῦς, ἐργον τέλειον υἱῷ καὶ πατρί, χαρακτῆρι τύπου ζωῆς σύμβολον ἐπιφέρων, ἣν ἔκλεισας αἰῶνι σῷ πύλην κόσμῳ ἀνοίξας, παροδεύω τὴν σὴν ἐλεύθερος πάλιν ἐξουσίαν · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, ναὶ πάπερ, συνέστω.[60]
>
> (I greet) you, First and Seventh, born to rule with audacity, Ialdabaoth! As a ruling Logos of pure Nous, as a perfect work for the Son and the Father, by the imprint of the seal bearing the symbol of life, opening your cosmic gate that was shut forever, as a free man I go past your authority again. May Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be with me.[61]

After passing through Ialdabaoth's gate, the initiates reach Iao. They are taught to say to Iao:

> Σὺ δὲ κρυπτομένων μυστηρίων υἱοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἄρχων νυκτοφαὴς δεύτερε Ἰαὼ καὶ πρῶτε δέσποτα θανάτου, μέρος ἀθώου, φέρων ἤδη τὸν ἴδιον ὑπήνουν σύμβολον, παροδεύειν σὴν ἕτοιμος ἀρχήν · κατίσχυσας τὸν ἀπὸ σοῦ γενόμενον λόγῳ ζῶντι · ἡ χάρις συνέστω, πάτερ, συνέστω.[62]

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[57] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 254, 256, 258.
[58] Origen, Contra Celsum 6.31: Borret 1969a, 254.
[59] English translation is mine.
[60] Origen, Contra Celsum 6.31: Borret 1969a, 254, 256.
[61] English translation is mine.
[62] Vatican MS. has φέρων ἤδη τὸν ἴδιον ὑπήνουν σύμβολον, which I follow and translate here. Borret accepts emendation by K.: ὑπή⟨κοον⟩ νοῦν: Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 256.

> (I greet) you, the Archon from whom the mysteries of the Son and the Father are concealed, Iao, the Second Lord Shining-in-the-Night and the First Lord of Death! As part of the Innocent One, wearing already my own beard as a symbol, (I am) prepared to go past your sovereignty, since by the Living Word I have overpowered that which was born from you. May Grace be with me. Father, may it be with me.[63]

Once they have successfully navigated through Iao's gate, they come to Sabaoth. They are supposed to address him:

> Πέμπτης ἐξουσίας ἄρχων, δυνάστα Σαβαώθ, προήγορε νόμου τῆς σῆς κτίσεως χάριτι λυομένης, πεντάδι δυνατωτέρᾳ, πάρες με, σύμβολον ὁρῶν σῆς τέχνης ἀνεπίληπτον, εἰκόνι τύπου τετηρημένον, πεντάδι λυθὲν σῶμα · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω.[64]
>
> Archon of the Fifth Power, Commander Sabaoth, Defender of the Law of your creation which is being destroyed by Grace! By a mightier Pentad, let me go past, since you see the symbol not open to attack by your craft. (I am) protected by the image of the imprint, since (your) body is destroyed by the Pentad. May Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be with me.[65]

Astaphaeus is the next Archon encountered. The initiates are taught the following formula:

> Τρίτης ἄρχων πύλης ᾽Ασταφαιέ, ἐπίσκοπε πρώτης ὕδατος ἀρχῆς, ἕνα βλέπων μύστην πάρες με παρθένου πνεύματι κεκαθαρμένον, ὁρῶν οὐσίαν κόσμου · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω.[66]
>
> Archon of the Third Gate, Astaphaeus, Overseer of the First-Water-Source! Since you are looking at one who is an initiate, let me pass. By the Virgin Spirit, (I) have been purified, perceiving the essence of the cosmos. May Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be (with me).[67]

After the initiate passes successfully by Astaphaeus, the next Archon is engaged with these words:

> Δευτέρας ἄρχων πύλης Αἰλωαιέ, πάρες με τῆς σῆς μητρὸς φέροντά σοι σύμβολον, χάριν κρυπτομένην δυνάμεσιν ἐξουσιῶν · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω.[68]
>
> Archon of the Second Gate, Ailoaeus! Let me pass since I bring to you your Mother's symbol, Grace that is hidden by the powers of the Authorities. Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be with me.[69]

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[63] English translation is mine.
[64] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 256.
[65] English translation is mine.
[66] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 256.
[67] English translation is mine.
[68] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 256, 258.
[69] English translation is mine.

The last to be addressed is the Archon Horaeus. When the initiates approach his gate, they are taught to say:

> Ὑπερβὰς φραγμὸν πυρὸς ἀφόβως, πρώτης λαχὼν ἀρχὴν πύλης Ὡραῖε, πάρες με, σῆς ὁρῶν δυνάμεως σύμβολον καταλυθὲν τύπῳ ζωῆς ξύλου, εἰκόνι καθ᾽ὁμοίωσιν ληφθὲν ἀθώου · ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω.[70]
>
> You who mount the wall of fire without fear, the Archon who protects the First Gate, Horaeus! Let me pass, since you see the symbol that destroys your power with the imprint of the tree of life. (Your power has been) seized by the image according to the likeness of Innocence. May Grace be with me. Yes, Father, may it be with me.[71]

Origen understands the names in these prayers to be passwords that coordinate with the Archons on the diagram. The mixture of names is explained by Origen to be derivative of multi-sources. The diagram drew names from the scriptures, as well as from the craft of ancient magic. He says that they took from magic the names Ialdabaoth, Astaphaeus, and Horaeus, while from the Bible they took various titles of God and applied them to different Archons: Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaeus, and Eloaeus.[72]

Origen describes other drawings on the diagram. He mentions a rectangular figure that was associated with the gates of paradise. Drawn with this figure was a circle of fire, and a flaming sword was pictured on the diameter of the circle, guarding the trees of knowledge and life.[73] Origen also describes further the dual circles mentioned by Celsus, the circles that were labeled "Father" and "Son" on their diameters. The smaller circle was inside the bigger circle. The bigger circle was yellow. The inner was blue. These circles were mirrored with a second set, and between the mirror-image sets was a barrier drawn in the form of a double-sided axe. Above the axe is a smaller circle that touches the larger first two circles. It is labeled "Love" and below the circle "Life" is inscribed.[74] The second smaller and larger circles are described by Origen. Within the larger circle is another circle labeled "Pronoia of Sophia." Within this circle are two smaller circles that intersect. One circle is inscribed with the word "Gnosis" and the other with the word "Synesis." The intersection of the circles is described as a rhomboid shape labeled "Nature of Sophia."[75]

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[70] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 258.
[71] English translation is mine.
[72] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.32: Borret 1969a, 258, 260.
[73] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.33: Borret 1969a, 260.
[74] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.38: Borret 1969a, 270.
[75] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.38: Borret 1969a, 270.

What Can We Know about the Diagram?

As a modern scholar, I have knowledge of comparable materials that Celsus and Origen did not. I operate within my own network of information, one that is more global in scope than were the personal networks of Celsus and Origen. By methodically superimposing this global knowledge onto the information gleaned from our analysis above a kaleidoscopic vista emerges allowing us to begin to gain insight into the deeper architecture of the diagram. We can begin to answer the questions, Who created it? Who used it? What was it?

Matters of Identity

Our analysis of the extended network provided us with contradictory information about the identity of the prime users. Celsus identifies them as Christians. Origen identifies them as non-Christian heretics called Ophians. Since Celsus had direct contact with some of the prime users, it is reasonable to think that he is transmitting information about their own self-identity. If this is the case, then the prime users understood themselves to be Christians and their initiation practices to be Christian. They marketed themselves and their rites to Celsus as Christian through-and-through. Celsus' descriptions of their ideologies are marked with Christian concepts, including Jesus' trade as a carpenter, his proclamation—as their teacher!—of a God of love, his crucifixion on the cross, the resurrection, and the Church on earth. So Celsus transmits in his work what was marketed to him as "Christian" by this group.

Origen's insistence that they are not Christian, but heretical, provides us with his own judgment of them. Origen understands his own brand of Christianity to be the genuine expression of Christianity. Any expression of Christianity that is deviant from Origen's is considered by him to be non-Christian. However, that the prime users were anti-Christian, blaspheming Jesus' Name, does not square up with the information that Celsus provided. This identification is generated solely from Origen's own imagination and consequent assumption that a heretical group must be also a blasphemous group.[76]

What about Origen's association of the diagram with Ophianism? Irenaeus describes a group he identifies as heretical in chapter 30 of his first

[76] For alternative explanations, see Rasimus 2009, 225–242.

book *Against Heresies*. The mythology of this group shares a substantial conceptual array with Celsus' and Origen's accounts of the diagram, including the positive evaluation of the Edenic serpent, certain characters in salvation history, and the names of the Archons.[77] In this case, the two sources are sharing not only common individual ideas, but an arrangement of conceptual arrays that are each emergent distinctive blends: a subversive interpretation of Genesis, a peculiar story of salvation history, and an idiosyncratic list of Archons. These shared conceptual arrays establish a strong domain fit between the diagram and the mythology of the particular group described by Irenaeus. Irenaeus, however, calls this group "Gnostic," not Ophian. It isn't until *Pseudo-Tertullian* that we find the Ophian label connected to a mythology comparable to Irenaeus' description.

This evidence shows that the prime users of the diagram, while understanding themselves to be Christians, were perceived by other Christians as heretics, Gnostics, and Ophians. These were all used as polemical labels meant to erase the group's own Christian heritage and identity. That said, the main tenets of the prime users form a strong conceptual fit with the mythological domain described in the heresiological literature and attributed to the Gnostics and Ophians, rather than the Christian mythological domain that either Origen or Irenaeus were advocating for themselves. While the architect and the prime users of the diagram understood themselves to be Christians, they were operating within a very specific Gnostic Christian matrix of myth, ritual, and social identity. This social matrix was competitive with other Christian matrices, while simultaneously it was perceived by other Christians as transgressive. To highlight their distinctiveness (and for the sake of a better term), we shall call their matrix, *Ophian-Christian*.

A Cosmic Map

What was drawn on the diagram? It is clear from the information gleaned from our analysis above that the diagram included an illustration of the heavens and Tartarus. Given that the diagram consists of ten separate

[77] Contrary to Ledegang 2011, 74, who argues that the users of the diagram are not necessarily the same as the Gnostics/Ophians mentioned by Irenaeus, since the serpent is negatively valued in Irenaeus' account. In my opinion, this is not accurate. The serpent is clearly used by Sophia to enlighten Adam and Eve in Ireneaus' rendition of the myth, even though the serpent is identified as Nous, Ialdabaoth's son. The serpent in fact acts against his father. He is punished for his transgression by being cast down in the lower world of demons and humans (Iren., *Adv. Haer*. 1.30.5–8).

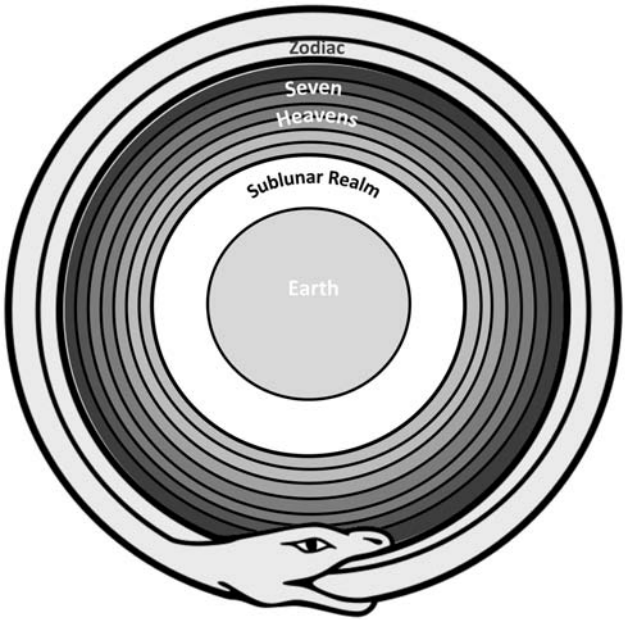

Figure 1. Map of Ptolemaic cosmos with ouroboros. Illustration by April D. DeConick

circles, with Leviathan encompassing them, what we have is a conventional ancient map of the cosmos (1. Earth, 2. Sublunar realm, 3.–9. Seven heavens, 10. Zodiac), with the body of Leviathan as the life-producing ouroboros surrounding the Zodiac.

What was unconventional about the map were its labels and the ouroboros. The map was charted with the Ophian-Christian names of the Archons of each planet and pictorial representations of the animal forms of each ruler. If we accept Origen's comment that Ialdabaoth was associated with Saturn and the planets were presented in conventional order, this would mean that Celsus and Origen were describing the archons on the map from the seventh heaven downwards to the first. The order presented in the following table is the standard ancient planetary arrangement based on the perceived distance of the planet from the earth, beginning with the farthest (Saturn) descending to the nearest (Moon). The seven heavenly spheres and the Zodiac were labeled with this arrangement on the Ophian-Christian diagram, an arrangement which will be confirmed later in this essay.

Table 2. Planetary arrangement

Star or Planet	Ritual or Magic Name	Scriptural or Angel Name	Animal Shape
Zodiac	(?)	Leviathan	Serpent
Saturn	Ialdabaoth	Michael	Lion-shaped
Jupiter	Iao	Suriel	Bull-shaped
Mars	Sabaoth	Raphael	Hissing Amphibian
Sun	Adonaeus	Gabriel	Eagle-shaped
Venus	Astaphaeus	Thauthabaoth	Bear-faced
Mercury	Ailoaeus	Erathaoth	Dog-faced
Moon	Horaeus	Thaphabaoth-Onoel-Thartharaoth	Ass-faced

It is more difficult to identify the location of the dark line that marked the site of Gehenna or Tartarus. Origen discusses this point immediately after he has identified "Behemoth" in the middle of the "lowest circle." This makes me think that the dark line was in close proximity to the lowest circle. By "lowest," I understand Origen to mean the circle that indicates the earth. So I imagine that the dark line was drawn somewhere within the sphere of the earth or immediately outside of it in the sublunar realm.

A Neopythagorean Ascent Pattern

Origen does not dispute Celsus' point that the diagram is connected to the path that the soul journeys through the planets.[78] Additionally, Origen states in book 7.40 that the path that the Ophians map on the diagram is the path "upwards" through the gates of each of the Archons.

Previous scholars, however, have found it impossible to reconcile the upward journey with the accompanying prayers, which move through the archons in a sequence that does not match a sequential order of ascent through the planets: Hoaeus (Moon), Ailoaeus (Mercury), Astaphaeus (Venus), Adonaeus (Sun), Sabaoth (Mars), Iao (Jupiter), Ialdabaoth (Saturn). Instead the prayers present us with what appears to be a descent sequence through the planets from an unnamed Archon, to Ialdabaoth, to Iao, to Sabaoth, to Astaphaeus, to Ailoaeus, to Horaeus. Adonaeus ruler of the Sun is missing from the prayer sequence when read in descending order.

[78] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.21: Borret 1969a, 230, 232.

Table 3. Ophian-Christian prayer chart

Prayer Sequence	Gate No.	Archon Invoked	Archon Epithets	Planet	Protection Used
1			· Solitary King · Bond of Blindness · Reckless Forgetting First Power		· Spirit of Pronoia · Sophia
2		Ialdabaoth	· First Seventh	Saturn	· Symbol of Life · Father and the Son
3		Iao	· Second Lord Shining-in-the-Night First Lord of Death	Jupiter	· Symbol of the beard
4		Sabaoth	· Archon of the Fifth Power · Commander Defender of the Law	Mars	· Symbol of the Pentad
5	3rd	Astaphaeus	· Archon of the Third Gate · Overseer of the First-Water-Source	Venus	· Purification by the Virgin Spirit
6	2nd	Ailoaeus	· Archon of the Second Gate	Mercury	· Symbol of the Mother
7	1st	Horaeus	· The-One-Who-Mounts-the-Wall-of-Fire-Without-Fear · Archon who protects the First Gate	Moon	· Symbol of Tree of Life · Symbol of Innocence

The problem that has frustrated past scholarship on this matter revolves around a failure to identify the domain of knowledge and the social matrix in which this ascent pattern was located. Previous scholars have not properly understood how diverse ancient speculation was when it came to identifying the exact path souls take to enter and exit the cosmos at birth and death. This speculation was embedded within the local webs of knowledge about astrology and philosophy, and it produced a plethora of theories. The ancients speculated about the soul's descent and ascent through various planetary routes, as well as through specific star gates within the Zodiacal belt or along star columns like the Milky Way.[79] In fact, one of the attractions of initiatory guilds like the Ophian-Christian was their claim to the secret knowledge of the precise path the soul uses to enter and exit the world. This

[79] DeConick 2012, 25–31.

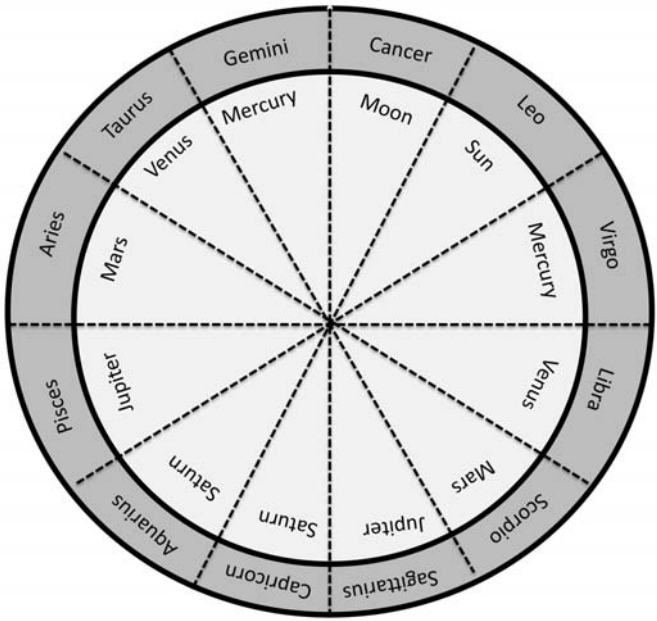

Figure 2. Ancient Zodiac with planetary rulers. Illustration by April D. DeConick

knowledge was the trade secret of each guild. The path of descent and ascent through the planets was not necessarily the same thing as ascending and descending through the structural arrangement of the planetary spheres. If this were the case, the guild would have no initiation secret to offer.

As it turns out, the architect and prime users of the diagram were not befuddled folk who did not understand astrology, nor was Origen mixed up and sloppy in his presentation of the prayers. As we will see shortly, the pattern that Origen transmits maps directly onto the ascent pattern articulated by Numenius according to Porphyry, a pattern that had the soul move successively through the Zodiacal signs and their planetary rulers. The correspondence between the ascent schema reflected in the diagram and Porphyry's record of Numenius' teaching is not just at the level of the order of the nocturnal houses, but also includes an exact correlation between the gates of entry and exit which were identified with Capricorn and Cancer.[80]

[80] Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 22–23. Contrary to Denzey 2005, 102, who writes that Porphyry's testimony is not helpful.

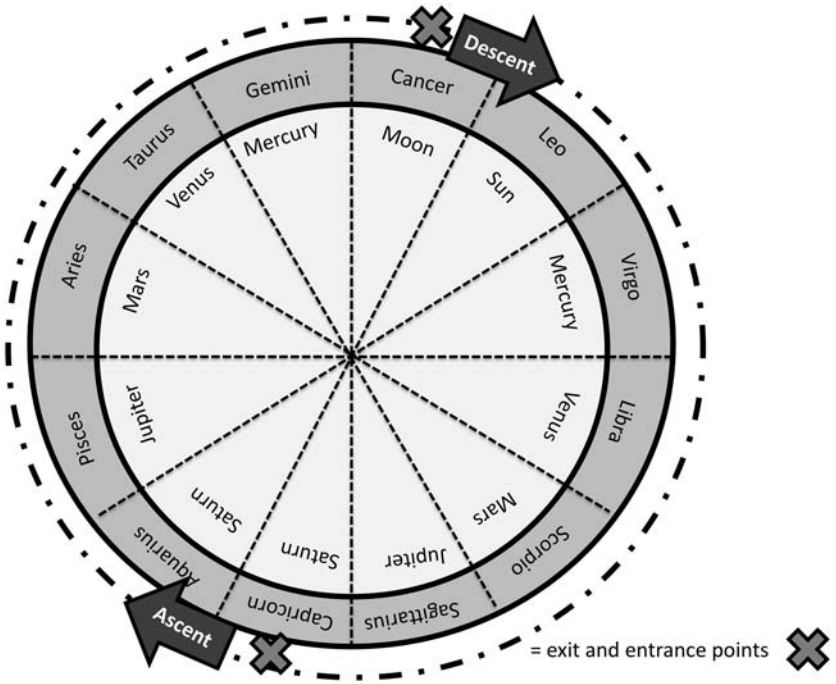

Figure 3. *Numenius' descent-ascent pattern*. Illustration by April D. DeConick

In Numenius' expert opinion, the descent of the soul started through the Gate in Cancer, which is ruled by the Moon, and then followed around the Zodiac until it hit the Gate in Capricorn when it was flung into a material body. The ascent of the soul was a different matter. It began at the Gate of Capricorn, which is ruled by Saturn and made its way around the Zodiac until it exited through the Gate of Cancer.

Table 4. Shared sequence of planets

Sequence of Planetary Rulers in Numenius' Ascent Pattern	Sequence of Archons and Planetary Associations in Ophian-Christian Prayers	
Saturn	?	?
Saturn	Saturn	Ialdabaoth
Jupiter	Jupiter	Iao
Mars	Mars	Sabaoth
Venus	Venus	Astaphaeus
Mercury	Mercury	Ailoaeus
Moon	Moon	Horaeus

How does Numenius' ascent pattern align with the sequence of prayers transmitted by Origen? An exact configuration is shared between them, except in the case of the first prayer, which is not explicitly connected to an Archon or a planet in Origen's account.

What can we make of the first prayer? Who might it have been associated with? The Archon is addressed as the "Solitary King" and the "First Power." The second prayer addresses an Archon who is both the "First" and the "Seventh" Power named Ialdabaoth. Why is he *First* and *Seventh*? Because in the descent pattern, Ialdabaoth is the seventh Archon encountered. He is the Archon responsible for genesis, putting the soul into a physical body when it passes through the seventh gate in the descent journey, Capricorn. The reference to the *First* must correspond to the ascent pattern, where Ialdabaoth guards the Gate of Capricorn, the first gate in the journey upwards through the Zodiac. Thus he is the *First* and *Seventh*.

If this is the case, then the unnamed Archon addressed in the first prayer, the "Solitary King" and "First Power," must be Ialdabaoth. But isn't the second prayer addressed to Ialdabaoth too? Why would we have two prayers addressed to the same Archon? Because, in the ascent journey, Ialdabaoth also guards the gate in Aquarius, the Zodiacal sign that the initiate progresses through immediately following Capricorn. It stands to reason that we would expect the first two prayers to be addressed to Ialdabaoth, since he guards the first two gates in the ascent path through the Zodiac. This is exactly what Origen preserves for us: two prayers to the *First Power*. It also explains why, in the second prayer, the initiate tells Ialdabaoth that he is going past "your authority again" (παροδεύω τὴν σὴν πάλιν ἐξουσίαν).[81] This means that there is an exact domain fit between Numenius' ascent pattern and the Ophian-Christian prayers.

What is highly significant is the fact that there is a correspondence between Numenius and the Ophian-Christian maps of the movement of the soul through the nocturnal houses, as well as a correlation of the gates of entry and exit. This innovative conceptual blend is not a simple sharing of a single data point, but the affinity of a bigger conceptual array that Porphyry believed Numenius created. This is strong evidence that there was contact between the Ophian-Christians and Neo-Pythagorean teachings,

[81] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a, 256.

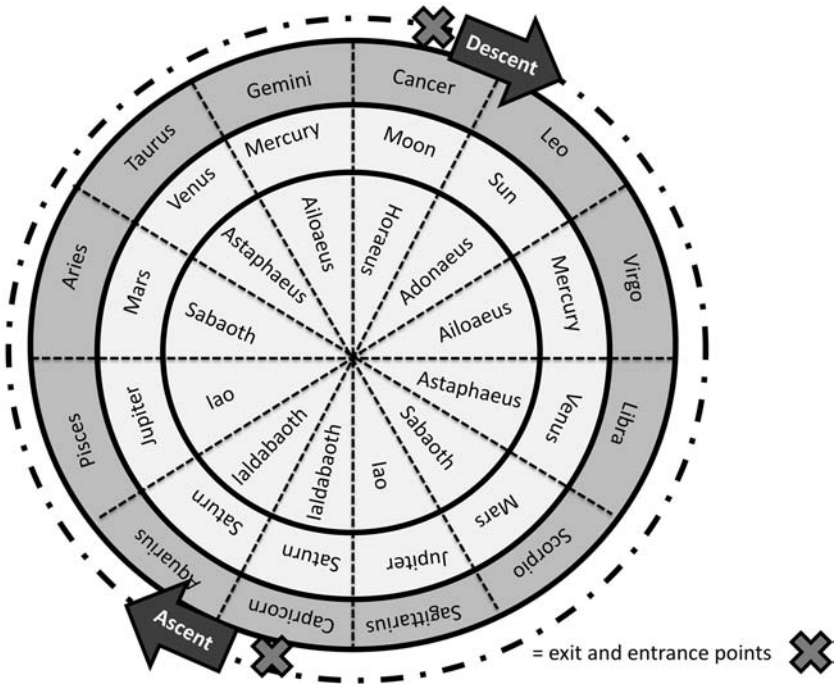

Figure 4. Ophian-Christian descent-ascent pattern. Illustration by April D. DeConick

even though they did not share the same social matrix as the Neo-Pythagoreans. In terms of the social and liturgical contexts, what the Ophian-Christians were doing with the shared ascent pattern was quite distinctive from Neo-Pythagoreans like Numenius. So the Ophian-Christians and their diagram cannot be regarded as Neo-Pythagorean. What the Ophian-Christian diagram reflects is an innovative blend of knowledge, where a Neo-Pythagorean astrological map of the soul journey has interfaced with Gnostic spirituality in a Christian matrix, and become something totally new and totally distinctive on both the conceptual and social levels.

It is difficult to isolate, however, the direct point of contact between the Ophian-Christians and the Neo-Pythagoreans. We do not know whether the Ophian-Christian prayers are younger or older than Numenius who was active in the mid- to late second century. Celsus' record of the diagram may give us the latest possible date for the composition of the prayers—178 CE—although it is Origen, not Celsus, who records the prayers, which were included with Origen's copy of the diagram. If the prayers were not

original to the diagram but are secondary, then their latest possible date of composition shifts from the late second to the early third century, just prior to Origen's testimony. In either case, it means that the composition of the prayers was roughly contemporary with Numenius.

That said, we do not know if there was direct contact between Numenius and the Ophian-Christians, although we do know that Numenius' philosophical writings were popular among Christians beginning in the late second and early third centuries. Even though Porphyry attributes the pattern to Numenius' and Cronius' interpretation of the *Myth of Er*, where Plato mentions two "mouths" as portals for the descent and ascent of the soul, we cannot be certain that Numenius invented this descent-ascent pattern with the Cancer and Capricorn gates. It may have been that Numenius was the one who popularized what already was a conceptual array within the Neo-Pythagorean domain of knowledge. In this latter scenario, the Ophian-Christians simply would have known the ascent scenario as a philosophical teaching among the Pythagoreans, while having had no direct contact with Numenius or his body of work.[82]

This matter is all the more interesting when we take into account the archaeological evidence for Mithraic worship, where the Mithraic caves are constructed to represent the image of the cosmos.[83] The benches that line the walls are meant to represent the ecliptic, the path of the sun through the Zodiac. The arrangement of the diurnal and nocturnal houses of the Zodiac is clearly demarcated on the benches. Furthermore, the gates of entry and exit marked on the benches are associated with Cancer and Capricorn. In the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres, the gates are specifically located at the Gemini-Cancer and the Sagittarius-Cancer boundaries and identified with the summer and winter solstices.

The identification of the gates with Cancer and Capricorn is also depicted on the Housesteads rockbirth, only in this case with the Cancer-Leo and the Capricorn-Aquarius boundaries.

The Housesteads monument, like the benches in the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres, depicts an arrangement of the Zodiac that follows the sequence of the planetary houses.[84] On the Housesteads monument, Mithras emerges in the center of the Zodiacal wheel from a broken egg. The arrangement of the two broken halves of the shells at the top and bottom

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[82] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs* 23. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 10.615d.
[83] Beck 2006; Beck Forthcoming.
[84] Beck 1988, 35.

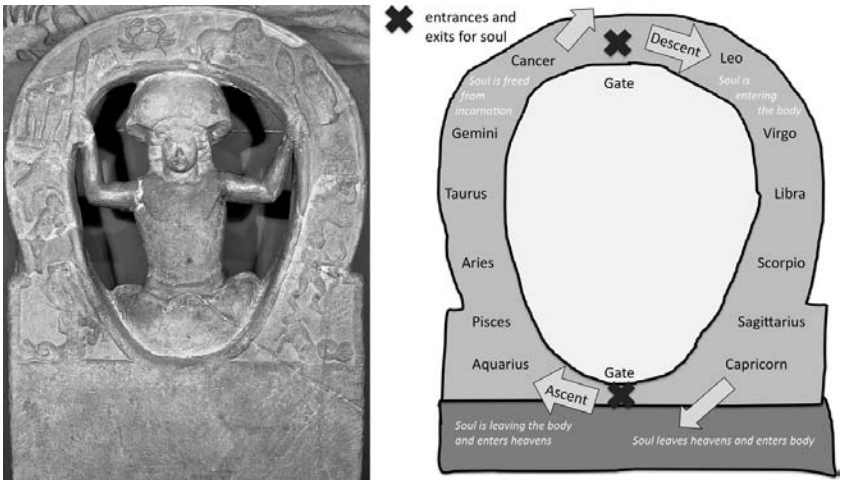

Figure 5. The birth of Mithras from the Mithraeum at Housesteads, MOA 43731, ca. third century; Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK; The Bridgeman Art Library. Reprinted with permission. Corresponding illustration by April D. DeConick

of the wheel reflect the entry and exit points of souls going into and out of the human body. The gate of entry is at the top between the two gates of Cancer and Leo ruled by the two luminaries the Moon and the Sun.[85] If we are meant to follow the pattern from top to bottom, then the artist is depicting the movement of the soul through Leo (Sun) and then through Virgo (Mercury), Libra (Venus), Scorpio (Mars), Sagittarius (Jupiter), and Capricorn (Saturn), at which point it embodies. This reflects a descent through the diurnal house of the Sun on the right side of the monument from top to bottom.

The gate of exit is found at the bottom between Capricorn (Saturn) and Aquarius (Saturn). The artist is depicting the soul leaving the body through this gate, and passing through Aquarius (Saturn), Pisces (Jupiter), Aries (Mars), Taurus (Venus), Gemini (Mercury), and Cancer (Moon). This route is depicted on the left side of the monument, moving from bottom to top, following the order of the nocturnal house on the lunar side of the artifact.

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[85] Cf. Varro, *ap*. Servius *ad. Georg*. 134. Varro read that Empediotimus of Syracuse claims to have seen three routes and three gates of the soul: one in the sign of Scorpius, where Hermes was said to pass to the gods; another *at the boundary between Leo and Cancer*; a third between Aquarius and Pisces. See Beck 1988, 42.

The evidence from Mithraism shows that these cult worshipers had identified the gates of entry and exit of the soul with the solstices associated with Cancer and Capricorn just as Numenius had done. The evidence from Origen tells us that the Ophian-Christians had identified Capricorn as the gate of exit as well. Additionally, the Mithraic cultists depict a nocturnal pattern of ascent through the houses that has striking similarities to the ideas of Numenius and the practices of the Ophians. Like the Ophians, the Mithraic worshipers not only connected the ascent of the soul with passage through the nocturnal houses, but also through the spheres of the seven planets. If Celsus is to be believed (and why not?), the Mithraic worshipers arranged the planetary spheres through which the soul passes sequentially in the week-day order due to some known music theory, likely related to ancient speculation about the harmony of the spheres.

No matter the similarities, the Ophian-Christian system was distinctive too, marketing a precise brand of knowledge to initiates. This brand of knowledge had complexities that would have been shared and rehearsed with the congregants. The fact that the archons are associated with the order of the planetary houses as well as the conventional order of the planets suggests that in the Ophian-Christian system, each archon was identified with a variety of numbers that initiates would have memorized: his planetary house number in the diurnal descent pattern, his planetary house in the nocturnal ascent pattern, and his conventional planet number in terms of distance from the earth.

Table 5. Enumeration of the archons

Archon	Number of his Planetary House in Nocturnal Ascent Pattern	Number of his Planetary House in Diurnal Descent Pattern	Number of his Planet in Conventional Order Farthest to Nearest from Earth	Number of his Planet in Conventional Order Nearest to Farthest from Earth
Ialdabaoth	First-Capricorn Second-Aquarius	Seventh-Capricorn	First-Saturn	Seventh-Saturn
Iao	Third-Pisces	Sixth-Sagittarius	*Second-Jupiter*	Sixth-Jupiter
Sabaoth	Fourth-Aries	*Fifth-Scorpio*	Third-Mars	Fifth-Mars
Adonaeus		Second-Leo	Fourth-Sun	Fourth-Sun
Astapheaus	Fifth-Taurus	Fourth-Libra	Fifth-Venus	*Third-Venus*
Ailoaeus	Sixth-Gemini	Third-Virgo	Sixth-Mercury	*Second-Mercury*
Horaeus	Seventh-Cancer	First-Cancer	Seventh-Moon	*First-Moon*

The Ophian-Christian association of the archons with their planetary houses and with the conventional planetary order helps to explain other difficult features in the prayers. Why, for instance, is Saboath called the "Archon of the Fifth Power" when Saboath rules Mars, the third planet, not the fifth Venus? As Table 5 shows, Sabaoth is the "Archon of the Fifth Power" in the descent pattern, just as Ialdabaoth is the "Seventh." Iao is called the "Second Lord Shining-in-the-Night" because Jupiter is the second planet furthest away from the earth. The references to Astaphaeus, Ailoaeus, and Horaeus as the Archons of the Third, Second and First Gates refer to their proximity to the earth, from Venus (Third) to Mercury (Second) to the Moon (First). Horaeus is called the Archon who "Mounts-the-Wall-of-Fire-Without-Fear" because the Moon, his planet, sits just above the flaming firmament at the top of the sublunar realm.

The question that remains to be answered is the how their movement through the zodiac corresponded to their movement through the planetary spheres, and how this might have been ritually performed by the Ophian-Christians. In Mithraism, the movement through the planets appears to have taken place through a sequence that mimicked the week-day order of the gods. Not so in the Ophian pattern.[86] The order of prayers suggest that the soul met each archon when that ruler was in his house, beginning with Ialdabaoth in Capricorn and ending with Horaeus in Cancer. Whether these meetings between initiate and archon took place in real time (that is, when Saturn was actually in Capricorn or the Moon in Cancer) or in ritually designated time (that is, on a particularly chosen date, like the winter solstice when the sun was in Capricorn) cannot be readily discerned from the extant evidence.

The literature beyond the Ophian evidence suggests that groups in antiquity practiced both. On the one hand, the Hermetics who wrote the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* held initiations into the highest spheres when Mercury was in the house of Virgo and the sun was in the first half of the day and fifteen degrees had passed by Mercury.[87]

On the other hand, the ascent practices of the disciples of the book of *Pistis Sophia* appear to have occurred on a specific designated day to imitate Jesus' ascension and conquest of the archons. They remembered that this event occurred on or around January 24th, that is the fifteenth day of the month of Tôbe when the moon was full and the sun was at its zenith. Their

[86] Contrary to Denzey 2005.
[87] *Discourse on Eighth and Ninth* 62.16–20.

ceremonies ended the next day at the ninth hour, when they believed Jesus' ascension to the Kingdom of Light had been completed.[88] Their mystery rites were phased, some lesser and others superior mysteries. Initiation begins, however, with a robing ceremony when the initiate dons a luminous garment and makes an initial ascent to the gate in the firmament above the earth.[89] Once having passed through this gate, the initiate enters the zodiacal houses of the spheres and encounters archons that become fearful and agitated at the sight of the initiate's luminous garment.[90] Once the rulers of the houses are overcome and bound in their places with the seals of Jeu, the initiate was believed to have passed the first mystery. With the twelve seals, the initiate had bound the planetary rulers in their houses and now had safe passage through the Zodiac.[91] Superior phases of initiation would have been performed on this same day as well, although they would have been reserved for initiates working on passing higher levels.

Whether in real or imagined time, the initiatory practices of the Ophians were similar. Given that Celsus tells us that when the initiates ascended into the archontic realms, "some became lions, some bulls, and others serpents or eagles or bears or dogs," it appears that the Ophian astrological ceremonies were phased.[92] The ascension to overcome Ialdabaoth in Aquarius, for instance, likely occurred on a separate occasion from the ascension to conquer Ailoaeus in Gemini. In the former case, the initiate would return a lion, while in the latter, a dog. The Ophian-Christians were successively traveling through each house when the ruler was believed to be present, to conquer the ruler and make passage through the heavens safe. They did this so that when their souls returned to the planetary spheres after their deaths, the initiated would ascend without resistance. When they came to the eighth sphere of the Zodiac, they would move with no trouble through the nocturnal houses where they would be released from reincarnation at the Cancer gate.

An Ophian-Christian Liturgical Handbook

When seeking the user environment for the diagram, all vectors converge in the web on a single site: a liturgical handbook. Both Celsus and Origen

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[88] *Pistis Sophia* 1.2–3: Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 4–6.
[89] *Pistis Sophia* 1.11: Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 20–21.
[90] *Pistis Sophia* 1.12–15: Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 21–25.
[91] *Pistis Sophia* 2.98: Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 239–241.
[92] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.33: Borret 1969a, 260.

are in agreement on this, and the record of Celsus' exchange with the prime users confirms this environment. The diagram was a page in a handbook filled with all forms of Ophian-Christian rituals and liturgies. We have copies of similar handbooks, such as the two *Books of Jeu* in the Bruce Codex. The pages were covered with illustrations, diagrams, incantations, prayers, creedal statements and ritual instructions.

The Ophian-Christian diagram was used during an initiation ritual called The Seal, when a white unguent was smeared on the body of the initiate by the priest or "Father" of the community. The unguent was understood to originate from the "tree of life" and effect the ἀνάστασιν σαρκός when the soul was released from the body and journeyed through the celestial spheres. It is apparent from their ritual, that the Ophian-Christians were reading the genitive in the phrase *resurrection of the flesh* as an ablative, *resurrection from the flesh*. This appears to have been a major point of contention between the Ophian-Christians and other Christians. In fact, Irenaeus reports the Ophian-Christian complaint that even Jesus' disciples misunderstood what Paul understood, that flesh and blood will not attain to the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not rise in a mundane body. Rather he rose *from* the dead, the Ophian-Christians argued according to Irenaeus' testimony.[93]

The goal of The Seal ceremony was to simulate the death journey—to learn the secret passage of the soul through the archontic realms so that, at death, the soul would be able to avoid the "narrow descent" of reincarnation, and the freed spirit could escape upwards from the cosmos. By superimposing my more global knowledge of the ancient world, I was able to establish that the social matrix of the diagram was not Neo-Pythagorean, but Gnostic Christian. I was able to corroborate, however, a Neo-Pythagorean cognitive domain fit for the diagram, which conceptualized the ascent of the soul as a journey through particular gates along a route in the nocturnal Zodiac houses ruled by certain planetary rulers, a route also known and perhaps invented by Numenius.

The prayers in the handbook coordinate with this particular ascent scheme. Their recitation, along with the display of certain images or seals and the invocation of the secret name of each Archon, opened the locked archontic gates to the passage of the soul. In addition to revealing the secret name of power for each Archon, some of the prayers mention certain items and seals that the initiate displays at each of the archontic gates. The

[93] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.30.13.

display of these ritual objects was understood to have a powerful effect, overcoming the Archon and opening the gates so that the soul could pass through them.

In the first prayer, as the initiate approaches the gate, the initiate acknowledges that "the Spirit of Pronoia and Sophia" are Ialdabaoth's guardians or wardens, restraining Ialdabaoth from harming the pure initiate. The second prayer mentions bearing a seal imprinted with the "symbol of life." According to the third prayer, sporting a beard is a symbol that overpowers the Archon. The fourth prayer references showing an image of the "Pentad," a symbol so mighty that it destroys the Archon. In the fifth prayer, it is the vision of the purified initiate him/herself that overwhelms the Archon. The initiate reveals the "symbol of the Mother" to the Archon, according to the sixth prayer. The seventh prayer describes a "symbol of the tree of life" that destroys the power of Horaeus, the Archon who sits atop the flaming wall.

Can we know any more about these ritual objects? Previous scholars have understood the illustrations on the diagram above the heavens to refer to supracelestial realms. But this is an unconvincing reconstruction, especially when one realizes that the concepts inscribed on these illustrations correspond directly with the concepts mentioned in the prayers.

So what was drawn above the cosmic map? Two of the seals to be used in the ceremony. One of the seals described by Origen was shown to Ialdabaoth twice, once at the gate of Capricorn and once at the gate of Aquarius. As the prayers, this sign contained references to the Father, the Son, Pronoia, Sophia and the sign of Life. The following sketch is my attempt to reproduce Origen's description of this seal and its circles.

The "Gates of Paradise" seal with the trees of life and knowledge and the flaming perimeter matches the final prayer with its description of Horaeus mounted atop the wall of fire. It was the seal the initiate was supposed to display at Horaeus' Moon gate, which was located immediately above the flaming firmament barrier at the top of the sublunar realm. From Origen's description, I offer the following sketch as a mock-up.

A description of the seal of the Pentad was not recorded by Celsus or Origen, perhaps because it appeared on a separate page of the handbook. The reference to the bearded initiate is curious. Since growing a beard is associated with the transition into adulthood, it may be that we have a reference to the achievement of spiritual adulthood, and with it, a strength and maturity that could overcome the Archon. The same idea seems to be behind the fifth prayer where the presentation of the purified initiate him/herself as a vision is what strikes down the Archon.

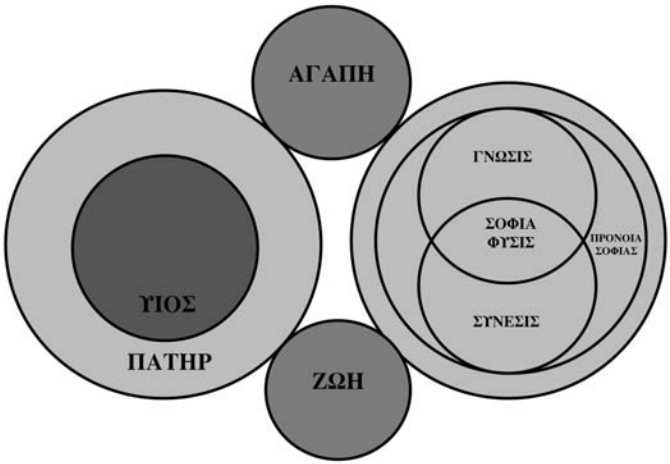

Figure 6. The seal for Ialdabaoth. Illustration by April D. DeConick

Figure 7. Gates of Paradise seal. Illustration by April D. DeConick

What Did the Prime Users Think about the Diagram?

Even though both Celsus and Origen have copies of the diagram and have opinions about the diagram, it is only Celsus who had direct contact with some of the prime users of the diagram. So I understand Celsus' testimony to be invaluable in my attempt to understand the people who were among the prime users of the diagram. First, the prime users of the diagram appear to have understood themselves to be Christians. Second, Celsus identifies the people he talked with as the Elders of a Christian congregation. He says that he was shown certain Christian books used by the Elders. The books contained the names of demons and other formulas used in their rituals of purification, redemption, healing, and demon appropriation. By reading the books and talking to the Elders, he was able to discern that these Christians in the performance of their rituals used vestments, numerology, stones, plants, roots and "all kinds of things."

The diagram appears to have been among the "all kinds of things" they used in their rituals. As a ritual object, it was a material anchor for the community, representing a compression of their conceptual worldview in the physical form of an illustration.[94] Within the performance of the ritual when the illustration was referenced, the diagram's condensed meaning and its connection with knowledge that is beyond human scale was roused. In this way, the map moored the entirety of the community's knowledge of their myth and this entirety was conjured when the diagram was in ritual use. The diagram was created as an external memory resource that prompted specific constructions of meaning and served as a reference point for a very specific worldview.

Since Celsus was told that a certain area on the diagram represented Gehenna or Tartarus, and he mentions that an illustration of the Gates of Paradise was drawn above the heavens, it is reasonable to conclude that the diagram was some type of cosmic map labeled with the names of the archons who were believed to have ruled each of the spheres. Celsus was told by the ritual performer himself, whom the community called the "Father," that the diagram was used in an unction ceremony called The Seal, which effected the separation of the soul from the material body. Some scholars have wanted to read this as a reference to death, although death is not mentioned in the passage, only the separation of the soul from the body.

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[94] Fauconnier-Turner 2002; Hutchins 2005, 1555–1577.

Such a separation would have been an ecstatic experience in the initiatory context described by both Celsus and Origen.

Further, the Christian Elders explained their theology to him, a theology where the Jewish God is cursed even though the Jewish scriptures are being used and reinterpreted, Jesus' Father is a separate God of Love, and the serpent in Eden is applauded for giving knowledge to the first human beings. The Christians Celsus talked to revealed to him the names of the seven archons on the diagram and identified them with their animal forms. They also told him that when they themselves go up into the realms of these archons, they assume their animal forms.

Celsus also provides us with a list of phrases that these Christians repeated. Celsus views them as the repetition of one nonsensical thing after another. In the sequence of Celsus' book, however, these phrases come after Celsus' mention of the ceremony of The Seal and his commentary on it. Were these also part of the anointing ritual associated with the diagram? From his list of phrases, we can see that the priests repeated certain sayings of the prophets while referring to the circles on the diagram. So it is likely that the phrases Celsus has preserved were some of the liturgical words that the community used during the ceremony of the Seal.

During this ceremony with the diagram in hand, the priests recounted the story of the unfolding of the Church and the Jewish community on earth, the outflowing of a Power from Prunikos, the creation of the living soul, and the institution of a sacrificial system that sustained life under the Jewish god of creation. Their liturgy hinged on their declaration that death will only cease when the sin of the world perishes, an apparent reference to the need for the cessation of the sacrificial worship of the Jewish God. The words Celsus recalls end with a reminder of what faces the soul at death. The sinful soul faces the narrow road of descent and rebirth and death again. The purified soul faces ascent through the gates that open. Celsus connects these liturgical words to the community's writings about the tree of life and the resurrection from the flesh by means of the tree. It appears that these Christians understood that they would be resurrected from the flesh when the white unguent that came from the tree of life was smeared on them during The Seal ceremony.

How did Celsus get all this information? He reports that he talked directly with the Elders and the priests of the community who were using the diagram. They showed him their books long enough for him to read portions of them. They explained their books and rituals to him, including walking him through the diagram and explaining it to him in the context of the ritual of The Seal, which Celsus appears to have witnessed. Celsus understands the

information he learns to represent Christian initiation, a mystery that effects the resurrection from the flesh when the soul journeys through the planets.

That Celsus was directly informed by the Elders and priests of the Ophian-Christian community about esoteric knowledge reserved for initiates is curious. Might it suggest that Celsus posed as a Christian initiate at one time, whether his intent was sincere or not? Or was the claim to esoteric knowledge and rites perhaps just that, a claim that held very little truth. Were the Ophian-Christians inviting outsiders to witness their ceremonies and learn about their ways in order to entice them to be initiated into their company?

Compression of Meaning

The Ophian-Christian diagram has long been misunderstood, not only because information about it is embedded in a complex narrative that requires systematic scrutiny, but also because the diagram itself is a compression of meaning. The architect of the diagram blended and compressed elements from the large web of knowledge known to him, so that this vast web of information that exists beyond the human scale was made humanly manageable and relevant to the prime users. This compression resulted in emergent ideas quite distinctive to the Ophian-Christians, ideas not so easy to organize in a linear model of origin, causation and consequence.

These distinctive features have been a challenge—one might even say, an impediment—to explain, and so previous scholarship has resorted to adjusting the information provided to us by Origen, assuming that Origen was wrong or copied the material in reverse order. Scholars have felt warranted to add the name Adonaios back into the prayer list, to rearrange the order of the archons and prayers, and to add information from other Gnostic sources that have nothing whatsoever to do with the diagram. And so previous scholarship, by altering Origen's testimony, has forced the information into modern historical paradigms, rather than decompressing the information and emergent blends back into their source domains.

When we decompress the information back into their source domains, we are faced with a group of mid-second century self-identified Christians who have a priesthood in place, a complex initiatory ritual called The Seal which effected *the resurrection from the flesh*, and a liturgical book that, among other things, includes a cosmic map, illustrations of seals, and prayer formulas used in their mystery initiations.

They are Christians who still give credence to parts of the Jewish scripture, although they understand the Jewish God to be a separate god from

Jesus' loving Father. The Jewish God is portrayed by these Christians as "cursed" because he cursed the serpent that gave Adam and Eve knowledge of good and evil. This god and his minions are associated with the planets. In order for the soul to journey out of this cosmos and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death, which the planets control, the archons must be ritually conquered at their zodiacal gates.

These Christians offer their initiates precise information about the path of ascent through these gates, following a Neo-Pythagorean conceptual pattern made popular by Numenius. The path began at the gate of Capricorn, and then proceeded through Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, with Cancer's gate as the exit. These gates are ruled by specific planets, which these Christians associated with a distinctive pattern of names: Saturn-Ialdabaoth (rules Zodiacal gates of Capricorn and Aquarius); Jupiter-Iao (rules Pisces' gate); Mars-Sabaoth (rules Aries' gate); Venus-Astaphaeus (rules Taurus' gate); Mercury-Ailoaeus (rules Gemini's gate); Moon-Horaeus (rules Cancer's gate). Adonaios is the archon of the Sun and he rules Leo's gate. But this archon is only encountered in the diurnal descent pattern, when the soul falls down through the Zodiacal gates and is embodied again. Thus there is no ascent prayer registered for him in the liturgy of The Seal.

In the end, we discover that Celsus and Origen were both correct. Celsus knew that the diagram was part of an initiatory ritual, a Christian mystery whose performance effected the release and ascent of the soul through a celestial route. In this way, he understood rightly that these Christian initiation practices were distinctive although comparable to those performed in the cult of Mithras. As for Origen, he was no sloppy copyist, nor did he invert the order of the prayers. In fact, his insistence that this ritual was an ascent ritual is confirmed. Indeed, the Ophian-Christian diagram mapped a very precise road for the soul to ascend to Jesus' Father through the nocturnal houses of the Zodiac which were ruled by the planets.

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ECSTATIC RELIGION IN THE ROMAN CULT OF MITHRAS

Roger Beck

Gnosticism and Mithraism—to use the vexed modern terms merely to *indicate* the two ancient systems without in any way *defining* them—share certain features. One of these was a penchant for prescribing, claiming, and undergoing exotic, other-worldly religious adventures. A paper on ecstatic religion in the Mithras cult seemed the most suitable tribute I could offer as a Mithraic scholar to Birger Pearson, one of the pre-eminent Gnostic scholars of our times.[1]

In 2009 my Toronto colleague Colleen Shantz published a groundbreaking book entitled *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought*. Shantz, as far as I know, is the first to apply the approach and methods of neurobiology systematically to a historical subject. Her particular concern is to give an account of the altered states of consciousness experienced by Paul and documented, primarily, in his own letters. Shantz's project, I emphasize, is descriptive ("an account *of*") rather than explanatory ("accounting *for*"), certainly not explanatory in a reductionist sense.

By the technical term "altered state of consciousness" ("ASC" for short) Shantz intends the state of mind and body undergone by Paul in, for example, the experience which he reports in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4. Although Paul employs third-person language to describe this experience, it is generally understood as Paul's own. In other words, the narrative is autobiographical. Paul writes:

> I know a Christian man who fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of it, I do not know—God knows) was caught up as far as the third heaven.

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[1] I first presented this paper as a public lecture at Rice University on November 4, 2011 as a part of the Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Research Seminar "Mapping Death". The exchange of ideas and the hospitality at Rice were among the most memorable and pleasant I have experienced over a by now very long career! If the paper still seems more like an orally delivered paper rather than a "learned article", notably in a shortage of footnotes and references, well, in context that is no bad thing! A few references by way of example seemed preferable to detailed citations of "the scholarship". In matters pertaining to the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), as also in matters pertaining to Paul of Tarsus, Shantz 2009 should be the first port of call; for the application of CSR to the Mysteries of Mithras: Beck 2006, Martin 2012, Martin forthcoming; on the mystery cults in general: Burkert 1987, Bowden 2010.

> And I know that this same man (whether in the body or out of it, I do not know—God knows) was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is impossible for a man to utter. [trans. NEB, except for final verse]

In this paper, I want to explore whether comparable forms of ecstasy were experienced in the cult of the god Mithras, a cult which began to spread widely across the Roman empire about a generation after Paul's time.[2] Mithraism was one of the so-called mystery cults. As such, it was not a public cult: that is, it was not part of the official worship of the gods of the Roman state or of any of the myriad city communities of which the empire was composed. It was a cult which one joined voluntarily as an adult and into which one was admitted by a process of initiation in which ritual played a prominent part.

A defining feature of Mithraism was that the initiates met in quite small groups in enclosed rooms known esoterically as "caves". These mithraea (as they are now called) were sometimes established in natural caves in hillsides and sometimes in vaulted chambers decorated to resemble caves.[3] Beyond the groups of initiates meeting in their mithraea, there was no wider Mithraic communion, no overarching regional or empire-wide authority: in sum, nothing corresponding to the Christian episcopacy. Accordingly, the ecstasy that I seek in Mithraism, if it happened at all, will have been something experienced by the initiates *as* initiates collectively within the confines of their mithraeum.

Here, then, there appears to be an immediate divergence from Paul's type of experience, which at first blush looks to be something quite individual, if not solitary. To some extent, there is indeed a disparity. But this is not really a problem, for I am not looking for a Mithraic experience which will in all respects match the Pauline. Moreover, as Shantz makes clear, even Paul's experiences were by no means unique within the early Christian communities. Forms of ecstasy such as glossolalia were cultivated in the early churches; not only that, but they could become *community* issues.[4] They were not simply the solo stunts of religious athletes.

A word of caution about what I am *not* trying to detect: I am not looking for borrowing or deliberate imitation of one religion's forms of ecstasy by the other religion. If there was borrowing, given that Paul predates all attested

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[2] The best general study of Mithraism, especially for the historical and material record, is Clauss 2000.

[3] Clauss 2000, 42–48.

[4] Shantz 2009, 157–164.

Mithraic communities, it would have to have been *from* Christianity *to* Mithraism. And there is no evidence that Mithraism borrowed or adapted *anything* from Christianity. For that matter, certain popular modern myths to the contrary, there is no evidence that Christianity later borrowed or adapted anything from Mithraism.

Casting a broad eye over ancient paganisms, one sees several forms of ASC, some of them institutionalized. The most obvious and the most deeply rooted in Greek culture was the oracle, the classic example of which was the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, consulted by both individuals and city states.[5] Apollo's answers were conveyed by a medium, a highly respected priestess known as the Pythia. The answers were then interpreted by experts in the priestly establishment. Seeking a counterpart in Roman civic religion, one finds mediumship frozen, as it were, in the Sybilline Books, volumes of prophecy kept in the care of the priestly college of the Quindecimviri Sacris Faciundis (literally, "the Fifteen Gentlemen for Doing Sacred Things") and consulted by the state in times of crisis.[6]

Most notoriously, ASC was institutionalized in "maenadism", the ecstasy of the female worshippers of Dionysus/Bacchus.[7] It is difficult to disentangle actual state-sanctioned performances of Dionysiac rituals by women in the wilderness from literary tropes (as in Euripides' great play, the *Bacchae*), visual artistic representations (especially vase paintings), and all these in turn from the lurid and paranoid fantasies of the patriarchy. Suffice it to say that licensed *oreibasia* or "mountain roaming" by women in ecstasy did occur. But perhaps in this case what was *imagined* is as significant as what actually transpired.[8]

A very different form of ASC obtained in the cult of the Magna Mater, the Great Mother.[9] In a common theological and mythic pattern, the Mother, Cybele, had a junior male partner called Attis. Myth told how in a frenzy Attis castrated himself, an act replicated, or *said* to have been replicated, in ghastly self-dedication by the Mother's priests. Certainly, in Roman times and in the city of Rome, eunuch priests in the service of Attis and the Great

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[5] Bonnechere 2007.

[6] Beard, North, Price 1998, 1.62–63; 2.23.

[7] Cole 2007.

[8] On Bacchic ecstasy "gone bad", at least in the eyes of the authorities, see the story of the "conspiracy" of 186 BCE as told by Livy 39.8–14 and reflected in the Senate's Decree "Concerning the Bacchanalia" (*ILS* 18), prescribing or severely limiting Dionysiac cult associations: Beard, North, Price 1998, 1.91–96; 2.288–291.

[9] Beard, North, Price 1998, 1.96–98, 164–166.

Mother existed and were recognized officially. The portrait of one such 'Gallus', complete with knuckle-bones for self-laceration and the musical and other instruments of his trade, is still extant on his tombstone.[10]

In the Mithras cult, initiation seems sometimes to have involved placing the initiand in literally *fearful* situations where he—always a "he" in this cult—would experience bewilderment, terror, and humiliation. Vivid scenes of initiation, for example, are still extant in fresco on the side-benches of the Capua Mithraeum.[11] In one scene, for instance, a white-robed mystagogue behind and an armed and helmeted figure in front, induct the smaller, naked, blindfolded initiand between them, the actor figure menacing the initiand with a spear.[12] The trio of mystagogue, actor, and initiand is repeated in other scenes. Again, on a large ritual vessel from a mithraeum at Mainz, one of the two scenes in relief shows the Father of the community, enthroned and garbed as Mithras (whose surrogate he is), drawing a bow at the cowering, naked initiand standing before him, while behind the initiand a mystagogue declaims.[13]

It has to be admitted, however, that the actions depicted in the Capua Mithraeum and on the Mainz vessel are not normative, in the sense of being performed in most mithraea most of the time. Or rather, we have no evidence to suppose them normative, and here I think absence of evidence really *is* evidence of absence. Note also that as well as rituals of initiation into the mystery and the Mithraic community, there were probably rites of initiation into one or other of the seven grades within the cult, and the scenes I have just described may—or may not—belong to that class.[14]

What one can say with confidence is that in Mithraism, as in the mystery cults in general, extreme emotional states and cognitive disorientation were sometimes, if not always, aroused in the initiand; and that in Mithraism, but not in every cult, extreme emotional states and cognitive disorientation were sometimes aroused by subjecting the initiand to bizarre and threatening actions. Just how bizarre we can glimpse from the following passage taken from the late fourth-century Christian authority known as Ambrosiaster who tells us that the initiates

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[10] Beard, North, Price 1998, 2.211.

[11] Vermaseren 1971.

[12] Vermaseren 1971, Plate XXII.

[13] Beck 2000, 149–154, Plate XIII.

[14] On the hierarchy of seven grades, see Clauss 2000, 131–140 (although Clauss's contention that the grades were *priestly* offices is moot).

> flap their wings like birds and imitate the raven's call, while others roar in the manner of lions. Yet others have their hands bound with chicken guts and are held over pits full of water. Then someone who calls himself the 'liberator' approaches with a sword and sunders the entrails.[15]

We should not underestimate those animal imitations. In this sort context, to assume an animal role, to represent, say, a raven, is both to *think oneself* a raven and, in the community's ontological convention, to *be* a raven. Not coincidentally, the Raven is the first of the grades of initiation.

The classic ancient description of an initiate's subjective experience … or let us be more sceptical, the classic *construction* of an initiate's subjective experience is found in a fragment of a lost essay by Plutarch, the great public intellectual of the late first and early second centuries CE. Interestingly, Plutarch is looking for something with which to compare the moment of death. At death, he says,

> the soul suffers an experience similar to those who celebrate great initiations … wanderings astray in the beginning, tiresome walkings in circles, frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then, immediately before the end, every terrible thing, panic and shivering and sweat, and amazement. And then a wonderful light comes to meet you, pure regions and meadows are there to greet you, with sounds and dances and solemn, sacred words and holy views; and there the initiate, perfect by now, set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet.[16]

Important for ASC in the mystery cults is what Aristotle in *Fr*. 15 is reported to have said about the final stage of initiation, almost certainly with reference to the mysteries of Demeter and her daughter Persephone (or "the Maiden") at Eleusis near Athens: it is no longer a matter of "learning" (*mathein*) but of "experiencing" (*pathein*).

None of all this, I must admit, gets us very far, at least not down the road I want to explore. What we lack is anything resembling the first-person testimony of Paul, the testimony of someone on the 'pagan' side who has experienced ASC and has something articulate to say about it—something, in other words, amenable to cognitive study. Actually, this is not entirely true. We have the experiences of Lucius, the hero of that brilliant novel, the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, by the second century North African

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[15] *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 114.11.

[16] Frag. 168 Sandbach = Stobaeus 4.52.49, trans. Burkert 1987: 91–92, with slight modifications.

philosopher and public intellectual Apuleius. Lucius is initiated into the mysteries of Isis and does indeed tell us something of that experience, albeit elusively. One must, however, remember that Lucius is a fictitious character who is literally transformed into a donkey and back again into human form. So much for verisimilitude! Many scholars, though, myself among them, think that Lucius the initiate is a proxy for the author Apuleius as an actual initiate of the Isis cult.[17] If that is so, then what Apuleius records as an initiate's subjective experience—for what it's worth—would at least be first-hand autobiographical evidence.

The subjective component is actually quite small in terms of volume of text. Most of the account deals with the actions (*drōmena*, 'things done') and paraphernalia of initiation. Subjectively, the experience of Lucius' first initiation was that of an underworld or meta-cosmical journey and a person-to-person encounter with the gods:

> I came to the boundary of death and, having trodden the threshold of Proserpina, I travelled through all the elements and returned. In the middle of the night I saw the sun flashing with bright light. I came face to face with the gods below and the gods above and paid reverence to them from close at hand.[18]

More promising, if only because less playfully evasive than Lucius/Apuleius, is Aelius Aristides, another second-century author and public intellectual. Aristides might also be described as a professional invalid. In a work called the *Sacred Tales* he has left a record of his relationship with the healing god Asclepius.[19] This record has been analyzed from various psychological perspectives, and there is certainly work to be done in assessing the part that ASC might have played.[20] As with Lucius, the sense of an unmediated encounter with god is paramount. Indeed, the same is true of the rich records of the ancient healing cults, in particular the votive testimonies of the patients themselves following 'incubation' at the shrines and dreams of divine intervention.[21] These represent an as yet largely untapped source for cognitive study.[22]

Turning from institutionalized religion to the more personal world of Greco-Egyptian magic, we should look next at the text known as the

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[17] The leading proponent of this view was Merkelbach 1995, 266–303.
[18] *Met*. 11.23.
[19] Behr 1968.
[20] E.g. Dodds 1965, 39–45.
[21] Edelstein 1998.
[22] Though work is under way by Professor Panayotis Pachis and Olympia Panagiotidou, both at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

"Mithras Liturgy".[23] The text contains detailed instructions for a celestial ascent, to be undertaken by an adept, with or without a trusted companion. The instructions take the form of commands (do this, that, or the other) and outcomes expressed in the second person (… and you will see such and such; you will encounter so-and-so). The voice, then, is that of a senior adept instructing a junior. But how authentic is this authorial voice? Is it the voice of an actual adept who has undertaken an actual spirit journey? Or is it the product of an armchair wannabe writing within the conventions of Graeco-Egyptian magic? Hard to say.

Whatever its authenticity, the Egyptian adept's instructions do concern a celestial ascent, and so invite comparison with Paul's experience of ascent to the 'third heaven'. What makes comparison particularly germane is that one of the principal celestial gods encountered and invoked in the adept's ascent is Mithras. Indeed, it was Mithras' presence that led Albrecht Dieterich, in editing the text, to call it "a Mithras Liturgy".[24] Nowadays, very few people believe that this section of the papyrus preserves an actual liturgy of an actual Mithraic community. Most however accept that a few elements, opportunistically employed, do descend from genuine Mithraic *theologumena* and perhaps even from cult practice.

The celestial ascent was not of course unique to Paul and the Egyptian adept. In antiquity, the route to and from the heavens, whether as ASC spirit journey or as a journey of the regular human imagination, was well travelled and, consequently, well mapped.[25] What made getting the route right of some importance was that it was widely supposed to be the route by which souls descended to earth at birth and ascended to heaven at death. Those who knew the map, and what and whom to expect along the route, had a decided advantage over those who did not.

Paul and the Egyptian adept did not, however, belong to that class. Posthumous celestial travel was not their concern. Paul's experience related to present life and present salvation. Even more tellingly, the Egyptian adept, though he speaks of the undertaking as an "immortalization" (*apathanatismos*), also says that one can perform it up to three times a year.[26] It seems, then, that one is not immortalizing oneself for the journey to the afterlife, but, rather, protecting oneself for an excursion into the potentially dangerous realm of immortal beings from where one hopes to return safe and

[23] Betz 2003.
[24] Dieterich 1903.
[25] See, e.g., Culianu 1983.
[26] Lines 746–748.

sound. The purpose of the trip is not in itself to experience immortality but to request a favor from immortal powers. The actual favor is not specified; it is left blank in the text. In effect, your choice!

The Egyptian adept's experience of celestial ascent is interactive. He is told not only that he will *see* certain persons and things but also that he has to *say* certain things, some of which are comprehensible Greek and some just strings of syllables which may—or may not—be deliberate distortions of meaningful words and phrases. Also, of course, he has to put the question or ask the favor for which he has undertaken this arduous journey. Of the nonsense syllables, one might be tempted to say that they represent glossolalia, except that "glossolalia" in which every syllable is prescribed seems something of a contradiction in terms. Lastly, I should mention another striking contrast with Paul's ascent: the Egyptian adept is quite loquacious; Paul only *hears* "unspeakable words which it is impossible for a man to utter".

Whatever their community contexts, Paul's experience and the experience of the Egyptian adept were *solitary*. What I am looking for in Mithraism is something quite different: *group* experience. This may seem a quest beyond the merely audacious; for other than what we might infer about ASC in the *individual* initiands in those representations of Mithraic initiation, which I have described above, I have no direct evidence for ASC in the Mysteries of Mithras at all. By *direct* evidence I mean a description of, or a prescription for, an experience of celestial ascent by a Mithraist. Why then should I postulate ASC of this sort for the Mithraists, and why at the group level?

What I have, by way of evidence, is as follows. The fourth and last public intellectual whom I shall introduce here is the third-century Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry. In ch. 6 of his essay 'On the cave of the Nymphs in the *Odyssey*' (*De antro*), Porphyry tells us that

> the Persians [by which he means the Mithraists] perfect their initiate by *inducting* him *into a mystery* of the descent of souls and their exit back out again, calling the place a 'cave'. For Eubulus tells us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honour of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created, and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos.[27]

[27] First sentence, my translation; remainder, Arethusa edition, 1969.

This is a dense passage, and I need to unpack it. What Porphyry here gives us is a part of Mithraism's foundation myth. Religions have founders, and in looking for Mithraism's founder the Greek intellectuals settled, not unreasonably, on the Persian Zoroaster. A founding *event* is also desirable. Ergo Mithraism's founding event 'must have been'—so goes the logic—the institution of the cult's very unusual meeting place, the so-called "cave" or what we now call the "mithraeum". And so chapter one of a history of Mithraism is constructed: Zoroaster created the first mithraeum in a cave in Persia, and that is why Mithraists even now are make-believe "Persians" and meet in make-believe "caves" (or actual caves, if available). I need scarcely add that this is myth-as-history, not real history; or—the necessary corrective—that in the study of religion a cult's own myth of origins is as important as an objective history of its origins, even supposing that the latter is recoverable.

Next, the *form* that Zoroaster gave to his proto-mithraeum: he fashioned it as an "image of the universe" (*eikona kosmou*). He constructed, in other words, a *replica* or *model* of the universe. Mithras made the actual universe, Zoroaster made a mini-universe in his honour. How did Zoroaster … or rather, how did the real-life Mithraists, do this? As Porphyry tells us, they did it by equipping their mithraeum with "symbols of the universe's elements and climates in proportionate arrangement". In so doing, they realized an authentic microcosm.

What are the "elements and climates of the cosmos", how are they symbolized, and how are they "proportionately arranged"? This is not the place for a full answer (which I shall be attempting elsewhere),[28] so let me just say that the "elements" of the cosmos are the planets, including the Sun and the Moon, and the stars ordered into signs and constellations; and that the "climates" of the cosmos are bands or zones of the celestial sphere corresponding to bands of latitude on the globe of the earth. By "proportionate arrangement" is intended a correspondence between the order and disposition observed in the macrocosm and the order and disposition as replicated in the microcosm of the mithraeum. Please accept provisionally that archaeology has confirmed Porphyry's outline as essentially correct.

Does the mithraeum, so designed, have a purpose? A purpose, that is, besides honouring Mithras with a microcosm of the macrocosm which he created? The answer is yes. The mithraeum has a very specific function which is spelt out in the first sentence of that passage from Porphyry's *De antro* (6) quoted above:

[28] In the interim see Beck 2006, 102–118.

> … the Persians perfect their initiate by inducting him into a mystery of the descent of souls and their exit back out again, calling the place a "cave".

This then is the function of the mithraeum qua cave qua model of the universe. It is the place of "induction into a mystery of the descent of souls and their exit back out again". And it is not merely the *place* of induction; it is the *instrument* of induction. That is why it is equipped with "symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos" in "proportionate arrangement". Put another way, the correspondence of microcosm to macrocosm is a necessary condition for successful induction into the mystery.

Porphyry's exact wording in that first sentence about 'perfecting the initiate by inducting him into the mystery of the soul's descent and exit back out again' is crucial. It has been widely *mis*-, or at least tendentiously, translated.[29] Scholars have assumed that what Porphyry is talking about is initiation *as instruction*: the microcosm, with its proportionate arrangement of the elements and climates of the universe, is *explicated* to the initiate. Robert Lamberton, for instance, translates:

> Likewise the Persian mystagogues initiate their candidate by *explaining* to him the downward journey of souls and their subsequent return, and they call the place where this occurs a 'cave'.[30]

Thus, initiation becomes an "instructional activity" (to use our jargon) and the mithraeum part classroom and part teaching aid.

But the text says nothing about *explanation*, nothing about *teaching*. What the Mithraists do to their initiate in the microcosmic "cave" is expressed by two Greek verbs. The first is *telein* which means "to bring to completion", hence "to initiate". The noun *teletē* is a technical term for an "initiation". The verb's object in our passage is *ton mystēn*. So, literally, the phrase means "they initiate the initiate". I have translated it as "they perfect the initiate". The second verb is the compound *mystagōgein*. The noun *mystagōgos* means "a mystagogue", someone who conducts someone else into a mystery. Its grammatical object here is the whole phrase "the descent of souls and their exit back out again". Hence, I am being utterly literal when I translate the clause as "inducting … into a mystery of the descent of souls …", etc. No teaching, just induction into an initiatory experience of celestial descent and return, mediated in and by the "cave" as authentic microcosm.

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[29] Beck 2006, 41–43.
[30] Lamberton 1983, 25.

There is a second misconception, closely related to the first concerning instruction, which I must correct. Like all people of all times and places, the Mithraists recognized that as human individuals they had entered life on earth (however one conceives of "life on earth" temporally and physically) at birth and would leave it at death. So if you were being inducted into "a mystery of the soul's descent and exit back out again", necessarily you were being told about what had happened to your soul prior to your arrival in the here-and-now; likewise, you were being told about your soul's journey after its departure hence, perhaps with some advice, as in the texts of the gold funerary tablets, that would give you a competitive edge on the uninitiated.[31] Your posthumous soul journey was being *foretold*. Note how the language of instruction has crept back into this scenario of Mithraic initiation.

But do we really have to read it that way, and that way only? I think not. Instead, let me suggest that induction into the mystery meant *re-experiencing* your "descent" into earthly mortality and likewise *pre-experiencing* your "exit back out again". Put another way, in initiation you experience an *outwards explosion* of normal spatio-temporal boundaries or, conversely, the *inwards implosion* of pre-birth and post-death worlds into the here-and-now.

So what am I postulating in place of the classroom model of initiation as instruction? Clearly, an ASC experience in which the initiate enters another world of space and time. Whether he enters an entirely illusory world or a world of transcendental reality, I cannot tell; nor, for that matter, can anyone else. What I can tell is that if it happened, it was a mind-brain event, that is, an event both physical and mental. Unusual events would have taken place in the brain's neural circuitry, events which can be reconstructed by comparison with events which today can be monitored in the brains of those who undergo—to repeat myself—the experience of "an outwards explosion of normal spatio-temporal boundaries or, conversely, the inwards implosion of pre-birth and post-death worlds into the here-and-now".

Here I can take one of two routes. One way would be to try to explain what the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) has to say about the brain events, which are the physiological side of the coin. However, that would make for rather dry and technical reading. If you wish, you can find it set out in my book or, better, in Colleen Shantz's.[32] So I am going to bypass altogether the *neurological* events of an experience of initiation into a mystery of the soul's descent and so on, and instead explore closer to the surface, at what one

[31] Graf and Johnston 2007.
[32] Beck 2006, 136–148; Shanz 2009, 67–109.

might loosely call the level of *mind* and the *senses*, asking what it is that the initiate *apprehends* and *comprehends* in the experience.

First, though, what are we to make of the *occasion* to which Porphyry refers? Is it a special once-only rite of initiation, like baptism for example? Certainly, it is that, but is it *only* that? I think not. After all, if you have gone to the trouble of modeling a microcosm to enable the experience of the descent and departure of souls, why limit yourself to the single initiatory experience, the rookie's maiden flight? Why not suppose that the experience was, for *some* Mithraists in at least *some* mithraea, a normative event? After all, we are dealing with a cult which manifestly—the archaeological record is clear and abundant—enjoyed an ongoing community life. Let us at least retain the hypothesis that, having acquired the freedom of the spatio-temporal universe in the microcosm of the "cave", one went there, regularly or irregularly, to enjoy it.

Which brings us to the next question: was this an *ideal* experience, in the sense of something which the initiate was supposed to aspire to, but which he might not actually achieve? Here one must first keep in mind that ASC is extremely difficult to monitor, absent modern brain-scanning equipment. Secondly, what would have been the point in even trying to police the initiate's experience of the mystery? If I, as your mystagogue, tell you that I am going to initiate you into "a mystery of the soul's descent and exit back out again" by getting you to apprehend our "cave" as a true "model of the cosmos", what possible reason do I have for questioning the validity of your experience during the event or afterwards? And supposing that the experience did not quite come up to your expectations, would you really want to tell me so? And if you were the archetypal "free rider", joining because your buddies had joined and because being a Mithraist was a smart secular career move, still less would you want to admit that you had been faking it. And in that case, what motive would I, as the community's admissions officer, have for exposing you. So let us agree: the experience probably *was* an ideal, achieved perhaps by relatively few. That does not mean that it was not normative in the sense of setting a benchmark.

What is it about the mithraeum, its design, and its furnishings that enabled the initiate to apprehend it as the universe in which souls descend to mortal life on earth and ascend again to celestial immortality? Of prime importance were those correspondences between the model and the imagined universe to which Porphyry alluded. But I suggest that more fundamental intimations were in play, and it is with these that I shall conclude.

As an image or model of the universe, a cave—in or out of quotes—has this advantage: like the universe, it instantiates the paradox of being an

inside without an outside. Take a natural cave: what is its outside? The hillside, the earth's surface locally? These are not very satisfactory answers—not satisfactory in the way that, say, one can compare and contrast the inside of a tortoise's shell and the outside, or the inside of an ancient temple and the outside. The dis-analogy with the ancient temple is telling. The classic exterior of the ancient temple is something we can all bring to mind: the rows of columns, the elaborate sculptures of the pediment, the dedicatory inscription. But try imagining the exterior of a mithraeum. You cannot do it. There were indeed some mithraea which were free-standing buildings, but we have no archaeological evidence that their exteriors were in any way embellished, nothing at all which would have said to the passerby: "this is a temple, this is sacred space". In the metropolis of Rome and its port of Ostia, the mithraea were rooms or suites of rooms inside much larger building complexes. Here there was literally no exterior. A Mithraist, then, could only apprehend his sacred space from inside, which, as the saying goes, "only stands to reason", because the mithraeum is the universe, and the universe is truly an inside without an outside; it has an interior, but no exterior.

If the Mithraist apprehends his mithraeum as the universe, as an authentic model of the archetypal inside-with-no-outside, what is he to make of the terrestrial everyday world that undeniably exists outside the mithraeum, albeit at an inferior ontological level? Here, I suggest, a second paradox, cognate to the first, comes into play: the inside is *larger* than the outside; the contained is *larger* than the container.

There is actually some evidence to back this seemingly nonsensical assertion, evidence related to the representation of caves in Mithraic iconography. Not only is the mithraeum presented and represented to the initiate as a cave, but a cave is also presented and represented as the locus of the great event in the myth of the god Mithras, his slaying of the bull.

There is a famous passage at the close of the first book of Statius's *Thebaid* in which Mithras is invoked as a final avatar of Apollo (719–720):

> Or as Mithras beneath the crags of the Persian cave
> Twisting the horns loth to follow.

Even more to the point, representations of the bull-killing in relief sculpture or in fresco *always* show the great act taking place at the mouth of a cave. A particularly telling example is the tauroctony painted on the end wall of the mithraeum at Marino in the Alban Hills not far from Rome.[33] The mithraeum

[33] Best illustrated in Vermaseren 1982.

is one of those situated in a natural cave. Literally, then, it has an inside but no outside, unless you want to call the hill on which the town of Marino sits the mithraeum's exterior. So on entering the Marino Mithraeum, you are entering what Porphyry and philosophers of his ilk would consider a *natural* image of the universe. You are also entering a "cave" (in quotes), which by esoteric convention represents, and so *is*, the universe. Accordingly, you have entered a space which, qua initiate, you apprehend as both *larger than* and *containing* that which you left on the outside, the town on its hillside and much, much more.

What do you now see on the end wall confronting you? You see a painted *representation* of a cave, that is, a representation of a representation of the universe. And what event is depicted at the entrance of this universe within a universe? What action transpires on this set? The action of Mithras "the creator and father of all".[34] At each level, as you are carried inwards, what is inside is no less than what is outside. That which is contained contains the container.

Even here you have not reached the inmost container and the inmost contained. Look at Mithras and observe the lining, that is, the *inner* surface, of the cloak billowing out behind him. What do you see? The starry vault of heaven, that is, the most *direct* representation of the universe possible, and thus the most vivid statement that the inside really is greater than the outside, the contained greater than the container.

To apprehend this paradox in context was, I would assert, to apprehend, at least in part, the Mithraic mystery. Let me further assert that it was a form of ecstasy and may reasonably be so described.

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[34] Porph. *De antro* 6, quoted above.

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THE *GOSPEL OF PHILIP* AS GNOSTIC INITIATORY DISCOURSE

Bas van Os

How do you turn a "proto-orthodox" Christian into a "gnostic" Christian? How do you get her or him to first take that decision, then to experience it as a transformation, and finally to live forever after as one who knows the truth? In this contribution, I invite you to read the *Gospel of Philip* as notes for initiatory discourse that performs these three functions.[1] In order to do so, I will first argue that the document is indeed a well-structured composition. I will also show that its composition and content are not incompatible with the genre of baptismal instruction. Finally, I will provide a rhetorical analysis of the text, read from this perspective.

Although Martha Lee Turner forcefully argued the thesis that the *Gospel of Philip* is a collection of sayings from various sources without much coherence, recent studies have approached the document as a meaningful whole in which one part may be used to illuminate the other.[2] Herbert Schmidt argues that the document contains perhaps the earliest attempt at a coherent sacramental theory to resolve the tension between the physical sacraments and the spiritual reality they represent.[3] Hugo Lundhaug shows how the text presents salvation and transformation through rituals and text, including polemics and paraenetics.[4] Minna Heimola takes the document as a whole to demonstrate how it serves Valentinian Christians in a larger Christian context.[5] These approaches are in sharp contrast with Turner's conclusion:

> The importance of these findings for the interpretation of *The Gospel according to Philip* is obvious. If there was no one author, and if the materials derive from multiple communities of faith, we cannot talk meaningfully of the document's position, its author's beliefs, or its community's practices (although, of course these are all possible approaches to material from any one source within it). Unless redactional contributions can be clearly identified and isolated, we cannot talk of the "redactor's meaning" either.

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[1] For a full discussion of the argument, Os 2007.
[2] M.L. Turner 1996.
[3] Schmidt 2009, 522–526.
[4] Lundhaug 2010.
[5] Heimola 2011.

Although I largely agree with the main arguments of Schmidt, Lundhaug and Heimola, I believe we should first deal with the argument of Turner with regard to the composition of the *Gospel of Philip*.

The Composition of the Gospel of Philip

Turner believes that the various passages are best seen as entries into a notebook of a collector, because a division of the text in 'chapters' is not feasible:

> 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.[6]

She does, however, find evidence of a division in two or three parts. Turner also 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 certain terms, the length and rhetorical structure of the units and an interest in moral exhortation. She suggests that the present *Gospel of Philip* may in fact consist of two collections of excerpts. Furthermore, with regard to the first "collection," Turner observes that the density of key sacramental references (such as baptism, anointing, eucharist, redemption and bridal chamber) 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 …"[7] We could also say, therefore, that Turner has demonstrated a three-part structure, with most of the interest in the sacraments concentrated in the middle part (§ 66-§ 109).

When reviewing Louis Painchaud's work on the composition of the *Gospel of Philip*, I recognized several structuring techniques through the repetition of keywords and themes that suggest a total of twelve textual units.[8] Interestingly, the division is fully compatible with the two caesuras observed by Turner. I will briefly summarize them in the remainder of this section.

Seven Units before Turner's First Caesura

Unit (1). The word *Hebrew* functions as a textual marker. This word is the keyword in the first passage (mentioned twice) and is repeated in § 6. But

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[6] M.L. Turner 1996, 22.
[7] M.L. Turner 1996, 177.
[8] Painchaud 1996, 35–66.

I, unlike Painchaud, do not believe it forms an *inclusion* with § 6. Rather, a good case can be made for a repetitive pattern as also § 4 and § 9 share a keyword, *Christ came*:

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). And indeed, even in the middle paragraphs (BB), which have no catchword connection, this is the case: *Inheriting* in this *cosmos* is like *harvesting* in winter.

Unit (11). 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. The following 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 "clothed with the name of the Father" is to be "fed with the bread from heaven."

Unit (iii). A different structuring technique can be found in § 17–24. This unit is organized as a series of disputes with other Christians regarding the nature of Christ's incarnation, his resurrection and the resurrection of his followers. 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 *dyer*;
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 *dyer*.

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.[9] 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 I 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 *gnosis*, 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.

Three Units between the Two Caesuras

Unit (viii). This unit is clearly 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 plērōma, *there is nothing else*.
    C. § 70–71: *Christ came and brought those inside out and those outside in*.
  B. § 72–74: References to Jesus' *crucifixion* and (*re*)*birth*, as well as to the *bridal chamber*. Remark about the Holy Spirit and Christ.
A. § 75: Baptism in *light and water*. *The light is the chrism*.

[9] 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).

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 plērōma.
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). 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) is again about the *world*:

A. § 97: Someone *went down into the water*.
  B. § 98: Bread, *cup* and oil. There is *something higher*.
    C. § 99–100: The *world* is an inferior creation.
      D. § 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.
    C. § 105: Only those who know the all that they have will enjoy them.
  B. § 106–107: The ascent of the perfect man.
A. § 109: We *go down into the water*.

Two Closing Units after Turner's Major Caesura

Unit (xi). It seems that the phrase *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. An 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 aggravating 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 plērōma
A. § 127: The initiate has received *the truth in images*.

I conclude, therefore, that the *Gospel of Philip* is not an unstructured collection of excerpts. There are probably twelve textual units, some of which are quite well marked by repetitive or chiastic structures (i, iii, viii and x). There are seven units before the first caesura, three units in the middle part, and two units after the second caesura. If, then, the document is a conscious three-part composition, what can this tell us about its genre?

The Gospel of Philip as Notes for Baptismal Instructions

The idea that the *Gospel of Philip* has something to do with notes for baptismal catechesis has been defended by already by Wesley Isenberg and

Edward Rewolinski.[10] It is even the major interpretative lens of Hans-Martin Schenke's impressive 1997 commentary.[11] There have been several arguments put forward by others as to why the text cannot reflect baptismal instructions. Scholars have objected (1) that only a part of the text is about the sacraments, (2) that it is not a text for beginners, and (3) that it consists of enigmatic sayings rather than clear exposition.

Objection 1: Only Part of the Gospel of Philip Concerns Sacraments

As an example of the first objection, I refer to Turner's analysis of the frequency of occurrences of sacramental references where she found that only the middle part showed a high frequency. In her discussion of a table, "The Distribution of Sacramental References in *The Gospel according to Philip*", Turner states:

> A glance at this table should put to rest any claims that the majority of the material in *The Gospel according to Philip* is sacramental in nature, or that the work as whole—as distinct from some of its sources—is some kind of sacramental catechesis.[12]

What Turner failed to recognize, however, is that a full cycle of early Christian baptismal instructions were not only about baptism, but rather consisted of three parts, separated in time and setting (prior to, during and after baptism). Each part has its own function, summarized in Daniélou's division of baptismal instructions: *Explicatio*, *Demonstratio*, and *Exhortatio*.[13] As anthropologists have indicated, initiation rituals serve to transfer a person into a new phase of life or into a new group of people.[14] Thereby the initiate assumes a new identity. In order to do so the initiate must pass through at least three phases. In the first phase the person is "disoriented", which is often achieved with the help of fasting, loss of sleep, subjection to the unknown, and so forth. In the second phase the person is given a new identity, which process is assisted by undergoing intense experiences often shared with other initiates. In the last phase the initiate is awarded the attributes of his new status together with the concomitant responsibilities.

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[10] Isenberg 1968; Rewolinski 1978.
[11] Schenke 1997.
[12] M.L. Turner 1996, 178.
[13] Daniélou 1993 reprint.
[14] Moore-Havlick 2001, 184–186.

The first part would be spoken to people who had been accepted as potential baptismal candidates. Its purpose was not only to provide instruction, but most of all to confirm for the candidate that he or she was making the right choice. The instructions were given to the candidates alone, prior to their final decision. From the pilgrim's diary of Egeria we know that giving such instructions in the Jerusalem church could take several hours. There was ample time for prayer, exorcism, anointment, singing, bible-reading, part of the instructions, and discussion. This invariably included polemics against those who saw things differently, as Gregory of Nyssa makes clear in the prologue of his *Great Catechism*:

> Not that the same method of instruction will be suitable in the case of all who approach the word. The catechism must be adapted to the diversities of their religious worship; with an eye to the one aim and end of the system, but not using the same method of preparation in each individual case. The Judaizer has been preoccupied with one set of notions, one conversant with Hellenism, with others; while the Anomoean and the Manichee, with the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, and the rest on the list of those who have wandered into heresy, each of them being prepossessed with their peculiar notions, require different tactics with each of their several opinions. The method of recovery must be adapted to the form of the disease …
>
> It is necessary, therefore, as I have said, to regard the opinions which the persons have taken up, and to frame your argument in accordance with the error into which each has fallen, by advancing in each discussion certain principles and reasonable propositions; that thus, through what is agreed upon on both sides, the truth may conclusively be brought to light.[15]

The polemics in the *Gospel of Philip* are mostly found in the first part of the document. Mostly mainstream Christians are targeted.

The second part, spoken during or shortly after the initation rite served to help the initiands to experience their transformation. They were called mystagogical instructions. Sometimes only this part has been preserved (as in the case of Ambrose, and probably also of the Nag Hammadi documents *A Valentinian Exposition* and the *Gospel of Egyptians*) which may have led to the misconception that baptismal cathechesis is mainly about the sacraments. As in the late-antique mystery religions, such discourse was considered secret and therefore spoken only after candidates had made their final

[15] *Prologue* (lines 1–2, 5–16, 23–36): Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers II 5:473–474 with some emendations.

commitment. The mystery rites were designed to provide a transformative experience. Baptismal candidates often fasted and came to the baptisterium in the dark of the night. They denounced the world, the devil or their ignorance. They were stripped naked and often fully immersed. They died and rose with Christ. They sometimes received a chrismation and white clothes. Often with lamps or candles they entered the main room where the fatithful community welcomed them with kisses. Some groups would give them milk and honey as a sign of their entry into the Promised Land. Then all of them would join for communion so that everytime they would celebrate the Eucharist again, they could re-live and reconfirm their transformation through baptism.

The third part consisted of ethical instruction that could be spoken in the semi-public context of the community. These instructions are sometimes referred to,[16] but seldom preserved. Notes for such postbaptismal instruction may have been preserved under the title *To the Newly Baptised*, preserved among Clement of Alexandria's writings.[17] The document contains no sacramental language but summarizes moral instruction for the newly initiated, not unlike the third—mostly paraenetical—part of the *Gospel of Philip*.

Objection 2: The Gospel of Philip Is Not a Text for Beginners

This objection presupposes that baptismal cathechesis is meant for beginners. That may be true following the imperial approval of Christianity in the fourth century, but it was certainly not the case in the second or third century CE. Contemporary mainstream Christianity admitted to baptismal instruction only those who had already received instruction in Christian beliefs, values and practice. Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 1.1–4, claims that Valentinians trained their recruits for considerable time before initiating them into their mysteries.

Objection 3: The Text Is Not a Clear Exposition

This objection is related to the second, but now it concerns the form of the document, which consists of short enigmatic passages. It is clearly more difficult to understand than for instance the summaries of Cyril of Jerusalem's

[16] Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18.33, and Gregory of Nyssa *Great Catechism*, book 40.

[17] Quasten 2005, 226, includes the fragment among Clement's writings. Young-Ayres-Louth 2004, 117–118, note its early ascription, but do not include it in their list of works whose ascription to Clement is certain.

Catechetical Lectures. But there are several reasons why notes for baptismal instruction don't have to be preserved in an easily understandable form:

– One reason for not writing down the text in full might be the secrecy attached to the mysteries. The text was meant for teachers only and hence there was no need for untrained people to be able to read it. Around 300 CE, Iamblichus describes a similar situation in *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*:

> And their dialogues and talks with one another, their memoranda and notes, and further their treatises and all their publications, of which the greater number are preserved until our own times, they did not make readily intelligible to their audience … But in accord with the 'silence' legislated for them by Pythagoras, they engaged in divine mysteries and methods of instruction forbidden to the uninitiated, and through symbols,[18] they protected their talks with one another and their treatises. And if someone, after singling out the actual symbols, does not explicate them and comprehend them with an interpretation free from mockery, the things said will appear laughable and trivial to ordinary persons, full of nonsense and rambling. When, however, these utterances are explicated in accord with the manner of these symbols, they become splendid and sacred instead of obscure to the many … And they reveal marvellous thought, and produce divine inspiration in those scholars who have grasped their meaning.[19]

– Christians in general and Valentinians in the second and third century CE were similarly protective of the sacraments.[20]
– When published as part of Codex II, the notes did not have to be written out as a full text, because they function as the pithy sayings in the text that precedes it, the *Gospel of Thomas*. Detached form its baptismal context, its readers could appreciate the enigmatic notes even more, as they stimulated contemplation and association in the reader.

There seems to be no objection, then, to try to read the *Gospel of Philip* as notes for twelve baptismal instructions, prior during and after initiation. We can do this as an imaginative experiment: if a Valentinian teacher would

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[18] Enigmatic sayings like "walk on paths, avoiding roads travelled by public".

[19] Dillon-Hershbell 1991, 127–129.

[20] As Cyril of Jerusalem put it to his initiands: "It is not our custom to explain these mysteries, which the Church now explains to you who are leaving the class of catechumens, to Gentiles. For we do not explain to a gentile the mysteries of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, nor do we speak clearly to catechumens about the mysteries. But many things we often speak about in a veiled way, so that the believers who know may understand, and they who do not know may not be harmed." *Catechetical Lectures* 6.29: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II 7:42, with minor modifications.

use these notes for conversations with the initiands, could he or she bring a sensible message across to the audience?

A Rhetorical Analysis of The Gospel of Philip

The Rhetoric of Christian Homilies and Instructions

Ancient works on rhetoric focus on public speaking in the *polis*, which is quite different from the focus of the texts that biblical scholars work with. There is considerable doubt whether early Christians received enough rhetorical training to warrant a division of their work into classical rhetorical structures. Moreover, Christian instruction and preaching represented a new development in classical rhetoric, as Kennedy also observes.[21]

Augustine reflected on this in the fourth book of his fundamental work *On Christian Doctrine*. He regards rhetoric as a tool used to convey both truth and falsehood. He believed the study of rhetoric to be useful, but it was not as important as the study of true wisdom. Both eloquence and wisdom can be learned simultaneously by listening to Christian preachers and memorizing scripture. In this way, the appreciation of biblical styles changed for those who became educated in its idiom. According to Augustine, the duty of a Christian orator was to teach through narrative, overcome doubts through reasoning and rouse emotions through entreaty, exhortation and castigation. He notes that teaching can take place without persuasion, if the audience is already willing to accept the teaching. At the same time, however, consent is absolutely necessary for teaching to be effective. Following Cicero, Augustine believes the orator "must not only teach so as to give instruction, and please so as to maintain attention, but he must also sway the mind so as to subdue the will."[22] To this end, the orator should choose a combination of three styles as required by the situation:

- he should instruct in a plain style,
- he should please in an agreeable or middle style, and
- he should win the hearts and minds of his audience in a grand or vigorous style.

While Cicero wrote about rhetoric in a civic setting, Augustine wished to confine himself to ecclesiastical questions. Note also that he did not use or

[21] Kennedy 1999, 155–182.
[22] Aug., *On Christian Doctrine* 4.29.

recognize the divisions of forensic speech in Christian literature or oratory. Augustine does analyze the style of various biblical passages and, appropriate to our subject, the sacramental instructions by Cyprian and Ambrose. The latter two use the plain style when instructing those who are already willing to accept their teaching. When, on the other hand, such writers exhort their flocks to a more holy lifestyle they employ both plain and grand styles. Augustine advises not to overuse the grand style; variation is required in order for the style to remain effective. The introduction should be presented in an agreeable style in order to obtain a willing ear. Complicated things should be explained in the plain style. Elsewhere, Augustine advises that the contents and style of the instruction should vary according to the social background, religious history, sex and age of the audience.[23]

When Augustine speaks of instruction, he uses the term neutrally. But instruction of baptismal candidates is a specific type of teaching that must contribute to the transformation of the initiate. One of the first to comment on this type of Christian rhetoric is Clement of Alexandria (around 200 CE). In the opening chapters of his *Instructor*, he discusses the paedagogia of the divine word. Clement distinguishes three types of discourse that form the "children of faith":[24]

1. *Hortatory discourse* is aimed at forming good habits, a practical piety which, 'like the ship's keel, is laid beneath as the foundation for building up faith'. We can consider this a form of epideictic rhetoric.
2. *Preceptive discourse* is aimed at defining the specific actions the audience should undertake. With this objective, it is a form of deliberative rhetoric.
3. *Persuasive discourse* aims at soothing the passions. This type of discourse is more than epideictic. If someone must be convinced of his (past) sinfulness, persuasive discourse may borrow elements from judicial rhetoric; when someone is being urged to (emotionally) trust in God, it is akin to deliberative rhetoric.

According to Clement, Christian paedagogia is not cognitive instruction; it is "practical, not theoretical". Its objective is to "improve the soul, not to teach; and to provide training for a virtuous, not an intellectual life". That does not mean that Clement disregards the (spiritual) intellect. On the contrary, he identifies a fourth type of discourse:

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[23] *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed* 8–9(12–13), concerning the initial instruction of those who profess the wish to become a Christian.

[24] Clement, *Instructor* 1.1: Ante-Nicene Fathers 2:209.

4. *Didactic discourse* is aimed at "explaining and revealing matters of doctrine". This has a spiritual quality. Clement does not reduce the intellect to what is called ratio in modern discourse, but sees it as a human faculty to perceive the divine. Didactic discourse is therefore "powerful and spiritual, observing with precision, occupied in the contemplation of the mysteries".[25] Such discourse is not for new recruits ("let it stand for the present"); it follows later on in the mystagogy, and continues after the candidates have been enlightened by that ritual. This type of instruction for initiates clearly needs more than Augustine's plain style, it needs transformative language.

Analysis of the Gospel of Philip

I will now present an interpretative summary of the twelve textual units, within the context of the three-part division of baptismal instructions: *Explicatio*, *Demonstratio*, and *Exhortatio*.

Part I. Explicatio

Part I can be characterized as deliberative rhetoric, which suggests the fourfold division of exordium (unit 1), proposition (unit 2), proofs (units 3 to 7) and epilogue (partly reflected in unit 7).

1. *§1–10. Procatechesis*. Unit one functions as the introduction to both the entire text as well as to Part I, like the *procatechesis* in the instructions of Cyril of Jerusalem. Consistent with Augustine's advice, the introduction is crafted carefully to please the audience. The speaker seems to use the agreeable style; the overall structure is ruled by an *abc-abc* pattern. The introduction does not have to be a formal *exordium*, which would be superfluous given the rhetorical setting. The relationship between preacher and audience was already established and quite likely some liturgical elements had already prepared the audience for the instruction. But unit 1 nevertheless functions as an agreeable introduction to the series. In line with its repetitive patter, it proposes three main points which will be the subject of the entire text of the *Gospel of Philip*:

[25] Clement, *Instructor* 1.3; Ante-Nicene Fathers 2:211.

a) Mainstream Christians are merely Hebrews, and slaves. Gnostic Christians are true Christians and legitimate sons.
b) Mainstream Christians will only inherit and harvest in this *cosmos*, which means that they will inherit nothing real. One should want to inherit and harvest in the other *aeon*, as gnostic Christians.
c) Christ came to transform people to the state of gnostic Christians.

This message is presented in coded language, that is somewhat familiar to the audience but sufficiently ambiguous to keep them guessing: "Is the preacher saying what I think (s)he is?" This makes the audience eager to hear more. The repetitive structure enables the preacher to state his or her message twice, albeit in different metaphors. This impresses these main points in the minds of the hearers more firmly for a longer period of time, which is sensible considering they may have had to listen to the remaining instructions over a number of days.

2. *§11–16. Proposition to Part I*. The second unit introduces the theme of the first part proper. Again the agreeable style is used in a carefully crafted *abc-abc* structure. The proposition includes polemics, transformation and instruction:

a) The evil powers use names like God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and concepts like "resurrection", to deceive mainstream Christians.
b) Gnostic Christian transformation is to clothe oneself with the name of the Father and to be nourished by the "food" of Christ; he was killed by the evil powers, but they were secretly led to this by the Holy Spirit and—contrary to their plans—he lives.
c) Truth is to be learned through many symbols, but only those who are initiated will see it harvested in the other *aeon*.

3. *§17–24. The Son and the resurrection*. This unit proves the first polemical point of the proposition: mainstream Christianity has been deceived by the evil powers in their understanding of God—"Father, Son and Holy Spirit"—and of the resurrection. The style is plain and the structure follows the line of a familiar argument,[26] which consists of three disputes, all of them introduced by a simple statement about people who "say" something but who are in error. It is clear that the logic employed here is for internal use

[26] Cf. Tertullian's two-volume work *De Carne Christi* and *De Resurrectione*.

only. There is no real debate going on, the preacher is repeating arguments that he (or she) and his audience share in their rejection of mainstream Christianity. The argument about the true nature of the resurrection is based on the premise that the body is despised, hardly a premise shared by his opponents. "Logic" is therefore not the primary means of persuasion but is used here at the start to establish "ethos", or the superiority of the gnostic Christian teacher over his mainstream opponents. Henceforth he will be able to state with authority various points contradicting mainstream Christianity without applying formal logic to prove them. In the end, however, he turns to the more personal "you say", and addresses gnostic Christians who conclude from the previous point that physical baptism is unnecessary. Here he uses real logic, on the basis of shared premises with his opponents. They assert that they will be resurrected spiritually, which seems to be linked implicitly with the understanding that baptism of the body would not be required. Although the "you" may refer to another group of gnostic Christians, it is clear that the thought could well resonate within the audience of baptismal candidates whom the preacher genuinely wants to convince.

4. *§25–31. The sacraments and salvation*. The mostly instructive fourth unit is appropriately in a plain style. The structure is simple. The sacraments of initiation are discussed and alternated with some related soteriological points. It builds on the previous unit. Most points are made on the basis of ethos but some points are supported by logic. There is even a bit of pathos in the warning that other gnostic Christians who despise the physical sacrifice of the Lamb will not be able to see the king.

5. *§32–42. The spirit*(*s*). The fifth unit combines instruction and polemic. It proves both the point about the deceptive use of the name Holy Spirit, as well as the point that the Holy Spirit secretly works through the powers. There is something of a repetitive structure, but the structure has no clear textual markers and it seems that the speaker uses the plain style. There is not a strict repetition of the message, but rather a progression of thought along the same exegetical framework (exegesis from names, reference to the powers, offspring of the two spirits). The final metaphor contains some nasty polemics. A gnostic Christian interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel, already known to the audience, underlies the argument. Cain (mainstream Christianity) is the issue of the adultery between Eve and the Serpent. The polemics of Jesus against the Pharisees in John 8 are here applied to mainstream Christians. Ethos is the dominant means of persuasion.

6. *§ 43–54. Sacraments with and without benefit*. The sixth unit is again more instructive and sets out to prove the point in the proposition about being clothed with the name of the Father. It has a carefully crafted concentric composition (*abcd-e-dcba*), which suggests that the speaker has returned to the agreeable style, possibly intended to give the audience a breather between the vigorous polemics of the previous unit and the one to follow. In a concentric structure, the inclusion and centre are often especially important. Here the enclosing paragraphs compare baptism and eucharist to the transformative work of God (the Demiurge) and of Jesus, so the whole unit should be read in that light. The central section reveals that the highest God sees his children (gnostic Christians) in this world as precious. Mainstream Christians have not received the Lord and will perish when they give up their body. Gnostic Christians, however, have believed the truth and have received the Lord, so that they can give up their body in baptism. Apart from the pervasive ethos, there is more logic in this unit, including etymological proofs and even a little pathos, when the preacher exclaims in § 49 that he hopes to receive a name as Christian that the Demiurge will not be able to endure hearing.

7. *§ 55–65. Differences*. The seventh unit proves the point in the proposition that despite the invitation of Christ, few will see the Truth being reaped. This unit displays none of the pleasant literary structures that this speaker uses for an agreeable style. It seems the speaker has switched to what Augustine would call a grand or 'vigorous' style, aimed at swaying the minds of the audience. The vigour lies in the strength of the metaphors, which are strung together as an escalating series of polemical situations. The first two are in line with the previous units, which establishes credibility. But the last one goes far beyond the level of polemics seen so far; the element of surprise heightens the pathos, which is the main means of persuasion in this unit:

a) Mary Magdalene is the only one, who has responded to Jesus' invitation, the other disciples are blind like the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14 and, perhaps, John 9:39–41. Mainstream Christians are animals. *The Gospel of Philip* claims that only the presence of the gnostic Christian "man" among them prevents them from eating each other (cf Paul's warning in Galatians 5:15).
b) Mainstream Christians do not receive the Holy Spirit in baptism, but are defiled by unclean spirits.[27] Gnostic Christians, however, cannot

[27] Cf. the warning in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 83–85.

be approached by unclean spirits, because they are united with their angel in baptism.

c) A gnostic Christian has come out of the *cosmos* and has entered the resurrection. Mainstream Christians also ascend, but are seized in the Middle by the evil powers, that will torture them.

Although the climax in pathos in unit seven constitutes something of a conclusion, it is nevertheless not enough in terms of an epilogue of a deliberative speech. But in the case of baptismal instruction in a liturgical setting, this is understandable. After this instruction, the candidates were asked whether they are definitely sure they want to be baptised. Given the fact that they were already interested in baptism and the effectiveness of the rhetoric employed to convince them (witnessed by the fact that the notes for this speech may have been transcribed to be used by other instructors), most if not all the candidates did consent. That liturgical and festive moment is the conclusion of part I.

Part II: Demonstratio

Just before actual baptism, the candidates received the last instructions. As noted earlier, the character of this part is different: there is a concentration of explicit sacramental language and polemic is almost absent. There is nevertheless continuity with Part I in the use of structuring techniques and in the continuation of metaphorical language. But now these metaphors are not intended to "rouse the passions" but to "elevate the mind and soul", and bring them to contemplate the divine;—Clement would characterize this as didactic discourse. The rhetoric of Part II is neither deliberative nor judicial, which means that the arrangements of these genres should not be forced upon Part II. It is better to approach these three units without a predefined arrangement in mind.

1. *§ 66–75. The mystery of turning inside*. The unit is carefully set out in a concentric *abc-d-cba* structure, using various minor embellishments indicative of the agreeable style. This is an appropriate opening of a new part. The image of a mirror is used and we can imagine that the candidates can see their faces reflected in the baptismal water in the light of the candles. The inclusor is clearly recognisable for the audience and functions as the proposition and conclusion of this unit. Its key point is that baptism and chrismation are necessary for transformation. This is then proven through demonstration of the parallel between the ritual and the transformation: both imply a journey from the visible symbol to the hidden reality. The cen-

tral section is a mini-chiasm itself and its key sentence is a command of the Lord: 'Go into the inner chamber' (quoted from Matthew 6:6). This inner chamber is the subject of the next unit.

2. *§ 76–88. The mystery of the bridal chamber*. In an alternating *abaaba* structure, there are four discussions about the bridal chamber and two about Adam and Eve. The style is plain. The bridal chamber is the plērōma; the cult room of the group ("our bridal chamber") is an image of the plērōma. The idea is that the bridal chamber repairs the separation that occurred when Eve was taken out of Adam, and that every disciple should follow Jesus' example and submit to baptism to reunite soul and spirit.

3. *§ 89–109. Final preparation*. The third unit of this part is double the length of the previous ones and contains a mystagogy for the mysteries (a first section is about baptism and anointing, a second about the eucharist, and a third about the bridal chamber and the ascent). Each of these sections displays an agreeable style; in their combination something of a grand style is developed: Each section seems to outdo the one before, while the mystagogue returns four times to his or her mantra, "when we go down into the water". Whereas the first section re-affirms the correctness of their decision vis-á-vis mainstream Christianity, the third section does so with regard to those other gnostic Christians who seem not to submit to baptism. At the time of speaking the candidates were very possibly standing in front of the actual baptismal water (they are "about to go down", says § 101). This colourful unit was intended to best prepare their minds for the transformative experience. The repeated key phrase heightens expectations: it confirms that the candidates had made the right decision, that they will indeed turn to the Father, and that they now should "go down into the water."

There is no conclusion to this part, since the rite of baptism itself fulfils this role.

Part III: Exhortatio

Following baptism, the newly initiated were received into the community, and a eucharist was celebrated together. The *exhortatio* would have been spoken to both the newly initiated as well as to the members of the group who had been initiated on previous occasions. The division between the end of Part II and the start of Part III is indicated by a marked difference

in style, as Turner has observed. The passages are longer and the structure is less tight. Explicit sacramental language is no longer present. The two units build on the teachings and metaphors of the previous parts, but can also be understood in their own right, which is appropriate in case of a larger audience.

1. *§ 110–123. Homily on "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free"*. The lengthy first unit is enclosed by allusions to John 8:32, which act as the proposition and conclusion: "the truth shall set you free". As there are more references to a limited number of passages from "the Word", it may well be that some passages were actually read out prior to the delivery of this homiletic text. In fact, all references to "the Word" as scripture occur in this unit. Three main sections can be discerned:

a) knowledge of the truth must be combined with spiritual love,
b) knowledge should not be disclosed to those who cannot handle it, and
c) the audience must continue to fight ignorance in themselves, as it is the root of evil.

No new course of action is urged. This is clearly an exhortation to live up to the values that the speaker and the audience share, but are quite appropriately reminded of in the presence of the newly initiated. The style is conversational, alternating between the agreeable style and the plain instructive style. The means of persuasion are ethos, related several times to the authority of New Testament quotes, and logic.

2. *§ 124–127. Peroratio*. The second unit is brief and an appropriate conclusion to the homily as well as to the baptismal instruction as a whole. It is in the agreeable style, with several grand highlights. It connects eschatological teaching (the actual restoration of the plērōma) with the mysteries. It both looks back on the mysteries and forward, which would fit subsequent celebration(s) of the eucharist. Through weak images, the initiates have entered the truth.

Conclusion

With Schmidt, Lundhaug, and Heimola, we may approach the *Gospel of Philip* as a whole. It is aimed at the transformation of the "apostolic" Christians into "gnostic" Christians, who know the true Father. It also presents a sophisticated sacramental theory that defends the use of physical sacra-

ments by spiritual people. It seems we can even go further than that: the composition of the *Gospel of Philip* may point to twelve instructions spoken prior, during, and after the initiation rite. Reading the document through that interpretative lens may prove to be helpful and stimulating in our reconstruction, translation and interpretation of this beautiful text.

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BECOMING INVISIBLE: RENDING THE VEIL AND THE HERMENEUTIC OF SECRECY IN THE *GOSPEL OF PHILIP*

Elliot R. Wolfson

> Jesus said, "Recognize what is in your sight,
> and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you.
> For there is nothing hidden which will not become manifest."
>
> *Gospel of Thomas* 5

Much debate has ensued over several decades regarding the legitimacy of identifying Gnosticism as a distinct socio-historical phenomenon and even of the utility of utilizing such a word to demarcate a definable and clear-cut school of thought and/or religious practice.[1] While there has been a significant amount of wrangling over the question of the meaningfulness and suitability of this term, there is a greater consensus with regard to *gnōstikos*, a locution already applied by early Christian heresiologists to Christians whose views were condemned as nonorthodox. It may be the case that *gnōsis* is too broad a category to circumscribe the contours of the phenomenon of Gnosticism, insofar as many religious and philosophical movements in Late Antiquity laid claim to a special knowledge,[2] but there can be no doubt that those identified as gnostics believed they possessed a special type of *gnōsis* that set them apart from others, most often construed as a wisdom of mysteries that had salvific consequences.[3]

For the purposes of this study, I will avoid being entangled in the problem of taxonomy that has plagued specialists in the field. I will focus instead on a crucial aspect of that knowledge as may be culled from the Nag Hammadi treatise (NHC II,3) *The Gospel according to Philip*, a text that has been

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[1] For two recent reviews with analysis of some of the major scholarly opinions, see Brakke 2010, 1–28; Lundhaug 2010, 16–19.

[2] Brakke 2010, 30.

[3] The esoteric nature of Gnostic teachings has been the subject of various studies. See, for instance, Stroumsa 1996, 46–62, and the more recent collection of essays in Bull-Lied-Turner 2012.

described as one of the finest examples of a form of writing that implements a mode of veiling that is characteristic of esoteric communication.[4] In the ensuing analysis, I will reexamine the relation between the hidden and the revealed that reverberates in various dicta preserved in this compilation. Anticipating the conclusion I will reach on the basis of painstaking textual scrutiny, at several moments the text proffers a depiction of the secret that resonates with what I have identified as a crucial aspect of kabbalistic esotericism: the secret can be revealed as secret only to the extent that it is concealed. The hermeneutic of secrecy thus revolves about the paradox that what is most visible is the invisible, what is most manifest is the nonmanifest. It follows that there is no disclosure of truth but through the withholding of truth, no path to the ineffable and imageless but through the cloak of words and images, no way to the nameless but through the garment of the name.[5] Gnoseologically speaking, there is no naked truth to behold, only truth exposed in the veil of untruth.

Before proceeding to the examination of specific pericopae, let me say something briefly about the provenance of the text. The precise compiler, place, and date of compilation of the *Gospel of Philip* are unknown. Some have traced its literary origins to Syria and have proposed that it is a work of the late second or the early third centuries. It is generally assumed, moreover, that the treatise is a compilation that contains excerpts from various other unidentified works whose theological orientation on the whole accords with the teaching of Valentinus. Martha Lee Turner has argued that there is a major disjunction between the first three quarters of the document and the final quarter,[6] although she surmises that some passages in the former derived from the same source underlying the latter, the so-called Valentinian block.[7]

The most serious challenge to what has become the standard classification of the *Gospel of Philip* is found in the work of Hugo Lundhaug, who set out to examine the text "on its own terms, that is, on the basis of an analysis of the conceptual as well as the intra- and intertextual blends it activates, the most relevant intertextual context … being that of authoritative Scripture."[8]

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[4] Painchaud, "'Joseph le charpentier planta un jardin …' (EvPhil 73,8–9): Sens apparent et sens caché dans *l'Évangile selon Philippe*," in Bull-Lied-Turner 2012, 107.

[5] I have discussed the matter of kabbalistic esotericism in many of my publications. See, for instance, Wolfson 2009, 22, and reference to other studies cited on p. 315 n. 13.

[6] M.L. Turner 1996, 146–205.

[7] M.L. Turner 1996, 230–234.

[8] Lundhaug 2010, 154.

I will not rehearse here the details of his analysis but the gist of it is summarized in his statement that "the parallelism between Christ and the initiated Christian is fundamental to the sacramental theology of *Gos. Phil*. Its Christology is reflected in its anthropology and vice versa."[9] The reciprocity can be seen in the fact that the figure of Jesus, as the incarnation of the preexistent Logos, the transfiguration through the reception of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal anointing at the Jordan, and the resurrection that occurs at the crucifixion with the separation of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, becomes the paradigm for the Christian to become a Christ by means of baptismal chrismation, a shedding of the material body and assuming the resurrected body, a transformation that results in union with Christ expressed variously as receiving the name, putting on the living man, and entering the bridal chamber.[10] Based on the detection of intertextual links to the Nicene and Constantinopolitan creed as well as themes reflective of the Arian and Origenist controversies, Lundhaug proposed a fourth-century *Sitz im Leben*.

Despite the diversity of themes that may be culled from the disparate textual units that make up this composite work, one is struck by the repeated emphasis on several central motifs. This plausibly suggests the presence of a redactional strategy at work in the text even if it falls short of yielding an ironclad sense of literary coherence.[11] As Michel R. Desjardins put it, "the means by which the author presents his message resembles, on a literary level, the embroidery of God's name and attributes by Muslim calligraphers. In both artistic media the units of expression, whether consonants and words or metaphors and images, blend into one another to produce variety and unity at the same time."[12] This approach has been amplified more recently in Lundhaug's contention that the rhetoric of the text is structured around certain key "conceptual blends," "scriptural intertexts," and "highly complex intratextual references."[13] Without denying the variegated nature of the *Gospel of Philip* or the likelihood that it went through a "long history of redactional change and augmentation," Lundhaug urges the contemporary scholar to try to understand the text as a whole in the manner that it presented itself to a reader encountering it in the fourth or fifth century.[14]

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[9] Lundhaug 2010, 394–395.

[10] Lundhaug 2010, 301–303, 331–335, 397–398. See further references cited below at n. 54.

[11] This matter is analyzed in detail in M.L. Turner 1996. See also the review of scholarly opinions in Desjardins 1990, 91–92.

[12] Desjardins 1990, 92.

[13] Lundhaug 2010, 154.

[14] Lundhaug 2010, 162.

In the remainder of this essay, I will follow that course and would even go so far as to say that the dispersal of themes is itself a form of esoteric writing, an encoding of secrets that demands of the reader to piece together different hints and allusions to a truth that is never fully revealed in any one context. My focus will be on the different iterations of the relationship between the visible and the invisible, the revealed and the hidden, which may be elicited from the textual threads woven together in the *Gospel of Philip*. In particular, the explication of the dialectic of concealment and disclosure will help illumine a theme that has not been adequately discussed, the magical rite of initiation of becoming invisible. I trust that this offering will contribute modestly to the elucidation of some neglected aspects of the role of esotericism in this treatise and strengthen the connection of parts of the text to a Jewish-Christian environment.

A Hebrew Begets a Hebrew: Jewish-Christian Hybridity

Let me begin by offering support for the suggestion of Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa that the *Gospel of Philip* may have "originated in a Jewish-Christian *milieu*, or among gnosticized Jewish Christians."[15] I would modify the claim by limiting this possibility to some layers of the text. The attitude toward Judaism that one may elicit from various pericopae in the text, and especially the occurrences of the term "Hebrew" used as a marker of ethno-religious identity as well as the specific reference to Jews, has been debated by several scholars.[16] Lundhaug is correct to point out the "noticeable polemic against Judaism" throughout the text of the *Gospel of Philip*,[17] but this may only enhance the prospect that some of it did stem from a circle of Jews who accepted the messiahship and divinity of Jesus and who thought of themselves as Christians in the ritualized sense of being baptized and anointed as a form of *imitatio Christi*. Consider Lundhaug's own observation that the anti-Jewish polemics in the *Gospel of Philip* would be "easily understandable in a hypothetical general milieu in which there was a relatively strong Jewish presence, that is, an environment where actual Jews and Judaism would be

[15] Stroumsa 1983, 284. See also Zinner 2011, 60, 145–146, 164–165.

[16] *Gos. Phil.* 51.29, 52.22, 55.29, 62.6, 62.26, 75.30–33. All references to the *Gos. Phil.* in this essay are taken from Isenberg's translation in Layton 2000. I have also consulted the translation in Layton, 1987, 329–353, and the new edition of the text and translation in Lundhaug 2010, 468–539. On the debate about ethno-religious identity, see Gruenwald 1981, 718; Siker 1989, 275–288; Wilson 2004, 199–201; Smith II 2004, 206–208.

[17] Lundhaug 2010, 385.

well known to the Christian audience. Perhaps one might even suggest the presence of a certain competition between Judaism and Christianity underlying some of the rhetoric of *Gos. Phil.*, and consequently a need to argue the case for the suppression of the former by the latter?"[18]

Curiously, the one possibility Lundhaug does not entertain is that such competition would be natural in an environment of Jewish Christians, who probably had the need to fend off the criticism of other Jews rejecting their conviction that they are a legitimate part of the community of Israel. Such a conclusion was stated explicitly by Stephen G. Wilson after reviewing all the relevant references in the *Gospel of Philip* to Jews and/or Judaism:

> What is denied is the dependence of the Christian (gnostic) religion on Judaism, not the Jewish background of individual Gnostics. And if they were Jews, this tells us something suggestive about the origins of at least one form of Gnosticism. There is evidence, therefore, that at least one gnostic author/group, who were formerly Jews, saw Judaism as an inferior form of existence and Christianity as a superior and independent venture. The anxiety about independence and identity may reflect day-to-day tension between Gnostics and Jews, a phenomenon that is rarely suggested elsewhere and may be because the *Gospel of Philip* represents a Christian form of Gnosticism adhered to by former Jews.[19]

Stroumsa cited as evidence for the Jewish-Christian milieu the somewhat enigmatic statement that appears in the beginning of the text, "When we were Hebrews we were orphans and had only our mother, but when we became Christians we had both father and mother."[20] I am not certain about the implication of the contrast between the Hebrews having a mother and the Christians having a mother and a father—it has been suggested that perhaps the maternal image refers to Wisdom[21] or the Holy Spirit,[22] which is

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[18] Lundhaug 2010, 392.

[19] Wilson 2004, 201.

[20] *Gos. Phil.* 52.21–24.

[21] Consider the speculation on Echamoth and Echmoth in *Gos. Phil.*, 60.10–15. The former is identified as "Wisdom simply" and the latter as the "Wisdom of death" or as the "little Wisdom." On the proximity of this passage to the symbolism in medieval kabbalah, already attested in the bahiric compilation, see Wolfson 2005, 498 n. 88. See also *Gos. Phil.* 63.31–32: "As for the Wisdom who is called 'the barren,' she is the mother [of the] angels."

[22] The Holy Spirit is explicitly characterized as female in *Gos. Phil.* 55.26, as part of the criticism of those who say that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit on the grounds that a woman cannot conceive by a woman. On the connection between the spirit and the mother, see 70.24–25. In 77.19–20, truth is identified as the mother and knowledge as the father. Compare Jerome's quotation from the *Gos. Heb.* cited in Pritz 1988, 89: "But in that Gospel written according to the Hebrews, which is read by the Nazarenes, the Lord says: 'A moment

complemented by the figure of Jesus[23]—but the supposition that the most plausible background to explain such a remark, as well as several other passages preserved in *Gospel of Philip*, is a Jewish-Christian community with knowledge of Hebrew and Syriac seems to me sound.[24] Firstly, in a number of contexts either implicit or explicit reference is made to a Semitic etymology (the name of the Messiah from *mšīḥa* and that of Jesus from *yešuʿah* in 62.13–14, and the name of the Eucharist as *pharisatha* in 63.22–23). Secondly, it is well to remember that the text begins, "A Hebrew makes another Hebrew, and such a person is called 'proselyte.' But a proselyte does not make another proselyte."[25] Obviously, the passage calls for a spiritual interpretation of the term "proselyte," that is, a Jew who has converted to becoming a follower of Christ rather than a gentile who has become Jewish, but I see no compelling reason to interpret "Hebrew" metaphorically.[26] Further support for this hypothesis can be elicited from the declaration that one who has not received the Lord is still a Hebrew, that is, a Jew who has not yet seen the light.[27] It is possible that a similar allusion is at work in another passage where the labels "chosen people," "true race," "seed of the son of man," and "sons of the bridal chamber" appear to be applied to Jewish Christians.[28]

Here it is also apposite to recall the passage, "When Abraham [...] that he was to see what he was to see, [he circumcised] the flesh of the foreskin, teaching us that it is proper to destroy the flesh."[29] In spite of the lacunae, the intent of the pericope seems clear enough. The motif of Abraham's

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ago my mother, the Holy spirit, took me up.'" Compare Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* 2.87 (Heine 1989, 116): "But if someone accepts the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Savior himself says, 'My mother, the Holy Spirit, took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great mountain Thabor,' he will question how the 'mother' of Christ can be 'the Holy Spirit' which was made through the Word." Regarding this symbolic theme, see Hennecke-Schneemelcher 1963, 160–161, and 164 where the text from Origen is cited; Meyer 2003, 79. See also Horsley 1979, 30–54, esp. 35–36; DeConick 2011, 18–19; Zinner 2011, 176–182, 224, 240–241.

[23] Compare *Gos. Thom.* 105, in Layton 2000, 91: "Jesus said, 'He who knows the father and the mother will be called the son of a harlot.'" See DeConick 2006, 284.

[24] See Gieschen 2003, 155: "The Gospel of Philip, however, appears to reflect older Jewish-Christian adoptionist Christology in the mention of 'put on himself the name of the Father' (i.e., the Son's divine nature was imparted to Jesus at his baptism)."

[25] *Gos. Phil.* 51.29–32.

[26] See Schenke 1997, 160, and other references cited in n. 70.

[27] *Gos. Phil.* 62.5–6.

[28] *Gos. Phil.* 75.36; 76.26.

[29] *Gos. Phil.* 82.26–29.

circumcision occasioning a vision of the divine—based on the exegesis of the juxtaposition of Abraham circumcising himself, Ishmael, and every other male in his household, to the epiphany of the Lord by the terebinths of Mamre and the subsequent vision of three men/angels at the entrance to his tent—is a well attested topos in midrashic and kabbalistic sources.[30] The author of this pericope combines that motif with the idea that the purpose of the circumcision of the foreskin is to destroy the flesh. This idea is not prominent in the early rabbinic texts but it does parallel a notion found in Philo and in medieval philosophic and mystical sources to the effect that the rationale for the rite of circumcision is that the cutting of the foreskin curtails sexual desire.

I am inclined to believe that the remark in the *Gospel of Philip* was written by a Jewish Christian, who continued to affirm the legitimacy of the cultic practice but ascribed spiritual significance to it, rather than by a Gentile Christian, who would have called for supplanting circumcision of the flesh with circumcision of the spirit or circumcision of Christ enacted by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.[31] We can profitably compare the comment in the *Gospel of Philip* to the discussion on circumcision between Jesus and his disciples according to logion 53 in the *Gospel of Thomas*:

> His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision beneficial or not?" He said to them, "If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable."[32]

Prima facie, one might argue that the query of the disciples does not imply a rejection of the Jewish rite of circumcision but a reorientation toward a spiritual understanding. But the response attributed to Jesus unequivocally problematizes the ritual and renders it, in a manner consistent with one

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[30] Gen 17:23–18:2. Wolfson 1987, 189–215. A similar explanation is found in Zinner 2011, 181. He analyzes my essay extensively on pp. 251–255.

[31] Cf. Rom 2:25–29; Colossians 2:11. I thus take issue with the conclusion of Siker 1989, 281: "The Gospel of Philip assigns a positive value to circumcision only as a symbol that is proper to denigrate the flesh, but not as a sign of God's covenant with the Jews." The text that Siker cites to support his view, 82.26–29 (and not 92.26–28 as he erroneously cited it) states that Abraham circumcised the flesh of his foreskin to mortify the flesh. Offering a rationale for the ritual does not mean that it denigrates the status of circumcision as the sign of God's covenant with the Jews. In n. 1, *ad locum*, Siker contrasts the passage in the Gospel of Philip with Philo, who accorded a spiritual meaning to circumcision as the "excision of pleasure and all passions" but insisted nonetheless on the need to retain the physical circumcision. I see no reason why the same cannot be applied to the *Gos. Phil*. See also Lundhaug 2010, 392.

[32] Layton 2000, 73.

way of interpreting the relevant dicta of Paul, obsolete,[33] an approach that is corroborated in other sayings from this text in which Jesus instructs his disciples to reject the rote practice of ceremonial acts that may have been considered customary by an earlier Thomasine community.[34] By contrast, the passage in the *Gospel of Philip* does not advocate for the supersession and overturning of the cultic practice. Just as in the case of Abraham, whose circumcision was the necessary prerequisite for him to see the angelic visitors, so Jews—including Jewish Christians—must continue to practice physical circumcision as a means to eradicate the corruptible flesh and to achieve the *visio Dei*.

Image of Truth Nakedly Concealed

At this juncture, we can turn to the interplay between concealment and disclosure. The first occurrence that is worthy of note is the distinction between Jesus as the hidden name and Christ as the revealed name.[35] In 54.5–13, which reads like an exposition of the hymn in Philippians 2:9–10,[36]

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[33] Patterson 1993, 88; Valantasis 1997, 131; DeConick 2006,186. For an alternative approach, see Zinner 2011, 256–257, 273–275, and see the extensive investigation in Luomanen 2006, 119–153.

[34] Layton 2000, 55 (logion 6), 59 (logion 14), and 69 (logion 36). Cp. DeConick 2006, 62, 87–88; Patterson 1993,147–148. See also logion 104 of *Gos. Thom.* (Layton 2000, 91): "They said to Jesus, 'Come let us pray today and let us fast.' Jesus said, 'What is the sin that I have committed, or wherein have I been defeated? But when the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, then let them fast and pray.'" Praying and fasting are repudiated as long as one is in the presence of Jesus. However, when the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, then there is need for these rituals. Cp. Mark 2:19–20, Matthew 9:15, Luke 5:34–35; Valantasis 1997, 184–185. Closer in spirit to the view on circumcision I have elicited from the *Gos. Phil.* is the dictum of Jesus according to logion 27 of *Gos. Thom.*, (Layton 2000, 65): "If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the father." From the context it seems that the Sabbath represents withdrawal from the world and the attainment of an otherworldly state; only through ascetic renunciation does one merit to have a vision of the divine. See DeConick 1996, 126–143; Valantasis 1997, 100–101.

[35] *Gos. Phil.* 56.5. Stroumsa 1983, 281 and 285, compares the passage in *Gos. Phil.* to the tradition of Marcus reported by Ireneaus, *Adv. haer.* 1.15.1, that the name of Jesus (*Iēsous*) has six letters and his unutterable name has twenty-four letters. I concur with his suggestion (1983, 281): "It is more reasonable to assume that the Gnostic conception here retains traces of a Jewish tradition, rather than to postulate an influence from Valentinian circles upon the Hebrew *milieu* in which the *Shiʿur Qomah* conceptions were first developed." See also Zinner 2011, 164–165.

[36] Schenke 1997, 188–189.

the reader is told that the "single name" that the father gave to the son, the "name above all things," is the name that is not uttered in the world. The name is identified further as the name of the father that is worn by the son and in virtue of which the son becomes the father—perhaps echoing the utterance of Jesus "I and my Father are one."[37] The ones who know this name do not speak it.

It is reasonable to assume that this text, much as the parallel formulations in the *Gospel of Truth*,[38] preserves the Christological appropriation of the Jewish tradition regarding the ineffable name, YHWH.[39] Support for this line of reasoning is found in 64.9–12 where there is an allusion to the standard interpretation of the Tetragrammaton as the eternal compresence of past (*hayah*), present (*howeh*), and future (*yihyeh*): "The lord said, 'Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be'."[40] As a consequence of being invested with and wearing that name—a theme well attested in Jewish magical and mystical texts from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages—the identity of the son and the father is affirmed. This passage is followed by another that expands the issue of names but in this case related to the matter of truth.[41] Since truth cannot be known in the world without these names, it can be thought of as both one thing and many things. The singleness of truth cannot be accessed except through its multiple investitures, and even this is constricted to the few, as we read in a second passage, "Truth, which existed since the beginning, is sown everywhere. And many see it being sown, but few are they who see it being reaped."[42]

The depiction of truth as something attainable, even if only by a small number of recipients, ostensibly conflicts with the statement in the *Gospel of Philip* that the names given to the worldly are "very deceptive, for they divert our thoughts from what is correct to what is incorrect."[43] In this section

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[37] John 10:30. *Gos. Phil.* 74.23–24: "The father was in the son and the son in the father." Cp. John 10:38, 14:10–11, 17:21.

[38] Wolfson, 2007, 234–271, esp. 249–257. The link between the *Gos. Phil.* and the *Gos. Truth* on this point was already noted by Stroumsa 1981, 425. See also M.L. Turner 1996, 231, and the reference in the following note.

[39] Gieschen 2003, 115–116, 154–155.

[40] Compare *Gos. Thom.* 19:1 (Layton 2000, 61): "Jesus said, 'Blessed is he who came into being before he came into being.'" On the Jewish Christian conception of the hypostasized name expressed in the *Gos. Truth* and the *Gos. Phil.*, see Longenecker 1970: 41–46; Fossum 1985, 106–112, 125–127; Quispel 1990, 149–154.

[41] *Gos. Phil.* 54.15–30.

[42] *Gos. Phil.* 55.19–22.

[43] *Gos. Phil.* 53.24–25.

of the text, language as such is degraded to the extent that it is linked to this world and hence incapable of properly naming the realities that belong to the eternal realm (אחוג). Indeed, we are told that if words belonged to that eternal realm, they would neither be pronounced in this world nor designate worldly things.[44] This is followed by the passage where it is stated that the one name uttered in the world is the name given by the father to the son.

I suspect that the text preserves two competing views regarding the conventional versus the essential status of language—aligned respectively with the Platonic and the Jewish perspectives—the former casts aspersion on names and the latter accords great value thereto, especially the divine name. But the juxtaposition of the different textual units leaves the impression, as Turner put it, of a "paradoxical anti-language" that "consists of only one word … the name of the Father. Bestowed by the Father on the Son, it allows the Son to become father; some humans possess this name as well, but do not speak it."[45] I would not invoke the expression "anti-language" to characterize the phenomenon at hand. If the conjecture of a background in Jewish magic and mysticism is correct, then we know from those sources that what is intended is that the name represents the matrix language of all creation; the name is one word but in that word all words, and hence all things, are contained.

Be that as it may, what is most important for our analysis is the aforementioned distinction between Jesus as the hidden name and Christ as the revealed name. Prima facie, one might have expected just the opposite based on the more predictable perspective, which is enunciated in 57.26: "There are some things hidden through the visible." Since Jesus is the name presumably given to him at the time of his earthly birth, it should be considered the revealed name, whereas *christos* in Greek[46]—*mšīḥa* in Syriac—is the designation of the preexistent divine nature and hence should be considered the concealed name. The statement that Jesus is not particular to any language as compared to Christ, which may be rendered differently in each language, is understandable if we suppose that behind the comment is the fact that Jesus is the proper name in Hebrew (ישוע), an assumption strengthened by the philological gloss in 62.15 that Jesus in Hebrew means

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[44] *Gos. Phil.* 54.3–5.

[45] M.L. Turner 1996, 231.

[46] Compare *Gos. Phil.* 74.12–16, p. 191: "The chrism is superior to baptism, for it is from the word 'chrism' that we have been called 'Christians,' certainly not because of the word 'baptism.' And it is because of the chrism that 'the Christ' has his name."

"redemption" (ⲥⲱⲧⲉ). Layton, accordingly, translated the "hidden name" as the "private name," that is, the personal name, and the "revealed name" as the "public name."[47] This also clarifies the statement that the Nazarene is the one "who reveals what is hidden," that is, Jesus bears the public name that discloses the private name of Christ.[48] Perhaps a deeper significance may be elicited from this comment on the basis of the contrived etymology of the title "Nazarene" [ⲡⲛⲁⲍⲁⲣⲏⲛⲟⲥ] in 62.15–16, "'Nazara' [ⲛⲁⲍⲁⲣⲁ] is 'the truth' [ⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲁ]. 'The Nazarene,' then, is 'the truth.'" If we apply this etymology to the previously discussed passage, then the import of saying that the Nazarene reveals what is hidden is that the disclosure of the secret is a task uniquely assigned to Jesus inasmuch as he is the embodiment of truth, and an essential feature of the truth is the lifting of the curtain to expose the mystery.[49]

This may be the intent of the comment that the word "Messiah" [ⲙⲉⲥⲥⲓⲁⲥ] has two meanings, "the Christ" [ⲡⲉⲭ̅ⲣ̅ⲥ̅] and "the measured" [ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲙⲩ]. To make sense of this midrashic exegesis, one must bear in mind that the word משח in Hebrew (and in its Aramaic cognate) can mean to anoint and to measure.[50] The author of the *Gospel of Philip* passage may have combined these two connotations together with the aforementioned etymology of the title "Nazarene" to drive home the point that the savior is the measure of truth. This is likely the gist of the concluding sentence, "It is 'the Nazarene' and 'Jesus' who have been measured."[51] When the wordplay is looked at from this vantage point it provides a window onto the nature of esotericism more generally. The elemental tenet is expressed, for example, in 84.14–20: when it comes to matters of the material world of creation, the strong are visible and held in high regard, whereas the weak are obscure and despised; with respect to the truth, however, the converse is true: the manifest things are weak and despised, while the hidden things are strong and held in high regard. Analogously, we read in the rather lengthy discourse at 82.30–83.30, the vitality of life depends on the inner parts being hidden. Just as the intestines of a person must be concealed if that person is to stay alive, so

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47 Layton 1987, 332.

48 *Gos. Phil.* 56.12.

49 Lundhaug 2010, 228: "For it is truth that reveals what is hidden. That Christ as truth reveals what is hidden must again be seen in connection with the fact that by his crucifixion Christ becomes the fruit of the new Tree of Knowledge, not least because it is his 'death' on the cross that causes the rending of the veil of the temple and the revelation of the hidden things within."

50 Unnik 1964, 465–467; Stroumsa 1983, 285.

51 *Gos. Phil.* 62.16–17.

if the root of the tree is exposed, the tree withers. Similarly, with respect to evil: if its root is concealed, it remains strong, but if it is brought to light, it perishes. The ethical mandate, then, is to uproot evil and to weaken it, just as Jesus "pulled out the root of the whole place."[52] The unexpected reversal of identifying Jesus as the hidden name and Christ as the revealed name partakes of the same hermeneutical axiom but from the inverted perspective: the mundane nature of the historical Jesus is, as it were, the open secret that reveals the divine nature of the primeval Christ, the nature that comprises "everything in himself, whether man or angel or mystery, and the father."[53] This secret of Christ is disclosed in the manifold masks of dissimilitude donned by Jesus, a duplicity encapsulated in the role with which he is entrusted, to bring out those who go in and to bring in those who go out.[54]

The polymorphic nature of Jesus is elaborated at greater length in 57.28–58.10.[55] Jesus is said to have tricked everyone because "he did not appear as he was, but in the manner in which [they would] be able to see him." Thus he appears docetically to the great as great, to the small as small, to the angels as an angel, to humans as a human.[56] As a consequence of this duplicity, "his word hid itself from everyone," whence it follows that every revelation is a form of occlusion. While those who saw Jesus thought they were seeing themselves, the reverse occurred when he was manifest to his disciples "in glory" on the mountain: he made them great so that they would be able to see his greatness.

Lying beneath this comment is the epistemological principle, which can be traced to Empedocles, that perception is based on the principle of *like by like*.[57] For the disciples to behold the greatness of Jesus, they had to become great. The principle is stated apodictically in 61.20–22, "It is not possible for anyone to see anything of the things that actually exist unless he becomes like them." In the continuation of this section, the principle is modified and

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[52] Lundhaug 2010, 303–307.

[53] *Gos. Phil.* 56.15.

[54] *Gos. Phil.* 68.20–22.

[55] Stroumsa 1981, 416, 431 n. 35.

[56] Compare Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* 1.217–218. "The Savior, therefore, in a way much more divine than Paul, has become 'all things to all,' that he might either 'gain' or perfect 'all things' [1Corinthians 9:19–22]. He has clearly become a man to men, and an angel to angels. No believer will have any doubt that he became a man; and we may be convinced that he became an angel if we observe the appearances and words of the angels … in certain passages of Scripture when the angels speak."

[57] On the related principle of like mixing with like, see Lundhaug 2010, 266–269.

applied exclusively to the realm of truth because of the obvious empirical fact that it is not the case that people become what they see in this world. In this world, one sees the sun without morphing into the sun, but in the true world one becomes what one sees. "You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw [the father, you] shall become father."[58] In this world, one sees everything but oneself; in the place of truth one becomes what one sees.[59]

Even more germane is a third passage:

> Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images. The world will not receive truth in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is certainly necessary to be born again through the image. Which one? Resurrection. The image must rise again through the image. The bridal chamber and the image must enter through the image into the truth: this is the restoration. Not only must those who produce the name of the father and the son and holy spirit do so, but also ⟨those who⟩ have produced them for you. If one does not acquire them, the name ("Christian") will also be taken from him. But one receives them in the unction of the [...] of the power of the cross. This power the apostles called "the right and the left." For this person is no longer a Christian but a Christ.[60]

We may deduce that the author of this pericope maintained that the truth (ⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲉⲓⲁ) in and of itself is naked, that is, devoid of all imagistic or metaphoric embellishments. To appear in the world, however, it had to be garbed in symbolic configurations, referred to as "types" (ⲛ̄ⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ) and "images" (ⲛ̄ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ).[61] Upon closer examination we see that "the image" (ⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ) is a polyvalent expression, denoting the manifestation of the imageless truth in the world, the invisible soul that is enclothed in the body, and the angelic counterpart of that soul with which it is reunited. Resurrection (ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) consists, therefore, of the rebirth (ϧⲛⲟ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡ) of the image and the bridal chamber rising through the image, a restoration (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) to the truth. The process is associated with those who have received the name of the father, son, and holy spirit. The designation "Christian" is removed from those who do not receive this *gnōsis*. Moreover, the one who does receive these names in the rite of anointment through the power of the cross, the power of the right and the left—an exegesis of 2 Corinthians 6:7,[62]

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[58] *Gos. Phil.* 61.29–31.
[59] *Gos. Phil.* 61.33–35.
[60] *Gos. Phil.* 67.9–27.
[61] Lundhaug 2010, 307–311.
[62] Lundhaug 2010, 308 n. 573.

which here signifies the coincidence of opposites mentioned more explicitly in 53.14–24[63]—is no longer simply labeled "Christian," that is, a believer in Christ, but such a spirit is called "a Christ" (ⲟⲩⲭ̅ⲣ̅ⲥ̅) that is, the anointed one.

The resurrection, on this score, is a transfiguration, a mystical apotheosis, a restoration to the fullness (ⲡⲗⲏⲣⲱⲙⲁ).[64] Thus, according to 66.7–21, there is a threefold distinction: this world, the resurrection, and the middle. In this world there is good and evil, in the middle is death or pure evil, and the resurrection, which is not the rising of the body from the grave but a state of rest that comes to be when ones takes off the corruptible flesh. The transfiguration is alluded to in several other passages in the image of being clothed in the "perfect light" in the mystery of union with that light.[65] This, too, strikes me as the esoteric meaning of the polemic against the materialist understanding of the resurrection, "Those who say that the lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died. If one does not first attain the resurrection he will not die."[66]

Common sense would dictate that death should precede resurrection. What are we to make of the reversal implied in the statement that one must, in emulation of Jesus, be resurrected before one can die?[67] The death here envisioned is the true life that is attained by dying to this world, but that dying cannot be accomplished until one has divested oneself of the contemptible body and taken on the body of light. The removal of the flesh is referred to as an act of unclothing. The uninitiated believe that death is a disrobing that leaves them as naked corpses, but the initiated know that this nakedness is, in fact, another form of garbing. The corporal body is a garment that must be removed so that one may be denuded of this nudity and thereby inherit the kingdom of God.[68]

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[63] *Gos. Phil.* 53.14–24: "Light and darkness, life and death, right and left, are brothers of one another. They are inseparable. Because of this neither are the good good, nor the evil evil, nor is life life, nor death death. For this reason each one will dissolve into its earliest origin. But those who are exalted above the world are indissoluble, eternal."

[64] The term *pleroma* appears in 68.14.

[65] *Gos. Phil.* 70.5–9; 76.27–29.

[66] *Gos. Phil.* 56.15–19.

[67] For a different interpretation, see Zinner 2011, 134. The author invokes the passage from the *Gos. Thom.* to explain Paul's attack in 1 Corinthians 15 on those who deny the resurrection. On death and resurrection in the *Gos. Phil.*, see the extensive discussion in Lundhaug 2010, 212–244.

[68] *Gos. Phil.* 56.31–34. On the postmortem resurrection, see the analysis of Lundhaug 2010, 236–242.

Mystery of Marriage and the Reconstituted Androgyne

I will turn my attention in this section to the theme of secrecy and openness as it pertains to the motifs of marriage and the bridal chamber. A salient feature of various dicta anthologized in the *Gospel of Philip* is the reference to five sacraments, delineated in one passage as the mystery of baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and the bridal chamber.[69] According to another passage, the architectural structure of the Jerusalem temple is interpreted allegorically to refer to three stages of initiation: the holy building opened to the west symbolizes baptism, the holy of the holy opened to the south symbolizes redemption, and the holy of holies opened to the east symbolizes the bridal chamber.[70] Much has been written about these rituals of initiation,[71] especially the last item on the list, the bridal chamber (ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ), and the possibility that preserved here is a symbolic rite that reflects the sanctification of heterosexual intercourse—the "mystery of marriage"—as a means to facilitate either the union of the soul with its angelic counterpart or the hieros gamos of the divine syzygy.[72]

The reconstitution of the androgyny, engendered by the union of the (female) image and the (male) angel through the sacrament of the bridal chamber in 58.14, is reminiscent of a central motif in medieval kabbalistic lore, an affinity that has been noted by several scholars.[73] The following passage especially calls for comparison to the kabbalistic doctrine: "Whereas in this world the union is one of husband and wife—a case of strength complemented by weakness—in the eternal realm (aeon) the form of union is different, although we refer to them by the same names."[74] This touches upon

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[69] *Gos. Phil.* 67.27–30. For an alternative rendering, see Layton 1987, 341: "The Lord [did] all things by means of a mystery: baptism, chrism, eucharist, ransom, and bridal chamber." Regarding this passage, see Thomassen 2006b, 925–939.

[70] *Gos. Phil.* 69.14–70:4.

[71] Eijk 1971, 94–120; J.D. Turner 1994, 136–181; Pagels, 1997, 280–291; Buckley-Good 1997, 1–19; DeConick 1998, 489–523; DeConick 1999, 335–339; DeConick 2001, 225–261; Thomassen 2006a, 341–350; Uro 2008, 457–486.

[72] *Gos. Phil.* 64.31; 82,3–6. In addition to the sources cited in the previous note, I offer a list of some other relevant studies: Grant 1961, 129–140; Williams 1971, 1–17; Buckley 1980, 569–581; Buckley 1986, 120–125; Tripp 1982, 251–260; Pagels 1991, 442–454; Pagels 1995, 107–116; DeConick 2003, 307–342; DeConick 2008; Strathearn 2004,198–253, 258–278; Strathearn 2009, 83–103. DeConick 2003, 307–310, offers a critical review of many of the most influential studies previously published. A list of the relevant studies is also conveniently cited in DeConick 2001, 225–226 n. 2.

[73] DeConick 2001, 253–256; DeConick 2003, 339–340; Idel 1989, 203–204; Idel 1991, 266–267; Scholem 1991, 300 n. 99; Liebes 1982, 230–232.

[74] *Gos. Phil.* 76.6–9.

a crucial feature of the symbolic approach adopted by kabbalists as well as the gender system that overwhelmingly informed their worldview: based on the homology between the union in the upper and the lower realms, we are compelled to use human language to depict the former in terms of the latter, even though the analogy cannot be interpreted literally. Moreover, the correlation of the masculine and the feminine respectively with strength and weakness corresponds to the widespread kabbalistic identification of the masculine with the potency to bestow and of the feminine with the capacity to receive.

A second passage that strengthens that comparison considerably is the portrayal of the forms of the evil spirits in 65.1–26. As in the demonology that evolved in the zoharic kabbalah, the impure forces are male and female, the female demons attempt to entice and unite with men and the male demons attempt to entice and unite with women. To escape from their detrimental allure one must receive the male and the female powers, the bridegroom and the bride, from the "mirrored bridal chamber." Just as the kabbalists allocated apotropaic efficacy to marriage as a means to ward off the pernicious effect of the male and the female unclean spirits, designated respectively as Samael and Lilith, insofar as the heterosexual pairing of husband and wife theurgically sustain the union of the sefirotic potencies, *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*, also referred to as the bridegroom and the bride, so the *Gospel of Philip* emphasized that single men and women are most vulnerable and hence when a man is sitting alongside his wife, the female demon cannot have sex with the man nor can the male demon have sex with the woman.

Two other passages from the *Gospel of Philip* point to what I deem to be the most intriguing affinity to the kabbalistic lore.[75] The first occurs in 68.22–26: "When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more." The second passage reiterates the theme that the separation of woman from man was the cause of death in the world,[76] but adds that the figure of Christ "came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and to unite them".[77] The reunion

[75] The proximity of the two passages from the *Gos. Phil.* 68.22–26 and 70.9–22 to the kabbalistic view on gender was already noted in Wolfson 2005, 165–166.

[76] *Gos. Phil.* 70.9–12.

[77] *Gos. Phil.* 70.13–17. See DeConick 2011, 97. A slightly different, and less misogynistic, explanation of Christ's salvific role is given in *Gos. Phil.*, 71.16–21: "Adam came into being from

of the female spirit and the male image transpires in the bridal chamber.[78] From the example of Adam and Eve a soteriological ideal is adduced for all humankind: "Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him."[79]

These texts display a skillful exegesis of the account of the creation of man and woman in the second chapter of Genesis. Woman is said to have been fashioned from the rib or the side of man, and consequently, the man is described as leaving his father and mother to cling to his wife, so that they will become one flesh.[80] Kabbalists similarly read the verses from Genesis as promulgating the view that the heterosexual union of man and woman is the means by which the latter is restored to the former. Death symbolizes the separation of male and female, which is to say, the severance of the part of man from himself. The overcoming of death, conversely, consists of the reconstitution of the male androgyne. Implicit in this mending is a transvaluation of gender that is expressed in several ancient Christian texts, including logion 114 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, as the female making herself male.[81] The partition of this androgynous condition gives rise to two sexes, which establishes the very heterogeneity that is rectified in the reinstallation of the originary state.

Rending the Veil to Unveil the Unveiling

In the end, since Jesus comes from the place of truth, the truth must be revealed, recognized, and glorified, bestowing freedom on those who take hold of it, rather than persisting like ignorance hidden and resting in itself.[82] Exegeting the verse from John 8:32, "If you know the truth, the truth will make you free," the author of the *Gospel of Philip* states, "Ignorance is a slave. Knowledge is freedom. If we know the truth, we shall find the fruits of truth within us. If we are joined to it, it will bring our fulfillment."[83] But the full

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two virgins, from the spirit and from the virgin earth. Christ, therefore, was born from a virgin to rectify the fall which occurred in the beginning."

[78] *Gos. Phil.* 70.17–18.

[79] *Gos. Phil.* 70.19–22.

[80] Gen 2:21–24.

[81] Wolfson 2005, 53–55. For a list of other scholars who have discussed the logion in the *Gos. Thom.*, see Wolfson 2005, 439–440 n. 46. See also DeConick 2011, 78–79.

[82] *Gos. Phil.* 73.24, 84.2–7.

[83] *Gos. Phil.* 84.8–14.

disclosure of truth must be qualified because the mysteries of truth can only be revealed through the pretense of truth, which is to say, "in type and image."[84] The one exception is the bridal chamber, the "holy in the holy" that "remains hidden."[85]

Once more, the text performs the intricate hermeneutic of esotericism as it is applied to the Jerusalem Temple: the veil at first concealed how God controlled creation, but when the veil is rent—through the crucifixion—the interior things are revealed, and as a result the house is left desolate and destroyed. The divinity flees, not to dwell in the Holy of Holies, since it cannot mix with the unmixed light and the flawless fullness, but to be under the wings and arms of the cross.[86] Those who "belong to the order of the priesthood" are "able to go within the veil with the high priest."[87]

It is no coincidence that at exactly this point, when the veil is unveiled, the critical teaching about the secret of secrecy is disclosed:

> For this reason the veil was not rent at the top only, since it would have been open only to those above; nor was it rent at the bottom only, since it would have been revealed only to those below. But it was rent from top to bottom. Those above opened to us the things below, in order that we may go in to the secret of the truth. This is truly what is held in high regard, (and) what is strong! But we shall go in there by means of lowly types and forms of weakness. They are lowly indeed when compared with the perfect glory. There is glory which surpasses glory. There is power which surpasses power. Therefore the perfect things have opened up to us, together with the hidden things of truth. The holies of the holies were revealed and the bridal chamber invited us in.[88]

The rending of the veil had to be from top to bottom to guarantee that the mysteries would be accessible to those below and to those above. Through this opening of what is below by means of those above, one can enter into the secret of the truth (ⲁⲡⲡⲉⲑⲏⲡ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲁ). But we are immediately reminded of the frailty of the human condition: one enters only "by means of lowly types and forms of weakness," that is, one cannot see the face of truth but through the guise of the image. This is the lower form of the glory compared to the upper form, the truth laid bare without any image.

Notwithstanding this impediment, one can experience a disclosure of the innermost secrets, the holies of the holies, the bridal chamber whence are

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[84] *Gos. Phil.* 84.20–21.
[85] *Gos. Phil.* 84.22–23.
[86] *Gos. Phil.* 84.23–34.
[87] *Gos. Phil.* 85.1–5.
[88] *Gos. Phil.* 85.5–21. See the analysis of rending the veil in Lundhaug 2010, 224–228.

revealed the mysteries of the marriage between the soul and the angelic Christ "perfected in the day and the light".[89] The one who becomes a "son of the bridal chamber" receives that light, and by receiving that light he "will not be seen, nor can he be detained. And none shall be able to torment a person like this even while he dwells in the world."[90]

The culminating vision is depicted by the shamanistic phenomenon of becoming invisible, a theme that is quite prevalent in magical formulae and adjurations.[91] To attain a state of invisibility is a sign of ultimate power as it protects one from all potential harm but it also signals the divinization/angelification of the adept and the reincorporation into the pleroma, which is invisible to the physical eye. In some respect, the one who illumined has already left the world by receiving "the truth in the images."[92] But for such a person the departure is not really going to some other place, since the world itself "has become the eternal realm (aeon), for the eternal realm is fullness for him."[93]

And now, at the conclusion of the text, the reader is prepared to receive the final reversal of the reversal: "This is the way it is: it is revealed to him alone, not hidden in the darkness and the night, but hidden in a perfect day and a holy light."[94] The truth is revealed but still hidden, not in nocturnal darkness but in diurnal light, there in plain view for no one to see but the one to whom the secret is uncovered by being recovered.

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[89] *Gos. Phil.* 86.5; 86.1–3.

[90] *Gos. Phil.* 86.7–11.

[91] Cp. the following words attributed to Simon Magus in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, cited in Ogden 2009, 73: "For I can make myself invisible to those who wish to capture me, and I can reveal myself openly again when I wish to be seen." Regarding this phenomenon, see Wolfson 2001, 119 and sources mentioned in n. 172.

[92] *Gos. Phil.* 86.11–13.

[93] *Gos. Phil.* 86.13–14.

[94] *Gos. Phil.* 86.15–18.

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RITUAL IN THE *SECOND BOOK OF JEU*

Erin Evans

The *Books of Jeu* of the Bruce Codex, a pair of 3rd–4th century Coptic-Gnostic treatises of likely Egyptian provenance, contain a wealth of detailed instructions for the reader or member of its particular belief group to be able to successfully ascend through the heavenly realms, past all of the otherworldly entities that would bar his or her passage. The main characters of the text are Jesus, who as emanation of the highest God acts as imparter of knowledge, guide through the divine realms, and officiant of the rituals; and the disciples, both the twelve and the women disciples, who absorb all of this information, occasionally ask questions, and generally rejoice as they move closer and closer to the heart of this spiritual divine realm.

Although the texts are fragmentary, missing large sections, there is still a good quantity of remarkably detailed instruction and ritual material to be found. Particularly striking is the ritual material found in what is now generally known as the *Second Book of Jeu* (here *2 Jeu*).[1] This text presents a series of baptisms or purifying rituals, followed by detailed information required for a rite of ascent through the aeons, or the visible cosmos. This paper will provide an analysis of some of the key elements of these rituals, exploring the system and logic that went into their practice and formulation. It will be argued that the presentation of all of these ritual details suggests that these rites were meant to be performed by followers, rather than depictions of literary or idealized ceremonies. The discussion will begin with examinations of the baptisms and their use of plants as offerings and symbolic tools, "ciphers" and seals, divine intermediaries, and the role of prayer, with its use of *voces magicae*. Then the instructions regarding the necessary ciphers, seals and magical names needed for ascent, the path to be taken in ascending, and the possible contexts for use of this information will be examined.

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[1] Transcriptions, translations and page numberings for the *Books of Jeu* are from Schmidt and MacDermot's edition (Schmidt and MacDermot 1978), except where noted that the present author has modified them.

Rites of Purification

Chapters 45–48 of *2 Jeu* describe a series of four rituals: three baptisms, and the mystery to remove the evil of the archons. The three baptisms are those of water, fire, and Holy Spirit—perhaps reflecting the idea mentioned in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, wherein John the Baptist tells the people that he will baptize them with water, but the one who is coming after him will baptize them in Holy Spirit and fire. Before any of the rites are administered, Jesus explains to the disciples that he will give them these three baptisms, the mystery to remove the evil of the archons, and afterwards, that he will give them the mystery of the "spiritual inunction."[2] The first four rites are duly given, but the final mystery of spiritual inunction has fallen away. These ritual descriptions suggest a unique, complex set of practices, with a balance of material preparation and mental and spiritual training required beforehand.

Each ritual involves a set of similar elements. Vine branches are laid out, and upon this are set wine, bread according to the number of participants, and an offering of various plant-based components (except the final ritual, which also involves a number of stones). The disciples are clothed in linen garments, and they have one plant in their two hands, one in their mouths, and one to crown them. They also hold in their hands a "cipher"—presented in the text as a number. The same cipher is used for each of the three baptisms, the "cipher of the seven voices;" for the mystery to remove the evil of the archons, it is the "cipher of the first amen." The disciples stand with their feet together, suggesting that they stood in a circle around the central proceedings. Jesus seals them with a seal, with its own name and interpretation, both given as brief *voces magicae*. He recites a prayer to his Father, and in two of the cases requests the intervention of intermediary figures in the process of the baptism. After all this, some sort of sign occurs, and Jesus baptizes and seals the disciples with a second seal.

Offerings and Ritual Materials

An examination of the more specific details of each individual ritual is necessary for greater understanding of the rituals' intent and logic. The first baptism, that of the water of life, opens with the most explicit instructions found in the texts for obtaining a specific element for the ritual meal or

[2] *2 Jeu* 102.

sacrifice. Jesus tells his disciples to go to Galilee and find a man or woman in whom most of the evil has died. For a man, he cannot have had intercourse, and for a woman, she must not have had intercourse and must also have ceased the "communication" of women.[3] From this person, they are to obtain two pitchers of wine.

This both suggests a fairly strict asceticism on the part of the group using the text, and indicates the degree of ritual purity required in certain items used in these rites. The disciples themselves are said earlier to have left behind their wives, children, and the whole life of this world, and to have followed Jesus for twelve years, fulfilling all his injunctions.[4] A tight internal community coupled with a separation from others outside of the community is suggested. This is accompanied with abstinence from physical or mental interactions leading to sin: a lack of "ϲγνογϲια" which can mean conversation or association, but in this context likely suggests sexual intercourse; and for women, additionally a ceasing of κοινωνία, or communication, society or fellowship, with women that presumably was thought to lead to evil talk or action. It displays a part of the mental, physical and spiritual preparation that was demanded of the initiates.

As previously noted, with this lone exception, no instructions are given for the obtaining or usage of the plentiful materials used in the rituals, which are listed in Table 1. We can gather a number of things from taking these lists individually, as well as comparing them. The only materials that are consistent through the different rituals are juniper, an unknown substance called "ϰαϲδαλανθοϲ," and ϰγνοϰεφαλον, which is placed in the mouths of the disciples. There was apparently a system or a progression in place with the ingredients, with some being phased out and others brought in at each stage of the process. Many of the ingredients are highly aromatic: things like juniper, myrrh, frankincense, spikenard, or mastich. These were viewed as symbolic of purity and effective for purification when burned.[5] Some were thought to ward off evil spirits. In a series of rituals meant to take away sins and remove the hold of evil entities, it is unsurprising to find such ingredients. Harvey, in her study of scent in early Christianity and the cultures in which it developed, notes that such sacrificial incense "had the capacity to transform the human worshipper who offered it, or even encountered it, into a state of exceptional piety. Its lingering scents attuned

[3] *2 Jeu* 105–106.
[4] *2 Jeu* 103.
[5] De Cleene and Lejeune 2003, 1:364–365, 435–436, 570.

the mind to devotion and adoration both before and long after the act of sacrifice had taken place."[6] In addition to its symbolic roles, it acted as a powerful sensory aid to reaching the proper state of mind for devotion and spiritual transformation.

Table 1. The offerings

Baptism of Water	Baptism of Fire	Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Mystery to Remove the Evil of the Archons
ⲁⲣⲕⲉⲩⲑⲓⲥ Juniper	ⲁⲣⲕⲉⲩⲑⲓⲥ Juniper	ⲁⲣⲕⲉⲩⲑⲓⲥ Juniper	ⲁⲣⲕⲉⲩⲑⲓⲥ Juniper
ⲕⲁⲥⲇⲁⲗⲁⲛⲑⲟⲥ *Kasdalanthos* (unknown)	ⲕⲁⲥⲇⲁⲗⲁⲛⲑⲟⲥ *Kasdalanthos* (unknown)	ⲕⲁⲥⲇⲁⲗⲁⲛⲑⲟⲥ *Kasdalanthos* (unknown)	ⲕⲟⲩⲟⲥⲭⲓ(?) *Kuoschi* (unknown/reading uncertain)
ⲛⲁⲣⲇⲟⲥⲧⲁⲭⲟⲥ Spikenard	ⲛⲁⲣⲇⲟⲥⲧⲁⲭⲟⲥ Spikenard	ⲕⲣⲟⲕⲟⲛⲁⲅⲙⲁⲧⲟⲥ Saffron residue	ⲗⲓⲃⲁⲛⲟⲥ Frankincense
	ⲙⲩⲗ Myrrh	ⲙⲩⲗ Myrrh	ⲁⲙⲓⲁⲛⲧⲟⲛ Asbestos-like stone
	ⲙⲁⲥⲧⲓⲭⲓⲛ Mastic resin	ⲙⲁⲥⲧⲓⲭⲓⲛ Mastic resin	ⲁⲭⲁⲧⲏⲥ Agate (stone)
	ⲥⲧⲁⲕⲧⲏ oil of myrrh or cinnamon	ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲙⲱⲙⲟⲛ Cinnamon	ⲙⲁⲗⲁⲃⲁⲑⲣⲟⲛ cinnamomum tamala
	ⲗⲓⲃⲁⲛⲟⲥ Frankincense	ⲉⲃⲓⲱ Honey	
	ⲧⲉⲣⲉⲃⲉⲛⲑⲟⲥ Terebinth	ⲥⲟⲛⲧⲉ "resin;" possibly another form of myrrh	

Furthermore, many of these substances were well known, but highly valued and pricey, such as frankincense and myrrh. They were gifts giving honor to the receiver, in addition to their sweet scents and wider roles of embalming or protecting. Harvey also noted that "compounds of multiple scents signified exceptional worth, not only in wealth but in effort: their

[6] Harvey 2006, 14.

redolence bespoke exotic ingredients obtained through difficult means and arduous transport, and elaborate processes of preparation."[7] It might also be observed that the materials used for the incense offerings in the first three of these rituals resemble recipes for *kyphi*, the incense used in Egyptian temples, suggesting further precedent for their use in a purifying, ritual context, particularly in the Egyptian setting where this group likely originated.[8] Overall, the focus of the ingredients used in the initial offering appears to be a combination of symbolic cleansing or purity, powerful scent, protection from evil, honor given to the recipient of the offering, and perhaps as a necessary corollary to that, the expensiveness of the overall concoction—it was not something that could be performed lightly or easily.

Crowns

The baptismal crowns—olive, verbena, and myrtle (see Table 2)—all have a history of use in symbolic crownings in the ancient Greek world. The first, the olive crown, was symbolic of peace, mercy, and victory. It was highly prized, and given as the main reward to Olympic victors. Further, it was used in certain magical rituals, particularly divination spells.[9] Its placement as the first crown in the series might show a view of the first stage representing an opening of the participants to communication or interaction with the divine.

The second crown, verbena or vervain, also symbolized peace, and was used in ritual cleansing of temples and altars. It was worn in crowns by Roman priests during sacrificial rites, and generally associated with purification.

The crown in the baptism of the Holy Spirit is made from myrtle. This was symbolic of many things, including virginity, purity, marriage, victory and freedom. Both Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Hymen, god of marriage, were depicted wearing a crown of myrtle. It is possible that the association with marriage was involved in the selection of myrtle crowns. Among the Valentinians, for example, one of the loftiest rituals of initiation was that of the bridal chamber. As Thomassen has pointed out, nuptial imagery was not uncommon in baptismal contexts.[10]

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[7] Harvey 2006, 34.
[8] See Manniche 1999, 47–59.
[9] For example, see *PGM* IV 3–4; V 38–39; XIII 651–654.
[10] Thomassen 2006, 405.

Myrtle was used in some ancient Iranian rituals relating to life and fertility.[11] In the Mandaean *masiqta* it is called "clothing which preserves the soul,"[12] and in their baptismal rite a crown of myrtle is worn on the finger before being placed on the head partway through the process.[13] They viewed it as bringing health and vigor.[14] Myrtle served as a crown in Eleusinian mystery rites, viewed as a "seal of mystic union."[15] In sum, myrtle was used as a crown in a wide variety of religious ritual contexts in the ancient Greco-Roman and Near Eastern world, associated with life, purity, and mystical marriage or union.

Table 2. Plants adorning the participants

	Baptism of Water	Baptism of Fire	Baptism of the Holy Spirit
Crown	ⲕⲗⲁⲇⲟⲥ ϫⲟⲉⲓⲧ (olive branches)	ⲡⲉⲣⲓⲥⲧⲉⲣⲉⲱⲛⲟⲥ (verbena)	ⲙⲟⲣⲥⲩⲛⲏ (myrtle)
In Hands	ⲏⲗⲓⲁⲕⲟⲛ (sunflower)	ⲭⲣⲩⲥⲟⲑⲉⲙⲟⲛ (chrysanthemum)	ⲁⲣⲧⲉⲙⲓⲥⲓⲁ(ⲥ) (mugwort)
In Mouth	ⲕⲩⲛⲟⲕⲉⲫⲁⲗⲟⲛ (cynocephalia)	ⲕⲩⲛⲟⲕⲉⲫⲁⲗⲟⲛ (cynocephalia)	ⲕⲩⲛⲟⲕⲉⲫⲁⲗⲟⲛ (cynocephalia)

Plants in the Hands and Mouth

The plants held in the hands also possessed symbolic connotations. The sunflower and the chrysanthemum were both associated with the sun, and also to some degree with death. These two are used in the first two rituals, perhaps signifying a death of the old self in the ways of the world. The "mugwort" in the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a translation of "ⲁⲣⲧⲉⲙⲓⲥⲓⲁⲥ", the name of which suggests a connection with the moon or Greek moon goddess. Whether there is significance in the shift from sun-plants to a lunar one is uncertain. The mugwort was further thought to be a deterrent against magic and to defend one against evil.[16] As they move into the final stages of the baptismal process, there is a shift in the manually held symbols

[11] Drower 1937, 121n.14.
[12] Drower 1963, 42.
[13] Drower 1937, 100–123; Buckley 2002, 80–87.
[14] Drower 1937, 179.
[15] Wright 1912, 41.
[16] De Cleene and Lejeune 2003, 2:390. See the herbal of Pseudo-Apuleius.

from a focus on death and embellishment of the body of the past toward defense of the current, purified self.

The plant placed in the mouth in all three baptisms, translated in MacDermot as an anemone, is called "ⲕⲩⲛⲟⲕⲉⲫⲁⲗⲟⲛ". According to Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon, however, "κυνοκέφαλος" means dog-headed. "κυνοκεφάλαιον" can mean anemone, but "κυνοκεφάλιον" can refer to another plant name translated as flea-wort.[17] In Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* there is a reference to a "cynocephalia" that was used in divination and for protection from sorcery, and it seems likely that this could be the plant referred to in this passage.[18] A tendency to use plants believed to protect the user from supernatural harm and open him or her to interaction with divine forces has already been shown.

Little insight is available for the majority of the materials used in the mystery to remove the evil of the archons. This ritual is the only one requiring non-plant materials in the offering, in the form of asbestos and agate. Furthermore, it uses a different cipher from the other three rituals. It clearly is operating under a slightly different set of principles from the previous set. It is worth noting that none of the four rituals involve any animal-based components. Frequently spells of a coercive nature require animal sacrifice or an offering of some part of a formerly living creature. For example, in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, there is a slander spell to Selene in which two types of offerings are described: the "beneficent" offering, which consists of non-animal components, and the "coercive" offering, which consists almost entirely of animals or animal parts.[19] The non-coercive nature of the rituals will be discussed further in the analysis of the use of prayer in the text.

Ciphers

Finally, the last of the physical items in the rituals remains to be discussed, the "ciphers" of the seven voices and the first amen. The term translated as "cipher" is "ψῆφος", which can mean a number of things: most commonly, a pebble or stone used in a number of different ways, from a voting tool to a divinatory one. It can also refer metaphorically to a number or cipher—and as the ψῆφος are described in the text only with numbers, in her English

[17] Liddell and Scott 1883, 1756–1757.
[18] Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 30.6. Referred to in Rognstad 2006, 38.
[19] *PGM* IV 2622–2707.

translation MacDermot described it accordingly. The text specifies that the cipher is held in the two hands of the participant, suggesting that it was written or engraved on a physical object. The necessity of holding these symbols in one or more hands—as opposed to being worn around the neck or otherwise displayed—gives these descriptions a further materiality and instructional specificity that supports an actual, physical ritual context as opposed to a purely literary phenomenon.

It is likely that this number was represented on a small stone of some variety. The English translation of the Greek Magical Papyri takes this likely manifestation into account, where in a visionary/divination spell one is commanded to "Clasp a pebble (ψῆφον) numbered 3663 to your breasts."[20] The number 3663 most likely refers to the magical name or entity βαϊνχω-ωωχ, the letters of which have a numerical value of the same.[21] In *2 Jeu*, both the "seven voices" and the "three amens" are suggested elsewhere in the text as "mysteries" in their own rights, suggesting that the numbers associated with them are further referents to some aspect of these mysteries. Both here and potentially in the magical spell just mentioned, the number-pebble was apparently used to further display the knowledge or worthiness of the participants at a glance.

Prayer and Voces Magicae

Prayer or oral recitation in the texts serves to bring the rituals to their conclusion. The speeches given in each ritual differs, but there are some common features. In each case, Jesus addresses "my Father, thou father of all fatherhoods, thou infinite Light;" there is a request to forgive their sins and purify or erase their iniquities; and there is a series of mystery names, or the "imperishable" names, of the Father given. A look at the differences between the spoken passages, however, is also illuminating.

The prayer that begins the baptism of water is unique, in that before anything else Jesus recites a series of mystery names or words, interspersed with "amens," as if to get the attention of the one he is addressing with his knowledge of these higher names or words and show that he is one worth listening to. Only then does Jesus call to his Father—and asks for the fifteen helpers of the seven virgins of the light who are over the baptism

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[20] *PGM* IV 937, trans. Grese, in Betz 1986, 56.

[21] The practice of *gematria*, or adding together the number values of the Greek letters that form particular words or names to formulate a number to represent the given name, was quite common in magical ritual practice.

of life to come. He recites all fifteen of their "unutterable" names, again demonstrating his knowledge of things generally unknown in the world of man, and asks that they come baptize the disciples and forgive their sins.

Graf has argued that such *voces magicae* are not used "to force the divinity: they take the place of, and serve as, the credentials, an ample display of knowledge"[22] in religio-magical rituals. Here, Jesus opens from the very beginning by calling upon these names of power, thereby establishing his credentials. By placing these words in the mouth of Jesus, with his unparalleled relationship with the unapproachable God, it also paves the way for officiants to take on his role in performing the rituals themselves, lending them a further set of higher credentials. The practice of a magician or ritual officiant reciting words or prayers in the role of a god or higher being was common in both Greek and Egyptian practice.

This prayer is followed by a request for a sign if this forgiveness has taken place, and that "Zorokothra" bring forth the water of the baptism of life into one of the pitchers of wine that was laid out as a part of the ritual offering. This changing of wine into water is an interesting reversal of the feat Jesus performs in John 2:7–9 at the wedding at Cana. It is possible that this is related to the idea of turning from the drunkenness of the world to the sobriety of truth to be found in the Kingdom of Light, similar to themes of returning from drunkenness in texts such as the *Gospel of Truth*.[23] It should also be noted that this is the wine described previously, that is specifically fetched from a pure source; perhaps the specification of the nature of its source is then related to the fact that an emissary of the Father is to come upon or purify it further for the completion of the ritual.

As for intermediary figures involved in purification of baptismal waters, the activity of angels in purifying water for the salvation of man was noted by Tertullian, with the example given from John 5:3–4. There, the people watch for the movement of the water in the Pool of Bethsaida, for the movement signified an angel stirring the water. Whoever washed in the water first after this would be healed of ills. Tertullian takes this as evidence that God sends an angel to sanctify baptismal water.[24] The calling of Zorokothra to bring or transform the waters of baptism is not, then, completely foreign to the Christian tradition. Furthermore, in both Mandaean and Sethian baptisms,

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[22] Graf 1991, 192.

[23] *GosTruth* 22:16–20.

[24] DeMaris 2008, 55–56. Discussing Tertullian, *De baptismo* 5.

a variety of figures from the divine realms are called upon to participate in the baptismal process, protecting or purifying.[25]

In any case, it is noteworthy that this is the only ritual to describe the sign that is sent from on high to show the ritual was successful—in the other baptisms, it simply says, "the sign of which Jesus had spoken happened." Either the author did not know what specific sign was supposed to occur for the others, the specific sign was not considered important beyond the first, or the sign was one that was not meant to be recorded and had to be experienced.

In the second, fire baptism, Jesus no longer has to prove his knowledge immediately, and this time begins with a call to his Father rather than a list of mystery names or words. Furthermore, he asks the Father directly for forgiveness of sins for the disciples. However, it then jumps into a request for Zorokothra to come and bring the water of the baptism of fire of the Virgin of the Light, the judge of souls. A series of mystery names is given for both the Father and the Virgin of the Light, and in the end it is the Virgin of the Light who is requested to come and baptize the disciples—again, putting distance between the participants and the Father. The shift in the direction of the prayer partway through could show signs of redaction, with two separate traditions of the ritual here being combined.

In the baptism of the Holy Spirit, at last the Father is called upon directly and no intermediaries are invoked. This is the shortest and simplest of the baptismal prayers. And finally, the prayer in the mystery to remove the evil of the archons is shorter and simpler yet, and soon the disciples are evil-free and immortal, finally ready to begin the ascent through the various realms that await them on the road to the highest place in the Kingdom of the Light.

These prayers show the rituals working their way up a chain of command and importance. The first baptism is clearly the lowest, being provided by helpers of relatively minor beings, the second moving up to the authority of the judge of souls, and the last baptism appealing directly to the Father, the infinite Light. With all of their sins forgiven, the participants are then freed from control of the evil beings of the world, and thus claim their true heavenly inheritance and eternal life.

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[25] On the Mandaean baptismal rites; see Buckley 2002, 82; In a Sethian context, see for example *TrimProt* 48,15–30; *Zost* 5,7–7,18; 15,4–12; 53,15–19.

Seals

The association of baptism with a seal or sealing was common to Christian and various Gnostic traditions, with figures such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian using the term, and the Sethian rites *par excellence* being called the "Five Seals."[26] What exactly the "seal" consisted of in each of these instances, however, varied. In Mandaean baptisms certain prayers spoken over those being baptized were known as *hathamatha*, or sealings;[27] Mandaean priests wore a seal-ring, the *Shom Yawar*, during a variety of rituals, but these were not used for imprinting in the course of their baptisms.[28]

In *2 Jeu*, all of the rituals involve two drawn seals: one used after the offering and preparation of the participants but before the prayer, and one presented after the completion of the baptism or mystery and the ritual meal. The ones used in the middle of the rite share certain characteristics: each is given a "true name" and an "interpretation," both of which take the form of *voces magicae*. It is possible that the use of two names is related to a Hebrew formula that presented a secret name and an expressible name of certain entities, which became garbled in translation into Greek and Coptic.[29] That this seal is presented prior to the prayer may suggest that this was used as a symbol of knowledge and worthiness to the entities to be invoked. The first seals consist of sets of branches in a generally circular arrangement.[30] The first two may have solar and lunar connections, given their twelve and fourteen branches respectively, representative of the stations of the zodiac through which the sun progresses and the days of the waxing period of the moon. Although this is speculative, the group's affinity for light and their high regard of the two luminaries throughout the texts makes this a plausible path for further investigation. The third seal is an eight-pointed star consisting of four crossed lines with circles at each point,

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[26] See the discussions of Clement and Tertullian in Ferguson 2009, esp. 312–313 and 338–339. On Gnostic baptism and sealing, see Turner 2000, 87–106.

[27] Drower 1937, 171; Buckley 2002, 82.

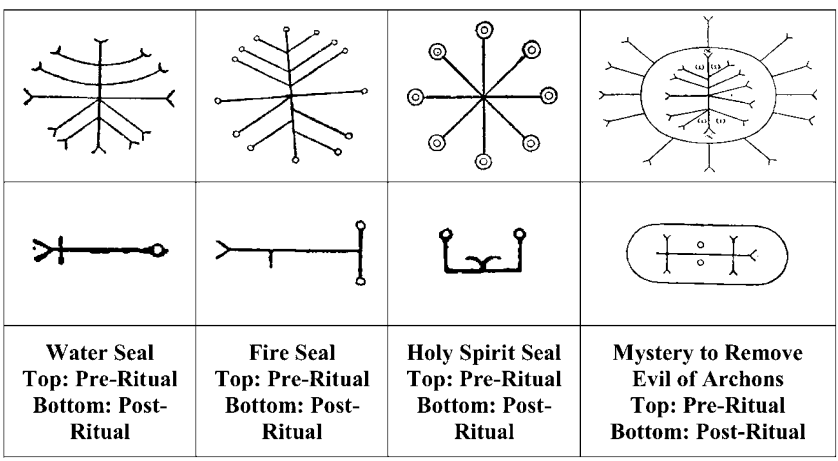
[28] Drower 1937, 34.

[29] Scholem 1931, 175–176.

[30] Rognstad 2006, 48–53 sees in the first three of these diagrams depictions of the Tree of Life, the fourteen aeons, and Venus or Ishtar. However, the evidence is not convincing, given the lack of any indication of the group's use of Genesis mythology, the fact that when the aeons are referred to, it is always as twelve in number, and despite the ancient connection of the eight-pointed star and Ishtar, there is no clue of a high divine role for Venus within the wider Jeuian corpus. The sun and moon as luminaries play a much stronger role with souls and the restoration of light.

one of the most common symbols found amongst the "characters" used in the Greek Magical Papyri and the magical gems.[31] The eight-pointed star has prehistoric origins, but is perhaps best known from its association with the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, from the Old Babylonian to Neo-Babylonian periods.[32] In the context of the later Greco-Roman gems and magic, Barb gives its origin as the Babylonian determinative for names of gods.[33] The eight-pointed figure is certainly viewed as a powerful one for ascension past particular celestial entities found in *2 Jeu*, as shall be seen below.

Figure 1. Baptismal seals



Water Seal Top: Pre-Ritual Bottom: Post-Ritual	Fire Seal Top: Pre-Ritual Bottom: Post-Ritual	Holy Spirit Seal Top: Pre-Ritual Bottom: Post-Ritual	Mystery to Remove Evil of Archons Top: Pre-Ritual Bottom: Post-Ritual

The second seals are not associated with names, but their use is somewhat more explicit: they are sealed on the foreheads of the disciples.[34] These seals are smaller and simpler, perhaps making them easier for reproduction on the body. It may have used oil, as in more typical Christian anointing, Mandaean baptismal anointing, or indeed in Egyptian burial preparation. These were rituals to remove evil and become reborn, giving one the right for post-mortem ascent to the highest regions of the divine world. These final seals likely served as an outward sign of the rites' successful completion. It

[31] See Bonner 1950, 194–195.

[32] Rochberg 2003, 174n.20.

[33] Barb 1953, 216n.48.

[34] *2 Jeu* 111, 114. The second seal of the final ritual shares the characteristics of the first seals, with two names and no explicit sealing placement.

is interesting to note that the second seal for the baptism of the Holy Spirit resembles the hieroglyph for *ka*, or spiritual essence: 𓂓. Given the apparent Egyptian provenance for the origins of the group, looking to Egyptian roots for the symbols' origins is an attractive possibility; however, the fact that only parts of certain seals or diagrams have such potential influence, and the likely temporal distance of the group from a setting where the hieroglyphs would be well-known, raise caution in embracing such a suggestion.

The final seal in the mystery to remove the evil of the archons causes the disciples to become immortal, and allows them to follow Jesus on the ascent thereafter.[35] Then the instructions are given on how to pass through the aeons. The purification imparted by these rituals—epitomized by the final sealings—grants the participant immortality and is the first step toward the right to take a place in the kingdom of light.

Rite of Ascent through the Aeons

The baptisms and the mystery to remove the evil of the archons provide initial purifications necessary for the initiate to ascend through the cosmic and divine realms. The ascent itself, however, also requires a great deal of specific knowledge, accessible only after having received these rites. In its current state, chapter 52 of *2 Jeu* provides the instructions for passage through fourteen "aeons" and an unnamed region before the text breaks off. Each level is presented in a systematic manner, giving a series of information and materials needed for passage. There is a cipher, or number/pebble similar to those found in the baptisms, which must be held in both hands; a seal with which one must seal oneself, followed by the name of the seal to be recited once; and the names of the archons of the aeon, followed by a series of three names to be called upon.[36]

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[35] *2 Jeu* 116.

[36] It is true that in the transcription for the fifth, eighth, ninth, and twelfth aeons, either two or four names are distinguished. Unfortunately the manuscript is corrupt such that checking the transcription is impossible. In at least one of these instances even the transcription notes acknowledge an illegible lacuna such that the number of names is unknowable. It seems likely, however, given the repetitive and systematic nature of the author's system, that originally three names were meant for each level. The number of names is also longer in the thirteenth and fourteenth aeons, but these appear to be outside of the twelve aeons that are considered a set unit in the text (*2 Jeu* 101, 117, 126), and thus may be subject to different protocol.

Ciphers

These take essentially the same form as those found in the baptisms, again being held in both hands; however, here each aeon requires its own, unique cipher. Furthermore, this idea of holding a sign or amulet associated with a particular superterrestrial region in the hands is also found in certain Jewish adjuration formulae. For example, a Coptic adjuration for help calls upon Gabriel, insisting that he come "on account of the seal of Adonai, the father, and the fourteen amulets that are in my right hand."[37] Lesses observes that as the text also refers to fourteen firmaments, a correspondence between the amulets and the firmaments is likely.[38] Although this is a calling down of powers to earth rather than an ascension, as in the *Books of Jeu* each region has its own individual sign that must be known and possessed in order to deal with it. In *2 Jeu* all of the elements combine to display the knowledge of the ascender, which in turn conveys his or her worthiness to ascend. When the signs are shown and the proper words recited, all of the guardians move away, allowing passage through the aeon.

It is also interesting to note that the ciphers of each aeon, up to the eight, begin with the numeral corresponding to its aeon. The number of digits is apparently not the important factor in the formulation of the ciphers, as the eighth aeon has only two digits after the first numeral 8, signifying its position in the eighth spot.[39] This may again suggest that each cipher is associated with a particular name, the number-values of which would have varied depending on its component letters.

Invocation of Voces Magicae

Unlike the baptismal rituals, the words spoken to the archons guarding the path of aeonic ascent do not incorporate a long or complicated address. Perhaps related to the inferior nature these archons were thought to have, the one ascending simply names the archons that guard the level, commanding them to withdraw themselves because he or she calls upon certain other names, in both cases consisting of *nomina barbara* or *voces magicae*. The function of these names is similar to the use of such terms in the baptisms,

[37] Meyer and Smith 1994, 136–137; cited in Lesses 1998, 320.

[38] Lesses 1998, 320.

[39] The accompanying text writes out the numbers of the ciphers, but the written and numerical numbers do not always correspond, suggesting that errors have crept into the transmission.

in that they serve as the proper credentials. Now, however, they cause the archons to withdraw (or in certain cases, to flee to the west) instead of bringing divine purity from the Father and other holy assistants.

The number of archons standing in the way varies from aeon to aeon, and in some cases has clearly been redacted to incorporate figures from outside religious traditions, such as Jaldabaoth, Samaelo, and the Barbelo. These more familiar names stand out in contrast to the obscure patterns of *nomina barbara* used for the rest of the archons. In the case of the Barbelo and her entourage in particular, the name's incorporation interrupts the regular pattern of the aeon instructions, giving evidence that these redactions were occurring deliberately.

Perhaps these additions were made in an effort to work within or counteract the shifting popularity of certain religious groups within the author or community's cultural milieu. In these specific instances it appears that the author is polemicizing against the Sethians, whose evil rulers are placed in some of the lowest, most insignificant realms, and whose highest entities are also relegated to the material cosmos. Despite these later additions, the overall pattern of reciting a series of mysterious names, which would need to be memorized by the one ascending in advance, to allow passage past antagonistic figures or guardians remains consistent throughout.

Seals

The seals in the aeonic ascent passages consist primarily of straight lines, angular figures, and spoke- or star-patterns. These seals might have been carved into a stone or gem, which would be carried to impress the seal on the bearer at the correct station. The term seal, or σφραγίς, in addition to an impression or mark, also refers to the stone or signet of a seal-ring.[40] Engraved gemstones with amuletic roles, some with patterns similar to those of these seals, were quite common in Greco-Egyptian culture.[41] That physical objects would be considered part of the preparation for what is most likely a post-mortem ascent is not entirely surprising, when one considers the Egyptian practice of leaving items with the deceased—including copies of the Book of the Dead, in case the person required help remembering the long and complex series of names and spells to be recited at the

[40] See the definition in Liddell and Scott 1883, 1513–1514.

[41] See, for example, catalogues in Michel 2001a; Michel 2001b; Delatte and Derchain 1964; Bonner 1950.

proper junctures.[42] The "Orphic" gold lamellae represent examples of Greco-Roman-era texts for aid in the post-mortem journey; one might also consider the Greco-Roman practice of placing a coin in the mouth of the deceased, to pay for the ferry ride across the river Styx. As for the seal-images themselves, there is evidence that the Ophites also utilized drawn seals in their ascension ritual, depicted in conjunction with the drawn map of their cosmic understanding.[43] That the ascender must seal himself with each seal lends the diagrams a more active ritual purpose.

No less than four of the seals consist of versions of the eight-pointed star, demonstrating the significance of this figure. It clearly represents a powerful emblem for protection in these dangerous realms. There may be some clue to origins of parts of the diagrams in Egyptian hieroglyphics: for example, the symbol for the sun , or pillar , several of which in early times were envisioned to be supporting heaven.[44] As noted above, seeing such connections is an attractive possibility; however, the same cautions must be highlighted. In any case, the use of the symbols in the context of the seals is obscure, and any deeper interpretations of their meanings remain hypothetical.

A Cosmic Journey

The specifics of the path for the journey itself are not completely clear. Although ultimately the ascent moves through a thirteenth and fourteenth aeon, the text emphasizes a set of twelve aeons through which the disciples must pass.[45] By virtue of emphasizing the set of twelve aeons, it would seem that a zodiacal journey is being implied. The fact that at each level one is given a set of three names to recite may also reflect the thirty-six decans or decan-stars originally used in Egyptian astral timekeeping prior to the implementation of the twelve-fold zodiac, and adopted to some extent in the Greco-Roman astrological scheme.[46] In the later periods these decans were divided into groups of three and associated with each of the twelve zodiacal signs.

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[42] Although the Book of the Dead ceased to be used as a corpus of funerary literature in the first century BCE (Taylor 2010, 59), motifs from it continued to be utilized.

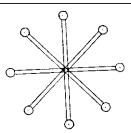
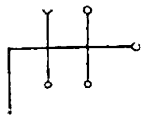
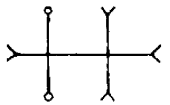
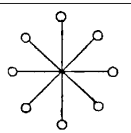
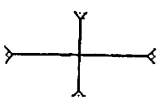
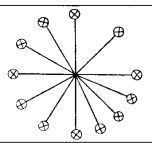
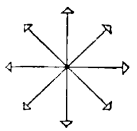
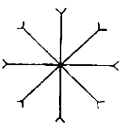
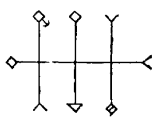
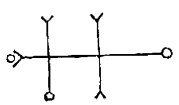
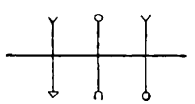
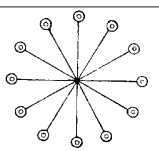
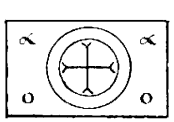
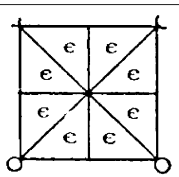
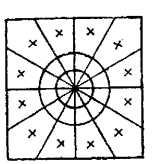
[43] See April DeConick's article in this volume, "The Road for Souls Is Through the Planets: The Mysteries of the Ophites Mapped."

[44] Budge 1967, ci.

[45] 2 *Jeu* 101, 117, 126. On the realms beyond the twelve aeons, see Evans 2012, 77–78, 82.

[46] See Manilius, *Astronomica* IV.294–407, Goold 1977, lxxxv–lxxxvii; see also Evans 2004, 2, and Barton, 1994, 28–29, especially the passage from Stobaeus, Excerpt 6, 1.21.9, 1.189.

Figure 2. Aeonic ascent seals

			
1st Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⲍⲉⲍⲏ Cipher: ⲁⲣⲓⲑ (1119)	2nd Aeon Seal Name: ⲑⲱⲍⲱⲁⲍ Cipher: ⲃⲥⲓⲑ (2219)	3rd Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⲍⲉⲁⲍ Cipher: ⲅⲧⲙⲑ (3349)	4th Aeon Seal Name: ⲁⲍⲱⲍⲏⲱ Cipher: ⲇⲫⲛⲉ (4555)
			
5th Aeon Seal Name: ⲁⲍⲏⲱⲍⲁ Cipher: ⲉⲧⳝⲑ (5369)	6th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲁⲭⲱⲱⲱⲙⲁⲍⲟⲍ Cipher: ⳾ⲣⲓⲉ (6115)	7th Aeon Seal Name: ⲭⲱⲍⲱⲫⲣⲁⲍⲁⲍ Cipher: ⲍⲱⲡⲑ (7889)	8th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⳝⲁⲱⲍ Cipher: ⲏⲛⲇ (8[-]54)
			
9th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⲫⲣⲁⲕⲁⲥ Cipher: (ⲃ)ⲱⲡⲑ (2889)	10th Aeon Seal Name: ⲑⲱⲍⲁⲱⲍ Cipher: ⲇⲫⲛⲑ (4559)	11th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⳝⲁⲍⲏ Cipher: ⲉⲫⲛⲏ (5558)	12th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲫⲣⲕⲁ... Cipher: ⲑⲱⲡⲉ (9885)
			
13th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲁⳝⲁⲫⲁⲣⲁⲥ Cipher: ⲏⲱⲛⲉ (8855)	14th Aeon Seal Name: ⲍⲱⲉⲍⲱⲍⲏⲓⲁⲍⲁⲭ Cipher: ⲑⲱⳝⲑ (9869)	ⲙⲉⲥⲟⲥ (?) – Triple Powers Seal Name: ⲍⲱⲱⲉⲍⲱⲏⲍⲁⲓⲱ Cipher: ⲉⲫⲛⲉ (5555)	

However, the twelve aeons are not described in a uniform manner. The first five aeons, when presented with the appropriate signs and seals, "flee to the west and the left," the directions of evil. Names of evil entities familiar from other Gnostic traditions, Jaldabaoth and Samaelo, have been appended to the archons associated with the third and fourth aeons by the author or compiler. There is overall a sense that these are realms of malevolence. Then, a change occurs at the sixth aeon—it is called the "Little Midst (ⲙⲉⲥⲟⲥ)," and its archons "have a little goodness within them, because the archons of those places have believed (ⲟⲩⲛ-ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲓ ⲙⲙⲛⲧⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲛ̀ⲣⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϫⲉ-ⲁⲩⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲛ̀ⲟⲓ ⲛⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ ⲛⲛⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲁⲩ)."[47]

The Midst was a common term for the ecliptic or path of the sun; if the Midst could refer to the ecliptic, it might be possible that to this author, the "Little Midst" represents the path of the moon—which moves at a slightly different angle to that of the sun, and indeed is the first of the seven planetary realms (typically ordered from the moon to Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). The moon is generally considered to have a positive nature in ancient thought, and as a luminary in particular is sometimes set in a category with the sun apart from the five planets.[48] Here it leads into the remainder of the aeons, which do not flee in terror before divine knowledge, but simply withdraw to allow progress.

It is thus possible that the seven aeons from the sixth to the twelfth represent the planetary realms, all of which have a neutral to positive aspect. This description of the aeons then presents a potential representation of the five sublunar levels of chaos or the underworld followed by the seven planetary heavens found in certain other Gnostic cosmologies.[49] However, in contrast to these other versions, the planets are not depicted as being purely malevolent—they are neutral, and at least one is also capable of joy for the initiate's blessed state.

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[47] *2 Jeu* 129.

[48] On the path of the moon and its importance—including as a division between light and darkness or righteous and sinners—see *1 Enoch* 41:5–8.

[49] See *GosJud* 51,4–52,14; *ApJohn* III 17,17–20; BG 41,12–15, II 11,4–6. For the seven and five division, Pleše 2006, 183–184 explains the case of the *Apocryphon of John* by suggesting a mixed Greco-Egyptian origin involving a particular manner of constructing the world horoscope. DeConick 2009b, 153 suggests that it is a blending of two systems, one with focus on the seven planets, the other on the zodiac. See also Welburn 1978, 241–254; DeConick 2009a, 255–257, Pleše 2006, 181–193. Rasimus 2009, 103–128 gives an excellent discussion of the typical set of planetary demons and their permutations in a variety of Gnostic and heresiological sources; although his proposed correspondences for entities in *2 Jeu* are highly questionable (104).

A clue to the text, however, may lie in the fact that as mentioned above, names prominent in the Sethian tradition have been evidently (and at times clumsily) *appended* to an existing tradition. It could be possible, therefore, that a zodiac scheme with accompanying decans has acquired an additional understanding as the five chaos/seven heaven scheme found in certain Sethian texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* or the *Gospel of Judas*, and that both interpretations are thus in a sense true. The demotion of Jaldabaoth from the head of the planetary demons to a mere sublunar archon may further the argument for an active polemic against the Sethian cosmic understanding. In any case, it is clear that an ascent was envisioned from the earthly body up through the sublunar and planetary realms, and eventually beyond the sphere of the fixed stars.

Preparing for the Beyond

While the baptisms are clearly performed in a living, earthly situation, for what context would this set of ascent ritual materials and information have been envisioned? After the baptisms, as he begins the explanation of what will follow in the journey, Jesus tells the disciples that the following information is for "when you come forth from the body" (ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛϣⲁⲛⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ-ⲡⲥⲱⲙⲁ).[50] It seems certain that it would have been considered a postmortem voyage, but it is less clear whether a meditative or ecstatic experience while still living might also have been expected.[51]

However, given the lack of description of the individual realms, encounters with inhabitants leading to personal transformation, or any sort of moral background for the types destined for each level that might further reinforce the group's social rules or enlighten the living, it seems likely that the postmortem aspect was the most important for the users of the document. The overall similarities to Egyptian practice and the *Book of the Dead* would also suggest a primarily postmortem focus. Despite this, earthly *preparation* was considered necessary—the information presented was meant to be memorized, and perhaps the physical seals prepared. The ritual aspects, including the formulaic statements to be recited at each aeon, should not be overlooked.

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[50] *2 Jeu* 116, and also at *2 Jeu* 127.

[51] On the prevalence of this combination of themes in the Hellenistic world, see Segal 1980.

Initiatory Preparation for Postmortem Ascent

The *Second Book of Jeu* is a ritual handbook that leads the initiate from a series of purifying, possibly initiatory rituals into preparation for an ultimate postmortem ascent through the visible cosmic realms. The four initial rituals involve gradual levels of purification and interaction with increasingly higher divine entities, eventually resulting in freedom from influence by evil powers, immortality, and inclusion in the Kingdom of Light. The baptismal rituals incorporate a multifaceted system of ritual ingredients and tools meant to have great symbolic impact, while being complex enough to make necessary extensive preparations both material and mental in nature. The offering materials consist of substances meant to suggest protection from evil, purification, and glory to the object of the offering, as well as giving the more sensory effect of pleasant and powerful scents to aid in shifting the mental state of the participants. The presence of materials used in embalming and others associated with death further suggest that these rituals represented the initiate's death to the old self in the ways of the world and his or her new life in purity within this community. The use of numbers or ciphers gives further evidence of the participants' knowledge or worthiness, and the seals show their initial preparation and give evidence of final success. The prayers recited by the officiant, represented in the text as Jesus, utilize *voces magicae* as a form of credentials to elicit a positive response from the entities invoked.

In the early stages, intermediary figures are required to mediate the salvific powers to the participants, but in the final stages direct appeal to the highest Father is possible. The author is clearly influenced by a strong magical ritual tradition, utilizing a wide assortment of elements in a repeated, but varied, ritual context. The intangible result of purification of the initiate's soul is achieved through a gradual process with symbolic landmarks along the way.

Once these rituals are performed, it allows the pathways of the heavens to be opened to the recipient upon death. Travel along these pathways requires further knowledge and credentials, demonstrated to the archons guarding the way using methods similar to those used in the purification rites. Although focusing on a postmortem journey, again mental and potentially material groundwork is necessary. By memorizing the correct *voces magicae* and the provision of the unique seals and ciphers for each region, the living initiate underwent a rigorous, personal ritual of spiritual preparation for the ascent to come.

The instructions outline a journey through the visible cosmos, beginning on earth and moving up through the sublunar and planetary realms, potentially surpassing the fixed stars to reach the Kingdom of Light. The *Second Book of Jeu* thus leads the initiate step-by-step from a neophyte stage all the way to ultimate immortalization beyond the cosmos. Unparalleled in other Christian-Gnostic texts from its period, this detailed record of complex rituals provides a unique and invaluable glimpse into the structure, beliefs, and practices of this Egyptian Gnostic group and its mystery traditions.

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DEATH ON THE NILE: EGYPTIAN CODICES, GNOSTICISM, AND EARLY CHRISTIAN BOOKS OF THE DEAD

Nicola Denzey Lewis

On a dusty hot day in 1886, a group of French archaeologists excavating Cemetery A at al-Hawawis in the desert necropolis of Akhmim (ancient Panopolis) opened the long-sealed grave of a Christian monk. Within the tomb, the excavators discovered a book, an ancient codex, now known as the Codex Panopolitanus.[1] Quickly and fairly artlessly bound—some of the pages were actually in upside-down—the Codex Panopolitanus has 33 leaves, or 66 pages bound between two boards, prefaced by a page bearing only a Coptic cross.[2] It proved to be an anthology of three texts; it contains almost all of the so-called "Book of the Watchers" from the popular Jewish pseudepigraphical text, *First Enoch*, a portion of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* [pages 2–10], and about one-third of the Greek *Apocalypse of Peter*, preserved in Ethiopic. What ties this one Jewish and two Christian texts together—beyond their physical binding—is their preoccupation with death, resurrection, and the topography of the heavens. Thus the discovery of the Codex Panopolitanus sent a frisson of excitement through archaeologists and papyrologists worldwide. The archaeologists had discovered, so it seemed, a veritable Christian "Book of the Dead"—a compilation of texts detailing the otherworldly journey of the soul, all carefully packed away in the grave of a Coptic monk from perhaps the eighth or ninth century.[3] Nearly a century later, a leading scholar of Jewish pseudepigrapha, George Nickelsburg, published an essay in which he reiterated the Christian Book of the Dead hypothesis, and it remains more-or-less unchallenged today.[4]

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[1] The site report is found in Kuhlmann 1983, 53 and 62.

[2] The codex is published by Bouriant 1892, 91–147, esp. 93–94. For additional manuscript information, plates, and the *editio princeps* of both the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Lods 1893, 217–235 and plates 1–34.

[3] The dating is contested; there are those who argue for a fifth- to sixth-century dating. See Nickelsburg 1990, 252.

[4] Nickelsburg 1990, 251–260, esp. 254.

I first heard about the Codex Panopolitanus from Birger Pearson at a paper he presented, many years ago now, at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, where he referred to it as a "Christian Book of the Dead" and raised the possibility that there might be others among our known "Gnostic" manuscripts. I found this idea intriguing, and have indeed Professor Pearson to thank for starting me on my quest to learn more about Gnostic Christian Books of the Dead. My investigations have led me to the conviction that one productive way of re-theorizing Gnostic practice is to re-orient it around specific teachings of personal and universal eschatologies. That is to say, many of our so-called Gnostic documents provide explicit directions for the soul after death. Together, they indicate that robust, Greek-based thanatologies persisted from the second century CE until at least the end of the fourth—the point at which the Nag Hammadi codices were copied—and perhaps even later, as isolated examples such as the Codex Panopolitanus may indicate.

This essay follows Birger Pearson's lead in considering seriously the Egyptian context—ancient and late antique—for the shaping of these Greek-based thanatologies. Seen with an attentiveness to Egyptian afterlife conceptions, it is little surprise that Greek-language apocalyptic texts with, apparently, a ritual component, found their final "home" in late ancient Egypt. There, a culture persisted which saw the cultural and religious value in creating and burying "books of the dead."

Books and Tombs in Late Antique Egypt

The Codex Panopolitanus is far from the only example of an Egyptian Christian "Book of the Dead." The Berlin Codex, which contains the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and the *Acts of Peter*, appeared on the antiquities market in 1896. Although the dealer claimed that the book had been found in a wall-niche, the text's first editor, Carl Schmidt, assumed it had been taken from one of Akhmim's cemeteries.[5] The Codex Tchacos, which contains (among other so-called "Gnostic" texts) the *Gospel of Judas*, was discovered near El-Minya, in a family tomb by Gebel Qarara.[6] At this late antique Christian burial site, the Codex Tcha-

[5] Schmidt 1903, 2. Schmidt was correct in his skepticism that a book might have survived nearly two thousand years in a wall-niche; a durable container (as usually found in a grave deposit) is necessary to preserve a book intact. See Luijendijk 2010, 232, n. 50.

[6] DeConick 2009, 64–65, discusses the find.

cos was only one of the books found in a limestone box that tomb robbers unearthed. The three others do not survive intact, having been divided up by antiquities dealers. However, we know that one of these was a fourth- or fifth-century papyrus codex containing a Greek version of Exodus.[7] The second, dating from the same period, was a Coptic translation of Paul's letters; the third, interestingly, was a Greek mathematical text called the Metrological Tractate.[8]

And then there is the case of the Nag Hammadi codices. I have argued recently in separate articles that these books derived not from a monastic library hidden for posterity, but were quite deliberately composed as grave goods and deposited accordingly.[9] The evidence is circumstantial, but certainly provocative. We may start from the find-spot of the codices themselves. The Gebel el-Tarif, where the Nag Hammadi codices were discovered, was not a monastic site. It was (and had been for millennia), a vast ancient burial ground. In the fourth century, numerous caves and rock-cut tombs were still in use for burials. Twenty meters south of the Nag Hammadi find-spot, in Cave T1, excavators found bones and pottery remains. In T114, eight hundred meters away, excavators found a burial shroud that yielded a C14 date of the fifth century CE.[10] Of the famous find-story where Mohamed Ali al-Samman discovers the codices secreted in a jar along a talus or rubbish slope at the base of the Gebel-al-Tarif, the time has come for us to be more suspicious of its shifting details and obscurities. But even the champion of the famous find-spot narrative, James M. Robinson, has admitted that the talus had been used as a burial site when the codices were deposited there.[11] Even Jean Doresse's earlier, sparer account of the codices' find-spot places it within a cemetery, albeit in a different location than that which Robinson identifies.[12]

In 1978, having distanced himself from Robinson's account of the Nag Hammadi codices' discovery, Martin Krause expressed his theory that the

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[7] The Greek papyrus now exists in pieces in private collections at the Schøyen Collection, Yale's Beinecke Library, and Ashland Theological Seminary.

[8] Heavily illustrated, the codex was bisected, with half being purchased by Lloyd Cotsen and donated to Princeton University, and half to an anonymous private collector.

[9] Denzey Lewis and Blount 2014; Denzey Lewis 2012.

[10] Robinson 1979, 213.

[11] Robinson 1979, 213.

[12] Doresse 1960, 133, 58; Doresse 1950, 432–439. For a recent critical reappraisal of the famous Nag Hammadi find story, see Goodacre 2013, and more diplomatically, Griggs 1990. Rightfully critiquing the Orientalizing elements of the story is Kotrosits 2012.

Nag Hammadi codices had been deposited intentionally as Books of the Dead:

> Das Auffinden der Bibliothek in einem Grabe spricht für eine, und zwar wohl reiche, Einzelperson als Besitzer … Es ist ein auch in christlicher Zeit noch nachweisbarer altägyptischer Brauch, dem Toten heilige bücher ins Grab beizugeben.[13]

The theory was adopted by one prominent scholar of Egyptian monasticism, Armand Veilleux, and has had its adherents since then, although it has not had the "traction" of Robinson's highly influential account.[14] Nevertheless, it bears careful examination. Its implications for our field of study are nothing short of monumental. Rather than situating the Nag Hammadi documents in relation to high ecclesiastical politics of their day—specifically, Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter against the reading of apocryphal literature in the monasteries—thinking of the Nag Hammadi codices as grave goods can force us to consider a broader context of late antique Egyptian elite intellectual culture. For example, Krause hypothesized that a private individual with eclectic and esoteric interests commissioned or otherwise acquired the collection, which was buried with him at the time of his death.[15] What we can and cannot know about such individuals I will reserve for the end of this essay.

In the history of late antique Egyptian books, in the meantime, we have some intriguing commonalities between the Codex Panopolitanus, the Codex Tchacos, the Nag Hammadi codices, and perhaps the Berlin Codex: a tomb site, a durable container, and a cache of books. In the case of the El-Minya find, we are clearly dealing with a private commission or collection of books, not a monastic library. We may indeed be dealing with the same thing in the case of the Nag Hammadi codices. In the case of Codex Panopolitanus, we must note its much later historical context, yet even this late deposit points to an enduring Egyptian tradition of placing books in graves.

These Christian books in graves are not an isolated phenomenon. There are various other cases of manuscripts found in burial sites in late antique Egypt. Among non-Christian texts, the fourth-century Theban Magical Library—composed of both scrolls and codices—was, like the Nag Hammadi codices, discovered by *fellaheen* under suspicious circumstances that

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[13] Krause 1978, 243. For the remarkable footnote where Krause and Rodolph Kasser disavow Robinson's find story, see *Facsimile* 1972, 3. n. 1.

[14] Veilleux 1986, 278–283.

[15] Krause 1978, 242–243. A similar theory is suggested by Khosroyev 1995.

was almost certainly tomb robbing in the Thebaid.[16] Other scriptural manuscripts have also been found in late antique Egyptian tombs, including a fifth-century CE copy of the Gospel of John, which was carefully deposited wrapped in a burial shroud.[17] Flinders Petrie reports having found a copy of the second book of the *Iliad*, in Greek, on a papyrus roll tucked under the head of an elite woman's grave at Hawara in the Fayyum.[18] The papyrus dates to the fifth century CE and was both well copied and well preserved. The practice of placing the roll at the head of a corpse in a sense continued the Ptolemaic practice of placing brief "Documents for Breathing"—the Graeco-Egyptian form of earlier "Books of the Dead" written in Demotic, hieratic, and Greek—at the top of a mummy's head at burial.[19] This last example is a particularly clear case of the survival of a very ancient practice, but we can see it in the earlier examples I have given here as well. A brief summary of Egyptian Books of the Dead and their continuities into the Roman period is useful at this point.

Egyptian Books of (*and for*) *the Dead*

Egypt's long history of mortuary afterlife instructions is well known. Egyptian funerary scrolls in burials from the late dynastic period are very well attested indeed, and comprised a well-known and well-used literary *Gattung*.[20] Those ancient Egyptian texts we commonly group together under the modern rubric "Books of the Dead" circulated in the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1069 BCE) and the Third Intermediate Period (1070–664 BCE) as 150–175 separate chapters known as "Coming Forth by Day" formulae, taken from the so-called Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE). These were originally inscribed on burial-chamber walls, then within sarcophagi, directly before the eyes of the deceased, or painted on the linen shroud wrappings of the corpse. Also placed in burials during the New

[16] For more on the Theban Magical Library, see Dieleman 2005 and Bagnall 2009. Both Dieleman and Bagnall note the interesting parallels between the Theban Magical Library and the Nag Hammadi codices, in terms of their provenience.

[17] Roberts 1979, 7; Luijendijk 2010, 238.

[18] Flinders Petrie 1889, 24–28.

[19] Forman and Quirke 1996, 171.

[20] In the late nineteenth century, Wallis Budge made famous the *Papyrus of Ani*, a New Kingdom text from a burial that contained the longest and best preserved Book of Coming Forth By Day (Budge 1893); see Budge 1898. For recent scholarly editions of the papyrus, see Allen 1974 or, better, Barguet 1979 and Faulkner 1998.

Kingdom were the so-called Amduat manuscripts that detailed the journey of the sun god Ra through the twelve nocturnal hours. These texts provided explicit and practical directions for the journey after death, carefully naming the malevolent beings which Ra (with whom the pharaonic soul was identified) would encounter, so that the soul could later call upon them or bind them. The Amduat texts detail the topography of the *Duat* (or *Dwat*), the otherworld territory that is the stage for the dramatic journey of the soul.[21]

In the Roman period, the production of Books of the Dead continued, moving from scroll to codex format. For example, the Book of Outlasting Eternity, a funerary composition of the late Ptolemaic or early Roman period, was a condensation of earlier mortuary literature, assuring its bearer safe passage to the afterlife. There were also papyri found within Roman-period burials at Saqqara, but these papyri were all explicitly ritual texts; on these documents, a ritual for the Opening of the Mouth was carefully copied out, having been commissioned by the deceased or the family of the deceased. The Opening of the Mouth ritual aimed originally to animate a statue, later, by extension, a coffin or a mummy. These papyri did not serve the same function as a guide to the otherworld, but seem nevertheless to have been the preferred texts in first- and second-century Saqqara for those seeking eternal life.

As late as the second century CE, funerary, liturgical documents were still in production in Egypt, though only in Thebes, and mostly as pairs of single sheets known as Documents for Breathing. These pairs were read aloud by a priest as part of the funerary process, then quickly arranged in the sarcophagus at the time of its final closure so that one papyrus sheet was hypocephalic, placed at the head of the deceased to "ignite a flame at the head of the *ba*" and the second, placed under the feet.[22] The Egyptologists Werner Forman and Stephen Quirke liken Documents for Breathing to "passports" held by the deceased to give them free access into the next world.[23] These documents did not contain formulae like the Coffin Texts, but rather a declaration by Thoth that the traveler was to be allowed to pass through the belly of Nut through the circuit of the underworld. A standard line read, "O guardians of the Underworld, let me come and go."[24]

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[21] Lucarelli 2006–2007 provides a brief analysis; for a translation with commentary, Hornung 1963–1967.

[22] Forman and Quirke 1996, 171.

[23] Forman and Quirke 1996, 167–171; Hornung 1999.

[24] Forman and Quirke 1996, 171.

The deceased is recalled to earth by the recollection of his or her name. The calling upon of the deceased by name, in fact, is the most standard feature of the Documents for Breathing, and it presents an innovation in Egyptian funerary material. However, the calling out of the deceased's name, the *conclamatio mortis*, was also a standard rite at Roman funerals. This intrusion of Roman practice into Egyptian practice (and not vice versa) represents the standard direction of influence in the set of cultural vectors involved with Romanization. The last secure date for a Document of Breathing included with an Egyptian burial is the late first to the early second century CE from the family grave of Soter, a governor of Thebes during the Hadrianic period (98–138 CE). Graves of Soter's family included two small, rolled Documents for Breathing per burial. These documents were in hieratic, although some of the instructions like the directions to place one papyrus *hypo ten kephalen*, were written in Greek.[25]

Despite the plethora of Egyptian mortuary texts that were in circulation in various forms for over two thousand years, after the second century CE, "even the concept of a text with which to survive death seems to evaporate," or so claims Stephen Quirke.[26] In fact, the idea did not simply evaporate. The genre of otherworldly "passport" or even "ritual text for attaining everlasting life" was well known in the second century, only in Greek, not hieratic. Our closest parallels for these archaic Egyptian "Books of the Dead" in Roman Egypt are embedded into a wide variety of "Gnostic" writings, many of which incorporate passwords, formulae, and explicit ascent material designed to facilitate the soul's postmortem journey. This material seems—at least on the face of it—to follow the *spirit* of archaic Egyptian religion and Books of the Dead, even if not the letter. But did these formulae and ascent of the soul passages also have a mortuary or ritual context?

The cautious answer, I believe, is "yes," at least in a few cases. The second-century Christian apologist Irenaeus, for instance, famously reports that certain Christian followers of the teacher Marcus, the Marcosians, practiced something called *apolytrosis* as a ritual anointment immediately before death (*Adv.Haer.* 1.21.5).[27] He reports that these Marcosians anointed the dying with a mixture of oil and water to render their souls "incapable of being seized or seen by the principalities and powers on their ascent"

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[25] Riggs 2005, 182–205; Quirke 1999, 85. Many of the sarcophagi from this family burial are now at the British Museum, London. Quirke also mentions the grave of Heter (93–125 CE) from the Theban necropolis, which also included Documents for Breathing.

[26] Forman and Quirke 1996, 172.

[27] For an in-depth study of Marcosian *apolytrosis*, see Denzey Lewis 2009.

(Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer* 1.21.5). Hippolytus also briefly describes this rite, claiming that Marcosians spoke certain words directly into the ears of the dying. (*Ref.* 6.41). Irenaeus and Hippolytus both in fact transcribe for us what was said at this rite. The first formula reads:

> I am a son (υἱός) from the father—the pre-existing father (Πατρὸς προόντος) and a son in him who is pre-existent. I have come to see (ἰδεῖν) all things, both those things which are alien and those which are my own (τὰ ἀλλότρια καὶ τὰ ἴδια), although they do not belong entirely (παντελῶς) to others but to Achamoth who is female (θήλεια), and made these things for herself. For I myself derive from the race of the pre-existent (Κατάγω δὲ τὸ γένος ἐκ τοῦ προόντος), and I venture (πορεύομαι) again to my own [place] (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) whence I came.[28]

The formulae do sound a little like Egyptian Coming Forth By Day documents. Here is a passage, for example, from the *Papyrus of Ani*, where Ani speaks to the gods of the afterworld:

> Indeed I am one who dwells in the sunshine, I am a spirit who came into being and was created out of the body of the god … who came into being from the root of his eye, whom Atum created and with whom he made spirits, in order that they might be with him, while he was alone in the Primordial Water, who announced him when he came forth from the horizon, who inspired fear of him in the gods and spirits, the Powers and Shapes … I am distinguished above the other beings who dwell in the sunshine, the spirits who came into being along with me.[29]

Both texts are set in the afterlife, and they are deeply concerned with locating and re-locating the soul within the conceptual framework of a complex afterworld. They are also defensive—witness the Greek term for them, *apologia*—because the soul addresses an audience of celestial beings that seek to inhibit its reunification with the source.

As is well recognized, the set of passwords for hostile celestial beings that Irenaeus ascribes to the Marcosians appears not once but twice in Coptic "Gnostic" manuscripts: once in Nag Hammadi Codex I, and a second time in Codex Tchacos, both times in the *First Apocalypse of James*. For example, the instructions read:

> You are to say to him, "I am a Son (ⲡⲉϣⲏⲣⲉ), and I am from the Father" (ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲡⲓⲱⲧ). He will say to you, "What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?" You are to say to him, "I am from the Pre-[existent] Father (ⲙⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧϣⲟⲣⲡ) and a Son in the Pre-existent One."[30]

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[28] Irenaeus, *Adv.Haer*. 1.21.5: Rousseau-Doutreleau 2002:1.305–306.

[29] *Papyrus of Ani*: Faulkner 1998: ch. 147, Plate 2.

[30] *1stApJas*. 33.16–25: Schoedel 1979, 86–87.

Though the mortuary, ritual context is no longer present in this treatise, the formulae themselves in the Coptic versions form part of Jesus' instructions to James on how to survive the suffering of martyrdom and the inevitable confrontation between the soul and hostile powers. What this tells us is that Christian afterlife material in the style of some of the Amduat or Coming Forth by Day texts did circulate in fourth-century Egypt quite freely, and was adopted to fit a variety of literary, ritual, and perhaps situational contexts. Ultimately, the texts containing material which must at least have been recognized as Egyptian in flavor came to be placed within two different books containing similarly eschatologically-oriented material, and then, most likely, placed in two different graves.

Another possible example of a Christian "Book of the Dead" with a distinctly Egyptian flavor is the so-called "Ophite Diagram" described first by the Greek philosopher Celsus in the second century, and then by the Christian philosopher Origen in Book 6 of his *Contra Celsum*, about sixty years later. The diagram provided a visual topography of the cosmos, and included formulae to address the seven archontic, theriomorphic beings one might expect to encounter during an otherworldly journey. The presence and nature of an accompanying liturgical dialogue to which Origen refers, as well as Celsus's references to death (6.27, 34, 35, 36), to a doctrine of reincarnation, and to resurrection of the body (6.34, 36) locates the ritual context for this diagram in a mortuary setting.[31] The formulae here sound a lot like Egyptian funerary texts. Here, for example, is the first greeting to be spoken to the first celestial power:

> Hail, one-formed King (βασιλέα μονότροπον) bond of blindness, unconscious oblivion, I greet you, First Power (πρώτην δύναμιν), preserved by the spirit of *Pronoia* and *Sophia*. From thee I am sent in purity, being already a portion (μέρος) of the light (φωτὸς) of Son and Father. May grace be with me, Father, let it be with me.[32]

As a comparandum, here is another excerpt from the opening of the *Papyrus of Ani*:

> Hail, O ye who make perfect souls to enter into the House of Osiris, make ye the well-instructed soul of the Osiris the scribe Ani, whose word is true, to enter in and to be with you in the House of Osiris. Let him hear even as ye hear; let him have sight even as ye have sight; let him stand up even as ye stand up; let him take his seat even as ye take your seats.[33]

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[31] For my full analysis, see Denzey 2005.

[32] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969a,141.

[33] *Papyrus of Ani*: Budge 1913, 2.360.

But other than the Ophite formulae's very broad similarities with the tremendously older *Papyrus of Ani*, I would argue that there is little explicitly Egyptian (at least in the classical sense) about the Ophite diagram overall. The names of the demonic beings are not recognizably Egyptian or even Egyptianizing. Its cosmology and theology draws on Genesis and Hellenistic Jewish mystical traditions, as does its liturgical symbolism. It is resolutely monist in its conception of God. In short, the Ophite diagram offered its users a bricolage of Greek, Jewish and Roman ritual language and symbolism, all drawing perhaps upon the mystique of Egyptian ritual discourse. This might well suggest that second-century "Gnosticism" in Egypt was populated by native Egyptian "priests," whatever that meant in the Roman Egyptian context, who brought to "Gnostic" Christianity indigenous ideas that were therefore retrofitted for a new, cosmopolitan audience. The Ophite diagram, while a Christian mortuary text, therefore provided an ideal and representative experiment in religious hybridity to suit a Roman Christian audience, equally at home in Alexandria or in Rome.

Nevertheless, the presence of these same eschatological themes—passwords for the soul, celestial gatekeepers, and heavenly topography—were evidently still powerful and valuable two centuries later, as the great Coptic book-producing culture of Upper Egypt continued to produce costly bound volumes of largely esoteric, speculative writings. This much is obvious from the inclusion of the "Marcosian" formulae in not one but two Gnostic codices—Codex V of Nag Hammadi and the Codex Tchacos—and the elaborate passwords, symbols, and diagrams of the *Books of Jeu* in the Bruce Codex.

Christian "Books of the Dead" in Late Antique Egypt?

Let us now return to the phenomenon of Christian Books of the Dead in late antique Egypt. It is helpful, perhaps, to think (as Stephen Emmel has done) of "Gnostic" codices found in graves as *artifacts* rather than as books, where the primary importance is the social meaning of the object rather than its contents.[34] In this way of thinking, there is no need to connect the *content* of a book with the *practice* of depositing it with a corpse. This explains why a mathematical book would be deposited in a grave with both the Codex Tchacos and the Codex Panopolitanus; it also helps us to make sense of

[34] Emmel 2008, 32.

other book finds from Egyptian graves that contained material apparently unrelated to mortuary ritual. To give a much earlier example, the famous Ebers papyrus (ca 1550 BCE) now at the University of Leipzig is a lengthy medical treatise in hieratic discovered between the legs of a mummy at the necropolis of Thebes.[35] It is in no way a mortuary or afterlife text despite its deposition in a grave.

However, because of Egypt's rich history of funerary texts, there remains the possibility that there was intended to be a connection between individual books' contents and their function as grave deposits. This brings us back to the case of Codex Panopolitanus, with its apocalyptic, "heavenly journey" writings. All our other major "Gnostic" manuscripts—from Nag Hammadi to the Bruce, Askew, Berlin, and Tchacos codices—are particularly interesting to consider from this perspective, for a few reasons. First, they are an apparently deliberate collection of documents that are overwhelmingly concerned with cosmology and eschatology. They contain no "secular" writings, no scripture, no correspondence, and precious little homiletical, ethical, or paraenetic material, with the exception of (for example) the *Gospel of Truth* in Nag Hammadi Codex I and what remains (very little) of the *Interpretation of Knowledge* in Codex XI. Still, even these works are very far in tone and spirit from, let us say, Melito's sermons and homilies, which we find in papyrus hoards from late antique Egypt that were not connected with burials.[36] Therefore, the collection of writings in these so-called "Gnostic" books as a whole is far from a random one, but seems to specialize in obscure cosmologically—and eschatologically—focused treatises with a liturgical dimension.

It remains to place these Gnostic Christian "Books of the Dead" into some sort of plausible social or cultural context. Not much can be deduced from the state of the evidence. We do not know, for instance, if any sort of ritual accompanied the deposition of these books, or indeed, if the individual tractates within them had any sort of performative element. We know nothing about the process by which individual tractates were assembled into books, when, where, or for whom this was done. Analysis of the cartonnage of some of the Nag Hammadi codices gives us a *terminus ad quem* dating only for those particular codices, and the range of papyri used in the cartonnage seems to indicate an urban (rather than Pachomian) production center,

[35] Bryan 1974.
[36] Hurtado 2006.

although this point has generated scholarly controversy.[37] We do not know, finally, how those who had commissioned the books in question thought about, or used, or "believed in" the writings that the books contained.

However, it seems to me that there are a few things about these books that can indeed be said. First: I am convinced that they were indeed intentionally created, in many cases, to function as "Books of the Dead." I argue this based on the predominance of eschatologically-oriented treatises that they contain, particularly in the absence of other types of writings. The most widely represented genre among the Nag Hammadi codices is apocalyptic, followed by revelation dialogues (and indeed often the line between those two is fundamentally blurred). If one were to include in our list of Christian "Books of the Dead" beyond Nag Hammadi (and within this corpus, Codex V and Codex II are the finest examples), the Bruce, Berlin, Askew, and Tchacos codices, the percentage of apocalyptic or revelatory texts is further raised.

We can also safely surmise that the idea of a book containing eschatologically-oriented material, placed within a grave in Egypt, was at least a very late continuation of a very ancient practice in Egypt. The presence of Egyptian elements such as formulae, passwords and symbols, gatekeepers, and the soul's encounters with these hostile beings were all standard fare in both these Christian Gnostic books and ancient Egyptian funerary texts.[38] The inclusion of these features in late antique texts may have pointed to a sort of Egyptian "national" revivalism, as we find in late Roman Egyptian funerary art and in the patriotic Egyptian spirit of Hermetic texts such as the *Asclepius*.[39] All these diverse examples of Egyptomania are also roughly contemporaneous, which leads me to suggest that in the fourth century, Roman Egypt experienced a sort of bubble of interest in Egyptian antiquarianism. Such a renewed interest may even answer the puzzle of why these so-called "Gnostic" treatises were translated from Greek into Coptic, when it was far from clear that they had a proper audience for them who were sophisticated enough to be literate and to have the educational background necessary to appreciate complex Greek speculative texts, but not educated enough to read them in their original Greek.[40] Perhaps they are in Coptic

[37] On the cartonnage: Burns 1981. On what this might mean about locating the codices in urban contexts: Khosroyev 2005.

[38] Lucarelli 2006.

[39] For funerary art: see Venit 2002; on Egyptian nationalism in the Hermetica, see Fowden 1993, 37–44.

[40] This question, along with a similar answer, is raised by Emmel 2008.

because an Egyptian language was more powerful and efficacious.[41] But of course, this is only speculation.

Another point to be made is that although there are explicitly Egyptian elements in what I have called Gnostic Christian Books of the Dead, we also find additional elements there—Jewish and Greek, in particular. The cosmologies of the individual cosmological tractates that these books contain are not purely Egyptian. Gone, for example, are any associations of the soul with Osiris or Ra, or with other classic underworld figures such as Anubis (still present in fourth-century Egyptian funerary iconography), and the idea of the afterlife as a *descent* and return (as opposed to an *anabasis*).[42] It seems to me, then, that there was a concerted effort at some unknown point from the second to the fourth century to draw on only some of the elements of Egyptian afterworld texts and teaching, while repressing or rejecting explicitly other elements in favor of Jewish or Greek themes.

This sort of eclecticism and even ambivalence over what was classically and authentically "Egyptian" in a late ancient context may help us to speculate on the question of audience for these texts. The books themselves form a corpus of highly unusual artifacts that stand apart from the usual culture of death in late antique Egypt. By the fourth century, Christian funerals, mortuary techniques, and attendant liturgies had achieved a remarkably homogeneity across the Empire, and Egypt was no exception. The Christianization of death followed hard upon a progressive, aggressive and pervasive Romanization, which brought with it its own dominant death culture, along with its own proclivities and fickle appetites for cultural assimilation. The practice of mummification, for instance, underwent significant shifts under Roman rule, not so much falling by the wayside as proliferating as part of a passion for all things ancient Egyptian in the High Empire.[43] But the quality of Roman mummies was less impressive than those of the dynastic periods, as embalmers rushed a lengthy process to fill the demands of Roman high fashion. After a while, the practice of mummification was reserved mostly for

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[41] Compare the attitude reflected at the opening of *Corpus Hermeticum* 16, where Asclepius speaks: "Hermes … often used to say to me … that those who read my books will think that they are very simply and clearly written, where in fact, quite on the contrary, they are unclear and hide the meaning of the words … the Egyptian words contain in itself the force of the things said … Preserve this discourse untranslated, in order that such mysteries may be kept from the Greeks … For all the Greeks have … is empty speech, good for showing off; and the philosophy of the Greeks is just noisy talk. For our part, we use not words, but sounds full of energy."

[42] On Anubis and Osiris in Roman Egyptian funerary art, see Riggs 2005; Venit 2002.

[43] For some comments and examples, see Walker and Bierbrier 1997.

intentionally archaizing burials, what we can call in this period, with irony noted, "Egyptianizing" graves.[44] Along with the discontinuation of mummification went the discontinuation of mortuary texts, with their close conceptual relationship between text and practice, text and body. The decline and disappearance of mortuary texts, in fact, accompanied the period during which mummification largely "switched sides," as it were, from authentic Egyptian practice to Roman "Egyptianizing" mimesis.[45]

If the connection with dynastic Egyptian practices was broken during the cultural imperialism of the Roman period, the process of Christianization in Egypt did nothing to mend it. Instead, Christianity brought significant continuities of Roman funerary traditions, apparently without any return to earlier archaic Egyptian elements. The University of Michigan's 1964 excavations of Kom Abou Billou—a fourth-century CE cemetery at Terenuthis between Alexandria and the Fayyum—revealed that by this time, Graeco-Roman mortuary traditions had penetrated the Egyptian hinterland deeply and thoroughly.[46] Thus the Christian graves from cemeteries like Qasr Ibrim or Kom Abou Billou are virtually indistinguishable from Graeco-Roman graves in style. Bodies, dressed simply, were interred in shallow pits or *loculi* slots within Greek-style pedimented funerary chapels. Corpses could be laid out straight or flexed, oriented either to the East or to the West. Graves were marked with simple wooden crosses, or with incised stelae. No body shows traces of mummification, despite that at Terenuthis there was a virtual industry of *natron* (the salt used in mummification) from the Wadi Natrun, the so-called "Valley of Natron"; we even have a papyrus dated to 346 CE that proves that the industry was still vital at the same time that the cemetery was in use.[47]

The case of Kom Abu Billou provides clear evidence for a pervasive, mainstream Christianization of death culture that permeated the Empire around the fourth century. In Egypt, this death culture generally looked as it did

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[44] See Walker and Bierbrier 1997: 16. For "Egyptianizing" Roman Egyptian graves in Alexandria, see Venit 2002; for Severan-era "Egyptianizing" Christian mummies at Deir el-Bahri, see Riggs 2005, 232–244.

[45] See, however, the fascinating article of Luijendijk 2011, 408 on the fifth-century CE Christian mummy wrapping inscribed with a line from the *Gospel of Thomas* in Greek—a wonderful example of the survival of an ancient practice in a Christian grave, with a so-called "Gnostic" text used as a sacred text. Luijendijk speculates that it may have been the mummy of a monk.

[46] McCleary 1987.

[47] McCleary 1987.

anywhere else.[48] To give the best example from literary sources, the earliest recorded Christian prayer to be said over a corpse derives from Egypt, from the fourth-century sacramentary of Serapion of Thmuis.[49] This prayer is replete with imagery not of an Egyptian Amente, but of fairly conventional Christian types drawn primarily from the Old Testament. There is nothing distinctively Egyptian—or even Egyptianizing—about it. Much later offices of the Coptic liturgy—still in use today—include a similar set of prayers to be spoken over the dead at burial, drawn from the Psalms and the gospels.

On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the existence of these late antique Christian Egyptian eschatological books out of hand, nor divorce them from their mortuary context. There are not many of them, but then, there are still more of them than we might easily account for if we persist in believing (as Egyptologists do) that ancient Egyptian afterlife conceptions had disappeared by late antiquity. Someone was producing these volumes, and someone was surely buying them. So who might these people have been?

My first guess would be learned fourth-century lay intellectuals, such as those who commissioned the Theban Magical Papyri or the Dishna Papyri—a hoard of books and scrolls that preserved a range of Christian and non-Christian materials together.[50] In the case of the Dishna papers, the papyrologist Raffaella Cribiore argues that the collection derived from a "Christian school of advanced learning,"[51] These Christian intellectuals were bilingual or trilingual, cosmopolitan, and well-versed in Greek literature and philosophy. In the fourth century, Egypt experienced a resurgent interest in Greek *paideia*, which may well have extended to an interest in Greek afterlife traditions, including the ascent of the soul. At the same time, the period marked a renewed interest in Egyptian "nationalism"—the antiquity and dignity of its traditions.[52] These two streams of interest—in Greek philosophical products and indigenous Egyptian traditions—may well have combined to produce an interest in new Christian "Books of the Dead" as luxury items that increased the status of whoever owned them.

Were those who commissioned these books Christian monks? Christian monasticism was still new in fourth-century Egypt, not yet coalesced into an "orthodox" identity. The monastic origins of the Nag Hammadi

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[48] Paxton 1999, 22.
[49] Johnston 1995, nr. 18, "Prayer for One Who Has Died and is Being Carried Out."
[50] On the Dishna papers, see Kasser 1988.
[51] Cribiore 2001, 200 and n. 74.
[52] On late antique Egyptian lay intellectuals, see Fowden 1993, 186–193.

documents has been dismissed, sometimes forcefully, by those who study Egyptian monasticism as well as by papyrologists who have studied the manuscripts' cartonnage most intensively.[53] Still, there were other "quasi-monastic" Christians who may have organized into loosely affiliated fellowships, from the Melitians to the class of monks Jerome called the *remnuoth*.[54] Of course, there is always the possibility that someone owned the books and then brought them into a monastery as part of a private book collection. Conversely, James Robinson has speculated that perhaps the codices belonged to a monk or monks who began in the Pachomian monastery, but then moved out to an eremitic life.[55] The lines between coenobitic monks, anchorites, and private citizens were fluid in the fourth century, and the question of whether the people who commissioned these codices were monastically inclined or not is ultimately fruitless. It simply does not matter.

But were the Christians who commissioned and/or were buried with these books "Gnostic"? The question requires us to clarify terminology and definitions. The immediate problem with the term "Gnostic" here is that it has been deployed, even by scholars who ought to know better, in such a way that it separates the Nag Hammadi codices (as well as the Askew, Bruce, Berlin, and Tchacos codices) from "proper" Egyptian Christianity.[56] As a consequence, these "Gnostic" manuscripts are held aloof by those who study late antique Egyptian Christianity rather than properly considered as part of it. If I am right, however, in suspecting that the eschatological focus of many of these Christian "Books of the Dead" formed part of an Egyptian Christian mortuary tradition, then they might have been used by a variety of otherwise theologically and socially differentiated Christians. Laypeople had no more reason than monks to take an active interest in what happened to the soul after death. The continuation of a very ancient Egyptian practice

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[53] Barns 1981, 2, 11; Khosroyev 1995; Wipszycka 2000; Griggs 1990, 176–180. Less convinced is Goehring 1997.

[54] *Ep*. 22.34. Veilleux 1984, 10, first suggested the Nag Hammadi documents might have held special appeal for Melitians; see, however, the cautions of Brakke 1994, 249: "while the nature of the apocryphal books accepted and used by the Melitians seems different from the texts found in the Nag Hammadi codices, the undecided nature of the canon evidenced in the debate suggests a period in which one can well imagine individual ascetics and ascetic groups involved in the sort of textual exploration that led to an interest in such texts." On the loosely affiliated Christian fellowship circles, see Wipszycka 1970.

[55] Robinson 1988.

[56] Witness the marginalization of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts—and the complete absence of references to other books such as the Bruce Codex—in discussions of late antique Egyptian Christianity: most egregiously, Bagnall 1993.

of associating a book with a grave likely transcended boundaries of monk versus non-monk, or even Christian versus non-Christian. The average life expectancy in ancient Egypt was in the environs of 30–36 years. Only half of all live-born children would reach the age of thirty. Few excavated burials reveal the bodies of anyone over the age of sixty.[57] When it came to the constant menacing proximity of death, anyone might have wanted to hedge their bets.

It is also the case that the eschatological materials in these Christian Egyptian Books of the Dead are perhaps their least "Gnostic" components. If we persist in calling the knowledge of passwords, heavenly topography, and otherworld demons as "Gnostic," then we are forced to likewise label the *Papyrus of Ani* and countless other ancient Egyptian "Books of the Dead" as "Gnostic." Rather, what we have in the case of these Christian Books of the Dead are volumes of speculative cosmology, ideally suited to a Greek, Roman, and Egyptian combined audience, that drew upon ancient traditions at the close of the fourth century. Beyond that, we cannot know precisely how, and why, they ended up as they did, almost lost in the sands of Egypt.

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[57] Davies 1999, 28.

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SECTION TWO

RECURRENT PRACTICES

GOING TO CHURCH WITH THE VALENTINIANS

Einar Thomassen*

In the study of Gnostic rituals, the center of interest has most often been occupied by initiation rites. Less attention has been given to other forms of ritual, which, though more poorly documented in our sources, nevertheless clearly existed. The present article proposes to explore some of those other elements of the ritual repertoire, and specifically with reference to the Valentinians. The purpose of such a study is not only to show that a variety of ritual forms existed in Valentinianism, but should also be to provide some idea of how their ritual practices interrelated in such a way as to form a more or less coherent ensemble.

Generally speaking, religious communities perform two main types of religious rituals. On the one hand there are regularly repeated rituals, collectively performed, which may be called maintenance rituals because they aim at maintaining the existing bonds between the community and its deities as well as the social cohesion of the community itself and the community's system of values.[1] On the other hand there are rituals of transformation, by means of which individuals are admitted to and integrated into the group, or undergo other changes of social and/or religious identity within it.[2] The familiar Valentinian initiation rite, the *apolytrosis*, obviously belongs to the second type of ritual. It effected the transformation of the novice into a member of the *ekklesia* and made him or her one of the redeemed. But the Valentinians evidently practiced rituals of the first type as well,

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* It is a pleasure to dedicate this essay to Professor Birger A. Pearson, in recognition of his important contributions to Gnostic and Nag Hammadi studies, including the area of rituals.

[1] Including, though less relevant in the purview of this article, rituals performed by specialists on behalf of a community, and individual devotions which follow a uniform pattern and thus are performed in the context of an "imagined community."

[2] Naturally, I make no claim whatsoever of originality for this typology, which more or less corresponds to the distinction between "confirmatory" and "transformatory" rituals made by Zuess 1987/2005, 7841–7844, and the classification into "calendrical rites" and "rites of passage" in Honko 1979, 369–390. A third type of ritual should be added, which Honko calls "crisis rites" (for which I would prefer a somewhat more general designation such as "incidental rites"), but we lack documentation that may be relevant for the present study for this type of rituals.

during regularly repeated events at which they met and acted as a congregation. What do we know about such rituals?

Holidays

We do not really know that the Valentinians used to meet for worship every Sunday, because it is nowhere explicitly stated in our sources that they did. Yet there is also no evidence that Valentinians deviated in this respect from what by the mid-second century had become normal Christian practice.[3] Of particular interest in this context is the fact that *Excerpts from Theodotus* 63.1 makes an explicit reference to the Lord's Day. It does so by symbolically relating this day to the theme of resurrection and to the Valentinian concept of the Ogdoad: "Now the repose of the spirituals takes place on the Lord's Day, in the Ogdoad, which is called 'dominical', where the Mother is …" (ἡ μὲν οὖν τῶν πνευματικῶν ἀνάπαυσις ἐν κυριακῇ, ἐν ὀγδοάδι, ἣ κυριακὴ ὀνομάζεται, παρὰ τῇ μητρί).

The passage alludes to the eschatological elevation of the spirituals, when they will rise above the Demiurge and his hebdomadal cosmos, and join their mother Sophia in the eighth sphere. The fact that the Lord's resurrection took place on a Sunday, the eighth day, is interpreted as a symbolic reference to this redemptive ascent of the spirituals at the end of the age. The adjective κυριακή, by which the early Christians designated Sunday as the Lord's Day because the resurrection took place on it, is, by a typically Valentinian combination of meanings, understood as containing, in addition, an allusion to Ogdoad, because it is the sphere in which Sophia resides as master, κύριος, over the psychic powers in the cosmos below.[4] The theme is also found in the *Gospel of Truth* 32:24–34, which contrasts the Sabbath filled with labour with "the day from above," "the perfect day" of never-sinking light.

Thus one can easily imagine the Valentinians celebrating the Lord's Day in practice as well, as the day symbolizing their liberation from the archons and their future redemption into the Ogdoad. In this, as in other matters such as baptism and the Eucharist, the Valentinians most probably conformed to current Christian practice, but gave their own interpretation of it. Yet, Valentinian theologians cannot be expected to have attached much

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[3] The basic study is Rordorf 1968. The sources are conveniently collected in Rordorf 1972.

[4] Cf. Iren. *AH* 1.5.3, where Achamoth is called κύριος: see Casey 1934, 152; Helderman 1984, 110; *Tri. Trac.* 92.24, 134.16–17.

importance per se to the cyclic flow of time measured by a calendar. Cosmic time is of course the creation of the Demiurge and is monitored by his archons.[5] Calendar events as such belong to the psychic realm. This may be one of the reasons why Ptolemy is opposed to the practice of appointing special days for fasting.[6]

For the same reason, the observance of annual holidays such as Easter is not likely to have held much appeal for the Valentinians. The passion of Christ celebrated at Easter was at any rate less important to them than his incarnation, at which he descended into the world as Savior, and his baptism, through which he was redeemed.[7] If Valentinians were to observe an annual holiday, Christmas would be a more likely candidate than Easter. In the context of second century Christianity, however, the only likely candidate for an annual celebration of the coming of the Savior into the world is the anniversary of Jesus' baptism, that is January 6, the date of the Epiphany.[8] Basilides and his followers did in fact celebrate the baptism of Jesus on this day, according to Clement of Alexandria, but Clement, who often mentions Valentinus in the same breath as Basilides, has nothing to say about the Valentinians in this context.[9] The Valentinians thought that Jesus was redeemed at his baptism by that which came down upon him from above. This event laid down the model for the Valentinian *apolytrosis* ritual. Yet, in spite of all the significance that the Valentinians attached to Jesus' baptism, we are not in a position to say that that event was an occasion for annual celebration by the Valentinians.

Singing

What, then, did the Valentinians do when they assembled? One thing is certain: they sang. As is well known, Valentinus wrote psalms. A *liber psalmorum* by Valentinus is mentioned by the Canon Muratori, whose author finds

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[5] Cf., e.g. Iren. *AH* 1.17.2.

[6] *Ep. Flora* 5.3: "External, physical fasting is observed even among our followers, for it can be of some benefit to the soul, if it is engaged on reasonably, whenever it is done neither by way of imitating others, nor out of habit, nor because of the day, as if it had been specially appointed for that purpose." Here, as in subsequent quotations from Patristic sources I use, modifying it when desirable, the translation by D. Hill in Foerster and Wilson 1972.

[7] The passion and the crucifixion are basically understood as symbolic representations of the incarnation, the Savior's descent into matter. Cf. Thomassen 2006, 94–95, 98–101.

[8] See Talley 1991, 120–129.

[9] Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.146.

it necessary to insist that this work is not to be received into the canon of Christian Scripture.[10] The Valentinian writer Alexander is taunted by Tertullian for citing the psalms of Valentinus as if they were the work of an authoritative writer.[11] Origen, too, knows about the psalms of Valentinus, and one psalm is actually preserved by Hippolytus.[12] Singing together the psalms of Valentinus was surely an important part of Valentinian worship.

That singing was essential can also be inferred from the descriptions of the Pleroma made in Valentinian texts. Singing is the basic activity of the aeons. Listen to the following passage from the *Tripartite Tractate* 68:22–36:

> Through the singing of praise and through the power of the oneness of him from whom they had come forth, they were drawn into mutual intermingling, union and oneness. From their assembled fullness they gave glory worthy of the Father, an image that was one and at the same time many because it was brought forth for the glory of the One, and because they had come forward toward him who himself is the entirety of the All.

The transcendent community of aeons, called an *ekklesia* in *Tripartite Tractate*, is evidently the ideal archetype for the earthly congregation of spiritual humans. When the latter worship, they seek to reproduce (as well as can be done in the physical world) the actions performed by the aeons in the realm of the spirit. Or, seen from another perspective, the description of the acts of worship performed in the transcendent world is a projection of what is perceived to take place at the meetings of the empirical church of the Valentinians. The unity into which the aeons are said to be "drawn" (ϣⲱⲕ ϩⲓⲟⲩⲛ) by their singing evidently reflects an experience the Valentinian community members themselves might share as they lifted up their individual voices to join in the communal choir of the congregation.

This singing is surely more than just an accessory part of the liturgy; it has a profound soteriological significance in its own right. Communal singing is conceived of as being instrumental in generating that unity whose restoration is the overriding concern of the Valentinian salvation narrative. Seen from this perspective, the singing of psalms has a "sacramental" significance, comparable to baptism: just as baptism prefiguratively effectuates the union of the individual initiates with their respective "angels," the singing together

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[10] Lines 81–85. The text is evidently confused, but there can be no doubt that it makes a reference to a psalm book composed by Valentinus.

[11] *… psalmis Valentini, quos magna cum impudentia quasi idonei alicuius auctoris inserit*, Tert. *Carn.* 17.1; cf. 20.3.

[12] Origen, *Enarr. in Job* 21.12: PG 17:80. Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.37.7 = Valentinus frg. 8.

proleptically realizes the absorption of the community as a collective into the oneness that holds together the divine Pleroma itself.

By singing in unison, giving praise to the Father, the aeons of the *Tripartite Tractate* produce his "image." This theme corresponds to the scene in Irenaeus' Valentinian system where the aeons, consolidated after the restoration of Sophia to the Pleroma, get together and thankfully bring forth a "fruit":

> … with great joy they sang a hymn (ὑμνῆσαι) to the Forefather, being very happy. Because of the beneficence (shown to them), the entire Pleroma of aeons, with one desire and one purpose, and with the consent of Christ and the Spirit, and with the approval of the Father, each of the aeons presenting and contributing the most beautiful and exquisite he had in himself, weaving it all harmoniously together and skilfully joining it, brought forth, to the praise and glory of Bythos, the most perfect beauty and star of the Pleroma, the perfect fruit Jesus, who is also called Savior, Christ and Logos … [13]

The aeons' hymn to the Father brings forth the Savior himself; the Savior is a personification of the unity of the Pleroma, produced by the harmony of their communal singing. In a sense, he *is* their song. It is not so strange, therefore, that the earthly community responds to the mission of the Savior to the world by itself uniting in songs of praise. Singing not only joins the individual members of the congregation with one another, but also unites the congregation itself, through the presence of the Savior, with its transcendent community model. The Valentinians of course adopted the Pauline notion of the *ekklesia* as the body of Christ and made it into a fundamental premise of their soteriology. This notion is also articulated ritually, however, and above all in the practice of communal singing. Joining their voices in song, the Valentinian community created itself as the corporeal unity of the Savior. Evidently, the idea that the Pleroma generates the Savior by singing a hymn is a mythological projection of this particular ritual practice and experience.

References to actual singing as part of Valentinian services, however, are rare. One instance, at any rate, occurs in the *Tripartite Tractate* 121:25–38, where, in the course of a discussion of the fate of the "good psychics," it is said that for these,

> the road to eternal rest leads from humility to salvation. After having confessed the Lord, having given thought to what is good for the Church, and

[13] Iren. *AH* 1.2.6. Cf. Hipp. *Ref.* 6.32.1 for the same episode in the Valentinian system reported by Hippolytus.

> having sung together with it the hymn of the humble, they will, for all the good they have been able to do for it, sharing its afflictions and sufferings like people who have consideration for what is good for the Church, partake of the fellowship in hope.

The passage suggests that there exists a special kind of liturgy which is performed by the full, spiritual members of the Church together with a group of psychic sympathisers, and that the singing of a "hymn of the humble" was an element of this liturgy, following upon, apparently, an act of confession spoken by the psychics, and, perhaps, a collection for the benefit of the Church. What precisely "the hymn of the humble" (ⲡⲯⲱⲥ ⲛ̅ⲛⲉⲧⲯⲃ̅ⲃⲓⲛⲩ) may refer to we can only guess: it may have been a psalm praying for redemption, different in tone and function from a psalm such as the one preserved from Valentinus, which joyfully celebrates the attainment of *gnosis* and probably was performed by the spirituals only, assured of salvation.[14] Whether this special liturgy common to the psychics and the spirituals may have been the first part of a service whose second part was reserved for the spirituals, somewhat in the manner of a mass of the catechumens, is also a matter for speculation, though a distinct possibility. Notable at any rate is the fact that singing together is mentioned as a way of displaying communal solidarity between the psychics and the spirituals, and as part of the road leading towards salvation.

Gifts of the Spirit

The *Interpretation of Knowledge* is fully aware that the community consists of individuals, and that, though they are all spiritual humans, some appear to have been given a greater share of the Spirit than others. Valentinian services evidently gave room for the display of such individual gifts. One has a prophetic gift.[15] Another has an advanced understanding and speaks.[16] The manuscript is badly preserved, so it is quite possible that other special talents may have been mentioned as well in the lost parts of the text on these pages. The concern of the writer in mentioning such differences between individual members is to warn against jealousy: we must not begrudge others such gifts, because we are all members of the same body. What has

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[14] One might think of how Biblical lament psalms were reused in *Pistis Sophia* to express Sophia's, and the human soul's, distress and prayer for redemption. Cf. Kragerud 1967.

[15] *Interp. Knowl.* 15.35–36.

[16] *Interp. Knowl.* 16.31–38. For the interpretation of this passage, see below.

been given to one of us is therefore for the benefit of all: "Do not consider [it as something] alien to you but rather as something [that] is your own. What each [of] your fellow limbs has received, you [will receive as well]."[17] Thus, individual performances are construed as contributing to the collective ritual achievement of the community.

My main interest here, however, is the particular ritual forms that are referred to in this discussion. Prophecy is not the kind of activity that is most often associated with Valentinianism, since there has been a somewhat one-sided tendency in scholarship to highlight the movement's intellectual characteristics and its resemblance to a philosophical school. It is nevertheless to be noted that prophecy is mentioned as a normal phenomenon in the Valentinian Church not only in *Interpretation of Knowledge*, but also in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* 24: "The Valentinians say that the Spirit which each of the prophets possessed as a special gift for his service, has been poured out upon all those who belong to the Church. For this reason the signs of the Spirit as well, healings and prophecies are carried out through the Church."

Then there is, of course, the description given by Irenaeus of what was going on in the community presided over by Marcus "the Magician."[18] Prophetic performances evidently occupied a central position in the ritual practices of this group. Marcus encourages his adepts to prophesy—especially females, according to Irenaeus—by inviting them to receive from him *Charis* and the bridegroom:

> Receive from me the bridegroom; make room for him and find room in him! See, Grace has descended upon you. Open your mouth and prophesy!
>
> But if the woman replies, "I have never prophesied before and I don't know how to prophesy," he makes invocations a second time so as to stupefy his deluded victim, saying to her: "Open your mouth and speak, no matter what, and you shall prophesy."
>
> She, however, puffed up and easily cajoled by these words, her soul overheated by the thought that she would prophesy, and her heart pounding excessively, becomes audacious and begins to utter silly things and whatever empty and frivolous words come to her mind, heated up as she is by an empty spirit …[19]

Such prophetic exercises were practiced in Marcus' community not only as a kind of initiation ritual whereby neophytes were introduced into the group,

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[17] *Interp.Knowl.* 16.24–28.

[18] Irenaeus, *AH* 1.13. For a detailed study, see Förster 1999, esp. chapter 2.

[19] Irenaeus, *AH* 1.13.3.

but also as a regular activity during meetings. Irenaeus says they organised banquets and drew lots to decide who would prophesy during the meeting.[20]

Marcus' practices, even if we disregard the tendentious aspects of Irenaeus' report, are hardly representative in all respects of Valentinian congregations in general. It is also possible that the prominence and the specific form of prophecy in Marcus' branch of Valentinianism owe not a little to the background of Marcus and much of his clientele in Asia Minor, a region where both Montanism and the cult of Cybele suggest the existence of a powerful tradition of religious enthusiasm, with a strong female element.[21] It is nevertheless the case that Marcus construes the prophetic practices of his community using a framework of ideas that makes good sense in a Valentinian theological context. Marcus presents himself as the mediator of Charis, Grace, who is another name for Silence, or the transcendent Father's Thought, through whom the Pleroma is generated and *gnosis* communicated. The individual community members receive the gift of prophecy by being joined to their "bridegrooms," that is, the "angels" who are the individualized manifestations, or "effluences" of the aeons.

This nuptial "joining," though it in this particular context takes the form of something like a possession, is an idea which is firmly based in Valentinian soteriology.[22] It is through the union with one's angelic *syzygos* that the spiritual person will be integrated into the Pleroma. It is to be noted, however, that this union is not only an eschatological idea, but also something that may be proleptically experienced even now. The experience of the Spirit through prophetic speech is thus construed in accordance with the same pattern of ideas as is used to describe the salvific process that takes place in the initiation ritual—the "bridal chamber"—and it also structurally parallels the communication with the Pleroma attained through communal singing.

Interpretation of Knowledge 19:15–20:13 may help to cast some more light upon the way in which the links between the earthly community of worshippers and the transcendent world are imagined.[23] The passage speaks

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[20] Irenaeus, *AH* 1.13.4.

[21] Cf. Wünsche 1997, esp. 207–208.

[22] In a cross-cultural perspective, the prophetic phenomena described by Irenaeus may be compared to possession cults, widespread throughout the world, where the image of a sexual union is one of the most common ways of representing the relationship between a human subject and a possessing spirit. In Haitian voodoo, for instance, even marriage certificates are issued recording the mystical union of a *loa*, or spirit, with a human woman or (less frequently) a man. See the now classic work by Lewis 1971.

[23] See Funk-Painchaud-Thomassen 2010, 152–156.

about "roots." If I understand the fragmentarily preserved text correctly, it describes the aeons of the Pleroma as invisible "roots" operating inside the humans who are members of the visible Church. It is those hidden aeonic roots that enable humans to "proclaim." The text continues in 19:23–37 by specifying what this means:

> Some are [sprouts?] of Church; because of [that they are] hastening, and exist for it [in particular]. Others, of Life; because of that they are such as love abundant life. And each of the others [receives] from his own root and brings forth the fruit that is like it. Since the roots are joined to one another, and their fruits are indivisible, what belongs to anyone superior is owned in common with the others. So let us resemble the roots …

Invisible roots link the earthly congregation with the Pleroma. Individual members of the Church may have special links joining them with particular aeons—this is, I think, the most plausible explanation for the mention here of Church and Life, which are well-attested names of aeons in several Valentinian systems. Those names are mentioned here only for the sake of illustration, and the further explanation given in the text is certainly *ad hoc*: "Church-people" are "hastening"—presumably in response to the κλῆσις, the "calling," of the ἐκκλησία—while "Life-people" are such as love the abundance of life, whatever we are supposed to understand by that. The main point the author wants to make is in any case that all the roots are mutually connected—somewhat like a rhizome, perhaps—so that everything is had in common, and the congregation of earthly humans should think of itself in the same way.

The root metaphor clearly has a wider application than just ritual situations; it relates to modes of conduct among the congregation members generally. But it is certainly also relevant for understanding what went on during the assemblies for worship, where the Spirit was working with particular intensity through the multiple direct lines connecting the members with their aeonic roots.

Preaching and Teaching

The *Interpretation of Knowledge* also mentions that certain people "have an advanced understanding" (ⲣ̄ⲡⲣⲟⲕⲟⲡⲧⲉ ⲉ̄ⲙ̄ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ).[24] Apparently they display

[24] I must correct the translation of this expression given in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* ("make progress as a speaker"), and which is basically the same in Funk-Painchaud-Thomassen 2010 ("progresse-t-il dans la parole") and in previous translations. The Greek

that understanding by speaking, because the text goes on to admonish the audience: "Don't say, 'Why does that one speak but I do not speak.'"[25] What kind of speaking may be meant here? It is based on *logos* and must be different from the kind of prophetic speech that was separately mentioned previously. Are we here to think of expositions of the Valentinian system in the form of a lecture, or rather of rhetorically elaborated homilies, including, perhaps, explication of scripture? Probably the latter.

It is clear that the homily was an important form of expression among the Valentinians. Valentinus himself wrote homilies: at least two of the fragments (4 and 6) derive from texts belonging to that genre. The *Gospel of Truth* and the *Interpretation of Knowledge* are two specimens of Valentinian homilies preserved in the Nag Hammadi Library.[26] These literary remains surely reflect the central place occupied by preaching in the worship of the Valentinians. It looks as if homilies may have been more important among them than in other varieties of Gnosticism, if we are to take the nature of the surviving documents in general as an indication.

The genre will have served as an appropriate vehicle for Valentinian speakers to unfold the characteristically Valentinian discourse of symbolic parallelism, exploring and expounding the multiple correspondences linking the meaning of the Savior's words and acts, the rituals performed by the community, and even ordinary phenomena in this world, with the realities existing in the transcendent realm and the narrative of Sophia's fall and redemption. Perceiving such symbolic homologies was clearly an essential part of what *gnosis* meant for the Valentinians, and homilies will have served to trigger in the listeners those eye-opening experiences of meaning by which hidden correspondences suddenly became transparent. In that sense, the preaching part of the service will have functioned in its own right as an important instrument of salvation.

Such preaching, which formed part of a regular service, must have been distinct from the type of teaching activity which consisted in imparting knowledge about the Valentinian system. It does not seem very likely that the many texts that present variations of that system were literary phenom-

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expression προκόπτειν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ, which most probably lies behind the Coptic, means "to have an advanced understanding," as Orig. *C. Cels.* II 63 τῶν πάνυ προκοπτόντων ἐν τῷ λόγῳ shows (on this expression see Borret 1967, 433, n. 2). The important point in our context, however, is that such advanced understanding expresses itself in speaking.

[25] *Interp. Knowl.* 16.31–35.

[26] For a discussion of the genre of *Interp. Knowl.*, see Funk-Painchaud-Thomassen 2010, 21–23.

ena only. But what may have been their *Sitz im Leben*? Did there exist some kind of separate "school" activity where those more theoretical topics were taught, beside the regular assemblies of worship? Or should we rather think of pre-baptismal catechesis as the proper location for this kind of activity?

The sources are not explicit on this point. At the end of his *Letter to Flora* (7.8), Ptolemy promises Flora that she will later be taught everything she wants to know about how the world came into being. This will happen when she has been found "worthy of the apostolic succession," he says, a formulation which gives the impression that the instruction formed part of an initiation process. The famous summary of what *gnosis* means in *Excerpts from Theodotus* 78.2 ("who we were, what we have become, where we were, where we have been placed," etc.) is also made in the context of a discussion of baptism—it represents, that is, a kind of catechism. Tertullian claims that the Valentinians prepared their adherents for baptism for as long as five years, something which suggests a rather demanding curriculum.[27] So it may well be that the various systematic treatises were written to serve as the basis for pre-baptismal instruction. That does not exclude the possibility that the genre may also have been cultivated by writers who wanted to present their own version of the Valentinian system independently of such a pragmatic context. In general, I think one needs to be cautious about assuming that there always must have been a close and direct relationship between a given system transmitted to us by a written source and the regular activities of a particular Valentinian community.

Eucharist and Sacred Meal

Evidence about a meal as part of regular Valentinian observance is not abundant. Irenaeus, in *AH* IV 18.4–5, clearly presupposes that the Valentinians celebrate a form of the Eucharist, since he argues that their practice stands in contradiction to their theories about the Lord, creation and the flesh. How, he asks, can they regard the bread as the body of the Lord and the cup his blood if they do not hold him to be the son of the creator of the world?

From this it may be inferred that the Valentinians celebrated the Eucharist with bread and a cup. This conclusion is confirmed by the *Gospel of Philip* and the Eucharistic prayers in NHC XI, 43–44. The *Gospel of Philip* in particular shows that Valentinians could speak without difficulty about partaking

[27] *Val.* 1.1–2.

of the flesh and the blood of the Savior in the Eucharist, because they gave a symbolic meaning to these words: thus, for instance, the "flesh" is the Logos and the "blood" is the Holy Spirit.[28] A more extensive analysis of the varied symbolism associated with the Eucharist in *Gospel of Philip* can be dispensed with here.[29] Suffice it to say that the author manages to find allusions in the Eucharistic bread both to the crucifixion (the "spreading out": 63:21–24) and to the incarnation ("bread from heaven": 55:6–14), and that the Eucharistic prayer in 58:10–14 is an invocation of the union with the angels, in other words of the bridal chamber. In the latter case it seems that the reference to the union with the angels served to stage the Eucharist as an image of the wedding feast associated with the bridal chamber.[30] As a feature of their regular liturgy the Eucharist thus seems to recapitulate the main tenets of the Valentinians' theology of salvation as well as to maintain and reinforce in a communal setting the assurance of salvation previously acquired by the individual community members through the initiatory ritual of redemption.

A peculiar and well-known variant of the Eucharist was performed by Marcus. By invoking the presence of Grace over the cup of water mixed with wine, he managed to make the liquid assume a blood-red colour, and then, pouring the contents into a larger vessel caused the latter to overflow.[31] Obviously, this is a special case. To dismiss it simply as an instance of deception, however, would mean to overlook the point that Marcus, by this instructive demonstration, in his own way exemplifies the Valentinian attitude to the Eucharist as a ritual filled with symbolic meaning. It is also to be noted that the Marcosian practice mentioned above, of casting lots in order to determine who would prophesy, is said by Irenaeus in I 13.4 to have taken place ἐπὶ τοῖς δείπνοις. This formulation not only shows that the Marcosians had a meal during their meetings, but also suggests that Irenaeus assumed a meal to be a normal feature of Valentinian worship.

From the *Gospel of Philip* it can be gathered that the meal consisted of bread and wine mixed with water. Marcus, too, worked with a cup of wine with water. Yet the *Excerpts from Theodotus* 82.1 mentions only bread,

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[28] *Gos. Phil.* 56.32–57.8; cf. 75.14–21.

[29] See the very detailed study by Schmid 2007, 369–370. Thomassen 2006, 99–100, 344–345, 349.

[30] For the δεῖπνον of the wedding feast, see *Exc. Theod.* 9.2, 63.2, 65.1.

[31] Irenaeus, *AH* 1.13.2. Förster 1999, 66–69, argues against the interpretation of this ritual as a form of the Eucharist. Schmid 2007, 394–405, however, defends that interpretation, in my view persuasively.

suggesting that the Eucharist in that case may have been celebrated with bread and water only. The policy on wine may thus have varied from one community to the next.

According to *Excerpts of Theodotus* 82.1, the bread was "sanctified by the power of the Name." This suggests a consecration in the form of an epiclesis. Marcus invoked Grace, as we have seen, and the Eucharistic prayer in *Gospel of Philip* 58:10–14 also has the form of an invocation. References to the Last Supper, the words of institution or the remembrance of Jesus are not attested.[32]

As a meal, the significance of the Eucharist was, as we have seen, exclusively symbolic; the enjoyment of food and drink was hardly a goal in itself. Moreover, the Valentinians do not seem to have attributed an independent soteriological function to the Eucharist; rather, it served as a further occasion for the symbolic instantiation of the general soteriological themes propounded by Valentinianism and for invoking once more the presence of pleromatic powers. Though a regular component of their liturgy, the ritual meal of the Valentinians therefore hardly occupied the central position in it that the Eucharist had, or was to have, in the Catholic Mass.

The Ritual Sequence as a Whole

In conclusion, an attempt will be made to arrange the various indications found in the sources in a sequence, so as to create some idea of what a regular Valentinian community meeting may have looked like from beginning to end. Needless to say, the nature of the evidence allows for little certainty, and practice was hardly uniform from one community to the next, or over time, so that the following, synthesizing reconstruction should be regarded only as an experiment.

The community would meet on Sundays (whether before sunrise or in the evening—or both—we do not know). Spirituals and psychics worshipped together for the first part of the service, which comprised a confession, a collection and the singing of a "hymn of the humble," and praying for redemption. Perhaps both groups listened together to a sermon. Baptism of new members may have taken place at this point. The second part of the service was for the spirituals only, i.e., the baptized. It included the

[32] This is probably also the case with NHC XI, 43–44, where the restoration of "remembering" in 43.21 (Coptic Gnostic Library) is unjustified.

singing of psalms from Valentinus' psalm-book. The congregation sang in an enthusiastic mode, seeking communion with the transcendent aeons. After that, a senior member of the congregation delivered a sermon. Then followed a Eucharistic meal, with bread and wine mixed with water, or just water. The elements were consecrated by means of an invocation for the presence of spiritual power and eaten as a prefiguration of the eschatological wedding feast of the bridal chamber. During the meal, individual church members stood up to prophesy, conveying messages from the aeonic world, perhaps speaking in tongues.

The ritual sequence as a whole shows a certain family resemblance to second century Christian Sunday worship as described in Justin, *1 Apology* 67, though the enthusiastic aspects are clearly more prominent than in Justin's account. Our general knowledge about the structure of Christian services during this period is in any case very scant. In a broad perspective, the Valentinian version of regular Christian worship, with its communal style of psalm singing and its general character as a service of the word, seems to owe more to Jewish and Christian traditions of congregation ritual than to the conventional forms of Greco-Roman cult.

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PRACTICING "REPENTANCE" ON THE PATH TO GNOSIS IN *EXEGESIS ON THE SOUL*

Madeleine Scopello

The *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6) is a short account of the Gnostic myth of Psyche, from her fall into a body and the world to her return to her heavenly father's place.[1] Hence two main themes developed in this tractate are prostitution (πορνεία) and repentance (μετάνοια). Prostitution portrays the earthly life of the Soul—once virgin and androgynous in her Father's house—running from one lover to another. Treated as a whore, she becomes their sexual slave, then she is left alone. The only gift she gets from them is their polluted seed by which she gives birth to unhealthy children. The time of πορνεία is characterized by deception, illusion and loneliness.

Then comes, little by little, the time when the Soul begins to perceive her condition of captivity: this self-awareness opens to her the way to repentance. In a poignant way she asks help from her Father, and he has mercy. His response consists in turning inward her womb—which was turned outward as male *genitalia* because of her prostitution—and in sending her a bridegroom, the Spirit, the first-born of the Father's house. Renewed and purified as a beautiful bride, the Soul adorns spiritually herself in the νυμφῶν, waiting for her fiancé. When this one enters the bridal chamber and decorates it, they love each other passionately and give birth to good and healthy children. At the end, the Soul regenerates herself and returns—virgin again, as she was in the beginning—to her first dwelling.

The story of the Soul—which clearly recalls the features of the Valentinian myth of Sophia—is counted in attractive and novelistic adaptation, which has some common features with Hellenistic romance literature. In these pagan writings we can distinguish the myth of Psyche under the veil of the tragic adventures of two fiancés and of the dangers encountered most often by the bride in the hands of wicked brigands. However the author of *ExSoul* has been very much influenced by Jewish stories of female sinners,

[1] I utilize here my own French translation, Scopello 1985, which I translate into English, taking also account of the translation of Robinson Jr. 2000 and Meyer 2007.

like Rahab, Tamar, Ruth or Bathsheba. All these women symbolize the soul going from prostitution to virginity through repentance, so that they may gain salvation.

Moreover, a series of biblical quotations from Old and New Testament as well as two references to *Odyssey* are cleverly inserted in the narrative with the aim to illustrate the itinerary of the Soul. Some are grouped together, pointing out the three moments of her existence: prostitution, repentance and return to Father. These quotations were not gathered by the author himself but have been taken from a manual or an anthology. The same groups of quotations are found in the works of Clement of Alexandria, Didymos and Origen. These groups of quotations have given these writers the basis for building their argument on a precise theme.

Relying on his rich cultural and religious heritage, the author of *ExSoul* offers his readers an attractive text, enriched by references to biblical and pagan lore. In this way, the Gnostic myth of the soul was expounded in an intelligible way both to Christian, Jewish, or pagan readers—a skillful strategy of propaganda which shows that this tractate had not been written for an esoteric purpose but to gain new adepts to Gnostic doctrine. The milieu where *ExSoul* was probably composed, in its original Greek version, is Alexandria, at the beginning of the 3rd century—a variegated, syncretistic milieu where various religious and philosophical doctrines encountered each other.

It seems to me that the main purpose of the author of *ExSoul* is to take from the story of the Soul an example for his readers. From prostitution to repentance, she recovers her former, divine dimension. It is the theme of μετάνοια that the author chooses to stress, with the intent to lead his readers to repent and to submit themselves to a deep change, so that they may become again what they were before their earthly experience. In fact *ExSoul* is not only a beautiful allegorical tale on the Soul—like other Greco-Roman symbolic tales, for example, Apuleius' *Love and Psyche* in *Metamorphoseis*—but a Gnostic tractate which, taking its departure from the story of the Soul, contains a precise teaching on repentance and gives instructions how to practice it.

The goal is here to obtain "salvation"—the word of "Gnosis" is not pronounced in the tractate—that is, the restoration of the Soul in her Father's house as a virgin. This signifies the re-appropriation of knowledge.

Prostitution and Widowhood of the Soul

The concept of μετάνοια becomes visible from the very beginning of the tractate. In describing the Soul, which gives herself to various lovers, believing, in each amorous experience, that she has found her true husband, the author says:

> When she had given herself to shameless (ἄπιστος), unfaithful (ὑβριστής) adulterers (μοιχός), so that they might make use (χρᾶν) of her, then (τότε) she sighed deeply and repented (μετανοεῖν). But even when she turned her face from those adulterers (μοιχός), she ran to others and they compelled (ἀναγκάζειν) her to live with them and serve them upon their beds, as if they were her masters. Ashamed, she did not dare (τολμᾶν) to leave them; they deceived (ἀπατᾶν) her for a long time (χρόνος), pretending to be faithful, true husbands, as if they respected (τιμᾶν) her. But finally they abandoned her and left. Then she became a poor desolate (ἔρημος) widow (χήρα), without help, nobody giving ear to her pain.[2]

We find in these lines the first movement of the Soul towards μετάνοια. But this first movement is not strong enough to release her from the "shameless, unfaithful adulterers": the only result, for the moment, is that "she ran to others"—in search of true love.

"To run" (Coptic: ⲡⲱⲧ) is a noteworthy term, charged with a negative meaning all over the tractate. It is employed to signify the Soul's escape from her maiden's quarters (129.1), towards the adulterers (130.7: quotation of Hosea 2:4–9), running here and there and copulating with whoever she finds (narrative of the author, 131.13–14), then stopping to run (132.16), and waiting for the bridegroom in the bridal chamber.

The object of the repentance of the Soul is not yet clearly identified; in this section, she is still in the time of illusion, somehow she still trusts her lovers who look to be faithful, good husbands. Focus is put on her behavior of shame (Coptic: ϣⲓⲡⲉ); this term is taken up again a few lines later under its Greek equivalent ἀσχημοσύνη.[3] Because of her shame—her degradation—the Soul has not the strength to come out from her condition.

Some typical Gnostic features can also be noticed: the lovers deceiving the Soul are a metaphor for the archons keeping humanity under their power by numerous tricks. The term ἀπατᾶν is often employed as a key-word in Gnostic literature; it characterizes their misleading action. A careful consideration on the notion of ἀπάτη may be found in the *Apocryphon of*

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[2] *ExSoul* 128.4–20.

[3] *ExSoul* 128.29 and 133.13.

John. This tractate develops in a powerful fresco the theme of the deceitful seduction of Eve by the chief archon, then the seduction of the daughters of men, operated by the fallen angels, before portraying the condition of humankind enslaved in passions and sexuality.[4]

The violence (a concept expressed already at page 127,30: βία) of the lovers towards the Soul—a sexual violence[5]—is emphasized, and this explains that she does not dare (τολμᾶν) to leave them: in other words, she is not only ashamed but also frightful. This violence is an important element in the mythical narratives of the rape of Eve by the archons. Let's recall *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5) 116.15–19: "Come, let's seize her and ejaculate our semen into her, so that she may be unclean and unable to ascend to her light, and her children will serve us." This violence reveals as well—according to the *Testimony of Truth*—the strength of the captivity to which humanity is submitted: "Passion, which is their delight, controls the souls of those who are begotten down here—those who defile and are defiled in return."[6]

The state of illusion and error in which the Soul lives has been treated in *ExSoul* through the theme of the Soul who takes the unfaithful lovers for true husbands. This incapacity of distinguish truth from falseness has been treated in various ways in Gnostic literature and has received in the *Gospel of Truth* one of its most impressive descriptions. Its anonymous writer has evoked the blurred atmosphere where terror grows dense as fog, and where error disguises itself in truth so to subdue humankind.[7]

As to the image of the widow, we may recall its presence in Philo, who presents the soul as being widow of virtues.[8] The attribute "poor" (Coptic ϩⲏⲕⲉ translating the Greek πτωχός or πένης) reinforces the sad widowhood of the Soul; "poor" and "poorness" often acquire a technical value in Gnostic literature, and are associated to lack of Gnosis and spiritual illness.[9]

But the image of the widow recalls most of all the first chapters of the book of Lamentations, from where the author of *ExSoul* may have taken not only this element (Lam 1:1) but most generally a vocabulary about the

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[4] Cf. Scopello 1980. See for comparison the *Auth. Teach*. 31.16–21 which employs the same terminology.

[5] See *Tri. Prot*. NHC XIII,1 144.12–13 and *Auth. Teach*. (NHC VI,2 31.14–20) for the link between violence and mislead (ἀπάτη).

[6] *Test. Truth* NHC IX,3 30.3.

[7] Cf. for example, 17.30–18.7.

[8] *De Fuga* 114. See also the *Disc. Eight and Ninth* NHC VI,6 59.15–19: "Trismegistus, do not let my soul become widow of the vision."

[9] See Puech 1978, 80–81.

distress of Jerusalem which suits the affliction of the Soul. Jerusalem is depicted in her solitude, nobody coming to help her (Lam 1:7).[10] She calls her lovers (Lam 1:19), until the Lord from heaven looks down at her (Lam 3:50).

If in this first passage of *ExSoul* its author sets briefly the tone about the meaning he intends to give to μετάνοια—which he mainly associates with sigh (Coptic: ⲁⲥⲁϥ ⲉϩⲟⲩ ⲉⲙⲁⲧⲉ)[11]—we need to consider carefully another passage which offer more elements on repentance. The painful condition of the Soul drives her to invoke her Father for help, and he answers to her call:

> But when the Father who is above notices her and looks down on her and sees her sighing in pain (πάθος) and shame (ἀσχημοσύνη) and repenting (μετανοεῖν) of her prostitution (πορνεία), and when she begins (ἄρχεσθαι) to call upon (ἐπικαλεῖν) [his Name] for help (βοηθεῖν) and [sighs] with all her heart, saying: "Save me, my Father, for behold I will tell (λόγος) [you how I] abandoned my home and fled from my maiden's quarters (παρθενών). Turn me to yourself again. When he sees her in this condition, he will consider (κρινεῖν) her worthy of his mercy for many afflictions have come upon her because she abandoned her house."[12]

Repentant Prayer

We can draw the following structure from the passage found in 128.26–129.5. This is where the narrative of the author frames a brief, direct speech of the Soul. Two personages intervene: the Father and the Soul. The Father on high is told to become aware of the pain of the Soul and of her repentance. The object of the μετάνοια is now clearly identified: it is πορνεία. It is also told that the Soul invokes the Name of God with all her heart. At this point of the narrative the direct speech begins.

Let us see the content of the invocation of the Soul: first there is a call for help ("save me!"), then a confession in which the cause of the fault is identified: the desertion of her house and her flying out her maiden's quarters. The consequence of this desertion is her wantonness, but this is passed over in silence. Finally the Soul asks the Father to be turned to him again. At this point of the narrative, the author intervenes specifying that the Father has mercy on her because of her distress, due to the desertion of her house.

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[10] Cf. 1:2; 1:9; 1:21.

[11] Στενάζειν: cf. Hipp., *Ref.* 6.31.3: τῶν τῆς Σοφίας στεναγμῶν.

[12] *ExSoul* 128.26–129.5.

Some remarks can be done on these lines. The expression "the Father who is above" (ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲛⲏⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲉ) translates the Greek πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος or πατὴρ ἐν οὐρανοῖς—a current formula in Jewish Apocrypha and the New Testament.[13] The strong term of ἀσχημοσύνη that the Coptic translator had rendered before by ϣⲓⲡⲉ is kept in Greek, here as well as in *ExSoul* 133.13. The expression "call upon (ἐπικαλεῖν) [his Name]" translates the Greek ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα (κυρίου); in Septuagint, this expression is frequently used in prayers and has a technical value.[14]

The terminology adopted in these lines reveals an influence of the biblical Psalms. It is in this kind of literature that our author has been able to find the appropriate terms and motifs to support his description of the mourning and distress of the Soul. The ease with which he moves in biblical literature shows that he had a first-hand knowledge of the texts, and not just a practice of florilegia.

Later in the tractate in 137.16–22, he quotes Psalm 6:7–10, a well-chosen text which focuses on the importance of tears and pain for conversion, and on the receptiveness of God in hearing the call of the Soul. Several Psalms contain different motifs of the prayer of repentance: recall of the painful situation, mercy of God, invocation of his Name. A good example is Psalm 114 (116): 1–9:

> I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death encompassed me, and the pains of hell came upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the Name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return to thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

In addition, the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha portray some penitential prayers where repentance and confession are tightly linked together. They might have inspired the author of *ExSoul*. The Prayer of Azariah, one of the most beautiful penitential prayers of Judaism—according to A. Strobel—consists in an invocation of the Name of God to obtain relief.[15] The main themes of this poetical composition are the awareness of sins, the repentance in contrition, and the mercy of God. The prayer of Manasseh

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[13] See Tobit 5:17; Daniel 3:17.
[14] Cf. *TDNT* 3:500.
[15] Strobel 1968.

briefly presents an invocation to God (1–4), a section on his mercy (5–8), a personal confession of the sins (9–10), a supplication to obtain forgiveness (11–13), and a final request for mercy followed by a doxology (14–15). The necessity of prayer, of confessing and recognizing his sins as well as the mercy of God toward the sinner, are also to be found in Daniel 9:3–18 and its parallel text in 1 Baruch 1:17–2:16.

ExSoul shares with these Jewish texts a same conception of μετάνοια: a multifaceted notion blending together repentance, remorse, compunction, penitence and conversion.[16] On this point our tractate differs deeply from a large amount of Gnostic texts where μετάνοια is conceived as an ἐπιστροφή, an intellectual return to oneself, without any penitential content, a concept rooted in the Hellenistic philosophical context. A good example of this last meaning is the *Gospel of Truth* 35.23–24: "The error did not exist with the father. It is a thing that falls, it is a thing that easily stands upright (again) in the discovery of him, who has come to him, whom he shall bring back. For the bringing back is called μετάνοια." In commenting upon this text, Henri-Charles Puech observes that "La μετάνοια n'est pas essentiellement 'repentance' mais 'conversion' (ἐπιστροφή), retour du gnostique sur soi-même, à son νοῦς, à son moi authentique, à son être plénier".[17]

The goal of μετάνοια is a return, through weeping and suffering, to the house of the Father. It is there that the Soul wishes to go back, with all her strength. The theme of the heavenly house—and her maiden's quarters—she has left, falling into a body, is a Gnostic leitmotif that is developed in *ExSoul* not only through the narrative but also through two biblical quotations (Psalm 44:11–12 and Genesis 12:1) and two references to *Odyssey*. To be saved, Jerusalem (Psalm 44:11–12 in *ExSoul* 133.16–20) and Abraham (Genesis 12:1 in *ExSoul* 133.29–31) must go back to their first dwelling, leaving the house of the earthly father—a transparent allusion to the demiurge, according to the Gnostic interpretation. As well, Ulysses and Helen yearn for their homeland: Ulysses has abandoned Ithaca (*Odyssey* I.48; cf. I.7 and IV.555 in *ExSoul* 136.28–35) and Helen has left her husband's home (*Odyssey* IV.261 in *ExSoul* 137.2–5). Having become captive of mundane powers, symbolized by Calypso and Aphrodite, their dearest aspiration is to rejoin their first, authentic house, the place of their origin. In summoning up his biblical and classic knowledge, and in weaving together Bible and Homer, our author has been capable to display a theme dear to Gnosis in a personal, original way.

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[16] Cf. Joly 1961.
[17] Puech 1958, 17.

Consciousness and Change

A third passage in 131.13–22 provides more information on μετάνοια; it follows a group of quotations from the Prophets the author has inserted to support his narrative. These quotations illustrate the time of πορνεία: Jeremiah 3:1–4 (in *ExSoul* 129.8–22), Hosea 2:4–9 (in *ExSoul* 129.23–130.10) and Ezekiel 16:23–26 (in *ExSoul* 130.11–20):

> As long as the Soul keeps running here and there having sexual intercourse (κοινωνεῖν) with whomever she meets and defiling herself, she will suffer (πάσχα) what she deserves. But when she becomes conscious (αἰσθάνεσθαι) of the pain she endures and weeps before the Father and repents (μετανοεῖν), the Father will pity her. He will make her womb (μήτρα) turn again (πάλιν) from the outside back to the inside, so that the Soul (ψυχή) will recover her proper character (μερικόν).[18]

In this passage it is explicitly told that the Soul becomes conscious (αἰσθάνεσθαι) of her prostitution. Here we find the real beginning of her conversion: self-awareness—a fundamental act in Gnostic doctrine, by which man perceives his degradation in ignorance and starts to move on the path to knowledge: "where are we?" questions Theodotus in his well known, impressive formula.[19]

How does the Father act when faced with the consciousness of the Soul? He changes the position of her womb from the outside back to the inside, allowing the Soul to recover her proper character (μερικόν).

This radical, physical change shows that μετάνοια is an ontological change, which concerns not only the behavior of the Soul but also her proper nature. In fact by μετάνοια she is able to leave her condition of prostitution and to regain her state of woman and then of virgin. Once her sexual nature is radically modified, she gets back her primeval, female character, losing the male character she had acquired during her stay in the world.

We find in Philo of Alexandria the idea of μετάνοια as an ontological change; μετάνοια is a μεταβολὴ τῆς ψυχῆς, a transformation of the consciousness: "repentance has nothing of that nature which remains ever in the same stage without movement or change."[20] As in *ExSoul*, for Philo μετάνοια it is not a "partial change of the soul wavering and oscillating," but "a total change of the man himself."[21]

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[18] *ExSoul* 131.13–22.
[19] Clem. Alex., *Exc. Theo*. 78.2.
[20] Philo, *De praemiis* 15: about the story of Enoch.
[21] Philo, *De mutatione* 123: Μεταβάλλω; the passage focuses on Caleb.

To illustrate this change, the author of our tractate employs the powerful image of the Father returning the womb of the Soul from outside to inside. The Coptic term ⲕⲱⲧⲉ translates the Greek ἐπιστρέφειν. ⲕⲱⲧⲉ has a technical value in the tractate, and it is employed as well in the narrative as in the biblical and Homer's quotations.[22] In these last references it concerns Ulysses turning his face away from the deceptions of Calypso, and Helen claiming her will to return to her husband's house.[23]

The image of the turning inside of the womb of the Soul matches well with one of the main themes of the tractate, the recovery of the "inside." We can ask ourselves if this image is a creation of the author or if he has found it elsewhere. In the Bible there is a similar but not identical image—the image of the opening of the womb—that might have inspired our author. We read in Genesis 29:31: "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb (ἤνοιξεν τήν μήτραν αὐτῆς)".

In Philo, the opening of the womb exerted by God on some biblical female figures (Sara, Leah and Rebecca)[24] contains an interesting, allegorical meaning: these barren women represent the soul, and it is on the μήτρα of the soul that God intervenes. Moreover, the opening of the womb offers these women the possibility to give birth to good children, the ideas. Philo's allegory is not far from the one in *ExSoul*, where, after the turning inward of the womb, the children conceived with the true husband—the Spirit—are good and healthy. On the contrary, the children born from the adulterers—symbols of the passions in the world—are sick.

It seems to me that the turning inward of the womb can be compared with an act accomplished on the sexual male *genitalia*: circumcision. Its goal is to take man away from *souillure*, from uncleanness, and to lead him to purity. The physical act of circumcision has sometimes been spiritualized. Let us be reminded of the *Rule of the Community* V,5 which tells about the "circumcision of the wicked tendency." An analogous interpretation on circumcision has been developed by Philo where it signifies the renouncing to the world.[25]

The term μερικόν in *ExSoul* 131.22 deserves our attention. It is linked to the notion of the fate (μήρος, μήρις) of the Soul. This notion is well attested in Essene literature as well as in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* where

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[22] *ExSoul* 131.19,21,25 and 28.
[23] *ExSoul* 136.29; 136.36.
[24] *De Mutatione* 255 for Sara; *De Cherubim* 46 for Lea and Rebecca.
[25] Philo, *De migratione* 92–93. Cf. *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.304–306.

several trends of Essene speculations can be detected.[26] A similar notion is taken up in the Gnostic tractate of *Zostrianos* NHC VIII,1 23.20, where some elements of Jewish lore mingle to philosophical trends.[27]

As to the term ⲙⲁϩⲧ in *ExSoul* 131.24, it is the Coptic equivalent of τὰ ἔγκατα, τὰ σπλάγχα, indicating, in Greek, the womb.[28] In 131.26 we can note the term φυσικόν, employed in Greek instead of the less elegant αἰδοῖον.[29]

Guidance for the Gnostic Readers

After having related the first steps of the Soul in repentance, the author narrates her purification from uncleanness, her union with her heavenly bridegroom, her emotion in meeting him again, until her final ascension to her Father's dwelling. Romanesque motifs and some biblical quotations enrich this part of the tractate.[30] Now the time is come for the author to draw some teaching from the experience of the Soul. After the myth, he takes in consideration—in the final part of the tractate—the level of reality, addressing directly himself to his readers:

> So it is necessary to pray to the Father and to call on him with all our soul (ψυχή), not outwardly with our lips but with the spirit (πνεῦμα), which is inside and which has come from the depth (βάθος), sighing and repenting of the life (βίος) we led, confessing (ἐξομολογεῖν) our sins, becoming conscious (αἰσθάνεσθαι) of our vain deception (πλάνη) and of our search of trivial pursuits (σπουδή), weeping because we were in darkness and in the waves, mourning (πενθεῖν) on ourselves so that he have mercy on us, and hating ourselves in our present condition.[31]

The lesson the readers can learn from the Soul's experience is the necessity of prayer. Some details are provided here on its condition: it has to be interior and spiritual. It has to be accompanied by sorrow and repentance on the past life and by a confession of sins. The consciousness of having sinned is a crucial moment. Sins are here identified with the "vain deceit" which characterized life, and with the large place given to "futile matters." The

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[26] *Levi* 2.12; 14.5; *Issachar* 5.5 *Benjamin* 6.3; 9.2.

[27] See Scopello 1980.

[28] Cf. Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 6.43; Sophocles, *Antigone* 1066. See "σπλάγχον," *TDNT* 7:548.

[29] See "Genitalien," *RAC* X, 3. In the *Tri. Tract*. 78.11–13 we find the term φύσις with a sexual meaning: "The last aeon has become feeble, as a female sex (φύσις) abandoned by its virility."

[30] *ExSoul* 132.10–133.24.

[31] *ExSoul* 135.4–15.

worldly condition of man is recalled by the presence of two conventional symbols: darkness and a tempestuous sea. Those who pray hope to obtain the mercy of God, and have a feeling of abhorrence for themselves.

In this sequence, the author employs a technical vocabulary on prayer which leads us once again to presuppose that he has been influenced by the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. The expression "with all our soul", referred to the prayer elevated to God, is of Semitic origin; it is used, by instance, in Tobit 1:13; 13:7; Judith (Vg) 4:17; *Jubilees* 1:16; 1:23. The Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch* (2 *Baruch*) 84:10 offers an interesting parallel: "And ask always and pray seriously with your whole soul that the Mighty One may accept you in mercy and that he may not reckon the multitude of your sinners."[32]

Moreover, this prayer must not be pronounced aloud, it has to be silent, "not outwardly with our lips but with the spirit." This is a motif that fits well the value of what is "inside" that we find all over the tractate. The theme of the silent prayer is developed in Judith 13:6, in the additions of Vulgata: *stetitque Iudith ante lectum orans cum lacrimis et labiorum motu in silentio dicens* (…).[33] Moreover, *Opus imperfectum* (*Liber apocryphus nomine Seth*) talks about a silent prayer lasting three entire days.[34] This Jewish motif—and not only this one—has been picked up in Hermetic literature. Let us quote some lines from *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. Trismegistus and his disciple dialogue together about singing a silent hymn and praying in silence: "I have seen. Language cannot reveal this. For all of the Eight, my child, and the souls in it, and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. I, Mind, understand."[35] And the disciple asks in 58.22–23: "How does one sing a hymn through silence"? Some lines later, in 59.19–22, Trismegistus encourages his pupil so to obtain the divine vision: "Sing ⟨praise⟩ again, my child, and sing while you are silent. Ask what you want in silence." And after the vision in 60.3–5, the pupil says: "From now on, it is good for us to remain silent, with head bowed. From now on, do not speak about the vision. It is fitting to sing a hymn to the Father until the day we leave the body."[36]

This extreme spiritualization and interiorization of the prayer ("not outwardly with our lips but with the spirit") is formulated in a similar manner by the *Prayer of Manasseh* 11–13: "And now behold I am bending the knees

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[32] Charlesworth 1985, 1:651.
[33] Iudith 13:4 in Septuaginta does not develop this theme.
[34] PG 56.637–638.
[35] *Disc. Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 58.16–22.
[36] Another example of a silent praise to God is *CH* 13.16.

of my heart before you; and I am beseeching your kindness. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; and I certainly know my sins; I beseech you; forgive me, O Lord, forgive me"![37]

What follows in 135.6–7 ("but with the spirit [πνεῦμα], which is inside and which has come from the depth [βάθος]") is a sort of pastiche of 1Cor 2:10–11: "But God has revealed these things to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ). For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ)"? From this passage our author has picked up the motif of the inner spirit and of the depth, arranging them at his convenience.

The behavior of the community echoes here with the Soul's moment of μετάνοια, when she became aware of her sins and repented.[38] If the phrase of "confessing (ἐξομολογεῖν) the sins" is quite frequent in Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,[39] the expression the "vain error" (ⲉⲧⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧ, 135.10–11) has a Gnostic taste and portrays well the untruthful realm where humankind is kept. The *Gospel of Truth* 26.26 tells as well: "Error is empty (ϯⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ ⲥⲱⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧ); there is nothing within her." In *ExSoul*, this expression is parallel to ⲥⲡⲟⲩⲇⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧ in 135.11–12, translating κενοσπουδία, the meaning of which is the readiness in the search of trivia, of frivolous matters.[40]

As to the metaphor of darkness and of tempestuous sea, the author intends to depict the human condition of ignorance (the darkness) and passions (the raging waves). It is picked up again with more details in *ExSoul* 136.18–20.

The last themes of this sequence—the affliction (πενθεῖν) and the hate of present condition—have been chosen by the author to express the sorrow of the Soul.[41] The sequence has been inspired by two passages from the Gospels, which the author quotes at the end of this exhortatory section.[42] Matthew 5:4 (in 135.16–17: μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες) has provided the term πενθεῖν, and the allusion to Luke 14:26 has suggested to the author the term μισεῖν.[43]

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[37] Charlesworth 1985, 2:634.

[38] *ExSoul* 131.17–18.

[39] For example, *Test. Gad* 2.1.

[40] The term is rare: cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 6.70; Diogenes Laërtius 208 (κενόσπουδος).

[41] *ExSoul* 135.13–15.

[42] *ExSoul* 135.20–21.

[43] Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and

After having incorporated these two references, he affirms in 135.21 that "μετάνοια is the beginning of salvation"—a statement he supports with an allusion to Mark 1:4 (cf. Luke 3:3) about the baptism of repentance. Moreover, in 135.25–26 he reminds once more his readers that "μετάνοια takes place in pain (λύπη) and sorrow," a statement tempered by his recalling of God's compassion.

A group of biblical quotations are then inserted: *Agraphon of Ezekiel*, Isaiah 30:15 and 30.19–20 in *ExSoul* 135.31–136.16. They illustrate the theme of repentance, of return (ⲕⲱⲧⲉ) to the primeval condition, and the necessity of sigh and prayer. These quotations, as we made clear elsewhere, have been drawn from an anthology, as it is shown by their occurrence in Clement of Rome and Clement of Alexandria.[44]

It is on page 136.17 that the author intervenes again, with a personal address to his readers, and draws some concrete teaching from these quotations of the Prophets.

> So (ὥστε) we need to pray (προσεύχεσθαι) God night and day, lifting our hands to him as sailors, that are in the middle of the tempestuous (πλεῖν) sea (θάλασσα), pray to God with all their heart without any hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις). In fact, those who pray (προσεύχεσθαι) with hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις) deceive (ἀπατᾶν) themselves.

This second section on prayer is introduced in the same way than the first one. In *ExSoul* 135.4 we read: ϣϣⲉ ⲟⲉ ⲉϣⲗⲉⲗ; now we have: ⲭⲱⲥⲧⲉ ϣϣⲉ ⲁ̄ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲉⲩⲭⲉⲥⲑⲁⲓ. Some more details about prayer are offered here. The various elements lead us without doubt to the milieu of Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

The motif in 136.17 of an uninterrupted prayer—during night and day—is finely developed in Judith, especially in the additions of Vulgata 6:16,21; 7:18; 12:7, and Tobit (LXX) 4:5 and 12:8. We find it as well in the *Testament of Abraham* fr. 19r (Arabic). The *Testament of Moses* 11 says: "(Moses) in every hour both day and night, had his knees fixed to the earth, praying and looking steadfastly toward him who governs the whole earth with mercy and justice."[45] This theme is taken up by Pseudo-Philo in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 22.6, and applied to night and day meditation. It makes its way into the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which were deeply influenced by Jewish

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wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

[44] Scopello 1985.

[45] Charlesworth 1985, 1:934.

traditions.[46] The practice among the Essenes of an uninterrupted prayer is confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls, as it is shown in the *Hymns*.[47]

The detail in 136.17–18 of praying with hands lifted to God is given as well by the *Ode of Salomon* 21.1 and *Joseph and Aseneth* 12.1.[48] But in *ExSoul*, the focus is mainly put on a maritime comparison, which widens the quick allusion to the stormy, dark sea made previously by the author, in *ExSoul* 135.13. The comparison with sailors who pray God in the middle of the storm echoes a traditional theme of Jewish Intertestamental literature, which, with the help of sea images, describes the human condition. These sorts of images are used in Essenic literature, in *Testament of Abraham* 17.25 and in the Greek fragments of the *Book of Henoch* 97 and 101 and also in the *Testament of Naphtali* 6.[49] Philo turns quite often to this image in his own allegoric works, the tempestuous sea being a metaphor for the passions shaking the soul.[50] If Gnosticism has rarely employed these maritime images, Manichaean literature has appreciated them thoroughly.

This weaving of motifs centered on the prayer in a hostile sea serves to introduce the Homeric quotation on Ulysses—the most known symbol of a sailor lost, under the veil of allegory, in the sea of passions and searching his homeland. In fact, the imagery of the stormy sea and the call to heaven of the sailors has also kept the attention of classical literature. Odysseus, even more than Helen, constitutes for the reader the best example of repentance in turning his face away from Calypso's deceptions.

Concluding Remarks

Taking his point of departure in the narration of the Gnostic myth of Psyche (her fall into the world and prostitution; repentance; return to the Father), the author of *Exegesis on the Soul* gives his hearers instructions to conduct their life and indicates them the path to recover their original place in the heavenly house. The adepts interiorize the myth and, identifying themselves to the Soul, they feel her tribulations in their deepest self.

The phase of prostitution, illustrated in the tractate by several quotations from the Prophets, was—already in the Bible—an allegory of idolatry. In the

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[46] VII,35,4 and *passim*.
[47] U (12.3–8); cf. 11.5–6.
[48] Charlesworth 1985, 2:754: "I raised my arms on high on account of the grace of the Lord."
[49] *Hymn* 3.6–18; 6.22–23; 7.1–5.
[50] *De Conf.* 68–70; *De sacr.*13; *De Cher.* 12–13 etc.

Gnostic view, even if the author does not develop this theme, prostitution means the affiliation to other religions. It means as well the worldly temptations and the empire of the wicked powers on the individual soul. Μετάνοια is the remedy to πορνεία, it unties the soul from passions and leads to the knowledge of oneself and of God.

This tractate is probably meant for new adepts who are invited to practice repentance to obtain salvation. We can suppose a group of cultivated people, susceptible to appreciate biblical and pagan literary references, and needing an instruction to practice Gnosis, in their first steps to this doctrine and way of life.

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OPENING THE WAY OF WRITING: SEMIOTIC METAPHYSICS IN THE BOOK OF THOTH

Edward P. Butler*

The editing and publication of the late antique Egyptian text dubbed the *Book of Thoth* may turn out to be a milestone in our recognition of speculative thought in ancient Egypt. Though much uncertainty attends the reading of a text at once enigmatic and lacunose, it is incumbent upon us to begin to take stock of this text. Even if the discovery of additional fragments may yet happen, to the very degree that they would be likely to upset any ventured interpretation, it is still wise for us to study the extant material with the urgency that comes from appreciating the value of an Egyptian voice speaking in ways and on matters of which it previously has not for us.

The *Book of Thoth* differs from other texts that we might regard as exhibiting the speculative tendency, the content of which is cosmogonic. A speculative tendency has long been recognized in Egyptian cosmogonic literature.[1] The *Book of Thoth*, however, draws on cosmogonic themes, but for a purpose wholly novel to us: a metaphysics of semiosis, or sign-production. The *Book of Thoth*, as best we can understand it, presents a manual of scribal initiation. But the text offers a conception of writing, not merely as one occupation amongst others, even as a privileged occupation in the manner of the 'Satire on the Trades', but as an intensification of the way of being of the sign-user as such.

The activity of writing in the *Book of Thoth*, according to my reading of it, is essentially a three-sided relationship.

(1) To a textual materiality that is primarily conceived, in accord with fundamental themes in Egyptian cosmogony, as (A) an oceanic chaos or riverine flow and the liminal space of the marsh, which yields the papyrus and reeds from which paper and pens or brushes are fashioned, but also as (B) a particular cultural extension of this environ-

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* This essay is humbly dedicated to Birger Pearson, in admiration for his skillful integration of phenomenological insight and textual criticism, and appreciation for his demonstration of the power of hermeneutics.

[1] E.g., Allen 1988.

ment in the form of the fishing- or fowling-net, and through (C) the processes yielding the charcoal used in ink.

(2) To writers who came before, and hence, in a distinctively Egyptian fashion, to mortality as the locus of ideality, but also to intertextuality as condition of the possibility of semiosis.

(3) To animality in the form of a discrete set of sites of enunciation, principles shaping the textual field in a fashion akin, perhaps, to our concept of 'genre'.

These three externalities of writing come together in the central concept of the *Book of Thoth*, the Chamber of Darkness, which has a distinctive relationship to each of the three. The 'Chamber of Darkness' (*ꜥt-kky*) is so important to the *Book of Thoth* that it is possible the text's true title is actually given at B07, 4[2] as "The Ritual of the Regulation of Entering the Chamber of Darkness," and that it is addressed primarily to Seshat, Goddess of Writing. The Chamber of Darkness, since it is usually determined by the book roll sign, seems to be a conceptual *topos* more than a real location, the book roll sign here serving in its function of determining abstract ideas. Indeed, the Chamber of Darkness is so clear a preoccupation of the *Book of Thoth* as to make it unlikely that the term refers primarily to *another* text. The Chamber of Darkness plays such a vital role in the symbolic economy of semiotic production in it that its sense could scarcely be exhausted by the ritual functions of a concrete locale. At Edfu, Seshat is called "Mistress of the Rope, Foremost One of the Chamber of Darkness." She is "Mistress of the Rope" because of her role in the ceremonial "stretching of the cord" when the foundations of temples were laid, a moment rich in cosmogonic significance. At B04, 7/22, the *Book of Thoth* speaks of "She-who-is-wise," presumably Seshat, as "this one who first established the Chamber [of Darkness], she being … a lamp of prophecy."

Kky or *kkw* in *ꜥt-kky* is not the quotidian darkness of night (*grḥ*), but the precosmic darkness personified in Kek and Kauket of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad. *Kky*-darkness is thus often associated with the Nun, the primeval oceanic chaos. In particular, *kky*-darkness suggests lack of differentiation; hence the term *kkw-sm3w*, 'utter' or, literally, 'united' darkness, which alludes to the precosmic condition in which "there were not two things."[3]

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[2] References to the *Book of Thoth* are according to the dominant manuscript witness for a section (B07 in this case), even when part of a line may be supplied by a different manuscript (here, e.g., C07.1).

[3] See "Excursus: The challenge of the nonexistent", 172–185 in Hornung 1982.

By means of the Chamber of Darkness, the initiated writer appropriates this night prior to any day: "My heart said to me: 'Return to it, namely, the Chamber of Darkness, so as to learn its boundary'."[4] In this respect, the Chamber pertains to the first externality, according to which the material dimension of text embodies aspects of the precosmic state. The Chamber of Darkness also pertains to the second externality, the underworld: "May I see the Chamber of Darkness, entering into the form of it, namely, the excellent limb of the underworld."[5] Through this aspect, the writer establishes a relationship with writers who went before and who are now 'excellent spirits' (*ʒḫw.w iqr*), transfigured from their mortality to become pure sites of enunciation: "the excellent spirits think in my heart."[6] Finally, the Chamber of Darkness is the locus of prophecy (*sr*), and hence is associated with utterances irreducible to human subjectivity, and which are conceived in the form of animals: "These dogs, these jackals, these baboons, these snakes, which prophesize according to their utterances […]."[7] "The jackal … speaks prophecies in the Chamber of Darkness […]."[8]

The Materiality of Texts

The Sea and the Marsh

Throughout the *Book of Thoth*, a speaker identified as 'He-of-Heseret' (a precinct sacred to Thoth) acts as one of two chief interlocutors of the aspirant to scribal initiation, who is designated as *mr-rḫ*, 'The-one-who-loves-knowledge'.

> The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: "What is writing [*sḫ*]? What are its places of storage [or 'explanation'[9]]? Compare it to its like, O overflowing one!"
>
> He speaks, namely, The-one-of-Heseret, he says: "Writing (or 'a book') is a sea [*ym*]. Its reeds [*ṯ.w*] are a shore [*ṯ*]. Hasten therein, little one, little one! Hurry to the shore! Count waves (?) (or 'difficult passages'). As for its body, it is a myriad [*ḥḥ*]. Do not be weak with regard to it (the sea) until its lord permits that you swim in it and he makes a perfect place (?) (or 'very fair wind') before you."[10]

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[4] B02, 9/5.
[5] B02, 9/12.
[6] L02, 1/6.
[7] B02, 11/3.
[8] C02.1, 5.
[9] See note on B02, 4/12, Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 210.
[10] B02, 4/12–15. Quack 2007 has presented a translation of the entire extant text of the

This particular exchange establishes a dialectic that is basic to the conceptualization of writing in the *Book of Thoth*, namely the identification of writing's abyssal quality with bodies of water, and its points of determinacy with the marsh plants, especially reeds and papyrus, that furnish the paper and writing instruments used by Egyptian scribes. Hence, at B02, 6/3, in response to an inquiry from 'The-one-who-loves-knowledge' concerning the "nature" and "shape" of the papyrus plant (*sm wt*), 'He-of-Heseret' says "They have named it the *ʿt*-plant," i.e., the scribe's reed brush, "namely, the *ʿt*-plant of life which the land of mooring will touch," echoing the wordplay between 'reed' and 'shore' in the passage from B02, 4. Reeds or pens also have the sense of a 'shore' of interpretive determinacy at B02, 5/3, where a series of symbols of interpretive difficulty includes "they have assigned reeds (?) which [they] cannot reach."

It cannot easily be determined to what degree we may regard diverse bodies of water mentioned in the *Book of Thoth* as primary symbols of writing like the 'sea' in B02, 4/13. Sometimes the waters in question are conceived as rivers or canals, and it is anticipated that they can be crossed, which makes them symbols of transition to a different plane or state of being, potentially transformative for the scribe as an individual, but in which the water itself is not thematic:

> He speaks, namely, The-one-of-Heseret, he says: "There are three seas to be crossed between them, namely, the corridors (?) of this land. Have you crossed the river in their ferries? Have you crossed their canals? Have you given the fare (?) to their ferryman? Have you crossed in their transport ship?"[11]

In other passages, however, the body of water cannot be crossed, and this shifts the focus onto the state of being on the waters, rather than the transit of them, which seems to pertain more directly to the experience of writing itself:

> I established my sailings, its … upon it (?). I have made sailings for a thousand years. Great are the lakes. I rowed in a canal with a sail (?) … without my being

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Book of Thoth often diverging significantly from Jasnow and Zauzich's, and fuller than theirs in some passages. While I have drawn upon Quack's translations where appropriate, Jasnow and Zauzich's translation must remain the standard for now, inasmuch as Quack's, due to the constraints of journal publication, could not include sufficient textual apparatus—in particular, transliterations of the demotic text as Quack reads it. It is to be hoped that a future edition of the text will incorporate Quack's readings. I have occasionally modified Jasnow and Zauzich's translations in accord with discussions in their notes on the text.

[11] L01.5, 10/10–12.

> able to reach (?) the … due to the width of the sea in its entirety. I was not able to reach them, the … its … so as to question (?) the sailors who row before it.[12]
>
> The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: "I have rowed in the circuits (?) of the sea (among?) the apprentices who are in the sacred bark … Fill my fingers (with) the rudder of the field-dwellers! I spent a thousand years while I rowed therein."[13]

The writer engages directly and physically with the 'waters' of the text by rowing upon them or swimming in them. Swimming and rowing are apparently interchangeable at B02, 4/15, where three manuscripts tell the writer to "swim" (*nb* or *nby*) in the sea of writing, a fourth (L01, 3/1) to "row" (*ḫny*) in it. B04, 8 speaks at length of certain "rowers … they worshipping (in) a mode of speech" (8–9). These 'rowers' seem to have achieved insight into the texts, so as to be able to direct others, but their own discourse presents an interpretive problem, i.e., they have taken on the qualities of their 'sea': "difficult are their [the rowers'] words; their explanations being too various to write, whereas it is they who commanded to them the loosening [explication] of the papyrus documents" (17–18). The scribal aspirant, too, seems to become native to this aquatic environment through the labor of interpretation: "I have explained them [the documents]. Since I have explained them, I will know how to worship [*snsn*, literally 'breathe']" (19).

The image from B02, 4 of 'counting waves', *tn tny.w*, where *tny.w* may equally refer to difficult textual passages (*itn.w*, 'obscurities, riddles'), suggests that resolution of difficulties in the limitless 'body' of the text is only to be achieved through a kind of immanent reckoning of and in the very turbulence itself. The contrast between the finitude of counting (*tn*) and the infinity (*ḫḫ*) of the text's 'body' indicates that there is no finality to interpretation. Indeed, the labor of interpreting existing texts is inseparable here from the production of new ones; thus it is virtually impossible to clearly distinguish 'writing' (*sḫ*) as the activity of creating new texts, from 'writing' as referring to the already existing text the scribe is trying to understand. The plants of the marsh not only furnish the paper and writing instruments of the scribe, but directly symbolize sign production: "Let me reveal a sea which is protected/holy … its … grow with turquoise,[14] while nine boats fare

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[12] B04, 6/12–15.

[13] B02, 15/1–3.

[14] Quack 2007, 282 suggests "its perimeter overgrown with turquoise". The symbolism of turquoise and lapis lazuli in the *Book of Thoth* is discussed further below.

north and south within it, concerning their souls [*b3.w*][15] and their creations, concerning their plants [*3ḏ*], which give birth to new words."[16] *3ḏ* here represents older Egyptian *i3r*, 'reed' as in, e.g., the netherworld locale known as the 'field of reeds', *sḫ.t i3r.w*. On the fundamental, 'material' level, so to speak, of the Egyptian semiotic, there is neither authorial intention, nor transcendent meaning, but only the elemental generativity of the textual environment, with its 'waves' and its 'plants that give birth to new words'.

Here we may adduce a comparison to some themes in Egyptian cosmogonies, which attribute a certain *self-organizing potential* to the precosmic waters and to the plants in them, particularly a floating mass of reeds. Hence, a cosmogonic text from the temple of Horus at Edfu states that

> [i]n a moment the water stabilized in passing by; the name is Stabilized-water … A (floating) mass of reed was seen by He-who-is-on-the-water … When the Beautiful-of-harpoon arrived, the reed separated (from the rest of the floating masses) as it went to them. And a floater of reed was stabilized in the water, something which the Hovering-one saw while encircling … When the reed was stabilized, the Falcon was supported ⟨by⟩ the floater of reed. The name of the floater is Support-of-Horus.[17]

In this cosmogony, a discrete 'floater' is separated from the main mass of reeds by the harpoon, the characteristic weapon of Horus, which is itself said to originate from the flood.[18] That which imposes determinacy—the cut—upon the floating mass is thus itself part of the same flow whose momentary stasis the floating reeds embody or express. Similarly, the demotic cosmogony edited and translated in Smith 2002 speaks of a floating thicket of reeds that comes to rest at Thoth's city of Hermopolis and upon which Ptah seats himself to carry out the further stages in the cosmogonic process.[19] A statement at the very beginning of this fragmentary text apparently draws symbolic value from the rhizomatic propagation of reeds or rushes: "It will grow, after being cut off, up until today."[20] In this text, the organizing principle immanent to the waters is personified as *p3-Šy p3 nwn*, 'Pshai in the Nun', the 'destiny' or 'fate' in the primaeval chaos, its *heimarmenē*.

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[15] 'Souls (*b3.w*) of Re' is established terminology elsewhere for sacred books, but the *Book of Thoth* seems to refer to texts as *b3*even without the theophoric modifier: "It is indeed possible that *b3.w* in the Book of Thoth generally refers to the sacred writings," (Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 28).

[16] B04, 8/2–5.

[17] Edfu VI 181,13–182,3; trans. Finnestad 1985, 27–29.

[18] Finnestad 1985, 28, n. 17.

[19] Fragment 1.

[20] 1.1.

The reed, as the scribe's brush or pen, gives life and mooring on the text's abyssal sea by establishing determinacy in the textual field: "The *seven* reeds [*ʿt.w*] which resemble the plow in the *seven* fields of 'He-who-understands-the-Two Lands' [Thoth]."[21] "If a magician (or 'scholar') raises (?) …, a field, the reeds encircle/enchant [*pḫr*] him (or 'it')."[22] "Let me hasten in proclaiming [the name of] him who is at the top of his brush (?), he who has ordered the earth with his scribal palette."[23] Similarly, the demotic Myth of the Sun's Eye speaks of "the papyrus stalk which is found in the hand of all Goddesses, which signifies 'We are the mistresses of records [*gnw.t*], which are [made of] papyrus [*ḏmʿ*]'."[24]

On this semiotic plane, however, the power of text to clarify and to obscure are inseparable. Hence when Horus, embodying civilization and sovereignty, is born, Isis conceals him in the marshes, in the locus of textuality, and Thoth instructs the marsh dwellers to "confuse the ways of those who rebel against him [Horus] until he has taken for himself the throne of the Two Lands".[25] Thoth wields the power of the text's materiality to overwhelm its sense, a power akin to Seth's and thus a way to resist him.

The Net

A net that is identified as the net of Shentait and of Shai (an epithet referring in this text to Seshat) is treated as virtually synonymous with writing itself, as can be seen in the following text:

> The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: "I have fished (with) the net of Shentait, Shai … the net of …" The Opener upon his Standard,[26] he says: "What is the taste of the prescription[27] of writing? What is this net?"[28]

In the peculiar terminology of the quote, the net is identified with writing's *tpy pḫr*, the 'taste' or 'experience' of its 'formula'. The net referred to in

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[21] B02, 4/16. There is likely a reference here to the sevenfold feature in Seshat's headdress.

[22] B02, 2/1.

[23] B02, 8/15.

[24] 6, 10–11: De Cenival 1988, 15 (trans. mine).

[25] § 91 in Borghouts 1978 (68).

[26] Jasnow and Zauzich read this name, occurring frequently in the latter parts of the Book of Thoth, as *Wpy-tp-ỉ3.t=f*, 'He-has-judged, namely, the-one-who-is-upon-his-back', and consider it an Osirian epithet, though it is otherwise unattested. Quack, on the other hand, reads *Wpy-tp-ỉ3.t=f*, 'the Opener upon his Standard', an abbreviated but readily recognizable epithet of Wepwawet, and is likely correct, in my opinion (Quack 2007, 259).

[27] *Pḫr.t*, a 'recipe' or 'formula', related to *pḫr*, to perambulate, encircle, encompass (see above quote from B02, 2/1). See the discussion of this term in Ritner 1993, 54–67.

[28] B02, 14/6–7.

the *Book of Thoth* is the word *ʒty.t*, from older Egyptian *i̯ʒd.t*, but it also apparently incorporates the semantic field of the old Egyptian *ibṯ*.[29] It seems to be the same net spoken of in the resurrection literature, that is the net trapping fish or birds. This image seems to symbolize souls in some state of passivity.

The special complex of associations contributed to this symbol by the *Book of Thoth* serve to illuminate this symbol in other contexts, as well as being illuminated by them. Thoth and Seshat preside over an important sanctuary at Hermopolis known as the 'House of the Net' (*Ḥt-ibṯ*), and references to nets, to hunting, and to trapping fish or fowl occur throughout the *Book of Thoth*, though unfortunately often falling in particularly damaged sections. It is clear, however, that this text associates the activity of writing in the closest fashion with the activities of hunting wetland creatures with nets or snares. Agricultural analogies to the work of the writer are also clearly present.[30] But while these are fairly straightforward, if not in their details then in their basic metaphorical intentions, the symbolic context of the writer as netting or trapping is richer and more complex.

In Utterance 555 of the Pyramid Texts, the king affirms "I am hale and my flesh is hale; I am hale and my garment is intact, I have gone up to the sky as Montu, I have gone down as a soul which he entraps, as a soul which he makes divine."[31] Faulkner identifies the 'he' in the last sentence as Thoth, who is mentioned a few lines above, while Allen leaves the reference ambiguous: "He has gone up to the sky as Montu, he has gone down as the *ba* he has netted."[32] Without attempting a comprehensive interpretation of this passage, it is clear that it associates the net (*ibṯ*) with the trapping of souls (*bʒ.w*) and in turn with embodiment, and that Thoth and Montu are involved. A ritual involving the netting of migratory birds is depicted at the temples of Karnak, Edfu and Esna.[33] This ritual identifies the birds with nomadic enemies of the state, and involves Horus, in a martial role perhaps comparable to that of Montu in the operation from the Pyramid Texts, along with Khnum and Thoth or Seshat. This rite shares the ambivalent character of the operation from the Pyramid Texts. Khnum, for example, is associated with hunting, but also with embodiment, for he famously crafts

[29] Jasnow & Zauzich 2005, 168, note on C04.1, 10.

[30] See, especially, B02, 5/1–11.

[31] § 528 in Allen's edition.

[32] Faulkner 215. Note that Allen does not convert the statements about the king into the first-person.

[33] Studied comprehensively in Alliot 1946.

the frames of mortals upon his potter's wheel. The equation in some fashion of hunting or war with mortal embodiment is known in other cultures.[34] But the presence of Thoth or Seshat creates a triangular structure which makes it possible to articulate the otherwise implicit ambivalence in the symbol of the net.

The resurrection literature, on the one hand, offers spells to prevent the deceased being trapped in the net him/herself, an operation which generally involves demonstrating knowledge of the symbolically pregnant names for different parts of the net or the other equipment of the netherworld fishermen. In the resurrection literature, the ambiguity with respect to fish and birds as victims of the net seems to be resolved with some consistency in favor of fish. It is noteworthy that *ḫ3t*, 'corpse', is written with an Oxyrhynchus fish.

On the other hand, tomb decorations include bucolic images of the deceased participating in fishing and fowling.[35] One is clearly either *netter* or *netted*. But one text we possess seems to speak directly to the net's ambivalence. A text edited and translated by Dimitri Meeks, which supplies the mythical aetiology for a Letopolitan ritual called the 'Wielding of Staves' (*ḫrp ḥwʿ.w*), tells of Horus using a net (*ibt*; *r3-i3d.t*) to capture the souls (*b3.w*) of his enemies (*sbiw*), but instead he captures the 'excellent souls' (*b3.w iqrw*) and, indeed, the *ba* of his father Osiris.[36] Horus strikes the *ba* of his father, and Thoth joins him, before apparently realizing their mistake, and proceeding to treat Osiris in the 'House of Gold' (*Ḥt-nbw*), which refers in general fashion to the workshop of the sculptors. *Nb*, 'gold', is the nexus of an important series of puns in Egyptian, all marked by the presence, sometimes straightforwardly etymological, sometimes allusive, of the bead collar sign.[37] The series includes *nbi* 'to melt metal', 'cast objects in metal', 'gild', and by extension to model or fashion something generally; *nbi*, 'flame', specifically the divine flame of the uraeus; *nb*, 'grain', perhaps metaphorical from its golden color; but also, intriguingly, *nbi*, 'to swim'.[38] The floating mass of reeds that features in the Edfu cosmogony is also, one may note, called *nbi.t*. This

[34] The Hellenic Artemis is associated with both hunting and childbirth, for example; for a discussion of the symbolic association of hunting and childbirth in certain Bantu traditions, see de Heusch 1982, 164–170.

[35] On positive depictions of fishing and fowling, see, e.g., Binder 2000; on the dangers of the net for the deceased, see Zandee 1960, 226–234.

[36] Meeks 2006, § 19. The translation 'Wielding of Staves' (*ḫrp ḥwʿ.w*) is preferable in my opinion to Meeks' "consécration des batons." See Egberts 1995, 112–114.

[37] Gardiner's S12 and S13.

[38] Wb 2, 236.10.

semantic extension is important for our purposes, because it relates Osiris cast into the net and Osiris immersed (more commonly expressed by the term *mḥi*)[39] with Osiris *cast into a form*, in this case the mummy-wrappings (*wt*) and sarcophagus (*nb-ʿnḫ*) in which Thoth in the Letopolitan text puts, not Osiris as a whole being, but his *ba*, his 'soul' or 'manifestation',[40] which is then in turn placed in the fields (*ȝḫ.t*).

Meeks, drawing on Cauville, relates this operation to the ritual creation of Osirian simulacra, which in itself extends the symbolic complex pertaining to embodiment into a semiotic register bordering that in which the *Book of Thoth* operates, where *bȝ.w* are no longer strictly 'souls', but *texts*, which are in a sense 'images' as well.[41] Meeks' Letopolitan myth, like the passage from the *Book of Thoth* at the head of this section, invokes Shentait.[42] The simulacrum of Osiris created by Thoth "is there to this day … Shentait and Merkhetes in his private space [*m ḏsrw=f*]," (VIII, 10). In the Letopolitan rite, Shentait appears, as is typical, with Merkhetes, the two being identified by Cauville with Isis and Nephthys respectively, while in the *Book of Thoth*, Shentait is apparently juxtaposed with Seshat (*Šȝy*). The name 'Shentait' is sometimes derived from *šni*, 'to encircle', on which the author of the *Book of Thoth* appears to pun at B02, 14/6, where 'The-one-who-loves-knowledge' states "I have fished (with) the net [*šn*, lit. 'encircler'] of Shentait." Another line of thought relates the name to *šni*, 'to suffer', seeing in Shentait the widowed Isis. Shentait is also known by the epithet *msn*(*t*), 'the spinner/plaiter', which in addition to evoking the net, also, as Cauville points out, alludes to *msi*, 'to give birth', as well as to *msḫnt*, the place of giving birth.[43]

The net traps *bas*, we might say, in the condition of passivity, in the condition of being objects, instead of subjects, as we read in the *Book of the Dead*:

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[39] Vernus 1991 argues that Osiris *mḥi* is not Osiris 'drowned', but 'immersed' or 'adrift'. Note the metaphorical extension of *mḥi*, which allows one to speak, as in English, of being 'immersed' in thought or concern about something (Wb 2, 120.13–16; 122.11).

[40] On the concept of the *ba* generally, see Zabkar 1968.

[41] Meeks 2006, 97 n. 263, 236. Mention should be made here, with all due caution, of the provocative interpretation by Stricker of the 'Book of the Earth' (the critical edition of which is now Roberson 2012) and related texts as 'embryological', i.e., pertaining to the process of embodiment, with far-reaching consequences for the relationship between native Egyptian thought and the devaluation of materiality in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Stricker 1992, 60; 1994, 110–112); for a balanced appraisal of Stricker's thesis, see Duquesne 1993.

[42] See Cauville 1981.

[43] Cauville 1981, 23–24. Cf. Stricker's remark that "During the pregnancy of the mother the body of the child is woven in the womb," a function which he relates to Hathor-Tayet (Stricker 1992, 60).

> O ye fishers, children and their fathers, catchers who go about in the midst of the waters. Ye shall not catch me with this net of yours wherewith ye catch the torpid; ye shall not seine me with this seine of yours wherewith ye seine wanderers.[44]

'Torpid' or 'inert' ones are *nnyw*, to which compare *nny*, 'to subside', which is said of flood waters. To be able to avoid being netted, to wield the net instead, is to be able to give names to its parts and to the elements of this activity. In the Letopolitan myth, *bas* are trapped in the net without discrimination, the enemies of Horus and the 'excellent *bas*' alike. For the latter, however, represented by the *ba* of Osiris, Thoth fashions a simulacrum. From the net, therefore, emerges an *image* of the 'excellent' *ba*. The net is thus the link between *bas* as 'souls' and *bas*, 'texts', and the ambivalence of the net in general explicable by the ambivalence of the process of the soul's *becoming an image*.

In lacunose passages such as V01, 3 and V01, 4 of the *Book of Thoth*, we see constant references to nets, hunting, fishing and bird trapping, along with the phrase *grg n3 b3.w*, 'supplying' or 'equipping' the *bas*, which Quack assimilates to the homophonous *grg*, 'catching' or 'hunting', in recognition of the wordplay inherent in the author's juxtaposition of the two terms.[45] In the culmination of this passage, a female divinity is introduced, who is identified as a huntress and a trapper.[46] This divinity appears to be Seshat, inasmuch as V01, 4/17 refers to a "lake of life which is before Shai [Seshat]."

There is also an erotic dimension to the hunting/trapping/writing symbolic complex: "The *sšty.t* ['secret place'?] of the harem does not trap (?) like the one who loves enchantment/writing [*mr-spḫl.w*]."[47] The *mr-spḫl.w* is likely a divinity of writing: compare B02, 3/9, which refers either to "Mut, the great one of the enchanters/writers [*spḫl.w*]," the "great one of the enchantresses," or the "Great Mother of the writings," who could be Seshat herself. There is also sexual symbolism apparent in the wordplays at B02, 6/5–6: "Let one open for me the well/nurse [*ḫnm.t*] which unites with the wise ones that I may drink from its sweet water. The vulva [*3tty.t*] which is as a nurse [*ll.t*] for the learned one, may I enter into its doorposts," where note the echo of *3ty*, 'net', in *3tty*, 'vulva'. This is in accord with the apparent association of the net with the conditions of mortal embodiment. The

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[44] Spell 153, trans. Allen 1974.
[45] See, e.g., Quack 2007, 266; 269.
[46] C04.1, 12–13.
[47] L01.5, 10/9.

identification of Seshat, Goddess of Writing, with hunting, fishing and bird-netting in the *Book of Thoth*, the role of the *bas* in this text, and the symbolic aspirations of the would-be scribe, are all explicable primarily on the basis of the symbolic transposition of the field of mortal embodiment into the field of the text and the becoming-sign of the *ba*.

A further dimension of this process emerges at B02, 15, where the aspirant, who states he has "spent a thousand years row[ing]" amidst the "field-dwellers" (*sḫt.w*), "catching fish", begins recounting a series of items he has received from magical animals in this land:

> A baboon gave to me a spear of sixty cubits/hands. He says to me: "It is their *wt3.t ht*." A dog/jackal gave to me a block of limestone. He says to me: "It is their net of trapping (?)." An ibis gave to me a cloth/sail of cattle-leather, while its mast is a skin of lion-skin. A dog gave to me a mummy-cloth (with) hieroglyphs. He says to me: "It is their … of hunting."[48]

It is clear that the animals are imparting to the aspirant the very sort of knowledge which the operator in the resurrection literature utters either to avoid being trapped by the netherworld fishers, or in order to construct the netherworld ferry-boat.[49] For example, in B02, 15/6, the aspirant receives from a baboon a spear (*in-nw*) which is identified as a *wt3.t ht*, which is apparently the *wḏ*, "steering-post", or *wḏyt*, "helm" of a ship, belonging perhaps to the "field-dwellers" of B02, 15/2. The older forms of this word occur in the *Coffin Texts* in just such a context. Thus, in *CT* spell 398, for constructing the netherworld ferry-boat, the deceased states of the boat that "Her steering posts [*wḏ*] are the elder Gods who preside over Nedit," that is, the place where Osiris fell victim to Seth.[50] In spell 404, the deceased, constructing the ferryboat in the presence of the ferryman of the Field of Reeds, says "The name of the steering-posts [*wḏwt*] is 'Reeds [*ʿ3ʿw*][51] of the Field of the God'."[52] The spells from the *Coffin Texts* and the passages from the *Book of Thoth* do not stand in a simple inverse relationship, however, because the symbolic economy in question applies in the *Book of Thoth* to a semiotic field of reference: the block of limestone suitable for making a statue or inscribed

[48] B02, 15/6-B04, 6/9–10.

[49] *Coffin Texts* spells 473–481 (the net and fish-trap spells, of which there is a later version in spell 153 of the *Book of the Dead*); 395–403 (the ferry-boat spells). Compare, in particular, the detailed inventory of the parts of the ferry-boat in *CT* spell 398, while spells 473 and 474 have the most detailed inventories of parts of the net.

[50] V, 127.

[51] Cf. *CT* spell 268, "Becoming Sobek, Lord of the Winding Waterway" (IV, 3b; 4e).

[52] V, 189.

temple block, the inscribed mummy-cloth for accomplishing the transition from inert object to "resurrected" subject. Note, in this respect, that a class of words for "form" in Egyptian—*twt*, *ki*, et al.—are distinguishable by the use of the "mummy" determiner, denoting a static, ideal form, while the term *ḫpr*, "to become", signified by the scarab beetle, generates a distinct term for forms, *ḫprw*, which denotes living "transformations", but takes the mummy determiner in order to denote reified stages of becoming, modes of being arrested from a living flux.[53]

The scribe aspires to the highest degree of form-giving agency, to be a *speaker* as well as a sign; hence B02, 8/10–11 complements formalization as reification—"may I become like unto [*twtw.y*, from *twt*] a monument [or 'statue', 'sign', *mnw*]" (10)—with fully personalized linguistic agency—"I have completed the action of the ⟨royal⟩ funerary offering/of creation[54] through pronouncing my name in the darkness, while I fight with the *bas*" (11).

Accordingly, parts of the netherworld vessel are identified with body parts or equipment of Gods and semi-divine agencies, and an identification of the vessel itself with the resurrection body of the deceased is implied, e.g., by the identification of Khnum, the God who fashions the bodies of humans and animals before birth. But in the *Book of Thoth* it appears that the vessel to be constituted, which is explicitly semiotic, is also explicitly identified by the aspirant with the parts of his/her *own* body.[55]

Hence, we find the *wt3*, steering-oar post, previously encountered at B02, 15/6, where the aspirant stated that a baboon gave him a spear that is "their *wt3.t ht*.". We see it again at B04, 6/10–11, where the aspiring scribe states that "(As for) my limbs, it is the ones of the *wt3* which steer (or "hunt") my heart for them. As for (their) net [*šn3*], my tongue supplies [*glg*, hence suggesting *glg*, "hunt" as well] one of their …"[56] Similarly, at B02, 3/11–15, the process of acquiring understanding of the sacred texts is linked to "find[ing] the gathering over eye, ear, heart, tongue, hand, sole of the foot" (12), in terms evoking the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, which has

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[53] For the use of the "mummy" determiner see Gardiner's A53.

[54] See the discussion of the disputed reading at Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 246.

[55] *Coffin Texts* spell 397 (V, 83).

[56] Regarding [*šn3*]: it is better logically than the alternative *šn*, 'hair', as acknowledged by Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 313, though note in any case B02, 3/6, "May he make a sailing in the sea of *šn*ʿ," to which the editors compare the "hair-lake" of spell 98 of the *Book of the Dead*, a ferry-boat spell; wordplay between *šnw*, "net", and *šnw*, "hair:", is common in any case, cf. *CT* spell 474 and Faulkner's n. 28.

as its goal the animation of statues and other images, not least of which is the resurrection-body of the deceased.[57] Instead of constituting a new vessel/body in the netherworld, therefore, as is the task of the operator in the resurrection literature, it appears that scribal aspirants in the *Book of Thoth* lend their *living bodies* to the semiotic enterprise.

Charcoal

Most of the references to the materiality of texts in the *Book of Thoth* pertain to water, or to the reeds, which supply paper and pens. An exception are several passages which speak of charcoal, an ingredient in ink. References to charcoal, and to burning, add an elemental polarity to the prevailing "wetness" of semiosis in the *Book of Thoth*, but also express, on the axis of the materiality of texts, the intersection with the axis of relation to the antecedent subject which is the topic of the next section.

At V01, 3/5, it appears that "container of coal" is a synonym for the Chamber of Darkness: "[… Chamber of] Darkness … spend the night, spend the day in the container of coal. You are to find scribal equipment …". At B02, 3/6, we read "May he row in the river of coals." The editors suggest a reference here to the "Isle of Flame" or "Lake of Fire" known from the afterlife literature, but there is no precedent for a "river of coals" in this connection, and the context suggests ink again.[58] The next line reads "Effective is the chapel of the *bas*. Effective is the one who takes possession for himself of the storeroom of the spirits." The *bas* here are texts, the 'spirits' (*iḫy.w*, *3ḫ* in older Egyptian) their authors. B02, 5/4 again links coal to storerooms: "As for these storerooms, they are overflowing with coal: their meanings, a hand which works."

This line belongs to a passage dense with symbols for writing: there is a reference to seed-corn in thick-walled storerooms, and to interpretive difficulty: "The second body thereof [i.e., of the thick-walled storerooms containing seed-corn] which acts for them as master, they have assigned reeds (?) [*qm3y*] which [they] cannot reach."[59] A different manuscript has: "The second body thereof which has acted for them as the masters of the fields of reeds (?). Another version: they are the Red and Black which cannot

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[57] For Morenz 1973, e.g., the primary function of the Opening of the Mouth is "to vitalize the image", and its performance upon mummies derived from this (155–156).

[58] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 195–196.

[59] B02, 5/3.

be reached."[60] This kind of internal glossing (*ky ḏ*, 'another version') signals multiple layers of symbolism. The concept of a "second body" or "second party", *ḫ.t 2.nw*, occurs earlier at B02, 2/3, where a reference to the writers of the past is explicit: "As for the magicians/scholars who came into existence earlier, do they not have a second party?" Here, the copyist has glossed the term "second party" as "helper", i.e., apprentice, disciple (*ḫlʿ*, read *ḫry-ʿ*). The "second body" is thus one who receives a transmitted text. Here, however, the "sea" of the text is one whose 'reeds' or 'shore' cannot be reached: it resists interpretation; accordingly, the gloss that reads "They are the Red and the Black which cannot be reached," seems to refer to the two colors of ink scribes used in a finished text.

The "storerooms overflowing with coal" are thus texts, pregnant with meaning ('seed-corn'; note also B02, 4/16: "The seven reeds [*ṯ.w*] which resemble the plow in the seven fields of 'He-who-understands-the-Two-Lands' [Thoth]"), but stubborn in their opacity, their darkness. We find again, however, the stress on the immanence of interpretation in the phrase "their meanings, a hand which works." The answer to the opacity of the "storerooms overflowing with coal" is to write one's way out: "meaning" (*ḏ*) is nothing other than the working hand. Hence just below we read, "The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: 'Let one say to me the work of the fist, the hand which labors on the divine writings'."[61] The reference to a fist grasping a pen here evokes Atum's primordial act of masturbation; his fist is personified as the Goddess Nebet-Hetepet, who is possibly mentioned elsewhere in the text.[62] Just as the fluid medium of the text provides both the problem of interpretation (waves, depths) and the means of its resolution (reeds, papyrus), so too the charcoal is at once the symbol of interpretive opacity and of the ink in which the successful interpretation expresses itself.

A further dimension of the symbolism of charcoal in the *Book of Thoth* comes from the process of burning by which it is produced. B02, 5/5 says of the "storerooms overflowing with coal" that the one who lays hold of

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[60] L01, 3/5.

[61] B02, 5/12.

[62] Read by Jasnow and Zauzich as *nb.w-ḥtp.w* and translated as 'lords/possessors of offerings', but they express ambivalence (373); Quack is noncommittal, rendering simply 'Neb-Hetep'. Notable occurrences are especially B07, 2–3, possibly as part of the book's extended title: "protection of purity of Osiris Naneferhotep, the great god … unification of his body for (?) the lords of offerings … before (the goddess) Shai (= Seshat)," and V01, 3/13: "He opened his mouth. He replied to his disciples (?) (regarding) the lords of offerings (?) the *bas* … in (or 'of') the net (?) …".

them without having experienced "heat" (*ḥmm*), "their roasting burns his fingers." Here the charcoal, symbol for the opacity of the text, evokes the "heat" of a process in the subject: experience the "heat" upon one's own initiative, lest one be "burnt". The editors note a homophony here between *ḥmm*, "heat", and *šmm*, "harvest", another frequent metaphor in the text. This seems to pertain to another passage: "As for his beloved, he being in complete darkness (or "the Chamber of Darkness"), the teaching will light for him a torch … the one who lives through eternity, they will burn him to his (very) bones. They will make a burning in his lips. They will set his limbs ablaze. She will make … to his heart before the chamber which has cooked his *kky* … the initiated ones/torches will draw near before him."[63] *Kky* here is apparently a part of the body that comes in pairs. Quack suggests "ears".[64] It seems that the fate writers seek is to be consumed in their writing, leaving behind only an inky trace. Their living speech (lips), their understanding (ears), live eternally as this "storeroom" of coal, which is also a river of coal, however, that flows through their "second body", the interpretive partner they possess in the living scribe.

Dialogue with the Dead: The Textual Underworld

The axis of relation to the speaking subjects who came before, the prior sites of utterance, seems to be defined in the *Book of Thoth* on one end by the *bas* with whom, or for whom, the writer must *fight*, and the transfigured 'spirits' (*3ḫ.w*) who *inform* speech/writing, and who lie beyond such agonism, at the other.

> And I shall bow the shoulder under the papyrus roll of the great god, and go (as) the possessor of the wealth of the land of the father. Let me go into it, namely, the chamber which is without singing/reading, and you should cause that I discover the form of the ones who are in it. May I see the great and the small (ones), the apprentices who shut their mouths among them. May I see the Chamber of Darkness, entering into the form of it, namely, the excellent limb of the underworld (?). My heart said to me: "Associate with her, namely, the excellent one who is in the room of *3kr.t*."[65]

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[63] B02, 2/12–16.

[64] Quack 2007, 269.

[65] B02, 9/9–13. A reference to Aker (*3kr*), the primordial divinity of earth, or to the affiliated "Earth Gods" (Akeru), as in, e.g., *Coffin Texts* spell 474, one of the net spells: "I know the name of the fishermen who use it [the net]; they are the earth-gods who preceded all the world and who preceded Geb," (VI, 23; trans. Faulkner 1977, 113); alternately, a form of *Igeret*, a term for the netherworld, from *gr*, 'to be silent'.

At B02, 8/11, the aspirant states "I have completed the action of the funerary offering/of creation[66] through pronouncing my name in the darkness, while I fight with the *bas*," and at B02, 9/16 "May I arm myself with them, my weapons, that I may fight in the Chamber of Darkness." The ambiguity concerning whether the aspirant means to fight alongside *bas* who are good or against *bas* who are evil is not important, for our purposes, to resolve. In the Letopolitan myth discussed in I.B., Horus wields a net that traps "excellent" *bas* as well as the *bas* of his enemies. Indeed, the field expressed by *bas*, "manifestations, souls", and by extension "texts", seems conflictual in its very nature. The aspirant states at B02, 10/1, speaking of unspecified enemies, "May I be full of *ba* against them. May I bring about their end, without forgetting the destruction of them (?)," to which "He-of-Heseret" replies, "Slaughterers (are) these, O you who love knowledge, in the darkness. The lord of the *bas* of Re [i.e., the texts] (is) the messenger of prophecy."[67]

Bas and *akhu* are paralleled at B02, 3/7: "Effective is the chapel of the *bas*. Eff[ective is] the one who takes possession for himself of the storeroom of the spirits." The editors remark that "It is tempting to understand the *b3.w* as referring to sacred texts and the *iḫy.w* as denoting the authors of those compositions."[68] The relationship to these spirits can well be characterized as intimate: "[…] while the excellent spirits think (?) in my heart … […]" (L02, 1/6); "[…] … […] companion (?) of the spirits."[69] It is conceivable that the *bas* with which or for which one must fight in some fashion *belong to* the spirits: "Embark me on the ferry of the excellent spirits! Raise up fighting for me with their *bas*."[70] If they do, however, the "spirits" nevertheless, for their part, unlike the *bas*, inhabit a stabilized, even beatific place: "The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: 'I have entered … the (?) field of turquoise which forms a shade for the spirits'."[71] Turquoise (*mfk3.t*), evoking for Egyptians at once

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[66] See Jasnow and Zauzich's note (Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 246) on this line; it is a question either of a "difficult" (243) writing of the name for the mortuary offering prayer, the *ḥtp-ti-nswt*, or a phrase with *qm3*, 'create, creation'. (Quack 2007, 274 does not offer a reading of the difficult phrase at line 11, but concurs with a similarly problematic reading of *ḥtp-ti-nswt* at B02, 8/3.)

[67] B02, 10/2.

[68] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 197. Note, among other passages, B02, 10/6: "His *oudjat*-eye saw before the road. He led at the hall of the divine spirits," which appears to be glossed by L01.2, 6/19: "[…] … path of their (?) writings […]."

[69] B06, 1/20.

[70] B02, 15/4.

[71] B04, 7/2.

the blue sky and the green of growing plants, is literally synonymous with a kind of joy associated especially with the theophany of Hathor.[72] The "field of turquoise" occurs again in frag. B04, 9/21, which Jasnow and Zauzich see as possibly attaching to L01.11, 12/16, which would then refer to a uraeus "giving birth to breaths [*nf*] in a field of turquoise," these being divine flames[73] which undergo certain transformations, perhaps into the forms of certain animals, in a series of poorly preserved lines.[74] These are themes that will concern us more in the following section, concerning the relation to animality. For now, it suffices to note that the location that is a resting place for the spirits is also the site of a *productivity* on the part of certain fully divine agencies.

The spirits may be linked to the scribal function of "prophet" (*sl3*, from older Egyptian *sr*) as the *bas* are to the function of "craftsman" (*ḥm*). The latter term is only with difficulty distinguished from *ḥm*, "hunter/fisherman".[75] This helps to clarify somewhat the ambiguity in the relationship between these functions in the *Book of Thoth*. Generally in this text "craftsman" is a broader term encompassing the office of "prophet" as well. Thus, B02, 2/1 states: "They reveal another box of divine secrets. Their craftsman is the one who interprets/prophesizes [*sl3*] about them." In one passage, however, it seems impossible not to construe an opposition between the "craftsman" and the "prophet". The subject of the passage B02, 2/2 is perhaps the "magician/scholar" (*rḫ-iḫy*) of B02, 2/1, who if he "raises/enlists [*ṯsy*] … a field," then "the reeds [*ʿry*, suggesting pens] encircle/enchant [*pḥr*] him/it": "He has supplied [*grg*, hence also suggesting 'hunted, captured'] the *bas* of Re [the sacred texts]. Do they [the texts] not serve the one who desires (to be) a prophet, since (or 'so that') he will not be able to become a craftsman?"[76] In a broken context, we find the phrase "craftsmen of the House of Life and the Khnum-builder gods."[77] The association of the craftsmen here with the *ḫnm.w*, a class of deities associated with Khnum, who fashions the netherworld ferry-boat and the bodies of mortal creatures, underscores that the craftsman, in the narrow sense, belongs to the symbolic complex of writing as hunting and trapping, and the prophet may be contrasted to the crafts-

[72] "La joie-*mfk*, '*joie-céleste*' selon certains, fut considerée par les Égyptiens comme la joie divine par excellence," (Aufrère 1982–1983, 11–12).

[73] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 480.

[74] L01.11, 12/17–21.

[75] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 32.

[76] B02, 2/2.

[77] L02, 2/12.

man on this basis, namely that the prophet represents the accomplishment and transcendence of this activity.[78]

This in itself relates the prophet structurally to the spirits, for the spirits, in a netherworld context, represent the successfully transfigured deceased. The term *3ḫw* is literally something effective or actualized, from the verb *3ḫ*, to be effective or, more concretely, to be bright or shine. Hence the *3ḫt*, or "horizon", is concretely the place where the sunrise or sunset occurs, but is also the 'horizon' of theophany in general; *3ḫw* are spells, or effective utterances; and *s3ḫw* the specific category of spells (known as "glorification" spells) that transform the deceased into "effective" ones, that is, into "spirits"—"spiritualizations". *3ḫw* can also refer to an artist's creative powers, as in the Instructions of Ptahhotep: "No artist has command of his *3ḫw*," i.e., no artist is in perfect control of their talent.[79] Artistic skill, like magical effectiveness or theophany, is an intensification of the basic state of effectiveness or agency. This is naturally the kind of agency with which the *Book of Thoth* is particularly concerned, and within that narrower category, writing above all: "The scribal palette is the beautiful praise which (is) in the arm of (the god) *ir* ['to do'] in its true name."[80] Writing is the highest and purest form of agency, of 'doing'.

The process that results in a deceased individual becoming a "spirit" renders the individual "true of voice" (*mȝʿ-ḫrw*), "justified", as it is commonly translated. An individual thus transfigured has become, from the viewpoint of the scribal initiation, a source of utterance with whom it is appropriate for the writer to enter into the most intimate relationship: "the excellent spirits think in my heart."[81] This statement about the spirits should be related to certain statements in the text referring specifically to the position of "prophet", such as B02, 6/4: "The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: 'Let one command for me the word which gives birth to the prophets that I may cause that they become pregnant in my flesh'," and B02, 1/3–4: "Control (?) over the heart and tongue is that which causes a prophet to come about. The field is

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[78] To the multiple Khnum deities of this passage might be compared the two "Shesmu-creatures" of V01, 3/3: "[…] 2 *sšm*-animals (?), they serving the scribal palette with wine (?) …". Shesmu is associated in the resurrection literature both with supplying meat and wine to the deceased, and with the processing, so to speak, of the objectified souls; e.g., in spell 273 of the Coffin Texts, Shesmu is present with his knife to gut the "fish" caught in the net of the netherworld fishers, and cook them in his cauldron, which is called a "woman" (CT VI 8d).

[79] P. Prisse, 56. For a general discussion of the *3ḫw*, see Ritner 1993, 30–35; a useful review of recent literature can be found in Barbash 2011, 36–39.

[80] B02, 5/6.

[81] L02, 1/6.

that which gives birth to her children which are as one (?). Have respect (?) for the offspring!" This relationship to the *akhu* is also denoted by the hermeneutic 'second body': "As for the magicians/scholars who came into existence earlier, do they not have a second party/body?"[82]

The *bas* are turbulent forces that belong to the *now* of the text, hence they are 'caught' in its "net"; to the degree that one is sufficiently "full of *ba*", one is also the catcher in this economy. One can glimpse this economy of strength at B02, 2/7–11:

> … hieroglyphic sign, craftsman. Let him who is strong of arm be at rest (?)! The … breath (?) … Does … the servants of Horus, they raising a troop more numerous than the enchantments of the heart? They will … they will flatter (?) the strong one. They will bow down to the craftsman who makes up 1,000 [L01: 'They will assign (?) his servants to the craftsman who amounts to 1,000'] … and myriads bow before him.

The occurrence of Horus here evokes the Letopolitan bird-netting myth, while the isolated term "breath", *nf*, alludes to the fiery breath of the uraeus. While no connected sense can be made of the fragments, their tone evokes the turbulent realm of contending forces that arise as the cosmos develops.

Noteworthy in this respect is a passage among the unplaced fragments, where repeated occurrences of "strong" and "the strong one" (*qny*, *qnw*) at C04.4, 2/x+4 and the parallel L01.8, x+4–5 is followed shortly after by "The evil injury … of Shu concerning his father, he making a disturbance," (C04.4, 2/x+7) then, further on, isolated occurrences of "rebel" (*bks*) (C04.4, 2/x+15), and then further occurrences of "strength" and "to raise fighting" (C04.4, 2/x+26–27), while the intervening line "to see for the work of the hands (with) a reed" (C04.4, 2/x+21) assures us that the passage is concerned with writing throughout. The passage suggests the painful dimension of cosmogenesis from the viewpoint of Atum, the primordial monad and father of Shu, as expressed memorably in spell 175 of the *Book of the Dead*, in which Atum complains to Thoth concerning "the Children of Nut," i.e., the generations of the divine procession concerned with the plane of mortal being (Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Seth):

> They have made war, they have stirred up turmoil, they have committed wrongs, they have started rebellions, they have made carnage, they have put under guard. Moreover, they have made large into small in all that ⟨I⟩ have done. Give thou effective (help, O) Thoth,

[82] B02, 2/3.

to which Thoth replies:

> Thou shalt not experience (further) wrongs … Their years have been shortened … since they have made a mockery of secrecy in all that thou hast done.

The operator of the spell adds:

> I am thy palette, (O) Thoth; I have brought thee thy water-bowl. I am not among these who betray their secrets. No betrayal shall come about through me.[83]

It is not a question here of secrecy in a mundane sense, but of the ontological "unconcealing" of mortal, transitory, particular or accidental being as such, which Thoth has the power to remedy, and the operator identifies with Thoth in this activity. Hence the spell evokes Re's withdrawal from the "rebellious" mortal world in the *Book of the Celestial Cow*, Re's final act being to empower Thoth to occupy the gap in divine immediacy through his works. The distance between the primordial moments of cosmogenesis and the articulated cosmos is also expressed by the going away and coming back to Atum of his "eye" (*irt*, agency), personified as his daughter Tefnut. This symbolic complex is evoked in the passage from the *Book of Thoth* by the line "… he making the companions of the eye, to remain in saying a spell (?) …".[84]

While the *bas*, therefore, belong on the side of the text's materiality, as the material aspect of psyche or the psychical part of materiality, the text as *3ḫ*, "effective", is the product of a transfigured subjectivity. The *ba* is not an authorial intentionality. *Bas* are rather a pre-personal field of potencies.

The nature of that which is *akh* can be glimpsed, I believe, in the literal sense of a mysterious epithet applied to the scribal aspirant in the *Book of Thoth*: "son of *wn-im3*". At B07, 1, we may have the opening rubric of the text: "The words which cause a youth to learn and a son of *wn-im3* to question." No translation has been proposed for this phrase, but the translation which offers itself at first glance for *wn-im3* is "who was there." Jasnow and Zauzich remark, "*Wn-im* may mean, of course, 'He who was there' … but it is by no means clear that this is the force of the phrase."[85]

There is a possible pun on the name at B07, 14: "… the prophets call out 'Istes, son of *wn-im3*' to him, every form in which he is [*imw nb i-wn=f*] is that which they say to him." 'Istes' here is the epithet of Thoth, more

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[83] Trans. Allen 1974, 183.
[84] C04.4, 2/x+20.
[85] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 31.

commonly "Isdes" or "Isden". This wordplay is a clue to how to hear *wn-im3*, so as to evoke the presence of the past that we see also in the Greek *to ti ēn einai*, "essence", but literally "what it *was* for something to be". "Essence" is in this sense not so much timelessness as something's retention of its past, its narrative. The *akhu* are of the past, and in virtue of that, possess a futurity that contrasts to the material textual generativity symbolized by the "plants which give birth to new words."[86] To be a "son of *wn-im3*", then, is to be a son of one who was there: to be located in space and time. In this respect, it is a kind of polar opposition to the status of *k3-mut.f*, "bull of his mother", i.e., begetter-of-himself, and similar epithets suggesting self-generation, so that the axis of the scribe extends precisely from the self-begotten (*k3-mut.f*) to the factical (*s3 wn-im3*).

The Animality of Texts

Animals are a topic of chief importance in the *Book of Thoth*, but understanding their role is difficult, particularly inasmuch as there may not be a *single* theme of the animal in the text, but rather, as Jasnow and Zauzich remark, the author sometimes "deals with the animal *qua* animal", other times "as a sacred being", that is, as a symbol.[87] One identifiable theme, however, is central to the concerns of the text, and hence demands our best efforts at reconstruction, namely that of the animal as *speaker*. The animal is established as possessing instruction or guidance whose source is explicitly non-textual:[88]

> Is a learned one he who instructs? The sacred beasts and the birds, teaching comes about for them, (but) what is the book chapter which they have read? The four-footed beasts which are upon the mountains, do they not have guidance?[89]

This establishes an analogy between the animal and the possibility of absolute textual *originality*. Animals hence represent escape from the hermeneutic closure exhibited by the economy of the *akhu*, the sites of utterance ren-

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[86] B04, 8/5.

[87] Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 38–39.

[88] This attitude toward the non-human animal presents a clear contrast with the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and is an example of the limits of comparison between these traditions: humans have "authority" over other, "unreasoning" animals at *CH* 1.14; 10.22; animals are associated with irrational drives, 12.4; lack consciousness, *Asclepius* 32; and so forth.

[89] B02, 1/6–7.

dered both "justified/true" and "effective" through being freed from indexicality, and the writer in the now, operating as their "second body", fixing meaning through the ongoing production of texts. The animal, lying outside this economy, embodies its originary moment as such:

> These dogs, these jackals, these baboons, these snakes which prophesize according to their utterances … […].[90]
> I have seen (?) the dogs which are as scribes (?) […].[91]
> […] writing of the dog […].[92]
> […] these sacred animals which open up the storeroom … to seek (?) its produce (?) of lapis lazuli (?).[93]

B02, 10 speaks of the "lord of the *bas* of Re," that is, the master of the sacred texts, "the messenger of prophecy" (*hby sl3*):

> He knew the form of speech of the baboons and the ibises. He went about truly (?) in the hall of the dog. He did not restrain their barking. He understood the barkings of these and these cries of the land of the fathers … He made the four pleas (?) of the wild beasts, one by one … He understood them. He brought them before me.[94]

The original "prophet" (*sr*/*sl*) is thus the animal, and the mediation of this inhuman utterance the primary hermeneutical intervention, an intervention, moreover, which is already also *ethical*, as we can see from the reference to juridical "pleas".

This evokes a passage from the *Pyramid Texts*, Utterance 270 § 386–387, an early version of the ferry-boat spell, in which the king affirms "There is no one living who makes accusation against me, there is no one dead who makes accusation against me, there is no duck which makes accusation against me, there is no ox which makes accusation against me." Faulkner posits that the duck represents birds in general and the ox the land-animals.[95] In a discussion of the passage, Griffiths has related it both to a general ethical concern toward animals in Egyptian thought, as well as to a specific ambivalence with respect to the sacrificial economy, in accord with "the hostile interpretation of animal sacrifices which was so marked a

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[90] B02, 11/3.
[91] L01 (V.T.), x+4/23.
[92] L01.7,6.
[93] V01, 4/15. Jasnow and Zauzich 2005 have "turquoise" at 162 in error, as their transcription on 161 and note on the line at 165 confirms they read here *ḫstb*, "lapis lazuli".
[94] B02, 10/8–11.
[95] Trans. Faulkner 1969, 79.

feature of Egyptian religious thought."[96] This "hostile ideology" manifests itself particularly in the identification of slaughtered animals with the enemies of Osiris and of Horus. So there is ambivalence with respect to killing animals for food, justified in the context of living within an ontic field inherently riven by conflict, but essentially culpable at the same time. This is symbolically united with the ambivalence already noted regarding the *bas* trapped in the symbolic bird- or fish-net.

The aspiring scribe in the *Book of Thoth* seems to enter into a degree of participation in certain animal species. Thus, with respect to the ibis, the aspirant states:

> May I enter therein, namely, the character (?) of all the ibises, that I betake myself to the place of the servants of Thoth.[97]
>
> May I wake up in the Chamber of Darkness, the wonder (?) of the Ibis under his guidance (?).[98]

A passage from the unplaced fragments contains a speech by "The-one-who-praises-knowledge" (*Ḥs-rḫ*, a pun on "Heseret", the sanctuary of Thoth), which seems to speak of the ascetic lifestyle of the ibises: "The ibises … Painful is their food, difficult their mode of life."[99] This continues for a few lines, culminating in the statement that "Their throat says a name to him (?)."[100] "Ibis" (*ḥb*) is throughout the text a byword for Thoth, and through the wordplay with *ḥb*, "to send a message", represents one of the principal functions assigned to him by Re in the *Book of the Celestial Cow*.

Another principal function of Thoth's is embodied in the baboon, and in a fragment from the *Book of Thoth* the aspirant seems to refer to a participation therein: "[…] … sacred animals […] saying I shall act as a baboon therein."[101] Dogs, not usually particularly associated with Thoth, are strongly associated with Seshat in the *Book of Thoth*, perhaps in her role there of huntress: "[…] wish to bark among the dogs of Shait [Seshat], the great."[102] A participation is evoked again below in direct address: "Let me make a barking with you […]."[103] We have already noted references to understanding barking and to "dogs which are as scribes."

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[96] Griffiths 1991, 153.
[97] B02, 9/2.
[98] B07, 15.
[99] F01, 11.
[100] F14, 13.
[101] B06, 1/16.
[102] B07, 17.
[103] L02, 1/5.

Another fragment alludes to an economy of symbolic eating probably referring actually to utterance: "Mouths are joyful. Snakes upon the two lips (are) their offering. A dog is their sustenance. A baboon is their … the reptiles […]."[104] Dogs vocalize. The same is not so clear with respect to ibises or, *a fortiori*, snakes. The prophetic utterances attributed to such creatures may come from dreams (e.g., B06, 1/12–13: "The-one-who-praises knowledge, he says: 'Do you have a dream? What is it? …'"), or from the observation and interpretation of the general behavior of sacred animals. But the role of animality in relation to the writer in the *Book of Thoth* seems to go beyond these practices, into a conceptual organization we can only imperfectly understand.

There is a certain cluster of animals in the text consisting of dogs, ibises, baboons, and snakes, which are explicitly said to speak or prophesize and are in direct relationship with the scribal aspirant. We see this cluster in the passage quoted immediately above from B06, 1/4–5 & parallels, which mentions snakes, dogs and baboons in a context of orality probably symbolic of utterance; dogs, jackals, baboons and snakes are said to prophesize at B02, 11/3; a baboon, a dog/jackal, and an ibis provide equipment to the aspirant at B02, 15/6-B04, 6/9–10.

Some other animals mentioned in the text could, with less certainty, be added to this set, especially bulls or cows, donkeys, and lizards/reptiles. There is clearly a distinction between these animals, in whom a participation of some sort is sought, and the "birds" or "fish" to be trapped in the net.

A small number of passages in the text indicate, however, a further structural bifurcation in the function of animality, one also irreducible to a distinction between "real" and "symbolic" animals. For example, "The sacred animal, which has [caused (?)] the baboon to perceive [*ʿm*] is the one which guides …" (L01 (V.T.), x+3/21) implies some relation *internal* to the category. In other cases, to be causative of thought seems to be a strictly divine prerogative: at B02, 11/2 a speaker identified as "He-created-the-thoughts [*mwy.w*]" begins, before a break, to speak of "the hall of the dog." This is probably the same speaker who refers on the next line to prophetic dogs, jackals, baboons and snakes.[105] An unidentified subject is said at B02, 10/13 to have "created the thoughts of the donkey".

The animal falling most clearly into a special category in the *Book of Thoth*, a category structurally parallel to the abstract faculty of "thought"

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[104] B06, 1/4–5 & parallels.
[105] B02, 11/3.

lying between the Gods and the other animals, including humans, is the vulture (*nry*). The vulture is the subject of a lengthy section, the so-called "Vulture Text" of L01, in which allegorical vulture figures are assigned to each of the nomes, or districts, of Egypt, this set of vultures being also identified with a core set of highly generative sacred texts:

> May the pastophoroi seek out the writings of the *bas* of Pre [Re], the ones who protect his (?) foundation … They say to me: "There are forty-two sacred places in the House of Life, they (?) growing […] … There are forty-two vultures which give birth between them, while their young … sing. May I list the vultures together with their names … A vulture will embrace them, she being in de[sire (?) …][106]

Within a few lines, the aspirant apparently begins reciting the vultures, beginning with "A vulture which draws a bow, while its young … […] It is Elephantine," capital of the First Nome of Upper Egypt.[107] The same multiplicity recurs at B04, 7/8, without reference to vultures, but instead to sacred animals generally: "The-one-who-loves-knowledge, he says: There are forty-two souls … which command myriads. They are 3,000 (of) myriads. I will give the choicest of the sacred animals." A mediating role for some sacred animals in assigning certain "vultures" to certain "territories" is also expressed leading up to the "Vulture Text": "a kite, an ibis, and a falcon assign them [the *b3.w*, 'souls/texts'] to the (two) lands [i.e., Egypt] one by one."[108] A different multiplicity of vultures, but still associated with the sacred texts, is mentioned at B02, 10/2–4, where it is said that

> The lord of the *bas* of Re (is) the messenger of prophecy. He made the forms of the vultures of Upper Egypt: ten, he giving praise to god for the teaching. He created nine female vultures of Lower Egypt together with their nine young, they making praise to the *bas* of Re.

A female artificer of some sort, likely Seshat, is also involved in a process generating "vultures" at B04, 7/18–22:

> She works some forty (with) gold and turquoise, another two (with) real lapis [lazuli ?] (in) the hall. The vulture discovered its young between [the] pillars (?) [belonging to] an entrance-way (of) the House of Life. Come! Let me go to it. Let me remain in it. Let me interpret the praise which came into being earlier. Let me learn of She-who-is-wise, this one who first established (the) chamber, she being … a lamp of prophecy.

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[106] L01 (V.T.), x+1/14–18.
[107] Ibid. 24.
[108] L01 (V.T.), x+1/12.

Turquoise (*mfk*) and lapis lazuli (*ḫsbḏ*) are both terms in the language of mineral emotions discussed by Aufrère; they both express a cosmic, indeed a cosmogonic joy closely associated with the theophany of Hathor. The several references to turquoise and lapis lazuli in the *Book of Thoth* make them virtually a further element of the text's materiality (I), in which texts would be concretions of divine joy, produced in the defense of the cosmos against entropy; V01, 4/15 speaks of sacred animals opening a storeroom containing lapis lazuli, as the conduit, it would seem, for the theophanic dimension of texts.

The passage above about Seshat seems in turn linked to one where the aspirant, in response to prompting from the Opener-upon-his-Standard (Wepwawet), explains the "names and secret aspects" of several beings "more mysterious than the nights":

> There are seven of them who announce [*sr*] the Lord of Protection and who are as protection for the one brilliant (?) of appearances. Another two of them give a foot (or 'position') in a … (in?) the place (?) of death, they being prepared (?) upon earth. The foremost also of them, he being as a lamp which is lit, while he interprets their language. The last nine (are) columns, carrying a Wadjet-figure amulet which has been spread out [i.e., explained], the orderer of the two lands. A noble vulture is the one who embraces them, it will give birth to all the young so as to settle them (according to their) manner (?).[109]

The two passages, obscure as they may be, likely describe moments in the same process or describe the same process in parallel fashion, i.e., on different planes of being. Thus, for example, the solitary activity of Seshat as "lamp of prophecy" in the first is attributed to the group in the second, who as "columns" personify the "pillars" in the first text; in the first, Seshat is credited with the establishment of the "chamber", presumably the Chamber of Darkness, while in the second, the prophetic figures create a bridge between this world and the netherworld.

The close association of the vulture and Wadjet, the uraeus cobra, has precedent in the pairing of Wadjet and vulture-formed Nekhbet as symbols of Lower and Upper Egypt respectively. Wadjet occurs again in the fragments of L01.11, which speak of a desire to "dwell in Dep [the city] of Wadjet" (12/2), and then of a uraeus giving birth to breaths of divine flame—Wadjet's weapon in the defense of the cosmos—in a field of turquoise; some cryptic lines follow—"She transforms [*pnʿ*] fifty of forms to a form [*n ḫbl r ḫbl*] […]

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[109] B02, 12/11–16. *Wḏy* here is either a figure of Wadjet, or a Wedjat-eye. Same usage for "explain" five lines above at B04, 7/8–10: "The opener upon his standard, he says: 'Explain to me this form of theirs; reveal their shapes.' May the mouth open … hear …".

some bulls therein in some […] some snakes, another version: […]"—ending with "She is like the vulture which gives birth [to a young bird (?) …]."[110] This process of transformation is perhaps that by which the Wadjet-figure in B02, 12/15 is 'unfolded'.

The uraeus and the vulture are thus both identified with the production of text in the properly theophanic sense. At L01 (V.T.), x+1/5, in what is effectively the introduction to the "Vulture Text", we read that "The vulture (?) has protected (?) Nun (?) … so as to cause the earth to overflow through its work." The vulture here perhaps embodies the investment, so to speak, of the primordial flux of Nun in the text, which can pour forth to inundate and fructify the earth. Hence the vulture is effectively associated with texts both as the repository of the precosmic chaos, and as the furthest development of the cosmogonic opus, as symbolized by the fiery uraeus cobra, who defends the constituted cosmic order from inimical forces.[111] The vulture is suited to its unique position perhaps by virtue of its position in the ecosystem as the greatest of the carrion eaters. Given the ambivalence Egyptian thought evinces to the eating of flesh, the carrion eater may have been regarded as occupying the *moral* summit of the food-chain. This may shed light on the otherwise obscure tendency for "human" to be written sometimes with a vulture-head.[112]

Closer yet to the concerns specific to the *Book of Thoth* is the parable of 'Sight' and 'Hearing' from the Demotic Myth of the Sun's Eye, where these two perceptual faculties are personified as two vultures.[113] The text begins by comparing, in metaphorical terms, the relative merits of these two senses.[114] At a certain point, though, it shifts its concern definitively to an ethical register, when the vultures of Hearing and of Sight mutually confirm a chain of consumption that begins with a fly being eaten by a lizard, the lizard by a skink, the skink by a snake, the snake taken by an eagle, which falls with it into the sea, where they are both eaten by an *ʿt*-fish, which is in turn eaten by a cat-fish, which is eaten by a lion when it comes too close to shore, the lion finally being eaten by a griffin.[115] The griffin is conceived as the top predator, a position which, however natural, is also inherently morally culpable:

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[110] L01.11, 12/18–21.

[111] In this respect, it does not matter if the item at B02, 12/15 is a figure of Wadjet or of the Wedjat-eye, because the latter symbolizes the effective offering which, as the human reply, so to speak, to the Gods, also manifests the culmination of the emergence of cosmic order.

[112] Wb 2, 279.10.

[113] Translated and discussed in Tait 1976.

[114] From roughly 13.25–14.10.

[115] From 14.30 on.

> Then ⟨Sight said to⟩ Hearing "What will happen about the murder of the lion that the griffin committed? How will it be settled?" Hearing said to Sight "It is true, do you not know that the griffin is the creature of [Death]? He is the herdsman of everything that is upon the earth. He is the avenger upon whom no avenger can take vengeance. His beak is an eagle's, his eye is a man's, his limbs are a lion's, his ears [...] scale are an *3b3ḫ*-fish's of the sea, his tail is a snake's—the five that draw breath that are upon the [earth]—this is the form that he takes. It is the case that he wields power over everything that is upon the earth, like Death, the avenger, who is also the herdsman of everything that is upon the earth ... Truly, he who kills is killed, and he who orders a killing, his destruction is ordered."[116]

Throughout this passage, there is a tacit awareness that the *nrt*, "vulture", though evoking "fear" (*nrw*), also "protects" (*nri*), and thus is also a "herdsman" (*nr*) in her own right, but not like the griffin. The vulture, too, is at the top of the food chain, but without the moral culpability the griffin bears. This seems to relate directly back to the universal reach of the senses of sight and hearing, especially when they work together to establish the truth of the causal chain represented by the series of predatory encounters ("The two vultures took themselves to the mountain. They found that everything they had said together was entirely true."). The perceptual faculties are "omnivorous", they "take in" everything, but without "blame", without being implicated in the causal chain: contrast this with the incorporation of the five types of animal in the shape of the griffin. The symbol of the vulture thus combines the widest perception and the most ethically clarified intention. This perhaps explains the priority of the vulture among the animal operators in the *Book of Thoth*.

Of the three relations that, as I have argued, determine the activity of writing in the *Book of Thoth*, textual animality is the most difficult to explicate, due to the fragmentary nature of the most relevant passages and paucity of other extant Egyptian texts to which we might compare it, but also on account of its overall originality for us: the very concept of the animal as deployed in Egyptian thought is completely new to us.[117] Textual animality appears to pertain to the possibility of absolute originality in writing, on the one hand, and to the conditions of theophany in writing on the other. In a seeming hierarchical organization of this field, the vulture represents the highest principle of textual production, with other animals operating closer

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[116] Tait 1976, 39.

[117] A potentially fruitful area of comparison might be with the *ngesh* in Kuba thought, which are animal spirits associated with divination and functionally distinct from ancestral spirits (see, e.g., Mack 1981).

to the writer him/herself. These other animals, to the extent that they are diverse participations or transformations of some more ideal or divine substance of textuality are perhaps discrete functions of writing akin to what we call "genres", inasmuch as they are "voices" establishing fields for new writing, but irreducible to the influence exerted on the writer by particular scribal antecedents (the *akhu*).

The Nature of Knowledge in the Book of Thoth

Jasnow and Zauzich subtitle their edition of the *Book of Thoth*, "A Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica". I have not addressed myself to the latter claim in the present essay, but would like to say a few words in conclusion about the former. I believe that the *Book of Thoth* must be regarded as a discourse upon knowledge in the specific sense of sign-production or semiosis. It has been noted that Egyptians use terms such as *rḫ*, "knowledge", for even the most arcane theological statements, rather than terms implying "belief", and this speaks indeed to the scope of "knowledge" in the Egyptian worldview.[118] But insofar as the *Book of Thoth* is indeed a discourse upon knowledge, it brings home to us that knowledge is essentially hermeneutic for Egyptian thought.

Typical of how terms such as *ʿm*, "to comprehend" and *ʿrq*, "to understand" operate in the *Book of Thoth* is a passage such as this: "If you understand her (and if) you comprehend her praises, she will make her place at your mouth, you being thirsty" (B02, 4/5), where the object is "the nurse who nurtures language [*3spy*]" (B02, 4/1). We see this term for language again at B02, 12/14: "The foremost also of them, he being as a lamp which is lit, while he interprets [*wḥm*] their language." *Wḥm* has the basic meaning of repetition, and therefore what is 'interpreted' in this sense is something sufficiently concrete that it may be repeated in order to explicate it. 'Understanding' in the *Book of Thoth* has as its condition the relation to some prophetic, that is, originary, text, as we see in the epithet "He-who-understands-prophecy."[119] This is so even if this text is not what we literally or conventionally understand as text, as when it is said that "the lord of the *bas* of Re … understood the barkings of these [in the 'hall of the dog'] and these cries of the land of the fathers" (B02, 10/10), or when the aspirant says "I understood their falcons."[120]

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[118] See the discussion at Jasnow and Zauzich 2005, 62.
[119] B02, 14/5.
[120] B02, 15/5.

Recognizing this essentially hermeneutic quality of knowledge for the Egyptian sage allows us to appreciate, to the extent possible in light of the fragmentary nature of the *Book of Thoth*, the purpose of the complex operations and diverse relationships in its pages. These relationships, even where they are to prior authors, that is, "spirits", on the one hand, or to primary sites of utterance, "animals", on the other, occur within a fundamental textual medium without which they are as inconceivable as the Egyptian cosmos would be without the Nun, the precosmic waters which flow through all reality. The waters of the text are the true presence of this precosmic flow, they are the Nun's *presence to Truth*, inasmuch as they are these waters, this darkness, rendered *workable* by Thoth and by Seshat, but at the same time, never so tractable that they lose their abyssal quality, their agonism, or their alienness.

The Egyptian *rḫ-iḫy*, "magician, scholar", is preeminently a knower of texts, but s/he is literally a knower of *things*, *iḫt*, a word which has the determiner of a rolled papyrus, for it has been abstracted from *particular* things. But this does not mean that the 'abstract' object grounded in textuality is not 'real', or that particulars are only real in some deceptive discursive twilight. Rather, text circulates in the bodies of all things, and these things obtrude themselves, they are *writing themselves into it* all the time: *everything* is a scribe.

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"I WORSHIP AND GLORIFY": MANICHAEAN LITURGY AND PIETY IN KELLIS' PRAYER OF THE EMANATIONS

Fernando Bermejo-Rubio

There is plenty of evidence that the study of Manichaeism is alive and well.[1] Besides the recent exciting discovery and/or identification of several Chinese paintings housed in Japan as Manichaean, new texts have come to light at Ismant el-Kharab, the site of the Roman village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis, in the last decade of the 20th century. These lastest finds are extremely important in several respects: they have provided the first opportunity to study material from a Manichaean community in its social context (including personal letters which indicate a close-knit set of family groups within the community). Material has been found in three languages, especially Coptic and Greek, but also bilingual Coptic-Syriac glossaries. This material shows a clear concern for the Syriac origins of the texts used by the community and is evidence for the translation of Manichaean scriptures directly into Coptic. Moreover, a good number of fragments from a single codex containing a translation of Mani's canonical Epistles have been recovered.

A further interesting aspect of the Kellis discoveries is the fact that we find in them a good number of psalms and related devotional material, such as prayers and liturgical texts. For a critical survey of a certain religious phenomenon, it is obviously essential to take into account the various dimensions which find expression in it, not only the doctrinal and mythic/narrative, but also the practical and ritual, the experiential and emotional, the ethical and legal, the social and institutional, and the material aspects.[2] This is all the more necessary in the field of Gnostic and Manichaean studies, as the traditional understanding has narrowly focused on the theoretical aspects of these religious phenomena (supposedly determined by the

[1] I am deeply grateful to Jason BeDuhn, Iain Gardner and Josep Montserrat for their helpful suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] The importance of all these dimensions, enumerated by Smart 1989, 10–21, has been often remarked upon by Birger Pearson, who has self-consciously and squarely situated himself in the camp of the history of religions, and has written all of his published work from that perspective. See e. g. Pearson 1994, 105–114; Pearson 1997, 10, 13–14, 215–216.

soteriological importance of knowledge and/or so often reduced to their protological accounts). Although traditional and idealistic approaches which stressed the theoretical elements in religion to the detriment of the ritual and material aspects have often predominated in scholarship, Manichaeism is not a mere mythical speculation, but an articulated system of beliefs and practices.[3]

In this context, I intend to survey one of the literary jewels discovered (during February 1992) at Kellis, the Greek text Εὐχὴ τῶν προβολῶν, also known as *P. Kell. Gr. 98*.[4] This extremely interesting piece of Manichaean literature allows different approaches, but the aim of the present article is to examine it in order to highlight its relevance for the practical aspects, which are specifically tackled in this volume.[5]

The Relevance of the Text for Manichaean Worship and Liturgy

There are a number of reasons which make the *P. Kell. Gr. 98* so captivating a text for modern scholars.[6] First, along with other Kellis texts, it enhances the number of available Greek sources (until Kellis' discoveries, the only Greek Manichaean work was—excluding the brief epitaph of an electa named Bassa, found in Salona—that entitled περὶ τῆς γέννης τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, better known as the *Cologne Mani Codex*).

A second reason lies in the virtual completeness of the text. While scholars of Manichaeism are sadly used to dealing with gaps and scraps, given the highly fragmentary condition of most surviving material, the Prayer, written on a single wooden board, is instead very well preserved, virtually without lacunae.[7] Moreover, the text is a tidily-composed piece of work, characterized by its formal beauty: beside its title Εὐχὴ τῶν προβολῶν (which might be

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[3] On the relevance of practice in Manichaeism, see e. g. BeDuhn 2000, ix–x, 211–212, and *passim*; Bermejo-Rubio 2008, 75–76, 153–154.

[4] *Editio princeps*: Jenkins 1995; *Critical edition*: Gardner 2007, 111–128. The provisional numbering system used by Jenkins was later abandoned by the Dakhleh Oasis Project.

[5] Although Khosroyev 2005 attempted to deny the Manichaean provenance of the Prayer, its Manichaean nature has been subsequently proved beyond any reasonable doubt. Khosroyev's arguments were already critiqued in Gardner 2007; for a more extended treatment, see Bermejo-Rubio 2009.

[6] Khosroyev 2005, 210, has convincingly argued that the Greek is better understood as an objective genitive, thus *The Prayer to the Emanations*. I refrain from further description of the piece, as it has been amply discussed by the works cited in note 4.

[7] The only one is found in line 73, although it is a brief one and is not especially important for the meaning of the passage.

secondary), a final section which is probably an addition, and the *subscriptio* (Ἐπληρώθη ἡ τῶν προβολῶν εὐχή), it is made up of ten stanzas of varying length, each beginning with the same phrase: "I worship and glorify" (Προσκυνῶ καὶ δοξάζω).

There is yet a third and more important reason. Recently, Iain Gardner made a highly significant contribution to the field by pointing to the existence of very close parallels between the Greek Prayer and al-Nadim's account of the practice of the Manichaean daily prayers in his *Fihrist*, written in Arabic in the 10th century in the Abbasid empire, on the one hand, and Middle Iranian fragments recently edited by D. Durkin-Meisterernst and E. Morano, on the other.[8] The existence of these parallels is actually striking,[9] to the extent that it is possible to surmise a plausible reconstruction of some lacunae in the Parthian fragments (M 194, M 790, M 7352, M 8050 and M 8531) by virtue of comparison with the Greek text.[10]

Furthermore, taking into account the widespread diffusion of the Prayer, and the care which was taken to preserve its text, Gardner has surmised that it was not composed in Greek (it would seem unlikely that a text as important as the daily prayers would have been composed in Greek, which represents a secondary stage of development for the Manichaean religion), but most probably must have been composed in Aramaic, and by Mani

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[8] On the *Fihrist*, see De Blois 2005. For Middle Iranian fragments, see Durkin-Meisterernst and Morano 2010, 107–113. Gardner identified the parallels for the first time at the 7th International Manichaean Conference in Dublin (8–11 September 2009). See Gardner 2011a; Gardner 2011b, 97–99; this article contains a useful synoptic version—in English translation—of the Greek, Arabic, and Middle Iranian prayers, including some commentary and notes.

[9] Whilst al-Nadim only recounted the first four of the ten prayers, the Middle Iranian tradition continues to the end in parallel to the Greek.

[10] I would like to advance here a couple of proposals:

Προσ(κύνω καὶ δοξάζω) τοὺς μεγάλους φωστῆρας, ἥλιόν τε καὶ σελήνην καὶ τάς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐναρέτους δυνάμεις.

nm'c br'm 'wṯ 'fryn'm 'w myhr 'wd m'ḫ rwšn'n w(*z*)*rg'n 'wd 'w z'wr'n* [*hy*](*nz'*)[*w*](*r*)[ʾ](*n*) (*'*)[*wd* ..] *ky pd hwyn m'*[....] (§ 363b Durkin-Meisterernst—Morano).

We can plausibly surmise that at least the last word of the Parthian fragment, whose two first letters are preserved, should be read as *m'*[*nynd*], from the verb *m'n* ("to live, dwell in"); see Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 225. In both texts, the heavenly bodies are thus portrayed as provisory seats inhabited by the divine figures.

Another example corresponds to the Middle Iranian section § 364b Durkin-Meisterernst—Morano:

[...] *hwyn* ° *šhr ny* '(*š*)[*tyd*], namely: "[...] them, the world will not stand".

If, in light of the Greek text (ἄνευ τούτων συνίστασθαι ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται), we assume the presence of the preposition *'by* ("without") at the beginning, the Parthian sentence makes sense: "without them (scil. the five great lights) the world will not stand".

himself.[11] It is known from canon lists that Mani composed *Prayers* and (two) *Psalms*, which are usually counted as a single work and numbered last in the traditional sequence of seven scriptures.[12]

According to al-Nadim, the Manichaean believers first stood and washed themselves with flowing water, or with something else, then they prayed, and the prayers were accompanied by ritual actions ("prostrations"). In fact, each stanza in the Prayer starts with the verb προσκύνω, which should be understood in its full sense of "prostrate" (here we find a ritual practice of daily prayer and prostration that precedes the rise of Islam).

In addition, according both to al-Nadim and several other sources, we know that it was toward the sun and the moon (the sun by day and the moon by night) that the prayers were recited, given the great importance of these heavenly bodies for Manichaeism.[13] The practice of using these heavenly bodies as the *qibla* towards which believers addressed their prayers—which seems to derive from Mani himself—is witnessed by Augustine in several passages: *Orationes faciunt ad solem per diem quaqua versum circuit: ad lunam per noctem, si apparet; si autem non apparet, ad aquiloniam partem, qua sol cum occiderit, ad orientem revertitur, stant orantes*.[14]

How often should this Prayer be pronounced? This is not clear. According to al-Nadim's account, the prayers should be undertaken four or seven times a day, depending on whether the worshipper is an elect or a hearer. The Greek Prayer puts the question a little differently: "Blessed be he who prays this prayer frequently, or at least on the third day, with a pure heart and forthright speech, asking for forgiveness of sins." The Parthian version reads "three times daily", thereby suggesting that the Kellis expression ἢ κἂν τρίτης ἡμέρας ("at least on the third day") should be emended, following Khosroyev's opinion, to "three times a day" (τρίτῃ ἡμερᾳ or τρὶς τὴς ἡμέρας).[15]

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[11] Gardner 2011a, 258–259. A major reason why Manichaean authorship was questioned by Khosroyev is that many of the familiar divine figures (Living Spirit, Primal Man, Mother of Life …) are not named in the text. If the text is by Mani, it would be—in Gardner's words—a "pre-scholastic" work, and the fact that it lacks much of what we think of as "technical terminology" would become more understandable, since in that time that language had not yet achieved its developed form.

[12] See e.g. Morano 2009.

[13] Dodge 1970, 2:790.

[14] Augustine, *De haeresibus* I 46.18: for an English translation, see Gardner and Lieu 2004, 191; *Contra Faustum* 11.14; 20.5; *Contra Fortunatum* 3. See also *Keph*. 80 (192.33–193.1)

[15] See § 368 b Durkin-Meisterernst—Morano 2010. "Of course, the issue of how this relates to the "four times daily" practice of the hearers remains; but both the Greek and the Parthian seem to say that the prayers should be repeated frequently, or at least three times a day. Possi-

Thus, as Gardner has convincingly argued, the context for the Prayer of the Emanations has become clear: it contains the text of the ten prayers that accompanied the physical prostrations at the heart of the practice of daily worship. The work from Kellis occupies a special place in the liturgical praxis of the Manichaean Church. Its discovery entails the recovery of the whole text of the probably most important prayer in the history of Manichaean worship (only fragmentarily preserved both in the Middle Iranian and the Arabic versions). This significantly enhances our knowledge of the ritual life of the Manichaean community.

In fact, despite the consistent usage of the first person singular pronoun throughout the text, the Prayer has an unmistakably community sense, an aspect which is most clearly revealed in its last two stanzas. In the ninth stanza the shining angels are said to "protect Righteousness". The word δικαιοσύνη (Parthian *'rd'wyft*) does not have here its immediate meaning, indicating a certain virtue; this becomes evident when we read the last two lines: that the angels have caused good to grow in the δικαιοσύνη (τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὔξοντας ἐν αὐτῇ) is a statement which does not seem to make sense.[16] However, the sentence makes full sense if we realize that δικαιοσύνη means something else, namely, the believers' community, or more likely the class of the Electi. This meaning of the term—which frequently recurs in Manichaean sources—is a *terminus technicus*, which conveys the understanding of the Elect as people belonging to the right side of reality.[17]

This reading of δικαιοσύνη as a technical term is further supported by the later allusion to the "righteous" (the class of the *electi*): Προσκύνω καὶ δοξάζω πάντας δικαίους τοὺς πάσης κακίας περιγεγονό{ν}τας.[18] It is worth noting that such a mention, along with the reference of the speaker expressing their hope for release from reincarnation (μετενσωμάτωσις) in line 110, points to the fact that the Prayer was meant to be used by Manichaeans belonging to the class of the catechumens or hearers (*auditores*).[19] Even

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bly the solution is that the seven times practice of the elect and the four times practice of the hearers were gradual developments that achieved fixity over time, and that at the start the situation was more flexible" (Gardner 2011b, 97).

[16] Let us note that the same verb used in this stanza, αὐξάνω, is also used in the *Cologne Mani Codex* to describe the spiritual growing-up of the members of the Manichaean Church (*CMC* 63.13).

[17] Especially in the Coptic ones, both in the *Homilies*, the *Kephalaia* and the *Psalm-Book*; see e.g. *Keph.* 7 (36.5–6); Hom 14.8–9; 15.12; 31.5; 53.6; Ps 140.12.

[18] Lines 95–97. For the designation of Manichaeans as "righteous", see e.g. *Ps* 212.23.

[19] This is already suggested by its find-site in a domestic context (the board was discovered in the rear court of the House 3 at Ismant el-Kharab).

though the terms ἐκλεκτοί and κατηχούμενοι are lacking in the text, we find a rather clear allusion to the Manichaean Church and its two levels or bodies.

The Prayer refers not only to the inner structure of the community, but also to the soteriological synergy among them, which fleshes out community life.[20] The text refers to the intercession that the righteous make for the catechumens, allowing them to be saved: "in order that all the ones whom I have worshipped and glorified and named may help me and bless me with favour, and may release me from every fetter and all compulsion and torment and every reincarnation, and grant me access into the great aeon of light".[21] This passage could be understood as an example of the hearers asking for intercession from the elect, such as is discussed in *Keph.* 115; this Coptic source refers to the intercession made by other Manichaeans, who "release" the "Living Soul" so that it "comes forth from this affliction" and "goes in to the land of light".[22]

Dualistic Logic versus Monotheistic Piety

Elsewhere I have thoroughly argued that the dualistic worldview—the irreconcilable opposition of two realms, Light and Darkness—subtends the whole Prayer.[23] Numerous references to an irreducible opposition of two realms (σύστασις and σύστημα are used regarding both the Father and his Adversary respectively in lines 13 and 33; the opposition of μεγίστας δυνάμεις to αὐθάδεις δυνάμεις in lines 23–28; the frequent usage of warlike and conflict language, such as πολεμεῖν and ὑποτάσσω, in lines 26, 29 and 88, and the portrayal of the opposition of dark powers to Light through the adjective πολέμιος and the term ἀντίπαλος in lines 54–55 and 63; the contrast between the "luminous angels" and the "wicked demons" in lines 85–89 and 92–93, and between τὸ ἀγαθόν and ἡ κακία in lines 89–90, 93–94 and 116–119, among others) unambiguously betray a radically dualistic stance.

The fact, however, that the Manichaeans were radical dualists does not signify that they granted equal power to Light and Darkness. Manichaeism—and perhaps ultimately every dualistic faith—is an asymmetrical

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[20] On this synergy, see Jacobsen Buckley 1984, 409; BeDuhn 2000, *passim*.

[21] Lines 103–113.

[22] See *Keph.* 115 (279.3–5.15–21.29–30).

[23] See Bermejo-Rubio 2009, 222–227. This is not a superfluous remark, as Khosroyev 2005 contended that the ontology of the Prayer is not radically dualistic.

dualism, which has always called "god" only the good principle,[24] and apparent exceptions either proceed from polemical anti-Manichaean writings—such as the *Acta Archelai*—or are to be explained as adaptations to others' way of speaking.[25] According to the Prayer's author, there is only one God (τὸν μέγιστον π(ατέ)ρα τῶν φώτων: lines 2–3); the first stanza is devoted to him (Σὺ γὰρ εἶ ὁ θ(εό)ς: line 13), and he is praised elsewhere as ὁ μέγιστος καὶ ἔνδοξος πατήρ (lines 18–19), and other honouring epithets.

This kind of piety towards the divine realm sometimes involves the risk of seeming somewhat inconsequential. A passage of the Prayer (lines 28–29) states that the evil powers desired to make war with "the one who is first of all" (τῶν πάντων προύχοντι). Such an expression is *prima facie* striking. If Manichaeans posit the existence of two independent and coeternal principles, how is it possible to refer to one of them as "first of all"? However, expressions of this kind must not surprise us, as they are usual in the texts of this religion.[26] Despite stating the coeternity of Light and Darkness, Manichaeans maintained the existence of a qualitative difference between the principles: from an axiological point of view, the superiority of Light is unmistakable. This explains—*a fortiori* in a doxology such as the Prayer from Kellis, which contains a high praise of the divine realm—the use of such a language.[27]

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[24] As the Manichaean bishop Faustus said in an emphatic way: "*Numquam in nostris quidem adsertionibus duorum deorum auditum est nomen*" (Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 21.1–2). Manichaeism is not a ditheism (*pace* Cumont 1908, 7).

[25] Faustus of Milevi acknowledges that Manichaeans sometimes use the designation "god" for the "contrary nature", but he remarks that this usage is merely occasional and a concession to the language used by the adversaries themselves; see Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 21.1.

[26] For instance, the Father of lights is said to be "the lord of all" (ⲡϫⲁⲓⲥ ⲛⲓⲧⲏⲣϥ) or "the first established one" (ⲡⲱⲁⲣⲡ ⲛⲧⲱⲕ ⲁⲣⲉⲧϥ); see references in Gardner 1995, 299.

[27] Let us recall that the opening section of Mani's Living Gospel, as preserved in the *CMC* 66.9–15, speaks about a God existing before all things and whose power make all things come into being (πρὸ παντὸς μὲν ὑπάρχων, διαμένων δὲ καί μετὰ πάντα—πάντα δὲ τὰ γεγονότα τε καὶ γενησόμενα διὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ σθένους ὑφέστηκεν). Some years ago, this passage generated a scholarly discussion as it seems to display a monotheistic stance and accordingly to contradict the dualistic dogma: one of the crucial tenets of Manichaeism is indeed that Evil, like God, has no beginning, and hence God cannot have existed before the dark principle; see Stroumsa 1984, 144. However, as other scholars have rightly pointed out, that reading would indicate a misunderstanding of Manichaean dualism, which does not necessarily imply a denial of monotheism; see Bianchi 1991, 15; Gnoli 1994, 456; Giuffré Scibona 2001. The most radically dualistic system ever devised is perfectly compatible with positions and statements such as we find in the *Cologne Mani Codex*, and we can conclude the same regarding the Prayer of the Emanations. For an extensive treatment of this issue, see Bermejo-Rubio 2007.

This feature of Manichean piety expresses itself further in the Prayer through the notion that, despite the damaging and seriously menacing activity of Evil, God retains actual control in the universe. Religion aims at providing meaning to a reality in which human beings feel ultimately defenseless, and this implies the need of a safety belt. Piety desperately needs hope, and such a hope is embedded in the assertion that the luminous powers have "subjugated the Darkness (ὑποτάξαντας τὸ σκότος) and its arrogant powers".[28] The widespread notion that the bodies of the archons of Darkness have been "enchained" or "crucified" by the Living Spirit and his five sons[29] reappears in the Prayer in the portrayal of the cosmogonic action as a binding: the divine powers have "put heaven and earth in order, having bound in them (δήσαντες ἐν αὐτοῖς) the whole foundation of haughtiness".[30] The emotional conviction of the believers of feeling protected is stated elsewhere, when the shining angels are said to rule the whole world, and to subdue all demons and all evil (τοὺς σύμπαντας τοῦ κόσμου δυναστεύοντας καὶ ὑποτάσσοντας πάντας δαίμονας καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν κακίαν).[31] Those angels are also praised for protecting "Righteousness" and defending it from the wicked demons (τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑπερασπίσοντας καὶ φυλάττοντας αὐτὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πονηρῶν δαιμόνων), so they behave truly as a kind of guardian angels regarding Mani's community.[32]

Piety towards the Revealer: Christ (*and Mani?*)

After having praised the Greatness (τὸ μεγαλεῖον: lines 6 and 11) of the Father of Lights and all his powers in the first three stanzas, the author of the Prayer dedicates the fourth to praising the Revealer, who is described with several epithets: τὸν φωτινὸν[33] νοῦν, βασιλέα, Χρ(ιστό)ν. According to Manichaean beliefs, given the stupefying activity of the dark powers on human souls, these souls need "awakening" and the revelation of their divine origin, and

[28] Lines 26–28.

[29] For references, see Bermejo-Rubio 2009, 233, n. 79.

[30] Lines 31–32.

[31] Lines 86–90. This key idea should prevent to label Manichaeism an "anti-cosmism".

[32] This is also the function accomplished by the Syzygos or heavenly twin who helps Mani according to several sources. In fact, whilst we find in the Prayer's sentence the verbs ὑπερασπίζω and φυλάσσω, the *CMC* applies the corresponding substantives to the Syzygos, who reassures Mani telling him that he will be ἐπίκουρος καὶ φύλαξ (*CMC* 33.4–5); elsewhere in the text the transcendent *alter ego* says again that he will be for Mani ἐπίκουρος καὶ ὑπερασπιστής (*CMC* 105.3–5; see also *CMC* 40.1–6).

[33] Read: φωτεινὸν.

such a releasing task is carried out by a figure sent by the divine realm. A high praise of this essential figure is, therefore, to be expected in a liturgical context, and it is precisely that which we find in the Prayer.

The intimate connection of the Revealer and the ultimate God is pointed out in several forms. To begin with, the Light-Nous, Christ, is described as the offspring of the greatness (τὸν τῆς μεγαλειότητος ἔγγονον).[34] The relationship between both instances is further shown in the fact that the Great Father of Lights had been formerly called "the basis of every grace and life and truth"[35] while the Light-Nous is now said to be the transmitter of these very gifts: "From you every grace has become known to the world; and life, together with truth".[36]

The work of the Revealer as Mediator between the transcendent realm of the Light "purified of all darkness and malignance" and this realm of mixture is further highlighted by the portrayal of the figure as "the one who came forth from the outer aeons into the ordered reality above, and from there to this created reality below".[37] The Coptic equivalent of the expression οἱ ἐξώτεροι αιῶνες is found in the *Keph*., where it denotes the transcendent and invisible divine realities (unlike the visible Light).[38]

What raises the gratitude of the believers towards the Revealer is the fact that he discloses for them the way to salvation: "without concealment (ἀπαρακαλύπτως) interpreted his wisdom and the secret mysteries (τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια) to people on earth".[39] Given that Mani saw himself—and was seen by the Manichaeans—as a soteriological figure and as the one who brought the teaching of Jesus to completion, this description raises a question as to whether the Babylonian prophet himself could have been envisaged here. I will tackle this issue below.

According to al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, the first two sets of words which the Manichaean prayers reproduced were blessings upon Mani.[40] In fact, the so-called Bema-festival was celebrated by the Manichaeans at the end of their month of fasting, in order to commemorate Mani' passion and death;

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[34] Lines 33–34.

[35] Lines 13–14.

[36] Lines 49–51.

[37] Lines 21–22 and 35–39.

[38] ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲉⲧϩⲓⲃⲁⲗ. See *Keph*. 29 (81.27; 82.25–26); *Keph*. 60 (152.11).

[39] Lines 40–42. The phrase ἀπόρρητον μυστήριον is used in the *CMC* to designate the mystery of the Living Soul (*CMC* 7.12).

[40] "Blessed is our guide, the paraclete, the apostle of light; Blessed are his angels, the guardians; Praiseworthy are his luminous armies"; "Praiseworthy art thou, oh luminous one, Mani, our guide; root of illumination and branch of life, mighty tree that is all cure!".

besides this, the Manichaean texts contain a number of prayersin which Mani is addressed as Paraclete, "our Lord", and his "new Covenant" is devoutly worshipped.[41] However, as Iain Gardner has remarked, the prayers properly start at what al-Nadim gives as the third prostration, and we do not find Mani's name in the Kellis Prayer.

This does not mean, however, that Mani would have been absent from the consciousness of the worshipping Manichaeans who recited the fourth stanza of the Prayer, addressed to the Light-Nous. Mani was deemed as the last and most authorized of the chain of successive revealers granted to humankind, so he encapsulated the revealing power of the Light-Nous, an evocation of Jesus Splendour (in turn, proceeding from the Third Envoy), sometimes called "the Father of all Apostles".[42] The possibility that the believers thought of Mani as they recited the Prayer is backed, in my opinion, by the existence of striking parallels between the Prayer and some sources concerning Mani, such as the Cologne Mani Codex and some Iranian texts.

First, the salvific work by Christ in the Prayer and the work carried out by Mani according to the Cologne Codex are both described as a separation of a series of pairs, denoting the two irreconcilable substances—truth from lie, light from darkness, good from evil, and so on

καὶ τοῦ ψεύδους τὸ ἀληθὲς διορίσαντα καὶ το⟨ῦ⟩ σκότους τὸ φῶς καὶ τοῦ φαύλου τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τῶν πονηρῶν τοὺς δικαίους	χωρισμὸς φωτὸς ἀπὸ σκότους καὶ τοῦ θανάτου τῆς ζωῆς [κα]ὶ τῶν ζώντων ὑδά[τω]ν ἐκ τῶν τεθαμβω[μέ]νων
And distinguished the truth from the lie, and light from darkness, and good from evil, and the righteous from the wicked	The separation of light from darkness, and of death from life, and of living waters from turbid ones
Prayer 46–49	*CMC* 84.12–17[43]

Second, the preaching activity of the Light Nous/Christ in the Prayer is described in terms which are virtually identical with those used to portray Mani's actions in other sources. To begin with, stress is laid on the worldwide scope of both the Revealer's and Mani's mission:

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[41] *PsB* 227; 20.19–22.26; *PsB* 228; 22.28–24.15. For this aspect, Ort 1967, 244–245.

[42] On this figure, see Sundermann 1995.

[43] Elsewhere in the same text, Mani is supposed to have said that he taught τὴν διάστασιν [τῶν δύο] φύσεων (*CMC* 132.12–13). See *Keph*. 76 (186.9–11).

ὑποδείξαντα σύμπαντι τῷ κόσμῳ
καὶ πάσαις ἑρμηνεύσαντα φωναῖς [...]
Ἐκ σοῦ
πᾶσα χάρις ἔγνωσται τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ
ζωὴ ἅμα καὶ ἀληθεῖα παντὶ φύλῳ
πάσαις ἑρμήνευται φωναῖς

And set forth to the whole world
and explained in every language
[...] From you
every grace has become known to the world,
and life together with truth, to every race
is explained in every language.

Prayer 44–45, 49–52

οὐκ εἰς τοῦτο μόνον τὸ δόγμα ἀπεστάλης,
ἀλλ' εἰς πᾶν ἔθνος [...] καὶ εἰς πᾶσαν
πόλιν καὶ τόπον. [ὑπὸ σο]ῦ γὰρ
σαφηνισθή[σεται κ]αὶ κηρυχθήσεται
[ἥδε ἡ ἑλ]πὶς εἰς πάντα [κλίμα]τα καὶ
περιοχὰς [τοῦ κόσμ]ου

You have been sent out not only to this religion,
but to every people [...] to every town and every place. For [by you]
will [this] hope be explained and proclaimed to all [zones]
and regions [of the world]

CMC 104.12–22

The twice repeated phrase πάσαις φωναῖς in the Prayer seems to confirm that "Christ" is here a synthetic name, used to refer to the soteriological activity of the Apostle of Light. Moreover, the verb ἑρμηνεύω, also repeated in the stanza to convey the explanatory task of the true message carried out by Christ, finds a correlate in the usage of the Graeco-Coptic substantives ἑρμηνευτής and ἑρμηνεία, and the verb ἑρμηνεύειν, for denoting respectively Mani and his activity in other Manichaean sources.[44]

An even closer parallel to the Prayer is found in the well-known Middle Persian fragmentary text (M 5761 + M 5794) which sings the excellences of Mani's religion: "This religion (*dyn*) which I have chosen is more complete and better than other former religions, for ten reasons. One reason is that the former religions were (restricted) in a country and a language, but my religion is going to be manifested in every country and in every language (*yk, kw dyn 'y 'nyng'n pd yk šhr 'wd yk 'zw'n bwd ; 'yg dyn 'y mn "d kw pd hrw šhr 'wd pd wysp 'zw'n pyd'g bw'd*)". We find here clear correspondences to παντὶ φύλῳ, σύμπαντι τῷ κόσμῳ and πάσαις φωναῖς. This should not come at all as a surprise, as linguistic and geographical universality is a central notion of the Manichaean self-definition. "Christ" in the Prayer from Kellis is a generic name for the activity of the Savior, which Manichaean believers would have identified with Mani.

There is a further striking parallel between the activity of Christ and that of Mani. In the Cologne Codex, Mani summarizes the mission entrusted to him by saying that he came into the world in order "to redeem the Living

[44] See e. g. *Hom.* 44.22; 60.31; 61.16; *Keph.* 2 (17.3–4).

Souls from the subjection to the rebels".[45] Let us now compare this text with the passage in the Prayer, according to which the Christ "has become redeemer for Living Souls from the compulsion of the hostile fetters":

λυτὴρ	(προῆλθον) πρό[ς τε] τὸ λυτρώσασθαι
ταῖς ζώσαις ψυχαῖς γέγονεν	τῆς ζ[ώ]σας ψυχὰς
ἐκ τῆς ανάγκης	ἐκ τῆς ὑπ[ο]ταγῆς
τῶν πολεμίων δεσμῶν	τῶν στασιαστῶ[ν]
Prayer, 53–55	*CMC* 107.8–11

The most cursory reading shows that the context and the content of the two passages are virtually identical, and in both cases the expression designating the object of redemption is used in the plural (a fact all the more significant because the notion of "Living Soul" is usually utilized in the singular).[46]

All this allows us to infer, in my opinion, that, although Mani is not mentioned in the Prayer from Kellis—understandably enough, if he is the author of the text and this was not thoroughly revised—, the worshippers who made use of it would have surely simultaneously thought of him when they recited the stanza addressed to the Light-Nous, Christ. Not in vain Mani styled himself "the Apostle of Jesus Christ".[47] This overlapping must not come as a surprise: from Manichaean soteriology we know that this telescoping and conflation of the salvific figures is to be expected.

Piety towards Sun and Moon

It is not surprising that the religion, which saw in the light the most genuine expression of the divine realm, has paid close attention to those bodies in nature which work as main sources of light. As is well-known, sun and moon have accordingly played a significant role in the history of Manichaean piety, as they have done in the history of religions.[48] Christian heresiologists

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[45] *CMC* 107.8–11.

[46] The avoidance of "rebels" (a common term in Manichean sources for designating the dark powers) in the Prayer might be due to the triumphalistic tone which is to be expected in a doxology. Regarding: Latin *viva anima*; Coptic ⲧϩⲩⲭⲏ ⲉⲧⲁⲓⲍ; Middle Persian *gryw zyndg*. The fact that the notion is not only found in the West but also in Turkestan shows that it belongs to the original Manichaean heritage.

[47] *CMC* 65.20–66.11. Several texts prove that the later community was inclined to consider to some extent that Mani was on a par with Jesus; see *PsB* 37, 26–29; *Keph*. 101 (26–33).

[48] According to Eckermann 1959, 583, some days (March 11th 1832) before Goethe died, the writer declared his veneration for the sun as a manifestation of the highest Being: "Denn sie

have interpreted this feature *in malam partem*, as a sign of heliolatry or selenolatry.[49] The well-informed pagan Neoplatonist philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis, however, was more careful in his comment, by observing that "they honour the sun and moon above all else, not as gods, but as the way which allows access to God".[50]

In this aspect, the Prayer contains interesting evidence. Its sixth stanza (lines 59–69), devoted to worship and glorification of sun and moon, concisely surveys the main reasons which led Manichaean believers to pay a special respect to these heavenly bodies:

Προσ(κυνῶ καὶ δοξάζω)	I worship and glorify
τοὺς μεγάλους φωστῆρας, ἥλι-	the great light-givers, both
όν τε καὶ σελήνην καὶ τάς ἐν αὐ-	sun and moon and the
τοῖς ἐναρέτους δυνάμεις, τὰς σο-	virtuous powers in them, which
φίᾳ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους νικώσας	by wisdom conquer the antagonists
καὶ φωτιζούσας σύμπασα⟨ν⟩ τὴν	and illuminate the entire
διακόσμησιν, καὶ τῶν πάντων	order, and of all
ἐφορούσας[51] καὶ κρινούσας τὸν	oversee and judge the
κόσμον καὶ διαπεμπούσας τὰς	world, and conduct
νικώσας τῶν ψυχῶν εἰς τὸν	the victorious among the souls into the
μέγιστον αἰῶνα τοῦ φωτός	great a eon of light.

The first three lines express the very important role that the sun and moon played in Manichaean piety, such as both original and polemical sources make evident. They are called "the great luminaries" throughout Greek, Coptic, and Middle Iranian texts.[52] The "greatness" of these heavenly bodies points not only to their size but also to the special reverence they inspired in the believers.

Moreover, the first part of the litany which starts every stanza of the Prayer (προσκυνῶ …) seems to be especially opportune in the passage under discussion: in the *Cologne Codex* Mani is said to have taught a man "about resting, the commandments and prostration before the luminaries (τὴν εἰς

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ist gleichfalls eine Offenbarung des Höchsten, und zwar die mächtigste die uns Erdenkindern wahrzunehmen vergönnt ist. Ich anbete in ihr das Licht und die zeugende Kraft Gottes, wodurch allein wir leben, weben und sind und alle Pflanzen und Tiere mit uns". For an overview of the place of sun and moon in the history of religions, see Eliade 1953, 117–167.

[49] E.g. Augustine, *Confessiones* 3.6.10; *Contra Faustum* 14.11; 20.6; 21.4; *Contra Fortunatum* 3.

[50] τιμῶσι δὲ μάλιστα ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην οὐχ ὡς θεούς, ἀλλ' ὡς ὁδὸν δι' ἧς ἔστιν πρὸς θεὸν ἀφικέσθαι (Alexander of Lycopolis 7.27–8.1: Brinkmann).

[51] Read: ἐφορώσας.

[52] For several references, see Bermejo-Rubio 2009, 230, nn. 64 and 65.

τοὺς φωστῆρας προσκύνησιν)", with a language which recalls very exactly the text from Kellis.[53] Sun and moon were conceived as accomplishing several functions, all of which, as we will see, are shown in the Prayer.

The author addresses himself not only to the sun and the moon, but also to "the excellent powers in them (τάς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐναρέτους δυνάμεις)". Unlike the planets, both sun and moon are considered to be made of pure light and simultaneously the residences or palaces where the divine powers (excluding the Father of Greatness) abide: therefore, they serve as seats of the godhead as long as the universe exists.[54] In fact, several *Kephalaia* talk explicitly about the gods abiding in each luminary: the Mother of Life, the Living Spirit and the Third Envoy live in the sun, while the Primal Man, Jesus the Splendour and the Virgin of Light, in the moon.[55] This idea of sun and moon as provisory abodes for the Light powers during the "second time" is a further expression of the belief that the universe is not a place abandoned by God, but rather a sophisticated salvation mechanism where God is—at least ultimately and to a certain extent—in control of events. This is what the text seems to mean by saying that the powers in the sun and moon "by wisdom conquer the antagonists".[56] And this also seems to be what the text means with the verb ἐφοράω: on high, sun and moon—or the powers abiding in them—oversee everything.

The text seems indeed to mix the functions of the luminaries with those of the gods in them.[57] The statement that they "judge the world" could proleptically point to the function of sun and moon as light-liberating machines, but it could also be explained through those texts, which refer to the divine powers as "judges". A clear example is that of *Keph.* 28, according to which there are twelve judges, among which are the First Man, the Living Spirit, the Third Ambassador, Jesus the Splendour, and the Light Mind, namely, the gods abiding in sun and moon.[58]

The two luminaries accomplish yet another task, according to the Manichaean myth. The elements of Light scattered in the world (the Living Souls) must become free, and sun and moon are also the vehicles through which

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[53] *CMC* 128.11–12.

[54] *Keph.* 1 (15.8–9); "The sun and the moon glorify thee, all the Gods that are in them …" (*Ps* 114.26–27).

[55] See *Keph.* 3 (24.8–20); *Keph.* 29 (82.29–83.1).

[56] Lines 62–63.

[57] Manichaeans did not distinguish or did not want to distinguish sharply between sun and moon on the one hand and the gods in the sun and the moon on the other; see Burkitt 1925, 79.

[58] *Keph.* 28 (79.13–81.20).

the Light that is purified from the mixture with dark matter is transported up into the divine realm.[59] Given that sun and moon transport the souls from this world to the transcendent realm, they are described as "ships" in other sources.[60]

The arrival of the Living Souls to the eschatological Aeon of Light mentioned in the last line of the sixth stanza entails the return to the heavenly homeland.[61] This fact is a victory both for the saving forces and the souls, and this is expressed in the Prayer through the use of the verb νικέω. Let us notice that in the *CMC* 37.6–10 Mani asks several things from the Syzygos (his heavenly twin), and he adds the following request: "that the souls of the victors (αἱ ψυχαὶ τῶν νικητῶν) may be seen, coming out from the world, by every human eye". The expression which forms the subject of this passage is a close parallel to that found in the Prayer, τὰς νικώσας τῶν ψυχῶν.

Some Specific Features of Manichaean Piety

The lengthy doxology in praise of a divine realm described in the most exalted terms, along with the overall use of the verb προσκυνῶ and the language of χάρις which we have met in the first and the fourth stanzas, could easily lead an inattentive reader into thinking that Manichaean piety is hardly discernable from that prevailing in mainstream Christian trends, in which the worshippers, aware of the insurmountable ontological and axiological chasm existing between them and the divine realm, pray in the hope of being the object of an undeserved grace.

Nevertheless, such an inference would be fatefully misleading. The religious experience of Manichaean believers is not liable to be described using Schleiermacher's famous phrase *schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*, at least in the sense that it conveys the belief that human beings are nothing "but dust and ashes".[62] As we will see, the fact that the piety nurtured within the Manichaean worldview seems to have been qualitatively different to that pattern (itself unmistakably modelled on Western monotheistic

[59] See e.g. Alexander of Lycopolis 6.25–7.6: Brinkmann.

[60] E. g. *Keph.* 29 (82.29,32); *Ps* 75.4; *Hom.* 6.27.

[61] Lines 68–69; see also 112–113.

[62] It is well-known that in *Das Heilige*, Rudolf Otto used this expression, taken from Gen. 18:27, to explain his own understanding of Schleiermacher's phrase. Otto 1958, 9–10, proposed to call it "creature-consciousness" or "creature-feeling" (*Kreaturgefühl*), and he added: "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures".

faiths) can be inferred from a number of significant and inextricably linked aspects in the Prayer itself.

First, from Manichaean perspective there is no ontological chasm between the transcendent Light and the Light entrapped in human souls. This is to be perceived in the fact that some human beings are also included as objects of veneration: "I worship and glorify all the righteous: they who have overcome all evil".[63] Thus, what deserves praise and being glorified is not the divine realm in opposition to the human realm, but Light in opposition to Darkness. And that Light is also contained in the human being—in fact, according to the Manichean beliefs it is scattered in the world, even in Nature.

Second, the high dignity of the human Self is expressed in the very notion of "Living Souls", as far as this expression—despite having a biblical background in Gen 2.7 and 1Cor 15.45—is a Manichaean *terminus technicus* for naming the Light abiding in this world, and thereby it contains the memory of the origin of the Soul in the Land of Life or divine realm.[64] The Living Soul is indeed the Soul of the Primal Man, swallowed by Darkness after the primal combat; it is a collective entity, namely, the whole of the Souls consubstantial to God, disseminated through the universe in many forms and figures.[65] In these circumstances, we can better understand the fact that, in the Prayer, the term "living" is used both for the human souls (ταῖς ζώσαις ψυχαῖς: line 53) God (τὸν ζῶντα θ(εό)ν: lines 55–56, a probable reference to the Living Spirit) and the angels (πάντας ἀγγέλους τοὺς ζῶντας: lines 78–79).

Third, the Living Souls are released not from unworthiness, but, as the Prayer states, from the constraints suffered by the Soul because of the malignant actions of the evil powers, the "inimical bonds (ἐκ τῆς ἀνάγκης τῶν πολεμίων δεσμῶν)".[66] This same language is taken up in another passage where

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[63] Lines 95–97.

[64] The notion is so important as to have been called "the most fundamental concept of Manichaeism" (Asmussen 1965, 215). On the memory of the origin of the soul, see Heuser 1998, 36.

[65] *Keph.* 73 (178.5–23).

[66] Lines 54–55. Admittedly, the wording of Manichaean confession texts, and an enormous amount of moral exhortation, suggest the accountability of the individual soul, and make it clear that Manichaeans often sought "forgiveness for sins"; in fact, the Prayer to the Emanations itself instructs that it should be recited "for forgiveness of sins" (lines 128–130). This does not imply, however, an understanding of sin as unworthiness such as we find in mainstream Christianity, as Manichaeism clearly recognizes the disadvantage with which the soul confronts evil, and posits a kind of sympathy working between God and the individual soul. For an illuminating study on this point, see BeDuhn 2005.

the liberation of the souls is envisaged: καὶ λύσωσί με ἀπὸ πάντων δεσμοῦ[67] καὶ πάσης ἀνάγκης καὶ βασάνου. The content and the structure of these sentences (using the prepositions ἐκ and ἀπό to indicate the provenance of Evil, and repeating the terms ἀνάγκη and δεσμός) express the fact that the blame for the negative state of mixture in this world which Souls encounter is not laid on the Souls themselves, but rather on powers carefully distinguished from them—the "wicked demons" of 92–93.[68] Living Souls are therefore considered not as responsible for their state, but rather as powerless victims of a plot. The portrayal of the Living Souls as being of a passive nature—they are temporarily fettered and even suffering torment (βάσανος)—does not imply at all an admission of guilt, even less a self-debasement, but discloses only the malignity of the dark powers, aimed at entangling the Light.[69]

Fourth, within a Manichaean framework, the necessity of a Savior and the deep reverence towards sun and moon do not imply the recognition of any ontological debasement in the worshipper, because that reverence is directed toward beings which are consubstantial to the Soul.[70] As the *Xᵘāstuānīft* revealingly says, it would be a sin to state that "our self is different from the Sun and the Moon".[71] In fact, the idea of this relationship of kinship and consubstantiality between god and the human self seems to be conveyed in the double use of the participle νικώσας applied to δύναμεις and ψυχαί in the stanza directed to the great light-givers. Not in vain did Manichaeans think that the good souls were "of the same nature as God".[72]

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[67] Lines 107–109. It would be possible to correct πάντων for παντός (Gardner) or δεσμοῦ for δεσμῶν (Jenkins). Given that here we find also the term ἀνάγκη, extant also in line 54, and that in 55 we have δεσμῶν, I prefer to follow here Jenkins' proposal.

[68] In fact, in the metaphor of captivity we find something of that typical symbolism (the images of drunkenness, oblivion, dream or slavery) which is also characteristic of some so-called Gnostic trends, and through which the person is cast in the condition of the unlucky victim, and thereby it is suggested that they are really the harmed beings by an external agency that seeks to destroy them in a surreptitious way. For a reflection on the underlying exculpatory logic of those metaphors, let me refer to Bermejo-Rubio 2008.

[69] In fact, the Manichaean hypostatization of Evil into an original and separate reality, previous to the existence of the human being, tends to develop the idea that Evil originally comes from without, and to create accordingly a soteriological view quite different for instance to the current views in mainstream Christianity and other monotheistic faiths.

[70] Let us notice that at least one Manichaean text can be considered a sample of the idea of the "Saved Savior"; see Franzmann 2003, 48–49.

[71] Asmussen 1965 (II C: 170, 194).

[72] *Ex his autem suis fabulis* […] *coguntur dicere, animas bonas, quas censent ab animarum malarum naturae scilicet contrariae commixtione liberandas, eius cuius Deus est esse naturae* (Augustine, *De haeresibus* 1.46. 2).

Further Remarks

There are several reasons making the Prayer of the Emanations an extremely interesting source for understanding Manichaeism. In fact, it would have been easy to prove that this text has what Gardner has called a "semi-creedal" nature.[73] It contains many references to the key dualistic belief, some important mythical figures (the great Father of Lights, the Light-Nous, the five great Lights), and plenty of allusions to cosmogonical and cosmological events, along with elements of ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, and prophetology. Our assessment, however, has focused on the relevance of the Prayer—which has a clear hymn nature—as a witness for the daily practice of Manichaean worship and for the kind of piety which characterizes this religious phenomenon.[74]

It is worth remarking that the portrayal of the divine powers in the Prayer hints further at the great importance of practice. After the general invocation to the great Father and to "all gods, all angels, all splendors, all enlighteners, all powers" which are from him, it is the action of the divine beings that is emphasized. The third stanza sings of the great powers and shining angels who have "subjugated the darkness", "put heaven and earth in order, and bound in them the whole foundation of haughtiness". The fourth one sings of Christ, who "interpreted wisdom and the secret mysteries to people on earth; and set forth the way of truth to the whole world; and explained in every language; and distinguished the truth from the lie". The fifth sings of the living God, "who, by his own power, raised up all things; that which is ordered above, and below". The sixth glorifies the great light-givers, which "by wisdom conquer the antagonists and illuminate the entire order, and of all oversee and judge the world, and conduct the victorious among the souls into the great aeon of light". The seventh glorifies the five great lights, without which the universe would not be able to endure. The eight glorifies "all gods, all angels […] who uphold this whole creation". The ninth praises "all the shining angels, who rule the totality of the universe, and subdue all demons and all the evil, and protect righteousness and defend it from the wicked demons". The divine powers are throughout praised by portraying them through action verbs. It is the actions of the gods, what they actually *do*, not simply its essence and greatness, what is worthy of being glorified.

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[73] Gardner 2011b, 93.

[74] Remark the use of ὑμνέω in line 84.

The reason for this fact lies in that—with the sole exception of the ultimate God and his heavenly court—the divine forces, in the course of the "second time", are involved in the mixture, and therefore urged to fight against evil, which has a chaotic and rebellious nature. The ontological solidarity between divine and human Light impels the righteous or *electi* to fight, in their turn, against evil. This is why the last stanza of the Prayer is addressed to the righteous ones who "have overcome all evil" (πάντας δικαίους τοὺς πάσης κακίας περιγεγονό{ν}τας). Just as it had been previously said that the divine powers conquer the antagonists, the *electi* are said to have overcome all evil. But this *Aufhebung* of evil is not simply carried out on a theoretical level. Admittedly, the text does not mention the communal meal which is the central ritual of Manichaean communities, but it hints otherwise at the importance of practice. It is not only the gnoseological dimension that matters—the fact that the righteous "have understood truth and all Preeminence" (τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ πᾶσαν ὑπεροχὴν ἐπέγνωσαν)—, but also their concrete moral behaviour. Not in vain is a reference found in lines 102–103 to "the chaste and steadfast" (τοὺς ἁγνοὺς καὶ βεβαίους). Chastity or purity—what Augustine calls the *signaculum sinus*—is one of the main commands for the righteous, and steadfastness was also an essential value in this much persecuted religion.[75]

It is therefore significant that, even in a work aimed at singing and glorifying the divine powers, the twofold way of knowledge and practice is, however indirectly, put forward. A religious phenomenon can only be understood if all its dimensions—not only its theology and its myth of origins and salvation, but also its inner organization, its ritual and liturgy, its distinctive piety, and so on—are thoroughly taken into account. A close reading of the Prayer from Kellis proves that Manichaean self-understanding could not fail to include a colourful description of the activity of the divine forces it posited, and of the behavior of its adherents. After all, it was the particular combination of belief and practice what served to establish and maintain the unique identity of the Religion of Light over time and space.

[75] Let us recall that, among the Psalms of the Errants, we find the "Psalm of Steadfastness" or ⲡⲯⲁⲗⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲩⲡⲟⲙⲟⲛⲏ (Psalter 141.1–143.35).

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THE MANICHAEAN WEEKLY CONFESSION RITUAL

Jason David BeDuhn

Between the daily prayers and sacred meal, and the annual high holiday of the Bema festival, Manichaeans punctuated their life with a weekly assembly that featured among its activities a rite of confession. Like everything else about the Manichaean religion, its practice of confession must be excavated and reconstructed from fragmentary remains and inexact allusions. We cannot simply assume what confession might entail and mean generically, and impose those assumptions precipitously on the isolated pieces of evidence for the specific Manichaean practice. Nor should we reduce the form and function of confession in Manichaeism to its antecedents, as if Mani and his successors merely cobbled together odd parts of previous religious traditions that possessed inherent meaning and purpose unrelated to their new context of application.

As the work of Birger Pearson has demonstrated, all religions have a prehistory, whose existing elements get taken up into the new system, whether that system arises out of self-conscious design or out of the interplay of personal and cultural forces in a dialectical process of community (re-)formation.[1] In either case, the individual components of ideas and practices that enter into a process of religious formation take new meaning from each other, and find a place of relative equilibrium in the system that emerges. Besides reconstructing the exact form confession took in Manichaeism, therefore, we should be concerned to discern its function as an integral part of a system that tended towards putting all of its constituent parts in coherent relation to each other.[2]

Confession belongs to those religious phenomena that appear throughout the world and human history.[3] By disclosing faults, one ritually rectifies

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[1] Representative of this emphasis in his work is Pearson 1997; for my review of this work, see BeDuhn 2001.

[2] All those who labor in this generation to understand both the form and function of Manichaean practices owe an inestimable debt to the pioneering work of Henri-Charles Puech. Particularly important for this subject is Puech 1972. It should be noted that another article specifically on confession in Manichaeism, Puech 1979, is based upon an address he delivered in 1965, and its content is largely incorporated into the 1972 piece.

[3] See Pettazzoni, 1929–1936.

the violation they entail, either to ward off various supposed consequences or to re-establish a state in which other ritual actions or contact with the sacred may occur. For the most part, then, rituals of confession have an *occasional* quality, employed as needed in response to specific infractions, or in response to some condition of illness, bad luck, or ritual failure indicating some undisclosed or unknown fault.

But in certain traditions, confession becomes *regularized* into a periodic performance, in order to systematically clear away accumulated faults and re-establish or maintain a condition of individual and community purity. To this latter kind belong the annual Yom Kippur observances, or the Buddhist and Jaina ceremonies performed at the conclusion of the annual rainy-season retreat. The Manichaeans, too, held such an annual ceremony of confession and absolution during the Bema festival.[4] But the Manichaeans also observed a regular schedule of weekly confession, whose form and function will occupy the center of our interest here.

The Manichaeans followed a lunisolar calendar (with lunar months adjusted to the solar year by a regular cycle of intercalated months), within which the moon's visible phases had ritual and ideological significance. They also employed the seven-day week, originating in Mesopotamian astronomy and adopted over a wide geographic area in the centuries just before and just after Mani.[5] Although in theory each seven-day week should align with one of the four phases of the moon, in practice the week-cycle ran successively, independently of the observable lunar cycle. The Manichaean assigned special observances to Sundays and Mondays, as the days associated with the two great luminaries that were the objects of Manichaean reverence. As days of community assembly, they afforded the opportunity for readings from Manichaean scriptures, sermons, hymn-singing, and a number of other observances, including a ritualized confession.

Mani himself is credited by Manichaean tradition with the introduction of regular confession and absolution. In a Sogdian confession text dating to the ninth or tenth centuries, Mani is quoted (in Middle Persian) with

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[4] See Wurst 1995, 132–144. Wurst 1995, 142–143, points to evidence that some sort of rite of confession was performed during the Bema among Western Manichaeans, just as it is widely and explicitly attested for Eastern Manichaeans.

[5] According to Henning 1945, even in regions where the secular calendar did not employ the seven-day week (e.g., in Iran and Sogdiana), the Manichaean leadership issued religious calendars that overlaid the week on the secular months. It has been suggested, based on philological evidence, that the Manichaeans played an instrumental role in disseminating the seven-day week in China during the Tang Dynasty.

regard to the obligation to make confession, in the following words: "At all times you should assemble for the forgiveness of sins and […] Forgive and ask (forgiveness) from each other; whoever does not forgive, will not be forgiven."[6] The closing words appear to base this instruction on a *logion* of Jesus.[7] Similarly, in a passage of the Coptic *Kephalaia*, Mani is quoted as saying, "It is right for the Catechumen (i.e., layperson, otherwise referred to as an Auditor) to pray at all times for repentance and the forgiveness of sins from God and the holy church, because of his sins."[8]

There is no doubt that forgiveness of sins stands at the center of how Mani conceived of his mission. In the *Cologne Mani Codex*, for instance, the power to forgive sins is one of a handful of gifts he asks for from his supernatural "Twin," and the latter grants it, "in order that you might impart pardon of sins to those sinners who accept repentance from you," and (if I read the fragmentary words that follow correctly) pass this power on to his church and his Electi (i.e., the sacerdotal, ascetic class of Manichaean practitioners).[9] Yet, besides these general affirmations of repentance, confession, and absolution, which one might take to refer to an individual, occasional practice, only one surviving text expressly quotes Mani appointing Mondays as a day set aside specifically for confession. A Parthian hymn composed for performance on Mondays quotes instructions from Mani for how the day is to be observed, culminating with the words "Make confession to one another; forgive all sins."[10]

Is this attribution of the weekly rite of confession to Mani historically true? As Christiane Reck has noted, "One must allow for the possibility that these utterances perhaps serve deliberately for the legitimation of a church tradition, and therefore they must not be overestimated. There thus exists in this form no proof of the establishment of Monday by Mani. But one can say that the community in its self-understanding viewed Monday, in its character as a day of confession, as Mani's 'gift.' "[11] We must reserve judgment on how much Mani himself may have elaborated his simple command to

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[6] M801a.739–744 (Henning, 1937, 40): pd wysp zm'n 'w 'st'r hyštn 'wd hw'[.].[y]ẖ 'w 'gny[n] hyb bwyd ○○ hylyd 'wd xw'hyd yk 'c yk ○ ky ny hylyd 'wyž ny hylynd.

[7] Cf. Matthew 6:15.

[8] *Keph.* 91.230.26–28: Gardner 1995, 238.

[9] *Cologne Mani Codex* 37.1; 39.4–13.

[10] M5860.I.R.ii.9–11: Reck 2004, 126–130; this hymn is quoted at greater length below. Cf. M284a.V.i.2–6: Reck 2004, 108: "The rich light-father gave to the religion confession (*wx'stw'nyftt*), salvation, and mercy on this praised day."

[11] Reck 2004, 10.

confess to one another into the structured, scripted confession ritual that eventually prevailed. But neither should we automatically assume that the more formalized ritual could only have been a later development within the religion. With a career spanning more than thirty years, Mani had plenty of time and opportunity to play "Paul" to his own "Jesus," and put in place the organization, literary resources, and ritual patterns central to Manichaean life thereafter.[12] Nor did Mani formulate his religious system on a blank slate. Previous traditions known to him had already turned occasional confessionary practice into a regularized one, and introduced comprehensive confessional scripts for collective recitation. Given his place in time, Mani could build on developed forms of confession already in place around him in West Asia.

For a weekly confession, however, the antecedents were relatively few. Most obviously, the pattern of Jewish and Christian community gatherings provided a schedule amenable to the introduction of weekly confession. Among the Jews, a "minor confession" (*viddui ze'ira*), employed on the Sabbath or on fast days, can be securely traced back only to early medieval times, even if tradition ascribes such texts to authors roughly contemporaneous with Mani.[13] In the Christian case, the *Didache* enjoins confession "in assembly" (*en ekklēsiai*),[14] and a formalized, scripted confession and absolution to prepare a person for the Eucharist is attested in the ("Nestorian") East Syrian Church at least by the sixth century.[15] The institution of the Manichaean practice falls between these two historical benchmarks.

Turning to eastern antecedents, both Buddhist and Jaina communities gathered (and still gather) every two weeks for ritual observances, a practice that goes back to Vedic ritual preparation (*vrata*, "initiation" or "vow") for prescribed periodic sacrifices, entailing abstinence from food from sunrise to sunset, from labor, from sex, from business transactions, etc.[16] Confession

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[12] Certain ceremonies and observances, of course, clearly were additions made after Mani's death, such as the Bema in its aspect as a commemoration of that death, and at least some of the Yimki fasts commemorating later martyrdoms. See Wurst 1995, 145–149, for a consideration of the possibility that Mani had instituted an annual confession and absolution rite, which later became incorporated into the Bema, as proposed by Ries 1976, 224 and 229.

[13] See BeDuhn 2004, 164–167.

[14] *Didache* 4.14.

[15] Isaac 1989, 181–187. A one-time confession before baptism seems to have been the early norm in Christianity generally: Lea 1968, 175.

[16] I leave aside here the Zoroastrian parallels, in accord with the conclusions of Asmussen 1965, that the *patīt* formulas of confession are late developments (tenth century, by his estimate, 89–90; cf. 78–79). The weekly assemblies currently observed in some Buddhist

of sin preceded certain sacrifices already in the Vedic tradition. Buddhists and Jainas built on this established ritual pattern, making it the occasion for laypeople to spend the day in the company of monks and nuns, temporarily emulate their stricter observances, receive instruction, and perform various ritual acts.[17] This kind of periodic reunion of two distinct classes of adherent—ascetic and lay—corresponds to the characteristics of the Manichaean weekly assembly; nothing similar appears in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

Confession comes into play on this periodic occasion among Buddhists only for the monks and nuns, who perform a ritualized confession and reaffirmation of their precepts in the *patimokkha* (Sanskrit *pratimoksa*) ceremony, from which laypeople are explicitly barred.[18] The recital consists of the rules of monastic life. At the end of each category of possible offense, a senior monk asks if anyone present has committed a violation. But in current practice this is no longer an actual inquiry; at some stage of development, confession of violations was separated into a private act, before assembly for recitation of the *patimokkha*.[19] In this private confession (*parisuddhi*), monks confess to each other in pairs, and thus are restored to full rights to participate in the following reaffirmation of the precepts at the *patimokkha*,[20] which had to be held in the full assembly of monks.[21]

It is only among the Jainas that we find the additional lay confession to the ascetic class also observed by the Manichaeans. The Jaina rite of *ālocanā* ("exposure") entails a formalized confessional recitation to a spiritual superior, lay to ascetic, or ascetic to ascetic, just as in Manichaeism. Jaina ascetics otherwise perform it amongst themselves twice daily, at the conclusion of the rainy season retreat, and annually, as well as at the fortnightly assembly, at which laypeople also perform it.[22] It is a scripted, general confession of

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traditions is a later development, as are other periodizations of monk and lay assemblies. For current practice in Burma, see Spiro 1982, 214–219. For Vedic connection, see Olivelle 1974, 52–53.

[17] Observance of the fortnightly *uposatha* assembly by Buddhists is attested as early as the time of Ashoka, in the latter's Pillar Edict 5: Dutt 1962, 104. But it is uncertain whether the monastic *patimokkha* confession was recited so frequently already at that time. Apparently, it was originally performed every six years (*Dīgha Nikāya* 13, *Mahāpadāna Suttanta*). One of the earliest attestations of the the twice-monthly recital at the uposatha is in *Mahāvagga* 2.

[18] For the prohibition of laypeople at the *patimokkha*, eee the Theravada *Vinaya* 1.115.

[19] See Theravada *Vinaya* 2.236–237.

[20] Gombrich 1988, 108–109.

[21] Olivelle 1974, 53.

[22] Dundas 1992, 146–148.

possible offenses,[23] followed by a statement of repentance (*pratikramana*, more properly, a wish for the disarming, so to speak, of the action's effect) and request for pardon (*ksāmanā*).[24]

The Manichaean weekly assembly involved the same sort of temporary emulation of the ascetic class on the part of the laity seen in Buddhist and Jaina *uposatha* gatherings, as well as similar ritualized acts of confession and absolution. In fact, Turkic-speaking Manichaeans borrowed the very term *uposatha* (*vūsāndē* through the mediation of Sogdian *ßūsāndē*) to refer to their weekly assemblies.[25] The shift to a weekly observance, on the other hand, is understandable against a Judeo-Christian background and a ritual calendar organized into weeks. Rather than looking for a single direct antecedent to Manichaean confessionary practice, therefore, we should take seriously Mani's broad familiarity with all of these traditions, and his explicit interest in identifying commonalities among them, which he understood to be artifacts of the original revelations underlying each of them, before corruption accentuated their differences.[26]

Manichaeans referred to their obligation to make weekly confession in the enumeration of their duties that they made in the grand annual confession at the Bema ceremony. Fragmentary copies of such annual confession scripts for both the ascetic Elect (in Sogdian) and the lay Auditor (in Old Turkic), dating to the ninth or tenth centuries, have been found in Turfan and Dunhuang, in what is today northwest China.[27] The Elect confession text, partially preserved in a Manichaean liturgical handbook, the *Prayer and Confession Book* (Bet- und Beichtbuch) as well as a number of other fragments, reviews the five primary rules of the Elect life, corresponding to the five *mahavratas* ("great vows") of Jainism, before going on to additional duties, including "the four Monday rules": (1) "confession from the heart

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[23] E.g. Williams 1963, 205: "I wish to make confession (*ālocanā*): Whatever fault has been committed by me during … [the appropriate period] in body, speech, or mind, in contravention of the scriptures and of right conduct, unfitting and improper to be done, ill meditated and ill conceived, immoral and undesirable, unbecoming for a layman, in regard to knowledge and philosophy and the lay life and the holy writ and the *sāmāyika*, and whatever transgression or infraction I may have committed in respect of the … the layman's twelvefold rule of conduct—may that evil have been done in vain".

[24] Including the following clauses in Williams 1963, 205–207: "I ask pardon from all living creatures. May all creatures pardon me. May I have friendship for all creatures and enmity towards none".

[25] E.g., in *Xwāstwānīft* 12A: Clark 2013, 92.

[26] On this theme in Manichaeism, see BeDuhn 2000b.

[27] Some small fragments of a Sogdian version of the lay confession formula have been identified in Henning 1940, 63–67.

and from the mind"; (2) "prayers and hymns with pure intent"; (3) "mind directed to the sermon"; (4) "mentally reconciling with one another and asking and giving forgiveness."[28] The Auditor confession text *Xwāstwānīft*, preserved in fragmentary manuscripts representing some twenty-five copies, progresses through various matters of faith, then the ten rules of lay morality, before addressing daily, weekly, festival day, and annual obligations. Regarding Mondays, it says, "It has been required every day of the moon god (i.e., Monday) to ask God, the religious community (*nom*), and the pure Electi to release our transgressions and our sins."[29]

Texts actually used at the weekly assemblies, recently published in a marvelous edition by Christiane Reck, provide further evidence for the centrality of confession at this periodic gathering. In a partially preserved Parthian hymn, the singers celebrate the day with the words, "Gracious is the fast-day (*rwcg*), the highest day, the praised day, new Monday. Gracious is this day of the confession (*wx'stw'nyft̲*) of the gods, the time of the assembly of gods and angels. Therefore, gather yourselves, you children of faith, on this Monday."[30] Another hymn, explicitly referring to "this Monday," expresses the good news that, "The rich light-father gave to the religion (*dyn*) confession (*wx'stw'nyft̲*), salvation, and mercy on this praised day."[31] Another exhorts its listeners to "Exert yourself with zeal on this Monday, the blessed day of sinlessness (*'by'st̲'ryft*). Every one of you in confession (*wx'stw'nyft̲*) entreat (*pdwhyd*), praise (*wndyd*) and bless (*'frynyd*). Implore and request humbly; forgive one another's sins; relinquish grievance."[32] Evidence for a Monday rite of confession among western Manichaeans is far scarcer. Augustine of Hippo refers a number of times to the practice of confession in the Manichaean community to which he belonged, but never identifies the occasion on which it occurred. Gregor Wurst has identified what might be the only explicit association of confession with Monday in a western Manichaean source. He has detected, at the end of the second of the "Psalms of the Vagabonds" (*psalmoi sarakōtōn*) from the Coptic *Psalm Book* from Medinet Madi, a kind of hymnic outline of the Manichaean festal calendar, proceeding from Sundays and Mondays, through the festival days (referred to here as *pannuxismoi*, and known in eastern Manichaean texts as *yamag*

[28] Henning 1937, 40.
[29] *Xwāstwānīft* 13A: Clark 2013, 92.
[30] M137.I.R.1–11: Reck 2004, 93–94.
[31] M284a.V.i.2–6: Reck 2004, 108.
[32] M763.V.i.13–25: Reck 2004, 121.

or *yimki*).[33] The text refers to "the day of [...], the salvation of the catechumens" (i.e., Auditors), presumably Sundays (see below), followed by "the day of forgiveness of sins, the life of the elect,"[34] which Wurst takes to refer to Mondays. Given this paucity of evidence, is it possible that Manichaeans did not observe a weekly confession in the West? Perhaps they only performed confession annually in the Bema ceremony, or, at the opposite extreme, performed confession daily in connection with the sacred meal. Yet western Manichaeans kept to the same weekly schedule of assembly found among their eastern brethren: in the fifth century, bishop Leo of Rome reported that, "They have been detected to fast in honour of the sun and moon on the day of the Lord and on the second ferial day."[35] Given this consistency of ritual schedule, we should be cautious about drawing a negative conclusion with respect to weekly confession simply because our limited sources so far have not yielded more explicit testimony to it.

Procedure

Our next task is to reconstruct the actual procedural details of the rite of confession, along with its surrounding ceremony and other observances. Drawing on evidence across thousands of miles of geography and a thousand years of history, we run the risk of constructing a synthetic procedure never observed in all its details in any one location or at any one time. With that cautionary note in mind, we can survey the relevant material looking for both consistencies and inconsistencies within it.

Fasting and Other Preparatory Abstentions

Manichaean Auditors fasted every Sunday. In his Epistle 15, written in 447 CE, Leo, bishop of Rome, states that, "They, as our examination has revealed and proved, spend the day of the Lord ... in mournful fasting; and as has been disclosed, they devote this continence to the worship of the sun."[36] A half-century earlier, Augustine of Hippo had the opinion that it would be a scandal for Catholic Christians to fast on Sunday, since "the Manichaeans ... have selected that day for their Auditors to fast."[37] At the other end of

[33] Wurst 1995, 31–32.
[34] *Psalm Book* 2.140.19–24: Allberry 1938, 140.
[35] *Sermon* 42.5: Schipper and van Oort 2000, 39.
[36] *Ep*. 15.4: Schipper and van Oort 2000, 59; cf. *Sermon* 42.5.
[37] *Ep*. 36.12.27.

the Manichaean world, a Chinese Buddhist writer named Yang King-fong, writing in 764 CE, reports: "The heretic Manichaeans observe a fast on the day of *mi* (i.e., Sunday); they perform a ritual on this day as on the 'great day.' They neglect neither this ritual nor this fast."[38] Similarly, the annual lay confession formula from ninth or tenth century Central Asia, the *Xwāstwānīft*, states, "There has been a precept that one should observe (lit. sit) *vūsāndē* like a pure Elect (does) fifty days a year. It has been required that one should keep a pure fast and present it (as an act of worship) to God."[39]

A number of passages from the Coptic *Kephalaia* bear on this practice. One says that, "They who have not the strength [to fast] daily" as the passage has just said the Electi do, "should make their fast [on] the Lord's Day."[40] In another, a disciple says to Mani, "I have heard you, my master, saying 'Seven angels shall be engendered by the fasting of each one of the Elect; and not only the Elect, but the Catechumens engender them on the Lord's Day (*kyriakē*).'"[41] In a third passage, an Auditor asks Mani "to talk to us about the fifty Lord's Days during which the Catechumens fast. For what do they fast, or for whose mystery do they fast? Or those second (fifty) [or: "those Mondays"][42] that are assigned to the Electi, to whose mystery were they assigned amongst them?"[43] In his answer, Mani refers again to "the fifty Lord's Days that I have revealed [for the] catechumens," as well as to "the second fifty days [or: "fifty Mondays"][44] that I have revealed for the Electi,"[45] and sums up by stating, "I have [bestowed] on the entire church … these fifty days in which the catechumens fast, according to the mystery of the First Man, along with the other fifty, according to the sign of the Second Man (i.e., Jesus) who was revealed in the church."[46] This passage clearly distinguishes

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[38] Chavannes and Pelliot 1913, 172. The Chinese *Hymnscroll* likewise has a hymn designated for recital "at the weekly fast": *Hymnscroll* 339.

[39] *Xwāstwānīft* 12A: Clark 2013, 92. For attestation of a weekly fast among Manichaean laity, not explicitly said to be on Sundays, see al-Biruni, *Athar-ul-Bakiya*: Sachau 1879, 190; an-Nadim, *Fihrist*: Dodge 1970, 789, with emendation of text.

[40] *Keph*. 79.191.31–192.1: Gardner 1995, 200.

[41] *Keph*. 81.193.28–31: Gardner 1995, 203.

[42] With *deutera* ("second") being used in its calendric sense of "second day of the week." See Smagina 1990, 122.

[43] *Keph*.109.262.15–21: Gardner 1995, 268.

[44] See note 44.

[45] *Keph*.109.264.2–4: Gardner 1995, 269.

[46] *Keph*.109.264.15–19: Gardner 1995, 269–270. Cf. *Keph*. 91.233.2–4: Gardner 1995, 240: "The Catechumen who truly believes performs fifty fasts, wherein [he] fasts on the fifty Lord's Days of the [year]."

fifty Sundays ("Lord's Day") on which the Auditors fasted from a different fifty days (and quite possibly expressly "Mondays") on which the Electi fasted. The mistaken assumption found in some modern treatments of the subject, that the Electi fasted on both Sundays and Mondays, is based on a misunderstanding of the Electi's discipline.[47] The Electi, of course, fasted every day from sunrise to sunset, and it is this sort of daytime fast that the Auditors observed in their Sunday fasts.[48] So there would be no point in referring to only fifty days of fasting for the Electi if all that was meant was this sort of ordinary daytime fast, which they observed every day of their lives, or if they kept an extraordinary fast for both Sundays and Mondays, which would amount to one hundred fast days rather than fifity.[49] Rather, the fifty fast days assigned to the Electi, on Mondays, must have entailed a suspension of their evening meal, which otherwise formed a central daily ritual act, including, presumably, on Sunday evenings.[50]

Fasting prepared the individual for confession by first "subduing the entire ruling power that exists in him", i.e., by rendering the body docile, and so better able to adhere to the moral regulations of Manichaean life.[51] As in the Buddhist and Jaina *uposatha* days, Manichaean laypeople also were expected to abstain from sex and labor on Sundays.[52] But Sunday involved

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[47] See, e.g., Puech 1972, 604.

[48] This is the proper understanding of Augustine, *Ep*. 236.2: *Die quoque dominico cum illis jejunant*, which should be translated "On the Lord's Day they (i.e., the Auditors) also fast with them (i.e., the Elect)." That Auditors broke their fast at sunset, as did the Elect, is suggested by references to eating proper food on Sundays, immediately following discussion of fasting on that day, in *Keph*. 91: "He shall … in his eating. He shall not defile his nourishment with the … of fish and all the pollution of flesh and blood. He [shall not] eat any unclean thing on these Lord's Days" (*Keph*. 91.233.7–10: Gardner 1995, 240). This passage suggests the temporary adoption of vegetarianism on the model of the Elect diet.

[49] So, in *Keph*. 81.194.1 and 7–8, while the Elect fast "every day" and "engender angels daily through total fasting", the head of a local community counted up only the number of angels produced by the Elect on the Sundays, when thy fasted in weekly congregation with the Auditors.

[50] That the Electi broke their fast on Sunday and partook of the ritual meal finds substantiation in the fact that the alms-service by which the Auditors supplied them with food for the ritual meal features prominently in a Chinese hymn designated for recitation on Sunday (i.e., "the weekly fast," *Hymnscroll* 339–346). In contrast, Reck 1997, 301, notes the absence of any reference to the alms-service in the surviving Iranian Monday hymns.

[51] *Keph*. 79.191.14–15: Gardner 1995, 200. See Puech 1972, 607.

[52] *Keph*. 91.233.5–11: "Also, he masters their purification, controlling himself [from] lust for his wife, purifying his bedroom through self-control on all these Lord's Days … . And he also restrains his hands from wounding and inflicting pain on the living soul." Cf. *Keph*. 80.192.30–33: "Now, the fa[stin]g b[y] which he can fast is [th]is: he can fast on the [Lord]'s day [and rest from the] deeds of the world."

more than just abstentions: hymns designated for performance on Sundays have also been found.[53]

As for Monday observances, a Parthian Monday hymn quotes instructions for them directly from the words of Mani:

> It is necessary that we hold (this day) in fear (*trs*) and regulation (*'ndrz*), as he indicated: "Study the strict commandment (*cxš'byd*) and scripture (*nbyg*), and promulgate wisdom, decorum (*brhm*), and precept (*'ndrz*) on this day.[54] On this day, also, do not go and come on the road, do not enter and go not forth; do not write scripture (*nbyg m' nbysyd*), and do not [give] the body medicine[55] … Always build together the true edifice; do not say 'my, my,' 'you, you,' and 'I, I'; rather, urge one another to purity, good conduct, and poverty. Make confession to one another (*kry*[*d*] *'yw 'w byd xw'stw'*[*nyft̲*]); [forgive] all sins."[56]

Were these Monday rules intended for the Auditors, too, or just for the Electi? If Auditors were expected to maintain this sort of restricted conduct on both Sundays and Mondays, we would not expect many of our sources to speak as they do of Sunday alone as the day of special observances among the Auditors. The reference to poverty also points towards the Electi as the recipients of these instructions. Most likely, then, this hymn relates the rules specifically for the Electi on Mondays, when they were expected to suspend their other activities, such as missionary travel and copying scriptures.[57]

For all we can tell, the Auditors arrived in the company of the Electi on Mondays only for a short time, for the rite of confession itself, even though they had fasted not on this day, but the day before. One further detail of the practices leading up to confession on Mondays can be gleaned from al-Biruni's description of the daily prayers of the Electi. The seven times of prayer began at noon, at which time an Elect normally would make thirty-seven prostrations (*rakaʿāt*); "on Mondays," however, "two prostrations are subtracted."[58] Biruni offers no explanation for this variation. We might propose a practical (though slight!) mitigation of the ritual rigors due to fasting;

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[53] In psalms 119 ff. in the still unpublished portion of the Coptic *Psalmbook* (see Allberry 1938, 230), and in Middle Iranian examples (see Reck 2004, 135–136), as well as the Chinese example mentioned in note 52.

[54] A mark of punctuation here may indicate the end of the quotation, or it may simply break the quotation into normal clauses. There is no obvious change in the speaking voice.

[55] I.e., break the fast by taking oral medicine.

[56] M5860.I.R.i.2—ii.11: Reck 2004, 127.

[57] Reck 2004, 127, draws the same conclusion.

[58] Reeves 2011, 213.

but it is just as likely to relate to some ideological rationale resulting in the abbreviation of the text of the noon prayer by omission of two clauses.

The Rite of Confession

We come now to what Christiane Reck has characterized as the "core of the Monday ceremony": the act of confession itself.[59] For the possible timing of the rite of confession on Mondays, we have no information whatsoever. We might surmise, given that the Auditors observed a fast on Sunday, followed by special food restrictions for the Sunday evening meal, that their rite of confession should take place relatively early in the day on Monday, before they have lost their preparatory condition by resuming their normal diet. But we cannot confirm this. Alternatively, the rite occurred at that time of day when Auditors typically had contact with Electi, namely, around sunset when they normally delivered alms for the evening ritual meal. With no such meal held on Mondays, the rite of confession may have filled the ritual void, so to speak. This conclusion is further supported by the use on Mondays of the chant known as the *Twelve Sovereignties* (on which more below), which we know to have been otherwise chanted each day after the evening meal.

Among the "praises and chants" collected in the Chinese Manichaean *Hymnscroll*, we find one identified with the following words: "This chant (*gat* > *gāthā*) is the prayer text (*yuan wen*) to be recited each Monday (*fan mo ri*) in the Repentance and Confession (*chan hui*) for Auditors (*tingzhe*)."[60] The *Hymnscroll*'s translator and editor, Tao-Ming, specifically states that he has translated from Iranian originals;[61] so the underlying ceremony reflected in the text may tell us as much about practices in Iran and Central Asia as they do about those in China. As the chant begins, a command is issued: "You Auditors, each of you kneel on both knees at once!"[62] At the other end of the Manichaean world, Augustine of Hippo reports similarly that Auditors knelt in confession: "Auditors kneel before the Elect so that these may

[59] Reck 2004, 12.

[60] *Hymnscroll* 387. Yutaka Yoshida has noted that the expression *mo ri*, previously translated as "sunset," should instead be understood as day (*ri*) of *mâk* (as the sign *mo* would have been pronounced at the time the text was written), with the latter term being the Iranian loanword *māh*/*māx* ("moon") as found in Chinese astrological works of the period (Yoshida 1992, 139; cf. Müller 1907, 459). My warm thanks to Robert Campany for assistance with the Chinese of this passage (other quotations from the *Hymnscroll* are taken from Tsui 1943–1946).

[61] See Tao-Ming's colophon, Tsui 1943–1946, 215.

[62] *Hymnscroll* 388: Tsui 1943–1946, 213.

lay a hand on the supplicant; and this is done not only by their presbyters or bishops or deacons, but by whichever Elect one wishes" (*auditores ante electos genua figunt ut eis manus supplicibus imponatur non a solis presbyteris vel episcopis aut diaconis eorum sed a quibuslibet electis*).[63] One can only guess whether the procedure between two Electi took the same form. Kneeling, of course, constituted a widely recognized posture of supplication. The Chinese text continues by exhorting the Auditors to vocally express repentance towards a list of divine beings and forces from Manichaean theology.

> Faithfully and imploringly beg, moan, and repent before the real and true Father, the great compassionate Lord, the twelve Kings of Light, and the land of Nirvana; before the wonderful, animating Air, the innumerable saintly assemblies, the unchangeable and unhindered precious soil of diamond; before the palaces of Sun and Moon, the two Halls of Light, each of the three compassionate Fathers, naturally praiseworthy and admirable; before *Lushena*, the great dignified and solemn column, the five bodies of wonderful forms, and *Kuan-yin* and *Shih-chih*; before this auspicious day and the praiseworthy and admirable hour, the perfumed lake of seven treasures, and the brimming life-giving water.[64]

The text then transitions into a collective confession, which would appear to be the Auditors' response to the previous exhortation.

> If we are neglectful of the Seven Alms-givings, the Ten Commandments, and the Three Seals—gates of the Law—and if we have damaged the five-fold Law-body, squandering it constantly; or if we have hewn and chopped the five kinds of plants and trees; or if we have made to labor and enslaved the five kinds of animals: these and other numerous sins and offences we now wash away, cleanse and repent.[65]

The chant next switches to a description of the transition at death, through judgment, and to a heavenly reward, thus focusing attention on the motivation for confession, and religious practice in general. At the same time, the regular recitation of this description of the passage into the afterlife reinforces the themes and imagery of this part of Manichaean teaching. The journey culminates in entry "into the eternal Light-world of Nirvana." For this ultimately happy end, the Auditors chant, "All our members are unanimous as to the above wish."[66]

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[63] Augustine, *Ep*. 236.2.
[64] *Hymnscroll* 388–391: Tsui 1943–1946, 213.
[65] *Hymnscroll* 392–393: Tsui 1943–1946, 213.
[66] *Hymnscroll* 399–400: Tsui 1943–1946, 214.

Taking this text as a starting point, we can compare other sources on how the confession may have proceeded. Nothing in those sources suggests that confession involved accusation by superiors or colleagues.[67] On the contrary, all of the evidence points to a voluntary confession. It may even be questioned whether, besides the initial confession at the time of conversion, the recurring weekly and annual confessions were anything but recitations of either brief general statements of repentance for sinfulness, as in the above Chinese text, or comprehensive scripted formulas, in neither case attempting to draw out specific, individual infractions. After all, despite the language often used in modern discussions, nothing in the sources suggests any sort of practice of penance imposed on the person who had confessed to sin. Therefore, it was not a matter of accusing people of sin and imposing penance upon them. The weekly and annual rites involving confession had as their primary result an immediate and automatic forgiveness and *absolution* of sin. Perhaps that part of Manichaean ideology came into play that Augustine constantly raised: that sin could not be unqualifiedly attributed to the soul's responsibility, overpowered as it was by the forces of darkness and suppressed in its full agency. The soul in and of itself was not directly tainted by sin, only hemmed in by it. Repentance therefore had more of the character of a rallying of zeal and effort, rather than a self-accusing *mea culpa*, and absolution rather than penance suited that emphasis.

But how exactly were sins "confessed"? H.-C. Puech suggests that the act of confession may have been carried out in three ways: (1) in a spontaneous and personal manner, (2) by response when appropriate to a list read out by one's superior, or (3) by a rote recitation of a comprehensive catalog of possible infractions.[68] As he notes, only the latter form finds attestation in our sources; the first form would be unlikely to leave any documentary trace, while the second has no evidence of being employed by the Manichaeans, though it was in other religious traditions around them.

Puech may be correct that more personalized, spontaneous confessional consultations took place between Auditors and Elect, and among the Elect. Undoubtedly, in such an individualized context, men would have confessed

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[67] This was suggested at one point by Puech 1972, 610: "The penitent … kneeled in order to be accused of his faults" ("Il se mettait à genoux pour s'accuser des ses fautes . …"). He is more cautious in 1979, 306: "He kneels to declare his faults" ("Il se mettait à genoux pour déclarer ses fautes …"). *Keph*. 38 and 82 approve of remonstrating with someone who has gone astray, in order to induce repentance, but neither passage in any way suggests that this takes place in the confession rite.

[68] Puech 1979, 306.

to other men, women to other women, given the general restrictions on cross-gender contact among the Electi. On the other hand, the weekly Monday confession had the character specifically of a community event. Rather than each individual meeting with a spiritual superior in private consultation, the community gathered at a particular time of a specific day. Rather than confession taking place in private, at least one Manichaean source described a typical religious center for the community (a *manistan*) including a "hall for worship and confession,"[69] supporting the notion that the latter was a communal event.

Nevertheless, a number of Iranian and Turkic texts of a confessional character, for both Electi and Auditors, are composed in the first person singular. Even one of the copies of the *Xwāstwānīft* confession formula for laypeople, usually in the first person plural for group recitation in the annual Bema ceremony,[70] has been redacted into the first person singular for individual use. Shorter confession texts, some of which likewise are composed in first person singular, not unreasonably had their use in the weekly rite.[71] They do not have the character of signed confessions, so to speak, of actual deeds committed. They retain their character as generic scripts for ritual use. As such, they could have been employed at the weekly confession, recited individually before an Elect. Of course, nothing prevents a script in the first person singular being recited collectively—the "I" merely could emphasize individual responsibility for sin. Some of the surviving individualized confessions might not belong to the weekly rite, but be products of extra-curricular occasional use, even special zeal above and beyond the weekly requirement. Or they might be relics of a period of steep decline, when assemblies had ceased to be practical and Manichaeism had become a religion of primarily private

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[69] The text is part of a summary of Manichaeism prepared for the Chinese court in the eighth century, known as the *Compendium* (and, specifically, that part that became detached from the rest and was published separately as the "Pelliot Fragment"; see Chavannes and Pelliot 1913, 105–116). The *manistan* is referred to here as a *sseu*, but it is not a "monastery" as found in use among Manichaeans in the Turfan region in later centuries, because its plan does not include any sleeping quarters for the Electi, who apparently at this time still adhered to an itinerant lifestyle. Therefore, we may consider this plan of a *manistan* to reflect earlier practice.

[70] The annual Bema is still attested in 1120 CE in China, in the "Wen-shu Memorial" (Forte 1973, 234–238), which also lists among the contents of a local Manichaean center's library a "Large and Great Contrition" (*Kuang-ta ch'an*), which A. Forte reasonably identified with a confession text related to the *Xwāstwānīft* (Forte 1973, 243–244).

[71] For Iranian examples, see Henning 1937, 41–45; Asmussen 1965, 237–252; Sundermann 1997, 259–267. For Turkic examples, see Clark, 2013, 121–129.

devotions. Given the many ups and downs of Manichaean community life amid a long history of persecution, one could reasonably propose that both regular communal confession and occasional individual confession existed side-by-side in the tradition, with trends towards the dominance of one form or another depending upon conditions that might allow Manichaeans to assemble at all.

A few examples will suffice to give a sense of these confessional scripts. In a Middle Persian text from Turfan, the speaker is to say, "I am slack and defective, weak and negligent, in [the great] and small [precepts], and also the other admonitions and moral directions in which the pure and perfect are ordered."[72] In a Sogdian text, the speaker recites:

> If I should have thought greedy, unruly, shameless or bad thoughts against the admonitions of the three supervisors; if I should have been stimulated by the power of greed, inflamed by evil lust, consumed by the devouring fire (of desire); if the passions should have been roused by vengefulnes, vexation, anger, fury, or hate, by these sinful, evil thoughts, both spiritually and physically, then I ask for forgiveness from all this.[73]

One fragmentary Turkic confession seeks absolution "if in any way there has been sins and [error]s against the [five kinds of] creatures and beings, the five [kinds of plants and trees], and the dry and moist earth."[74] One from a private devotional book used by a Central Asian Elect named Aryaman Fristūm, following a conditional confession of violations of the rules binding on an Elect ("if I have …"), concludes in the following way:

> If I have offended and committed mistakes against mortal beings who, one and all, bear (it), (then), in the presence of the god *Nom Quti* (i.e., the Light-Mind), I venture to repent all (these) evil deeds of mine, and to ask and beg for pure absolution. Forgive my sins! Now I, Aryaman Fristūm Xoštir, venture to repent all of our various grievous and evil deeds … and to ask and beg for pure absolution.[75]

Among western sources, where we so far lack specimens of such confession texts that might have been used in the weekly rite, we find similar sentiments in confessional language woven into psalms composed for the annual Bema ceremony, with its more elaborate confessional program. It is to be hoped that the still unpublished first half of the Coptic *Psalm Book*

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[72] M210: Asmussen 1965, 241, with some modifications of the translation.
[73] M131 + M395 + T II D 138: Henning 1937, 42; translation from Klimkeit 1993, 149.
[74] Ch/U 6860.1–5: Clark 2013, 129.
[75] U85.V.1–5: Clark 2013, 116–117.

will yet yield Monday psalms, which while not confession scripts per se, would help balance the record in comparison with the more extensive eastern Manichaean sources.

Manichaeans enacted absolution through the gesture, made by an Elect, of laying hands upon the supplicant, as Augustine of Hippo reported in the passage already quoted (*eis manus supplicibus imponatur*). Mani accorded high significance to this ritual gesture of *cheirothesia*, giving it equivalent importance to the revelations he received, and regarding it just as much as a divine gift.[76] But if Manichaeans recited a weekly confession text as a group, how did they coordinate this with the obviously individual-to-individual contact of laying on of hands? Christiane Reck points out that, in the four Monday activities listed in the Sogdian *Prayer and Confession Book*, absolution does not immediately follow confession; hymns, prayers, and a sermon intervene. While the list may not have been intended as an actual schedule, the ability of its author to separate confession from absolution suggests that these could be conceived as discrete ritual acts.[77]

With this in mind, one might imagine a scenario similar to the Christian mass, with Manichaean supplicants, having already recited a collective confession, lining up for *cheirothesia* much as Catholic and Orthodox participants line up for the eucharist. Rites of absolution can be found throughout the Christian liturgical tradition, and entail in some instances a laying on of hands, as found already in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and in Cyprian of Carthage.[78] For instance, in the East Syrian liturgical tradition, the supplicant kneels, and bows his or her head, as the priest performs the gesture of laying on of hands (*syāmīḏā*). The East Syrian patriarch, Timothy I (fl. 780–823 CE) refers in one of his letters to the "imposition of hands for absolution" (*syāmîḏâ d-ʿal ḥûssāyâ*).[79] Especially pertinent to the Manichaean case is the fact that the Eastern Syrian absolution rite (*ṭaḵsā d-ḥûssāyâ*) constitutes a fully liturgical communal ceremony, as both its textual scripts and eyewitness reports of the rite attest.[80] Jacques Isaac has noted the association of this gesture with prayers invoking the Holy Spirit, including its

[76] *CMC* 64.8–12.

[77] Reck 2004, 12.

[78] Isaac 1989, 106–107; he goes on to catalog the extent of the practice in the Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and Armenian liturgical traditions, as well as in the Eastern Syrian one.

[79] Murray 1966, 526.

[80] Isaac 1989, 181. Cf. Badger 1852, 2.155, for an eyewitness account of the rite in the 19th century; it has since fallen into abeyance.

intervention within the penitent.[81] In Manichaeism, the functions of the Christian Holy Spirit are taken by the "Light-Mind," which intervenes with the sinner, shapes and guides his or her conduct in a positive way. When a text such as *Keph. 138* describes such interventions of the Light-Mind in recurrent cycles of sin and repentance, therefore, this spiritual and psychological action may have been understood to take place in correlation with ritual acts.

Prayers, Hymns, and Other Recitations

The rite of confession proper probably possessed a penumbra of ceremony around it: prayers, hymns, sermons, and so forth. Texts of a confessional nature easily slip into the form of prayers, so the distinction cannot always be made certainly. Tao-Ming includes in the Chinese *Hymnscroll* a "Penitential Prayer of the Auditor (Ni-yu-sha > Niyōšāg, Middle Persian "Auditor")," closely related in character to the confessional recitation already quoted.

> I now repent whatever were the deeds of my body, mouth, and mind; my greedy, indignant, and foolish behavior; and had I encouraged the robbers to poison my heart, or not restrained my roots; or had I doubted the eternal-living three Treasures and the two great Lights; or had I injured the body of *Lushena*, as well as the five Lights; had I begot a feeling of slight and neglect against the priest-teachers, our fathers and mothers, and against the wise intimates, and had I accused and blamed them; or had I imperfectly observed the Seven Alms-givings, the Ten Commandments, and the Three Seals—gates of the Law—I wish my sins may disappear![82]

Another text in Tao-Ming's collection bears the caption, "Chant for the Concluding Prayer on Mondays."[83] Its content closely parallels that found in the surviving Iranian Monday hymns edited by Christiane Reck. Several of the latter have a hortatory content, urging the audience to the act of confession and mutual forgiveness, and thus likely were performed before the confession.

One such hymn enjoins the community to "Exert yourself with zeal on this Monday, the blessed day of sinlessness (*'by'st'ryft*). Every one of you in confession (*wx'stw'nyft*) entreat (*pdwhyd*), praise (*wndyd*) and bless (*'frynyd*). Implore and request humbly; forgive one another's sins; relinquish grievance."[84] Another urges those who hear it to "[Wish for blessing] and

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[81] Isaac 1989, 107.
[82] *Hymnscroll* 411–414: Tsui 1943–1946, 215.
[83] *Hymnscroll* 380–386. For *mo ri* as "Monday," see note 63.
[84] M763.V.i.13–25: Reck 2004, 121.

mercy, o faithful (*'mwst'n*), on this Monday of the compassionate father. [Be] upright [and] united in this attitude, forgive one another and move yourself to pity. The soul's care … [sympathy] and mercy did the father give you on this Monday." The exhortation addresses the Elect as well as the Auditors:

> Be compassionate you Electi, the pure assembly: forgive sins and absolve evil. Prepare one another in a divine love, set upright, help, and wrap yourself in zeal. Great power comes from the compassionate father, he shows you pity, he forgives sins. He melts the poison from you: the hate of vengeance, the schism of anger, and sensuousness of pride and evil. He forgives you your sins and the offences of everyone who believes from a pure attitude. The rich light-father gave to the religious community (*dyn*) confession (*wx'stw'nyft*), salvation, and mercy on this praised day.[85]

The hymn goes on to describe the happiness of the denizens of heaven upon witnessing the forgiving attitude of the believers on earth.

The composition known as *Recitation of the Twelve Sovereignties of Light* (or simply, *Twelve Sovereignties*) also appears to have had a place in the day's ceremony. Preserved in Iranian, Turkic, and Chinese versions, and normally recited by the Electi following their daily sacred meal, it nonetheless is found also in forms and contexts that can only be understood in terms of Monday observances, despite the fact that the Electi seem to have consumed no meal on that day. The evidence consists in part of several modified versions of the composition in Old Turkic, whose modification entails the addition of repeated requests for absolution "for my sins on this praiseworthy small fast day (*kičig bačak*)," often including the Parthian formula of pardon (*manāstār xirzā*) found in confession texts, including the annual one used at the Bema.[86]

If this key theological chant was performed on Mondays according to the same schedule on other days, this would place its recitation in the early evening. Perhaps parallel timing between the daily ritual meal and the weekly confession rite was intended to evoke certain meaningful polarities: the Monday fast of the Elect "rested" and prepared them for the all-important food ritual of other days, while the confession and absolution confirmed their ritual qualification for that primary ritual function the rest of the week.

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[85] M284a.R.i.21—V.i.6: Reck 2004, 107–108.

[86] Clark 2013, 267–280. Further confirmation is found in similar combinations of the content of the *Twelve Sovereignties* recitation with confessional passages in New Persian fragments from Turfan, published by Sundermann 1989.

Function

H.-C. Puech has addressed what struck many critics of Manichaeism as an inherent contradiction in their practice of confession of sins, since by their dualistic ideology the initiative to sin originates from some other than the intrinsically good soul, and the latter is implicated in that other's sinful action only involuntarily.[87] Puech discerns that the impression of contradiction "is, in large part, a misapprehension."[88] Citing *Keph. 138*, Mani's *Epistle to Menoch*, and the letter of the Manichaean Secundinus to Augustine of Hippo, he illuminates the Manichaean distinction between the eternal evil principle and the transient sinful act, between the "natural" force that impinges on the soul, and the soul's—as it were—"unnatural" compliance. This compliance occurs in the first instance to a fragmented and unconscious soul substance mixed in the body with evil, and so without any culpability, and in the second instance in lapses of the coalesced and awakened soul momentarily overwhelmed by the evil force that continues to exist all around it.[89]

The initial awakening of the soul comes about through the operation of the "Light-Mind" (in Greek *nous*), which arrives within the individual soul through the grace of a divine call, carried in the preaching of Manichaean missionaries. The activity of this "Light-Mind" within the individual could be elaborated in quasi-mythological images (as in *Keph. 38*), or described in simpler, ethically-focused terms (as in *Keph. 138*). But the upshot is the same: the reformulation of the interior power structure of the individual human, producing the "New Man" capable of ethical decision making and right action. Puech captures the essence of the teaching eloquently:

> The decisive role that the *nous* is thus supposed to play conforms to a remarkably simple mechanism. The spirit gives power to the soul to gain the upper

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[87] Puech 1972, 612–614.

[88] Puech 1972, 614.

[89] See Puech 1972, 618: "There is as yet no will, personal will, until one, regenerated by gnosis and become a 'new man,' has received by a gift of the spirit conjunction to the consciousness of itself and of its power. Whoever, by contrast, has not been enlightened and instructed, or is still so imperfectly, whoever is ignorant or misinformed of oneself, is for this reason without will. If one yields to temptation, if one acquiesces to evil, it is unconsciously or by powerlessness. One does not possess in oneself the means to do otherwise, and therefore will be considered to a certain degree irresponsible and one's sins presumed to be remissable or indifferent." Puech 1972, 614–616. In the words of Mani's Epistle to Menoch: "All sin, before it has been committed, is not; and, after it has been done, only the recollection of the act persists, not its very form. But the evil of concupiscence, because it is natural, exists before it is produced, increases while it is produced, appears and remains after it is produced."

> hand over the carnal or exterior man, resuscitating in it the recollection of its origin and of its divine essence, provisionally or momentarily forgotten, returning it to a clear consciousness of that which it is in its plenary truth, maintaining it in, as much as making possible, that state of lucidity where it possesses itself and disposes freely of itself … . This instruction is a warning, an 'admonition,' but also, at the same time, a recall, a 'reminding': a recall of the soul to its original nature, and therefore to itself; a recall which restores throughout it the memory of its past, reestablishes it in its state, in its own substance, the return of that which makes 'luminous, lucid.' By recapturing in this way consciousness and knowledge of itself, by seizing anew that which it was at first, that which it is in itself, by remembering itself in order to rediscover itself in itself, the soul is isolated automatically from that which it is not, that which is alien to it, that is to say, from Matter, from the flesh: it establishes between evil and itself a separation … . once it has been illuminated by the spirit, the soul discerns what is the Good and what is the Evil … . It knows, at the same time, its *obligations* and its *powers*: it knows that, good in itself, it must not do evil and that it can resist evil, that it has within it the capacity to not commit it and to triumph.[90]

The Manichaean Secundinus, writing in the first decade of the fifth century from somewhere in Italy, refers to this awakening (*se ipsam cognoverit*) as the moment when a responsible and culpable self emerges within the human individual. This moment corresponds to the time when a person responds to the Manichaean message and passes through an initial confession and absolution as part of his or her initiation into the community.[91] If, afterwards, the soul "consents to do evil and does not arm itself against the enemy, it has sinned by its own will. Yet if it is ashamed of having gone astray, it will find the author of mercies ready to forgive. For the soul is not punished because it sinned, but because it was not sorry for its sin."[92] "Such conceptions established, explained, and justified at once the employment of confession," Puech observes.

> This, indeed, has no other goal than to remit the soul of the sinner in possession of itself by provoking in it the manifestation and the operation of the spirit, of the *nous*. Without doubt it tends to recall the culpable to order, but this is by recalling it to itself … . It renders it at the same time conscious of its transgression and of itself … Thus brought back to itself, remembering that which it is, that which it owes, that which it may be, the soul is not only fortified, immunized with regard to sin: it is placed in a state of absolute being … . In the final analysis, sin is produced, inevitably, only due to 'the forgetfulness'

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[90] Puech 1972, 616.
[91] Cf. *Keph.* 91.231.12–232.17.
[92] *Epistle of Secundinus* 2: Teske 2006, 357–358.

> into which the 'old man,' instrument or work of evil, plunges or attempts to re-plunge the soul; a forgetfulness that is always for it 'forgetfulness of itself.' In this sense, temptation is a menace of unconsciousness; the fault, unconsciousness itself.[93]

In this way, Manichaeans conceived of confession serving as a periodic stimulus, necessary to motivate and reinforce an entire self-scrutinizing way of life. Through confession, one applied dualistic analysis to one's own conduct, impulses, thoughts, and feelings, distinguishing "the light from the darkness" within oneself, and affirming and reinforcing identification with only the positive manifestations of self. This ideologically-driven self-formation, by which one continually delineated one's own "soul," and purged it of alien accretions, explains why discussion of confession and forgiveness so often comes accompanied by reference to the post-mortem passage and ultimate liberation of the soul. The introspective "separation of light from darkness" allows the soul to shed its dead-weight, so to speak, and facilitate its ascent to the Realm of Light.

But let us approach the question as well from a more etic perspective, and ask ourselves what function confession had in inculcating and maintaining a Manichaean identity as a psychological and social phenomenon. And such a question means inquiring into how confession serves both community and individual interests simultaneously, such that it *works*, it *succeeds*, in producing a stable sense of oneself as a Manichaean and reproducing the Manichaean teachings and practices in another generation of adherents—not in everyone who attempts it, of course, but in sufficient numbers to sustain the Manichaean religion for more than a thousand years.

By means of this voluntary practice, which at the same time stands as an unnegotiable expectation of the community, individual Manichaeans took upon themselves the task of producing conformity in themselves. Armed with almost no disciplinary powers, the Manichaean leadership handed over to the individual adherent the means of self-discipline through a "technology of the self." This self-disciplinary technique worked precisely in drawing together the social normative power of promoted "right thoughts, right words, right deeds" with a probative self-examination of one's impulses, desires, notions, in order to test the one by the other, in order to filter and correct the raw material of one's being in light of the given paradigm, in order to actually identify a 'self' amid the clutter of one's being, and to reify and reinforce it against disintegrative forces.

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[93] Puech 1972, 617.

In referring to a "technology of the self," I am obviously invoking a key concept introduced by Michel Foucault. He includes within this concept "techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on."[94] He considers the "government" of people in their social existence to arise out of combinations of "techniques of domination" and "techniques of the self."

Presuming that various groups, such as Mani and his successors in the leadership of the Manichaean community, wish to create certain behavioral results in those over whom they exercise authority, they face severe limitations on what they can achieve by coercion or direct domination; and this was particularly true in the Manichaean case, where state and social power usually was unsympathetic. As we have noted, the Manichaeans seem to have made no use of enforced penance, or punishments of any kind, other than possibly expulsion of wayward Electi from their status and privileges.[95] The success of a group such as this depended, therefore, on its ability to identify and integrate into its system of practice and ideology a "technique of the self" that motivates individual adherents to discipline themselves.

The Manichaeans did not invent self-examination and confession; it already existed in various forms within religious and philosophical communities of the age. But they adopted it and gave it a central place in their routines of practice, coordinating it very closely with their teachings on the nature of the human individual. In the Hellenistic period, the practice had entailed a conception of the self as more or less a tabula rasa, on which one could impress an ideal character through imposing certain rules of conduct and values, checked periodically by self-examination in comparison to the ideal, just as one checked any educational process or apprenticeship to assess how perfectly a skill set had been incorporated into the self. But Manichaeism brought a new dimension to this practice, through its conception of the self not as a blank slate, but as a complex mixture of constructive and destructive components. For the Manichaeans, it would not suffice to

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[94] Foucault 1997, 154.

[95] One Sogdian text (M131.I: Henning 1937, 49–50) speaks of excommunication of obstinate sinners, which has as its most serious consequence a barring of the individual from ritual absolution. On the other hand, in a Coptic passage, Mani speaks about the great forbearance the Elect show toward sinning Auditors (*Keph*. 88.220.22–221.9: Gardner 1995, 228).

set rules for oneself, because what constituted "oneself" was precisely in question. Manichaeans therefore required a "hermeneutics of the self" to discern and distinguish what was "self" and what "other" within the happenstance of a bodily individual.

Foucault, unaware of the Manichaean case, detected the shift from self-discipline to self-interpretation only in its echoes within the Christian monastic tradition. But his analysis of the latter can be applied to the Manichaean case with only a few adjustments with regard to the practical and ideological differences. He notes how John Cassian placed great importance on sorting through one's "own" thoughts in order to distinguish the good from the bad. This approach involved a "constitution of thoughts as a field of subjective data needing an interpretive analysis in order to discover the power of the other in me," bringing out an alienation of the self from particular thoughts, taking them as evidence of "the presence of somebody else in me."[96] He contends that "this form of examination is at the same time new and historically important," and, in comparison with the techniques of the earlier Hellenistic era, "is quite a new way of organizing the relationships between truth and subjectivity.[97] I think that hermeneutics of the self begins there."[98]

But if that is so, the hermeneutics of the self within the Christian Church that followed in later centuries largely abandoned the particular dualistic dynamic found in John Cassian and other strands of the monastic tradition. At least in the West, the overpowering influence of Augustine reclaimed the sinful "other" within as none other than oneself, rather than something that would allow one to say "the devil made me do it." This claim on the entire self in all its impulses—good and bad—grew out of Augustine's deliberately anti-Manichaean anthropology. Nonetheless, within either hermeneutical matrix, equal stress came to rest on *confession*—on the importance of verbalization and self-disclosure, on *exagoreusis*.[99] For, as Foucault puts it, "If, for the government of people in our societies, everyone had not only to obey but also to produce and publish the truth about oneself, then examination of conscience and confession are among the most important of these procedures."[100]

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96 Foucault 1997, 183.
97 Foucault 1997, 181.
98 Foucault 1997, 184.
99 Foucault 1997, 184–187.
100 Foucault 1997, 155.

In confession, Manichaeans took into their own thoughts and repeated through their own verbalizations the approvals and disapprovals of their community, affirming in the case of the former who they wished to be and believed themselves ultimately to be, and in the case of the latter rejecting parts of themselves outright—publically marking and disavowing any wish to maintain those thoughts and behaviors as parts of themselves. In this way, the "self" that Manichaeism posits as a primordial entity, fractured and lost, to be discovered and restored, is actually formed within the individual by the very processes of "recognition" and "recollection." Manichaean teaching motivates adherents to *make* a particular self by telling them that it is already there, and only needs to be set free from its mixture with polluting elements that do not constitute proper parts of it. "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself," Foucault observes regarding another historical example of institutional self-formation. "A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him into existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy."[101] Yet, "this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them."[102] Confession amounts to self-imposed discipline and voluntary subjection—not so much to individuals of authority as to a paradigm of perfection which one wishes to achieve. What motivates that wish? Not only the unproven promises of a happy afterlife, but also the immediate evidence of an increasing self-mastery, a greater efficiency of purpose and action, a greater facility in overcoming the obstacles of one's own conflicted drives.

We return, then, to a very distinctive feature of Manichaean confession and absolution, namely, its voluntary and mutual character. Every week, all Manichaeans—Electi and Auditors alike—subjected themselves to a ceremony of contrition and reconciliation. No one was perfect, everyone had to repent and be absolved equally. Even the spectacle of singling out particular sinners and particular sins was bypassed by the use of comprehensive formulas, in which everyone "confessed" to every sin, on the premise that the self might be unaware of what it has done, precisely because it must, in a sense, lose self-consciousness to sin at all. The system did not depend upon the sanctity and authority of certain individuals within the community, but

[101] Foucault 1979, 30.
[102] Foucault 1979, 27.

rather functioned automatically through its reciprocity in which rank had little privilege. Thus, it approximated what Foucault describes in terms of a system of *surveillance*:

> Its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery. And, although it is true that its pyramidal organization gives it a 'head', it is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field.[103]

Such a system overturns assumptions we may have about how "power" is "exercised" within an institution such as the Manichaean community. "The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power … he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[104] Seen in this light, Manichaean ritualized confession would appear to be a strategically efficient means for producing certain kinds of selves, certain sorts of lives, believed to make liberation and immortality possible, but in any case effective in perpetuating Manichaeism through its conformed representatives.

Confession persisted as a core practice of Manichaeism amid all of its cultural permutations and historical vicissitudes. I think the resiliency of the religion as a living community has some relation to this ritual conservatism. Or, read another way, the ritual retained its central place in Manichaean life because it worked, because it successfully produced and maintained Manichaeans in their commitment to a particular view of themselves and specific set of approved behaviors that marked them as Manichaeans. In other words, this way of distributing "power" proved remarkably effective, since it brought surveillance from limited external forms to a pervasive internalized self-scrutiny. We should not be misled by facile analogies to other ideologies that regard sin as unavoidable, and the individual as always hopelessly a sinner. Even though Manichaeans shared this view of the human

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[103] Foucault, 1979, 176–177.
[104] Foucault 1979, 202–203.

condition, through the regulations of life that they constantly reiterated and reinforced through confession, they sought to actively do something about their involvement in sin, to curtail it ever more effectively. By linking mere rules of conformity so tightly with a constantly rehearsed image and narrative of the "true self," Manichaeism hit upon a powerful set of motivational rationales for its adherents. We need not waste time wondering whether Mani and his successors were psychological geniuses, or this particular convergence of ideology and practice simply emerged through a kind of conservation of forces within the community over time. The confession practice visible in the sources has found its coherence, its rationales, its efficiencies, its place in the overall Manichaean system, such that to remove or overlook it would be to fundamentally misconstrue how Manichaeans proposed to achieve their ultimate goals.

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RITUAL INGENUITY IN THE MANDAEAN *SCROLL OF EXALTED KINGSHIP*

Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley

The last Gnostics from the Near East, the Mandaeans, survive (under increasing duress) in their homelands Iran and Iraq. Over 80 % are in emigration in various countries around the world. The Mandaeans' vast literature is insufficiently studied, and the great variety of literary genres leave scholars with the still unfinished task of categorizing the Mandaean corpus. In 1993, I published a translation of a Mandaean text, extant in the West in only one manuscript, an illustrated scroll known as # 34 in the Drower Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The scroll is *Diwan Malkuta ʿlaita* (*The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*).[1] A large document, it was copied by a priest named Bihram Sam, of the Disfulia clan, in 1789, possibly in Qurna, Iraq. Its colophon (list of scribes) goes back to the 3rd century CE. The text consists of 1363 lines, with drawings and additional text inside illustrated panels.

The Scroll belongs to the category I call "esoteric priestly commentaries." Such texts presuppose the Mandaean liturgies, which in many cases go back to the 3rd century.[2] *The Scroll* describes the initiation of the *tarmida*, the Mandaean lower-ranking priest. Other Mandaean texts treat the priest initiation, but they are shorter.[3] *The Scroll* launches into highly mystical realms of speculation on esoteric associations and correlations regarding the priest candidate's new body, and on the initiation ritual's effects on earth as well as in the Mandaean world of light.

At present, I begin by severely compressing the details given in chapter 12 of my 2002 book on the Mandaeans.[4] I raise selected issues on how to understand ritual, and use this occasion of honoring Birger Pearson to think about the conditions for evaluating ritual in Mandaeism. It is the most complex

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[1] Buckley 1993, here cited as *The Scroll*.

[2] The most complete edition is Drower 1962b, here cited as *CP*. For the colophons, see chapters 9, 10 and 13 in Buckley 2010a.

[3] For instance, the translation by Burtea 2005. This seems like a prosaic handbook when compared to the complexities in *The Scroll*.

[4] Buckley 2002. Those who need more can consult it, and correlate the information, in parallel fashion, with other Mandaean texts, especially the liturgies.

form of Gnosticism known to us. In contrast, the sheer lack of ritual and liturgical complexity in early Christianity becomes almost painfully obvious. Among Gnostic traditions, only Manichaeism and Mandaeism have abundant texts testifying to rituals, and we scholars are more prone to use envisioned—more or less orthodox—Christian prototypes instead of beginning with the Gnostic materials.

I will raise theoretical questions toward the end of this essay, but first, starting with *The Scroll*, I use selections from lines 7–225[5] of it. The events in these lines are limited to the second day of a week in the sixty-eight day long priest initiation period. During this week, the text priest candidate sits, praying, with his teacher inside a cult-hut, *škinta*, built for the purpose of priest initiation. *The Scroll* plumbs the mysteries of the effects of the priest novice's own utterances of the first 103 prayers of the Mandaean liturgy while he sits in the hut. These prayers comprise the baptism and death mass liturgies.[6] It is outside of ritual contexts such as baptisms, death masses, or "response" settings, that is: in *The Scroll* the prayers are seen as effective outside of—indeed loosened from—their more familiar contexts.

In the examined segment of the priest initiation ritual, *The Scroll* comments on the effect of every one of the 103 recited prayers.[7] The text interprets not only the novice's words but focuses on the inner meanings of them. The exegesis appears to follow unstated interpretive principles, known to Mandaean priests but not to us. The text itself does not explicitly invoke any such principles or logic, nor for any underlying, native understanding of ritual. We are exclusively on priestly, intellectual territory. A particular theme arises in *The Scroll*: a curious focus on evoked time—past, present, and future—in the novice's recital. Ritual implements are evoked for future use, and the text explicitly provokes anxiety about potential ritual errors, both forward and backward in time.

The aim, for outsiders such as us, is to glimpse a "native theory of work," a Mandaean understanding of *what* is accomplished—and *how*–in the chosen part of the priest initiation ritual. We have no Gnostic evidence (not even in Manichaeism) as extensive as the Mandaean esoteric literature. This category of texts expressed how liturgy and ritual combine into a highly

[5] Lines 1–7 give the set initial formula for a Mandaean text—as found at the beginning of the prayers in *CP*. *CP* 1 (p. 1) gives the requisite petition for forgiveness of sins for the copyist and his family members. References to *CP* prayers are given according to numbers, not to pages.

[6] See ibid.

[7] I will not deal with all of them.

refined native exegesis. Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of ingenuity with respect to canon is useful here.[8] In our case, the canon is of course the *CP* liturgy, as stated above, and we will see a "tailoring," a creative use, of *CP* prayer contents adapted to *The Scroll*'s interests.

Gender is important in *The Scroll*, and so is the relation to the three-part Mandaean anthropology, i.e. the religion's idea of the components in the human being. While retaining his body, the new priest, understood to belong to the "male" sphere, will need to subject his own "female" spirit to his soul. The spirit *ruha* in the human being has as her mythological, capitalized counterpart Ruha, the ambiguous mother of the planets. She is a co-creator of the world and of human beings. Both soul and spirit in Mandaeism are usually female, but in *The Scroll* we find a switch to the soul becoming male, because of the need to keep the new priest's female spirit under ritual control. It is *not* a matter of erasing or overcoming the female aspect of a (usually) male priest.

Near the beginning of our text, two laymen accompany the postulant into the hut.[9] These two give strength to his body, says *The Scroll*.[10] The novice's old layman self will have to yield to a new, priestly self, and this shedding and re-clothing, understood as a new creation, begin to take place already during the novice's recital of *CP* 1–103.

Like other Mandaeans, the new priest already has a body and an independent spirit, in addition to his soul. But because of his female-to-male-switching soul-element, his Light-world citizenship will be stronger than that of laypeople. The entire initiation ritual can be seen as an effort to secure a balance in the new priest's life between his "female" inclinations—his body-and-spirit ruled passions—and his Light-world soul. Priests represent Light-world beings on earth, and such a simultaneity of existence means that they must know how to play on this dynamic, to move between the realms, to symbolize and live the *laufa*, the vital connection between the Light-world and earth.

Transformation from Lay-Status to Priestly Level

After a public testing—outside the hut—of the novice's memory of the prayers *CP* 1–103, the novice moves inside, away from public view. His

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[8] Smith 1982, 36–52.
[9] Note the sketch in Drower, 1962a, 150.
[10] *The Scroll*, line 15, p. 2.

teacher and other priests are with him, and now the recreation of the novice begins, his transformation from lay-status to priestly level. The priests' greeting "Healing!" functions as an "exorcism" from lay life constrictions. At a set formula, the novice's own soul rejoices in anticipation of acquiring its priestly emblem, the silk crown. Note the time-aspect: concentration is drawn to an act further ahead in the ritual, as the novice's soul already looks forward to that event. In a jarring contrast, a lurking danger looms, according to *The Scroll*'s interpretation. This is so because a section of *CP* 1 conjures up Ruha, the mythological figure. In *CP* 1, she is not explicitly named—as anyone checking the text will readily note—but she belongs to the dark forces evoked in *CP* 1.

Liturgies can play tricks on reciters, for mere mention of the dark forces immediately evokes them. Battles with evil are pointless if evil is not made present, and liturgies activate dark powers precisely in order to contend with them. The pernicious powers understand the prayers, and these powers know when they are mentioned. Ruha originally belonged to the Lightworld and is contentious and homesick. Evil is then both internal and external, and the text intentionally jettisons any assumed "homeostasis" in the priest candidate's body-spirit-soul relationship at this stage of the ritual.

The mystery of the "Father" (as opposed to the lay status symbol, the "Mother") awakens at the novice's recital of *CP* 3, a prayer for the priest's turban. Both *CP* 5 and 8 invoke items that rise, as it were, from the "ritual tool-box," stand at attention, and say: "I am ready." The latter prayer awakens incense that belongs in a future baptismal segment. We might expect that a performer would remind himself of the implements he will need later on. But instead, the text stresses human subjection to ritual tools in a work context: the ritual implements are "alive."

At *CP* 14, "that adhesive which supports him and his whole body palpitates, stands up, and sunders the mysteries of lay status from their inner protective cover."[11] So, the candidate literally sheds his lay status, like a plant reaching a new developmental stage. *CP* 19 reverts into past time, for now the novice's recital awakens the water-sign of his own first baptism as an infant.

As for *CP* 26, *The Scroll* makes an exegetical play on a segment in that prayer (a technique perhaps typical of religious intellectuals!). Here, the text tries to link the spirit to the soul in a manner that does not unduly weaken

[11] *The Scroll*, line 54, p. 4.

the spirit, but that places it under the tutelage of the new priest's soul. We note a demonstration of flexibility and creativity in the use of canon.

At *CP* 31, a baptism prayer, Ruha (unmentioned in the prayer) reacts to the recital by weeping, by her loss of a human companion. One might say that this prayer, or baptism in general, hints at what is in store for Ruha at the end of the world: loss of Mandaeans under her sway. When no Mandaeans are left in the world, it will end, as it has no reason to exist.

At the declamation of *CP* 35, Ruha and her seven planetary sons sit in lamentation, curling their lips in disappointment and disdain at the prospect of the soul and the spirit leaving the body, states *The Scroll*. Here, as elsewhere, *The Scroll* makes a sharp distinction between the element *ruha*, eligible for ascent, and the left-behind mythological mother of the planets.

CP 51 states, "I beheld Life, and Life beheld me, and in Life I put my trust. When this, the soul of N., cast off her bodily garment, she puts on a dress of Life and becomes like the Great Life in Light."[12]According to *The Scroll*, the effect of the first quoted sentence is a surprising one: the soul accuses the spirit of having persecuted her. The soul specifies, "See, (you) spirit, that I am a master whose mistress takes off her female dress and puts on a male garment."[13] For the first time, *The Scroll* portrays the soul casting herself in a male role. The soul insists that her "mistress"—the spirit, subjected to the male soul and master—must also don the male garment. *CP*'s non-gendered "dress of Life" and "bodily garment" become gendered in *The Scroll*'s exegesis. The switch implies a new gender consistency, for now both soul and spirit ought to be male, whereas in other contexts, both are female.[14]

CP 49–53 form the nucleus of the Mandaean death mass, the *masiqta*. Alluding to the handling of soul-symbols in this ritual, *The Scroll* warns the novice against the possibility of making a mistake further on in the priest initiation, when the same prayers are used. Here we note an anxiety-provoking warning, an explicit command to associate the use of the same prayer in two different contexts. *Present* creative activity will not be annulled retroactively by ritual mistakes *later* on. That is, at least, a relief.

But even raising this question of a possible mistake—in a ritual segment about two months hence!–evokes a sense of danger. For at that point, i.e.

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[12] Regrettably, Drower omits part of the translation here (see the facsimile Mandaic text *CP* p. 70).

[13] *The Scroll*, lines 112–113, p. 8.

[14] For gender issues in Gnosticism, see chapter 7 in Buckley, 1986.

when the novice baptizes his own teacher, the novice will be engaged in a different task: creating a new body for the teacher. The questions are: will a mistake now destroy the novice's own body, as he has created it so far, according to *The Scroll*? And might that affect the new body for the teacher? The answers are: no. But the novice may ruin both his teacher's body and his own in the future ritual of body-construction if he does not, at that later point, pay close attention to his work.

What map can we obtain of a religious mentality exerting energy on such notions of mistakes and their results? What is the understanding of cause and effect, of time, of tools and their employment? What is the precise relationship between the novice's and the teacher's body? Answers to these questions would demand separate studies, and I can only point to the issues here. The dangers of Mandaean priestcraft are overwhelming.[15]

Let me make an illustration here. Some years ago, a Mandaean priest in exile was accused of having faced south instead of north at an important point in a ritual. He immediately conceded to the mistake, and did what he and other Mandaeans knew was necessary. He returned to his original home country, had fellow-priests stand, assembly-line fashion, to perform the requisite ritual for him (three hundred and sixty baptisms) in order to rectify the matter. Thus restored to purity, the priest returned to his office in exile.

I return to *The Scroll*. In explicit, polemical contrast to the Jewish Sabbath, the Mandaean *Habšaba*—the personified female Sunday—is evoked twice in the prayers toward the end of the recital, in *CP* 81 and 95. According to *The Scroll*, Sunday blesses the candidate in response to his recitals of both prayers. The two lines long *CP* 97 reads, "He rose and took me with him, and did not leave me in the perishable place."[16] Either the savior has saved the soul, or the spirit has been saved *by* and *with* the soul. *CP* probably tends towards the first interpretation. But *The Scroll* does not consider the matter settled, for here the spirit implores the soul, "By your life, by your life, soul! When you ascend to the House of Life, take me with you! If I inflicted persecution on you, do remember me in kindness, for I did not know you and did not understand you."[17] *The Scroll* still understands the spirit's salvation as pending, but we note *The Scroll's* touching exegesis of an awakening gnosis in the spirit!

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[15] Parts of Drower, 1960, deal with ritual mistakes and their effects: abbr. *ATS* II, iiia, pp. 195–210 and V(a), pp. 262–265, which may be versions of the same text.

[16] *CP*, p. 99.

[17] *The Scroll*, lines 214–216, p. 14.

The final prayer in this ritual segment is *CP* 103, which states that darkness is crushed back and Light established in its place. In response to this recital, the earth's foundations shake and the monster-dragon 'Ur (Ruha's non-planetary son) "moans like a dove."[18] For the time being, then, the dark forces are kept in check. But the ritual is only in its second day. Sixty-six days remain, and much can go wrong.

Activated Fields and New Realities

The preceding section has shown examples of how words produce actions according to the logic: "when you say word/sentence A in prayer B, the result is C with respect to D." *The Scroll* demonstrates a strikingly wide range of what one might call "activated fields": the candidate's own soul, spirit and body; his teacher; ritual implements or formulas to be used later on in the initiation; Light-world emblems; Ruha and the evil forces. Energies and entities are moved around, strengthened, weakened, or otherwise changed. The novice's transition from lay level to priesthood affects and effects forces on minute and on cosmic scales. Future and past events come into play. The dynamics of past, present, and future makes for a dizzying philosophy of time in *The Scroll*. Reference to a specific time-segment demonstrates a modicum of optimism regarding errors committed in the present, but dire warnings emerge against future mistakes. One might call this a "so far, so good" attitude.

As noted, lines 7–225 treat a segment of prayers recited by heart, without any of the accompanying actions or created environments usually associated with the prayers. The novice handles no priestly implements, is not immersed in water, eats nothing, is not being prayed over by someone else, etc. The novice's superiors monitor his words—but the postulant himself performs no actions aside from speaking. His utterances are invested with great power and consequences. The supremacy of the word in this ritual segment testifies to a necessary, early round in the edifice of priest-building. In fact, at the end of *The Scroll*, lines 1325–1329 (not part of the above-treated text segment) state, "For the novice is a builder who constructs a beautiful palace; if he did not put a brick in its (proper) place, all that he built is spoilt. If he does not read the masiqta for his teacher, that building and palace is not beautiful."

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[18] Ibid. line 225, p. 15.

By sheer words the novice creates a new reality, and in the examined part of the text he focuses the person he is about to become.[19] It is not a matter of thrusting himself back into the ideal condition of the ʿutras at the time of the world-creation. Neither is he projecting himself forwards onto ʿutra status entirely outside of the earthly world. Slowly and methodically, he becomes both an ʿutra and a priest set squarely in this world as a servant to his community. In his role as ritual official, the new priest belongs to the Lightworld. As a human being, he remains subject to Ruha's attacks, but as a priest, his own spirit, ruha, seems to have been joined to his soul in a way that otherwise holds only for dead Mandaeans whose masiqta has been successfully performed. "Father" and "Mother" aspect in the novice are both active, but the former dominates.

Only priests can "enter" and "exit" the Light-world and the human world while still on earth. The various "markers" for priests entering or exiting ʿutra-hood are a so far unstudied area in the interpretation of Mandaean rituals. But prayers, formulas, gestures, and the eating of certain foods seem to be primary signals for being "on the job" or "taking a break." Watching part of a video of a Mandaean priest initiation in Khuzistan, Iran in 1991, I was struck by the rhythm in segments of the ritual.[20] At times, the priests took a break, laughed, relaxed, and talked with spectators who entered the ritual space. After eating particular foods and performing certain ritual gestures, the priests went back to work. Spectators knew when the priests were on or off the job, i.e. when it was appropriate to approach the priests or to withdraw to the edges of the arena, respectfully resuming their role as witnesses to the priestly activities.

Heinrich Petermann, watching a Mandaean ritual in mid-19th century southern Iraq, was a bit scandalized by "the lack of sustained piety," and in the 1930s, Lady Drower noticed that Mandaean onlookers kept talking, doing their own things during a baptism, and even shouted questions to the priest, who would interrupt the ritual in order to answer. A woman shivering in the cold water shouted to the priest: "Yalla"! ("Hurry up!").[21]

Conditions for making and marking ritual space and time can be glimpsed in *The Scroll*'s lines 7–225. No ritual context is a "given"—per-

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[19] For Mandaic verbs literally conveying *construction*, see Buckley 2002, 106, with references.

[20] In April 1996, in Ahwaz, Khuzistan, I witnessed the baptisms of two bridal couples and saw for myself the rhythms of the ritual.

[21] See Buckley 2010a, 125 and Drower, 1962a, 114–117.

formers create it.[22] The anthropologist Charles L. Briggs, working in an entirely different geographical and cultural area, notices that ritual context does not exist prior to the performance. The ritual creates the context, and audience participation prevents that context from being reified.[23] Neither is a ritual simply a mirror image of a text. The work is constantly self-referencing. Any temptation to see ritual as a "mechanistic" act shows lack of personal involvement. Think of the potential, increasing boredom of onlookers watching a work-team building a house that is not theirs: the lack of participation and immediate concern create eventual distance, disinterest, yawns.

The Mandaean priests in *The Scroll* construct a temporal and spatial "laboratory" for priest-making. In the examined segment, we see a step in the construction where the novice is responsible for his part in the production of his new self. The relative passivity of the officials is worth noting: they are supervisors. In the segment under treatment, the novice starts to create himself, for it is his spoken prayers that create and affect the elements in the laboratory. Speech arises in the same body as the one that is affected by the speech. Power inheres neither in novice nor in words, but in the dynamic between them.

Rituals take control by cutting what is united and, conversely, by binding together what is severed, and ritual practice aims to facilitate passages and/or authorize encounters between opposed orders.[24] A consistent theme regarding the effects of the treated recitals is the banishment of the mythological Ruha to the depths, while her elemental spirit counterpart in the novice's body must be joined with, yet subordinated, to his soul. Here is an implicit mapping of a macrocosm, for Ruha needs to be enclosed, if possible, to a territory safely removed from the Lightworld. But Mandaean mythological figures cannot be controlled, unlike the element ruha in the body, which *can* be manipulated to a certain extent.

The priest initiation can be seen as a strategic "inoculation" against the vicissitudes of earthly/bodily life. Priestly spirit and soul are joined in a way that for laypeople requires a real, bodily death. In a sense, priests have reaped the rewards of bodily death while they exist on earth. The switch from "Mother" to "Father" domination works in an analogous manner, for the two domains are both effective in the novice's body, but the "Father"

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[22] For this issue, consult the discussion in Briggs, 1988, esp. pp. 13–14.
[23] Briggs, 1988, 6 and 36.
[24] Bourdieu 1977, 133 and 119.

side predominates. The ritual makes possible the passage from one to the other and enables the developing/developed priest to handle the opposing forces within himself. Only the dead are fully citizens of the "Father" side. When the novice's new body starts to emerge like a plant out of his old body during *CP* 14, that body does not really die, but continues, transformed and subdued.

The Dynamic Work of Ritual

If ritual is religious labor, what does the examined segment of *The Scroll* achieve, and in what framework?[25] I have presented a second-order, pragmatic-philosophical Mandaean esoteric tradition, one that employs the liturgies in a very specific manner. It is not a matter of abstraction, even though the Mandaean priests initiating the novice seem to act as a type of esoteric theoreticians. But this is a different kind of theorizing than academics and scholars would do. The question is not what the action means, but what it does.

Jason BeDuhn critiques Catherine Bell for neglecting to distinguish between training for a ritual and a performance of a ritual.[26] The danger of Bell's views of ritual is that she is too abstract, too far off from the work situation. In terms of applicability to the *Scroll* segment, Bell's statement, that, "the physical body generates an endless circular run of oppositions that come to be loosely homologized to each other," I would rather say that the effect is cumulative.[27] The task, as we have seen it, is one of construction, of a step-by-step building. Meaning is piled upon meaning in the priestly esoteric-philosophical project.[28]

Mandaean esoteric literature like *The Scroll* may seem arbitrary, but it is not. Bell notes that when activity is analyzed and categorized as something already finished, the very nature of activity is lost.[29] This is a good insight, because activity spells dynamic. A characteristic of the cultivation of esoteric interpretation is that it refuses to entertain doubt. Instead, it adds ever more meaning, creating surpluses of meaning.

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[25] For a discussion, see Buckley, 1986, 399–411.

[26] BeDuhn 2000, 243. He is referring to the very influential work on ritual: Bell 1992.

[27] Bell 1992, 220.

[28] Here arises an unavoidable association to an esoteric tradition related in time and geography: the Babylonian Talmud. Oddly enough, this connection has not yet received attention in scholarship on Mandaeism.

[29] Bell 1992, 72.

The danger lies in scholarly suspicions of native motivation. When Bell invokes the philosopher Louis Althusser, who states that practice does not see itself as what is actually does, I would have to ask: what does "actually" mean?[30] Who decides that misrecognition is a feature of practice?[31] Studying Mandaean priests and their literature, we will have to agree that they are the experts on their own religion. There is a difference between the meanings of rituals for natives and for scholars.[32] For instance, Mandaeans would hardly state that they reassert and secure their worldview. That is the talk of scholars.

To place our text-segment in a larger, comparative context, one would have to deal with Babylonian Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism, among other traditions. One question here would be: what are the ritual tool-chests (so to speak) already available in the larger religious arenas interacting with Mandaeism? Nag Hammadi texts are usually too short, cryptic, and without sufficient context to be of much use in the task of interpreting Gnostic rituals in a satisfying manner. But those texts do assume—indeed, they take for granted—an already well-informed native readership, religious hierarchies, and, very often, polemical interests. However, the larger, cultural life-situations lack clear contours, and remain ripe for scholarly conjecture.[33] We can do detail studies, but it is still difficult to obtain a grasp of full contexts. Mandaeism, in contrast, contains so much information that the interpretive tasks seem unlimited.

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30 Bell 1992, 87.

31 For Althusser's view, see Bell 1992, 81.

32 I have had conversations about this with Mandaean priests.

33 But see Buckley 2010, 495–507.

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SECTION THREE

THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES

NATURAL, MAGICAL, SCIENTIFIC OR RELIGIOUS? A GUIDE TO THEORIES OF HEALING

Naomi Janowitz

In one of the most famous reports of a healing event from the ancient world, Jesus mixes his saliva with dirt and applies it to the eyes of a blind man.[1] Jesus' act has been classified as everything from magic to proto-scientific folk medicine.[2] This range of opinion mirrors the range of Late Antiquity positions on agency and causality in healing, reflecting debates that were always highly rhetorical, complex and contested. The purpose of this contribution in honor of Professor Pearson is to review the debates, ancient and modern, and offer a new approach to analyzing them.

For an entrance into Late Antique debates about saliva, Pliny is a particularly rich guide. In his *Natural History* he argues in detail, though often unsuccessfully, in favor of his particular interpretations of healing powers. He happily catalogues for readers many theories he rejects, attempting to displace other healers as frauds. We can see, therefore, a range of ideas about causality. Acceptable healing for him involves a dense mapping of social roles and prejudices, many of which anticipate current scholarly struggles to classify powers and modes of healing.

Ancient Theory # 1: Saliva as a Divine Substance

Pliny reports that Marsi males who inhabit the mountains of central Italy have very special bodily fluids.[3] Their saliva protects against snakebites. Why do they have this unusual spit? One intriguing explanation mentioned by Pliny is that these men are descendants of a son of Circe and "possess this natural property (*vim naturalem*) on that account."[4] Pliny dismisses this idea of the divine status of Marsi saliva. Despite Pliny's negative attitude

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[1] John 9:6.
[2] For magic, see Smith 1978; for folk healer, see Malina-Rohrbaugh 1998.
[3] *NH* 7:15. Discussions of the Marsi include Dench 1995, Piccaluga 1976, and Letta 1972.
[4] *NH* 7.15.

towards it, the claim refracts a number of very popular ideas and deserves close analysis.

The Marsi reputation as fierce warriors and living-close-to-the-land men was consistently formidable; the evaluation of that power and its impact on Romans varied from author to author. The Marsi are lauded for giving the Roman army free passages through their territory.[5] Considered to have a special relationship with snakes, they were viewed as healers by some ancient writers, magicians by others. The distinction was based on the social relationship the group had with each author.[6]

If some individuals found them potentially helpful and others saw them as a basic threat to Roman society, still others saw them as a source of a good joke. In the case of satire, for example, snake people, like courtesans, offer an opportunity too good to pass up. Horace mocked the Marsi, claiming that their songs gave him a headache.[7] This joke deflated both their threat and their healing power, poking fun at them and at those who took them too seriously.

The divine-progenitor explanation of Marsi divine saliva is intriguing, positing a genealogical, quasi-biological relationship between the forces of the female goddess and her male descendents. In the process of the intergenerational and inter-gender transfer, Circe's power was reshaped, or perhaps "domesticated", into a human trait. The humans, meanwhile, were partially divinized, something likely to be contested by many.

Numerous stories outline some connection between a snake-connected goddess and her "snake-like" children. The Marsi religion was long known to have included worship of a snake goddess, Argitia.[8] This goddess, according to Gnaeus Gellius, who wrote in the second century BCE, was the sister of Circe and Medea.[9] Argitia no doubt comes into these family connections via her association with snakes as she is assimilated to the more famous goddesses. The Marsi goddess passed on a multi-modal heritage that included both powerful rituals and body fluids, that is, different means for healing snakebites.[10] These stories locate the origin of special powers in passed-on

[5] Livy 8.6.

[6] See Phillips 1995 and Dench 1995, 163.

[7] *Ep*. 17–20, 38.29. For a similar classification see Ovid *Ars amatorium* 2.103 and *Fasti* 6.142.

[8] Sulmo *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* ix.3074.

[9] Gnaeus Gellius Fr 9 = Solinus 2.28.

[10] The exact ritual practices attributed to the goddess and the Marsi vary from ancient author to author. For example, according to Dench 1995, 159, they knew how to cause snakes to explode.

special knowledge, inheritance of a bodily trait due to a special genealogy and a mixture of both.

A genealogical relationship with a deity or goddess was a basic component of many claims to healing powers.[11] As a comparative example close in time to Pliny, C. Stertinius Xenophon, Claudius' doctor, claimed to be related to Asclepius and Heracles. In his case, however, the inheritance does not include any claims about his body parts or fluids being divine as a result.

The goddess-to-children explanation for the saliva intersects with a number of striking stories about goddess-snake relationships. According to Lucan, drops of blood from the cutting off of Medusa's head turned into the seventeen types of snakes.[12] The bodily fluid (blood) of the goddess spawns snakes in what appears to be a twisted variant on normal childbirth, insemination via sword and childbirth outside the womb. Goddess blood flowing from a sword decapitation produces monstrous children. This blood contrasts with other female "drops," that is, unfertile menstrual blood that falls outside the body and results in no normal children but no monstrous children either.

Circe's descendants, the snake healing Marsi men, can be seen as reverse images of Medusa's snake "children." Their saliva contains the antidote to the snake offspring and their poisonous saliva. They undo some of the harm done to humanity by the creation of snakes, very concretely representing the ambivalent power of female blood (the good and bad sides of female fertility both writ large).

Given the emphasis on a bodily manifestation of power, "snake people," including the Marsi, had to practice careful breeding. The Ophiogenes and the Psylli practiced endogamy in order to preserve their special bodily attributes from generation to generation.[13] Children were exposed to snakebites in order to make sure that they carried the trait.[14]

Ambivalence runs through every anecdote. All of these "snake power" goddesses have frightening aspects; they terrify and enslave men. Yet Circe demonstrating a touching concern for Odysseus.[15] The goddess children, though potentially dangerous, were also good to have around for help. Snakes, not surprisingly, are themselves ambivalent figures. Pliny reports

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[11] Smith 1974.
[12] *BC* 9.619–733.
[13] Lucan, *BC* 9.890–891, Pliny *NH* 7.14–15.
[14] Auleus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 16.11.1–2.
[15] Segal, 1968.

that people keep snakes as pets due to their protective powers and also cites Democritus' story of a pet snake that saved a family from robbers.[16]

Pliny briefly mentions the claim that Marsi saliva gets its power from the goddess only in order to dismiss it. He is not going to argue against the idea of powerful saliva, but he is going to classify that power on a completely different basis.

Ancient Theory # 2: Saliva as a Natural Force

Pliny dismisses the entire story about the divine Marsi relative. Curing for Pliny is primarily based on the innate powers of natural items and he makes as broad and as complicated a claim for them as he possibly can. The Marsi men, according to Pliny, are examples of a common trait found throughout the natural world. In a typical move, he presents himself as one step ahead of everyone else based on his extensive investigation and keen mind. Pliny explains, "All men contain a poison available as a protection against snakes. People say that snakes flee from contact with saliva."[17] Pliny is interested in the Marsi saliva because it falls into his general category "powerful body fluid." Marsi men are unusual but they are unusual on a nature-based scale, manifesting a stronger version of what is widely found in the natural world, not based on inheritance from a goddess. The saliva from a fasting person is also extra efficacious.

In terms of strategy, Pliny is trying to move saliva from a "pseudo-divine efficacy" classification towards the "naturally efficacy" classification as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Pliny's spectrum of terms

Pliny accepts			*Pliny rejects*	
Natural cures (divine to the extent that nature is divine)			Magical cures (*contra naturam*)	Pseudo-divine cures
Fluids with extra, extra special powers (*religio*)	Fluids with extra natural power (*miracula*)	Fluids with natural power (*vis naturalis*)	Natural fluids used improperly *Veneficia falsa* (28:29) *Piacula* (abominations) *monstroficium*	Via Olympian gods (NH 2.5. 2.14–27)

[16] *NH* 24.158 ff.
[17] *NH* 7.15.

Table 1. (*cont.*)

Pliny accepts			*Pliny rejects*	
Urine Menstrual blood from first menstruation	Fasting saliva Marsi saliva Menstrual blood	Saliva	Some uses of menstrual blood, human blood	"divine" saliva

Pliny's argument is not theoretical and his terminology is fairly sloppy and varied. He does not offer abstract arguments about how natural forces work, a frustration for those who want to see him presenting proto-science. In this generality he had plenty of company; highly theoretical arguments are few.[18] He presents what is often identified as a basic Stoic stance towards nature, taken for granted while he outlines the diversity of natural forces.[19] These forces are related to divine forces only in a very secondary, or tautological, manner. Divinity underlies the entire cosmos, and particularly the sun, so divinity is manifest in every natural force. The sum total of divinity is the sum total of everything he describes in his extensive volumes, manifest in the natural world better than in the questionable stories about Olympian gods.[20]

Pliny follows general ideas about sympathy and antipathy, looking for interconnections in nature.[21] Pliny's use of these ideas, however, was extremely broad as he envisages a "sacred canopy" that encases the entire cosmos. He tries to convince others of his vision through the extravagance of his offering, much like the *Guinness Book of World Records*, and by his encyclopedic thoroughness.

Reclassifying saliva from divine to natural efficacy involves several strategic moves. As with any powerful fluid, saliva has a number of roles beyond snakebites.[22] Saliva takes its place within a complex of powerful human body parts and fluids. The list is impressive and includes bones of the untimely dead, saliva, earwax, menstrual blood, gallstones, and teeth.[23] At the same time, every claim made about these elements should not be accepted.

[18] Rives 2003, 320, notes for example, the same vague depiction found in Cicero. He cites in particular Cicero's statement about the limits to his understanding of forces (*De Divinatione* 1.13 and 16).

[19] Stated, among others, by French 1994, 198.

[20] *NH* 2.5.

[21] This is not to say that his use of these ideas is always consistent. Cf. *NH* 36.26.

[22] *NH* 28:35.

[23] Many of these are discussed in Book 7.

Menstrual blood, for instance, is connected with all sorts of wild stories.[24] Careful review, presumably by Pliny, is needed.

"Natural" is distinguished from "magical" since Pliny wants to avoid any notion of suspect or illicit agency in his cures.[25] Pliny repeatedly stresses that he rejects anything that looks like magic. Magic is described, as basically vanity (*vanitas*), supplemented with terms such as "madness" (*rabies*, 30.8) and "detestable, vain and idle".[26] Magic is itself a disease.[27] It threatens to infect the Roman "body" and thus must be eliminated.[28] An educated Roman who uses a natural cure cannot by definition be engaging in magic.

Pliny maps a wide range of specific potencies, presented with a shifting set of terms. Urine, Pliny reports, has a double potency, both "*ratio*" and an addition level of power he calls *religio*. W.S. Jones translates the terms as "natural" and "supernatural," though this option does not satisfy him.[29] Pliny does not have a consistent term for the extra-effective natural elements such as blood from a first menstruation. The "commercials" he writes vary, perhaps based on the sources he cites.

In contrast to his enthusiasm for the natural world, Pliny takes what must have looked like an unusually negative position for his time and rejects the power of the spoken word. Words, both spoken and sung, were widely used in cultic and healing rites.[30] Most healing rites combine spoken formulas (words) and use of special objects. Since he was wary about the power of words, Pliny was wary of words in general, he made no attempt to distinguish between "words," "charms" and "incantations." He faults the Magi on their unnecessary addition of complex phrases to healing rites. Significantly, he does not deny all uses of words. He points to a long tradition that words, particularly words orally exactly copied from written texts, were a necessary part of sacrificial practices. A sacrifice was not complete without a song,

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[24] *NH* 28.23.

[25] Given the inherently strategic nature of the term "magic", it no surprise that, he fails as Gordon 1987, 75, reluctantly notes, "The character of magic remains entirely elusive in Pliny's account". He echoes the concerns of Riess 1896 that Pliny rejects magic yet his curses are the same as those found in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.

[26] *NH* 30.17. See the detailed discussion in Gordon 1987.

[27] *NH* 30.8.

[28] Gordon notes this stance of Pliny's but he still searches for a substantive meaning for the term *magic*.

[29] Jones 1963, 46, appends a short note offering normal/abnormal as another possible reading.

[30] Majno 1975 is still a good introduction to the use of words in healing.

and one that exactly copies the written version.[31] This evidence leads him seriously to consider the "potency" (*vis*) of formulas, perhaps based on the power of the written texts they were taken from. In addition, certain religious specialists can employ words with direct efficacy. He reports that Vestal Virgins can stop people in their tracks, at least within the city. Their powerful words are restricted to the area of their divine power, that is, within the city.

Outside of these examples, Pliny lacks a theory of powerful words that might be suitable for the setting of healing. This is not a scientific stance in the modern meaning. At least one strand of thought in the Hebrew Scriptures, the priestly source, appears to have advocated for silent animal sacrifices. In both cases we see a kind of obsession about causality, as if they do not want anything to detract from a single-minded channeling of divine power via the killing of the animal in the case of the Biblical sacrifices and via the power inherent in a part of nature in the case of Pliny. He wants his divine forces to be manifest through the plant or body part and only through that item. No other divine power is necessary, making any formulas either redundant or annoying interference.

Much has been written about Pliny's citation of the phrase *qui fruges excantassit* translated as "who 'sings off' crops."[32] Pliny cites the phrase from the now-lost XII Tables, dating to the fifth century BCE. In this legal text the use of songs to harm others by stealing their crops was deemed illegal. For both ancient and modern writers, legal codes offer the promise of definitive definitions of vexed terms, hence the close scrutiny of the use of *excantare*. However, the fixing of this term as an illegal action is context-dependent. The term *excantare*, as Rives notes in his thorough analysis, appears for the first time in a medical writer, Marcellus Empiricus.[33] To "sing off" can be a very good action if something like a disease needs to be gotten rid of. Using song to steal crops is completely different. Once again the basic idea is songs have power and the classification of that power depends on someone's point of view about how that power was used.[34]

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[31] *NH* 28.3,5.

[32] *NH* 28.10.

[33] Rives 2002, 273.

[34] Rives 2003, 327, points out that by the time of the trial of Apuleius, Roman law was moving from "an exclusive focus on harmful actions accomplished through occult and uncanny means, toward a more general concern with issues of religious deviance."

Pliny's classification system calibrates not simply an item from nature, but also the status of the person using it (see: Table 2). Even as the rhetoric flows, he borrows extensively from doctors and magi, complicating his classification system.

Table 2. Pliny's classification system

Person using tool→	*Doctors/Greek doctors*	*Romans like Pliny*	*Roman priests*	*Magi*
Tool↓	Read, don't believe (*NH* 29.7)			
Items from nature	Extortion (*NH* 29.13), search for popularity	Cure	[No cultic use]	magic
Human blood	Greeks make immoral uses of body parts (*NH* 28.5–7)	Cure	[No cultic use]	Cannibalism
Songs/ cantare incantare excantare		No role in healing	Necessary for sacrifices 28.3,5; 17.18	magic

This system permits Pliny to make use of other people's cures but distance himself from them based on social position. Echoing Cato, Pliny charges doctors with extorting huge fees and killing with impunity.[35] The powers that doctors use are based on remedies available to any person, making their special claims as unnecessary as those about the divinity of saliva. It might seem unbelievable that Pliny would borrow their ideas, but not only does he by necessity but also he admits borrowing from animals as well. They have discovered natural powers by accident, so the content of a cure can be separated from those who employed it. Though again, Pliny does not press this point since he tries to disguise the extent of his borrowing. Social role is everything. Greeks who used olive oil for anointing their bodies were wrong-headed, but Romans who anointed their victory wreaths with oil were engaging in a noble practice. The use of cold baths is encouraged by Greek doctors and people who did not know better, while the wise (Roman) might still bathe but not make the baths too cold.[36] In sum, when a Greek doctor uses some item from nature, it is simply in order to extort large amounts of money from the patient. The same item may be effective when

[35] See, for example, his attack on the royal doctor Thessalus (*NH* 29.5.10). That this is his own opinion, see Nutton 1986, 31.

[36] *NH* 29.11.

adopted for use by a properly-educated Roman. Others, such as the Magi, may use the same items for magical purposes.

The use of human blood is a good example of his dilemma. Romans are permitted to use human body parts and fluids since they are so efficacious. However, Romans must absolutely avoid anything that looks like cannibalism. Making a distinction appears to depend on establishing moral superiority for Roman uses, combined with offering some confusing examples. Prolonging life at any cost is rejected as if a general acceptance of death might mitigate against cannibalistic tendencies. A basic contrast is established between helpful cures (*auxilia*) and abominations (*piacula*) such as "drinking" blood directly, as from a wound. Pliny denounces the Greek writer who suggests using human items all the way down to the paring of nails yet, despite the rhetorical flourish, offers uses of just as small body parts. The principle and the specific example do not prohibit many other uses of human blood that could also be classified as cannibalism.

In contrast to the correct Roman use of body parts, Ostanes, the Persian sage, is called the "inventor of monstrosities." He presumably has no limits, though again his monstrous practices are not clearly distinguished from permitted Roman practices. Pliny intertwines his discussion of cannibalistic-sounding human-based cures with cases of human sacrifice, such as the Scythian tribes who both sacrifice humans and eat their flesh. This anecdote darkly implies that any cures that employ body parts may depend on the slaughter of humans, a practice forbidden to Romans.[37] This point only serves him to a limited extent since he refers to some examples where Romans engage in practices that can be interpreted as human sacrifice. Romans are still left with the problem of how to procure the body parts needed for cures. The topic raises fantasies of not only cannibalism but necromancy since any supply of body parts implicates corpses.[38]

Similar problems plague his discussion of menstrual fluid.[39] Wild claims are made about this blood by the Magi and others, described by Pliny as "monstrificum" and a "virulent scourge." He then outlines many uses and appears to endorse them all. The Greek doctors, Magi and Pliny may in the end have been indistinguishable on the topic of cures that come from humans.

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[37] Beagon 2005, 123 lists numerous related references to human sacrifice and cannibalism.

[38] Women are most likely to be charged with involvement in this unsavory process as seen in Lucan's Erictho, a masterful depiction of the total boogey-woman.

[39] *NH* 7.63–65, 28.20–23.

Given how much he borrows from people he dismisses, and how hard it is to sustain his social prejudices as a classification system, Pliny admits that he is not sure exactly how to evaluate some of the claims made by foreigners. Ultimately, Pliny demurs; everyone will have to weigh the evidence.[40] The Romans, according to Pliny, are more civilized than most people, so can pick and chose among all the information available from the entire world. Pliny's intellectual empire is cast as a parallel to the political rise of Rome; his encyclopedic knowledge mirrors the reach of Roman power into the farthest regions of the world.[41] Romans know how to fight and rule, so they will also know which cures are effective.

Somewhat surprisingly, Pliny does not spend much time denouncing women healers. He mentions midwives and prostitutes, both groups that might be expected to have special knowledge related to women's health issues.[42] In this off-hand and not negative mention, Pliny separates himself from the many other ancient writers who cast suspicion on any healing activity done by women. As many recent studies have argued, women may have been able to use various healing tools in the privacy of their families but outside they were vulnerable to the charge of engaging in magic. The more public the family, the greater the danger as well.[43] This slippery slope towards charges of magic illustrates just how limited the possibilities were for a woman to use any type of healing tools on the public stage, gender determining the interpretations of such actions.

Pliny worked under tremendous constraints in trying to establish his authority, depending primarily on displaying his extensive research and the impressive number of volumes he consulted. He had to make the argument that what he presented was more effective then the alternatives. His superiority has to be built at someone else's expense to build a hierarchy of healing reliability.

Lévi-Strauss described reluctant healers, forced by social circumstances to display powers they did not believe in.[44] Quesalid, a now-famous Kwakiutal native first described by Franz Boas, began investigating shamans in order to expose their tricks but found himself caught up in the process of healing people. Encountering other shamans with even thinner tricks, his

[40] *NH* 28.29.

[41] French 1994, 205–206.

[42] *NH* 28.18. On 'wise women' see Gordon 1987, 64.

[43] A few exceptional women, for example, were trained as doctors through being "substitute sons" for fathers who had no biological sons.

[44] Lévi-Strauss 1963.

tricks gained a new status and efficacy in his eyes as well as in the eyes of the disgraced shamans.

Pliny was by no means a reluctant healer but the Magi and Greek doctors function as his "weaker" shamans; he was not sure about all of the ideas he presented but he knew that his corpus in its totality was better than theirs. Their remedies may work but should be rejected because of the fees that accompany the remedies and their ethical standards.

Reclassifying Pliny's Classifications

Many modern scholars classify the use of natural forces as magic.[45] Derek Collins argues that natural forces are the basis of magic because natural forces are unseen.[46] Richard Gordon makes a similar argument about the natural basis of magic based his reading of Aelian. This writer on natural forces points out that chameleons can change their external form in a manner parallel yet distinct to the shape-changing drugs used by Circe.[47] Perhaps instead what Aelian is arguing is that chameleons do not have to use herbs, a fact that makes their natural power all the more impressive. Christopher Faraone similarly defines magic via Pliny's report about the use tortoises make of plants to attract other turtles.[48] As presented by Pliny, the point of the story is that animals make use of natural forces just as humans do. While it is no doubt a story about human attraction as much as turtle-love, as Faraone points out, the thrust of the story is not about magic in any form. Instead its point is exactly that it is not necessary to resort to other explanations of powers in order to understand the natural world.

More popular in recent scholarship has been classification of Pliny's ideas as proto-science, despite, among other points, the fact that he rejects the use of surgery.[49] Pliny's use of plants can be interpreted as having, in the eyes of scholars, some "real" efficacy; his advocacy of animal parts is much more problematic.[50] Even the use of plants matches medical cures only in a

[45] All of these, including the three examples discussed here, repeat the early Christian attack on sympathy, that is it just magic. See Edelstein-Temkin-Temkin 1967, 235.

[46] Collins 2003.

[47] Gordon 1987.

[48] *NH* 7.7.

[49] French 1994, 124. The bulk of studies of Pliny follow this paradigm from Stannard 1965 through Tempkin 1991.

[50] Any treatment may, of course, seem efficacious from the placebo effect.

coincidental manner. As Tamsyn Barton points out about astrology, drawing a simple line from the ancient to the modern practice obfuscates the completely different social role it plays in society.[51] Finding the precursors of modern science demands such a broad definition of science, she reiterates, as to be meaningless.[52]

After making these judicious remarks, Barton offers yet another critique of modern modes of characterization. She writes, "No one in antiquity strove through philosophy to manipulate nature except perhaps the Magi and the doctors."[53] Here she seems to be channeling Pliny's prejudices, since this would not be the self-characterization of either the Magi or doctors. The very term "manipulate" has a negative connotation, as if other might use nature more "naturally," an idea that is based not on a specific technique but again based on an evaluation of what a technique implies.

Taking a different tack, Richard Gordon distinguishes between five types of healers: 1) divine healers who use divination, 2) root cutters with their "materia medica," 3) purifiers who use incantations and lustrations, 4) exorcists with amulets and 5) sorcerers with their counter-magic.[54] Gordon's schema avoids some generalizations, building very closely from late antique terminology.[55] These categories, however, are not commensurate or nearly as stable as Gordon argues. "Root cutters" ranged from anonymous "wise women" to Diocles who did dissection.[56] Roots are used in purification, exorcisms and all sorts of other rites.[57] Finally, in Gordon's schema some categories are based closely on a general theory of illness (exorcism) while others, such as sorcerer, on hostile labeling.

These modern re-classification attempts are likely not to succeed. Each item used in a healing rite is, as it were, a "power tool" used to make something happen. But the tools and their employment are not easy to classify on the still-popular spectrum of magic, science and religion. Of these, at least in the case of Pliny, given his emphasis on the divine basis of nature, all his cures are closest to the modern second-order category religion.[58]

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[51] Barton 1994.

[52] Barton 1994, xiv.

[53] Barton 1994, xii.

[54] Gordon 1995.

[55] As, for example, lumping all healers into the three categories of doctor, exorcist and doctor/prophet. See Coffman 1993, 421–422.

[56] Scarborough 1991, 355. Galen's all-male "official list" of root cutters may have influenced the idea of a profession. See Gordon 1987, 566.

[57] Scarborough 1991, 143–145.

[58] Smith 2004.

This observation is not new. Already in 1932 David Kaufman outlined the contours of the ancient Latin term *veneficium*: translation by either "poison" or "drug" is dependent on the accompanying adjective assessing it as harmful or beneficial.[59] A form of retro-determination is needed even to decide what is in fact a tool. It is no surprise that Theophrastus "seems uncertain of his definition [of herb], because he continues by distinguishing those potencies … of roots which are general from those *dynameis* in roots which have use in healing or medicinals."[60]

Classification of the tool was often after-the-fact and was an attempt to assign a specific interpretation of cause and motivation (attempt to heal, attempt to murder). These rhetorical interpretations are both flexible (more than one possible interpretation exists) and yet at the same time constrained (only certain types of classificatory arguments were considered plausible). All classifications depend on a "retro-determination" in which an action is given a specific interpretation from among the many possible. The implications of these observations are side-stepped as scholars fill in the interpretive gaps themselves and allot one use as harmful (magic) and another beneficial (medicine) based on, for example, what seems to be a closer precursor to a modern category such as science.

The basic problem with classification, ancient and modern, is always-shifting meanings of the material dimension of social life. In these rites, objects are used as agents of power by "imputing spirits to dead matter and divine agency to ordinary creatures."[61] For Pliny, humans, just like plants and animals, are implicated in the obvious power of the cosmos, brimming with all sorts of forces. They are in fact the very best examples of that divinity, not set over or in opposition to it. He has no "Protestant theory of transcendence," as it were, where "the value of a person is not defined in its distinctiveness from, and superiority to, the material world."[62]

A completely different way of trying to solve the classification problem is to directly address what Webb Keane calls the "economy of representation."[63] As analyzed by Keane, the practice of bridal exchange presents some

[59] Kaufman 1932. The Greek term *pharmakos* raises identical issues.

[60] Scarborough 1978, 356.

[61] Keane 2002, 67.

[62] Keane 2002, 71.

[63] Keane 2002. Keane's writings are part of a much larger corpus of anthropological research that brings close attention to culturally-specific linguistic ideologies and semiotics modes of interpreting words and objects. His writing is particularly useful because he does not simply equate the meaning of objects with the now wildly-popular idea of performativity

of the same issues of interpretation as healing rites to both those engaged in it and to scholars. As practiced in Indonesia, it appears to the newly-converted Christians as a disturbing degradation of women. These women seem to be "brought-down" to the level of objects so the practice is reinterpreted as merely being symbolic.[64] To those who engaged in the practice, however, it "exemplified rather than threatened the distinctiveness of human self-worth."[65] The exchange is reinterpreted as having primarily symbolic meaning. This new retro-determination makes the exchange "stand for" symbolic meanings that suit the interpreter. For those used to the old system, marriage that is not represented by an exchange means reducing marriage to the level of animal behavior.

In semiotic terms Pliny posits a formal "standing for" relationship between a sign (a plant) and what the sign stands for (nature as divinity). The relations are not arbitrary but instead are either the same or mirror opposite (both formal). At the same time they are all one level removed from divinity but still formally connected to that power. No human intention is needed and no basic transformation of objects into formal representations of divinity. The problem for Pliny is that many people do not understand the workings of the cosmos and supposed healers disseminate disinformation about which items represent healing powers and which do not.

In other healing rituals, parts of nature are employed based on different "economies of representation," that is, on different interpretation of the role of objects and words. The elaborate rituals preserved in the *PGM* are described by J.Z. Smith and others as modified sacrifices.[66] Here a miniaturized, mobile version of sacrifice takes place, with an emphasis on the act of writing itself.[67] In these rituals an item is sanctified by contiguity with a sacred site (altar) or person (officiant), or perhaps by having sacred words spoken over them. Brought into contact with a source of divinity by means of these actions, something closer to a "pivoting of the sacred," the transformed item now represents power. These rites transform nature (i.e. natural items) into something divine and esoteric in the sense of being hidden from general understanding and restricted to only the few.

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as scholars are now doing, making a completely circular argument that objects also "do things" just as words do.

64 Keane 2002.

65 Keane 2002, 71.

66 Smith 2004.

67 Smith 2004, 26.

The divine ancestor theory of saliva motivates a special "standing for" relationship between the saliva and its power based on genealogy. This delineation of power is transmittable but also restricted via literal embodiment. Divine saliva cannot be created by any act but it also is not divine based on the Pliny's sympathy and antipathy.

If we now return to Jesus' use of saliva as presented in John, whatever ideas the reader might have about the power of saliva, the special usage in this story is establishing the power of the person putting the saliva to work. Despite the fact that many more direct interpretations of healing saliva are available, the anecdote trumps these theories with yet another theory, this one with its emphasis on the figure who uses the saliva as a special type of person (better than both natural causation and a distant divine ancestor). "If he were not from God," the text explains, "He would not be able to do these things."[68] The act points to the special "standing for" relationship of the healer himself.

Outlining Pliny's ideas does not give us a complete guide to ancient ideas but only his version. Even a small random sample shows the web of strategies used by Late Antique writers, some familiar from Pliny, others not. Tertullian posited that the holy spirit is manifested in the holy water by means of "natural processes" seeming to wish to harness the positive association of this description much as advertisers today use the word "natural" to sell any and every product.[69] Tatian argued against the use of roots and amulets hoping to set Christians apart in their notion of where divine power is located.[70] Analyzing these ideas must begin in each case with the particular strategy each author is trying to use to "retro-determine" agency and causality. Only when these are investigated will we be able to construct a complete guide to theories of effective action in late antiquity.

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[68] John 9:32.

[69] *De Baptismo* 4.

[70] *Oratio* 16. Temkin 1991, 120, argues that this is a rejection of magic, an odd stance for a historian of science to take.

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ASTROLOGICAL MEDICINE IN GNOSTIC TRADITIONS

Grant Adamson

Much narrower than the general topics of both astrology and medicine, to say nothing of magic, the study of astrological medicine in western antiquity is prohibitive for a number of reasons besides the 'wretchedness' of all things astrological.[1] For one, several of the ancient texts have not survived or only survive in fragments. Moreover they were often written under the names of legendary figures such as the pharaoh and Hermetic sage Nechepso or even Hermes Trismegistus himself. Thus information as to any social reality behind this technical Hermetic tradition is scarce. So is information as to any social reality behind the affiliated pseudo-Zoroastrian and Solomonic traditions of the Hellenistic period and Roan Empire. The boundaries between these traditions are debatable, like the extent to which they represent belief and practice that are actually Egyptian, Persian, or Jewish.[2]

'Alien wisdom' or not, titles attributed to such legendary figures are cited in Gnostic texts. The *Apocryphon of John* refers to a Book of Zoroaster (ⲡⲭⲱⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲍⲱⲣⲟⲁⲥⲧⲣⲟⲥ) and may in fact contain an extract from it.[3] *On the Origin of the World* refers to a Book of Solomon (ⲡⲭⲱⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ).[4] Although perhaps unidentifiable with any other known pseudepigrapha, the presence of these titles in Ophite-Sethian texts brings with it the possibility of astrological medicine in Gnostic traditions.[5]

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[1] A concise encyclopedia entry aimed at some of the technical Hermetica is Touwaide 2005, 690–692; preceded by Kroll 1914, 802–804. See also recently Michel 2004a, 146–177 for the gems; Akasoy et al. 2008 for astrological medicine both eastern and western. On the wretchedness of astrology, refer to Sarton 1951, 374, writing of the Mandaean *Book of the Zodiac*; and the follow-up in Neugebauer 1951; Taub 1997.

[2] Hermetic tradition: e.g. Riess 1892; Festugière 1950/1989; Gundel-Gundel 1966, 9–40; Pingree 1974; Fowden 1986/1993; González 2005. Zoroastrian tradition: e.g. Bidez-Cumont 1938/1975; Beck 1991; de Jong 1997, 5–38; Quack 2006; Solomonic tradition: e.g. Torijano 2002.

[3] NHC II,1 19.10: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 111.

[4] NHC II,5 107.3: Layton 1989, 48–49.

[5] Prior discussion of iatromathematics, melothesia, and/or healing in 'Gnostic' traditions includes van den Broek 1981; Jackson 1985, 74–108; Quack 1995; King 1997; Brakke 2000,

Of course not every title attributed to Nechepso, Zoroaster, Solomon and their colleagues was about astrological medicine, iatromathematics, to employ the technical term. But the possibility of astrological medicine in Gnostic traditions is supported by instances of the iatromathematical doctrine of melothesia. According to this doctrine, the parts of the human body are associated with the stars and under their influence for better or worse. In the *Apocryphon of John* there are no less than three instances of the doctrine: one in which the parts of the human body are associated with what seem to be the seven planets, followed by another elaborate melothesia in which the parts of the human body are associated with what seem to be the seventy-two 'half' decans of Greco-Egyptian astrology, followed by another in which the parts of the human body are associated with thirty astral rulers whose precise astrological function is unclear.[6] The latter two of these instances of the doctrine may have been extracted from the aforementioned Book of Zoroaster.[7] The start of a similar planetary melothesia related to the one in the *Apocryphon of John* is also found in *On the Origin of the World*, albeit not immediately in connection with the Book of Solomon referred to there.[8]

122–124; Mastrocinque 2005, 42–93, 173–183; Logan 2006, 45, 49–50; Pleše 2006, 201–210; King 2006, 111–118; Quack 2006, 272; Rasimus 2009, 128, 219, 286; DeConick 2009, 249, 253. I generally use the term Gnostic in the sense of classic Gnostic, more or less interchangeably with Sethian and Ophite-Sethian.

[6] NHC II,1 15.13–19.14; NHC III,1 22.18–23.19; NHC IV,1 24.2–29.24; BG 8502,2 49.9–51.1. The standard reference volume on the decans is Gundel 1936. Since the thirty rulers appear to be related to the seventy-two rulers, their astrological function may have been decanal as well. Perhaps the thirty should be the thirty-six decans, six of them having dropped out accidentally. Compare the thirty-six names, including Pisandraptēs, on the silver lamella discussed below. In some Greco-Egyptian sources there are thirty-six (half) decans and thirty-six horoscopes (not to be confused with nativities), for a total of seventy-two pentads, each governing five days in the Egyptian calendar. See P.Oxy. 465; P.Lond. 98; Porphyry, *Epistola ad Anebonem* 2.12b–c, apud Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 3.4.1–2; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 8.3.264.7–10, 8.4.265.13–267.1; and compare *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 83.10–84.8; *Gospel of Judas* TC,3 49.9–50.18. Alternatively, the thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John* could have reference to the thirty days of the month in the Egyptian calendar. The seven-day planetary week or Sabbath cycle and the thirty-day Egyptian month were not mutually exclusive in Christian Egypt, despite the Egyptian month being based on the ten-day decanal week. In the long manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John*, still more daemons are named following the thirty astral rulers and their superiors.

[7] Many of the names of the seventy-two and thirty astral rulers are not recognizably Gnostic.

[8] NHC II,5 114.33–35.

Table 1. Melothesia of the seven astral rulers in NHC II,1; IV,1

Name of Authority	Iconography (face)	Name of Power	Psychic Body Substance
ⲁⲑⲱⲑ	sheep	Goodness	bone
ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲱ	donkey	Providence	sinew
ⲁⲥⲧⲣⲁⲫⲓⲱ	hyena	Divinity	flesh
ⲓⲁⲱ	seven-headed serpent	Lordship	marrow
ⲥⲁⲛⲃⲁⲱⲑ	serpent	Kingdom	blood
ⲁⲗⲱⲛⲉⲓⲛ	monkey	Envy	skin
ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲉⲱⲛ	fire	Wisdom	hair

Besides a list of body parts, that is, parts of Adam's psychic body, the planetary melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John* has two sets of names for the seven astral rulers, plus their iconography (see table 1). The double-decanal melothesia and the other melothesia following it have a single name per astral ruler with its associated body part and no iconography (see table 2). The immediate superiors to these seventy-two and thirty astral rulers are also named. Why the lists of body parts, names, and iconography? Could there be some utility to knowing which part of the body is associated with a given astral ruler, what the names and iconography of the rulers are, together with the names of their superiors?

Table 2. Melothesia of the seventy-two astral rulers and melothesia of the thirty astral rulers in NHC II,1; IV,1

Their Superiors: ⲁⲑⲱⲑ, ⲁⲣⲙⲁⲥ, ⲕⲁⲗⲓⲁ, ⲓⲁⲃⲏⲗ, ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ, ⲕⲁ[ⲓⲛ], [ⲁⲃ]ⲉⲗ	Their Superiors: ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲏⲗ, ⲟⲩⲣⲓⲏⲗ, ⲁⲥⲙⲉⲛⲉⲇⲁⲥ, ⲥⲁⲫⲁⲥⲁⲧⲟⲏⲗ, ⲁⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲣⲓⲁⲏ, ⲣⲓⲭⲣⲁⲏ, ⲁⲙⲓⲱⲣⲩ

The Seventy-Two Astral Rulers		The Thirty Astral Rulers	
Name	Psychic Body Part	Name	Psychic Body Part
ⲉⲧⲉⲣⲁⲫⲁⲱⲛ̣[ⲉ] ⲁ̣[ⲃⲣⲱ]ⲛ̣	head	ⲁⲓⲟⲗⲓⲟⲇⲣⲁⲍⲁ	head
ⲙⲏⲛⲓⲅⲉⲥⲥⲧⲣⲱⲛⲑ	brain	ⲓⲁⲙⲙⲉⲁⲍ	neck
ⲁⲥⲧⲉⲣⲉⲭⲙⲏⲛ	r. eye	ⲓⲁⲕⲟⲩⲓⲃ	r. shoulder
ⲑⲁⲥⲡⲟⲙⲟⲭⲁⲙ	l. eye	ⲟⲩⲉⲣⲧⲱⲛ	l. shoulder
ⲓⲉⲣⲱⲛⲩⲙⲟⲥ	r. ear	ⲟⲩⲇⲓⲁⲓ	r. hand
ⲃⲓⲥⲥⲟⲩⲙ	l. ear	ⲁⲣⲃⲁⲟ	l. hand
ⲁⲕⲓⲱⲣⲉⲓⲙ	nose	ⲗⲁⲙⲡⲙⲱ	r. fingers
ⲃⲁⲙⲏⲛ· ⲉⲫⲣⲟⲩⲙ	lips	ⲗⲁⲙⲡⲙⲱ	l. fingers
ⲁⲙⲏⲛ	teeth	ⲃⲁⲣⲃⲁⲣ	r. breast
ⲓⲃⲓⲕⲁⲛ	molars	ⲓⲙⲁⲏ	l. breast

Table 2. (*cont.*)

The Seventy-Two Astral Rulers		The Thirty Astral Rulers	
Name	Psychic Body Part	Name	Psychic Body Part
ⲃⲁⲥⲓⲗⲓⲁⲇⲏⲙⲏ	tonsils	ⲡⲥⲁⲛⲇⲣⲁⲡⲧⲏⲥ	chest
ⲁⲭⲭⲁ	uvula	ⲕⲟⲁⲇⲏ	r. shoulder joint
ⲁⲇⲁⲃⲁⲛ	neck	ⲟⲇⲉⲱⲣ	l. shoulder joint
ⲭⲁⲁⲙⲁⲛ	vertebrae	ⲁⲥⲫⲓⲍⲓⲍ	r. ribs
ⲇⲉⲁⲣⲭⲱ	throat	ⲥⲩⲛⲟⲅⲭⲟⲩⲧⲁ	l. ribs
ⲧⲏⲃⲁⲣ	r. shoulder	ⲁⲣⲟⲩⲫ	belly
ⲛ[.....]	l. shoulder	ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲗⲱ	womb
ⲙⲛⲓⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ	r. elbow	ⲭⲁⲣⲭⲁⲣⲃ	r. thigh
[...]ⲉ	l. elbow	ⲭⲑⲁⲱⲛ	l. thigh
ⲁⲃⲓⲧⲣⲓⲱⲛ	r. underarm	ⲃⲁⲑⲓⲛⲱⲑ	genitals
ⲉⲩⲁⲛⲑⲏⲛ	l. underarm	ⲭⲟⲩⲍ	r. leg
ⲕⲣⲩⲥ	r. hand	ⲭⲁⲣⲭⲁ	l. leg
ⲃⲏⲗⲩⲁⲓ	l. hand	ⲁⲣⲟⲏⲣ	r. shin
ⲧⲣⲏⲛⲉⲩ	r. fingers	ⲧⲱⲉⲭⲑⲁ	l. shin
ⲃⲁⲗⲃⲏⲗ	l. fingers	ⲁⲱⲗ	r. knee
ⲕⲣⲓⲛⲁ	fingernails	ⲭⲁⲣⲁⲛⲏⲣ	l. knee
ⲁⲥⲧⲣⲱⲩ	r. breast	ⲃⲁⲥⲧⲁⲛ	r. foot
ⲃⲁⲣⲣⲱⲫ	l. breast	ⲁⲣⲭⲉⲛⲧⲉⲭⲑⲁ	r. toes
ⲃⲁⲟⲩⲙ	r. shoulder joint	ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲫⲛⲟⲩⲛⲑ	l. foot
ⲁⲣⲁⲣⲓⲙ	l. shoulder joint	ⲁⲃⲣⲁⲛⲁ	l. toes
et alii	et cetera		

Celsus, Origen, and Plotinus on Gnostic Ritual Practice

According to Celsus, some of the Christians that he was familiar with, and that Origen preferred to call Ophian heretics, memorized the names of the seven planetary rulers for use in heavenly ascent. Origen even quotes the ascent formulas from a copy of one of their diagrams of the cosmos.[9] Memorization would go some way towards explaining the varied continuity to the many lists of the names of the seven astral rulers attested throughout Ophite-Sethian literature.[10] But memorization and spoken recitation for ascent need not have been the only use of the names of astral rulers in Gnostic myth. The widespread phenomenon of heavenly ascent in the ancient Mediterranean does not fully account for instances of the doctrine

[9] *Contra Celsum* 7.40; 6.31. On the diagrams and ascent formulas, see DeConick's contribution to this volume.

[10] See table 3 below; also Rasimus 2009, 104.

of melothesia in Ophite-Sethian texts, least of all such an elaborate double-decanal melothesia as in the *Apocryphon of John*. Stripping off the bodily passions while ascending through the cosmic spheres would not have required knowledge of the names of the astral rulers with which the ears, nose, lips, teeth, molars, tonsils, uvula, throat, and so on, are associated. Practical application of this knowledge must have been otherwise.[11]

Upon conclusion of his exposé of ascent ritual, Celsus says that the Ophian Christians "profess also some magical sorcery (καὶ ὑπισχνοῦνται … μαγικήν τινα γοητείαν), and this is the summit of wisdom to them (καὶ τοῦτ' ἔστιν αὐτοῖς τὸ τῆς σοφίας κεφάλαιον)." It is not plain what else Celsus has to say about this or how his statements fit together, as his work is only preserved in limited quotation by Origen. He does go on to say, however, that they "use some sort of magic and sorcery (χρωμένους … μαγείᾳ τινὶ καὶ γοητείᾳ) and invoke the barbarous names of certain daemons (καὶ καλοὺντας ὀνόματα βαρβαρικὰ δαιμόνων τινῶν)." He refrains from delineating "all those who taught rites of purification (ὅσοι καθαρμοὺς ἐδίδαξαν), or spells which bring deliverance (ἢ λυτηρίους ᾠδὰς), or formulas that avert evil (ἢ ἀποπομπίμους φωνὰς), or noisy crashes (ἢ κτύπους), or pretended miracles (ἢ δαιμονίους σχηματισμούς), or all the various prophylactics of clothes, or numbers, or stones, or plants, or roots, and other objects of every sort (ἐσθήτων ἢ ἀριθμῶν ἢ λίθων ἢ φυτῶν ἢ ῥιζῶν καὶ ὅλως παντοδαπῶν χρημάτων παντοῖα ἀλεξιφάρμακα)." But he testifies that he himself saw "books containing barbarian names of daemons and knowledge of portents (βιβλία βάρβαρα δαιμόνων ὀνόματα ἔχοντα καὶ τερατείας)" in the hands of Ophian Christians.[12]

Celsus disparages them for this. Nevertheless, his disparagement does not invalidate his basic testimony. With disparagement of his own, Origen also claims that the Ophian Christians were involved in sorcery and magic, unlike orthodox Christians, so he asserts.[13] From Origen's limited quotations of Celsus, it is reliable enough that Ophian Christians invoked daemons with unusual names and owned books with the names written in them. Why and how they invoked the daemons is not something that either Celsus or Origen specifies, at least not something that Celsus specifies as quoted in Origen. Prompted by his encounter with them, Celsus does have a few lines about amulets made from assorted media though. Could the Ophian Christians he encountered have used amulets alongside invocation?

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[11] Heavenly ascent: e.g. Segal 1980; Culianu 1983; Couliano 1984.

[12] *Contra Celsum* 6.38–40: Borret 1969, 270–275; Chadwick 1953/1965, 354–355; translation modified.

[13] *Contra Celsum* 6.31–32, 38–41; 7.40.

Later, roughly a century after Celsus and within a few decades of Origen, Plotinus had similar things to say about some of his associates in Rome. They were Christians that his literary executor Porphyry referred to as Gnostics. Plotinus says that they "write chants, intending to address them to those beings (ἐπαοιδὰς γράφωσιν ὡς πρὸς ἐκεῖνα λέγοντες), not only to the Soul [i.e. World Soul, a.k.a. Wisdom, Sophia] but to the beings above it as well (οὐ μόνον πρὸς ψυχήν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐπάνω);" while below "they claim to purify themselves of sicknesses (καθαίρεσθαι δὲ νόσων λέγοντες αὐτούς)," based on their assumption that "the sicknesses are daemons (τὰς νόσους δαιμόνια εἶναι), and they claim to be able to drive these out by their word (καὶ ταῦτα ἐξαιρεῖν λόγῳ φάσκοντες δύνασθαι)."[14] He does not mention amulets as such, but he does indicate that these Gnostic Christians wrote things as well as spoke them.

Plotinus is only slightly less disparaging than Celsus and Origen. He argues that the Gnostics were doing the same things prescribed in magical literature, even if they did not think so. Instead of what they were doing to heal themselves, Gnostics ought to live a philosophical life, according to Plonitus. Daemons do not cause sickness, anyway. This is in keeping with Plotinus' stance on astrological determinism, namely that the stars indicate terrestrial conditions more than they actually influence them. Regardless, the highest order of things is what the philosopher is after. He should not worry so much about what goes on in the lower orders.[15]

Taken together with what Celsus and Origen say, there is evidence in contemporary reports, then, that Gnostics invoked daemons and owned books with daemon names in them. This was because they believed that daemons cause bodily ailment, which they endeavored to cleanse themselves of and remove by their word. When this contemporary evidence is added to the instances of melothesia in Ophite-Sethian texts, the possibility of astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions becomes plausibility, and a reading of their myths within the context of iatromathematical texts is justifiable.

Gnostic Myth in the Context Of Iatromathematical Texts

Among the best preserved texts of astrological medicine are the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* and the *Testament of Solomon*. Establishing a date of

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[14] *Ennead* 2.9.14: Armstrong 1966, 276–279; translation modified.
[15] *Ennead* 2.9.13–14.

composition for either is difficult. All manuscripts of the *Sacred Book of Hermes* are medieval, although the text itself is likely ancient.[16] Galen, for example, cites a comparable prescription of astrological medicine from a technical Hermetic text attributed to Nechepso.[17] As for the *Testament of Solomon*, all complete manuscripts are also medieval. However, it was already being cited in late antiquity, and there are papyrus fragments of chapter eighteen that date to the fifth or sixth century.[18] A recent argument places the final Christian version of the testament as early as 175–250 CE, while reiterating that its important eighteenth chapter on the decans would be at home in late Ptolemaic or early Roman Egypt and may have been in circulation as an independent text before the Common Era.[19] Josephus attests the attribution of such texts to Solomon in the first century. He himself witnessed the therapeutic removal of a daemon by a Jewish practitioner. In accordance with Solomic prescription, the practioner used a gemstone amulet set in a ring with plant material.[20]

The *Sacred Book of Hermes* is a manual. Having learned about the doctrine of melothesia, its practitioner is taught the zodiacal signs, names, iconography, and associated body parts of all thirty-six decans. In order to heal and protect the associated body part, the practitioner is instructed to make an amulet from whatever gemstone is proper to that decan and then set it in a ring with that decan's plant. On the gemstone are to be engraved the name and above all the iconography of that decan. This is how the text opens:

> I appended for you the shapes and forms of the thirty-six decans in the zodia, both how you must engrave (γλύφειν) each one of them and wear it between the Ascendant and the Agathos Daimōn and the Place concerning health. So after you do this, wear it, and you will have a great amulet. For as many sufferings as are sent upon humans from the influence of the stars (ὅσα γὰρ ἐπιπέμπεται πάθη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἀστέρων ἀπορροίας), they are healed by these decans (τούτοις ἰᾶται). Therefore when you have reverenced (τιμήσας)

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[16] Editions and translations: Pitra 1888, 284–290; Ruelle 1908; Gundel 1936, 374–379; Festugière 1950/1989, 139–143; compare also Kroll 1903, 73–78. The manuscripts postdate the thirteenth century. For the late Byzantine scribal context, see Pingree 1971; Rigo 2002.

[17] *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9.2.19; cited and discussed below.

[18] Manuscripts, editions, and translations are discussed in Klutz 2005, ix–x, 1–37; another translation with commentary has since appeared, Busch 2006. McCown's standard edition of the text is known to be problematic but it is yet to be replaced. It may never be and arguably should not be replaced with an eclectic text that aims to represent the original, as the manuscripts are highly divergent.

[19] Klutz 2005, 34–35, 109–110.

[20] *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.42–49.

> each decan through its proper stone and its proper plant and especially its shape, you will have a great amulet. For without this decanal arrangement there is no generation of anything, since the universe is encompassed by it.
>
> Now the zodiacal circle, shaped into parts and members and joints, stands out from the cosmos. And part by part it is thus. Aries is the head of the cosmos, Taurus the neck, Gemini the shoulders, Cancer the chest, Leo the back, heart, and sides, Virgo the abdomen, Libra the buttocks, Scorpio the genitals, Sagittarius the thighs, Capricorn the knees, Aquarius the lower legs, Pisces the feet.
>
> So each of the zodia has power over its own member and brings about some suffering related to that member (ἕκαστον οὖν τῶν ζῳδίων ἐπέχει τὸ ἴδιον μέλος καὶ ἀποτελεῖ περὶ αὐτὸ πάθος τι). Accordingly, if you do not want to suffer what you must suffer under the zodia (εἴπερ βούλει μὴ παθεῖν ἃ δεῖ παθεῖν ὑπ' αὐτῶν), engrave the shapes and forms of their decans on stones. And after you put the plant of each decan underneath, and especially after you also produce its shape, wear the amulet as your body's great and blessed remedy. Let us start then from Aries.
>
> First decan of Aries. This one is named Chenlachōri. As for its shape, given below, it has the face of a little child, hands raised up, holding a scepter as if carrying it overhead, the shins clad with greaves. This one dominates the sufferings that are related to the head (οὗτος κυριεύει τῶν περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν γινομένων παθῶν). Engrave it then just so on fine Babylonian stone, and after you put isophrus plant underneath, set it in an iron ring and wear it. Avoid eating boar's head. For thus you will flatter (κολακεύσεις) each one of the decans when you engrave it on its stone along with its proper name also.[21]

The text proceeds formulaically through the remaining thirty-five decans. If working alone, the practitioner assumed in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* would have knowledge of astrology, botany, gem cutting, and metallurgy. He is able to recognize and has access to specific materials. As an artisan he possesses the tools and expertise needed to craft the prescribed amulets.

Emphasis on gem cutting and on the iconography of the decans in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* could be a reaction to more skeptical physicians like Galen. In a famous passage from his voluminous work entitled *On the Composition and Specificity of Simple Remedies*, Galen comes to write about the use of stones.[22] Of green jasper he writes: "Some people bear witness that there is a special property to certain stones, such as in fact the green jasper does have. It benefits the stomach and the opening of the esophagus when it is worn. Some people," Galen goes on to explain, "even set the stone

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[21] *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* 1–5: Ruelle 1908, 250–253; translation mine.

[22] *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*, beginning at 9.2.1.

in a ring and engrave on it the radiate serpent (ἐντιθέασί τε καὶ δακτυλίῳ αὐτὸν ἔνιοι καὶ γλύφουσιν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸν τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἔχοντα δράκοντα), just as king Nechepso indeed prescribed in his fourteenth book (καθάπερ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Νεχεψὼς ἔγραψεν ἐν τῇ τεσσαρακαιδεκάτῃ βίβλῳ). Now I myself have made a sufficient trial of this stone," Galen adds. "After I made a little necklace of small stones of this type, I hung it from the neck just so as for the stones to reach the opening of the esophagus. They appeared no less beneficial when they did not have the engraving (τὴν γλυφὴν) that Nechepso prescribed."[23] In this passage Galen thinks that the stone itself is a natural curative, but his contemporaries, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian, were less certain that prescriptions like that of the legendary Nechepso were unnecessary. For them, the names and iconography of the astral rulers were key to healing and protecting the body.

While the *Sacred Book of Hermes* is a manual of instructions for engraving gemstone amulets, chapter eighteen of the *Testament of Solomon* mixes instruction and narrative. The iconography of the decans is not featured in the text, but it hardly shares the skepticism of Galen. As Solomon tells the story, he summons each decanal daemon to find out who it is. They respond one by one, answering with their name, the associated body part that they afflict or their influence on human life more broadly, and what should be done to counteract them. These measures are often speech oriented but also include the making of amulets of various media to be inscribed with the names of thwarting gods and angels. After giving its name, the first decan tells Solomon, "I cause people's heads to suffer pain and I cause their temples to throb (κεφαλὰς ἀνθρώπων ποιῶ ἀλγεῖν καὶ κροτάφους σαλεύω)." Conveniently enough for anyone who might be suffering from such a headache, before concluding its response to the king the decan mentions that when it hears someone invoke the archangel Michael to thwart it, it immediately withdraws (εὐθὺς ἀναχωρῶ), that is, the headache will be gone.[24]

In terms of genre, this chapter of the *Testament of Solomon* is closer than the *Sacred Book of Hermes* is to the *Apocryphon of John*. The Gnostic myth is also told as a story, although the practical application of its doctrine of melothesia is less obvious. All three texts feature decanal names and associated body parts. But there are instructions for healing and protecting the

[23] *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9.2.19: Kühn 1826/1965, 207; translation mine, with reference to Bonner 1950, 54; Jackson 1985, 77–78; see both, for issues of textual transmission and translation of the passage.

[24] *Testament of Solomon* 18.5: McCown 1922, 52; Duling 1983, 978; translation modified.

body only in the sacred book and the testament, not in the apocryphon. Chapter eighteen of the testament seems to have been composed through narrative adaptation of a manual something like the sacred book: a decanal melothesia and instructions for healing and protecting the body have been placed within a narrative framework dealing with the career and reputation of Solomon. Likewise in the apocryphon, an elaborate decanal melothesia and another melothesia of thirty astral rulers are placed within a narrative framework as the Savior retells the account of creation from Jewish scripture. The testament is also closer to the apocryphon in that its decans are negatively called daemons.

Perhaps the source of this material in the *Apocryphon of John* was the Book of Zoroaster referred to there. Whether a pagan or Christian text, it could have been a manual of astrological medicine, complete with instructions for making amulets. The *Sacred Book of Hermes* and the *Testament of Solomon* are limited to the thirty-six decans, but there is a second-century papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy. 465, that features the names and iconography of the seventy-two 'half' decans, their astrological influence on parts of the body, households, cities, kingdoms. As the same double-decanal structure of the Greco-Egyptian cosmos is found in early Sethian and proto-Sethian texts like the *Gospel of Judas* and *Eugnostos* respectively, the melothesia of seventy-two astral rulers in the long manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John* does not necessarily represent a later development in Gnostic myth.

Speech and Amulets in Gnostic Astrological Medicine

More important than source criticism is the question of what use Gnostic myth had with its instances of the doctrine of melothesia. The evidence from Celsus, Origen, and Plotinus together points to the invocation of daemons for purposes of healing and protecting the body. Celsus has a few lines about amulets made from assorted media such as stones, plants, roots; and Plotinus indicates that Gnostics wrote things as well as spoke them. Despite the absence of any explicit instructions for making iatromathematical amulets in Ophite-Sethian literature, a reading of their myths in the context of the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* and the *Testament of Solomon* shows how the iconography and names of the astral rulers could have been used to heal and protect the body.

Somewhat generously though not wildly reconstructed, astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions as I understand it involved both speech and the making of amulets. The planetary melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John*

and *On the Origin of the World* would have allowed for making amulets that feature not only the names of any of the seven astral rulers but also their iconography; the decanal melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John* would have allowed for making amulets that feature the names of any of the seventy-two astral rulers; and the other melothesia following it would have allowed for making amulets that feature the names of any of the thirty astral rulers whose precise astrological function is unclear but are said to be "particularly active in the members (ϩⲣⲁⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ)."[25]

Hence, whatever the ailment in any given body part, from one of the major organs to the toenails, it could be healed or prevented. Speech was quicker and less costly to be sure, and the vocalized word was forceful. Still the making of amulets might have been valued precisely because of the extra involvement and the power of iconography. Inscribed amulets made from common media need not have required more than basic literacy, whereas amulets made from metal foil or gemstones could only be had with additional expertise and tools. Gnostics who wore gemstone amulets set in rings or as pendants around their necks must have had knowledge of gem cutting and metallurgy or else commissioned other, maybe non-Gnostic, artisans to make them. The use of plants and the knowledge of botany as assumed of the practitioner in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* are also possible.[26]

Identifying an amulet as Gnostic has been a problem in the history of scholarship. Objection to the excesses of previous generations of scholars, while necessary, has had the infelicitous result that the study of amulets is liable to be neglected in Nag Hammadi studies. If there is just a handful of amulets that are identifiably Gnostic, this does not mean that Gnostics were uninterested in wearing them. To find some amulets that are Gnostic would be rather fortunate given that Christians were a small percentage of the population of the ancient Mediterranean. A handful is all that might be expected to be found.[27]

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[25] NHC II,1 17.8–9: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 103; translation modified.

[26] For amulets and amulet making in general, see Kotansky 2005; for gems and gem cutting in general, see Michel 2004b.

[27] Counting gemstone amulets, which survive in the greatest number and are the most durable, there is an estimated total of 5,000. See Michel 2005, 141. Among the major catalogues and studies are Bonner 1950; Delatte-Derchain 1964; Philipp 1986; Michel 2001a; 2001b; Mastrocinque 2003; Michel 2004a. Christianity constituted maybe half a percent of the population as Celsus was writing in the second century; it was maybe one or two percent of the population in the third century as Origen and Plotinus were writing. Refer to the projections in Stark 1996, which increase exponentially in the fourth century. Of course, many Christians were not Gnostics, so the Gnostic percentage of the population would be even lower. While

The Ialdbaōth Gem

Such good fortune was the late Campbell Bonner's when he examined some amulets from the New York gallery of a major art and antiquities dealer. Recognizing one of them to be "of a rare and important kind," Bonner first published it separately in 1949 and then again the following year in his *Studies in Magical Amulets*. On the front it features a lion-headed human figure standing between the names Ααριηλ and Ιαλδαβαωθ. On the back are the names of the seven planetary rulers, the first one abbreviated: Ια(λδαβαωθ), Ιαω, Σαβαωθ, Αδωναι, Ελωαι, Ωρεος, Ασταφεος.[28]

Bonner bases his estimation of the rarity and importance of the amulet on its seeming "to be truly Gnostic. Contrary to an opinion which was once widely held," he explains, "few of the amulets commonly called Gnostic have anything to do with the various speculative religious systems to which that word is properly applied," making it "all the more important that a genuine relic of Gnostic belief should be faithfully recorded." Bonner correctly identifies the gem as an amulet of the Ophite Gnostics, with reference to the myth in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30, and to the descriptions of the cosmological diagrams by Celsus and Origen. He rightly sees the names on the amulet as those of the planetary rulers and notes that the first ruler is described as leonine in Celsus and Origen, from which Bonner concludes that "[t]he lion-headed demon [on the front of the amulet] may therefore be accepted as Ialdabaoth."[29]

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it is challenging to quantify how many Gnostic amulets of astrological medicine might be expected to survive, then, out of an estimated 5,000 total gems, iatromathematical and otherwise, certainly no more than one hundred might be expected, and in all likelihood far less than that. Compare the number of Christian books, dating to the first three centuries, that might be expected to survive from Roman Egypt, as discussed in Bagnall 2009, 1–24. Additional challenge to a quantification of expected Gnostic gems is that the gems themselves are hard to date with much precision. A few easily come from before the Common Era; others were produced as late as the modern period. However, in the expert opinion of Michel 2005, 143, "the production of magical gems peaked in the second and third centuries CE."

[28] Bonner 1949; 1950, 135–138, 284 (D. 188).

[29] Bonner 1949, 43–45. If he had not faithfully recorded the gem when he did, it would have gone completely unappreciated by scholarship, as its whereabouts have been unknown since the dispersal of the Joseph Brummer collection. Information pertaining to the dispersal of the collection is to be had in the *New York Times*: 15 April 1947, 25; 16 September 1947, 26; 22 September 1947, 22; 20 January 1948, 25; 25 September 1948, 10; 17 April 1949, 80; 21 April 1949, 23; 22 April 1949, 21; 23 April 1949, 9; 8 May 1949, 80; 15 May 1949, 72; 22 May 1949, 91; 9 June 1949, 28; 10 June 1949, 25; 12 June 1949, 80; 23 March 1964, 85; in auction catalogues: Parke-Bernet 1949; Sotheby's 1964; Galerie Koller 1979; in a memoir by Brummer's contemporary: Martin 2002; and in a Duke University museum catalogue:

Even though he did not have at his disposal the Coptic manuscripts of Ophite-Sethian texts, the bulk of which had only recently been discovered and remained to be published in critical edition, Bonner's interpretation of the amulet is remarkably accurate. With the publication of the Berlin Gnostic Codex, the Nag Hammadi Codices, and now the Tchacos Codex, further correspondences have come to light.

Most striking is a passage from *On the Origin of the World*, where it is said that the chief astral ruler "called himself Ialdaoth (ⲁⲫⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ϫⲉ ⲓⲁⲗⲇⲁⲱⲑ, scribal error for ⲓⲁⲗⲇⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ). But Ariael is what the perfect call him (ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲉⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ϫⲉ ⲁⲣⲓⲁⲏⲗ), for he was like a lion (ϫⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲡⲉ)."[30] Correspondence between this passage and the lion-headed figure standing between the names Αριηλ and Ιαλδαβαωθ on the front of the amulet is extraordinary. It confirms Bonner's suggestion that Ariel is "only a secondary name or epithet of the lion-headed Ialdabaoth," though it may be more accurate to say that Ialdabaōth is a secondary name of Ariēl. Bonner had also suggested that "the presence of the name Ariel in conjunction with Ialdabaoth can best be explained by its Hebrew meaning, which, according to some authorities, is 'Lion of God,'" i.e. אריאל.[31] And just as he suggested, *On*

Bruzelius 1991. After Joseph Brummer's death in 1947, the collection was dispersed in several ways. A group of objects was purchased for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1947, and other private sales occurred before the auction by Parke-Bernet in New York in 1949. Some of the collection stayed with Joseph's brother Ernest. The Ernest Brummer collection was auctioned by Sotheby's in London in 1964, the year of his death, and by Galerie Koller in Zürich in 1979. Part of the family collection also went to Duke beginning in 1966, and another portion remained with Ella Baché, Ernest Brummer's widow, even in the 1990s. Her nephew, Dr. John Laszlo, graciously informed me that the amulet is not with him, when I inquired as to its whereabouts, January 2008. It could have been sold in one of the private purchases of 1947–1948, however insignificant it must have seemed among the other objects in a collection so vast; or it could have been grouped together with one of the 57 lots of "cameos, intaglios, and seals" offered in the 1949 Parke-Bernet catalogue, all of which lots were sold; or it could have been dispersed from the family collection sometime after that. I have inquired at the Metropolitan and at Duke, as well as at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, which has some gems purchased from Joseph Brummer in 1942, but the amulet in question was not located there. Parke-Bernet was acquired by Sotheby's along with its records of sales, including the lots of gems in the 1949 auction. Names of buyers are confidential, however. The only description and photos of the amulet from autopsy, then, are Campbell Bonner's. His black-and-white photos are from casts, whereas he describes the stone as "green jasper clouded with dark red." The casts are housed in the Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor, Michigan: KEL Inv. BRU 5; see Michel 2004a, 546. With luck, one day the amulet may be located and photographed in color as well.

[30] NHC II,5 100.23–26: Layton 1989, 34–35.

[31] Bonner 1949, 46. As for the rest of the names on the amulet, Ialdabaōth is ostensibly

the Origin of the World connects the name Ariaēl with the chief astral ruler's leonine appearance. What is more, *On the Origin of the World* also supplies a list of the names of the seven astral rulers that is virtually identical to the one on the reverse of the gem (see table 3).[32]

Table 3. Lists of the names of the seven astral rulers

Gem:	NHC II,5:	Irenaeus:	Origen:	BC 20915:
Ια(λδαβαωθ)	ⲓⲁⲗⲇⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ	*Ialdabaoth*	Ἰαλδαβαώθ	[ⲓⲁⲗⲇⲁ]ⲃⲁⲱⲑ
Ιαω	ⲓⲁⲱ	*Iao*	Ἰαώ	[ⲥ]ⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ
Σαβαωθ	ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ	*Sabaoth*	Σαβαώθ	ⲁⲇⲱⲛⲁⲓⲟ[ⲥ]
Αδωναι	ⲁⲇⲱⲛⲁⲓⲟⲥ	*Adoneus*	Ἀδωναῖος	[ⲓⲁⲱⲑ]
Ελωαι	ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟⲥ	*Eloeus*	Ἀσταφαιός	[ⲉ]ⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟⲥ
Ωρεος	ⲱⲣⲁⲓⲟⲥ	*Horeus*	Αἰλωαιός	ⲱⲣⲁⲓⲟⲥ
Ασταφεος	ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ	*Astaphaeus*	Ὡραῖος	ⲁ[ⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ]

Semitic but of disputed etymology. Iaō (compare יהוה), Sabaōth (צְבָאוֹת), Adōnai (אֲדֹנָי), and Elōai (אֱלֹהִי) are divine names and epithets from Jewish scripture that have been transliterated into Greek. Iaō, Sabaōth, and Adōnai in particular occur everywhere on amulets and in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri. The last two names on the Ialdabaōth gem, Hōreos and Astapheos, are of uncertain derivation and occur only rarely, if at all in the case of Hōreos; the name HORION occurs after variations of Iaō and Sabaōth in a demotic love spell, *PDM* xiv.1035. There are occurrences of the name Ialdazaō and Aldabaim, but the name Ialdabaōth proper only occurs on one other amulet. A portion of this gem was already broken off when it was transcribed in the early 1800s, and since then the gem was lost. According to Bevilacqua, 1991, 26–28, who published the transcription but was unable to locate the gem, the transcription "is not very clear: the letters cannot be distinguished with safety." At any rate, when the names of the seven planetary rulers of Gnostic myth do occur on amulets and in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri, they do not refer to multiple gods so much as one and same conglomerate deity. See e.g. *PGM* XII.284–307, where a single supreme god is invoked as IAŌ SABAŌTH ADŌNAI EILŌEIN … ASTAPHAIOS, among many other names.

[32] NHC II,5 101.29–102.1: Layton 1989, 36, with Ialdabaōth supplied from 100.10–24. There are other more or less identical lists in: Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30.5, 11: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 369, 378; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31: Borret 1969, 254–258, with Adōnaios supplied from 6.32; the "[teaching] of the Sethians" according to the so-called Coptic Book, *Berlin Codex* 20915: Schenke Robinson 2000, 247. And there are other lists without the name Hōraios in: *On the Origin of the World* NHC II,5 100.9–23: Layton 1989, 36; *Apocryphon of John* BG 8502,2 43.11–44.4; NHC II,1 11.26–34, 12.15–25; NHC IV,1 19.15–26; BG 8502,2 41.17–42.7; NHC III,1 17.22–18.6: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 70–75. This is the order in which I have arranged the lists in table 3. Correspondence between the Ialdabaōth gem and *On the Origin of the World* is all the more striking given the general lack of such precise correspondence between the extant gems and Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri. See Michel 2005, 144.

Table 3. (*cont.*)

Without Hōraios, 2x Sabaōth				
NHC II,5:	BG 8502,2:	NHC II,1:	NHC II,1:	NHC IV,1:
ⲓⲁ̣ⲱ	ⲓⲁⲱⲑ	ⲁⲑⲱⲑ	ⲁⲑⲱⲑ	ⲁ[ⲑ]ⲱ[ⲑ]
ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓ	ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟϒ	ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲱ	ⲉⲗ̣ⲱ̣[ⲁⲓⲱ]
ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲱ	[ⲁⲥⲧ]ⲣⲁ̣[ⲫⲁⲓⲱ]
–	ⲓⲁⲱ	ⲓⲁⲱ	ⲓⲁⲱ	[ⲓⲁ]ⲱ
–	ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ	ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ	ⲥⲁⲛⲃⲁⲱⲑ	ⲥⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ
–	ⲁ̣ⲁ̣[ⲱⲛⲓ]	ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲓⲛ	ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲉⲓⲛ	ⲁⲁⲱ̣[ⲛⲉⲓⲛ]
–	ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲓⲟⲥ	ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲉⲁⲉ	ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲉⲱⲛ	[ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲉⲱⲛ]
Without Hōraios, 2x Adōnaios				
BG 8502,2:	NHC III,1:			
ⲓⲁⲱⲑ	ⲁⲱⲑ			
ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲉⲗⲱⲁⲓⲟⲥ			
ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲁⲥⲧⲟⲫⲁⲓⲟⲥ			
ⲓⲁⲱ	ⲓⲁⲍⲱ			
ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲁⲓⲟ̣ⲩ̣			
ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲓ	ⲁⲁⲱⲛⲓⲛ			
ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲁⲓⲟⲥ	ⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲇⲁⲓⲟⲥ			

As for how the amulet was used, it is not pierced but would have been mounted in a setting and worn as a pendant or ring. This is clear from ancient literature on gem cutting, from the amulet's shape, and from the fact that other gems of similar shape survive in their settings. When worn, the lion-headed human figure standing between the names Aariēl and Ialdabaōth would have faced outward, distinguishing the wearer as one of 'the perfect' according to the passage in *On the Origin of the World*, while the list of the planetary rulers would have been concealed against the wearer's chest or finger. Professor Pearson has written that the amulet "would serve as a reminder to the wearer of his/her initiation, which (as in the case of the Ophite Diagram) would have included the 'passwords' enabling the soul to escape the realm of Ialdabaoth."[33] There is no reason to second-guess this. Since the wearer lived in a mortal body for some time before ascending past the planetary rulers once and for all, the amulet also would have been used for healing and protection on earth.

Unlike the thirty-six gems that the practitioner is directed to make in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* and unlike the various invocations and amulets for thwarting individual decanal daemons in chapter eighteen of the *Testament of Solomon*, this gem probably was not made to heal a single body part or

[33] Pearson 2004, 259, original parenthesis; refer also to Pearson 2007, 47.

prevent one specific ailment. Rather, with the iconography of the chief astral ruler and both his names on the front together with the names of all seven planetary rulers primarily responsible for incarnation on the back, it could have been used as a cure-all or protection against each and every ailment to which the body is susceptible. By invoking one of the planetary rulers and wearing his name engraved on the gem, the Gnostic could control any of his inferiors, whether zodiacal, decanal, etc. By invoking the chief astral ruler himself and wearing the names of the lion-headed Aariēl/Ialdabaōth engraved on the gem, in turn the Gnostic could control any of the planetary rulers. The wearer of this amulet might not have been familiar with the elaborate double-decanal melothesia or the other melothesia following it in the long manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John*. But it is safe to say at the least he or she would have known that Ialdabaōth formed the brain and marrow, Iaō the bones, Sabaōth the sinews, Adōnai the flesh, Elōai the blood, Hōreos the skin, Astapheos the hair, or something close to this, and that the seven planetary rulers were assisted by a number of angelic daemons.[34]

A Silver Foil Amulet

The Ialdabaōth gem is certainly Gnostic, as Roy Kotansky states in his entry on amulets in the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*.[35] He considers very few others as potential candidates. A metal foil amulet or lamella deserves special consideration for its loose parallels with the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John*. In the estimation of its editor, Florent Heintz, this silver lamella was produced from a larger sheet on which the texts of other amulets could have been inscribed too. The metal sheet was then cut into strips, and this process caused the strips to curl. They were then rolled up completely and placed in tubular cases for wearing. A portion of this lamella's bronze case in fact survives. It was worn for protection by someone named Thomas, son of Maxima. After thirty-six carefully inscribed lines of unusual and exotic sounding names, the text reads: "sacred and mighty and powerful names of the great Necessity (ἅγια κα‹ὶ› ἰσχυρὰ καὶ δυνατὰ ὀνόματα τὰ τῆς μεγάλης Ἀνάγκης), preserve and protect from all sorcery and potions (ἀπὸ πάσης γοετίας καὶ φαρμακίας), from

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[34] See *On the Origin of the World* NHC II,5 114.33–35; *Apocryphon of John* NHC II,1 15.13–23; III,1 22.18–23,6; IV,1 24.2–14; BG,2 49.9–50.4; and Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 194 for a similar melothesia from an Apocalypse of John that Theodore bar Konai attributes to the Audians.

[35] Kotansky 2005, 70.

curse tablets, from those who died an untimely death, from those who died violently and from every evil thing, the body, the soul and every member of the body (καὶ πᾶν μέλος τοῦ σώματος) of Thomas, whom Maxima bore, from this day forth and for his entire future."[36]

Among the names invoked on this lamella are Pisandraptēs, spelled exactly as in the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John* (see table 2). Some other names appear to be connected as well.[37] Overall, the thirty-six names on the lamella and the thirty names in the melothesia are admittedly quite different, yet they total approximately the same number. Moreover, the names on the lamella are invoked to protect every member of the wearer's body, and the astral rulers of the melothesia in the apocryphon are said to be "particularly active in the members (ϩⲣⲁⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ)."[38] Thomas, son of Maxima, was probably a Christian. I personally would not go so far as to state with confidence that he was a Gnostic. He could have been, and the lamella may be Gnostic. It also might not be.

Either way, this metal foil amulet is significant for reconstructing the utility of Gnostic myth. Gnostics could have worn similar protective lamellae. Protection from sickness is not specified on Thomas' amulet but might be lumped in with protection from "every evil thing." Foremost on his lamella is protection from "all sorcery and potions (ἀπὸ πάσης γοετίας καὶ φαρμακίας), from curse tablets," and from the dead.[39] If the astrological rulers of Necessity could be invoked to heal and protect the body, they could also be invoked to harm it. Perhaps Gnostics worried about ritual attack from other people and wore amulets for protection, as Thomas, son of Maxima, did.[40]

As is the case with the reference to sorcery and potions on this lamella, in Ophite-Sethian literature the only reference to magic per se that I am aware of is negative. After directing readers to the Book of Solomon as well as the Archangelic (Book) of the Prophet Moses, *On the Origin of the World* refers to "magic and potions (ⲙⲁⲅⲉⲓⲁ ϩⲓ ⲫⲁⲣⲙⲁⲕⲓⲁ)" along with idolatry and blood sacrifice as "many kinds of error (ϩⲁϩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲗⲁⲛⲏ)" introduced by the daemonic angels of the seven planetary rulers.[41] Regarding astrology, according to the *Apocryphon of John* it was also introduced by Ialdabaōth's angels, so too

[36] Heintz 1996, 295–297; translation modified.
[37] Such as Aremmouth (lamella) and Marephnounth (apocryphon).
[38] NHC II,1 17.8–9: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 103; translation modified.
[39] Heintz 1996, 297; translation modified.
[40] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 10, says that his teacher was the object of such an attack but warded it off by the strength of his soul.
[41] NHC II,5 123.4–124.15: Layton 1989, 82–83.

metals like gold, silver, copper, and iron.[42] None of this prevented Gnostics from reading books of magic and astrology, any more than the chief astral ruler's introduction of monotheism prevented them from reading and rewriting Jewish scripture.

How Gnostic Astrological Medicine Worked

The thirty-six gods of Necessity invoked on Thomas' lamella were as likely to harm as to protect him. He calls them 'sacred,' and he might even be said to pray to them. But it hardly follows from this that he viewed Pisandraptēs and the rest as benevolent.[43] With minor exceptions, the astral rulers in Ophite-Sethian literature, from Ialdabaōth to Pisandraptēs, are not benevolent either. Gnostics invoked them, wore amulets featuring their names and iconography, not because the astral rulers willed good for humans. On the contrary. Gnostics did so because the astral rulers were responsible for human suffering. They wanted to thwart Ialdabaōth and his inferiors. This can be seen by contrast and comparison, going back to the *Sacred Book of Hermes* and the *Testament of Solomon*.

In the *Sacred Book of Hermes*, the decans are to be reverenced and flattered. They are not called daemons. There is even a sense that the decans are positive and the zodiac is negative. The zodiac brings about suffering, which the decans heal. In order to avoid or stop a headache, for example, brought about by Aries, the prescribed gemstone amulet had to be worn when Chenlachōri, the first decan of Aries, was most visible in the sky after crossing the eastern horizon and therefore most likely to look down and see its name and especially its iconography engraved on the gem.[44] In order to counteract zodiacal influence, the practitioner reverenced and flattered the decans by displaying the proper amulet.

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[42] NHC II,1 28.5–30.2.

[43] Heintz 1996, 295–296 points out that this same amulet for protection against curse tablets "seems to be replicating deliberately their language." And not only do the thirty-six names that it invokes for protection loosely parallel the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John*, they closely match the names invoked in a rather violent love-spell in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri for employing the ghost of a corpse to torment a desired woman, *PGM* XIXa.

[44] As the opening of the text instructs, each gem must be worn when the decan is between the Ascendant and the Place concerning health. For the Places, see Bouché-Leclercq 1899, 280 figure 31. It would make little sense for the amulets to be worn when the decans are in this position on the actual birth chart. It must refer to the position of the decans in their daily crossing of the eastern and western horizons along with their zodiacal signs.

Astrological medicine in Ophite-Sethian traditions would have worked through similar display of such amulets as the Ialdabaōth gem, though I doubt that Gnostics were reverencing the astral rulers. In that regard, their iatromathematics had more in common with the eighteenth chapter of the *Testament of Solomon*, where together with amulets, speech is given a larger role among the measures to counteract the decans. These decans are called daemons. Not to be reverenced or flattered, they are to be thwarted, primarily by invocation of their superiors, such as one of the Judeo-Christian archangels. Astral rulers in Gnostic literature are daemons too, and their superiors are named. When the Savior tells his disciple in the *Apocryphon of John* the names of those that "were appointed (ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲧⲟⲑⲟⲩ) over all" seventy-two astral rulers in the double-decanal melothesia, and the names of those that "have power (ⲛⲉⲩⲥⲙⲟⲥⲟⲙ) over all" thirty astral rulers in the following melothesia, it is so that users of the apocryphon will be able to thwart them by invoking their superiors.[45] If a Gnostic was suffering from headache, he could invoke Michael to thwart Diolimodraza (see table 2), just as Solomon is told to invoke Michael to thwart the first decanal daemon in the testament. The distinction, however, is that in Ophite-Sethian literature even the archangel Michael is daemonic. So it is not a matter of counteracting evil with good; it is a matter of invoking a superior daemon against an inferior one.

What was astrological about Ophite-Sethian iatromathematics was the identity of the astral rulers as planetary, zodiacal, decanal, etc., the association of the astral rulers with parts of the human body through the doctrine of melothesia, and the use of their names and iconography for invocation as well as for making amulets to heal and protect the body. Other varieties of iatromathematics involved calculating the position of the stars on the birth chart and keeping time according to siderial calendars.[46] Astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions may have also been similarly technical.

Molded in the divine image, the psychic bodies of the Gnostics were created by the astral rulers along with their bodies of flesh. To heal and protect themselves, the Gnostics played the daemons' game, which they took seriously. They were not content to sit on the sidelines and live the

[45] NHC II,1 17.7–8; NHC IV,1 27.13–14: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 101–105.

[46] See Ideler 1841/1963, 387–396, 430–440 for the position of the stars on the birth chart; P.Oxy. 465 for keeping time according to the Egyptian calendar, divided into seventy-two 'half weeks' of five days. An important manuscript of the eighteenth chapter of the *Testament of Solomon* also features the Egyptian calendar, divided more commonly into thirty-six periods of ten days. Refer to Duling 1983, 938; Klutz 2005, 27.

life of the philosopher indifferently resigned to Fate and Necessity, as was encouraged even in some of the philosophical Hermetica of their day.

The alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis records a dispute between 'Hermes' and 'Zoroaster' on this very issue. Against Zoroastrian claims to "avert all the evils of Fate (ἀποστρέφεσθαι πάντα τῆς εἱμαρμένης τὰ κακά)," Hermes has it that the pneumatic should not "overpower Necessity by force (μηδὲ βιάζεσθαι τὴν ἀνάγκην), but rather allow Necessity to work in accordance with her own nature and decree," and to "leave Fate to do what she wants to the clay that belongs to her (ὃ θέλει ποιεῖν τῷ ἑαυτῆς πηλῷ), that is, the body."[47] This Hermes is not the patron deity of the technical Hermetica; this is quite another from the Hermes of the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* on engraving gemstone amulets so as to avoid suffering what must be suffered under astral influence. Here in the dispute between the two sages, the Gnostics who produced and used the *Apocryphon of John*, with its reference to a Book of Zoroaster, would not have sided with the Egyptian sage. They would have sided with the Persian, despite their double-decanal melothesia and the general Hermetic pedigree of iatromathematics.[48] With this Zoroaster, they claimed that the evils of fate can be averted, at least by the Gnostic holy generation and until their death.[49]

Further Gnostic Traditions Broadly Defined

Ophite-Sethian literature does not represent all traditions that might be grouped together as Gnostic. By way of conclusion, a small survey of other traditions and literature of ancient Gnosticism as Professor Pearson has outlined them suggests that the Gnostics whose astrological medicine I have been reconstructing were not alone in their practice of iatromathematics.

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[47] *On the Letter Omega* 7: Jackson 1978, 24–25; translation modified.

[48] For the definite Egyptian context, regardless of attribution to Zoroaster, see Quack 2006, 272.

[49] Averting death poses a special problem. Gnostics are free from the rule of the stars, except as it concerns their bodies of flesh, in that they will still die under the circumstances determined by the stars. But in the meantime, their psychic bodies are not subject to the astral influences that cause the rest of the human generations to sin. Compare Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.8.1–3. Through the practice of iatromathematics, neither must they suffer ailment. The thrust of Gnostic astrological medicine would not have been to prolong life on earth under the astral rulers so much as to make it less painful. Death before the fated time, including suicide, was not an option. On that much, the Gnostics and Plotinus were in agreement.

According to Irenaeus, the Basilidians used "magic, spells, invocations, and all remaining jugglery (*magia et incantationibus et invocationibus et reliqua universa periergia*). And they also concoct certain names, as it were, of angels. They report that some reside in the first heaven, others in the second, and thus they strain to relate in full the names, archons, angels, and authorities of the 365 heavens that they have fabricated." Irenaeus goes on: "They locate the positions of the 365 heavens just as the astrologers do (*similiter ut mathematici*); for accepting the astrologers' speculations (*illorum enim theoremata accipientes*), they have adapted them to their own kind of teaching (*in suum characterem doctrinae transtulerunt*). And their ruler is named Abrasax, which is why he has the number 365 in himself."[50]

Heresiological rhetoric must be taken into account here, and I would not want to defend past identification of the several gemstone amulets featuring the name Abrasax (365: A=1 β=2 ρ=100 α=1 σ=200 α=1 ξ=60) as somehow Basilidian. A few could have been worn by followers of Basilides, yet I see no way to tell which ones. Basilidians may have studied the names of the angels and their astrological function for iatromathematical purposes, not only for achieving invisibility to pass through the realm of Abrasax. Epiphanius states that Basilides taught the doctrine of melothesia: "Then, he says, the human being has 365 members for this reason (εἶτα, ἐντεῦθεν, φησί, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τριακόσια ἑξήκοντα πέντε μέλη), so that he can assign one member to each of the powers (ὡς ἑκάστῃ τῶν δυνάμεων ἀπονέμεσθαι ἓν μέλος)."[51] If Basilides did teach such a doctrine of melothesia, it would have been even more elaborate than the double-decanal melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Epiphanius also states sarcastically of the Manichaeans that "they have astrology as a handy subject of boasting, and phylacteries—I mean amulets—and certain other incantations and spells (καὶ φυλακτήρια, φημὶ δὲ τὰ περίαπτα, καὶ ἄλλαι τινὲς ἐπῳδαὶ καὶ μαγγανεῖαι)."[52] Some confirmation of this is to be had in Manichaean texts, such as the *Kephalaia*, where there are instances of the doctrine of melothesia. Manichaean astrology is notoriously opaque. The more transparent instances of melothesia are zodiacal, but the soul and body are also parsed in terms of five members or garments,

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[50] *Adversus haereses* 1.24.5–7: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 330–333; Layton 1987, 424–425; translation modified.

[51] *Panarion* 24.7.6: Holl 1915, 264; Williams 2009, 81; translation modified.

[52] *Panarion* 66.13.7: Holl 1985, 35–36; Williams 1994, 233.

as well as seven, nine, and eighteen garments. This human microcosm is further divided into four worlds of seven rulers, each with its associated body part. All told, there are thousands upon thousands of rulers inhabiting the body, causing it ailment.[53] In the largely Manichaean *Pistis Sophia*, the Savior explains to the disciples how the decans (ⲇⲉⲕⲁⲛⲟⲥ) and their assistants (ⲗⲓⲧⲟⲩⲣⲅⲟⲥ) enter the womb to construct the embryo, each one of them building a member (ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ). The Savior promises to teach the disciples the names of these astral rulers responsible for the creation of the body of flesh, which would have been useful in the practice of astrological medicine.[54]

Never as widespread as the proselytizing Manichaeans, the Mandaeans have outlasted them to the present. Their main astrological text is the *Book of the Zodiac*, a handbook of astrology and ritual. Mandaeans have zodiacal names referring to their nativities. These names are used in ritual practice, such as on inscribed strips of paper, rolled up in metal capsules and worn around the neck for protection against sicknesses, etc. Priests also wear an iron ring during exorcisms, for instance. Its features are presumably astrological and confessedly of the powers of darkness, including the lion, scorpion, and serpent. To quote Lady Drower: "Most of the leading events in a Mandaean's life are decided by recourse to the priests, who tell him the astrologically auspicious day … In cases of illness, cures and herbs fall under the influence of certain planets and certain signs of the Zodiac, and a man should take only the medicament or cure which belongs to the sign under which he fell ill., i.e. the hour he sickened."[55]

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[53] See especially *Kephalaion* 70; and BeDuhn 2001, 13–14.

[54] *Pistis Sophia* 3.132: Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 685–687.

[55] Drower 1937/2002, 25–27, 36–38, 81–83.

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THE PERSISTENCE OF RITUAL IN THE MAGICAL BOOK OF MARY AND THE ANGELS: *P. HEID. INV. KOPT. 685*

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In this essay, the focus of attention is upon a parchment codex that is part of the significant manuscript collection of the Institut für Papyrologie in Heidelberg, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685.[1] This text, to which I have given an appropriate title in the light of its contents, "The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels," is one of a number of magical manuscripts, or manuscripts of ritual power, in the collection. P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 consists of twenty parchment pages (ten leaves, or five sheets) assembled into a single-quire book. The five sheets were derived from the hide of an animal, and when prepared for the codex, the sheets were folded in half and bound together with parchment thongs tied on the outside at the "spine" of the book—the twenty-page book.

This Heidelberg book, "The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels," may be compared, with its present contents, to other magical texts in the Heidelberg collection. According to the report of Richard Seider in "Aus der Arbeit der Universitätsinstitute: Die Universitäts-Papyrussammlung," this text and others were acquired for the Heidelberg collection in 1930 by Carl Schmidt.[2] Heidelberg papyrologist Friedrich Bibabel, in *Griechische, koptische und arabische Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit*, classifies P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 with a number of these texts as all being part of the acquisition.[3] These texts are the following, here listed with new inventory numbers:

P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 678 (curse to harm a man and leave him impotent)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 679 (curse to harm a person through the use of wax dolls)

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* I dedicate this essay to Birger A. Pearson, a scholar and friend whose work on ancient texts has spanned many a year. [Professor Marvin Meyer died on August 16, 2012. Before his death, he gave the editors of this book permission to publish his contribution, in celebration of the career of his friend and colleague, Birger A. Pearson.]

1 On P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, see Quecke 1972; Meyer 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004.

2 Seider 1964, 163.

3 Bilabel-Grohmann. 1934.

P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 680 (spell to help with power of speech)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 681 (curse against a woman's face and work)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 682 (sexual curse to leave a man impotent)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 683 (spells to protect a woman, to attract a woman)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 (erotic spell of Cyprian of Antioch)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 ("The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels")
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 ("The Praise of Michael the Archangel")

Several of these texts are published in the volume of Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*.[4]

Two of these texts, in addition to P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, are particularly noteworthy. First, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 reproduces an erotic spell of Cyprian of Antioch. As the story goes, Cyprian attempted to seduce a Christian virgin, Justina, through the use of magic and ritual power, but when he was unsuccessful he converted to Christianity, threw his magical books away—and proceeded to become St. Cyprian, Bishop of Antioch. The story further suggests that Cyprian and Justina were martyred together at the time of the Emperor Diocletian, at the very beginning of the fourth century. P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 is a rag-paper booklet that presents what is alleged to be the magical spell once employed by Cyprian of Antioch.

Second, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 is a ritual handbook entitled, in the manuscript itself, "The Praise of Michael the Archangel." This parchment codex contains a hymn of greeting and praise, offered by Michael, who is described in the text as a winged angel wielding a wand of power. Following a series of invocations, and a final adjuration for the empowerment of water and oil to be used in a ritual ceremony, twenty-one numbered prescriptions are listed for such problems as demon possession, domestic violence, male impotence, a wife's unfaithfulness, infant death, insomnia, and the like. Initially published by Angelicus Kropp under the title *Der Lobpreis des Erzengels Michael*,[5] P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 went missing at the time of World War II, but in 1998 colleagues at the British Museum contacted me and asked for help with the identification of an obscure Coptic manuscript brought to their attention. It turned out to be P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686, previously lost but now found.

Bibabel suggests that these several texts not only belong to the same acquisition, but also may come from a single "library," "portfolio," or "hoard" of texts and spells of ritual power. In his estimation they constitute "eine

[4] Meyer-Smith 1999.
[5] Kropp, 1966.

Zauberbibliothek mit Hss. aus verschiedenen Jahrhunderten."[6] The one dated manuscript in this possible library of ritual texts, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 682, concludes with the date Paope 21 in the year 684 AM ("in the year of the martyrs"), which corresponds to October 19, 967 CE. According to paleographer Viktor Stegemann, the script of some of the other texts in the collection may be assigned a date around the eleventh century. Bibabel also notes similar dialectal peculiarities in these magical texts that may link them together. Hans Quecke, who worked for a time on P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 and the other texts in this library, goes even further in his observations. He states, "Nach meinem Urteil stammen diese Texte alle von ein und derselben Hand."[7] Thus, a reasonable case may be made that the text under particular consideration here, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, could have been part of a magical library of texts of ritual power that were written either by a single copyist or by several copyists and were in the possession of a Christian person or Christian persons who valued the magic or ritual power featured in the texts. Such a Heidelberg magical library of ritual power may be compared to the London Hay collection of texts (London Hay 10122, 10376, 10391, 10414, and 10434), the Michigan "Coptic Wizard's Hoard" (Michigan 593–603 and 1294), and the portfolio of spells of Severus son of (Jo)Anna (London Oriental Manuscript 6794, 6795, 6796(2), (3), (1), 6796(4), and 6796).

The Heidelberg Lectionary

In his brief description of magical texts in the Heidelberg collection, Bilabel introduces P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 and 686 together, and he indicates that they resemble each other and the other magical texts in the collection in a number of respects—and he adds that they are both palimpsests. Whether in their current form, as ritual handbooks, they may be thought to be constituted out of the same original parchment document is uncertain, but it is conceivable that parchment sheets from an original manuscript were used to construct both magical texts. In the case of P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, Quecke has studied the earlier text on the parchment and has published the results in his article "Palimpsestfragmente eines koptischen Lektionars." Quecke identifies the earlier text as a portion of a Coptic lectionary copied onto the parchment, he suggests, somewhat tentatively, in the ninth century. These

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[6] Bilabel-Grohmann 1934, 392.
[7] Quecke 1972, 5 n. 2.

traces of a Coptic lectionary are visible as shadowy remains throughout the codex and as a more legible text on the three pages (1, 19, and 20) and other parts of pages of the codex that were left blank when the second, magical text was written out.

A careful examination of P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 discloses that the Coptic lectionary was written in two columns, in a formal hand, and it included readings from the Pauline letters for specific religious holidays in the Coptic Church calendar. (The readings from the apostle Paul reflect what Coptic Christians traditionally attributed to Paul—including, for example, Hebrews and the Pastoral Epistles—and not what scholars now conclude Paul actually authored.) Apart from the pages that were left blank when the second text was copied, the readings of the lectionary often remain difficult to decipher, although they may be enhanced through the use of infrared photography. The title of the lectionary describes the ritual text as composed of readings ([ⲛ]ⲁⲛⲁⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ) for holy festival days, though the holidays are not specified and the months are not named in what is preserved and can be read. What can be deciphered is the title of the lectionary, several rubrics or portions of rubrics, and some of the readings to be used, presumably, within worship services. Two rubrics give a sense of how the lectionary was structured:

[ⲁ̅ (?) ⲁϥ ⲡ]ⲉⲓ ⲛⲥⲟⲩ ⲁ [...]
[1) Read] this on Day 1. [...]

[ⲃ̅] ⲁϥ ⲡⲉⲓ ⲛ̅ⲥⲟⲩ ⲃ̅. ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟ̅[ⲗ̅]
[2)] Read this on Day 2. (The) apostle.

The following chart, adapted from the work of Quecke,[8] reflects the organization of the lectionary:

Table 1.

Sheet	Coptic pages	Rubric	Reading
1	20 + 1		Hebrews 5:3–6 (see below)
		11) Day 15	2 Timothy 2:3–13
	19 + 2		2 Timothy 2:13–15
		12) Day 16	Philippians 4:1–9
2	18 + 3		Hebrews 9:7–10
		[.]6) Day 2[.]	Hebrews 2:11b-[17]
	17 + 4		Hebrews 2:17–18
		[.]7) Day 2[.]	Hebrews 12:1–6

[8] Quecke 1972, 11–12.

Table 1. (*cont.*)

Sheet	Coptic pages	Rubric	Reading
3	16 + 5	[1]) Day 1	2 Corinthians 5:17–6:4a
		[2]) Day 2	Hebrews 6:9
	15 + 6		Hebrews 6:9–20
4	14 + 7		Hebrews 11:32–40
		[ ]) Day 11 (?)	Titus 2:11–12
	13 + 8		Titus 2:12–3:7
5	12 + 9		Hebrews 1:13–2:8
	11 + 10		Hebrews 2:8–11a
		...	Hebrews 4:14–5:3

Thus, the Coptic lectionary preserved in P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 directs the liturgical leader to read, in the context of Christian worship on certain holidays, selected passages from what was considered the Pauline corpus. On Day One, the first reading was to be 2 Corinthians 5:17–6:4a, which begins as follows: "So if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look, they have become new." Quecke recalls that in fact this passage was to be read, as indicated elsewhere, on New Year's Day, the first day of the Egyptian month named Thoth, which corresponds to August 29.[9]

The lines of the Heidelberg lectionary run at right angles to the lines in the subsequent magical text, and this gives a hint of how the parchment was handled when it was determined that a new use would be made of the parchment sheets. Perhaps some time around the middle of the tenth century, the ritual usefulness of the lectionary was judged to be a thing of the past, and it was decided that the parchment document would be disassembled, erased, and reused. The parchment leaves were trimmed to an appropriate size, rotated ninety degrees, and folded to form the single-quire codex as it now exists. The extant ink traces at the ends of lines of the second, magical text extend from one page of the present codex to another page—and to another sheet. This bit of evidence suggests that the parchment sheets were folded to form a new codex before the magical text was copied onto the pages. At a given point in the process, the parchment was perforated at the "spine," and three thongs were inserted and tied to form a small bound codex. One ritual text, the lectionary, was all but gone, with only traces of ink left on the parchment to call attention to what had been written once

[9] Quecke 1972, 12.

upon a time. Now another, very different ritual text was to be copied onto the pages: "The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels."

Texts of Ritual Power

Eventually the ritual handbook dubbed "The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels" would find its way, it would seem, into the magical library of texts of ritual power conserved in Heidelberg, but prior to that, magical texts had to be written and collected and the handbook itself had to be created.[10] While the individual texts copied onto the parchment pages of P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 include several shorter texts, two texts dominate the codex by their size: the Prayer of Mary (2,1–9,12), and the adjuration of the nine angelic guardians, or guardian angels (12,1–16,15).

The Prayer of Mary is the text that opens P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, and it occupies seven and a half pages of the ritual handbook. The text identifies itself in the first lines as "the twenty-first prayer (that) the Virgin Mary spoke (on) the day (of) her falling asleep" (2,1–3), and it states that its intent, as a text of ritual power, is to restrain evil forces and provide healing and wholeness for the client (NN) using it. The Virgin Mary is said to lift up her eyes to God and utter a prayer of entreaty and praise. She asks that all things submit to her and be subservient to her, "for," she declares, "I am Mary, I am Mariham, I am the mother of the life (of) the whole world—I myself am NN" (2,20–23). Sacred names and words of power—*voces magicae*—are incorporated into the invocation of God, who is called by a number of divine names, "Yaō Sabaōth Atōnai Elōi," and is addressed with liturgical acclamations reflective of the worship of the Christian church. The word "Amen" is repeated, and the trisagion is affirmed: "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Lord Sabaōth! Heaven and earth are full of (your?) holy glory!" (6,7–9). There may be a theological reference to "the faith of the Nicaeans" (ⲡⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ ⲛⲛⲓⲕⲁⲓⲁ, 6,5–6) in these lines of text.

In the Prayer, God is invoked as Father Bathuriel, seated upon the heavenly Merkavah and addressed with potent names. These names, which are formed with permutations and modifications of a name apparently derived from the Syriac for "lord of lords," underscore the power of God the Father Bathuriel. In form of presentation the names approximate the use of lists of

[10] The English translation of passages from "The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels" given here is taken from Meyer 1996.

names of power given in wing-formation in magical texts, with names dropping a letter at each successive occurrence: "Marmaruēl, Marmaruniēl, Marmaruēl, Marmaruniēl, Marmaruē, Marmaru, Marmar, Marmam" (6,16–19).

If God is thus invoked and adjured in the Prayer of Mary, so are the twenty-four elders and the seven archangels, all by their mighty names. Near the conclusion of the text the divine is adjured for the sake of empowering water and olive oil to be used in the ritual enactment of the Prayer of Mary. Among the names and sounds used in the adjurations are Daveithea, Eleleth, Ōrem, and Mōsiēl, variations on the names of the four luminaries in Sethian gnostic texts (Daveithai, Eleleth, Oroiael, and Harmozel).[11] The text itself ends with a statement, typical of magical texts, of what might be termed "ritual impatience": "Amen, Amen, Amen, yea, yea, at once, at once (ⲁⲓⲱ ⲁⲓⲱ ⲧⲁⲭⲏ ⲧⲁⲭⲏ), Jesus Christ" (8,28–29).

After the Prayer of Mary itself, the text gives instructions (page 9) for the procedure (ⲧⲟⲓⲙⲉⲣϩⲱⲃ) to be used for the ritual enactment of the Prayer, and a drawing of Mary is added. The instructions for how to proceed with the ritual action are given in an abbreviated form, as something of a "recipe" for a magical ceremony. The ritual is to be performed while the moon is waxing, a propitious time also mentioned elsewhere in *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*, and during a period within which the participants in the ritual ceremony are fasting. Water and olive oil are among the main ingredients in the ceremony, and other ingredients are also mentioned: bay leaves and lemon leaves, and sticks of a plant of Mary, wood of Abraham, and Ethiopian mint. Myrrh is to be offered, probably as incense, and a burning oil lamp is to be present. Something is to be written, maybe a dedicatory inscription or a drawing.

The drawing of Mary below the recipe is an example of folk art, but it is also reminiscent of the icons dedicated within the sanctuaries of Christian churches. Mary is the dominant, authoritative figure in the drawing, and she is identified with variations of her name (Maria, Mariham, Marihēu, Marisei) listed in registers. The name of Jesus Christ is also written, with the ring letters that are commonly found in magical texts. The names of other women named Mary are enumerated at the right of the drawing (Mary Magdalene, Mary the daughter [?] of Clopas, Mary of James), and this intimates that the Mary of the Prayer, and the Mary depicted in the drawing, designates something of a universal Mary. Mary's body is covered with ring signs and letters, and she holds cosmic wands in her hands. Other portions

[11] On a similar usage of these names in a similar magical context, see Meyer 2004.

of the drawing may indicate demonic shapes of pain that may attack a person, but all such pain and grief come under the overwhelming power of Mary—the Virgin Mary, the universal Mary—in the Prayer and the drawing of Mary.

The second of the two longer texts in *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*, the adjuration of the nine guardian angels, fills four and a half pages of the magical handbook. This text invokes God with a trinitarian formula, and then introduces the nine guardian angels with drawings and names, along with ring signs and ring letters displayed most often on shields or breastplates that the guardians are carrying or wearing. The nine guardian angels, like Mary in the Prayer of Mary, carry wands in their hands. The guardians are invoked, in a series of adjurations, that they might watch over and protect the body of the client NN. In one instance a client's name, Joseph son of Paraseu, may have been left in the text. The adjurations are to be uttered by the power of Jesus Christ, as that comes to manifestation in moments of his life and death, and the mystical body of God is also invoked.

A series of lines constituting what might be dubbed a magical "life of Jesus" are interwoven with the words of adjuration, so that the nine guardian angels are adjured by Mary's labor pains, Jesus' sufferings on the cross, the five nails in the crucifixion (named after the five lines of the SATOR-square),[12] the vinegar and gall Jesus tasted, the three cries Jesus called out on the cross, the spear thrust, the tears of God as he wept over the crucifixion, and the elements of the body and blood of Jesus in the eucharist. A similar but longer "life of Jesus" is included in P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686. In both cases, aspects of the life of Jesus are mentioned not for their historical value or their theological content, but rather for their power when invoked in a magical, ritual setting.

In the adjuration of the nine guardian angels, the adjurations continue with lists of names and terms of power, including that of Orpha, which is the body of God the Father, and Orphamiel, which is the great finger—the index finger, the finger of power—on the right hand of God the Father. Abrasax, of magical and gnostic fame, is invoked as the one who measures the right hand of the Father. The reference in the spell within the text to the client, NN, wearing the nine guardians and wearing the figure (ϲⲱϯⲟⲩⲛ) suggests that an amulet or phylactery is to be fashioned and worn for protection.

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[12] On the SATOR-square, see below, and also cf. Meyer-Smith 1999, 392, and Marcovich 1983, 155–171.

As with the Prayer of Mary, the adjuration of the nine guardian angels itself is followed by instructions (page 16) for the procedure (ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲓⲛⲉⲣⲅⲱⲃ) that is to be employed for the ritual action to accompany the adjuration. Actions of writing are featured in the instructions, as might be anticipated by the earlier reference to the client wearing the nine guardians and the figure. The procedure as outlined offers directions for writing, it seems, onto a piece of paper to be worn as an amulet. Then more writing is alluded to, and what has been copied is to be washed off, perhaps to empower the water or other liquid with the power of the words or names. More writing is mentioned. The ingredients for this process include saffron, olive oil, rose water, and "spell-free (?) water." A pot is employed, with linen thread and virgin palm leaves as a garland for the pot. An offering is to be made, with mastic, alouth, storax, muscatel, and rose water—ingredients, known from other magical texts, for ritual offering and incense.

Interspersed between and after these longer texts are several other, shorter spells for various practical purposes. First, a spell for exorcising a female power (9,13–20 ff.) offers adjurations with names and words of power, and states that the goal, as the text puts it, is "that you (fem. sing.) go out of God's creature" (9,16). The spell concludes with a drawing of a head with ring letters and ring signs.

Second, a Solomonic spell for exorcism and protection (10,1–18) invokes the guardian "who guards and protects the body of King Solomon" (10,3–5), and requests that the guardian drive out evil spirits and demonic influences from the client NN who is using the spell. The spell represents another example of the interest in linking Solomon with magic and ritual power, as seen, for instance, in the *Testament of Solomon*.[13] In the present spell the guardian is named Nassklēn (perhaps compare Onoskelis in the *Testament of Solomon*), and a bird-like image, with a wand, in drawn in the manuscript. The spell specifies that the client is to wear the figure (ⲥⲱϯⲟⲩⲛ) as a protective amulet. The Solomonic spell ends with the typical comment of "ritual impatience."

Third, a SATOR-spell for help and protection (10,19–27) invokes Jesus Christ the savior and several angels, probably the archangels, for aid to be given to a client. The spell includes the words of the SATOR-formula (Satōr Aretō Tenēt Ōtera Rōtas), a well-known magical expression often presented as a palindrome and at times written as a word-square. In the adjuration

[13] On the *Testament of Solomon*, cf. the introduction, translation, and notes by Duling 1983, 1.935–987.

of the nine guardian angels in *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*, as previously noted, the five words of the SATOR-formula are said to be the names of the five nails driven into the crucified body of Jesus.

Fourth, a spell for release of blood (11,1–11) invokes power through names of power—the names of angels or archangels, the words, once again, of the SATOR-formula, and other names and titles of Jesus and of God (for example, ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲱⲣ, for "Pantocratōr"). The issue addressed is that of a person whose blood has been "bound" through illness, demonic activity, or a curse or binding spell (*defixio*).

Fifth, a spell for stopping a flow of blood (16,16–27), like the spell just described, addresses a similar sort of ailment by invoking more angelic and divine names of power, and terms from the SATOR-formula. Healing for the client NN is requested, and a citation of Psalm 45:1–2 (44:2–3 LXX) is included for good measure: "My heart has uttered a good saying; I myself shall declare my deeds to the king; my tongue (is) a pen of a scribe who is fast in writing. He is fairer than all the children of humankind" (16,16–19).

Six, a spell, apparently with a "magical script" and a drawing of Christ (17,1–17), is copied onto the parchment, and instructions are included. The script incorporates Greek-Coptic letters, letters and signs that seem to resemble Semitic-like letters, maybe Arabic letters, with various kinds of lines and shapes. It is feasible that some actual Arabic, in some form, may be represented in the text, but other magical texts with "magical scripts" are known.[14] The instructions appended to the spell, like the instructions for the Prayer of Mary, make reference to a propitious time for the ritual action, "while the moon is waxing."

Seventh, a spell for gathering (17,18–29) is intended to improve the business of a client through the invocation of the power of the names of the three youths from the fiery furnace mentioned in Daniel 3, six angels, and two groups of seven Alphas. With a little hyperbole, or at least ritual enthusiasm, the prospective patrons that are to come to the client's shop include "all (the) generation of Adam, all the children of Zoe, and all the offspring of Ismaēl" (17,25–27). The reference to Ismaēl probably is meant to indicate Ishmael or Ismail, son of Abraham (Ibrahim) and Hagar, the traditional ancestor of the Arabs. The interest of this spell in providing economic gain is paralleled in several other magical spells, and some of the parallels are very close to the wording of the present spell.[15]

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[14] Cf. Parássoglou 1974, 57–60.

[15] Cf., for example, Moen 3, London Hay 10122, and London Hay 10414, discussed in Meyer 1996, 99–101.

Eighth, *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels* concludes with a spell for—or, better, against—fevers. As such, this magical spell addresses some of the most common maladies mentioned in healing spells: fevers, chills, colds.[16] The present spell invokes the names and powers of the divine and recalls, again, the three youths from the fiery furnace. Ring letters, ring signs, and a drawing of the three youth are appended. A short story of the three youths in the furnace is alluded to as the precedent for what God may do for the client using this spell:

> Sabaōth almighty, I adjure you today,
> (by) your names and your powers and your amulets (ϥγριωϩ, for ϥγλακτηριον)
> and your places where you dwell,
> that just as you quenched the fire of the fiery furnaces
> of Nebuchadnezzar king (of) Babylon,
> through the power (of) the archangel Michaēl,
> you quench the small (?) fire and fume (and) fever in NN,
> yea, at once (18,1–9)

The prayer or adjuration thus requests that the same power that extinguished the fire in the fiery furnace also extinguish the burning fever of the client—and that it do so right now.

The texts of ritual power in P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 represent forms of spells and ritual interests found in a number of other magical and religious texts. These particular spells have been gathered into a collection of texts, and the texts of ritual power have been copied onto the parchment pages of a ritual handbook. Of these texts, longer and shorter, the Prayer of Mary provides an excellent opportunity for exploring the place and use of a magical text of ritual power, and the way in which the interest in ritual power of this sort of text compares, or contrasts, with other ritual concerns in the world of Coptic Christianity.

The Prayer of Mary

The Prayer of Mary in *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels* is introduced, as noted, as the twenty-first prayer of the Virgin Mary, uttered on the day of her death—a prayer that not only was efficacious in the past but remains powerful in the present to alleviate evil influences and provide good health

[16] Cf. Greek texts of ritual power from Christian Egypt and healing spells in Meyer-Smith 1999.

for the one who can tap into its power. While the story of the Virgin Mary and her prayer is not narrated in the Heidelberg Prayer of Mary, it is told elsewhere, in texts that parallel the Heidelberg version and in other sources. The Heidelberg Prayer of Mary belongs to a tradition of magical prayers that at times have been classified as forms of the prayer of Mary in "Bartos." The meaning of "Bartos" has been debated by scholars, but an Ethiopic version of the prayer suggests that Mary offered her prayer in a village of Bartos, perhaps among the Parthians.[17] Versions of the prayer are known from Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, Arabic, and Greek sources.

The story that is told about the Virgin Mary and her prayer—the Virgin Mary who dissolves chains—goes as follows. In Egypt, the dormition or death of Mary is commonly claimed to have taken place on the twenty-first day of the Egyptian month Tubah (perhaps the origin of the prayer being numbered as the twenty-first prayer in the Heidelberg version). On the day of her death, according to the story, Mary is said to have offered a prayer to deliver Matthias, the replacement for Judas Iscariot in the apostolic circle according to Acts 1:26, from his incarceration in prison. It is maintained in the story that the prayer of Mary was so powerful that the iron fetters melted and the doors of the prison opened, and consequently Matthias was freed.

This tale of the prayer and the miracle of the Virgin Mary is also known within the piety of the Coptic Church, and icons and festivals celebrate the remarkable miracle of the Virgin Mary who dissolves chains. In present-day Cairo there is a Church of St. Mary Who Dissolves the Chains in Khurunfish, and upstairs, above the church, is a Convent of St. Mary at Harat Zuwaila al-Khurunfish. An icon with scenes in the life of the Virgin Mary, including her prayer on behalf of Matthias, may be seen in the so-called Hanging Church, al-Muʿallaqa, the Church of St. Mary in Old Cairo. Modern Copts may recall using versions of the prayer of Mary who dissolves chains in their devotional life, and a little Arabic book with the prayer of Mary may still be found in contemporary Coptic circles.[18]

Commonly in magical texts, or texts of ritual power, such a potent tale, whether Christian or not, may be rehearsed as a *historiola*, a story of mythic precedent.[19] A story of mythic precedent presents a literary situation in which a mighty deed is performed, and the power inherent in the story is applied through ritual recitation and reenactment to the situation of the

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[17] Cf. Kropp 1930–1931, 2.134, 3.220–224; Euringer 1929, 214–216.

[18] On the place of the prayer of the Virgin Mary who dissolves chains in the life and lore of the Coptic Church, see Meyer 2002.

[19] On the place of the *historiola* in magical traditions, see Frankfurter 1995.

client who is using the spell. Words have power, ritual has power, and the employment of magic or ritual power may be thought to channel that power to a given client. That time, the time of the divine and of supernatural power, becomes this time, and that power becomes power coming to expression here and now. This process, this mechanism, is clear in the eighth and last of the shorter spells in the Heidelberg codex, in which the story or *historiola* of the three youths being delivered from the fiery furnace is told as the precedent for the diminishing of the fiery fever in the client employing the spell.

In the Heidelberg version of the Prayer of Mary there is no full recitation of a *historiola* or story of mythic precedent of the Virgin Mary who dissolves chains, but there is the introduction, with the hints about Mary's prayer, and there are allusions somewhat later to the miracle that liberated Matthias. The prayer itself begins with a soulful invocation:

> I entreat you today,
> who exists forever.
> I praise you today,
> Yaō, who is coming upon the clouds of heaven,
> Sabaōth, who is stronger than them all,
> who exists before all the aeons,
> before heaven and earth appeared.
> Heaven became for you a throne
> and the earth a footstool for your feet.
> Listen to me today,
> through your great, blessed name.
> Let all things submit to me,
> for I am Mary,
> I am Mariham,
> I am the mother of the life (of) the whole world—
> I myself am NN.
> Let the rock split before me today,
> let the iron dissolve before me today,
> let the demons withdraw before me today,
> let the powers of the light appear to me,
> let the angels and the archangels appear to me today,
> let the doors that are bolted and closed ⟨open⟩ for me,[20]
> at once and quickly,
> so that your name may become my helper and life,
> whether in all the day or in all the night. (2,8–3,11)

[20] Here I emend the text slightly, on the basis of parallels in related texts, to read ⲛⲁⲣ(ⲟⲩ) ⲟⲩⲱⲛ{ⲉ} ⲛⲁⲓ.

Within the prayer the references to the rock splitting, the iron dissolving, and the bolted doors opening may well call to mind details of the mythic account, widely known, of the virgin Mary dissolving the chains of Matthias through her power of prayer.

In this opening section of the Prayer of Mary, and thereafter, the attention quickly turns to what is of particular interest in the text: the wholeness, protection, and wellbeing of the client, NN. Such practical concerns are expected in a text of ritual power. These practical concerns are continued throughout the text, as powers are invoked, a ritual ceremony is celebrated, with water oil, and other ingredients, and an iconic picture is drawn, all for the purpose of empowering the body and person of the client. Already in the opening invocation and prayer the transition from the story of the Virgin Mary to the concerns of the client may be sensed. To be sure, at the beginning the prayer is Mary's prayer, but the wording allows the client or ritualist reciting the invocation to identify with Mary: "I myself am NN." In this manner Mary's prayer is becoming the client's prayer and her place is becoming that of the client.

Toward the conclusion of the Prayer of Mary, although the Virgin Mary is still being invoked, the transition is complete. At the end of the spell the prayer is no longer a prayer of Mary at all, but rather a prayer about Mary. The first-person-singular subject of the verbs at the end of the prayer could be the client or, perhaps more accurately, the ritualist. The ritualist ("I") seems to be reciting the prayer about St. Mary and her power on behalf of the client in need (NN). This concluding part of the text reads as follows:

> I adjure you today,
> by the first word that arose in your heart
> and became your only Son,
> who is Jesus Christ,
> and his holy powers that I have named,
> that you send me our holy Mother of God,
> St. Mary, the Holy Virgin,
> and she bless them and the water,
> and she consecrate them
> and seal (the) water (and) the oil,
> so that at the moment that I pour the water upon NN,
> he may become strong and healthy and completely well,
> through (the) power of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
> forever and ever,
> Amen, Amen, Amen,
> yea, yea,
> at once, at once,
> Jesus Christ. (8,13–29)

The instructions for how to proceed with the ritual action in the ceremonial celebration of the Prayer of Mary name the ingredients, the methods, and the circumstances of the ritual, in a terse, shortened form. The ceremony is to take place at an appropriate time in the "liturgical" calendar (when the moon is waxing). The emphasis upon water and olive oil suggests a holy lustration and perhaps an anointing. As the prayer says, the water and oil are to be consecrated and sealed, and the client, who is to be washed with the holy water, is to have it poured over his person, apparently by the ritualist. In this way the client is empowered. The rest of the ingredients have an aromatic quality, and the ceremony employs incense and embraces the iconic nature of a drawing of Mary. Not only are liturgical formulae from Christian worship cited throughout the Prayer of Mary; the lustration, baptism, and anointing in the ceremony that accompanies the prayer also reflect aspects of Christian ritual in the Christian church, and the ritual space has the sweet aroma of incense, the flickering light of an oil lamp, and the iconic power of an image of Mary. Yet, as a magical text with a magical ceremony, the Prayer of Mary is recited and enacted in a small, private way, as a ritual in miniature, outside the bounds of the organized church, apart from its governing and controlling authority. That is why, in the eyes of some, it is magic—in the worst sense of the word.

Miracle, Magic, and Ritual Power

The interest in ritual and ritual power persisted in the codex now given the inventory identification P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685. Initially the parchment pages were inscribed with materials for a lectionary that presumably was used—or could have been used—in the context of the formal worship of the organized Coptic Church. After the parchment was erased and reconfigured, the pages were filled with ritual materials, representing what is usually called "magic," that could be used by private clients and ritualists, away from the authority of the church. The ritual continuity, from one form of ritual to another, may be seen to extend even beyond the sheets of the parchment codex, to ongoing preoccupations with the Virgin Mary and ritual power, including her power to dissolve the chains that bind, in the modern world.

The perceived distinction between the form of ritual in a text like the Heidelberg lectionary over against *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels* must answer to an interesting claim made in *The Magical Book*. In the Prayer of Mary, the text of the prayer calls upon God to cure all maladies and all ills, and among the evils to be eradicated is "magic":

... you who destroy everything in which there is malice,
all acts of magic (ⲙⲁⲅⲓⲁ) and sorcery (ⲫⲁⲣⲙⲁⲅⲓⲁ) (that) happen
through wicked and meddlesome people,
whether blindness
or lameness
or speechlessness
or headache,
or attack of the demons,
whether having a fever
or being troubled
or depressed
or hemorrhaging
or having pain from the demons
or oil or fruit ⟨or⟩ (?) a potion in a jar (?). (4,2–15)

A few lines later the hoped-for state of the client, when touched by the power of the prayer, is summarized, and there too the claim is made that magic—"all magic (ⲙⲁⲅⲓⲁ) of people"—is to be undone. The same sort of request for protection against magic (now with the Coptic word ϩⲩⲕ) is raised elsewhere in *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*, in the Solomonic spell (10,15).

Thus, in a text that is conventionally classified as a magical text, magic is specifically repudiated and opposed, almost exorcised—in two languages! It turns out that the definition and classification of magic is not a simple matter. In Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian settings, the term "magic" carries a great deal of polemical and rhetorical baggage, and it is used to support the social and political distinctions separating those who understand themselves to be insiders from those understood to be outsiders.[21] Within Christian traditions "miracles" are commonly contrasted with acts of "magic." Miracles, it is affirmed, are what "we" do and what "we" enjoy, within the bounds of the church and its governing control. Magic is what "they," the outsiders, do when they go their own way and meddle in unlawful acts of ritual power. That is why *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels* can attack magic. Maybe *The Magical Book* is not so magical after all.

Once the polemical and rhetorical interests surrounding the discussions and accusations of magic are exposed, the distinctions between liturgical texts and magical texts—texts of ritual power—begin to fade. The politics and the polemics may remain, but ritual texts like the Heidelberg lectionary and the Heidelberg magical handbook have more in common than

[21] On the term "magic," cf. the essays by Smith, Graf, and Ritner in Meyer-Mirecki 1995, and Meyer-Smith 1999, 1–9.

one might imagine. Finally, the texts and traditions meet on the field of ritual practice, and they may be acknowledged as being close to each other. Perhaps as close as two texts copied onto the same sheets of a parchment palimpsest.

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IMAGE AND WORD: PERFORMATIVE RITUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE ARAMAIC INCANTATION BOWLS

Rebecca Lesses*

The Aramaic incantation bowls (4th–8th centuries CE), used by Jews, Christians, Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, and others in Sassanian Babylonia, are earthenware bowls (found in archaeological excavations in present-day Iraq) inscribed with incantations whose goal was to exorcise demons, cure illness, protect against evil spirits, and save oneself and one's children from Lilith and other demons. Many of the incantation bowls are also inscribed with crude drawings—usually of demons, occasionally of the wizard or of the weapons directed against evil forces. In addition to these drawings, the incantations often include "verbal images"—evocative descriptions of what the demons look like "in sleep by night and in visions of the day."[1] The verbal images are often more varied and richer in detail than the drawings on the bowls. The drawings on the bowls also include what the ancient texts call "*charakteres*"—letter-like figures that appear to belong to unknown alphabets.

Previous studies of the bowls have concentrated on the written incantations, and not on the bowls' pictorial depictions. This article, therefore, examines the images found on the bowls and their relation to the bowl texts and discusses why those who made the bowls and other amulets found it meaningful to use pictures and *charakteres* in conjunction with words. There are two centers of focus for this paper: the cultural framework in which these bowls, their texts, and their images, were created, and the reasons that those who wrote them, drew them, and used them considered them efficacious. Where did these images come from? What cultural markers, both written and drawn, are to be found on the bowls? What cultural

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[1] Segal, 2000, 99. Bowl 068A: lines 3–4.

landscape, representing which nations, languages, and religions, do they inhabit? Why were the images and *charakteres* used? Were the images considered efficacious when used alone, or was it necessary to accompany them with words?

In order to consider the questions about why the images were used and why they were thought to be efficacious, this article employs contemporary linguistic and anthropological theories, particularly the theory of iconic signs first developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, the speech-act theory of John L. Austin and Liza Bakewell's notion of "image acts."[2] These theories are useful because they argue for the pragmatic functions of words and images, holding that words, or images, are not merely descriptive of the world, but like physical actions, are used to affect the world, including human beings. The people responsible for inscribing the bowls, as well as those who used them, assumed the pragmatic function of both words and images. For them, words and images were attempts to change the world—the writing of efficacious words and the drawing of efficacious drawings would rid people of demons, illness, and malevolent enemies.

The first part of this article introduces the bowls and the images on them, and discusses the wider cultural landscape they inhabit. It then turns to Peirce's theory of icons to analyze three different ways that the images on the bowls depict the binding of demons—the shackling of demons; surrounding demons by a circular line at the bottom of the bowl, and encircling demons with a snake (the ouroboros). Following this is a discussion of the "verbal images" on the bowls and the way that some of the images on the bowls are verbally linked with the incantations. This second part of the article makes use of anthropological and linguistic theories of speech and image acts to explain why and how the images, in concert with the words, were thought to be efficacious.

What Are Incantation Bowls?

The incantation bowls are domestic pottery from the Sassanian and early Islamic periods in Iraq and Iran, dating from roughly 400–800 CE. The form of bowls chosen for the incantations is identical to those of uninscribed bowls.[3] They were chosen to offer the maximum possible surface on which

[2] Austin, 1963; Peirce, 1940; Bakewell, 1998; see also the discussion in Lesses, 1998, 161–173.
[3] Hunter 1995, 322.

to write the incantations, and thus were "wide, open-mouthed vessels."[4] They were buried upside-down in courtyards outside houses, under the thresholds of houses, and under the floors of houses, often in the four corners of a room,[5] and sometimes joined "lip to lip."[6] Some of the bowls carry an inscription on their outer surface that indicates where they are to be placed in the house.[7]

The location of the bowls' burial indicates that their purpose was to protect the house's inhabitants at liminal points of danger, where evil forces could easily invade. The evil forces could be demons, illness, the evil eye, or the malevolence of other humans, expressed through aggressive spells. The threats posed by the "invisible members" of society, such as demons or hostile angels, are just as real as those wrought by human beings.[8] The bowls often mention the "threshold" (*'isqopta*) as the place from which the demons should be repulsed.[9] This is an obvious location to protect, since both humans and demons could enter and leave the dwelling by the threshold. We might compare this function of bowls to the mezuzah as it was understood by many Jews in late antiquity and in medieval Europe and the Middle East: as a protective device, in which the canonical texts inserted into the case[10] were supplemented by additional verses (for example, "The Lord is your guardian, the Lord is your protection at your right hand"),[11] *charakteres*, and pentagrams.[12] The Zohar makes the demon protective qualities of the mezuzah crystal clear: "Next to the door, there is a demon (*sheda*)

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[4] Ibid.

[5] This instruction to place bowls in the four corners of the house is often mentioned in the incantation bowl texts. See, for example, Montgomery 1913, 133 (Bowl 4, line 1): "in each one of the four corners of his house." See also Segal 2000, 99 (Bowl 068A, line 7): "from the four borders of [the house of Bahram Gushna]sp," and Morony, 2003, 94–96.

[6] Hunter 1995, 322; Hilprecht 1903, 447: "Sometimes two bowls facing one another had been cemented together with bitumen."

[7] Shaked 1997, 105. One example he cites is of a bowl written in Jewish Aramaic (Schøyen Collection MS 1927/20) that carries a bilingual inscription, in both Aramaic and Pahlavi, indicating where it should be placed. As he says, "This suggests that the owners of the bowl could read Pahlavi, and that consequently the Jewish-Aramaic language of the text was not necessarily their own but the language of the spell-writer." See also Shaked, 2000, 60–65, for more examples of instructions on where to place the bowl.

[8] Shaked 2002, 123.

[9] See, for example, British Museum bowl 26A (Segal 2000, 67): "Health from heaven for the house and the threshold …" and 17A (Segal 2000, 59): "may they be removed and come forth from the house and the habitation and the threshold."

[10] Deut 6:4–9 and 11:13–21.

[11] Ps 121:5.

[12] Trachtenberg 1984, 150–151; this is an example from Sefer Gematriot.

waiting, with authority to destroy, and he is on the left-hand side. When a person raises his eyes, he sees the mystery of his Master's name, and pronounces it, and then the demon cannot harm him."[13]

The incantations on the bowls were written in several Aramaic dialects and scripts—Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, Mandaic, Syriac, and the proto-Manichaean script. In his examination of 411 bowl texts, Michael Morony found that 62% were in Aramaic, 23% in Mandaic, and 13% in Syriac.[14] Erica Hunter has shown that the bowls demonstrate that the "everyday or 'vernacular' beliefs and practices" of these communities—Jews, Mandaeans, Syriac-speaking Christians, Zoroastrians, and polytheists who worshipped the ancient deities of Babylonia "indicate a common underlying fabric."[15] Shaul Shaked argues that the bowls reveal the popular religion of Sassanian Babylonia, expressing the belief that humans "live surrounded by numerous invisible beings, good and evil, as well as by some that can be ambiguously good or evil."[16] There are differences in content between the bowls in the different dialects and scripts—for example, the Mandaic incantations mention Mandaean deities, savior figures ("Hibil"), and demons ("Ruha"), while the incantations in the Jewish Aramaic script call upon YHWH, quote biblical verses, and invoke angels such as Gabriel, Michael, or Metatron.[17] Zoroastrian religious concepts also enter into the bowls—see, for example, Ashmedai, who derives from the Old Iranian figure *Aesma daeva*.[18] Both Mandaic and Jewish Aramaic bowls might invoke the ancient Babylonian deities, such as Astarte/Ishtar, or the planets and constellations, and there are examples of purely pagan bowl-incantations.[19] One of these, for example, invokes the ancient Babylonian deities of Shamash, Sin, Bel, Nanai, and Nergal.[20] Many of the bowl-incantations are, therefore, highly syncretistic.

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[13] *Zohar* III, 263b–264a. Translation from Lachower and Tishby 1989, 3.1189.

[14] Morony 2003, 87.

[15] Ibid., 319; Shaked 1994, 81; Shaked 1997, 106–114. He says (106), "One can speak of a broad common denominator in the field of popular religious beliefs, around which members of different communities could be united."

[16] Shaked 2002, 121.

[17] See, for example, British Museum bowl 87M (Segal 2000, 116), which mentions Ruha, and 82M (Segal 2000, 109), which mentions Hibil.

[18] Shaked 1997, 108.

[19] Montgomery 1913, 95–96, writes, "what appears like a good Jewish text at times admits a pagan deity into its celestial hierarchy—somewhat as the mediaeval Church came to canonize the Buddha." See, for example, Montgomery 1913, 133 (Bowl 4), which mentions "the Seven Stars and the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac."

[20] Montgomery 1913, 238–240 (Bowl 36, written in the Syriac Estrangelo script). Yale Babylonian Collection bowl 2393 (published by Obermann 1940/1) calls upon several Babylonian

Scholars are not in agreement about whether the incantation formulas may also at times owe something to ancient Babylonian magical traditions. Christa Müller-Kessler and Theodore Kwasman note the similarities of part of one bowl text to the *Maqlu* series of Babylonian incantations, which were directed against malevolent sorcery.[21] Markham Geller, on the other hand, states that, "It is therefore somewhat surprising, and even disappointing, that relatively few traces of Mesopotamian magic can be identified in the later magic bowls."[22] According to Geller, "The entire system of magic in the cuneiform tradition has certain fundamental features which cannot be found in Aramaic," including the lack of ghosts in the Aramaic texts (as opposed to the profusion of demons).[23] Geller notes, however, possible parallels to other Sumerian and Akkadian incantation series. He sees some connection between the Namburbî incantations and the Aramaic bowls, and between the use of oaths and oath formulas of the Sumerian-Akkadian tradition and the Aramaic incantation bowls.[24] He concludes nonetheless that:

> The practice of using bowls for writing incantations is unknown from earlier Mesopotamia, nor is this surprising considering the nature of cuneiform script and the writing materials involved. The prophylactic nature of the bowls, or even the standard phrases of 'sealing' or 'binding' the house cannot be considered calques on Akkadian formulae. The use of biblical verses within incantations is also unprecedented. The many differences, therefore, between the tablets and the bowls, whatever the corpus which survives in these forms, does not encourage us to conclude that the magic bowls preserve anything more than a scant few of the ancient magical traditions of Sumer and Akkad.[25]

Joachim Oelsner, on the other hand, argues that there was a continuity of ancient Babylonian cuneiform culture, including magical literature, until the third century CE, which could make plausible the eventual transmission of incantation texts, themes, or rituals to the practitioners who made and used the incantation bowls.[26]

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deities in an imprecation against 'Ona, daughter of Gayat: Shamash, Sin, Nebo, Dlibat, Bel, Nerig. Montgomery 1913, 195 (Bowl 19) is also thoroughly pagan. See discussion in Morony 1984, 384–386.

[21] Müller-Kessler and Kwasman 2000, discussing British Museum BM 135563.

[22] Geller 2005, 53.

[23] Ibid., 54–55.

[24] Ibid., 60–62. Geller argues that parallels other than the Maqlu series are more appropriately found in the Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual incantation Udug-hul and in the Akkadian Diagnostic Manual.

[25] Ibid., 70.

[26] Oelsner 2005, 42–45.

The incantation bowls were inscribed both with incantations and illustrations, predominantly depicting demons, although sometimes, as we will see, showing other figures as well.[27] The illustrations are also part of the "common fabric" of the bowls. On the Aramaic bowls these are usually located in the center of the bowl, normally enclosed by a circle, and then surrounded further up the curvature of the bowl by the incantation text. In the Mandaic bowls, the figures are often found inside the text, rather than in the center of the bowl set off from the text, although there are still many examples in which there is a circle in the middle of the bowl. While the arrangement of the illustrations seems to differ by linguistic/religious community, the depictions do not differ according to religious affiliation. As Erica Hunter demonstrates, many of the illustrations of demons have deep roots in the iconography of ancient Babylonian demons like the *lilitu*, *lamashtu*, and *labartu* demons.[28] She argues that the figure drawings can be compared to apotropaic figurines that "were ubiquitously used throughout Mesopotamia during the first millennium *BCE*, where they have been discovered at sites from as far south as Ur to Nineveh and Nimrud in the north." These figurines were usually "buried in brick receptacles or boxes under the floor in different parts of both private and public buildings," and were intended to protect people against demonic attack or illness.[29] One signal difference between the bowls and the figurines is, of course, that the bowls have drawings of the *demonic* figures, rather than themselves being sculpted.[30]

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[27] Hunter 1995, 326.

[28] Hunter 1998, 95–115; Hunter 2000, 176–180. See Geller 2005, 63–70.

[29] Hunter 2000, 177.

[30] Montgomery 1913, 53, also comments that the drawings on the bowls "come down from the earlier and more realistic age when gods and demons were represented by simulacra and in this wise were manipulated so as to do the sorcerer's will." A similar relationship exists between the figurines that were often made according to directions found in the Greek magical papyri and engravings of those figures carved into magic gems. The material form of the image could vary but still retain its power. See Michel 2005. He cites one example (144–145) of the directions in the magical papyri of a figurine to be sculpted out of wax, which is very similar to the carving on a certain gem, and says (145), "We may therefore assume that the gem, presumably intended to protect a house or an individual wearer, was created in accordance with the recipe, substituting an engraved figure for the wax figurine with a heart of magnetite, containing an inscribed scrap of papyrus."

Types of Images

Of 229 bowls whose publications I examined—the forty bowls published by James Montgomery in *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, which were all found in Nippur, now in southern Iraq; the 142 bowls published in the British Museum's *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, from all over Iraq; the 27 bowls published by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked in their two books, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* and *Magic Spells and Formulae*,[31] from Iraq and Iran; and the 20 bowls published by Dan Levene in *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*[32]—about 59 have drawings of some kind. Most of the drawings are anthropomorphic pictures of demons, both male and female; a few depict the exorcists; while a few depict animals (two birds, and three snakes encircling the bowl, swallowing the tail).[33] Several bowls are illustrated with designs, including a fancy little spiral.[34]

It is often difficult to determine if the demons are male or female, although some are clearly one or the other gender. For example, one of Montgomery's bowls depicts a male holding a sword and a spear, wearing a helmet, and fettered at the ankles.[35] The inscription written on the bowl is against the "evil Demon and the evil Satan, who is called TsP'SQ, the Mighty Destroyer, who kills a man from the side of his wife and a woman from the side of her husband."[36] Another demon is clearly female, naked with breasts and genitals showing, flowing hair, and feet bound at ankles.[37] The accompanying inscription contains formulas of expulsion, in the form of a divorce, directed against "the evil Lilith, … the Lilith, the male Lilis and the female

[31] Naveh and Shaul 1987; Naveh and Shaked 1993.

[32] Levene 2003.

[33] Birds: Montgomery 1913, 165 (bowl 10, Plate XI); 168–170 (bowl 11, Plate XII). Snakes: Montgomery 1913, 185 (bowl 15, Plate XVI); Segal 2003, 147 (bowl 117ES, Plate 134); Hilprecht 1903, plate facing p. 447 = Gordon A (for full citation, see note 54 below). Morony 2003, 85 and 98, says that figures with their arms raised and stars on their robes should be identified as wizards trying to get rid of the demons.

[34] Montgomery 1913, 117 (bowl 1, plate 1), 205 (bowl 24, plate XXIII); Segal 2000, 67 (bowl 26A, plate 27), 72 (bowl 33A, plate 34).

[35] Montgomery 1913, Plate IV. See also Müller-Kessler 2000, 224–228. She says, 227, "One may conclude that SSṬM, ŚSṬM, ŚṢṬM, SṢṬM or ŠSṬM are alternating spellings of the *saf'el* stem of the root *STM* which is attested only in Eastern Aramaic texts as a technical term for shackling, or better for hobbling the feet of demons and fettering their wrists. This is demonstrated by drawings of crude figures of demons on incantation bowls that are displayed with shackles around neck, wrists and feet to keep them from harming."

[36] Montgomery 1913, 127 (bowl 3, lines 2 and 3).

[37] Ibid., plate VIII.

Liliths."[38] It describes the liliths who are divorced with these words: "naked are you sent forth, nor are you clad, with your hair disheveled and let fly behind your backs."[39] And indeed, the drawing of the lilith depicts her as naked and with disheveled hair.

Cultural Landscape

The images on the bowls reflect a confluence of different cultural markers—Jewish, Hellenistic, ancient Babylonian, and Iranian. This section explores three iconographic elements that reflect these confluences—the naked, bird-like liliths, which appear on many bowls, the ouroboros (the snake swallowing its tail) that encircles a few of the bowls, and the *charakteres*, which appear rarely.

Let us turn first to the images of the lilith as an example of cultural confluence.[40] The wild hair of the lilith and her nakedness are certainly her most significant features on many of the incantation bowl illustrations. In some drawings the liliths also have bird-like qualities—arms that look like wings. For example, one bowl published by Montgomery depicts a bound female figure with clearly marked breasts, fettered at arms and ankles, with several strands of hair sticking straight up.[41] The text mentions "blast-demons and evil injurers."[42] The arms look like they could also be wings. Another Montgomery bowl sports a figure with long frizzy hair in a cloud around the head, arms that could be wings, feet bound, and what looks like a necklace crossing the breast.[43] The incantation on the bowl refers to "evil liliths," among other demons.[44]

On another bowl, there is a figure with a long robe, a belt around the middle, arms stretched out in both directions, and wild frizzy hair going up from the head.[45] The spell on this bowl reads:

> Bound, sealed, and doubly-sealed are the house and the life of this Ishpiza bar Arha, and Yandundishnat bar Ispandarmed, and … bath Simkoi from the Sun and Heat, from the *deva*, the Satan, the male Demon, the female Lilith, evil

[38] Ibid., 154, (bowl 8, line 2).
[39] Ibid., 154, line 3.
[40] For the history of the lilith, see Lesses, 2001, 355–358, Geller, 2005, 63–70.
[41] Montgomery, 1913, bowl 14, plate XV.
[42] Ibid, 183 (bowl 14, lines 5–6).
[43] Ibid, bowl 20, Plate XXI.
[44] Ibid, 201 (line 3).
[45] Ibid., bowl 30, Plate XXVI.

> Spirits, the impious Amulet-Spirit, the Lilith-Spirit male or female; the Eye of man (or) woman.[46]

The disheveled hair on the illustrated demons is also a feature with deep roots in ancient Babylonian mythology, as Hunter says, "A description of the Lamashtu, similarly reviled as a killer of infants, who eventually synthesized with the lilitu, 'furious … impetuous … divine … terrible … like a leopard, the daughter of Anu … her hair is in disorder, her breasts are uncovered' evokes much of the iconographic repertoire of the figure drawings."[47]

The bird-like features and disheveled hair of the incantation bowl liliths are also characteristic of rabbinic references to the liliths. Two mentions of the lilith point to her physical appearance: she has wings and long hair. "Rav Judah said in the name of Samuel: An abortion with the likeness of a lilith (*demut lilit*), its mother is impure because of the birth, for it is a child, but it has wings (*kenafayim*)."[48] In a discussion that enumerates the curses of Eve, a *baraita* holds that, "she grows hair like a lilith."[49] As we have seen, drawings of the liliths or demonesses on the incantation bowls bear out these two details of physical appearance. For the rabbis, women's untamed long hair is a curse that makes them like the lilith, whom we know has long hair both from the incantation bowl illustrations and texts.[50]

The bird-like quality of the demons seems to be drawn from popular Persian iconography of demons, which is then reflected in rabbinic literature. Isaiah Gafni writes:

> The Zoroastrians knew how to identify an entire host of demons (*daevas*). The beginning of these entities in the ancient Indo-Iranian religion was as gods, and with the separation of the Iranian religion from the Indian religion and the change that Zoroaster brought about, this turned the gods into demons, destructive powers that must be fought; at their head stands the evil spirit, Ahriman (Angra Mainyu) … This host was mentioned far more extensively in the Babylonian Talmud than in the Palestinian. About the *baraita* (b. Ber. 6a) transmitted in the name of Aba Binyamin, "If permission were given to the eye to see, no creature could exist because of the destroyers," the amoraic sages of Babylonia (in particular, of Pumbedita), elaborate in detail—they are

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[46] Ibid., 221, lines 1–4. There are other notably hairy demons in Segal, 2000, 99 (bowl 068A, plate 71), with long hair falling down the body; 101 (bowl 075A, plate 77), with a headband and long hair; 122 (bowl 093M, plate 101), with long wavy hair; and 125 (bowl 095M, plate 103), with wavy hair sticking up from the head.

[47] Hunter, 2000, 178.

[48] *b.* (Babylonian Talmud) *Niddah* 24b.

[49] *b. Erubin* 100b.

[50] See Lesses 2001, 357–359.

> more numerous than we are and surround us, one thousand to the left and ten thousand to the right, and the crowding in the 'Kallah' (summer study session) is because of them. This belief in the multiplicity of demons, who surround a person on every side, fits the Iranian belief in the spirits who are found in every place, as it is found in the continuation of this passage, about the demons whose feet leave the impression of chicken feet—this fits the Iranian demonology which gives the form of fowl to many of the creatures from the demonic host.[51]

It is clear, therefore, that the iconography of demons on the bowls has roots in more than one culture, thus reflecting the complex cultural situation in Sassanian Babylonia: ancient Babylonian apotropaic figurines and contemporary Persian depictions of demons are both important influences taken up by Jews and others in Babylonia both on the popular level (as found in the bowl texts) and on the learned level (as found in rabbinic writings).

The idea of binding the demons is expressed graphically on the bowls by the ubiquitous use of the circle, both around the inscription on the entire bowl and to mark off a space in the center of the bowl where the demon is usually drawn (on the Aramaic bowls). The circle encloses the demon securely in a space that it cannot escape from. Erica Hunter argues that the circle on the bowls goes back to the "*zisurru* or flour circle," used "to thwart evil spirits."

> The concept of the *zisurru* is reiterated not only in the physical typology of the incantation bowls but also in their written and decorative conventions. The spiral arrangement of text repeatedly imitates the shape of the rim edge, which is reiterated in the "inner" and "outer" circles that are the cardinal cultural attribute of the incantation bowls … . [T]he "inner" circle … not only simulates the "outer" circle complementing and reinforcing the apotropaic function of the incantation bowls, but in the Aramaic bowls the "inner" circle also encloses the figure drawings.[52]

The binding circle may also occur in the form of a snake going around the entire bowl, with the mouth swallowing the tail—the *ouroboros*.[53] This occurs on two bowls. In the first one, a photograph of which was published by Hilprecht in 1903, while the text was transcribed and published by Gordon in 1934, a ribbon surrounds the entire bowl, with the space between the two lines filled with a pattern of triangles.

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[51] Gafni 1990, 169–170; my translation.

[52] Hunter 2000, 177.

[53] Betz 1986, 337: "The serpent who swallows its own tail is a widely used figure in magic."

It is possible that this pattern also forms a snake, but the photograph is not clear enough to make this assertion sure.[54] Further down the bowl, a clearly discernible snake divides between the incantation and the *charakteres* found in the center of the bowl, thereby enclosing the *charakteres* separately from the rest of the incantation. In the incantation itself there is reference to the "seal-ring of Solomon the king, the son of David," but snakes are not mentioned.[55]

In the second bowl, an Estrangelo bowl published by Segal, a snake with eyes along its whole body encloses the entire inscription, which is directed against goddesses, demons, and liliths. It also does not mention snakes.[56] An ouroboros also appears on a third bowl, published by Montgomery, but in this instance it does not run around the entire bowl—instead, it is placed at the bottom of the bowl.[57]

Why would the snake, in particular the image of a snake swallowing its tail, be used to indicate binding in these bowls? The serpent is a symbol of life and death across the ancient Near East, associated with "protection, danger, healing, [and] regeneration."[58] It has particular importance in Egypt: "a serpent biting its tail is a common Egyptian emblem for immortality,"[59] and "time itself can be depicted as a snake."[60] In ancient Egypt, the ouroboros is one of two cosmic snakes. "The Ouroboros ('tail-swallower') is the world-encircling snake who marks the boundary between the ordered cosmos and the endless chaos around it."[61] And in fact, "Many Egyptian sarcophagi are encircled by painted serpents biting their tails—a circle symbolizing eternity."[62] The serpent as symbol of immortality in Egypt is obvious in a spell found in the *Book of the Dead*, for a person to transform himself into a snake

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[54] Hilprecht 1913, plate facing p. 447. The photograph is of two bowls—the left one was later published by Montgomery (bowl 4), and the text of the right-hand one was published by Gordon 1934a, 320–324 (bowl A—an uncatalogued bowl in the Istanbul Museum). There is no indication in Gordon's text that the bowl is identical to that photographed in the Hilprecht volume, but a comparison of the photograph with his transcribed text reveals that they are identical. My attention to the identity of the bowl was directed by notes made by an anonymous reader in the Israeli National and University Library copy of the Hilprecht book. Over the left-hand bowl it reads "Mont 4" and over the right-hand "Isbell 47: Go A."

[55] Gordon 1934a, 322.

[56] Segal 2000, 147 (bowl 117ES, Plate 134).

[57] Montgomery 1913, bowl 15 (Plate XVI).

[58] Van der Toorn-Becking-Van der Horst 1995, 1405. See also Allan 2000, 203–226.

[59] Joines 1974, 19.

[60] Van der Toorn-Becking-Van der Horst 1995, 1406.

[61] Ibid., 1407.

[62] Joines 1974, 112.

in order to be renewed daily.[63] All of these associations of protection, life, and healing would be relevant to the use of the ouroboros and other serpents on the incantation bowls.

Snakes also appear on other incantation bowls surrounding the demons to be exorcised. On a bowl written for the protection of Yawitai daughter of Khatai against a lilith who dwells with her, the central figure is completely surrounded by an ouroboros and then by another snake that does not entirely surround it. The figure's feet are then encircled by what could be either a chain or a snake.[64] The demon is identified as "that Lilith, who dwells with Yawitai, daughter of Khatai."[65] In this case the snake protects Yawitai from the Lilith by encircling the Lilith, rather than by encircling the one who is to be protected. On another bowl, directed against Dafriy the son of Mahfriy, the central figure is shackled at the legs and also has a snake partially encircling him from the right side of his head left over his body and coming up around again on the right side of his body near his feet.[66] If the figure is Dafriy, then in this case also the snake seems to be circling him threateningly rather than protectively.

The image of the ouroboros is by no means restricted to the incantation bowls. Such images are also to be found in greater profusion on the Greek magical papyri, most of which are from Egypt of the second-fifth centuries CE. The papyri include both formularies and paper amulets. One example is found in instructions for making a phylactery.[67] This phylactery is "a bodyguard (σωματοφύλαξ) against daimons, against phantasms (φαντάσματα), against every sickness and suffering." The text can be written on any of a variety of materials: "on a leaf of gold or silver or tin or on hieratic papyrus." The directions then tell the practitioner what to draw: "The figure (χαρακτήρ) is like this: let the Snake be biting its tail (ἔστω ὁ δράκων οὐροβόρος), the names being written inside [the circle made by the snake], and the characters thus, as follows." The text then gives the *charakteres* to be drawn inside the snake, which look very much like those on the Hilprecht bowl. The Greek text also specifies that inside the area formed by the snake there should be written a spell that is personalized according to the name of the

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[63] Allan 2000, 207, and for the text of the spell, Joines, 20, which is chapter 87 of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*.

[64] Naveh-Shaked 1987, Bowl 13 (p. 200, Plate 31).

[65] Ibid., p. 198.

[66] Segal 2000, 043A (p. 86, Plate 46).

[67] *Papyri Graecae Magicae* VII: 579–590, in Betz, 1986, 134; Greek in Preisendanz, 1928–1931, 2.26, plate 1, no. 4.

client: "Protect my body, [and] the entire soul of me, NN (διαφύλασσέ μου τὸ σῶμα τὴν ψυχὴν ὁλόκληρον ἐμοῦ, τοῦ δεῖνα)."[68] These words express the idea that the snake will protect the wearer of the amulet by encircling him or her.

A Greek amulet for "Touthous, whom Sara bore," also includes a drawing of the ouroboros. This amulet is intended to protect against malaria. Next to other *nomina barbara* and divine and angelic names, the ouroboros encloses the following words: Semesilam ("eternal sun") and the seven vowels AEHIOYΩ.[69] As with the previous phylactery, this amulet encloses words of power inside the protective snake. Thus in both Sassanian Persia and Greco-Roman/Byzantine Egypt the snake swallowing its tail is an image of protection from demons or illness. Given its ubiquity in Egypt, it is likely that the symbol of the ouroboros originated there and was then brought to Mesopotamia at some point later, perhaps as part of the process of Hellenization when the Greeks came to Mesopotamia.

The *charakteres* found on a few of the bowls also point to connections with the Greco-Egyptian traditions of ritual power. The *charakteres* are symbolic figures that appear ubiquitously on the Greek magical papyri (both formularies and amulets) and on metal amulets and curse tablets found around the Mediterranean.[70] One bowl in particular illustrates the use of the *charakteres*—but in a peculiarly Babylonian fashion.[71] On the Hilprecht bowl, where two snakes encircle the incantation, the interior bottom of the bowl is covered in a variety of these characters. They include a figure that looks like a branch, many lines with circles at both ends, which are sometimes combined together as crosses or as stars, a grid of squares, and other odd symbols. On this bowl, the characters take the place of the drawing of a demon. Given the comparison with the Greek magical papyri, the *charakteres* are probably not intended to represent demonic forces, but instead play a performative role in the bowl-inscription as a source of power against evil forces. This can also be illustrated from the Greek magical papyri. For example, instructions for a silver amulet that is made "to secure favor" supply drawings of a complex figure that is to be drawn

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[68] "NN" is a placeholder for the name of the client, which should be inserted when the phylactery is made.

[69] *Papyri Graecae Magicae* CVI: 1–10. Betz 1986, 311. For the original Greek, see Brashear 1975, 27–30.

[70] On the *charakteres*, see Gager 1992, 10–11. According to Gager, their ubiquitous presence on amulets did not begin before the second century CE.

[71] Another bowl with *charakteres* was published as Bowl D by McCullough 1967, 28–47. This is a Mandaean bowl, and in line 15 of the bowl there appear many magical signs similar to the *charakteres* in the Greek Magical Papyri and other sources.

on the amulet, which include names of power, and several *charakteres*.[72] Several of these *charakteres* are identical to those found on the Hilprecht bowl, most notably the star-like symbol. These symbols often accompany various names of power, and are similarly a resource of power for the person wearing the amulet.

Comparing this bowl to the others emphasizes the cultural features that almost all of the bowls share, in distinction to the Greco-Egyptian tradition of ritual power. When the Babylonian bowls use images, they almost always are of demons. Only rarely do they make use of the *charakteres*. The Greek magical papyri, when they include symbols in the incantation, usually use the *charakteres*—they do not provide drawings of demons following the models of Babylonian and Persian iconography.

From the evidence presented here about the depiction of the liliths, the ouroboros, and the *charakteres*, it is clear that the iconography of the demons on the incantation bowls is not restricted to any one of the several religious/cultural groups of Sassanian Babylonia. The iconography of demons seems to cross more boundaries than the incantation texts themselves, which often bear signs of the communities from which they come.[73] Instead, the people who created these bowls, wrote the inscriptions and inscribed the drawings, used an iconographic tradition that was available to all of them, and in all probability, constructed by people from all of the various communities of Babylonia.[74]

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[72] *Papyri Graecae Magicae* XXXVI.35–68; Betz 1986, 270. Compare Preisendanz 1928–1931, 2.164 and Plate 3, No. 13.

[73] For a relevant discussion, see Harviainen 1995, 53–60.

[74] To comment on the Jewish contribution to the bowls: by the time these bowls were made, starting sometime in the 4th or 5th century CE, Jews had lived in Babylonia for a thousand years, and by 500, their population may have reached at least a million. For discussions of the history of Jews in Iraq in late antiquity, see Morony 1984, 306–330, Neusner 1976, and Neusner 1986. On the population figure, see Morony 1984, 308. By the mid-7th century, Morony estimates a Jewish population of at least one million in central Iraq, near what is now Baghdad, exclusive of other Jewish communities elsewhere in Mesopotamia. In the third century, following Neusner, he estimates the Jewish population at about 500,000. In any case, Jews formed a significant part of the population of Babylonia in late antiquity—their contribution to its culture was not negligible. Throughout those centuries, they rejected certain aspects of polytheistic Babylonian religion and culture, and accepted others. It is arguable that as part of the process of accepting and adapting certain parts of Babylonian culture, Jews were among those who designed the particularly Babylonian form of the incantation bowl, both the written incantations and the drawings of demons. It is not that Jews adapted or adopted an already existing cultural form—a way of expelling demons and other evil influences from one's household—but that they helped to create it, along with their non-Jewish neighbors in Sassanian Babylonia.

Images as Icons

This section of the article explores how the theory of signs developed by Charles Sanders Peirce may lead to a greater understanding of the meaning of the drawings on the bowls. Peirce's theory divides signs into three basic categories: symbols, icons, and indexes.[75] Alessandro Duranti, following Peirce, defines an icon as "a sign that exhibits or exemplifies its object or referent—this often means that an icon resembles its referents in some respect. Pictures as well as diagrams are typical examples of icons."[76] Symbols, in contrast, have a purely conventional relationship to their referents, while indexes have a "spatial and/or temporal connection" with their referents.[77] Peirce distinguished between different kinds of iconicity, including "images" and "diagrams." Images partake of "simple qualities" of that which they represent; diagrams "represent the relations" of the parts of one thing by "analogous relations" in their own parts.[78] The drawings on the bowls are images, in this sense, because they are representations of what people in Sassanian Babylonia thought demons looked like. They are not pure icons—there is a conventional aspect to them, because they are culturally determined (not every culture will depict its demons/evil figures with the same iconography), so these pictures have to be understood as being of demons both by those who draw them and those who see them—the clients and the demons themselves, if we are thinking of them as the invisible members of the human world, as Shaked puts it.[79]

The images on the bowls should not be understood in a merely static, descriptive sense. The images, like the words, are intended to do something. For those who drew them on the bowls, the pictures of bound demons, along with the words of binding, seem to have had power to depict what should be happening to the demons. As icons, we can consider the drawings of demons "image acts" in the sense pioneered by Liza Bakewell, who argues that, "Images … are more accurately categorized as actions."[80] We can speak of the "pragmatic functions" of images as well as of speech.[81] "Image acts"

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[75] Peirce 1940.
[76] Duranti 1997, 205.
[77] Ibid., 204, 208.
[78] Peirce 1940, 105.
[79] Shaked 2002, 123.
[80] Bakewell 1998, 22.
[81] Duranti, 1997, 201, defines "pragmatic functions" as the "use of speech forms to evoke or establish particular types of contexts, including the speaker's stance or attitude, the social relations or relative status of the participants, and special attributes of particular individuals."

correspond to speech acts because images do not merely depict reality slavishly, but also seek to change reality—images are actions as well as speech. The drawings of the demons, which are icons of those demons, are intended to have a real effect upon the demons.

The preceding discussion of the cultural landscape of the bowls has provided examples of icons on the bowls that represent three different ways of binding the demons: the drawings of shackled demons; of demons encircled by a line at the bottom of the bowl, and of demons encircled by a snake. Even without the accompanying words of binding, these images convey the meaning of binding or restricting, but in different ways. Shackles are an instrument that people use to bind other human beings, and they are powerful against humans not because they have some occult power, but because they can physically prevent someone from acting. Putting shackles on the demons expresses the idea that the demons are like human beings, who can also be controlled by shackles that people put on them.[82] The shackles are metaphorical in another sense: the bowls are meant to prevent not just physical attack by demons, but to stop illness and death, and to turn back dangerous curses from other people. The shackling then expresses the idea that the demons are entirely prevented from injuring people by any means, whether direct physical attack or through illness or curses.

Binding through encircling, either by a line or a snake, is a more abstract way of depicting control of the demons, because it does not involve using a physical object that people usually use to control another person. The circle around the demon is more like a diagram than an image, to use Peirce's categories of icons—it is an abstract representation of the idea of binding or controlling. The demon within the circle cannot get out to harm others. The ouroboros combines in one sign the qualities of an icon and a symbol, because it conveys other ideas of a conventional nature about snakes in addition to the encircling of the demon. As a circle, it functions to hold the demon in a place from which it cannot escape to injure people, but as a snake it has the additional quality of protection against danger, similar to what is found on the Greek amulets where the snake surrounds the *charakteres* or the written words of protection. While it is useful to consider the images as icons in isolation from the words that accompany them, the words of the incantations tell us more about how the demons were imagined

[82] This analogy between humans and demons extends to other areas of life as well—when the demons are issued bills of divorce, they must leave the human household just as a wife had to leave her husband's household when he gave her a divorce.

to look and to appear to people. As we will see, when the words directly refer to the images on the bowls, they shed still more light on what the images depict and how they are supposed to function.

Verbal References to Demonic Appearances

In addition to the drawings of demons, there are also verbal references to appearances of the demons in the texts of the bowls. They are often said to "appear" in many different forms, using the verbal root D.M.Y.; the noun *demu* is used for an "appearance" or "likeness" of a demon. The verb *khazi* (appear, see) and noun *khezona* (vision) can also be used,[83] as can the noun *tselem/tsalma* (figure).[84] The usual idea is that they appear to people in dreams by night or visions by day. They can appear in the likeness of human beings, for example to "men in the likeness (*bi-demut*) of women and to women in the likeness of men,"[85] probably for the purpose of misdirection and seduction. The idea that demons can appear to human beings in various forms is clarified by a series of Talmudic stories about rabbis who are tempted to commit sexual transgressions.[86] In two of these stories, Satan (= the Evil Inclination) appears first to Rabbi Meir and then to Rabbi Akiba in the form of a woman.

> One day Satan appeared to him (Rabbi Meir) as a woman (*yoma khad 'idmi leh satan ke-'iteta*) on the other side of the river. Because there was no ferry, he seized hold of the rope (which crossed the river) and crossed. When he came to the middle of the rope—it (the Evil Inclination) left him. (It said to him): If it had not been announced in heaven, "beware of Rabbi Meir and his Torah!" I would have valued your life at two *ma'ahs*.[87]

This story makes explicit the implication in the bowl texts that when a demon appears to a man in the form of a woman or vice versa, the intent is seduction. It is interesting, and typical, that the rabbinic story only mentions the possibility that a demon could seduce a man, leaving out the equally

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[83] Segal 2000, 99 (bowl 068A: line 3).

[84] See discussion below of how this term is used to point to drawings of demons on the bowls.

[85] See Montgomery 1913, 117 (Bowl 1, lines 12–13). Cf. also 148 (Bowl 7, line 15): "in the likeness of man and woman." See also Gordon 1934b, 417—Text G, line 8, which also refers to the "likeness of a man or woman"; Gordon 1937, 87–88 (bowl H, lines 5–6) also refers to demons who "appear to man (in the form of) woman and to women (in the form of) men."

[86] *b. Qiddushin* 81a.

[87] Translation is adapted from Freedman 1966, 81a. A *ma'ah* is a coin of little value.

probable case that a demon could seduce a woman, thus demonstrating that the incantation bowls tell us more about the concerns and anxieties of women than does rabbinic literature.[88]

The demons can also appear to people in the forms of various animals—"in the likeness of vermin and reptile and in the likeness of beast and bird … and in every likeness (*demu*) and in all fashions (*gevanin*)."[89] Rabbinic texts also confirm the idea that Satan can appear to a person in animal form. For example, in one story, Satan appears to King David in the form of a deer (*ke-tavya*). He shot arrows at him, but did not reach him.[90] One bowl text refers specifically to the ability of demons to fly in the form of birds: "As you go out in the form (*demu*) of birds …"[91] Another bowl text recounts the multitude of ways the demons can appear to Yawitai daughter of Khatai in "bad dreams, in a hateful shape (*demuta*)": in the shape of various kinds of metals, of trees, of various animals—camels, oxen, donkeys, lions, wolves, tigers, cats, and monkeys, of various people, including "father and mother," of tombs, ovens, and unmended looms.[92] This same text also puts this speech into the mouth of the demons: "Let us go and (make ourselves visible) to them in the shape of a human being (*li-demut 'adam*),"[93] thus making explicit the assumption that the demons fashion the shapes in which they appear to humans. Demons, therefore, do not have a fixed shape or form by which they might be recognized. What is intriguing about these descriptions is that they do not match the drawings found on the bowls, which are almost exclusively of more-or-less human forms (sometimes equipped with bird-like wings), rather than vermin, animals, or birds.

Just as one of the chief actions of the demons is to appear to people, one of the important commands directed against them is *not* to appear to people, either during sleep at night or during daytime sleep or visions, thus showing that these were the principal ways the demons appeared to people. One of the Nippur bowls commands the demons not to appear "in dream by night or in sleep by day."[94] Another orders the demons: "Desist and go forth from

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[88] For more discussion of this point, see Lesses 2001.

[89] Montgomery 1913, 148 (Bowl 7, lines 14–15).

[90] *b. Sanhedrin* 95a; cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 107a, where Satan appears to David in the shape of a bird, which he also shoots at. The arrow broke the screen shielding Bathsheba as she was bathing, so that David was able to see her.

[91] Naveh-Shaked 1987, 180–181 (bowl 10, line 9). See the discussion of the birdlike form of demons above.

[92] Ibid., 200–201 (bowl 13, lines 11–13).

[93] Ibid., 202–203 (bowl 13, line 19).

[94] Montgomery 1913, 141 (bowl 6, line 10).

the house … nor appear to them [the named residents] either in dream by night or in slumber by day."[95] This command not to appear to people is not restricted to the Aramaic incantation bowls—on a formulary for a Hebrew amulet on one of the Geniza magical texts, the evil beings are ordered not to appear in their several forms: "Do not appear to him, neither in the form of man nor of a wild animal nor in the form of a domestic animal and not in the form of a bird, rather be annulled and distance yourselves from now and forevermore."[96]

Words and Images

On several of the bowls words are intertwined with the drawings in a meaningful way: they are written on the body of the demon itself, or they identify the image as a particular demon or type of demon. These cases, I would argue, demonstrate the performative force of the drawings as well as the words on the bowls. This section of the paper surveys several bowls where words and images are intertwined. The next section of the paper outlines performance and speech act theories and demonstrates how they can be used in further understanding the bowls.

On a bowl intended to protect one Tardi bat 'Oni, a figure is drawn in the center of the bowl, with words written between the torso and each arm, and on one leg.[97] On the figure's right it reads *'isura*, which could mean "prohibition" or "binding," or "spell,"[98] while on the left it reads *reshu*, which could mean "permission," "control," or "authorization."[99] On the right leg of the figure the client's name is written: "Tardi bat 'Oni." The figure itself is anthropomorphic—with arcs of frizzy hair emerging from its head, a torso, legs that appear to have a shackle fastened between them, and arms akimbo that do not look very much like arms, but more like snakes attached to the torso. The spell reads: "Bound and sealed are the *sheda* and *deva* and satan and cursing-spirit and the e[vil] liliths which appear by night and appear by day, and appear [to] Tardi bat ['Oni]." Montgomery argues that, "The picture thus graphically presents the idea that the demon has no power over the

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[95] Ibid., bowl 7 (147: *we-lo titkhazun*).

[96] T.-S. K 56, 1a/lines 20–21, a formulary for an amulet (Schäfer-Shaked 1994, 31). On 222, T.-S. K 147, 1a/line 37–38 uses the same wording in an amulet for Karam daughter of Tamharun and Joseph.

[97] Montgomery 1913, 201–202 (bowl 20, Plate XXI).

[98] See Sokoloff 2002, 121.

[99] Ibid., p. 1095.

lady in question."[100] I would argue that the meaning of the drawing is a good deal more ambiguous than Montgomery makes it out to be. Could the fact that the client's name is written on the figure mean that this is a drawing of Tardi herself? Or might it indicate that Tardi is, in some fashion, possessed by the demons? By saying "authority" and "binding," could it mean that Tardi is asserting her authority over the demons to bind them? The inscription does not shed much light on these questions.

Another figure with a mysterious inscription appears on a bowl for the benefit of Khanina son of Rav Yatma.[101] In the center of the bowl there is a little figure with a circle around it. On the left of the figure is written Metatron, and on the left is written *qadish* (holy). Metatron is not mentioned, however, in the incantation, which is directed against the "curse of the evil Tormentor (*mevakalta*) that appears" in Khanina's house.[102] It may be that the figure in the center of the bowl depicts this "Tormentor" and that "holy Metatron" is one of the forces of good enlisted to aid Khanina. It seems very unlikely that the drawing depicts Metatron. Erica Hunter writes about this bowl, "A portrait of the angel Metatron is, however, enigmatic, since the figure is shackled."[103] The text also refers twice to "evil and powerful angels" (*mal'akei bishei ve-taqifei*), so perhaps Metatron is the guardian against the Tormentor and the evil angels.

The bowls also sometimes refer explicitly to the images found on them, using the terms *tselem* (figure) or *demut* (image or likeness).[104] This is particularly notable on one of the bowls published by Naveh and Shaked, made for the protection of Panah-Hurmiz son of Rashndukh and several others.[105] Around the entire bowl is drawn a circle, which encloses the inscription and other designs. There is a large circle in the center, with 14 triangles drawn all the way around on the outside of it, and inside each triangle is written

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[100] Montgomery 1913, 201.

[101] Segal 2000, 87–88 (bowl 044A, Plate 47). Incidentally, this is one of the few bowl or amulet texts that uses the rabbinic title "Rav."

[102] Ibid., 87, line 7.

[103] Hunter 2000, 175. She also writes (178), "The caption may bear no direct relationship with the figure drawing. On the other hand, Metatron may have been depicted, enigmatically, in the same repertoire as the apotropaic figurines of 033A and 059A with their mixed assemblage of iconographic attributes."

[104] Two additional examples are to be found in Gordon 1937, 90–91 (bowls I and J, Plates V and VI), which have similar texts with the same figure of a bound demon in the center of the bowl. Right next to the left foot of the demon, the inscription begins "This is the figure (*tsilmah*) of the curse and of the Lilith."

[105] Naveh-Shaked 1993, 122–124 (bowl 18, plate 23).

YHWH YHW. Inside the circle made by the triangles is a figure with a head (eyes, nose, mouth, short hair), arms with a rope binding them together, torso, legs and feet sticking out to right and left. Around the figure is written an inscription; beginning on the right side of the figure it reads: "This is the figure (*tsilmah*) of the Tormentor (*mevakalta*) that appears in dreams and takes on forms (*be-demu atah mitdamyah*)." Beginning on the top left of the figure, it reads: "This is the binding (*'issurah*) from today and forever. Amen Amen Selah. Gabriel Nuriel."[106] The demon is bound both verbally and visually by the rope between its arms, which prevents it from "this day" onward and "forever" from harming the family. Portraying the demon with bound arms demonstrates that it is already prevented from doing harm. The bowl text also reads, "This is the firm seal (*khatamta*) and protection and sealing of Solomon" for all the members of the household, "this" probably referring to the entire ensemble of incantation and images. The incantation also wishes them "good healing (*'asuta*) from heaven." This bowl thus clearly identifies the figure drawn in the middle as the "Tormentor" who appears in dreams and takes on various likenesses. The likenesses are probably to be identified with the different forms identified verbally in the incantations on many of the bowls, so that even though it says "*this* is the figure," the figure can have many different forms.

On the bowl that is designed to send away the Lilith who afflicts Yawitai, daughter of Khatai, there is also an inscription that points to the figure of the Lilith in the center of the bowl.[107] The figure has a torso, head, arms crossed across its body, and legs enclosed by a chain. Encircling the whole figure is a snake-like circle, and on the right and left side of the figure there are also what appear to be straight portions of a snake. Between the left side of the figure and the snake is the inscription that clearly identifies the figure: "For that lilith who dwells with Yawitai, daughter of Khatai." Additionally, written under the figure's feet, and then curving up to its left, between the surrounding snake and the second snake, is another inscription, taken from Ex. 15:7: "In the fullness of your triumph you did cast the rebels down, you did let loose your fury, it consumed them like chaff." This verse expresses the desired result of the curses against other evil beings mentioned in the incantation and especially against the Lilith, embodied in the figure drawn on the bowl.

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[106] Naveh-Shaked 1993, 123 comment that the string that ties the two hands together "deserves the term *issura*."

[107] Naveh-Shaked 1993, 198–203 (bowl 13, plates 30 and 31).

The phrasing of the curse against this Lilith in the body of the incantation echoes the identifying phrase inscribed next to the drawing.

> There came the lord (Bagdana Aziza), there came the troop. He came against them, against the demons, against the devils, against the evil Lilith who dwells with Yawitai daughter of Khatai, against Danahish, against the judges, against he who is acquitted, against the idol, against the evil Lilith, against the impudent female companion who accompanies Yawitai daughter of Khatai and Zorigai son of Imma, who kills their sons and daughters. He cast a hatchet in her mouth, he broke her teeth in her mouth, he pierced her brain before her, they smote her on the top of her head with a sword of slaying.[108]

This incantation expresses *both* the desire to get rid of the Lilith and other evil beings—demons and devils—who make themselves visible to Yawitai *and* the accomplishment of this desire. The attack against the Lilith has already been executed and is recorded in the incantation text: "He came against them … He cast a hatchet in her mouth." The Lilith, who appears to be the primary enemy of Yawitai, is destroyed by this attack, so that one imagines she no longer "accompanies" Yawitai. (The close association between the Lilith and Yawitai may also suggest that she is possessed by the Lilith, and that is why the Lilith can continue to accompany her against Yawitai's will).

Finally, a Mandaic text from the British Museum uses the word *demuta* to refer to the figures drawn on the bowl.[109] There are two figures, one in a roughly human shape, with four strands of long, frizzy hair, a long neck, a thick torso with dots marked on it, and legs with the feet facing outward (and between them what could be either a tail or a penis). Next to it is a figure with long legs and almost equally long arms, and a very small head. The inscription below them reads: "These are portraits (*demuta*) of one bound (*'asir*) and seized by his mouth (*pumah*) and one seized by his tongue (*lishanah*)."[110] This is a fulfillment of the curses in the body of the bowl incantation: "Bound and seized be the mouth and seized the tongue" and "Bound be their tongues in their mouths, bound their lips, shaken, hobbled and banned their teeth and their molars and deafened the ears of their curses and invocations."[111] In a similar fashion to the bowl made for Yawitai, the verbal incantation here commands that the demons' mouths

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[108] Ibid., 199.

[109] Segal 2000, 122 (bowl 093M, plate 101).

[110] Ibid, line 4.

[111] Ibid. Segal comments: "the caption of the drawings at the side repeats line 4, but with the notion that the imprecation of line 4 has been fulfilled."

and tongues be bound, and the drawing apparently depicts the already bound demons.

Binding of Demons as a Performative Act

The theory of performative speech—of speech acts—can illuminate the ensemble of words and images the bowls employ to rid people of liliths and other demons. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski introduced two important ideas for the development of performance theory, which form part of his ethnographic theory of language: context of situation and language as a mode of action.[112] "Context of situation" includes the idea that "the *situation* in which words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant to the linguistic expression."[113] Thus in order to figure out what words mean, one must be aware of the situation in which they are uttered, or written. Language as a mode of action means that, "the main function of language is not to express thought, not to duplicate mental processes, but rather to play an active pragmatic part in human behaviour."[114] In other words, language is part of action, rather than being distinguished from it. Bakewell recounts vividly the many powers of language: "Words are hardly unobtrusive or harmless. On the contrary, words can accuse, denounce, and actually harm people. They can also flatter, promote, and benefit those same people. We employ them regularly to make promises, issue commands, or just simply state something. We use them to establish group solidarity, to give voice to our opinions, and to create boundaries around ourselves and others."[115]

John L. Austin provides a philosophically detailed explication of how it is that words are part of action. According to Austin, there are three types of acts that we perform when we speak: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary acts are the mere act *of* saying something "that can be interpreted according to grammatical conventions."[116] For the bowls, the locutionary act would be the setting down of the words of the incantations and the drawings of demons on the bowls. Austin makes the point that whenever "we perform a locutionary act we also perform an

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[112] Duranti 1997, 215–216.
[113] Ibid., 216, quoting Malinowski 1923, 306.
[114] Ibid., 216, quoting Malinowski 1978, 2:7.
[115] Bakewell 1998, 24.
[116] Duranti 1997, 220.

illocutionary act," because all speaking "takes place within a certain *context* and is evaluated with respect to such a context."[117] The context becomes explicit for the next category of speech acts.

An illocutionary act consists of "the act the speaker can accomplish *in* saying something by means of the conventional *force* of the locutionary act."[118] Illocutionary acts must be performed within a "context of situation" in which they make sense. Austin refers to these criteria as the "felicity conditions." In order for words to have a certain effect, the conditions must be correct.[119] For example, when an employer says to an employee, "you're fired," the employee may lose his or her job if the employer has the proper authority to end the employee's employment. On the other hand, if a coworker says the same thing, it will not affect the person's employment status. For the bowls, one of the conditions required for the illocutionary act to be "felicitous" is the knowledge of the correct formulas of exorcism and of the conventional iconography of the demons drawn on the bowls. Although we cannot know very much about the larger social context in which the bowls were produced or in which they had their effect, it is possible to make some inferences from the bowl texts. Probably the most important assumption held by both the practitioners and clients of the bowls is that words or pictures are not merely descriptive of physical reality, beliefs, or states of mind, but that they express a wish for change, effect a change, or demonstrate that change has already occurred for the clients named on the bowls.

The third kind of speech act is perlocutionary: "the act produced by the uttering of a particular locution, that is, the consequences or effects of such locution regardless of its conventional force."[120] The effect of being told that one has been fired by one's boss will be to lose one's job—but it may also result in becoming depressed or feeling liberated. These last two consequences are not a predictable effect of the words "you're fired," and thus Austin classifies them as perlocutionary acts.[121] They are not part of the conventional force of the words. Unfortunately, since we cannot go back to Iraq in late antiquity and ask those who used the bowls what effect they had upon them, we cannot have much idea of their perlocutionary effect, except perhaps to assume that they must have been thought to have some positive effect, or people would have stopped using them.

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117 Ibid., 222.
118 Ibid., 222.
119 Ibid., 224.
120 Ibid., 220.
121 Ibid., 220.

Liza Bakewell has applied the theory of speech acts to images as well, calling them "image acts."[122] She argues that, "Images, rather than re-present reality and therefore be largely descriptive, are more accurately categorized as actions."[123] Images are human-made, and can range from body gestures to "great works of art." And therefore, "if images are actions, a theory of images ought to form part of a theory of action, much as a theory of speech devolves from a theory of action."[124] Bakewell writes that "In each case there is a visual dimension that provides not only an essential setting … but constitutes a large portion of the communicative reality under investigation."[125] For example, the word "madre" (mother) in contemporary Mexican Spanish must be understood both as a speech act and as an image act, because "one also needs to consider the visual landscape with which the grammars and meanings, narratives, and actions of the word unfold."[126] This visual landscape includes gestures that accompany the utterance of the words and published pictures of women. Bakewell argues that the study of image acts should begin with the human body, not with the products that some produce and others consume, such as movies or paintings.[127]

While speech acts and image acts have many similarities to each other, they are not identical. As Bakewell says, "Verbal and visual performances emphasize two different signifying modes: one is predominately symbolic, the other iconic."[128] As mentioned above in the discussion of icons, "images are not as arbitrarily related to their referents as symbols are to theirs." Language is primarily (thought not exclusively) symbolic, while icons do not have to adhere to conventions to be understood.[129] Nonetheless, there may be a complementarity between symbols and icons, and language and gesture.[130]

To understand the drawings of demons as "image acts" we must begin by noticing that they are very largely icons of the human body. As described above, most of them possess important parts of the human body, and in roughly the same configuration: head, torso, arms, and legs. On the head there are usually eyes, a nose, and a mouth, and often hair or some kind of

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122 Bakewell 1998, 22.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 23.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 28.
128 Ibid., 29.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.

headgear. They usually wear some kind of clothing, although some are naked with breasts and genitals visible. Sometimes they hold human weapons in their hands—swords or spears. The human iconography of demons displays their kinship to human beings, and demonstrates the characterization of them as invisible members of human society—although, in the case of the bowls, the drawings make them visible. They are not, however, entirely human, since their arms sometimes are closer to wings than human arms. The wings are an indication of their part-human status.

What kind of "image act" is the drawing of the demons' arms and legs as bound and shackled? It seems to me that this falls into the same category as much of the verbal language of binding on the bowls—an illocutionary act. In the case of a drawn image, it is "the act the speaker can accomplish *in* [drawing] something by means of the conventional *force* of the locutionary act." Shackles on the limbs of the demons, like circles drawn around them, are visual conventions of binding. They express what those who drew them would like to happen to the demons: they should be prevented from doing harm to human beings. They also show what will happen to them if the incantations are successful, since they portray the demons as *already* being bound and prevented from action.

I would like to elaborate on the point that the drawings depict the demons as having already been bound. In Sam D. Gill's articles on Navajo rituals for healing, he emphasizes the way in which Navajo prayers in the rituals describe—or better put, enact—the sufferer as being progressively healed from what ails him or her. One prayer reads:[131]

> This very day you must take your spell out of me by which you are bothering me,
> This very day you have removed your spell from me by which you were bothering me,
> You have left to take it far away from me,
> You have taken it far away from me.

This prayer is intended to have an effect upon one of the Navajo "Holy Persons" and cause the spell to go away. Gill says, "The prayer constituent beseeching the Holy Person to act has a pragmatic effect in that the utterance of the words exerts a force upon the Holy Person addressed."[132] The utterance thus has an illocutionary force. One could also see these four lines as a diagrammatic icon of the healing process that a person goes through—

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131 Gill 1977, 146.
132 Ibid., 150.

from the imperative to remove the spell, to the assertion that the spell has been removed, to the acknowledgement that the Holy Person has taken it far away from the sufferer. As Gill says, describing the entire ritual, "The semantic structure of the prayer is identical to the effect the prayer seeks, the restoration of health."[133] The sequence of verbs is very important, leading from "the removal of the malevolent object as a future event and progresses through verb forms to a conclusion which refers to the removal and dispersion in the past tense, as a fact accomplished. This language construction engenders a performative force which surpasses the description of such events and participates in effecting the desired conditions."[134]

The drawings on the bowls, together with the words of incantation, graphically depict the same process of being healed or protected from demons. Probably the two most prominent verbs for what should happen to the demons is that they should be "bound and sealed," and this is graphically expressed by the fetters on the ankles and arms of the figures on many of the bowls.[135] When the demons are depicted with fetters or shackles, it means that the verbal curses on the bowls are *already accomplished*. The bowls—words and images—do not merely express the desire to destroy the demons, but present their binding and destruction as already finished. As Elliott Wolfson writes, "the reality depicted by the picture reflects the stated goal of the incantation, to neutralize the satanic power of the evil force, which is here represented by the shackling of the feet."[136]

The bowl written for the benefit of Yawitai, afflicted by a Lilith who will not leave her alone, depicts the Lilith as *already bound* and describes—or enacts—how "the Lord, Bagdana Aziza" completely destroyed that Lilith.[137] Yawitai, who apparently has been beset by bad dreams in which demons appear to her in a myriad of forms, will not have to worry further about being accompanied by the Lilith, if Bagdana has actually succeeded. To use Gill's words, describing the vanquishing of the Lilith as an already accomplished deed, performed by the immensely powerful Bagdana, together with the

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133 Ibid., 152.

134 Gill 1987, 106–107.

135 See, for example, Montgomery, 1913, bowl 3 (plate IV) and bowl 14 (plate XV); Segal 2000, bowl 043A (plate 46). Examples of the use of "sealing" and "binding": Montgomery 1913, 127 (bowl 3, line 1): "for the sealing of the household"; 138 (bowl 5, line 1): "bound and doubly-bound, sealed and doubly-sealed"; 141, (bowl 6, line 6): "I seal and bind them"; 145 (bowl 7, line 2): "I bind to you and I seal and doubly-seal you." Many other examples could be adduced from almost every bowl.

136 Wolfson 2001, 106.

137 Naveh-Shaked 1987, 198–203 (bowl 13, plates 30 and 31).

drawing of the already bound Lilith, "engenders a performative force which surpasses the description of such events and participates in effecting the desired conditions."[138]

Fighting the Invisible Members of Human Society

This paper is focused on the pictorial and verbal images, mostly of demons, found on the Aramaic incantation bowls. The demons are the "invisible members" of human society, whose goal is to harm people. The anthropomorphic images of shackled demons, both male and female, and of the circles and snakes drawn to enclose them, reveal common iconography, religious ideas and ritual practices in the popular religion of Sassanian Babylonia, which were held in common by people from a wide variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds. The images of the demons are drawn from Babylonian and Persian iconography: for example, the depiction of disheveled hair of the liliths can be traced back to the ancient Babylonian Lamashtu, the bird-like quality of some of the drawings reflects contemporary Persian demonology, and both of these qualities are accepted also in rabbinic references to demons in general and liliths in particular. Other iconography on the bowls is drawn from Greco-Egyptian sources—both the *charakteres*, commonly found in the Greek magical papyri and on amulets and gems from the eastern Mediterranean, and the ouroboros, the snake swallowing its tail which in Egyptian mythology is a sign of protection and immortality.

The "verbal images" of the demons in the bowl-texts tell us more about the qualities of the demons: they can appear to people in many different forms, both human and animal, as well as other objects. This "appearance" is precisely what people do not want to see, either in dreams at night or in visions of the day. The incantations frequently command the demons not to appear to the clients named on the bowls, in addition to other commands to the demons to be bound or to go away.

The pictorial images on the bowls are icons—both of the demons and of the means used to control or destroy them. In Bakewell's sense, these icons have a pragmatic function—they were not drawn merely to illustrate the texts on the bowls, but to act against the demons. The shackling of the demons, and the circling of the demons both by a line and by an ouroboros metaphorically express how the demons should be controlled, and also

[138] Gill 1987, 106.

depict how that control has already been accomplished. This pragmatic function of the drawings is demonstrated even more on those bowls where the words of the incantation identify the image on the bowl, for example the bowl written on behalf of Panah-Hurmiz, which depicts the "Tormentor" with a rope between its arms and says "This is the binding."[139]

Theories of performative language—of speech acts and image acts—help us to understand the pragmatic force of the ensemble of words and images on the bowls. Both the images and the words have illocutionary force, and by their conventional force they accomplish the goal of the practitioner, to rid the clients of the demons. They graphically depict the process of being healed or protected from demons. Depicting the demons as bound by shackles or surrounded by a circle or a snake means that the verbal curses on the bowls have already done what the practitioner intended them to do—protect those named on them from demonic threats. The drawings on the bowls appear to the modern researcher as crude caricatures of the human form, but for those who drew them on the bowls, they were essential tools in the fight against demons, illness, and death.

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[139] Naveh-Shaked 1993, 122–124 (bowl 18, plate 23).

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SECTION FOUR

ECSTATIC PRACTICES

FROM BAPTISMAL VISION TO MYSTICAL UNION WITH THE ONE: THE CASE OF THE SETHIAN GNOSTICS

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This essay is offered as an attempt to trace the process by which the Sethian baptismal rite of the "Five Seals" developed into the contemplative practice of mystical union with the supreme deity (the One, Monad, or Invisible Spirit) as emerges from a comparison of five Sethian treatises: the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Holy Book of the Invisible Spirit*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*. While it is clear that the common element shared by them is visionary experience, what is less clear is the process by which tangible and sensory components of ritual performance become transformed into acts of self-reflexive cognition and assimilation to putatively external ontological realities.

Already in the 1970's, Hans Jonas observed that mystical philosophies like that of Plotinus or Origen may have originated when the dualism between the evil cosmos and the transcendent god reflected in the dramatic antagonisms between the actors that populate much early gnostic mythology was gradually replaced by a monistic emanative scheme in which a continuum of greater or lesser degrees of perfection extends downwards and upwards throughout the entire chain of being.[1] Simultaneously, external

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* It is a real pleasure to offer homage to Birger Pearson, my honored friend, colleague, and mentor for over forty years in the fields of Nag Hammadi studies and the history of religions in general.

[1] According to Hans Jonas 1969, 315–329, the culminating, soteriology of most typical Gnostic myths and rituals offer only a preparation for deliverance from the world and its governing powers, since the actual deliverance will take place only after death. Nevertheless, it is precisely at this point that gnostic myth and ritual can develop into a mystical philosophy by which this ultimate deliverance can be in some way experienced already in this life. But before mystic philosophy can fully develop, the gnostic myth and ritual on which it is based must first be "rationalized" by transforming the beings who had appeared as actors in the original mythical drama into a sequence of impersonal entities that spontaneously emanate from a supreme source, and by replacing their generative and salvific actions by some kind of automatic process that determines the necessary order of these emanations. When the dualism of the evil cosmos and the transcendent god reflected in the original mythical drama is transformed into monism, the cosmos is no longer god's adversary but

ritual practices gradually gave way to a self-performable interior rituals of self-reflexive contemplation whose ascending stages inversely replicate the original descending order of emanations. In this way, the aspiring mystic can experience as an internal pilgrimage already in this life what earlier gnostic myth had portrayed as an external and often *post mortem* return of the soul to its native realm of light. It seems to me that the same process is visible in the Sethian treatises from the Nag Hammadi library.

The Sethian Platonizing Treatises: Two Patterns

Despite their shared features, one may bifurcate the eleven Sethian treatises into two subgroups according to the path to saving enlightenment offered in each.[2] For the larger and probably earlier group of seven treatises—the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Thought of Norea*, *Melchizedek*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*—salvation is enlightenment concerning the true nature of self, world and ultimate reality revealed by a heavenly savior in the course of a biblically-inspired horizontal sequence of temporally successive earthly *descents*, often culminating in the bestowal of a saving baptismal rite known as the Five Seals. This rite seems to have been a communal ritual involving the use of ordinary water to "wash away" the baptizand's corporeal and emotional attachments to the world of everyday experience, and awaken the participant's sense of ultimate membership in the world of light, thereby anticipating the soul's final post-mortem return to its divine point of origin.

The other group of four treatises, which I call "the Platonizing Sethian treatises"—*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*—

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simply his "other." The proactive antagonisms and conflicts of earlier myth are replaced by a continuum of greater or lesser degrees of perfection extending downwards and upwards throughout the entire chain of being. Similarly, external ritual practices must be transformed into a self-performable interior ritual of self-reflexive contemplation whose ascending stages inversely replicate the original descending order of emanations. In this way, the aspiring mystic can experience as an internal pilgrimage already in this life what the gnostic myth had described as an external and often *post mortem* journey. Here speculation and theory are the anticipation, not the projection, of experience; they actually make experience possible. Myth and ritual coalesce into mysticism; gnosis has turned into contemplative philosophy like that of Origen or Plotinus. "Thus, in order that certain experiences may become possible and even conceivable as valid anticipations of an eschatological future, or as actualizations of metaphysical stages of being, speculation must have set the framework, the way, and the goal, long before the subjective experience has learned to walk the way." (p. 329).

[2] See Turner 2001, 57–92.

conceives saving enlightenment to be achieved through a Platonically-inspired self-actualized *ascent* of a visionary through a succession of supramundane realms and mental states, during which one becomes assimilated to ever higher levels of being and insight. Though necessarily self-actualized, the visionary ascent is initially enabled by one's imaginative emulation of the recorded experiences of an exemplary visionary in dialogue with angelic and other divine guides who reveal the nature and origin of the beings that populate divine world to be traversed by the individual aspirant, whether in this life or in the final postmortem ascent of the soul.[3] This distinction of emphasis roughly corresponds to that between "cosmic" and "personal" eschatology in apocalyptic literature,[4] in which there is a gradual a shift towards the latter in later Jewish and especially Christian and Gnostic texts, where the emphasis is on the hope for the individual's transcendence of death.

From Exterior to Interior Ritual

The Sethian rite of the Five Seals seems to have originally featured a renunciation of worldly life, an invocation of spiritual powers, a water baptism by multiple immersions in the name of various Sethian divine figures, and perhaps also acts of anointing, investiture, and enthronement symbolizing the new status conferred upon the participant. Eventually the original water-based rite was transformed into the practice of visionary and contemplative ascent depicted in *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, where baptismal imagery still occurs, or in *Allogenes*, where such imagery is entirely absent. Of these latter, *Zostrianos* bridges the gap between the descent and ascent pattern treatises by completely displacing the entire set of baptismal events and

[3] Of the four Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes* commemorate the ecstatic ascent of a *single* exceptional individual, such as the ancient figures of Zostrianos, the alleged uncle or grandfather of Zoroaster, or Allogenes, the "one of another kind," or the biblical son of Adam Seth, or even a contemporary Sethian prophet such as Marsanes. On the other hand, the *Three Steles of Seth* presupposes an entire *community* of aspiring visionaries by providing for their use a set of exemplary doxological prayers long ago uttered by Seth in the course of his own spiritual ascent to the supreme deity. Analysis of the mythemes and literary composition of the Sethian treatises suggest that, while elements of both patterns are present throughout the entire corpus, as one moves from what seem to be relatively early treatises to the relatively later ones, there is a noticeable trend away from the descent pattern towards the ascent pattern. See my introduction and commentary to *Zostrianos* in C. Barry et al. 2000, esp. 139–148, and Turner 2001, 292–301, 720–722.

[4] See Collins 1979, 17–18.

personalia from an earthly setting into the transcendent realm. The visionary ascent is portrayed as an ascending series of transcendental baptisms that mark increasing levels of spiritual attainment and insight. Indeed, this shift seems to confirm Jonas' hypothesis that myth and ritual are the natural antecedents to a mystical philosophy in which the mystic experiences as an internal pilgrimage what gnostic myth and ritual had previously portrayed as an externally assisted anticipation of a *post mortem* journey.

What we seem to have is a process of "ritual internalization," a term that Mircea Eliade applied to the emergence of yogic practices from the sacrificial ritual of ancient Vedic religion, wherein yogic asceticism amounts to an internal sacrifice in which certain subjective psycho-physiological states and processes replace external ritual acts and objects such as the sacrificial fire and various libations.[5] According to Guy Stroumsa, a similar process occurred in post-second-temple Judaism, where the ritual action of sacrifice in the former temple lives on in the form of prayer and verbal liturgy in which "liturgical prayer … reproduces the daily rhythm of sacrifices … telling has replaced the doing to such a point that the recitation of sacrificial injunctions in a synagogue was now equivalent to their former practice in the temple."[6] The link between the divine and human is realized no longer in *ex opere operato* ritual actions, but in an inward focus on maintaining the link between the individual's interior conscience and a God who is even more invisible and incomprehensible than when the temple was still standing, a focus whose outward counterpart became directed to the heavenly temple depicted by Ezekiel as the true palace of the invisible God. Thus earthly liturgical practice becomes displaced by the verbal performance of a heavenly liturgy whose holiness and transcendence leads the participant into increasingly silent acts of visionary imagination and the mystical contemplation of God and his attributes. Thus we seem to have a general line of development from ritual action through verbal liturgy and prayer that culminates in silent contemplation.

[5] Eliade 1969, 111. The term "ritual interiorization" bears a multitude of meanings: a mental performance of the ritual; replacement of the ritual with a continuous process of life, such as breathing or eating; a particular way of life, such as renunciation; an actual performance with an inner interpretation; the replacement of the external ritual with an internal one, and so on. See Bodewitz 1973.

[6] Stroumsa 2009, 68–71.

The Sethian Baptismal Rite of the Five Seals

According to the *Apocryphon of John*, the baptism of the Five Seals separates one from ignorance, servitude to hostile powers, and the prospect of bodily reincarnation, and reincorporates one into the elect seed of the Mother Barbelo, that is, into an awareness of one's immortal and divine identity, conceived as an elevation into the primordial light whence one had fallen into mortality. The divine Mother, who is herself the divine Providence (πρόνοια) as well the instrument of its "remembrance," calls on those who hear her to "arise from the deep sleep" of forgetfulness and ignorance and to "remember that you have heard and trace your root, which is I." The rite culminates in being sealed in the "light of the water," understood as a reentry into the supreme Invisible Spirit's primordial aqueous luminosity from which all divine realities, including one's own soul, originally emanated. In this way, the baptizand is reincorporated into the community of transformed humanity, the Sons of Light.

The *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 49.2 2–50,1 2) portrays the Five Seals as a sequence of five ritual actions (investiture, baptism, enthronement, glorification, and rapture) that strip away and replace bodily and emotional preoccupations with an enlightenment that protects one from the deceptive influences of the Archons.[7] Here the emphasis lies upon the *ascent* of the baptizand to the light, as is also the case in the concluding lines of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 31,2 2–25): "I (Barbelo) *raised him up* and sealed him in the luminous water with five seals." A similar emphasis on ascent is obvious also in *Zostrianos*' portrayal of a visionary ascending through a sequence of multiple baptisms, although the nomenclature of the holy powers and the centrality of baptism "in the name of Autogenes" is more characteristic of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

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[7] In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 48,7–33, the Five Seals are interpreted as a sequence of acts administered by the divine Mother Barbelo, apparently consisting of a stripping away of the initiate's psycho-somatic nature, followed by investiture in a luminous garment, baptism in living water, enthronement, glorification, rapture into the light, and induction into the mystery of knowledge: XIII 48,7–33: "I gave him the Water [of Life, which strips] him of the thought of [the corporeal] and psychic [faculty] … I put upon him a shining Light … I handed him over to those who [covered] him with a robe of Light … he was baptized … he was immersed in the spring of living water … he was enthroned in glory … he was glorified with the glory of the Fatherhood … he was raptured into the light-[place] of his Fatherhood … he received the Five Seals … he partook of the mystery of knowledge." XIII 49,2 8–32: "He who possesses the Five Seals of these particular names has stripped off (the) garments of ignorance and put on a shining Light."

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 62,2 5–63, 23 = IV 74,9–75, 11), whose baptismal liturgy closely resembles that practiced by other Christian groups,[8] the emphasis seems to lie on the *descent* of the holy powers upon the baptizand.[9] Here, Seth descends in the guise of Jesus to institute a baptism that includes a renunciation of the lower world and its symbolic reconciliation with the upper world through the invocation and birth or rebirth of the "saints," conceived as ineffable wombs for the Father's preexistent light:[10]

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[8] According to the survey of Ysebaert 1962, by mid-second century, the Christian baptismal ritual comprised (with regional variations) approximately the following sequence of acts (in certain regions preceded by purifying bath, a two-day fast, perhaps with exsufflations and consignations by the bishop, and an all-night vigil culminating with the baptismal rite performed in darkness): 1) a renunciation (ἀπόταξις) of sin and Satan (later spoken with outstretched arms and facing westwards according to Cyril of Jerusalem), sometimes coupled with removal of the outer garments, standing in penance on sackcloth or goatskin—the "garments of flesh"—which in the East was followed by a profession of faith (σύνταξις) and a pre-baptismal anointing with oil and cruciform signation on the forehead, (either as a kind of exorcism or as an invocation [ἐπικλήσις] of the Holy Spirit); 2) stripping naked (reminding the postulant of the primal nudity of Adam and Eve in the Garden); 3) an optional complete pre-baptismal anointing with oil; 4) water baptism by triple immersion accompanied by invocation of "the Names" (usually the threefold names of the trinity including affirmations of creedal interrogations, later spoken eastward); 5) emergence from the water (in which the baptizand is to imagine himself as clothed in a radiant garment); 6) in the West, an optional post-baptismal anointing with oil or myrrh (absent in the Syrian rite, and thus likely a secondary addition); 7) investiture (usually in white clothing, signifying receipt of the light of immortality, supplemented in Egypt much later with a crowning); 8) in the West, a post-baptismal anointing of the head by the priest or bishop with oil or myrrh; and 9) an imposition of hands, usually by the bishop, which may include a further anointing and "sealing" on the forehead. Any one of these acts, the anointings (frequently conceived as apotropaic), the imposition of hands or the baptism itself might be called a "seal." To judge from the *Acts of Thomas* 26–27, the ascent from the water (Syriac version) or the anointing with oil (Greek version) may also involve luminous appearances of the Savior, and Justin Martyr (*Apol.* 1.61.11–12) characterizes the baptismal washing as "enlightenment" (φωτισμός). See also Finn 1967, 50–54; Bradshaw 1988; the important unpublished survey of Thomassen 2001, and the convenient collection of texts in Whitaker 1970. While for non-Sethian Christians this ceremony would be followed by an imposition of hands, a kiss of peace and the Eucharist, the Sethian ritual appears to have been complete in itself, and effective of salvation.

[9] In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,9–68,1), the recipient of the Five Seals offers an invocation (ἐπίκλησις) of the aeonic powers and certain renunciations (ἀπόταξις, ἀποταγή), undergoes baptism in the spring of truth in which one receives the name and a vision of Autogenes, followed by an extension of one's arms to symbolize inclusion in the "circle of light" and the receipt of the ointment (or perfume) of life.

[10] I.e., on analogy with Plato's receptacle, the initiated person becomes a receptacle for the divine light just as the divine mother Barbelo served as a receptacle for the supreme Father's light at the origin of her self-generated Child; cf. *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 45,6–8 "I am the Womb [that gives shape] to the all by giving birth to the Light that [shines in] splendor"; *Apocryphon of John* II 6,1 0–18: "And he gazed intently into Barbelo with the pure light surrounding the Invisible Spirit and its radiance, and she conceived from him. And he

> The great Seth was sent … to save the errant race … through a baptism … for the birth (IV 74,2 9: rebirth) of the saints by the Holy Spirit through invisible symbols hidden in a unification (ϩωⲧⲡ; IV 75,3 has ϩωⲧⲃ, killing) of worlds through the renouncing of the world and the god of the thirteen aeons, and the invocations of the holy and ineffable ones, even the incorruptible wombs and the Father's great light that preexisted with his Pronoia.

In such baptismal ritual contexts, everyday physical acts such as "stripping," "immersion," "putting on," "sealing," more formal verbal performances such as "renunciation," "invocation," and altered perceptions such as "rebirth" and the "unification" of worlds symbolize experiences of personal and social transformation ("rites of passage"), abstention from previous behavioral dispositions and social associations, "unlearning" or even rejection of former ways and the invocation and adoption of new perceptions of self and world.

In terms of Arnold van Gennep's model of initiatory rites with their successive phases of separation, liminality, and reincorporation, such renunciation, stripping, disrobing and attendant nakedness denote separation from the profane condition of ignorance and mortality.[11] Through immersion and reemergence from the baptismal waters, the baptizand passes through a liminal state of death, burial, and rebirth wherein one is "neither this nor that, and yet is both," neither enlightened nor unenlightened, but inhabiting a liminal state of literal or figurative nakedness and loss of customary distinctions, with no claim to status or special knowledge.[12] But there follows a third phase of ritual reincorporation into a new social status or group such as the seed of Seth, or—in terms of individual consciousness—into a new identity or state of awareness.

From Exterior to Interior Ritual

In the course of time, such ritual acts can become interiorized as techniques of mental transformation, conceptual refinement and abstraction, and entrance into a higher state of enlightenment, techniques which could

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begot a luminous spark … This was an Only-begotten of the Mother-Father who came to appearance; he is his sole [offspring], the Only-begotten of the Father, the pure light."

[11] Van Gennep 1961.

[12] V. W. Turner 1967, 97–98: "Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise." As such it is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, a *temporary* state that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure.

be practiced either while participating in a physical water ritual or quite apart from it. The soul's successive divestiture of its psychic and somatic accretions reappears "internalized" as an ascending scale of mental states by which the self, while still in the body, might attain union with its originally pristine naked state as an immanent, even if temporary, condition that prefigures and guarantees its final post-mortem return to the divine realm to become once again one with God. With this transposition of a ritual action into the inwardness of the person and the concomitant translation of its objective stages into a structured sequence of increasingly self-reflexive epistemological acts, external ritual performance can pass into an internal discipline of contemplative acts culminating in mystic union.

Among the Sethian treatises, it seems that the early stages of such a transformation are most clearly noticeable in the Sethian Platonizing treatise *Zostrianos*. Here, the baptismal ritual itself has been entirely transcendentalized, since the baptisms occur, not on the earthly plane but in the supramundane world. Here a sequence of multiple baptisms—more that 20!—symbolize Zostrianos' passage through a series of ontological transformations into various degrees of angelhood culminating in at least a temporary divinization during the course of a visionary ascent to the highest reaches of the Aeon of Barbelo, who is the very Mind of God.

An even further shift from external ritual to internal mystical union appears in the treatise *Allogenes*, where a visionary ascent to divine realities conceived as external to oneself leads to an internal contemplative withdrawal into one's primordial self. To see how this works, we first have to take a detour through the mechanics of the metaphysics of emanation adopted by these treatises.

Ontogenesis through Dynamic Emanation

The metaphysical hierarchy of the Platonizing Sethian treatises is headed by a supreme and pre-existent Unknowable One who, as in Plotinus, is clearly beyond being and is therefore conceivable only through negation and cognitive vacancy. Below the supreme One, at the level of determinate being, is the Barbelo Aeon, conceived along the lines of a Middle Platonic tripartite divine Intellect.[13] It contains three ontological levels, conceived as sub-

[13] Cf. Bechtle 2000, 409 n. 74: "Barbelo really is equivalent to mind. It is the first thought of the Invisible Spirit and it has, principally speaking, three levels: Kalyptos, the hidden One, Protophanes, the first appearing One, Autogenes, the self-begotten One. At first this

intellects or subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon: one that is contemplated (νοῦς νοητός), called Kalyptos or "hidden"; one that contemplates (νοῦς νοερός or θεωρητικός), called Protophanes or "first manifesting"; and one that is discursive and demiurgic (νοῦς διανοούμενος), called Autogenes or "self-generated."

Originally, the names of these subaeons seem to have been derived from epithets that earlier Sethian literature applied to the members of their supreme trinity consisting of the Father or Invisible Spirit; his First Thought, the Mother Barbelo; and their self-generated Child Autogenes.[14] Thus in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Invisible—and thus "hidden"—Spirit emanates an overflow of luminous water in which he sees a reflection of himself; this self-vision then "first manifests" itself as the second principle Barbelo, the divine First Thought. In turn, Barbelo contemplates the same luminous water from which she had originated in order to generate the third principle, the divine Autogenes as the "First Appearance" of the Invisible Spirit's first power. This method of theogonical ontogenesis through productive self-contemplation is widely attested in other non-Sethian Gnostic theogonies of the second century.[15]

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triad is an emanative triad: it represents the stages of the unfolding and proceeding of the aeon of Barbelo from its source in the Invisible Spirit. In the beginning Barbelo is hidden as purely potential intellect in the Invisible Spirit. Once Barbelo is constituted, Kalyptos will represent the realm of that which truly exists, i.e. the ideas. Next, Barbelo first appears as the male intelligence which is then conceived of as those which exist together, those which are unified (perhaps mind and ideas which are unified through intellection), represented by Protophanes who thinks the ideas of Kalyptos, on the one hand, and acts on the individuals, on the other hand. Finally, Barbelo becomes the self-begotten demiurgical mind which can be identified with the rational part of the world soul. As an established ontological level it is the individuals represented by Autogenes who has the demiurgic role of a world soul. Thus Barbelo corresponds to Numenius' second mind. Insofar as the second mind is participated in and used by the first, i.e. insofar as the second mind is prefigured in the first and thus is the first in a certain way, we have Kalyptos. Insofar as the Numenian second mind is identical with the third and acts through the third it can be compared to Autogenes. *Stricto sensu* the second mind as second mind is comparable to the Protophanes level of the Sethians."

[14] In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Barbelo is the invisible "hidden one," (NHC XIII 38,9–10; cf. 36,6–9: "It is I who am hidden within [radiant] waters. I am the one who gradually put forth the All by my Thought"), the Intellect hidden in silence (46,1 1–23). In Codex Bruce, *Untitled* [Schmidt-MacDermot] the Monogenes is said to be "hidden" in the supreme Setheus (chs. 6–7) or in the "Triple Powered One" (ch. 11)., According to the *Apocryphon of John*, not only Barbelo (NHC II 4,2 7–30; 5,1 1) and her self-generated child Autogenes (6,2 0–21; cf. also the *Gospel of the Egyptians* NHC IV 54,2 1–2; 55,2 5; *Eugnostos the Blessed* NHC III 74,1 4–15), but even the divine Adamas (II 8,3 2) are said to be the "first to appear" (ⲡⲉⲧⲁϥϣⲣⲡ ⲟ[ⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ] ~ πρωτοφανής).

[15] Cf. *Eugnostos* NHC III 75.3 ff. and *Sophia of Jesus Christ* III 99.2 ff. ("the unoriginate Forefather … sees himself within himself, like a mirror, having appeared in his likeness as Self-Father"); *Tripartite Tractate* NHC I 56.32 ff. ("by knowing himself in himself the Father

Now in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, these attributes of "hidden," "first-appearing," and "self-generated," originally applied to the Mother Barbelo as the Invisible Spirit's *feminine* First Thought (ἔννοια) have become designations for the tripartite structure of the *masculine* Aeon (αἴων) of Barbelo reconceived along the lines of a Middle Platonic tripartite intellect.[16] As constituents of the divine intellect, these attributes become conceived as an "intellectual" triad of distinct intelligences Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes.

However, a bit of reflection on the significance of these names would suggest that they could designate, not just mere intellectual and ontological levels of the Barbelo Aeon, but the dynamic process by which the Barbelo Aeon itself gradually unfolds from the Invisible Spirit: at first "hidden" (καλυπτός) or latent in the Spirit as its prefigurative intellect, then "first appearing" (πρωτοφανής)[17] as the Spirit's separately-existing thought or intellect, and finally "self-generated" (αὐτογενης) as a distinct demiurgical mind that operates on the physical world below in accordance with its vision of the archetypal ideas emerging in the divine intellect, Protophanes.[18]

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gave rise to the Son without generation, so that he exists by the Father having him as his thought about himself"); Clem. Alex. *Exc. Theod.* 7.1 ("Being unknown, the Father wished to be known to the aeons, and through his reflection, as if knowing himself … he emitted the Monogenes"); Simon Magus *ap.* Hippolytus, *Refutations* VI.18 ("For Thought that subsists in unity processing forth became two, being rendered manifest to itself from itself [φανεῖς αὐτῷ ἀπό ἑαυτοῦ], the Father passed into a state of duality"); Marcus *ap.* Hippolytus, *Refutations* VI.42 ("The self-existent Father opened His mouth, and sent forth a Logos similar to himself and it stood by him and showed him who he was [ὃς παραστὰς ἐπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ὃ ἦν, that he himself had been manifested as a form of the Invisible One").

[16] *Marsanes* NHC X 9,1–3: "For this reason the Virgin (Barbelo) became male (as νοῦς, i.e., the Aeon [m.] of Barbelo), because she had separated from the male (i.e., the Invisible Spirit)."

[17] Cf. Phanes, *Orphicorum Hymni* 52.5–6; *Papyri Magicae* IV.943–944; cf. Orphic *Argonautica*, line 16 Dottin: Φάνητα … καλέουσι Βτοτοί· πρῶτος γὰρ ἐφάνθη. Note the use of φαίνειν in the following Gnostic testimonia: Simon Magus *apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VI.18.4: "For Thought (ἔννοια) that subsists in unity processing forth became two, being rendered manifest to itself from itself (φανεῖς αὐτῷ ἀπό ἑαυτοῦ), the Father passed into a state of duality"; Marcus *apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VI.42.4: "The self-existent Father opened His mouth, and sent forth a Logos similar to himself and it stood by him and showed him who he was, that he himself had been manifested as a form of the Invisible One" (ὃς παραστὰς ἐπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ὃ ἦν, αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀοράτου μορφὴ φανείς). Cf. Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 242,2 4–253,2 [Schmidt-MacDermot]: "Moreover the power that was given to the forefather is called first-visible because it is he who was first manifest (πρωτοφανής). And he was called unbegotten because no one had created him. And he was (called) the ineffable and the nameless one. And he was also called self-begotten (αὐτογενής) and self-willed because he had revealed himself by his own will."

[18] In *Ad Candidum* 14.11–14, Victorinus hints at a similar progression: "For what is above ὄν is hidden (cf. Kalyptos) ὄν; indeed the manifestation (cf. Protophanes) of the hidden is generation (cf. Autogenes), since ὄν in potentiality generates ὄν in act."

The Noetic Triad of Being-Life-Mind in Plotinus and the Sethian Platonizing Treatises

When it came to working out the actual dynamics of this emanative process, however, the Platonizing Sethian treatises ended up employing a completely different and distinctive terminology to account for the emergence of the Barbelo Aeon from the supreme Invisible Spirit, namely the noetic or "intelligible" triad of Being, Life, and Mind.

Indeed, Plotinus too occasionally employed the terms of the noetic triad to designate phases in the emanation of Intellect from the One,[19] although just as the Sethians ended up confining the Kalyptos-Protophanes-Autogenes triad to their second hypostasis Barbelo, Plotinus too mostly confined the function of the noetic triad to his second hypostasis, Intellect, as a way of portraying Intellect, not as a realm of merely static being, but instead as living and creative thought.[20]

By contrast with Plotinus' implementation, the Platonizing Sethian treatises conceive this intelligible triad as a quasi-hypostatic entity, an intermediary triad of powers called the Invisible Spirit's Triple Power, that functions as the means by which the supreme Invisible Spirit gives rise to the Aeon of Barbelo.[21] It is composed of the three powers of Existence (ὕπαρξις rather

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[19] E.g., *Ennead* VI.7.[38].17.

[20] Justified by Plato, *Sophist* 248e–249b: "Are we really to be so easily persuaded that change, life, soul and intelligence have no place in the perfectly real (παντελῶς ὄν), that is has neither life (ζωή) nor intelligence (νοῦς), but stands aloof devoid of intelligence (φρόνησις)?" and *Timaeus* 39e: "the Nous beholds (καθορᾷ) the ideas resident in the veritable living being (ὅ ἐστι ζῷον); such and go many as exist therein he purposed (διενοήθη) that the universe should contain." Intellect is not a lifeless being, but an act (*Enn*. V.3.[49].5.33–44; cf. II.9.[33].6.14–19; VI.9.[9].9.17; II.5.[25].3.36; V.5.[32].2.9–13). This restriction perhaps owes to his aversion to Middle Platonic and even Gnostic theologies that multiply the number of transcendental hypostases beyond three, since he regarded the supreme One as entirely transcendent to Intellect; there is no being that exists between them as mediator, nor may one distinguish between a higher intellect in repose and a lower one in motion, or a One in act and another One in potency (*Ennead* II.9.[33].1); nor may one distinguish between an intellect at rest, another in contemplation and yet another that reflects or plans (*Ennead* II.9.[33].6) as did Numenius and even Plotinus himself on one occasion (*Ennead* III.9.[13].1).

[21] While *Zostrianos* tends to portray this entity as the Invisible Spirit's inherent three-fold power, *Allogenes* (and *Marsanes*) tends to hypostatize the Triple Power as a quasi-hypostatic "Triple Powered One" or "Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit" interposed between the supreme Unknowable One and the Aeon of Barbelo by identifying it in terms of its median processional phase (e.g., Vitality, Life, Activity; XI 66,3 0–38: "From the One who constantly stands, there appeared an eternal Life, the Invisible and Triple Powered Spirit, the One that is in all existing things and surrounds them all while transcending them all."), although in its initial and final phases it actually *is* these two.

than ὄν, Being), Vitality (ζωότης rather than ζωή, Life), and Mentality (νοότης [or Blessedness in *Zostrianos*] rather than νοῦς, Intellect). Each of its powers designates a distinct phase in the emanation of the Barbelo Aeon: 1) In its initial phase as a purely infinitival Existence (ὕπαρχις or ὀντότης), the Triple Power is latent within and identical with the supreme One; 2) in its emanative phase it is an indeterminate Vitality (ζωότης) that proceeds forth from One; and 3) in its final phase it is a Mentality (νοήτης) or Blessedness that contemplates its prefigurative source in the supreme One and, thereby delimited, takes on the character of determinate being as the intellectual Aeon of Barbelo.[22] Although this nomenclature for the noetic triad does not explicitly appear in the *Apocryphon of John*, its introductory theogony utilizes essentially the same concepts, suggesting that it too was composed in the same conceptual environment: here, the supreme Monad, source of life and blessedness, instantiates his First Thought as the triple-powered Barbelo by contemplating himself in the luminous living water emanating from him.[23]

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[22] E.g., *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 81, 6–20: "She (Barbelo) [was] existing [individually] [as cause] of [the declination]. Lest she come forth anymore or get further away from perfection, she knew herself and him (the Invisible Spirit), and she stood at rest and spread forth on his [behalf] … to know herself and the one that pre-exists."; *Allogenes* NHC XI 45,2 2–30: "For after it (the Barbelo Aeon) [contracted, it expanded] and [spread out] and became complete, [and] it was empowered [with] all of them, by knowing [itself in the perfect Invisible Spirit]. And it [became an] aeon who knows [herself because] she knew that one"; NHC XI 48, 15–17: "it is with [the] hiddenness of Existence that he provides Being, [providing] for [it in] every way, since it is this that [shall] come into being when he intelligizes himself"; NHC XI 49, 5–26: "He is endowed with [Blessedness] and Goodness, because when he is intelligized as the Delimiter (D) of the Boundlessness (B) of the Invisible Spirit (IS) [that subsists] in him (D), it (B) causes [him (D)] to revert to [it (IS)] in order that it (B) might know what it is that is within it (IS) and how it (IS) exists, and that he (D) might guarantee the endurance of everything by being a cause for those who truly exist. For through him (D) knowledge of it (IS) became available, since he (D) is the one who knows what it (IS; or he, D?) is. But they brought forth nothing [beyond] themselves, neither power nor rank nor glory nor aeon, for they are all eternal." Cf. *Apocryphon of John* NHC II 4, 19–28: "For it is he (the Invisible Spirit) who looks at himself in his light which surrounds him, the Fount of living water … the Fount of pure luminous water surrounding him, and his thought became actual and she [Barbelo] appeared"; rather like Narcissus, the Invisible Spirit sees his reflected image and unites with it, but rather than ending in self-annihilation, the visionary act is here productive. The living waters of the baptismal rite have become a transcendent emanation of luminous, living, and self-reflective thinking.

[23] The supreme principle is a monarchical Monad (μονάς; ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲟⲩⲁ, BG 22,1 7) who "always exists" (ⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲁⲉⲓ, BG [Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus] 24,2) and who is "the life that gives life" and "the blessedness that gives blessedness" (25,1 5–16), which is tantamount to a being/existence–life–mind/blessedness triad within the first principle. Moreover, the second principle Barbelo, who originates from the first principle's self contemplation (ⲛⲟⲏ, 26,1 5) of

Let us now see how this ontogenetic metaphysics plays a role in the visionary ascent described in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.

Baptismal Ritual, Triadic Speculation, and Visionary Ascent in Zostrianos

Upon his initial rapture into the heavens, the ascending levels of Zostrianos' ascent are interpreted as baptismal sealings. At each stage of his ascent, he is instructed about the character of the spiritual being inhabiting the level he has achieved, and becomes assimilated to their nature. The ritual of the Five Seals is presented as a sequence of five baptisms in the name of Autogenes, conceived as the lowest of the three sub-intellects comprising the Barbelo Aeon, a kind of demiurgic intellect who presides over the four great Luminaries of traditional Sethian mythology. At each baptism, Zostrianos becomes an certain type of angel that is able to "stand upon" each of these Luminaries in ascending order.[24] Having entered the lowest level of the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos must now ascend through the three major levels of the Barbelo Aeon, the divine intellect comprised of the intellectual triad Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos, here conceived as aeons, each of which is imbued with its own special baptismal water. Each level is distinguished by the degree of enlightenment it conveys as well as by the nature of the knowledge appropriate for cognitive assimilation to the ontological character of its aeonic level:

> *Zost.* NHC VIII 24 [28] [For each] of the aeons [29] [there is] a baptism [30] [of this sort]. Now if [31] [one] *strips off* the world 25 [1] and lays aside [nature], [2] whether one is a *sojourner*, without [3] dwelling place or power, [4] following the practices

himself in the luminous "living" water (ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲓϣ̄, 26,1 8) that emanates from him, is herself called Triple-Powered (BG 27, 21–28,1: ⲧϫⲟ[ⲙ]ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲙ; III 8,2–3: [ⲧϫⲟ]ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲛ̄ⲁⲩⲛ[ⲁⲙⲓⲥ]). Finally, the third principle, the Invisible Spirit's and Barbelo's self-generated Child is, like the Father, also identified as blessed (ⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲛ; BG 30,2–3) and receives Mind (ⲛⲟⲩⲥ, BG 31,5–9 parr.).

[24] Zostrianos successively becomes a "[contemplative] angel" (NHC VIII 6,1 7–18), an "angel of masculine gender" (7,4–6), a "holy angel" (7,1 3), a "perfect angel" (7,1 8–19), whereupon he finally becomes "divine" (53,1 8–19) as he ascends to Autogenes himself, the light that is over them all. Baptism is interpreted in epistemological categories essentially similar to those in Plato's *Symposium* 210–211, where the vision of absolute beauty is achieved by progressive shift of attention away from individual instances of beauty, to the ideal beauty of all forms, and finally to absolute beauty itself, which then discloses itself as a sudden (ἐξαίφνης) and immediate intuition. The next higher stage is therefore achieved by a purifying and unifying synthesis of the experience of the lower stage.

> of [5] others, or whether one *repents*, [6] having committed no sin, [7] being satisfied with knowledge (and) [8] without concern for anything (worldly), [9] *baptisms* are appointed [10] respectively for these; it is the *path* [11] *into the Self-generated ones*. (There is) the one (in the name of Autogenes) [12] in which you have now been baptized each [13] time, which is appropriate for *seeing the* [*perfect*] [14] *individuals*; it is a knowledge [15] of everything, having originated [16] from the powers of the Self-generated ones. [17] (There is) the one you will perform when you *transfer* [18] *to the all-perfect aeons* (of Protophanes). [19] When you wash in the third [20] baptism, [then] you will learn [21] about *those* [*that*] *truly* [*exist*] [22] in [that] place (i.e., of Kalyptos).

The originally ontogenetic function of these intellectual subaeons becomes apparent in their association with three grades of baptismal water whose ultimate source is the supreme intelligible triad of Existence, Vitality and Blessedness by which all reality subsequent to the supreme One is generated:

> *Zost*. NHC VIII 15 [1] And [there exists] a water for [2] [each] of them. Therefore [3] they are [three] perfect waters: [4] It is the water of Life hat [5] belongs to Vitality in which you now [6] have been baptized in the Autogenes. [7] It is the [water] of Blessedness [8] that [belongs] to Knowledge in which you [9] will be [baptized] in the Protophanes. [10] It is the water of Existence [11] [which] belongs to Divinity, that is, [12] to Kalyptos. [13] And the water of Life [14] [exists with respect to] Power, that of [15] [Blessedness] with respect to Essence, [16] and that of [Divinity] with respect to [17] [Existence]. But all [these] [18] [are likenesses and forms of the] Triple Powered One.
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> *Zost*. NHC VIII 22 [4] And [5] the universal intelligence joins in [6] when the [7] water of Autogenes is complete. [8] When one knows it and [9] all these, one has to do with the [10] water of Protophanes; when [11] one unites with him and all these, [12] one has to do with Kalyptos.

This passage suggests that the connection between the noetic Being-Life-Mind triad (in its abstract form as Existence-Vitality-Mentality or Blessedness) and the apparently earlier Kalyptos-Protophanes-Autogenes triad arose in the ritual context of the Sethian baptismal rite. Here, the ascent has become an intellectual act of contemplation whose stages are symbolized by an ascending series of transcendental baptisms in which the various baptismal waters are isomorphically associated with each term of the lower triad of intellects comprising the Barbelo Aeon—Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos—and with the higher noetic triad of powers—Existence, Life, and Blessedness—by which the Invisible Spirit gave rise to the intelligible world.

Since the waters associated with each of these three subaeons signify participation in each of the very powers through which the intelligible

world itself originated, baptism into each successive one enables ascending degrees of spiritual enlightenment or knowledge. Such enlightenment is a progression from awareness of discrete individuality characteristic of ordinary perception toward a vision of the unity of all things including one's own unity with the eternal principles:

> *Zost*. NHC VIII 23 [17] According [18] to each locale one has [19] a portion of the [20] eternal ones [and] ascends [21] [to them. As] one [22] [becomes pure and] simple, [23] just so one continually [approaches] [24] unity. Being [always] [25] pure and [simple], [26] one is filled [with Mentality,] [27] with Existence [and Essence] [28] and a holy Spirit. There is 24 [1] nothing of him outside of him.

As a rite of passage, *Zostrianos* clearly interprets baptism as a series of cognitive acts by which one's perception of self and world undergoes a shift in awareness from multiplicity and fragmentation to unity. The separation phase is achieved Zostrianos' abandonment of his earthly body and successive baptisms in the various realms between earth and the Self-generated Aeons. As a stripping away of worldly preoccupations and ways of thinking, these baptisms broadly resemble the purgative function of the ritual of the Five Seals, such as the stripping away of one's psycho-somatic nature described in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the renunciations in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The liminal phase consists in a gradual loss of the self conceived as a center of awareness of entities outside of oneself; all the powers have become an indistinguishable inner unity. The phase of reincorporation is not so much an integration into a new community such as the seed of Seth as it is into a new supra-personal state of awareness of the unity of one's intellect with the intelligible world, conceived along Platonic lines.[25]

From External to Internal Assimilation

When we come to *Allogenes*, a similar sequence of ascending epistemological states is presented, but without any reference to the baptismal imagery of *Zostrianos*. While Zostrianos' *heavenly* ascent succeeds only in his assimilation to the second of the three levels of the divine intellect designated by the intellectual triad Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos, Allogenes—who

[25] This conception stands in contrast to the more apotropaic conception of baptism in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where receipt of the divine Living Water enables one to escape the influence of the hostile cosmic powers by entering a community that possesses insight into the existence and nature of the superior powers that govern the true world beyond this one.

has already received a vision of the divine intellect while still on earth—now proceeds to become united with the supreme One itself through a purely cognitive assimilation with its three powers designated by the intelligible triad of Existence, Vitality, and Mentality. The ontological progress of this assimilation is marked by his transfer from instability and uncertainty to firm "standing" and entry into successively higher levels of reality and insight.

Now it is crucial to note that, during the mystical ascent, the ascending sequence of these ontological levels is nearly the exact reverse of the sequence of the descending ontogenetic phases or modalities by which the Triple Powered One unfolds into the Aeon of Barbelo. The ascent is described as a centrifugal sequence of self-withdrawals from determinate self-knowledge leading to a loss of awareness and annihilation of self, and ending in union with the self's original prefiguration resident in the supreme One:

> *Allog*. NHC XI 60 [1] There [15] was within me a stillness [16] of silence, and I heard the [17] Blessedness [18] whereby I knew ⟨my⟩ proper self. [19] And I withdrew to the [20] Vitality as I sought ⟨myself⟩ (ⲛ̄ⲥⲱ⟨ⲓ̈⟩; cod. ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲥ; cf. 59, 14 "seeking yourself"). And [21] I joined it [22] and stood, [23] not firmly but [24] quietly. And I saw [25] an eternal, intellectual, undivided motion, [26] all-powerful, [27] formless, undetermined [28] by determination. And when [29] I wanted to stand firmly, [30] I withdrew to [31] the Existence, which I found [32] standing and at rest. [33] Like an image and [34] likeness of [35] what had come upon me; by means of a manifestation [36] of the Indivisible and the [37] Stable I was filled [38] with revelation; by means [39] of an originary manifestation 61 [1] of the Unknowable One, [as though] [2] incognizant of him, I [knew] [3] him and was empowered by [4] him. Having been permanently strengthened, [5] I knew that [which] [6] exists in me, even the Triple-Powered One [7] and the manifestation of [8] his uncontainableness.

In *Allogenes*, these withdrawals constitute a series of reflexive reversions towards the self, as if the entire triad comes to abide within the mystical subject. First perceiving the quiet Blessedness that conveys self-knowledge, Allogenes next seeks himself by withdrawing to and joining with the more indeterminate and unstable level of Vitality. His third and final withdrawal is made towards the completely stable level of Existence, which he finds "standing and at rest." Having himself become "like an image and likeness" of the stability "that has come upon" him, Allogenes is "filled" by the primordial unity and stability that preceded his very own existence, where all cognition and awareness are absent.[26] Thus the withdrawals are essentially acts of

[26] That this sequence of reflexive visions amount to a transformation of the self is con-

self-cognition in which a product retreats into the precognitive vacancy of its "originary manifestation," that is, its own pre-existent prefiguration still latent in the source from which it originally emanated, a notion found also in Plotinus.[27]

It is only a short step for the imagination to transfer these three ascending states of union with the supreme deity through successive acts of contemplative self-knowledge to the very process by which the three phases or powers of the supreme deity's self-cognition give rise to the Aeon of Barbelo through successive acts of self-contemplation. In *Allogenes* ontogenesis apparently begins, not with the First One—the Invisible Spirit, who is pure self-contained activity—but on a secondary level with the self-contraction of the Spirit's Triple Power. It is this initial self-reflexive contraction and subsequent expansion or procession that gives rise to the Aeon of Barbelo, which thereupon achieves initial determination.[28] It then becomes a distinct

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firmed when Allogenes declares that he knows the Triple Powered One who "exists in" him. Similarly Plotinus, *Ennead* V.8[31].10.40–44: "One must transport (μεταφέρειν) what one sees into oneself (εἰς αὐτὸν), and look at it as oneself, as if someone possessed by a god, Phoebus or one of the Muses, could bring about the vision of the god in himself."

[27] *Ennead* III.8.[30].9,2 9–39: "What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it? Rather, the Intellect must first return ["withdraw"], so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it (δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἷον εἰς τοὐπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἷον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὄπισθεν αὐτοῦ ἀμφίστομον ὄντα)—for it faces in both directions; and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is the first life, since it is an activity manifest in the way of outgoing of all things (Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρώτη, ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων; cf. *Allogenes* NHC XI 48, 34–38 'But when they (passively) apprehend (i.e., through a preconception), they participate in the previtality [ⲧⲫⲟⲣⲡ ⲙⲙⲛⲧ̀ⲱⲛϩ = ζωὴ πρώτη], even an indivisible activity [ἐνέργεια], a reality [ὑπόστασις] of the first One, of the One that truly exists'); outgoing not in the sense that it is now in process of going out but that it has gone out (οὐ τῇ διεξιούσῃ, ἀλλὰ τῇ διεξελθούσῃ). If, then, it is life and outgoing and holds all things distinctly and not in a vague general way—for [in the latter case] it would hold them imperfectly and inarticulately—it must itself derive from something else, which is no more in the way of outgoing (ἐν διεξόδῳ), but is the origin of outgoing, and the origin of life and the origin of intellect and all things" (ἀρχὴ διεξόδου καὶ ἀρχὴ ζωῆς καὶ ἀρχὴ νοῦ καὶ τῶν πάντων): trans. A.H. Armstrong. Cf. *Ennead* VI.7[38].15.31–32: δεῖ δὲ ἑαυτὸν ἐκεῖνο γενόμενον τὴν θέαν [ἑαυτὸν] ποιήσασθαι.

[28] One can compare this process of contraction with Moderatus' (*apud* Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum* 231,7–10) "unitary Logos" that inaugurates ontogenesis by depriving itself of the unitary aspects of its multiple Forms Apparently, thus yielding not only the transcendent unity of the First One, but also making room for pure Quantity—perhaps the mere plurality of the Forms—deprived of all unity and proportion as a sort of relative non-being that could be identified with the receptacle of the *Timaeus*. Cf. the similar process in frgs. 3–5 of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where the Father snatches away his own fire or hypostatical identity (ὁ πατὴρ ἥρπασσεν ἑαυτόν, οὐδ᾽ ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ) to yield pure indeterminate power or potential to be informed by his intellective power on a lower level, and Numenius' (frg. 52 des Places) objection to certain Pythagoreans (e.g., Moderatus?) who claim "that this inde-

and structured entity, the tripartite Aeon of Barbelo, by its own further self-reflexive acts of knowing itself and its source:

> *Allog*. NHC XI 45 [21] [O] Triple-Powered One who [22] [truly exists]! For after it [contracted] [23] [it expanded], and [24] [it spread out] and became complete, [25] [and] it was empowered [with] [26] all of them by knowing [itself] [27] [and the perfect Invisible Spirit], [28] and it [became] [29] [an] aeon. By knowing [herself] [30] she (Barbelo) knew that one, [31] [and] she became Kalyptos. [32] [Because] she acts in those whom she [33] knows, [34] she is Protophanes, a perfect, [35] invisible Intellect, Harmedon. [36] Empowering [37] the individuals, she is a triple male (Autogenes).

The process of contemplative union with the Unknowable One is the exact inverse of the process by which of the Barbelo Aeon emanates from the supreme One's Triple Power; the two processes are mirror images of one another. In other words, the power by which the Intellect attains its own mystical union with the supreme principle is the same as that by which it was originally generated, a power that is also present to human aspirants either jointly or individually. The ascending human seeker thus assumes identity, not with the divine Intellect, but with its primordial prefiguration, which eternally subsists as the One's initial moment of self-perception. The first instant of emanation and the penultimate instant of mystical self-reversion thus coincide. The contemplator's acts of self-withdrawal (ἀναχωρεῖν) are equivalent to the self-contraction that precedes the emanation of all subsequent reality from the One's Triple Power.

Having thorough successive acts of self-knowledge retreated into his own pre-existent prefiguration still latent in the source from which all of reality originally emanated, Allogenes has become "like an image and likeness" (ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲙ̅ⲡ̅ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛⲉ) of the primordial unity and stability that now envelops him and which preceded his very own existence.[29] This "image and

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terminate and unlimited Dyad is itself brought forth from the single Unity, as it withdraws from its singular nature and departs into the condition of the Dyad." Such a notion of contraction and expansion clearly draws on the Stoic doctrine of a tensile movement directed alternately outward to produce multiple magnitudes and qualities and inward to produce unity and cohesive substance, a precursor to the Neoplatonic doctrines of procession and reversion: ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος φύσις καὶ ἡ τονικὴ κίνησις, Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* IV 55,7–8; SVF II.451: εἰ δὲ λέγοιεν καθάπερ οἱ Στωϊκοὶ τονικήν τινα εἶναι κίνησιν περὶ τὰ σώματα εἰς τὸ εἴσω ἅμα καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔξω κινουμένην, καὶ τὴν μὲν εἰς τὸ ἔξω μεγεθῶν καὶ ποιοτήτων ἀποτελεστικὴν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἴσω ἑνώσεως καὶ οὐσίας, ἐρωτητέον αὐτοὺς—ἐπειδὴ πᾶσα κίνησις ἀπό τινός ἐστι δυνάμεως—τίς ἡ δύναμις αὕτη καὶ ἐν τίνι οὐσίωται = Nemesius, *De natura hominis* II.42 = Numenius, frg. 4b des Places, as applied to the soul; cf. Hadot 1968: 1.68–77.

[29] This envelopment or investiture (ⲡⲏ ⲉⲧ̀ⲧⲟⲉ ⲉ̀ⲓⲱⲱⲧ̀) is suggestive of ritual investiture

likeness" represents—in the analysis of Zeke Mazur[30]—both 1) the primordial and prenoetic self-manifestation and self-apprehension of the transcendent first principle that gave rise to both universal ontogenesis and the genesis of the first prototypical human being (e.g., Adam as God's "image and likeness" in Gen 1:27; cf. 5:3), and 2) simultaneously represents the contemplative or visionary replication of this self-knowledge by which the human aspirant attains the highest apprehension of and ultimate coalescence with that transcendent principle. This "image and likeness" seems to be the apprehensible representation of the inapprehensible deity, the paradoxical "image of the invisible God" that mediates between human experience and that which transcends human experience altogether. This seems to be a metaphysicization of a general Gnostic principle that salvation—understood as an ascent to an absolutely unknowable principle—was accessible only through the mediation of an image (*eikōn*) of the supreme unknowable principle that somehow also inheres within the human aspirant.

From Baptism to Mystical Union

In this essay, I have tried to suggest that the Sethian treatises exhibit a development from exterior to interior ritual, especially in the ritual context of the baptism of the "Five Seals." In this process, the tactual, auditory and visionary actions of an external physical rite become transformed into an interior contemplative ritual of transcendental ascent through an ascending sequence of epistemological states, a development most evident in the Sethian Platonizing treatise *Zostrianos*.

In the "descent pattern" treatises *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the raising up of the baptizand from the baptismal waters is regarded as the Mother Barbelo's act of raising the initiate out of the physical world and its entanglements into the primordial light. Speculation on the nature and source of the baptismal waters—called the Living Water[31]—has come to conceive them as the transcendent emanative medium of radiant life and thought flowing from the supreme deity

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or the heavenly enrobing in Jewish apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature; a similar notion of investiture also occurs in *Trim. Prot.* XIII 45,1 6–17.

[30] Mazur 2011, 11.

[31] I.e., flowing, Life-giving water (Gen 21:19) whose analogue is the ritually pure water used in the temple and its cleansing rituals (Lev 14:5, 6, 50, 51; Num 5:17, 19:17). Significantly, Zechariah 14:8 uses the expression to describe the water which flows out from Jerusalem to renew the land in the last days (cf. Rev 7:15–17; 21:6; 22:1–2,1 7; Jn 4:7–15 and 7:37–39).

that gave rise to his First Thought, the divine mother Barbelo. Not only is she the one who mediates the primordial divine light to the lower world, but it is also she who authorizes, reveals and confers the very baptismal rite by which one may reenter that light. To be immersed in this luminous water is in fact to be reabsorbed into the self's own primordial point of origin as a portion of the mother's light, in effect retracing or rewinding—or indeed unwinding—the very process by which, not only the transcendent world, but ultimately all levels of reality, came into being. As Barbelo's epithet "womb of the all"[32] suggests, immersion and reemergence from such waters is tantamount to a rebirth, a reentry and reemergence from the cosmic womb, in which the old self is extinguished and the new self is reborn.[33]

In the external baptismal rite, the initial stage of separation is enacted by the renunciation of the world and the god of the thirteen aeons, the stripping away of one's attachment to the body and its passions, and awakening to the revelation of one's divine origin, while in the internal contemplative ritual it amounts to a suppression of the customary sense perception and discursive thought by which the self distinguishes itself from other entities. In the external rite, the stage of liminality is experienced as the advent of heavenly powers and the receipt of a new luminous garment by which one reunites with the divine light, while in its internal contemplative analogue there is a cognitive reversion upon the self culminating in unification with its prefiguration at the point of its origin, an annihilation of the self in its complete coalescence with the supreme One. In the external ritual, the phase of reincorporation is the receipt of a new self-identity as a member of the immortal seed of Seth whom the divine Providence has now freed from the prospect of bodily death and eventual reincarnation, while its internal analogue is a descent through the levels through which one ascended so as to reinhabit one's former body and awaken others to the possibility of union with the supreme.[34]

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[32] Cf. *Ap. John* NHC II 5,5; *Trim. Prot.* NHC XIII 38, 11–16; *Gos. Egypt.* NHC III 43,1; Codex Bruce, *Untitled* ch. 13.

[33] Cf. Nicodemus' literalistic interpretation of Jesus' injunction that one must be reborn/born from above (Jn 3:4, γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν): "Can a man enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

[34] Cf. *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 130,5–9: "Then I came down to the perceptible world and put on my image. Because it was uninstructed, I empowered it and went about preaching the truth to everyone" with Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.9[9].7.22–23, where he says that once one has been sufficiently unified with the supreme principle, one should "come announcing [the union] also to another" (ἥκειν ἀγγέλλοντα … καὶ ἄλλῳ).

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MARCOSIAN RITUALS FOR PROPHECY AND APOLYTROSIS

Niclas Förster

"Another among them (is one) who boasts that he corrected his teacher, Marcus by name, extremely experienced in magical deception …" With these words Irenaeus introduces the Valentinian Gnostic Marcus in the thirteenth chapter of the first book of *Adversus haereses*.[1] By calling him "extremely experienced in magical deception," he inspired the use of the epithet "the Magician" that is still used today.

In spite of the considerable number and quality of sources, Marcus, and his Valentinian doctrine and rites have been neglected in modern research.[2] For a long time, Marcus's speculations about numbers and letters were responsible for this lack of interest. This was because these speculations were not considered to be a serious subject for research. This attitude is reflected in the typical comment of William H. Simcox, who assessed the intellectual level of Marcus's thinking as follows: "Gnosticism as an intellectual system had run its course."[3] Marcus was also called a "mere charlatan"[4] or "Gnostic Casanova".[5]

However Marcus's doctrine, and special Gnostic rites and ceremonies, were not at all mere witchcraft or playing with numbers and letters, but a kind of religious syncretism. I will argue that it was so successful precisely because it was not understood as a syncretistic mixture of different religions and non-religious traditions. I will begin by establishing Marcus's dates. Thereafter, I will turn my attention to the community-life and cultic practice of the Marcosians and the challenge presented to the early Catholic Church by Marcosian syncretism. Finally, I will discuss why Christians of the second and third century became Marcosians. At the end I will give a brief survey of Marcus's gnosis in the setting of second and third century religion.

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[1] *AH* 1.13.1: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 189: ·Ἄλλος δέ τις τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς, τοῦ διδασκάλου διορθωτὴς εἶναι καυχώμενος, Μάρκος δὲ αὐτῷ ὄνομα, μαγικῆς ὑπάρχων κυβείας ἐμπειρότατος.

[2] The first monograph on Marcus was Förster 1999.

[3] Simcox 1881, 364. He also poured scorn on Marcus as a "impostor and villain" (1881, 363).

[4] Kidd 1922, 213.

[5] Filoramo 1990, 168.

Dating Marcus the So-Called Magician

Unfortunately the reports of the Fathers of the Church on Marcus tell us almost nothing about his biography. The dates of his birth and death, and his place of origin, are unknown as is the geographic starting point of his missionary work.[6]

However, on the basis of the work written by Irenaeus against the heretics, it is at least possible to deduce a *terminus ante quem*. This is because it can be assumed that Marcus has successfully spread his teaching for quite a long time before Irenaeus started to write his book. This is suggested by two pieces of information given by Irenaeus.[7]

On the one hand, he quotes from a poem mocking the Gnostic.[8] The mere existence of such a poem presupposes quite a long period in which Marcus taught and successfully spread his Gnostic thought and stood out owing to the difference between his teaching and the doctrine of the church. Only after that could he have become the target of such a fierce literary attack.

On the other hand, Irenaeus expressly reports on the missionary work done by "pupils" of Marcus in the river valley of the Rhône,[9] i.e. in the immediate vicinity of Lyon, the seat of Irenaeus' bishopric.[10] This implies that a group of adherents had developed in the meantime, which was loosely associated with Marcus and was independently spreading his teaching. This fact makes it also likely that several years had already passed since the first appearance of Marcus as a Gnostic missionary. It remains unknown if at this point of time Marcus was still alive and, if so, where he was living.

Irenaeus does not offer us a specific date for Marcus's activities, although by inference, it might be possible to reconstruct the general period in which Marcus carried out his missionary work. Because the first book of the large work of Irenaeus written against the Gnostics can be dated around 180 CE, Marcus probably taught between 160 and 180 CE.[11]

Irenaeus does, however, specify that the Gnostic carried out his missionary activity primarily in Asia Minor. This means that he was active in a very old centre of Christianity where a dense net of Christian communi-

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[6] Förster 1999, 389.

[7] Cf. N. Förster 1999, 38.

[8] Cf. e.g. *AH* 1.15.6: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 251–252. On this poem, cf. Förster 1999, 18–22, 389.

[9] *AH* 1.13.7: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 205; cf. on this Förster 1999, 159–160.

[10] Förster 1999, 389–390.

[11] Förster 1999, 390.

ties had already been established. In this region he travelled around, visiting the existing Christian communities and trying to convert their members to his own Gnostic ideas. That Marcus taught in Asia Minor suggests that his Gnostic teachings could have been closely connected to the ideas of other Gnostic groups spread in the same area around the same time, principally the so-called "Anatolian school" of Valentinianism.[12] It should be noted, however, that Irenaeus reports several points in the teaching of Marcus, which are reminiscent of the Western, the so-called "Italian school" of Valentinian Gnostics too.[13]

Community-Life and Cultic Practice of the Marcosians

From our current perspective, the Marcosians occupy a very interesting place among the Valentinian groups in the second and third century, because Irenaeus' work contains not only a report on the doctrine of Marcus but also information about the cult and the community-life of this Valentinian group. His report is very valuable among the reports of the Fathers of the Church, since it allows us to look at the form and sequence of the rites in the Gnostic service, whereas in other Valentinian groups we possess only cultic formulas that are isolated from their religious context. The *sitz im leben* of such formulas, in these cases, cannot be ascertained. In the exerpts of Irenaeus are also valuable because in his report about the rites and cultic formulas, the influence of the different, older traditions of Marcus's (pagan) religious and cultic environment can be proved.

According to Irenaeus, the Marcosians were, at least at the beginning of their history, a small faction within a Christian community. The Gnostics went to the Christian service and for some time they were not perceived negatively. In addition to Christian ritual they practised their own separate cult, partly in the course of a common meal. This cult was reserved form members of their group and for those who wanted to join them.[14]

Rite of Initiation

A rite of initiation set the seal on the introduction and reception of new members of the Marcosian group. In the course of this ceremony Marcus

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[12] Förster 1999, 390.
[13] Förster 1999, 390.
[14] Förster 1999, 128–129, 400.

himself or one of his adherents changed the color of wine from white to red. For this he used a non-toxic plant pigment.[15] Thereafter he probably asked some of those present to drink.

Is it possible, as many interpreters think, that this ritual was a Gnostic imitation or modification of the eucharist? Probably not.[16] Jesus and the Eucharistic words pronounced over the bread and the cup are not mentioned. No bread was shared in the course of the meal. Other sources attest that the eucharist among the Valentinians was derived without major changes from the Christian liturgical practice.

Therefore, the rite, in which the color of wine was changed, was a new ritual form invented by Marcus. It had a specifically gnostic meaning. In its course, the changing color of the wine symbolized and manifested the presence of the divine. It was interpreted by Marcus as the appearance of "Charis," the highest female aeon of the Valentinian Pleroma. This aeon was believed to rain down her red blood, which corresponded to the red color of the wine.

With this idea Marcus followed the rules of popular faith in so-called "sympathetic" connections between similar things like red wine and red blood.[17] By drinking the blood symbolized by the red wine, the Marcosians regarded themselves as endowed with supernatural knowledge by which they were enabled to speak as prophets. This had parallels in some minor Greek oracles,[18] e.g. Larissa in Argos und Aigeira in Achaea, where women received the divine revelation after drinking sacrificial blood. In these places blood inspired the local priestess, so that she could speak in the person of the God. However, the blood was not symbolized by red wine but taken from an animal ritually slaughtered as divinatory sacrifice.

Besides such influences from pagan oracles and divination, the Marcosian rite in which the color of wine was changed had also a special Gnostic meaning. This can be detected with help of the formula that was combined with this ceremony. This formula is quoted by Irenaeus in *Adv. Haer*. I 13,3 and was separated, probably for polemical reasons,[19] from his description of the ritual in *Adv. Haer*. I 13,2. If one analyses the rite in the light of the formula its Gnostic meaning becomes clear. The formula quoted by Irenaeus in *Adv. Haer*. I 13,3 expresses the conviction that Marcus could influence the

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[15] Förster 1999, 77.
[16] Förster 1999, 66–69.
[17] Förster 1999, 78–79.
[18] Pausanias, *Graeciae Descripto* 2.24.1 and 7.25.13. On this passages cf. Förster 1999, 79–81.
[19] Förster 1999, 72–74.

highest female aeon Charis, also called Ennoia or Sige, and that he could transmit this Charis to persons who were more appropriate than others:[20]

> I am eager to make you a partaker of my Charis, for the Father of all continually beholds your angel before his face. But the mightiness' place is in us; we must be restored to the One. First receive the Charis from me and through me. Prepare yourself as a bride awaiting her bridegroom, that you may be what I am, and I what you are. Place the seed of the light in your Bridal Chamber. Receive the bridegroom from me; contain him and be contained in him. Behold Charis has descended upon you; open your Mouth and prophesy.

This formula presupposes that Marcus could, probably because of his prophetic knowledge, identify the spiritual humans. To this group of persons he transmitted Charis. Those who belonged to Marcus' group were required to have an angelic heavenly counterpart, the angel before the face of the father mentioned in the text of the formula above.[21] Marcus also equated these angels with the aeons of the Pleroma.

Underlying this rite and its formula is a typically Valentinian concept shared by the Marcosians: each spiritual human being can be united, during his lifetime, in a kind of spiritual marriage with her or his personal angel. Marcus's ceremony confirmed this spiritual matrimony on the level of ritual practice. Comparable Valentinian rites are mentioned in other sources. Irenaeus tells us, that some Valentinians "prepare a Bridal Chamber and perform a mysterious initiation with invocations for the initiates and define these actions of theirs as spiritual marriages in imitation of higher unions."[22]

Among the Marcosians, Charis united bride and groom and brought the angel to the Gnostic.[23] She could achieve this because she was on a higher heavenly level and the subordinated angels had to fellow her command. The male and female Marcosians were brides to their angels.[24] In this respect their true earthly sex was of no importance probably because every human

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[20] *AH* 1.13.3: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 194–195: Μεταδοῦναί σοι θέλω τῆς ἐμῆς Χάριτος, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Πατὴρ τῶν ὅλων τὸν ἄγγελόν σου διὰ παντὸς βλέπει πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ. Ὁ δὲ τόπος τοῦ Μεγέθους ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστι· δεῖ ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸ ἓν καταστῆναι. Λάμβανε πρῶτον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ καὶ δι' ἐμοῦ τὴν Χάριν. Εὐτρέπισον σεαυτὴν ὡς νύμφη ἐκδεχομένη τὸν νυμφίον ἑαυτῆς, ἵνα ἔσῃ ὃ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ ὃ σύ. Καθίδρυσον ἐν τῷ νυμφῶνί σου τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ φωτός. Λάβε παρ' ἐμοῦ τὸν νυμφίον, καὶ χώρησον αὐτὸν καὶ χωρήθητι ἐν αὐτῷ. Ἰδοὺ ἡ Χάρις κατῆλθεν ἐπί σε· ἄνοιξον τὸ στόμα σου καὶ προφήτευσον.

[21] Förster 1999,98–102.

[22] *AH* 1.21.3: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 298–299: Οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν νυμφῶνα κατασκευάζουσι, καὶ μυσταγωγίαν ἐπιτελοῦσι μετ' ἐπιρρήσεών τινων τοῖς τελουμένοις καὶ πνευματικὸν γάμον φάσκουσιν εἶναι τὸ ὑπ' αὐτῶν γινόμενον κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῶν ἄνω συζυγιῶν; on this ritual cf. Förster 1999, 106–107.

[23] Förster 1999, 103–105; cf. also Gaffron 1969, 186–187.

[24] The Bridal Chamber seems to be located in the human soul, cf. Schenke 1997, 353.

soul was regarded as feminine.[25] This is also the grammatical gender of the Greek word ψυχή.[26] Marcus also described the union with the angel using the image of semen put into a human being as a germ of light endowing him or her with the gift of prophecy.

The ability to speak as a prophet was an experience with far reaching consequences for the life of every Marcosian. Because of Irenaeus' polemic, it is difficult to establish what exactly induced the prophetic words and utterances. However, one can assume, that the prophecy was based on a self-induced state of over-breathing.[27] This could explain why Irenaeus quoted "a greater man" as his source and hinted by this quotation to air as a means for chancing the Marcosian mind and fevering their soul: "a greater man than I has said: An impudent and shameless thing is a soul made feverish by empty air."[28] The "feverish" soul mentioned by Irenaeus may allude to the observation that intentionally increased breathing often causes sweating.[29] The prophecy consisted of associations and spontaneous ideas induced by hyperventilation.

In addition to prophetic words and utterances, there were visions reported. Irenaus tells us that Marcus had visionary experiences, including a vision of the Supreme Tetrad, descended from invisible, unnameable places in the Pleroma in female form.[30] Because of the widely attested polemic that shaped Irenaeus' report, this interpretation of the Marcosian prophecy must be tentative. Despite all uncertainties, however, it seems clear that after passing through the rite in which the color of wine was changed, all Marcosians regarded themselves as prophets. So in the course of their common meal gatherings, they were chosen by lot for prophesying.[31]

Can we discern what the religious basis of this rite might have been? As in other Valentinian ceremonies described in the sources, traces of pagan myths can be detected. For the cultic formula, the fertility myths were of crucial importance, above all, because the male sky fertilized the female earth through rain.[32] Also present in the rite is the idea of the so-called

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[25] Förster 1999, 108.

[26] *Exeg. Soul*, NHC II,6, 127.20–23. Cf. on this passage Förster 1999, 108.

[27] Förster 1999, 25–26, 119–120.

[28] *AH* 1.13.3: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 196: ὁ κρείσσων ἡμῶν ἔφη περὶ τῶν τοιούτων, ὅτι τολμηρὸν καὶ ἀναιδὲς ψυχὴ κενῷ ἀέρι θερμαινομένη.

[29] Förster 1999, 119.

[30] *AH* 1.14,1: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 206.

[31] *AH* 1.13.4: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 199; cf. Förster 1999, 131–132.

[32] Förster 1999, 87–88.

sacred marriage, widely attested in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Marcosian rite was also reflective of various interpretations related to prophecy in the important Greek oracles. For instance, the Pythia in the Delphic oracle was regarded as a vehicle of the divine, what was described as a sexual union between the Pythia and her divine partner Apollo.[33] In addition, the influence of popular belief in guardian angels and in cosmic sympathy shaped the Marcosian rite, including the influence of Jewish speculations on wisdom. The latter is also found in the works of Philo of Alexandria, where wisdom comes from heaven like rain; she is absorbed by human beings like a drink and bears good fruit on a good field.[34] We encounter an allusion to and quotation of this metaphor in the Synoptic gospels too.

The Gnostic syncretism that shaped this ritual and its formula is also clear. But what was the place of this rite and its formula in the Gnostic service? By interpreting the information provided by Irenaeus the following picture emerges. Spiritual matrimony and the corresponding rite connected with the changing color of wine were probably a ceremony of initiation that was performed once by entering into the Gnostic group.[35] It required no repetition.

The increasing prophetic knowledge was symbolised by another special rite that was also connected with the drinking of wine. In this ceremony a kind of effervescent powder was used to make a goblet of wine overflow. Thereafter, the rest of this wine was shared while Marcus or one of his adherents pronounced the following formula over the goblet:[36]

> May the inconceivable and ineffable Charis who is before all things fill your inner man and increase in you her knowledge, by sowing the grain of the mustard seed in the good ground.

This second rite was probably exclusively reserved for those Marcosians who were already united in spiritual marriage with their angels as their heavenly counterparts. In its formula these angels are compared with the grain of mustard already seed in a good soil.[37]

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[33] Förster 1999, 112–115.

[34] Cf. e.g. Philo, *De fuga et inventione* 166 and *De migratione Abrahami* 34–35; on these passage Förster 1999, 82–83; 115–116.

[35] Förster 1999, 121.

[36] *AH* 1.13.2: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 192–193: Ἡ πρὸ τῶν ὅλων ἀνεννόητος καὶ ἄρρητος Χάρις πληρώσαι σου τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον καὶ πληθύναι ἐν σοὶ τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτῆς, ἐγκατασπείρουσα τὸν κόκκον τοῦ σινάπεως εἰς τὴν ἀγαθὴν γῆν.

[37] This is has to be understood as allusion to biblical passages; cf. Mark 4:31; Matt 13:31; Luke 13:19 and Förster 1999, 87.

The Marcosian Apolytrosis

The union with the angel was also supposed to manifest its worth after the death of each Gnostic, in the face of the dangers of the world beyond, during the ascent to the Pleroma. Special last rites, the Apolytrosis, served as a means to the expected redemption. The formula of this ceremony was a kind of invocation that was supposed to ensure the salvation of the Gnostic when, in the moment immediately following his death, he was judged by the Demiurge.

This is presupposed by the formula connected with this rite that served as a kind of password for escaping this judgement after death. The pneumatic class of human beings, with the help of such saving knowledge, could liberate itself from the mundane sphere and, very importantly for their redemption, from the sphere of influence of the Demiurge.[38]

The salvation of the pneumatic human beings occurs for Valentinians, as it does for Marcus, with the appearance of Jesus.[39] A celestial "Christ" formed from all thirty aeons of the Pleroma is united with the earthly "Jesus" in the shape of the dove that came down onto Jesus, when he was baptized in the Jordan.[40] Therefore, Marcus considered Jesus to be a divine messenger who brought the information about his own heavenly origin and the "indescribable" first God, whom Marcus also called "Father." Furthermore, the preaching of Jesus radically brought an end to the ignorance of all listeners who had not been conscious of their real origin. Marcus defined this meaning for the pneumatic human beings as follows "… then, when they recognized him, they were freed from (their) ignorance, went up from death to life (…)."[41] "The father of all things wanted to abolish ignorance and to destroy death. The knowledge of him became the abolition of ignorance."[42] Thus abolishing ignorance by knowing Jesus and the Father of all things could protect from the final death. But the knowledge that the spiritual element exists in the world and how it can be saved must be conveyed also. The Gnostics instructed by Marcus's teachings were aware of their heavenly

[38] Bousset 1907, 315.

[39] Förster 1999, 338–340.

[40] Förster 1999, 255–256.

[41] *AH* 1.15.2: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 240–241: τότε γνόντες αὐτὸ ἐπαύσαντο τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἐκ θανάτου δὲ εἰς ζωὴν ἀνῆλθον.

[42] *AH* 1.15.2: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 241: Τεθεληκέναι γὰρ τὸν Πατέρα τῶν ὅλων λῦσαι τὴν ἄγνοιαν, καὶ καθελεῖν τὸν θάνατον. Ἀγνοίας δὲ λύσις ἡ ἐπίγνωσις αὐτοῦ ἐγίνετο; cf. on this passage Förster 1999, 337.

origin and prepared for the union with the angel waiting for them in the heavenly sphere.

The Apolytrosis also served the same purpose on the level of ritual practice.[43] Underlying this ceremony is a typically Valentinian concept, that the Gnostic has after his or her death to pass through the heavenly spheres. The spiritual matrimony with the angel in this life anticipates the perfect union. But the definitive spiritual union will take place in the Bridal Chamber of the Pleroma. Then "the wedding feast, common to all who have been saved, will take place."[44]

Among the Marcosians the formula of Apolytrosis served as a means to protect the knowing Gnostics on their way into the Pleroma:[45]

> O you, who sittest beside God, and the mystical Sige before the aeons, you through whom the mightinesses, who continually behold the face of the Father, having you as their guide and introducer, draw their froms heavenward—which appeared to her to the greatly-daring one and because of the goodness of the Propater she produced us as their images, having a dreamlike notion of the things on high—behold, the judge is nigh, and the herald orders me to make my defence. But do you, as understanding the affairs of us both, render an account to the judge for us both as if it is one.

In the formula a heavenly being, which can be identified as Sophia, is implored as sitting besides Sige and Propater, the highest aeons of the Valentinian Pleroma. Its introductory passage was probably later expanded by an explanatory gloss that underlies the role of Sophia's dreams in creation.[46] However, it seems clear that Sophia will enter the Pleroma to celebrate her eternal nuptials with the Savior followed by the pneumatic beings who are finely reunited with their male counterparts. On their way they have to pass the judgement of the deaths. This is imagined in accordance with the proceedings in an earthly court of justice. A herald calls the deceased for interrogation. The formula of Apolytrosis becomes the means of asserting the

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[43] Förster 1999, 144.

[44] *Exc. Theo*. 63.2: Sagnard 1948, 186: Εἶτα, τὸ δεῖπνον τῶν γάμων κοινὸν πάντων τῶν σῳζομένων.

[45] *AH* 1.13.6: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 203–204: Ὦ πάρεδρε Θεοῦ καὶ μυστικῆς πρὸ Αἰώνων Σιγῆς, δι' ἧς τὰ μεγέθη διὰ παντὸς βλέποντα τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Πατρὸς, ὁδηγῷ σοι καὶ προσαγωγεῖ χρώμενα, ἀνασπῶσιν ἄνω τὰς αὐτῶν μορφὰς, ἃς ἡ μεγαλότολμος ἐκείνη φαντασιασθεῖσα διὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τοῦ Προπάτορος προεβάλετο ἡμᾶς τὰς εἰκόνας αὐτῶν, τότε ἐνθύμιον τῶν ἄνω ὡς ἐνύπνιον ἔχουσα· ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς ἐγγὺς καὶ ὁ κῆρύξ με κελεύει ἀπολογεῖσθαι· σὺ δὲ, ὡς ἐπισταμένη τὰ ἀμφοτέρων, τὸν ὑπὲρ ἀμφοτέρων ἡμῶν λόγον ὡς ἕνα ὄντα τῷ κριτῇ παράστησον.

[46] Förster 1999, 147–150.

Marcosians freedom from the Demiurge because they are obliged to recite it when the herald calls them.[47]

Then in response to the invocation, Sophia will intervene on behalf of those who are already united with their angels. She presents them to the judge "as one."[48] Thus the angel, with whom each Marcosian was united, ensured for them the help of heavenly beings such as the aeon Sophia, who will assist them in the dangers of the beyond. She protects their ascents, the celestial journey awaiting the Marcosians immediately after death, against all interferences of the Demiurge.

Also magical means served this purpose. It is said that Sophia uses the Homeric hat of Hades for making the wearer invisible.[49] According to Irenaeus the Apolytrosis made the Marcosians self-confident and even proud.[50] They regarded themselves as freed from the fear of eternal punishment that could endanger their salvation.

We are informed about the later development of the Marcosians by Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium*. In Hippolytus words it shines through that he had personal contact with Marcosians, probably in Rome.[51] He even mentions that some of them criticized Irenaeus' report on them and rejected his polemic.[52] From Hippolytus' description we also understand how the Marcosian Apolytrosis developed in the third century.

Hippolytus regarded the Marcosians as an independent Gnostic group separated from the church and headed by its own Gnostic bishop.[53] This shows that the Marcosian community moved toward a structure, which paralleled the church in order to compete successfully with it. According to Hippolytus, the special Gnostic rites effectively stabilized the Marcosian group. These rites were arranged as a system of initiatory grades and could be compared with symbolic steps of a ladder involving not only initiation but also aspects of a *disciplina arcani*. Therefore the cultic area of the Marcosian life underwent a profound transformation and their rites became a kind of secret mysteries to which not everyone, even not every Gnostic, had immediate access. Only the Gnostic bishop could perform all ceremonies

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[47] Förster 1999, 151–152.

[48] Sagnard 1947, 419.

[49] Förster 1999, 152; cf. also Bousset 1907, 295 and Schenke 2012, 97.

[50] Förster 1999, 142–144.

[51] Förster 1999, 27, 390.

[52] *AH* 6.42.1. This reaction of Irenaeus'report by the Marcosians is a unique exception, cf. Förster 1999, 27–29 and 412.

[53] Valentinian bishops are also mentioned in other sources; cf. on this Förster 1999, 157–158.

and recite their corresponding formulas because their exact wordings were restricted to his secret knowledge.[54]

As a first step after joining the Marcosians, Hippolytus mentions baptism.[55] This probably presupposes that the Marcosians did missionary work among pagans and baptised them before entering their group.[56] The last step of the symbolic ladder was reached with the Apolytrosis. Their formula was only revealed to the dying Marcosians by their bishop watching over them at the moment of death. Then the bishop put his hands on their head and whispered the formula of Apolytrosis into their ears.[57] According to Hippolytus, these last rites kept the Gnostic group "inseparably" (ἀχώριστοι)[58] together and its members eagerly desired "to learn what that might be which is spoken at the last."[59]

The Separation of the Marcosians from the Early Catholic Church

With help of the special rites and teachings I have just described, Marcus's circle could establish and stabilize itself within a Christian community. At least at the beginnings before the office of bishop mentioned by Hippolytus developed, Marcus and his adherents considered themselves to be Christians and led, so to speak, a double life. Because of their Gnostic knowledge and their prophetic abilities, they regarded themselves as a kind of Christian elite.[60]

But what caused the separation of the church? Irenaeus describes the fierce controversy shaping the period of separation between the Marcosians and the early Catholic church. The controversy started when Christians were invited to the cultic meals of the Marcosians and refused to accept their special rites. After distancing themselves from the Gnostics they alarmed the local bishop.[61] In the following time both sides struggled for those Christians who had already joined the Marcosian group. Irenaeus illustrates this

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[54] *AH* 6.41.4.

[55] *AH* 6.41.2–3.

[56] Förster 1999, 155.

[57] Förster 1999, 156–157.

[58] *AH* 6.41.4: Marcovich 1986, 258.

[59] *AH* 6.41.4: Marcovich 1986, 259: γλιχομένους μαθεῖν τὸ τί ποτε εἴη ἐκεῖνο, τὸ ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων λεγόμενον.

[60] Förster 1999, 130–131; 141–143; 413. Hippolytus underlines that after the Apolytrosis the "knowing" Marcosians belonged to the "perfect," *AH* 6.41.4: Marcovich 1986, 259: τελείων ἔσται ὁ μανθάνων.

[61] Förster 1999, 128–129.

by describing how the wife of a deacon from Asia Minor had left her husband to join Marcus and his adherents. "Then, when the brethren had brought her to repentance with great difficulty, she spent the whole time in confession weeping and lamenting the defilement which she had receive from the magician."[62]

In Hippolytus' time, the Marcosians were no longer considered to be members of the Church and had to worship as a completely separate group. However, they imitated the hierarchy of the church by establishing their own Marcosian bishops. This mimicry was combined with bold elitism, which could also help to draw the boundaries to all outsiders and keep the group together.

What kind of challenge did a Valentinian special community like the Marcosians, with their teachings and rites, present to the early Catholic Church? To understand the threatening competition of such a Gnostic group, we need to remember that the Gnostics were unquestionably successful with their missionary work. This led to a serious dispute with the majority of the church and finally to the expulsion of the Gnostics.

But what made this Gnostic challenge so threatening? According to the picture drawn by Irenaeus, a crucial question was the following: How did Christian redemption work?[63] It seems quite clear that Marcus's understanding of redemption eliminated or relativised many of the convictions of the Christian faith that could be difficult to accept.

For Marcus, the redemption of humankind depended not just on Christ's death on the cross, which absolved the human from sin. It depended on the revelation of Gnostic knowledge that Jesus brought from his heavenly Father and preached to all human beings. The resurrection was, according to Irenaeus' excerpts, never even mentioned in Marcus's teachings. Its place was taken by the doctrine of the return of every Pneumatic to his or her origin in the Pleroma. The pre-condition for this was the Gnosis brought by the redeemer and the union of each Pneumatic with the divine, a union that first occurred with the aeon Charis and then with the personal angel

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[62] *AH* 1.13.5: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 201: ἔπειτα μετὰ πολλοῦ κόπου τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐπιστρεψάντων αὐτὴν, τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἐξομολογουμένη διετέλεσε, πενθοῦσα καὶ θρηνοῦσα ἐφ' ᾗ ἔπαθεν ὑπὸ τοῦ μάγου διαφθορᾷ. Irenaeus uses this for attacking Marcus whom he considered to be a womanizer and seducer "especially interested in woman, particularly in wealthy, elegant woman, whom he frequently attempts to seduce" (Μάλιστα γὰρ περὶ γυναῖκας ἀσχολεῖται καὶ τούτων τὰς εὐπαρύφους καὶ περιπορφύρους, καὶ πλουσιωτάτας, ἃς πολλάκις ὑπάγεσθαι πειρώμενος), *AH* 1.13.3: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 194.

[63] Förster 1999, 405–410.

waiting in the Pleroma. The descent of Charis became apparent through the invention of the Macrosican ceremony that I discussed earlier.

What caused Christians in the second and third centuries to become Marcosians? This question cannot be answered with any certainty because neither Irenaeus nor Hippolytus or any other Church Fathers properly understood the reasons that induced many Christians to follow Marcus. They thought of these Christians as seduced, deceived, and even bewitched. So they poured fierce invectives on the head of their leader Marcus. Their accusations can be relatively easily exposed as unfounded, and as using standard arguments of ancient polemic, for example, abusing Marcus as a kind of Gnostic Casanova.[64]

The true motives only become accessible, so to speak, *ex negative*, that is, through the direction of the polemical attacks of the Fathers of the Church. Because it was so difficult to make successful arguments against their Gnostic opponents, the true motives of Gnostic conversion must be recovered from the assault of the Fathers of the Church, who were forced to give their readers counter-arguments against this Gnostic *causa fidei*. Even with the reservation that we are dealing with incomplete and polemically distorted tradition, we can determine three central targets of these accusations.

First is the Gnostics' marked sense of forming an elite, an identity that Irenaeus mentions again and again. This distinctive self-confidence as a Christian elite was founded in, and reinforced by, the prophetic experience. It also immunized the Gnostic group against criticism and gave authority to their teachings. It seems that the experience of prophecy convinced the majority of Marcus's new adherents, especially if it was felt to be a far-reaching event in their own lives.

Second is the distinctive Marcosian idea of redemption, that can be experienced *hic et nunc*, this means in a spiritual marriage of every Gnostic, during his lifetime, to his angel. This principle made it possible to anticipate the conditions of redemption, i.e. the union with the angel, in the rite that could, therefore, provide a convincing conversion experience for each Gnostic. His or her salvation was then not only a hope for the future but, with some restrictions, a lived reality.[65] The rites of the Marcosians also served the purpose of making the union with Charis and the angel, so to speak, "tangible" through the change of the colour of the wine and making the goblet overflow. By these rites, in addition, potential adherents who were

[64] Förster 1999, 411–412.
[65] Förster 1999, 413–414.

invited to the Gnostic common meals became interested in being taught and initiated.

Third, the special last rite, the Apolytrosis, appears to have been an additional attraction. The belief that certain invocations could protect against all the dangers of the beyond was evidently so attractive that all the attempts made by the majority church failed to persuade Marcosians to return to their old Christian community. The early Catholic Church got into great difficulties, because it stood by its belief in God as judge rather than the Demiurge, and in the Last Judgement as taking place at the end of the world and not in an immediate judgement after death. The Church had no rite that could compete with this Gnostic ceremony, as Hippolytus implies. So many Marcosians remained with their bishop, who could promise them redemption immediately after death using the formula of Apolytrosis.

The Syncretism of Marcus' Gnosis in Late Antiquity

Marcus tried to make early Christian tradition interesting and convincing for the educated strata of society. He put into practice this intention by adapting his Gnostic speculations to the pagan education of many Christians. This resulted in a growing pagan influence on his system. The end result was a system of teachings that was the consequence of a process of pagan adaptation. It could be called a wild and undomesticated philosophy of religion, with strongly syncretistic characteristics. Yet it still wanted to be considered Christian.

Thus it can be observed that Marcus' teachings and the ceremonies of his group show the clear characteristics of an eclecticism based on the general education of his time. It could be regarded as an individually chosen mixture of traditions of very different origin.[66] Marcus's inherent eclecticism, which led to the combination of these different elements, was probably responsible for the growing persuasiveness of his ideas in the eyes of his adherents. It can be assumed that the majority of these adherents had a pagan background before conversion to Christianity. Marcus adapted their worldview so that these new Christians could recognize in his teachings elements of their own education such as, for example, theories of Greek grammar, arguments of contemporary philosophy, or parts of myths.

[66] Förster 1999, 416.

It cannot be established with certainly which stratum of society Marcus belonged to and where he was educated. He probably was self-taught and garnered his knowledge of neo-Pythagorean numerology that shaped his doctrine from contemporary philosophical handbooks. His system of teachings did not fulfill the requirements of a higher philosophical education, such as the academic Platonism of the second century. Marcus refused to accept philosophical methods of thinking, like rationality as a method of drawing conclusions. Rather, he built his system on speculations about letters and numbers, a method that was not entirely above suspicion of arbitrariness. Yet it was this way of thinking played an important role in spreading Marcus' ideas and complied with the wishes of his adherents who were looking for redemption.

The essence of Marcus's teachings was deeply syncretistic. However, Marcus was completely unaware of his syncretism and the non-Christian elements in his system. This kind of syncretism, that did not regard itself as syncretism, seems to have made a deep impression on its Christian environment.[67] This was probably because Marcus could combine through his associative chains and pseudo-arguments almost anything with almost anything else. He did not ask the difficult, and often unsolvable question, whether these heterogeneous parts of traditions belonged together.

Marcus and his adherents, however, were able to describe themselves as Christians. At the same time, they were able to remain deeply committed to their basic pagan outlook without regarding this as a syncretistic mixture of religion.[68] The basic tendency towards the adaptation of pagan religion shaped not only Marcus's doctrine but also the rites of his community. Marcus combined elements of Valentinianism, the popular belief in guardian angels, cosmic sympathy and the ceremonies of pagan oracles. A very important influence came also from the mystery-cults, especially the initiation rite that Irenaeus describes. But why did Marcus approximate with his rites the ceremonies of the mystery-cults? The answer to this question must be in many respects hypothetical. Yet it is reasonable to think that Marcus was motivated to ritually express the experience of the divine, and the union with the divine, as a special status. He wanted people to be able to access a higher status, one that could be reached during a person's lifetime and one that would protect a person in the hereafter. The center of Marcosian

[67] On this form of syncretism, see Berner 1982, 95–109, Wagner 1994, 240–243 and Förster 1999, 409.

[68] Förster 1999, 417–418.

religion was the expansion and deepening of divine self-manifestation and this purpose linked it with the mystery-cults and their special rites. Marcus' cult, perhaps, could be viewed as an acute endeavor for union with the divine and for the immediacy of its experience.

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RITUAL IN THE HEKHALOT LITERATURE

James R. Davila*

The paper will provide a succinct catalogue of the rituals described in the Hekhalot literature, with minimal analysis or commentary. Following Evan M. Zuesse, I define "ritual," as "those conscious and voluntary, repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences."[1] I use the term "praxis" here to mean an assemblage of ritual acts and, often, ascetic disciplines which is created to produce a particular outcome. The textual corpus consists of the standard macroforms of the Hekhalot literature along with some relevant fragments from the Cairo Geniza.[2] I have omitted *3 Enoch*/*Sefer Hekhalot* and the *Massekhet Hekhalot* from my analysis because the first is an ascent apocalypse, the second is a description of the celestial realm of the Hekhalot literature, and neither contains any significant accounts of rituals.[3] I categorize

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* I am very pleased to dedicate this paper to Birger Pearson, in honor of a career that has greatly advanced our knowledge and understanding of esotericism and mysticism in Western antiquity.

[1] Zuesse 1987, 405.

[2] *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 81–121, 152–173, 189–277); *Sar Torah* (§§ 281–306); *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§ 335–375, 407–426); *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§ 544–596); *Merkavah Rabba* (§§ 655–708). I have also included the evidence of the briefer macroforms *The Chapter of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* (§§ 307–314, found only in manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vaticana, Vat. ebr. 228); *The Great Seal-Fearsome Crown* (§§ 318–321//§§ 651–654); and *Sar Panim* (§§ 623–639). All paragraph references are to those assigned to the texts by Schäfer 1981. Of the Geniza fragments, only G1, G8, G19, and G22 are relevant to this paper. I follow the sigla and folio, column, and line enumerations of Schäfer 1984. All translations of Hekhalot passages from these texts are from Davila 2013. Italicized references to the *Sar Torah* indicate the specific text with that title (see above), while "Sar Torah" in Roman type can indicate any praxis or ritual that involves the Prince of Torah.

The *Shi'ur Qomah* texts have been edited and translated by Cohen 1985. All translations from this corpus are my own. The text cited as *The Youth* describes an angelic figure who goes by this title and who leads an angelic liturgy in the heavenly throne room and officiates in his own tabernacle. I quote my own translation, which is of the version found in the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition known as the *Siddur Rabba*, as published by Cohen 1985, with some reference to other textual traditions.

[3] For *3 Enoch*, see the edition of Odeberg 1928/1973; the German translation by Schäfer-Herrmann 1995; and the English translation by Alexander 1983, 1:223–315. For *Massekhet Hekhalot*, see Herrmann 1994.

the relevant Hekhalot passages into groups: in section 1, praxes that involve recitation of adjurations, songs, prayers, or names along with other physical actions and ascetic disciplines; and in section 2, praxes involving only recitations. The praxes are broken down into further categories in each section.[4]

Praxes Involving Recitation and Other Actions

Ascent-Descent Praxes

These passages give instructions for praxes intended to cause the practitioner to ascend to the throne room of God, see a vision of it and sometimes participate in the events there, then return safely. For reasons that remain unclear, the visionary ascent is normally called a "descent" and the return descent an "ascent."

The first and lengthiest of these rituals is found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§198–243, set as an instruction by R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah in a clandestine meeting with a group of disciples in a Temple chamber. The praxis involves the invocation of Suriah, Prince of the Presence, adjuring him a total of one hundred twelve times by the divine name ṬWṬRWSY'Y YHWH, counting each adjuration on a finger (§§204–205). The practitioner must pass through a gauntlet of eight angels at the entrance to each of the seven celestial palaces in order to reach the throne room of God in the seventh (§§206–212). Seven of the angels at each entrance must be adjured by name and presented with two "seals", each consisting of a *nomen barbarum*, pacifying them so that the eighth may lead the practitioner on to the next entrance. In the seventh palace he is interrogated about his piety and learning and he must display "a great seal and fearsome crown" consisting of more *nomina barbara*, after which he is taken to the divine throne room (§§219–223, 229–237).[5]

The second ascent-descent praxis is given in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–419 in a series of revelations about the heavenly ascent narrated by R. Akiva.

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[4] Mentions of mundane Jewish rituals and praxes such as daily prayers or specific holidays are noted when they arise but are not analyzed in any detail.

[5] Two additional praxes are described in this passage, neither of which directly involves the ascent and descent itself. The first is a banishment praxis to bring a practitioner back safely in the midst of an ascent experience (§§224–228) and the second describes the special revelation of the names of the angels and seals of the seventh palace (§§238–243). Both praxes are discussed below.

Here too the practitioner must pass angelic guardians of the entrances of the seven palaces, but there is only one guardian of each entrance and the practitioner must show him a seal-ring on which is engraved a divine name ending in the Tetragrammaton. The practitioner is seated on the lap of each angel in turn, after which he may make a request from God, apparently using an adjuration based on chapter 5 of the Song of Songs.[6]

The purpose of the third praxis covered in this section (*Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 422–424) is debated, but the text itself twice labels it a "praxis of the ascent and descent of the chariot," and I treat it as such here.[7] R. Akiva reports a revelation from a divine voice (*bat qol*) that the practitioner must fast for forty days, remain celibate for the last three days of the fast, place his head between his knees "until the fasting overcomes him," and recite an incantation, the content of which is not specified.[8] This forty-day period is set at a specific time in the liturgical year so as to conclude on the Day of Atonement. The passage also gives obscure instructions, some of which seem to be secondary additions, for testing the rite by reciting specific letters from it.

Other, simpler praxes for experiencing a vision of heaven seem to be referred to in the *Maʿaseh Merkavah*. In § 558, R. Akiva reports that he recited the *qedusha* (or Trisagion, Isa 6:3) and a hymn, the text of which is given, on his ascent through seven palaces. In § 570, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah and R. Ishmael discuss how to use the invocation of twelve words in the immediately preceding Sar Torah praxis along with the praying of an unspecified prayer in order to "have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah." The praying of the prayer in § 591 is reported by R. Nehuniah to have the same effect. In §§ 592–594, R. Akiva gives the text of a prayer

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[6] Paragraph 419 concludes, "As for this teaching, study it (or "repeat it") each day after prayer." This instruction may simply tell the practitioner when to recite the Metatron adjuration in § 419, although it is also possible, with Halperin (1988, 373) that it implies that at least under some circumstances the praxis was undertaken only in the imagination. The nature of this particular praxis might more easily lend itself to a purely mental undertaking than other praxes that involve bodily actions or ascetic disciplines. Indeed, one could possibly take it as a ritual of recitation, but because of the presentation of the "seal-rings," which most naturally is taken as the manipulation of physical objects, I interpret the praxis as a ritual drama and include it here.

[7] Skepticism that the praxis should be associated with ascent-descent is registered by Halperin 1988, 374; 1984, 550–551; Schäfer 2009, 302–303. I have replied to Halperin in Davila 2001, 95–99. Schäfer cites this, but does not address my analysis.

[8] *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 357–359 gives an adjuration with many divine names and *nomina barbara* which involves "seventy (names?), to go forth and to come in, until the fast overcomes him" (on a heavenly journey?).

that he prayed "and I had a vision of the Shekhinah, and I saw everything that they do before the throne of glory." Likewise he reports that the prayer given in §§ 595–596 is to be used, along with the invocation of two named angels, to ascend through the seven palaces and "have a vision above the seraphim who stand above the head of" God.[9] It should be noted also that one of the benefits of the praxis in *Sar Torah* §§ 299–303 (306?) is "the vision of the chariot."[10]

Sar Torah Praxes[11]

These rites involve the invocation of an angel called the Prince of Torah (*śar tōrāh*), whose purpose is to teach the practitioner knowledge of Torah without the necessity of the normal arduous study to acquire it.

The so-called Sar Torah macroform (§§ 281–306), narrated by R. Ishmael quoting R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Great, prescribes a ritual in which the practitioner washes his clothes, immerses himself in case of pollution due to a nocturnal emission, then isolates himself in a private room for a period of twelve days. During this time he must eat only bread he made himself, with no vegetables. He recites his normal prayers three times daily, but he must insert "this midrash of the Prince of Torah" into them, and study or recite it throughout the day (§§ 299–300). The content of the "midrash" is not specified, but it presumably is related to the preceding narrative that tells a legend about the origins of the praxis at the time of the rebuilding of the Second Temple (§§ 281–294, 297–298). He must call on a group of about thirteen named angels (§ 301), adjuring them in the names of four other angels who are in turn adjured by two additional angels whose names constitute a "great seal" and a "fearsome crown" (§ 302). Two

[9] The prayer given in § 590 refers to the highest angels standing before the divine throne and saying an invocation in the name of ṬWṬRWSY' YHWH one hundred and eleven (or, variant reading, "one hundred and twelve") times. Although the context is quite different, this does bring to mind the recitation of the same name one hundred and twelve times by the practitioner in the ascent-descent ritual in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 204–205. In the first part of the Geniza text G8 (2a 1–2b 24a, which bears the concluding title "The Seal of the Chariot") describes an ideal descent to the chariot, but it does not give ritual instructions for the process. It is possible that the enigmatic reference to an explanation of "those hundred and nineteen" in 2b 20 had in mind another name-counting rite, but this is not specified in the surviving text.

[10] Swartz (1996, 107–108) argues that the passage consists of a later synthesis of the ascent-descent tradition and the Sar Torah tradition.

[11] See also the mention of the Prince of Torah in *Merkavah Rabba* § 688, which, however, makes no reference to knowledge of Torah.

prayers known from elsewhere are given to precede the praxis in § 306, but this paragraph may be a secondary addition.[12] The practitioner is promised that "he will go forth to all the principles of Torah that he seeks, whether to Bible or to Mishnah or to the vision of the chariot" (§ 303).

Another Sar Torah praxis is described in an episode in the *Maʿaseh Merkavah* (§§ 560–569). R. Ishmael reports that when he was thirteen years old, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah revealed it to him. It is a complicated assemblage, which involves a forty-day limited fast, twenty-four ritual immersions, deliberate sensory deprivation, prayers that include adjurations of the angelic Prince of the Presence, the invocation of twelve "words" and three divine names, and the binding of various of the practitioner's body parts with "seals" (*nomina barbara*). He must pray while standing inside a magic circle which shields him from demonic attack (§§ 560–564; cf. §§ 566–568).[13] R. Ishmael then attempted the praxis. When he grew discouraged after twelve days of fasting and attempted to end the process prematurely by the use of the forty-two letter divine name, the Prince of the Presence descended and compelled him to complete it. Upon its completion the same Prince of the Presence, along with "angels of mercy," descended again and "they placed wisdom into the heart of R. Ishmael" (§ 565). Paragraph 569 gives a prayer to be used in the praxis to protect the practitioner from demonic attack.

An additional Sar Torah praxis appears in the *Maʿaseh Merkavah*, but only in manuscript New York JTA 828/8128 (§§ 571–578; cf. on Merkavah Rabba §§ 659–670 below. Narrated mostly in Aramaic by R. Ishmael, the passage opens with the invocation of the forty-two-letter divine name and the quotation of Exod 3:15 and Num 10:36 (§ 571). The ritual lasts for nine days, commencing on the first of Sivan and extending into the festival of Shavuot, during which time practitioner is to engage in a limited fast (eating only bread cooked by himself and drinking wine in a new vessel), immerse himself in a river twice per day, and not lie alone at night (§ 572). A number of rites are then described which involve writing incantations on objects (a fig leaf, olive leaves, and a silver cup) and consuming the ink, either by eating

[12] Paragraphs 304–305, which are not found in all manuscripts, tell a legend of the testing of the praxis by the three narrating rabbis in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia. This section is probably a secondary addition to the narrative.

[13] Paragraph 564 also gives an easier alternative to the rite, which we are told Moses taught Joshua: a previously mentioned sequence of three "letters" or "signs" is to be inscribed on a cup, from which one drinks.

the object or rinsing off the ink and drinking it (§§ 573–576). In § 577 we read a difficult passage that may involve divination by observing the internal organs of an animal, followed by a rite involving the recitation of a prayer for knowledge of Torah-learning forty-one times over wine, which is then drunk. The final ritual is the writing of an invocation of the Prince of Torah on a roasted egg, which is then consumed (§ 578).

A fourth Sar Torah praxis is found in §§ 313–314, a passage embedded in the small macroform that titles itself *The Chapter of R. Nehuniah Ben HaQanah* (§§ 307–314). The praxis is similar to the one recounted in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§ 560–569, but is presented more briefly. R. Ishmael reports that when he was thirteen years old, he learned the name of the Prince of Torah and then, after a forty-day fast he compelled the angel to descend by reciting the "great name." The angel confronted him in a hostile manner (§ 313). It is not entirely clear that § 314 is intended as a sequel to § 313, but this seems the best interpretation. It instructs the practitioner to fast for forty days, immerse himself twenty-four times, avoid impure food and looking at a woman, and to isolate himself "in a dark, peaceful house." An invocation of *nomina barbara* follows.

Torah-Memory Praxes

Another group of rituals are quite similar to the Sar Torah praxes in that they too seek to endue the practitioner with a supernatural knowledge of Torah, but these rituals make no mention of the Prince of Torah. For convenience I refer to them as "Torah-memory" praxes.[14]

One such praxis is given in *Merkavah Rabba* §§ 677–686. R. Ishmael reports that at age thirteen he had difficulty remembering his lessons in Bible and Mishnah and so he fasted and deprived himself until R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah brought him into a chamber of the Temple, adjured him by a "great seal" and revealed to him "the praxis of the secret counsel of Torah"[15] (§§ 677–678). This praxis gave him mystical insight into Torah which prevented him from ever forgetting a word of it again and the experience of which he compares to the experience of standing before the throne of glory (§§ 678–680). Paragraph 681 is a difficult passage in which R. Akiva sent R. Ishmael to R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah for further explication of

[14] See also on *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 336 in n. 21.

[15] The term "secret counsel" (*swd*) could conceivably be a corruption of "Prince of" (*śr*), in which case this section would belong with the Sar Torah rituals discussed above.

the praxis, apparently to ward off violent angelic attacks such as previous, careless practitioners had suffered. R. Nehuniah appears to confirm that R. Ishmael had been performing the praxis imperfectly and that only his priestly lineage had protected him from angelic annihilation. The remainder of the praxis, which all practitioners are enjoined to undertake, involves the pronouncing of names one hundred and eleven times, while keeping track of the count on one's fingers. The parallel with the adjuration count in the ascent praxis of *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 204–205 is obvious.

Then in §§ 682–683 R. Ishmael prescribes an additional praxis for "every wise disciple who knows this great mystery." After sleeping in his bed and reciting the Shema', presumably as normally, he stands over his bed, anoints his hands and feet twice with water, then with oil, dons phylacteries, prays, and then recites an adjuration consisting of various names of the angel Metatron.

Following this, R. Ishmael prescribes yet another praxis, this one involving a forty-day limited fast and period of celibacy (§ 684). The relationship of this praxis to what came before is unclear, but we read in §§ 685–686 that R. Akiva descended to the chariot to inquire "concerning this matter" and that God revealed to him of even the most recent proselyte, as long as he is morally pure, that "I bind to him Metatron, My servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah." It is difficult to tell how much continuity is assumed between §§ 678–681, §§ 682–683, and §§ 684–686, but arguably they present a range of praxes intended to augment the practitioner's memory of Torah.

A somewhat similar range of praxes is described in *The Chapter of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §§ 308–312. The opening passage in §§ 308–309 is a variant version of §§ 677–678, 680 (cf. §§ 278–279), recounting the same interchange between R. Ishmael and R. Nehuniah, followed by similar reflections by R. Ishmael on his enlightening experience and the unfailing memory for Torah which it then gave him. In § 310 the practitioner is instructed to recite the same adjuration of the names of Metatron and then to undertake the same praxis of name adjuration and finger counting. The this-worldly and future benefits of the praxis (health, social prominence, and protection from troubles, sorcery, and condemnation to hell) are recounted in § 311 (cf. *Merkavah Rabba* § 705, discussed below), then in § 312 the practitioner is told to study (or recite) "this great mystery" and to invoke a blessing on God and to petition him to teach the practitioner his laws. No direct parallel to §§ 684–686 follows, but §§ 313–314, which have been discussed above, do deal with a Sar Torah praxis involving a forty-day fast.

Other Praxes

A curious praxis is used during the course of the narrative in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§224–228, involving returning a practitioner safely when it is necessary to interrupt his journey during an ascent-descent experience. Since the passage seems to be a late addition to the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and it describes the use of the praxis during the events of the story rather than giving instructions for its use, it may well be that this praxis is entirely fictional and was never actually used.[16] In the passage, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah's instructions for the ascent-descent praxis in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§198–243 are misconstrued as an account of his actual mystical mental ascent through the seven palaces. When he reached the sixth palace his disciples wished to call him back so he could answer a question about the behavior of the angels in this palace. Accordingly, R. Ishmael took a strip of soft white wool, exposed it to the least hint of the possibility of exposure to menstrual impurity, inserted the strip into a myrtle branch infused with foliatum and pure balsam, and placed it on R. Nehuniah's knees, recalling him safely from his trance to answer the inquiry.

The rationale of the praxis is not entirely clear, but it seems to involve exposing the practitioner to just enough impurity to banish him from the celestial realm without causing him any harm through bringing impurity into that pristine arena.

In *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§238–243, the names of the guardian angels of the seventh palace as invoked on the "descent" (i.e., ascent) and "ascent" (i.e., descent) to the chariot are, because of something to do with their exalted nature, revealed by R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah to the other sages in a special praxis in which he would recite a name, they would fall on their faces, scribes would write the name down, and then the process would be repeated.

The comparatively brief macroform known as the *Sar Panim* (§§623–639) gives a detailed praxis for summoning and controlling the angelic "Prince of the Presence," framed as an instruction by R. Eliezer the Great to R. Akiva. It opens in §623 with an interchange between the two rabbis in which R. Eliezer warns that improper invocation of this angel could destroy the world. Having received assurances that R. Akiva would obey instructions, R. Eliezer begins with accounts of the preliminary rites, involving a one-day fast preceded by seven days of celibacy, an immersion before and after the seven days, and refraining from conversation (with a woman,

[16] For discussion of this passage see Schiffman 1976; and Schlüter 1982.

according to one manuscript).[17] Then (§ 624) the practitioner recites an adjuration of angels of fear and (§ 625) seals himself with the forty-two-letter divine name and adjures these angels again. Only then does he invoke Ozhayah, the Prince of the Presence, and adjure him to obey and do what the practitioner says, and not harm him (§§ 626–627). The practitioner invokes him by his fourteen names (*nomina barbara*) and adjures him to descend and reveal heavenly and earthly secrets (§§ 628–634). The angel is then invoked by his "five chosen names" (again, *nomina barbara*) and ordered to do the will of the adjurer (§§ 635–636); then he is invoked by his "greatest and loveliest and dearest name," a string of *nomina barbara* whose "explication in the pure tongue" (i.e., Hebrew) consists of permutations of the letters of the Tetragrammaton (§ 637). The practitioner then adjures the angel by God's holy right hand and by His name, commanding that the angel neither transgress nor delay nor alter any of the orders of the practitioner (§ 638). The final adjuration dismisses the angel, making him ascend again, and repels hostile spirits and demons as well (§ 639).

The Prince of the Presence, who is the focus of the *Sar Panim* text, is mentioned in many other contexts in the Hekhalot literature under a variety of names. The central purpose of this macroform seems to be to gain control of this angel so as to receive unspecified theurgic powers, but this text is noteworthy in that it indicates that the practitioner should insert his own name into the adjuration as its initiator (§ 636) as well as the name of a person (himself or a client?) away from whom malevolent spirits and demons are to be driven (§ 639). The insertion of names in such contexts is also typical of Jewish magical literature.

A calendrical theurgic praxis written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic appears in *Merkavah Rabba* §§ 659–670. The first part, in Hebrew (§§ 659–663), gives a series of rituals in which *nomina barbara* and words of power are written on a physical object (myrtle leaves, bay leaves, a fingernail, and a silver dish), then blotted out and consumed. Each rite is to be done on a particular holy day (Shavuot, Rosh HaShanah, the New Moon, and the first of Adar) Paragraph 663 then includes a brief hymn, followed by instructions for a seven-day praxis involving thrice-daily immersion in a river, dietary restrictions, and the chewing of a rolled leaf while praying a benediction over permutations of the letters of the Tetragrammaton. The second part,

[17] The concluding lines of G1 (F 23–33) preserve a somewhat variant and perhaps corrupt fragment of § 623.

mostly in Aramaic (§§ 664–670), presents a series of seven invocations of *nomina barbara*, each of which is attributed to a particular angel in each of the seven firmaments; in order: Michael, Gabriel, Suriel, 'KTRY'L, Raphael, BWDY'L, and YWM'L. The rubric "3 (times)" after some of the invocations indicate that they were to be recited as part of the praxis. Paragraph 670 concludes the praxis with a self-fumigation ritual and promises that "in any place that you wish, you may pray and it shall be heard, whether in the day or at night, whether on the sea or on dry land, at any time that you invoke in purity."

This praxis is closely related to the Aramaic one found in *Maʿaseh Merkavah* §§ 571–578, manuscript New York JTA 828/8128 only. Although there are many differences between them, both involve the writing of names on an object and the consumption of the ink, immersions, dietary restrictions, association with named angels, and coordination with the ritual calendar. Despite the similarities, they are prescribed for different purposes: the one in the *Maʿaseh Merkavah* is a Sar Torah praxis while the one in the *Merkavah Rabba* more generally causes one's prayers to be heard.

A praxis involving an adjuration of the angel Metatron, Prince of the Presence, is found in G19 1a 1–1b 5. Its text is damaged and it is unclear whether it began on the surviving leaf or a preceding one. The practitioner must isolate himself in a house. He fasts (evidently a limited one, since he is enjoined not to eat bread made by a woman), avoids eye contact with all human beings, immerses himself every evening, recites the Shemaʿ, and then recites the adjuration of Metatron. It includes a list of the names of Metatron (cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277, *Chapter of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* § 310, and *Merkavah Rabba* § 682) and they must be recited one hundred and eleven times while the practitioner counts on his fingers (cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 205, *Chapter of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* § 310, and *Merkavah Rabba* § 682). The angelic Youth also figures in the adjuration. What survives of the text gives no specific purpose for the praxis.

Rituals of Recitation

Merkavah Hymns and Prayers

These hymns deal with the realm of the divine throne room, the angels, and the heavenly praise of God. They are assigned a range of reciters and a range of addressees and, although ritual contexts for them are almost never specified, they are frequently prescribed for use by practitioners and it is reasonable to infer that they were intended for ritual recitation.

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* contains several collections of Merkavah hymns and refers to them consistently as "songs" (§§ 94, 95, 106, 154, 156, 251). The first collection (§§ 94–106) gathers together a group of songs of threefold holiness (i.e., which end with the Trisagion). These are sung by angels, although they are also presented in § 94 as songs to be sung by human practitioners, and they address the throne of glory, God, and undefined listeners. The second collection (§§ 152–169) also consists of songs of threefold holiness which together give an extended description of the heavenly realm and which are associated with the normal thrice-daily earthly prayers (§§ 161, 163–164, 169). They address God, the angels, and even (§§ 163–164, 169) the practitioners themselves. The third collection (§§ 251–257//260–266) is presented as being sung daily by the throne of glory itself, although the frame of the passage has these songs being recited by the practitioner who has succeeded in undertaking the heavenly ascent ("descent") to the point of arriving at the throne of glory. These hymns address God. The final collection of Merkavah hymns in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 268–276) also address God. They give no indication who is to recite them.

Most of the remaining Merkavah hymns in the corpus are found in the *Maʿaseh Merkavah*, where they are generally called "prayers" (§§ 544, 569, 586–587, 592, 595–596). One, indeed, is a variation on a prayer known from elsewhere (§ 551, the *ʿAlay le-shabbeaḥ*). The first prayer, § 544, praises God and refers vaguely to mysteries to be used for "accomplishing the Torah," which could imply an association with Torah-memory praxis. Most of the others are prescribed for recitation to achieve a visionary state. The prayers in §§ 548–549 are for experiencing the vision of the heavenly bridges described in § 546. These prayers are to be recited daily at daybreak by morally pure practitioners (§ 547). The prayer in § 551 gives the practitioner a vision of the angels around God's throne (§ 550). The prayer in § 558 was recited by R. Ishmael during a visionary ascent when he reached the seventh palace. These prayers all seem to have been composed originally for other contexts and were included secondarily into the *Maʿaseh Merkavah*.[18]

The prayers in §§ 552–553 (found now only in manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 22, although it is unclear whether they

[18] Swartz divides the *Maʿaseh Merkavah* into four sections and has done a redactional analysis of the prayers in each section. See Swartz 1992, 103–104 and 166–168 for a summary of his conclusions. I follow his analysis in my comments here.

are a secondary addition or not) praise God in order "to make use of His crown and to invoke His name and to ornament His invocation," implying the invocation of unspecified theurgic powers. In § 569 we find a prayer that seems to have been composed for protecting the practitioner from the angels who participate in the immediately preceding Sar Torah praxis.[19]

In §§ 581–582 we learn the names of the guardian angels of the seven palaces (cf. *Hekahlot Rabbati* §§ 204–212 and *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 413–419). The five prayers that follow in §§ 587–591 are to be recited by the practitioner to strengthen himself when invoking them "in descent and in ascent" (§ 586). These too seem to have been composed originally for other contexts, but have had *nomina barbara* interpolated into them when added to the *Maʿaseh Merkavah*. In §§ 592–594, R. Akiva reveals a prayer that he prayed "and I had a vision of the Shekhinah, and I saw everything that they do before the throne of glory" (§ 592). Likewise, in § 595 he reveals a prayer to "have a vision of above the seraphim who stand above the head of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel," which prayer (§ 596) he recited during a heavenly ascent while invoking the names of two angels to aid him. These two prayers appear to have been composed for the contexts in which we find them.[20]

Shiʿur Qomah

The constellation of traditions known as the *Shiʿur Qomah*, the "measure of the stature," gives a detailed account of the size of the various body parts of God, along with *nomina barbara* assigned as names for each member. The text varies widely depending on the macroform in which it appears, and even from manuscript to manuscript within a given macroform. Nevertheless, the surviving sources give us some hints about the ritual use of the material.

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[19] Paragraph 570 refers to a prayer to be recited with the Sar Torah rite and the invocation of the twelve words in order "to have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah," but the prayer itself is not given.

[20] Merkavah hymns and prayers appear elsewhere in the Hekhalot literature occasionally. A version of *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 153 is found again in *Sar Torah* § 306 (cf. G22 1a31–32). In § 306 we also find another hymn with parallels in G1 B 6b–15 and G8 2b 27b–30a. A hymn found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 94 (and § 154 in manuscript New York JTA 828/8128 only) also appears in *Merkavah Rabba* § 687 and G22 1a 29–30, 33–35. In *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 336, Moses is taught to invoke a brief invocation to be recited over "any man whose heart errs" to grant the power of Torah memory. The incantation prayer revealed by the high angel ʿAnaphiʾel in *Hekahlot Zutarti* § 421, which apparently gives the practitioner the power to control this

The longest *Shiʿur Qomah* recension included in my translation is found in *Merkavah Rabba* §§ 695–704.[21] The adjuration in §§ 689, perhaps intended to include the incantation prayers in §§ 690–694, stands now as a revelation by the Prince of Torah (§ 688) as a prelude to the *Shiʿur Qomah* passage that follows in §§ 695–704. The material in §§ 690–694 is revealed by the angelic Youth.

One aside in § 699 says "And any who does not say the measure by this verse (Ps 147:19), he is nothing but astray." The implication seems to be that a practitioner is to recite the *Shiʿur Qomah*, including the indicated biblical verse, presumably in a ritual or liturgical context. Likewise, the continuation in §§ 705–706 directs the practitioner to "study" or "repeat" "this great mystery"—evidently the immediately preceding *Shiʿur Qomah* text—and promises him numerous earthly blessings as well as restfulness in the world to come. The opening sentence of § 706 makes the ritual or liturgical context quite explicit: "Whoever studies (or "repeats") this great mystery, studying (or "repeating") the teaching each day after his prayer, must recite it in purity in his house or in the synagogue." Immediately following §§ 705–706a there is an adjuration of Metatron (§ 706b), binding him to produce the promised benefits, and incantation prayers seeking a heart enlightened by learning, along with protection from angels and demons (§ 707) and a favorable answer to prayer (§ 708).

Although the ritual associations in §§ 705–706 are clear, a briefer version of the same passage also appears in § 311 with reference to the Torah-memory praxis in §§ 308–312, indicating a certain generic quality to the material.

Cohen has edited several other recensions of the *Shiʿur Qomah* and they provide some additional information. In the *Sefer HaShiʿur* recension the parallel (l. 51) to the sentence in *Merkavah Rabba* § 699 reads, "And any who does not seal (*ḥwtm*) with this verse, this one is in error." Again, ritual recitation seems to be in view. A similar reading is found in the recension of *Siddur Rabba*, ll. 111–112: "And any who does not seal with this verse, he is nothing but in error." Later, in ll. 133–135, the same recension promises regarding the names in the book that "as for him who knows them but does not make use of them (*mštmš bhn*)," that person shall receive both earthly and *post-mortem* rewards. A passage parallel to § 705 follows immediately.

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angel, is noteworthy because it appears also in an incantation amulet in G75 (T.-S. NS 91.53 1a–b) in a context in which it was obviously intended to be used (see Davila 2001, 229–230).

[21] Other brief *Shiʿur Qomah* passages are found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 167, *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 367b, and *The Youth*, ll. 3–6.

The Hebrew phrase translated "make use of" is consistently used in the Hekhalot literature to mean theurgic use in a ritual context. The fact that the author of this text found it necessary to discourage such use of the *Shiʿur Qomah* traditions implies that others did not share the author's scruples.

The opening of the *Sefer Razi'el* recension has the speaker compare his heart and mouth to flowing sources of water (ll. 18–21), perhaps implying that what follows is to be recited. Likewise in ll. 24–26 the speaker says that he will sing and make music. In l. 88 the speaker specifies that he will recite a series of *nomina barbara*. In the parallel to the line in § 699, this recension reads "Anyone who does not seal with this verse, behold, this one errs" (ll. 139–140). Later in ll. 231–233 we read, "and any who does not seal with the order of the working of creation (*sdr mʿśh br'šyt*), behold, he errs in the ornamentation of the Holy One, blessed be He." The reference to what may be a book is not clarified in the context. In ll. 201–204 R. Ishmael and R. Akiva assure "the one who knows this measure of the One Who Formed him and His praise" that he has a place in the world to come, "but only if he studies (or "repeats") it every single day." And ll. 433–434 open a supplicatory prayer with the formula "And I, so-and-so son of so-and so, who writes this, Your servant, son of Your maidservant," apparently so that a copyist may insert his own name into the prayer. Finally, the *Sefer HaQomah* recension has a passage parallel to ll. 201–204 of the *Sefer Razi'el* recension which reads "but only if he recites (or "studies") it as a *mishnah* every single day" (ll. 126–127).

In brief then, the various recensions of the *Shiʿur Qomah* give numerous indications that the contents were sometimes recited and there are hints that they may have been used by some for theurgical purposes as well.

The Great Seal-Fearsome Crown[22]

The great seal and the fearsome crown are two sets of *nomina barbara*, each of which is assigned a prayer to go with it. They appear together in two contexts in the Hekhalot manuscripts (§§ 318–321 and §§ 651–654). The great seal "is the seal by which heaven and earth were sealed" (§ 318/651; cf. *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 367a) and the fearsome crown "is the crown by which they adjure all the princes of wisdom" (§ 318/651). The prayer associated with the great seal (§ 320/653) deals with cosmological matters and may have been composed for the stated purpose. The prayer associated with the fearsome

[22] This section is adapted from the introduction to chapter seven of Davila 2013.

crown (§ 321/654) is a hymn of generic praise to God and its content has no obvious connection with its stated purpose.

This passage is of interest because some of the other Hekhalot macroforms refer from time to time to a great seal and a fearsome crown. *The Hekhalot Rabbati* prescribes the use of both to pacify the guardians of the entrance of the seventh palace (§ 236); both are also prescribed for the praxis in the *Sar Torah* document (§ 302; cf. the references to a seal and a crown in §§ 288, 289, 298, and 304); the *Maʿaseh Merkavah* calls a list of *nomina barbara* in § 568 "a great seal" and the adjuration in § 569 "a great seal upon my limbs." The Torah-memory praxis of *Merkavah Rabba* § 678 (//§ 279//§ 309) involves adjuration by a great seal, and other adjurations by a great seal are found in § 689 and § 708 (which also involves a crown). A great seal is also used in the ascent account of G8 (2a 37).[23]

There is no rigorous consistency in these traditions. The reference in *Sar Torah* § 302 gives the great seal as 'ZBWG' and the fearsome crown as ṢWRṬQ. *The Great Seal-Fearsome Crown* agrees in giving these as the first name of each but goes on to assign additional *nomina barbara* to both (§§ 318/651). *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 236 gives an entirely different string of *nomina barbara* which may be a corrupt transcription of a Greek phrase.

No ritual context is specified for the *Great Seal-Fearsome Crown* passage, but it is clearly intended for ritual recitation for theurgic purposes.

Names and Letters

It is worth underlining the importance of the use of angelic and divine names in the various praxes prescribed and described in the Hekhalot literature. For example, the invocation of angels by means of divine names figures in the ascent praxes in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, what may be an ascent praxis in *Maʿaseh Merkavah* §§ 580–582; the Sar Torah praxes in *Sar Torah* §§ 301–302 and *Maʿaseh Merkavah* §§ 560–569. Names figure prominently in the Throne Midrash of *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 368–375 and the

[23] The Hekhalot literature also refers often to the theurgic use of "seals" consisting of divine names or *nomina barbara* (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 219–223, 229–232; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 358, 415; *Maʿaseh Merkavah* §§ 560, 562, and the incantation prayer that commences at G19 1b 6). Although "crowns" are sometimes headgear worn by men (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 120; *Sar Torah* § 288) or more often by God (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 105; *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 372; *Merkavah Rabba* § 697) or angels (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 156, 170–171), there are also references to "crowns" that have much the same function as seals (e.g., *Hekhalot Zutarti* § 349/361, § 360, 364, 374; *Maʿaseh Merkavah* § 552, manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 22 only).

Mystery of Sandalphon in *Merkavah Rabba* §§ 655–658, although their use is not specified. The names associated with the divine body parts are also a central feature of the *Shiʿur Qomah* text. A list of the names of Metatron appears in several contexts (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277, *The Chapter of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* § 310, *Merkavah Rabba* § 682, and G19 1a 25b–1b 2a).

The ritual manipulation of letters, apparently from divine names, is also mentioned from time to time, for example in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 364, 421, 424; *Maʿaseh Merkavah* § 561, 564, 565, 568, 586; and G19 1a 2. Some divine names are also presented as "explicit" (*meforash*) in the form of an angelic name, but "substitute" (*kinnuy*) as a combination of *nomina barbara* with letters from the Tetragrammaton according to now obscure principles (see, for example, *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§ 357, 366, 367b, 372, 373; *Merkavah Rabba* § 665, 667, 670; and *Sar Panim* § 628).

A Limited Number of Ritual Components and Objectives

The ritual praxes in the Hekhalot literature congregate for the most part around a limited number of objectives, mainly to bring about an experience of ascent to and descent from heaven; to compel the Prince of Torah to grant the practitioner supernatural knowledge of Torah; to bring about this supernatural knowledge of Torah through means and angels other than the Prince of Torah; and to give the practitioner less-clearly-defined theurgic powers to compel angels to do his bidding and gain this-worldly and *post-mortem* benefits for himself. This power of the practitioner to bend angels to his will for various purposes is a defining and nearly universal element of these praxes.

Likewise, the praxes themselves are assembled from a limited number of ritual components and ascetic disciplines. The ritual components include recitation of adjurations, songs, and prayers, sometimes in association with normal daily prayers; recitation of angelic and divine names according to a prescribed pattern which is kept track of by counting names on the fingers; the adoption of particular physical postures or dispositions (falling on one's face, kneeling with the head between the knees, standing in a magic circle, not sleeping alone); immersion in running water as well as other ablutions and anointings; and the writing of incantations on physical objects which are then either themselves consumed or they are rinsed and the wine used for rinsing is drunk. Self-fumigation with incense is prescribed once. Some of these praxes are coordinated with the festivals of the Jewish calendar. The ascetic disciplines include fasting and dietary restrictions, temporary celibacy, and self-isolation and other forms of sensory deprivation.

Most of the praxes involve adjurations or prayers and the recitation of divine and angelic names. There is no exclusive association of a given ritual practice or ascetic discipline with a particular type of praxis. For example, name counting on fingers is used for an ascent-descent praxis, Torah-memory praxes, and an adjuration of Metatron for uncertain purposes; forty-day fasts appear in an ascent-descent praxis, Sar Torah praxes, and Torah-memory praxes; and the consumption of divine names inscribed on physical objects is undertaken in a Sar Torah praxis and a calendrical praxis for making one's prayers heard. The praxis for banishing an ascending practitioner during a heavenly journey described in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 224–228 is an idiosyncratic and late addition to the macroform and it may be an imaginary creation by the *Ḥaside Ashkenaz*.

The cumulative evidence of the concrete nature of the instructions for ritual praxes in the Hekhalot literature provides a very strong case for the actual use of these praxes as mystical disciplines by real practitioners. This does not exclude the possibility that some of them (e.g., §§ 413–419) were at least sometimes carried out solely in the practitioner's mind or that sometimes simpler rites were substituted (as in § 564), but most of them seem best suited to be acted out most of the time on the physical basis indicated in the instructions. The question of the psychological state of practitioners as they carried out these praxes is outside the scope of this paper, but I have demonstrated elsewhere that there is considerable cross-cultural evidence that rites such as these typically have the effect of generating visionary experiences similar to those described in the Hekhalot literature.[24] As I have suggested elsewhere,[25] the possible range of such experiences is very wide and should be viewed as a continuum: at the weaker pole they might involve the exercise of the active imagination to visualize themes and images that have been absorbed through meditation on the scriptures, but the stronger pole could include trance states and deeply altered states of consciousness.

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SECTION FIVE

PHILOSOPHIC PRACTICES

THE PLATONIZING SETHIAN GNOSTIC INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

Zeke Mazur*

Among Plotinus' explicit complaints in *Enneads* II.9[33], *Against the Gnostics*, we find the accusation that the Gnostics have plagiarized Plato.[1] Although Plotinus mentions only the *Timaeus* by name, he implies that they have borrowed from the *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* as well.[2] Nevertheless, despite Plotinus' own insistence, the majority of modern scholars have tended to be skeptical that the Gnostics drew directly upon the works of Plato himself, although, to be sure, an indirect influence of Plato upon Gnostic thought via a more 'popular' Middle Platonist school tradition is now generally recognized. Against the grain of this general tendency, I would suggest that a close examination of the Platonizing Sethian corpus from Nag Hammadi reveals that the Platonizing Sethians were reading and interpreting specific passages from Platonic dialogues, and were often doing so in unusual and creative ways that both resembled and, more significantly, diverged from that of Plotinus and other academic Platonists.[3]

This essay constitutes the second part of a larger investigation into the evidence of a tacit debate between Plotinus and the Gnostics over the interpretation of Plato. In a previous part of this study, I made the case that *Zostrianos* drew on a number of specific passages describing the cyclical reincarnation of souls especially in the *Phaedrus*, but also in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and that Plotinus and Porphyry had tacitly responded in several

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* This essay is offered in honor of Prof. Birger Pearson, whose own work has emphasized the Platonic substrate of Gnostic thought. See Pearson 1978, 1984, 1990. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference of the ISNS in Cagliari in June 2012.

1 II.9[33].6.10–13.

2 II.9[33].6.19–62, 17.1–4, and 18.38–40.

3 This corpus includes *Zostrianos* (NHC [Nag Hammadi Codex] VIII,1) and *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3)—the Coptic tractates homonymous with the Gnostic apocalypses mentioned by Porphyry as being read and critiqued among Plotinus' circle (*Vita Plotini* 16)—but also *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) and the *3 Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5), which are not mentioned by Porphyry but are indubitably related to the former two tractates by common technical terminology, divine nomenclature, and conception of contemplative or visionary ascent. On the definition and history of Platonizing Sethianism, see esp. Turner, 2001.

locations throughout their writings.[4] Here I would like to present a similar case for the Gnostic use of the *Sophist*. The specific thesis of this essay is that the Platonizing Sethians drew at least in part upon the text of Plato's *Sophist* for central aspects of their metaphysics, and—in relation to the topic of the present volume—they even went so far as to reconceptualize the dialectical methods described in the *Sophist* in terms of their praxis of visionary ascent.

Let us begin, then, with Plotinus' reaction to the Gnostics in *Enn*. II.9[33]. As mentioned, one of Plotinus' principal complaints with the Gnostics is that—aside from their numerous errors—whatever they happened to have actually gotten right was abusively pilfered from Plato. But among Plotinus' other fundamental complaints we repeatedly find him imputing a special kind of arrogance or even hubris to the Gnostics. This accusation apparently involves not merely the Gnostics' claim to possess some special revelation or *gnōsis*, but also—and *especially*—their claim to possess some kind of extraordinary faculty of apprehension that enables them to surpass the celestial gods—and even Plato himself—in their grasp of intelligible reality. Thus, for example, at II.9[33].5.2–4, Plotinus complains that "[the Gnostics] do not dishonor their own power, but claim to be able to grasp the intelligible (ἐφάπτεσθαι τοῦ νοητοῦ λέγειν ἐξεῖναι)"; and at 6.25–29, that they degrade Plato's doctrines "as if they had comprehended the intelligible nature (ὡς αὐτοὶ μὲν τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν κατανενοηκότες) while [Plato] had not"; and further, that "by naming a multiplicity of intelligibles they think that they will seem to have made a more precise discovery (πλῆθος νοητῶν ὀνομάζοντες τὸ ἀκριβὲς ἐξευρηκέναι δόξειν οἴονται)." In the final chapter of the treatise, he accuses the Gnostics of claiming to be able to transcend the stars during their visionary ascent, and implies that they pretend to possess a unique kind of *theōria*: "even if they claim that they alone are able to contemplate (εἰ μόνοι λέγοιεν θεωρεῖν δύνασθαι) …" [See complete passages in Appendix A].

From the surprisingly intellective terms that Plotinus uses to frame the Gnostic claims—to "grasp" (ἐφάπτεσθαι), "to have comprehended" (κατανενοηκέναι), "to have discovered" (ἐξευρηκέναι), or to "contemplate" (θεωρεῖν) the intelligible—one gets the feeling that he is bothered less by the Gnostic claim to possess some particular *revelation* than by their claim to possess some specifically philosophical technique: that is, their claim to possess an extraordinary *method* or *faculty* of apprehension that allows them to apprehend both intelligible and hypernoetic reality.

[4] Mazur 2013.

Now it is intriguing that Plotinus' accusation is borne out by the Platonizing Sethian corpus itself. Thus, for instance, in *Allogenes*, on page 50, lines 10–14, the eponymous visionary addresses the divine revealer Youel by announcing that he himself possesses some extraordinary power that has permitted him to discern the transcendentalia: "I heard these things from you, and about the teaching which is within them, because the thought which is within me distinguished those things which are beyond measure and those things that are unknowable." Youel responds by informing Allogenes that he has been invested with this power by the supreme deity:

> No one can hear these things except the Great Powers alone, O Allogenes. A great power was invested upon you, that which the eternal Father of the Entirety invested upon you before you came to this place, so that those things that are difficult to distinguish you will distinguish and those things that are unknowable to the multitude you will know ... [5] [Complete passage in Appendix B1].

Significantly, Allogenes' power is described not as a determinate corpus of revealed knowledge itself, but as a faculty of discernment: the power to "distinguish," to "differentiate," or, more literally, to "separate." The Coptic verb that occurs in the text is ⲡⲱⲣ̅ⲭ̅, which, when used intransitively, renders the Greek verb διαιρεῖσθαι and various cognates and synonyms. It appears that this markedly philosophical term is unusual in the context of Gnostic writings, and deserves closer attention.

To determine what this means, we may turn to the other Platonizing Sethian tractates which are closely related to *Allogenes*. In *Zostrianos*, on pages 22 to 24, we find a clear indication that the visionary ascent requires some faculty of specifically philosophical discernment. In an extended passage (whose middle section is unfortunately damaged), we find the eponymous visionary Zostrianos at mid-ascent, receiving instruction from the heavenly revealer Ephesech on the methods he must use to ascend through the increasingly transcendent divine realms. In the course of this revelatory instruction, Ephesech describes a complex series of cognitive acts that Zostrianos must undertake, each of which is correlated with a spiritual or symbolic ablution or baptism. Each ablution in turn corresponds to the aspirant's progressive assimilation into a series of successive divine strata, including the three subaeons of Barbelo (Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos), whence one can ultimately apprehend the hypertranscendent Triple Powered Invisible Spirit itself. This entire passage is remarkable both for its use of identifiable philosophical terminology and its apparent

[5] *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) 50.21–32. This and all subsequent translations are my own.

equation of ritual acts—namely, the various ablutions—with intellectual acts of increasing difficulty. [See complete passage in Appendix B2 and table in B3].

Although the passage is extremely recondite, what seems to be happing is as follows. On page 22, lines 1–12, Ephesech's revelation contains a series of specific equations: [a] the knowledge of how one is able to contain an "eternal 'impression' (τύπος)" as well as a "communion" with "universal intellect" is equated with the "washing" of Autogenes; [b] the knowledge of "them all"—presumably the eternal or aeonic realities—is equated with the "washing" of Protophanes; finally, [c] the "joining" of oneself with "them all" is equated with the "washing" of Kalyptos. In the subsequent lines, Ephesech reiterates the schema in more precise terms: the intellection that corresponds to the "washing" of Protophanes is the knowledge of "how it [or he] exists for it [or him]" and how it further entails a "mutual fellowship."[6] Finally, we come to the crux of the passage, which redescribes the supreme ablution which occurs just prior to the ultimate apprehension of the transcendentalia:

> And [with respect to] the principle (ⲁⲣⲭⲏ < ἀρχή) of these things, if one knows how all things are manifested in a single origin [lit: "head"], and how all of these that are joined (ϩⲱⲧⲡ̄), separate (ⲡⲱⲣⲭ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ), and how those that are separate, join again, and how the parts (ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ < μέρος) join with the wholes, and the species [or "Forms"] (ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲇⲟⲥ < εἶδος) with the genera (ⲛ[ⲓⲅⲉ]ⲛⲟⲥ < γένος); if one understands these things, one has washed in the washing of Kalyptos.[7]

This remarkable passage equates the supreme ablution with what appears to be a rather surprisingly discursive, even 'scholastic' comprehension of the relationship between species (or Forms) and genera, parts and wholes. Indeed, a cursory glance at the passage might give the amusing impression that the exalted strata of Zostrianos' aeonic realm correspond to various heavenly 'classrooms,' so to speak, and that spiritual progress for the Platonizing Sethians entailed something like increasing levels of competence in the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*.

Prior to undertaking the present study, I had the vague notion that if one could simply use the TLG to identify parallel uses of the particular combination of technical terms in this and other 'scholastic' passages of *Zostrianos*,

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[6] Following a lacuna that presumably contained a description of the ablution of Autogenes.

[7] *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 23.6–17.

one might be able to locate rather precisely the philosophical *Sitz im Leben* of the tractate as a whole. This turns out to be considerably more difficult than I had imagined, largely because every conceivable permutation of the Aristotelian vocabulary of whole, part, species, and genus occurs widely among later authors, ranging from pre-Plotinians such as Philo and Clement through virtually every post-Plotinian Neoplatonist and philosophically-minded theologian up through the middle ages. From a few very informal searches, it appeared that the philosophical vocabulary of *Zostrianos* corresponds *grosso modo* to that current among pre-Plotinian authors of the late second and early third century such as Sextus Empiricus and Alexander of Aphrodisias.

But this particular passage of *Zostrianos* is in fact atypical because it concerns not just the relation between species / genus and part / whole but also—in particular—the conjunctions and separations of species and genera. As it turns out, this particular detail reveals that this passage draws not so much on the Aristotelian commentators (with which pseudo-Zostrianos is also almost certainly familiar)[8] but, I believe, rather directly on an extended passage of Plato's *Sophist*. We may recall that at 253b–254b, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus are in the midst of the search for the definition of the sophist, but arrive instead—accidentally—at the definition of the true philosopher who alone is able to apprehend the Divine. At 253d1–3, the Stranger identifies the science of dialectic as that which can accurately distinguish a Form (εἶδος) through the process of διαίρεσις, "dividing according to genera" (κατὰ γένη διαιρεῖσθαι), and immediately thereafter, at line d5, we arrive at what seems to be the crux of the dialogue, the definition of the philosopher himself:

> STRANGER: And so, then, the one able to do this adequately discerns one 'idea' (ἰδέα) extended everywhere throughout many things, each one of which lies separately, and [also discerns] many [ideas] which are other than one another, encompassed by one [idea] from the outside, and again one [idea] coming together into one through a multiplicity of wholes (δι' ὅλων πολλῶν), and many entirely separate [ideas] bounded off (διωρισμένας) [from each other]. To understand this is to [be able to] distinguish (διακρίνειν), according to genus (κατὰ γένος), where each [idea] is both able and not able to commune (κοινωνεῖν).[9] [Complete passage in Appendix C.]

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[8] The frequency with which εἶδος and γένος appear to be correlated in *Zost.* suggests that a considerable influence of Aristotelian commentary underlies the use of these terms in the tractate; on the formalization of this Platonic language in and after Aristotle, see esp. Pellegrin 1991, 389–416.

[9] Plato, *Sophist* 253d5–10.

In this passage—which has long bewildered interpreters—the Stranger insists that the defining characteristic of the true philosopher is the ability to understand how a single 'idea' (ἰδέα)—whatever this means—can be present in many different independent objects, and how 'ideas' themselves may be subsumed into broader 'ideas' as parts to a whole; also, conversely, how the individual 'ideas' (or possibly species) and genera relate to each other, which can coexist or interpenetrate and which are mutually exclusive.[10]

Now I would suggest that these lines of the *Sophist* comprise the immediate source for *Zostrianos* 23.6–17, and in fact we may get the sense that the *entire* extended passage on pages 22–24 of *Zostrianos* took its inspiration from this section of the *Sophist*, down to the use throughout the passage of the specific term "to have communion with," which derives from κοινωνεῖν at *Soph.* 253e1, and which we find preserved in Greek in the Coptic text at *Zost.* 22.4–5. What is most striking about the parallel is the fact that each passage describes this dialectical technique as the prerogative of an epistemologically superior *category of person*—for Plato, the true philosopher, for pseudo-Zostrianos, the member of the spiritual elect who has been "baptized in truth and *gnōsis*" according to *Zost.* 24.20—and then insists that such a person is uniquely able to attain the ultimate vision of the Divine.[11] What is more, the subsequent lines of both passages immediately proceed to contrast the superior individual with its inferior counterpart—i.e., the lowly sophist who slithers into the darkness and cohabits with nonbeing (*Soph.* 254a4–6), or the non-Gnostic multitudes, decribed as powerless, homeless individuals who "follow the way of the others."[12]

It thus appears that *Zostrianos* has drawn upon Plato's distinction between the sophist and the true philosopher to justify the soteriological stratification among humans. Yet allusions to the technique of διαίρεσις itself recur repeatedly throughout the entirety of *Zostrianos*. We may recall that in the *Sophist*, Plato describes διαίρεσις most emphatically as the essence of philosophical dialectic. This technique not only serves as the theoretical desideratum of the discussion, as in the passage just quoted, but is also exemplified in the narrative of the dialogue itself, as the Eleatic Stranger

[10] The meaning of the term ἰδέα is far from obvious. It is not necessarily equivalent to Form (εἶδος). It is sometimes thought to denote "appearance" or "aspect" or even soul, as has been most recently suggested by Brisson 2010, 387–396.

[11] In both cases (*Soph.* 253e5, *Zost.* 23.25) the superior category is described in terms of being "pure."

[12] *Zost.* 25.1–4.

and Theaetetus whittle down the various species of expertise to arrive at the definition of the sophist. We find a similar theme in *Zostrianos*, in which the eponymous visionary's entire ascent—whose ultimate goal is a direct apprehension of the transcendentalia—is framed as a search for understanding the various categories of beings, both divine and human. Thus, for instance, in the early stages of his ascent, Zostrianos inquires,

> Are they the same except for their names [that] are different from each other? And is a soul different from [another] soul? And why are humans different from each other? And how and in what way are they human?[13]

Subsequently, throughout the course of the many revelations that Zostrianos receives, there are extensive discussions of multiple categories of humans and deities that employ a similar philosophical vocabulary of species, genus, part, and whole, as well as the various conjunctions and disjunctions among them.[14] This aspect of *Zostrianos* merits a far more detailed study than I can provide here, and yet, in a very general sense I think it is safe to say that pseudo-Zostrianos has at least superficially conformed the dialectical technique of the *Sophist* to his own conception of ascent.[15]

This concern with the *Sophist*, however, seems not to be limited to the tractate *Zostrianos* alone. Returning to *Allogenes*, we may now infer that the mysterious power that is invested upon the eponymous visionary—the power to "differentiate" or "divide" (ⲡⲱⲣⲭ) the transcendentalia—similarly alludes to the Platonic technique of διαίρεσις. Indirect support for this may even be found in Plotinus himself. In the course of his complaint that Gnostics posit an unnecessary profusion of principles, he suggestively describes this Gnostic proclivity with the verb διαιρεῖσθαι: "It is ridiculous [for them] to create a multiplicity of natures *by dividing* (διαιρουμένους) things that are potential and those that are actual among those that are [truly] actual and incorporeal."[16] Indeed, we may begin to suspect that in a broad sense the

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[13] *Zost*. 8.2–7: ⲏ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲣ[ⲱ] ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲣⲁⲛ ⲇⲉ ⲥⲉⲫⲉ|ⲃⲓⲛⲟⲩⲧ ⲉⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲫⲭⲉ ⲟⲩ|ⲛ̅ⲩⲩⲭⲏ ⲫⲉⲃⲓⲛⲟⲩⲧ ⲉⲩⲩⲭⲏ· ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲉⲧⲃⲉⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲉⲛⲓⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲫⲉⲃⲓⲛⲟⲩⲧ | ⲉⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩ ⲥ̅ⲛ̅ⲟⲩ ⲏ̅ ⲟⲩⲏⲣ ⲣⲱ ⲛ̅ⲣⲱ|ⲙⲉ ⲛⲉ.

[14] 2.16: εἶδός … γένος … μέρος; 19.1–4: εἶδός … γένος … μερικόν διάφορα; 65.22: γένος … εἶδός; 85.14–18: εἶδός … γένος … μερικόν; 95.1–4: διάφορα … διάφορα … διάφορα; 115.2–10: "And they do not delimit each other, but they live within [each other], living among them and agreeing with one another, being from a single origin, and they exist joined together because they are all in a single aeon of Kalyptos." 117.21–118.1: μέρος … εἶδός … γένος; 120.18–21: The fourth luminary is the one who sees all the forms (εἴδη) existing together.

[15] One should note that at the very highest phases of ascent this language is replaced with the schema of transcendental apprehension outlined in the table in Appendix B3.

[16] II.9[33].1.24–25: γελοῖον γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ἐνεργείᾳ οὖσι καὶ ἀύλοις τὸ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ διαιρουμένους φύσεις ποιεῖσθαι πλείους.

Platonizing Sethians borrowed from Plato's description of the technique of διαίρεσις, and especially from those passages of the *Sophist* in which the use of this technique serves as the definiens of the true philosopher.[17]

That the specific technique of διαίρεσις occupied a prominent place in Platonizing Sethian soteriological epistemology would seem to be confirmed by the two other Platonizing Sethian tractates from Nag Hammadi. At *Marsanes* (*NHC* X,1) 4.23, for instance, we find the hypertranscendent principle described as "the one who was not distinguished (ⲇⲓⲁⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ < διακρίνειν)"; the narrator (presumably the eponymous visionary Marsanes himself) continues by describing the process of differentiation among all subsequent realities [see complete passages in Appendix D]:

> For it is I who [intelligized] that which truly exists whether according to the part or to the whole. According to [their] difference (ⲇⲓⲁⲫⲟⲣⲁ < διάφορα), I knew that they exist, since the beginning, in the entire place which is eternal: all those that have come into existence whether separate from substance (ϫⲱⲣⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ < χωρὶς τῆς οὐσίας) or in substance (ⲉⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ < ἐν οὐσίᾳ) ...[18]

The visionary emphasizes that he has "distinguished" all things to and beyond the very limits of the sensible cosmos, including the entire intelligible realm:

> I 'distinguished' (διακρίνειν) and I attained the end of the sensible cosmos, according to the parts of every place, the incorporeal substance and the intelligible cosmos; I knew, in the distinguishing (διακρίνειν), that the sensible cosmos was in every way worthy of being saved entirely.

Similar language occurs elsewhere; for example, on p. 42, in a fragmentary passage surrounded by lacunae, we find the language of separation and recombination that seems to have derived from the original passage of the *Sophist*:

> [...] these numbers, whether [those in heaven] or those upon the earth, and those under the [earth], according to the communions (ⲛⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲓⲁ < κοινωνία) and divisions (ⲙⲛⲉⲣⲓⲥⲙⲟ[ⲥ] < μερισμός) among these and in the rest [...] parts, according to genus (ⲅⲉⲛⲟ[ⲥ] < γένος) and according to form ([ⲉⲓ]ⲛⲉ < * ἰδέα?).[19]

Moreover, in the latter part of the tractate we find an extensive example of διαίρεσις in the form of a phonological disquisition involving the taxonomy of various vowels, consonants, and phonemes that are each corre-

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[17] Mention of this technique is of course found elsewhere, e.g., at *Phaedrus* 266b and *Philebus* 23e.

[18] *Marsanes* (NHC X) 42.17–25.

[19] *Marsanes* (NHC X) 42.17–25.

lated with different divinities.[20] This involves various enigmatic references to "division";[21] a profusion of disjunctions that take the form 'they are either of category X or category Y';[22] and frequent mention of conjunction, mixing, or "communion" (κοινωνία) and separation.[23] This is especially interesting because in the *Sophist* itself, at 252e9–253a12, the Eleatic Stranger offers the letters—vowels and consonants—as an example of a category some of whose constituents intermingle harmoniously while others do not. Although this casual reference to the letters in the *Sophist* is clearly not the unique inspiration for the phonological disquisition of *Marsanes*, it appears likely that the *Sophist* lurks somewhere in background of this discussion.

We may turn to the one remaining Platonizing Sethian tractate, the *3 Steles of Seth*, where (by now) we will not be surprised to find similar themes. Thus, for instance, during the course of a communal hymn addressed to Barbelo, the latter is invoked as the one who has unique access to some unspecified "division" among divine realities [complete passages in Appendix E].

> According to a division (ⲡⲱϣ) of all those truly existing, you revealed to them all in a word (or: "discourse").[24]
>
> It is you alone who sees the first eternals and the unbegotten ones, and the first divisions (ⲛ̄ⲡⲱϣⲉ) according to the manner in which [they] were divided (ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲡⲟϣⲉ). Unite (ϩⲟⲧⲡ̄) us according to the manner in which you were united. Teach us those things that you see.[25]

The passage implies that the deity served as the prototype for the dialectical philosopher, and was the very first to have discerned the primordial "divisions." An earlier passage implies that the deity him- or herself "empowered" the totality of intelligible reality as a series of dichotomies corresponding to these divisions:

> You have empowered this one in knowing. You have empowered another in creating. You have empowered the one that is equal, and the one that is unequal, the one that is similar and the one that is dissimilar.[26]

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[20] The schema is ultimately based on the terminology initially described by the Hellenistic grammarian Dionysius Thrax, but it apparently purports to explain certain correspondances between phonemes and various aspects of the soul and presumably had utility in some ritual ascent; see Pearson 1990, 161.

[21] *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 25.9 18; 31.16; 32.16, 17; 38.2.

[22] *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 29.11–30.2; 31.15–18; 34.1–5; 37.3–6, 15–26.

[23] *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 27.8–11, 15; 30.29–31.1; 32.3–5; 36.5–6; 37.18–20.

[24] *3 Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) 123.8–11.

[25] *3 Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) 123.26–33.

[26] *3 Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) 122.26–31. Similar / dissimilar: *Soph.* 254e ff.

Most interesting is the binary opposition between "creating" and "knowing," a distinction which also appears in the *Sophist* at 219b ff., when the Eleatic Stranger is in the process of dividing human expertise between the "creative" (ποιητική) and "acquisitive" (κτητική) genera. The first species of the latter, acquisitive, genus is that of "learning" (τὸ μαθηματικόν) and "coming to know" (γνωρίσεως). As the latter categories occur immediately after the description of the creative genus in the Platonic text, it is easy to imagine how a Platonizing Sethian interpreter could have interpreted the passage in terms of the somewhat less abstract opposition between creating and knowing.[27]

It therefore appears that the Platonizing Sethians had a particular interest in the techniques of διαίρεσις as it occurs in the *Sophist*. Their particular use of this dialogue corresponds to a characteristic Gnostic hermeneutic in which specific terminological elements in the source text—sometimes even peripheral details originally intended as metaphor if not mere literary device—are isolated, crystallized, and reified into technical conceptions and metaphysical principles.

Now it is certainly possible that the Platonizing Sethian authors could have made use of a lost pre-Plotinian commentary on the *Sophist*. The dialogue was certainly known and held in great esteem by 2nd century Platonists such as Plutarch. No commentary on the *Sophist* is known, although it is possible that one did exist.[28] There were pre-Plotinian commentaries on other dialogues, including the (certainly pre-Plotinian) anonymous commentary on the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue with which the *Sophist* is closely connected.[29] Moreover, that the Gnostics could have made use of such a commentary is plausible; we might note the many persuasive arguments that one or more lost but pre-Plotinian *Parmenides* commentaries inspired the negative theological passages in Platonizing Sethian and other Gnostic texts.[30] But I would emphasize that the nature of the parallel between *Zostrianos* and the *Sophist* suggests that the very structure of the dialogue

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[27] Plato *Sophist* 219b11–c3: "STR: … Let us call these things collectively the 'creative' expertise. TH.: Let it be so. STR.: Indeed, after this, once again, [consider] the whole species of "learning" and of 'coming to know' …"

[28] I thank Harold Tarrrant for helpful discussion on this topic.

[29] On the certainty of the pre-Plotininan dating of this commentary, see Bastianini-Sedley 1995, 246–247.

[30] See, *inter alia*, Whittaker 1983, 303–306; Whittaker 1969, 367–371; Turner 2006, 9–64; Tardieu 1996, 7–114. John Dillon sorted through the evidence for commentaries on a number of other dialogues by the vaguely Gnosticizing 2nd century Platonist Harpocration; see Dillon 1971.

itself—and not merely its interpretation—seems to have been crucial for pseudo-Zostrianos. It is therefore unnecessary to posit a lost commentary as intermediary. Both Porphyry and Plotinus' own comments suggest that the Gnostics whose apocalypses they were reading were closely associated with the pre-Plotinian academic philosophical milieu. I therefore believe it it safe to assume that the Platonizing Sethians were either within or on the immediate periphery of some late 2nd / early 3rd century Platonist circle which actually made use of the *Sophist*. The identification of such a circle remains a project for the future.

Yet if this is the case, we may still wonder why the Platonizing Sethians would have been so inspired by this particular dialogue, given its relatively humble subject matter, and (more generally) given their apparent ambivalence about Plato's own grasp of intelligible reality.[31] It seems to me that there are several incidental features of the dialogue which might have been of interest to the Platonizing Sethians due to some subtle resonance with their own ideas, a resonance that might have intimated to them some deeper inspiration beneath the surface of the text. The most important such features are as follows.

[1] Most generally, the *Sophist* provides a technique for the differentiation of multiple categories of beings, a technique which (in its rhetorical contours, if not in its actual content) might have appealed to those interested in providing a quasi-philosophical account of a plethora of divine realities and metaphysical principles. This dialogue may thus have inspired the positive-theological account of the intermediary divine strata as a counterpart to the negative-theological account of the vastly superior transcendentalia inspired by the *Parmenides*.

[2] Second, the *Sophist* transposes a difference of epistemic aptitude—namely, that between those who are able to behold the Divine and those who are not—into a hierarchical sociological distinction between philosopher and sophist. This would have served as a venerable proof text for the Sethians' own notion of the spiritual elect as possessing a special faculty of transcendental apprehension unavailable to non-Sethians.

[3] Third, the *Sophist* contains one of two principal sources for Plato's critique of artistic image-making, which—as I have argued elsewhere—

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[31] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16.8–9: … πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων καὶ αὐτοὶ ἠπατημένοι, ὡς δὴ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἰς τὸ βάθος τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας οὐ πελάσαντος. / "[The Gnostics were] misleading many, and themselves misled, that Plato had not attained to the depth of intelligible substance."

> the Gnostics typically turned against the Demiurge to justify their denigration of the cosmos and its creator.[32]

But there are other, slightly more obscure reasons the Sethians might have been attracted to this particular dialogue. For one thing, at 226d–227c, the Stranger and Theaetetus divide the activity of "purification" into the cleansing of the body (i.e., bathing), and that of the soul, and this discussion extends for several lines. We can imagine that the Sethians—having themselves emerged in part from a baptismal milieu (reflected in the profusion of spiritual baptisms throughout Zostrianos)—would have felt some particular kinship with the apparent reference to 'baptism' in this dialogue. And finally, the name of the mysterious Parmenidean sage himself—the Eleatic "Stranger" (ξένος)—would have appealed to a community one of whose mythical forebears was himself named ἀλλογενής,[33] the "Alien."[34]

Although more research is certainly needed, I think it is safe to say that the Platonizing Sethians made use of the text of the *Sophist* to conceptualize their praxis of visionary ascent. Moreover, that they even tacitly purported to employ Platonic dialectic in a manner superior to that of contemporaneous academic Platonists—and even to that of Plato himself—apears to have been supremely irksome to Plotinus; this fact alone might explain the annoyance that he exhibits towards what he sees as the specifically *philosophical* aspect of Gnostic hubris.[35]

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[32] *Sophist* 233e–236c; see also *Republic* X.596b–598d. I made this argument in a paper entitled "Plotinus' Response to Demiurgic *Mimēsis* in Platonic Gnosticism" presented at the ISNS at the University of Maine at Orono in 2002.

[33] This was in fact already suggested by Scopello 2005. Note esp. p. 198: "… on peut aussi se demander si le mot ἀλλογενής, qui est inconnu dans le grec classique, mais attesté dans la LXX, dans le Nouveau Testament et dans la littérature chrétienne, ne porte pas en lui, au delà de la différence terminologique, une allégorie du personnage du ξένος des dialogues de Platon; ξένος auquel, puisqu'il vient d'ailleurs, l'on reconnaît un statut privilégié, un charactère semi-divin."

[34] Presumably a cognomen of Seth (derived from σπέρμα ἕτερον at Gen. 4:25).

[35] One interesting thing to note is that the apparent Platonizing Sethian use of the *Sophist* did not (as far as I can tell) extend to that feature of the dialogue that so captivated Plotinus himself, at least in his later period; namely, the five principal genera of Being, the μέγιστα γένη. Conversely, the emphasis on dialectical διαίρεσις that seems to have inspired the Platonizing Sethians had very little importance for Plotinus. Plotinus alludes to this technique only obliquely, and very briefly, in I.3[20].4, in largely rhetorical description of Platonic dialectic. An interesting project for the future might be to re-examine Plotinus' discussion of the *Sophist* in his later period VI.2[43] for subtle indications of a dialogue with the Gnostics.

Finally, there is one aspect of the Platonizing Sethian use of the *Sophist* that I have conspicuously neglected to mention thus far, and which I cannot discuss in detail here. I will simply mention, in closing, that the evidence thus far adduced for a substantive Platonizing Sethian interest in the interpretation of the *Sophist* provides strong support for the hypothesis that these sectaries were at the origin of the noetic (Existence–Life–Intellect) triad,[36] which is evidently present, in various permutations, throughout the Platonizing Sethian corpus—as well as, of course, in later Neoplatonists—and which is thought to have ultimately derived, at least in part, from *Sophist* 248c–e.[37] The implication, if correct, is that the Platonizing Sethians—far from conforming to the tired scholarly sterotype of Gnostics as derivative 'parasites' who feed off of 'real' philosophy—were the agents of significant innovations in the development of Platonic interpretation in late antiquity, and therefore should be restituted to their deserved place in the history of philosophy.

Appendix

Table 1.

[A1] Plotinus II.9[33].5.1–8. Text from Henry-Schwyzer 1964.

Ἀλλ' αὐτοὺς μὲν σῶμα ἔχοντας, οἷον ἔχουσιν ἄνθρωποι, καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ λύπας καὶ ὀργὰς τὴν παρ' αὐτοῖς δύναμιν μὴ ἀτιμάζειν, ἀλλ' *ἐφάπτεσθαι τοῦ νοητοῦ* λέγειν ἐξεῖναι, μὴ εἶναι δὲ ἐν ἡλίῳ ταύτης ἀπαθεστέραν ἐν τάξει μᾶλλον καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἀλλοιώσει μᾶλλον οὖσαν, οὐδὲ φρόνησιν ἔχειν ἀμείνονα ἡμῶν τῶν ἄρτι γενομένων καὶ διὰ τοσούτων κωλυομένων τῶν ἀπατώντων ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐλθεῖν·	*But they* [*i.e., the Gnostics*], who have a body like human beings have, and desire and grief and anger, *do not dishonor their own power, but claim to be able to grasp the intelligible*, and [also claim] that there is not the same power in the sun (which is more impassible, in better order, and more unchanging), and that the sun does not have greater sagacity than our own: we who have just recently come into being and are impeded by such a great quantity of deceptions from coming to the truth.

(*continued*)

[36] On the Platonic sources of the triad itself see the seminal article of Hadot 1960, 199–121. The case for a pre-Plotinian origin of the triad is made in Corrigan 2000, 141–177; while the case for a Sethian origin was made most recently by Rasimus 2010, 81–110.

[37] It might be of interest that the Platonizing Sethian triad often substitutes the term "blessedness" (ⲙⲡⲛⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ) for νοήτης. Authority for this substitution, I suggest, may be found in the *Sophist* itself: at 233a4, the epithet μακάριος is specifically applied to "one who is able to know all things" (πάντα ἐπίστασθαί … δυνατόν).

Table 1. (*cont.*)

[A2] Plotinus II.9[33].6.28–34	
πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον ἕλκουσι τὰς δόξας τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ὡς αὐτοὶ μὲν τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν *κατανενοηκότες*, ἐκείνου δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν μακαρίων ἀνδρῶν μή. Καὶ πλῆθος νοητῶν ὀνομάζοντες τὸ *ἀκριβὲς ἐξευρηκέναι* δόξειν οἴονται αὐτῷ τῷ πλήθει τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν τῇ αἰσθητικῇ καὶ ἐλάττονι εἰς ὁμοιότητα ἄγοντες, δέον ἐκεῖ τὸ ὡς ὅτι μάλιστα ὀλίγον εἰς ἀριθμὸν διώκειν καὶ τῷ μετὰ τὸ πρῶτον τὰ πάντα ἀποδιδόντας ἀπηλλάχθαι, ἐκείνου τῶν πάντων ὄντος καὶ νοῦ τοῦ πρώτου καὶ οὐσίας καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα καλὰ μετὰ τὴν πρώτην φύσιν.	[The Gnostics] drag the worthy man's doctrines towards the inferior, *as if they had understood the intelligible nature*, and he and other blessed men had not. And *by naming a multiplicity of intelligibles they think that they will seem to have made a more precise discovery*. By this very mutiplicity they bring the intelligible nature towards likeness with the inferior, sensible nature, while [instead] one should seek after the smallest possible number and to rid oneself [of multiplcity], attributing everything to that which is after the first, that one being all things and the first intellect and substance and whatever other beautiful things are after the first nature.

[A3] Plotinus II.9[33].9.45–60	
ἔπειτα σεμνὸν δεῖ εἰς μέτρον μετὰ οὐκ ἀγροικίας, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἰόντα ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ φύσις δύναται ἡμῶν, ἀνιέναι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις νομίζειν εἶναι χώραν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ αὐτὸν μόνον μετ' ἐκεῖνον τάξαντα ὥσπερ ὀνείρασι πέτεσθαι ἀποστεροῦντα ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ δυνατὸν ψυχῇ ἀνθρώπου θεῷ γενέσθαι· δύναται δὲ εἰς ὅσον νοῦς ἄγει· τὸ δ' ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἤδη ἐστὶν ἔξω νοῦ πεσεῖν. Πείθονται δὲ ἄνθρωποι ἀνόητοι τοῖς τοιούτοις τῶν λόγων ἐξαίφνης ἀκούοντες ὡς σὺ ἔσῃ βελτίων ἁπάντων οὐ μόνον ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεῶν—πολλὴ γὰρ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἡ αὐθάδεια—καὶ ὁ πρότερον ταπεινὸς καὶ μέτριος καὶ ἰδιώτης ἀνήρ, εἰ ἀκούσειε· σὺ εἶ θεοῦ παῖς, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι, οὓς ἐθαύμαζες, οὐ παῖδες, οὐδ' ἃ τιμῶσιν ἐκ πατέρων λαβόντες, σὺ δὲ κρείττων καὶ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐδὲν πονήσας—εἶτα καὶ συνεπηχῶσιν ἄλλοι.	… the dignified person must ascend in a measured fashion, without boorishness, going just as far as one's nature is able, but one also must consider there to be space beside God for the others, and not order oneself alone next to him (it is just like flying in one's dreams!), thus depriving oneself of becoming god even insofar as it is possible for a human soul. One is able to go as far as Intellect leads, but to go above Intellect is immediately to fall outside of it. *Unintelligent people are persuaded by such discourse immediately upon hearing that 'You will be better than all, not only than humans, but also gods!'—for there is much arrogance among humans—and the man who was formerly humble and measured and private, if he hears, 'you are the son of God, but the others, at whom you* [*once*] *marveled, are not his children, nor are those which they venerate* [*according to the tradition*] *taken from their fathers, but you are superior to the heaven without any effort'*—then also others will join in the chorus!

Table 1. (*cont.*)

[A4] Plotinus II.9[33].9.75–83	
τιμῶν δὲ ἑκάστους κατ' ἀξίαν, σπεύδων δ' ἀεὶ οὗ πάντα σπεύδει τὰ δυνάμενα—πολλὰ δὲ εἶναι τὰ σπεύδοντα ἐκεῖ [πάντα], καὶ τὰ μὲν τυγχάνοντα μακάρια, τὰ δὲ ὡς δυνατὸν ἔχει τὴν προσήκουσαν αὐτοῖς μοῖραν—οὐχ αὑτῷ μόνῳ διδοὺς τὸ δύνασθαι· οὐ γάρ, ᾗ ἐπαγγέλλει, τὸ ἔχειν, ὃ λέγει τις ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καὶ εἰδότες ὅτι μὴ ἔχουσι, λέγουσιν ἔχειν καὶ οἴονται ἔχειν οὐκ ἔχοντες καὶ μόνοι ἔχειν, ὃ αὐτοὶ μόνοι οὐκ ἔχουσι.	[The man who truly loves God] honors each one according to his worth, and always strives towards that to which all who are able strive—for many are striving there, and some who are blessed, attain it, while others have the share appropriate to their ability—while not *according himself alone that ability. For it is not by proclaiming to have what one claims to have that one has it, yet many things that they too know they do not have, they say that they have, while not having them, and* [*they say that*] *they alone* [*have*] *what they alone do not have*.
[A5] Plotinus II.9[33].18.30–38	
Ἐγγὺς δὲ γενόμενοι τοῦ ἀπλήκτου μιμοίμεθ' ἂν τὴν τοῦ σύμπαντος ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν τῶν ἄστρων, εἰς ἐγγύτητα δὲ ὁμοιότητος ἐλθόντες σπεύδοιμεν ἂν πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἂν ἐν θέᾳ καὶ ἡμῖν εἴη ἅτε καλῶς καὶ αὐτοῖς παρεσκευασμένοις φύσεσι καὶ ἐπιμελείαις· τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑπάρχει. Οὐ δή, εἰ μόνοι λέγοιεν *θεωρεῖν* δύνασθαι, πλέον ἂν θεωρεῖν αὐτοῖς γίνοιτο, οὐδ' ὅτι αὐτοῖς φασιν εἶναι ἐξελθεῖν ἀποθανοῦσι, τοῖς δὲ μή, ἀεὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν κοσμοῦσιν.	Having come close to an undisturbed condition, we might imitate the condition of the soul of the entirety and that of the stars; having come into proximity by similarity, we could hasten towards the same thing [as the stars] and [attain] the same things through vision, and *we* would be beautifully prepared even for those [elevated things] by nature and by exercises; but [contemplation] belongs to them [the stars] 'from the beginning.' *Even if* they [*the Gnostics*] *declare themselves the only ones able to contemplate*, there would not be more for them to contemplate, nor would there be if they declare themselves to be able to exit [the cosmos] when they die, while others [the celestial bodies] are not, as they eternally decorate the sky.
[A6] Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 16.6–9	
πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων καὶ αὐτοὶ ἠπατη μένοι, ὡς δὴ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἰς τὸ βάθος τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας οὐ πελάσαντος.	[The Gnostics were] misleading many, themselves misled, that Plato had not penetrated to the depths of intelligible essence.

Table 2.

[B1] *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) 50.8–36. Text from Funk et al. 2004.		
8	ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲇⲉ	And I was able [to know],
9	ⲁⲉⲓⲟ̅ⲙ̅ⲟ[ⲟⲛ] ⲉⲩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲥⲁⲣⲝ̅ ⲧⲟ	even though flesh was invested
10	ⲫ̅ⲓⲱⲱⲧ[ⲁⲉⲓ]ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲉⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ	upon me. I heard these things from
11	ⲛ̅ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲕ̅ [ⲁ]ⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲫⲥⲃⲱ	you, and about the teaching
12	ⲉⲧⲙ̅ⲙ̅ⲡⲛⲧⲟⲩ· ⲉⲁⲡⲓⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ	which is within them, because *the*
13	ⲉⲧⲙ̅ⲙ̅ⲡⲛⲧ ⲁⲩⲡⲱⲣⲝ̅ ⲙ̅ⲙ[ⲛ] ⲉⲧ	*thought which is within me distinguished*
14	ⲭⲟⲥⲉ ⲉ[ⲡ]ⲙⲓ ⲙ̅ⲙ̅ ⲛⲓⲁⲧ[ⲥ]ⲟⲩ[ⲱ]	*those things which are beyond measure*
15	ⲛⲟⲩ· ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲫⲣ̅ⲣⲟⲧⲉ ⲛ[ⲛ]	*and those things that are unknowable.*
16	ⲡⲱⲥ ⲁⲧⲁⲥⲃⲱ ⲁⲥⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩ	On this account I was afraid lest
17	ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲡⲁⲣⲁ ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲙⲫⲉ· ⲁⲩⲱ	my teachings become something
18	ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲥ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲟⲛ {ⲭⲉ} ⲡⲁ	against what is appropriate. And
19	ⲫⲛⲣⲉ ⲙⲉⲥⲥⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲑⲓ ⲧⲁⲛⲓⲉ	then, my son Messos, spoke to me again.
20	[ⲟ]ⲟⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲓ̈ⲟⲩⲏⲗ̅ ⲁⲥⲟⲱⲗ̅[ⲡ̅]	The all-glorious Youel made a revelation
21	ⲛ]ⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲥ ⲭⲉ ⲙ[ⲉ]	to me and said: "No
22	ⲣⲉⲫⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲉⲛⲁ[ⲓ]	one can hear these things
23	ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲛⲓⲛⲟⲟ ⲛ̅ⲑⲟⲙ ⲟⲩⲁ[ⲁⲩ]	except the Great Powers alone,
24	ⲱ̅ ⲡⲁⲗⲗⲟⲅⲉⲛⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲧ ⲫ̅ⲓⲱ	O Allogenes. *A great power*
25	ⲱⲕ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲟ ⲛ̅ⲑⲟⲙ· ⲧⲏ ⲉ	*was invested upon you, that which*
26	ⲧⲁⲩⲧⲁⲁⲥ ⲫ̅ⲓⲱⲱⲕ ⲛ̅ⲑⲓ ⲡⲓⲱⲧ	*the eternal Father*
27	ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲧⲏⲣⲩ̅ ⲡⲓⲫⲁ ⲉⲛⲉⲫ ⲫⲁ	*of the Entirety invested*
28	ⲑⲛ ⲉⲛⲡⲁⲧⲉⲕⲉ̅ⲓ̅ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲁ· ⲫ̅ⲓ	*upon you before you came to this place,*
29	ⲛⲁ ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲙⲟⲩⲕ̅ⲫ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲣⲭⲟⲩ	*so that those things that are difficult to distinguish*
30	ⲭⲉ ⲉⲕⲉⲡⲟⲣⲭⲟⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲏ	*you will distinguish and those*
31	ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ ⲙ̅	*things that are unknowable*
32	ⲡⲓⲟⲩⲁⲧⲟ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲕⲉⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉ	*to the multitude you will know,*
33	ⲣⲟⲟⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲛⲟⲩⲫ̅ⲙ̅ ⲉ	and you escape
34	ⲫⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲕ· ⲡⲏ ⲉ	up to that which is yours, the one
35	ⲧⲁⲩⲣ̅ⲫⲟⲣⲡ̅ ⲛ̅ⲛⲟⲩⲫ̅ⲙ̅ ⲙ̅ⲙ̅	who first saved and
36	ⲡⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲩⲣ̅ ⲭⲣⲓⲁ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲫⲙⲉⲩ	the one who does not need to be saved."

[B2] *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 22.1–24.17. Text from Barry et al. 1999.		
1	ⲙⲙ[ⲉ]ⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲛ̅ⲛⲉⲱⲛ· ⲁⲩⲱ	And
2	[ⲉⲩⲉⲓ]ⲙⲉ ⲭⲉⲡⲱⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ̅ⲙ̅ⲑⲟⲟⲙ	one knows how one is able
3	[ⲙ̅]ⲙⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲙ̅ⲱⲡ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲧⲩ	to contain an eternal
4	ⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲙ̅ⲁⲉⲛⲫ̅· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̅ⲁⲩⲕⲟⲓ	model; and the universal
5	ⲛⲱⲛⲓ ⲛ̅ⲑⲓⲡⲛⲟⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲕⲁⲑⲟⲗⲓ	intelligence has [1] *communion*
6	ⲕⲟⲛ· ⲉⲙ̅ⲁⲩⲭⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̅ⲑⲓⲡⲓ	when the Autogenes water
7	ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲛⲥ· ⲉⲙ̅ⲱ	makes [one] perfect.
8	ⲡⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲩⲙ̅ⲁⲛⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲙⲛ̅	When one [2] *knows* it [or him(self)]
9	ⲛⲁⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ· ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲱ	and all of them, it is the
10	ⲧⲟⲫⲁⲛⲏⲥ ⲡⲉ· ⲉⲙ̅ⲱⲡⲉ ⲇⲉ	Protophanes water. And when
11	ⲉⲩⲙ̅ⲁⲛⲫ̅ⲱⲧⲡ̅ ⲙⲙ̅ⲏⲁⲩ ⲙⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲓ	one [3] *joins* oneself with all

Table 2. (*cont.*)

[B2] *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 22.1–24.17		
12	ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ· ⲡⲁⲡⲓⲕⲁⲗⲩⲡ⟨ⲧ⟩ⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ·	of them, it is the [water] of Kalyptos;
13	ⲡⲉⲓⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲉ̄ⲛⲛⲓ	this image still exists in the
14	ⲉⲱⲛ· ⲉⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉ[ⲛⲁ]ⲓ̈ ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲟⲩⲁ	Aeons: [i.e.,] to know these individuals
15	ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲛ̄[⟨ⲓ⟩ⲧⲉⲗⲓ]ⲟⲥ ⲛⲉ· ⲛⲏ	and the parts are the [perfect] ones.
16	ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲩ [ⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲉⲡⲥⲟ	Those of the All—the place where
17	ⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ [ⲁⲩⲱ] ⲡⲏ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲉⲓ	knowing is—and and those which
18	ⲛⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲡ[ⲱ]ⲣⲭ [ⲉ]ⲃⲟⲗ· ⲁ[ⲩⲱ]	they know, were separated, and
19	ⲟⲩⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲱ[ⲃⲏⲣ] ⲉⲧ̄ⲛⲧⲁⲩ [ⲛ̄ⲯⲣⲁⲓ̈]	[yet] they have a fellowship
20	ⲯⲛⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏ[ⲩ]· ⲡ[ⲧ]ⲏⲣ̄ⲩ ⲁⲩ[ⲱ ⲛⲁⲓ̈]	with each other. The All and
21	ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲩ[… 7 …] ⲟⲩ [ⲁⲩ]	all of them […
22	ⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ ⲉⲡⲓ[ⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ ⲛ̄ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉ]	baptized [in a baptism of
23	ⲛⲏⲥ [· ⲉ]ⲱⲁⲩ[… 12 …]	Autogenes […
24	ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ[ⲗⲓⲟ]ⲥ ⲉ[… 13 …]	[perfect …
25	ⲙ[… 20 …]	[…
26	ⲙ[… 20 …]	[…
27	ⲡ[… 20 …]	[…
28	[… 20 …]	[…
29	ⲡ[… 20 …]	[…
[p. 23]		
1	ⲙⲏⲁⲩ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲱⲛⲯ̄ ⲙ̄ⲛⲟ[ⲩ ⲉⲃ]ⲟⲗ	… there, he reveals him(self?),
2	ⲉⲧⲉⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉⲓⲙⲉ [ⲭⲉⲡ]ⲱⲥ	that is, when one knows how
3	ⲩⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲁⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲛ̄[ⲧⲁ]ⲩ ⲛ̄	it [or "he"] exists for it [or "him"], and [how] it [or "he"]
4	ⲛⲟⲩⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲃⲏⲣ ⲯⲁⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲟⲩ	has a mutual fellowship,
5	ⲁⲩⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ ⲉⲡⲓⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲱⲟⲧⲟ	one washed in the washing of
6	ⲫⲁⲛⲏⲥ· ϯⲁⲣⲭⲏ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲉ	Protophanes. And [concerning] the principle of these
7	ⲱⲟⲡⲉ ⲉⲱⲁⲩⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ	things, *if one knows how*
8	ⲡⲱⲥ ⲥⲉⲟⲩⲟⲛⲯ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲯⲛ	*all things are manifested in*
9	ⲟⲩⲁⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲱⲥ	*a single 'head,' and how*
10	ⲉⲩⲯⲟⲧⲡ ⲛ̄ⲥⲓⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲱⲁⲩ	*all of these that are joined,*
11	ⲡⲱⲣⲭ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲱⲥ ⲱⲁⲩ	*separate, and how*
12	ⲯⲱⲧⲡ ⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥⲓⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲡⲱⲣⲭ̄	*those that are separate, join*
13	ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲱⲥ ⲱⲁⲣⲉⲛⲏⲉ	*again, and how the parts*
14	ⲣⲟⲥ ⲯⲱ[ⲧⲡ ⲙ̄]ⲛⲛⲓⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲓ	*join with the all and the*
15	ⲉⲓⲇⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲛⲛ[ⲓⲣⲉ]ⲛⲟⲥ· ⲉⲱⲟⲡⲉ	*species* (*Forms*) *with the genera; if one*
16	ⲉⲣⲱⲁⲟⲩ[ⲁ ⲉⲓ]ⲙⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲁⲩⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ	*understands these things, one has washed*
17	ⲉⲡⲓⲭⲱ[ⲕ̄ⲙ ⲛ̄]ⲕⲗⲥ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ	*in the washing of Kalyptos.* And with
18	ⲡⲟⲩⲁ ⲡⲟⲩⲁ [ⲙ̄ⲛⲓ]ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ· ⲟⲩⲛ̄	respect to each of the places, one
19	ⲧⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲟ[ⲩ]ⲙⲉⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ	has a portion of

(*continued*)

Table 2. (*cont.*)

20	ⲛⲓϣⲁⲉⲛⲉ[ϩ· ⲁⲩ]ⲱ ϣⲁⲩⲃⲱⲕ	the eternal ones, and one
	ⲉϩ[ⲣⲁⲓ … 4 … ⲙ̄]ⲡⲣⲏ[ⲧⲉ] ⲉϣⲁⲩ	ascends […] in the manner one
21	[ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲩⲧⲟⲩ]ⲃⲛⲟ[ⲩ ⲛ̄ϩ]ⲁⲡⲗⲟⲩⲛ	[becomes pure and] simple.
22	ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓϣ ⲛ[ⲓⲏ] ⲉⲩ[ⲛⲏ]ⲟⲩ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ	One continually proceeds up
23	ⲉⲟⲩⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡ[ⲓⲣⲏⲧⲉ· ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ]ϣ	to unity in this way: continually
24	ⲛⲓⲏ ⲉⲩⲧⲟⲩⲃ[ⲛⲟⲩⲧ ⲛ̄ϩⲁⲡ]ⲗⲟⲩ̄·	pure and simple,
25	ϣⲁⲩⲛⲟⲩϩ ⲉⲃⲟ[ⲗ ϩⲛ̄ⲑⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓ]ⲙⲉ	one is filled […]
26	ϩⲛⲟⲩϩⲩⲡⲁⲣ̀ⲍⲓⲥ ⲛ[ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲡⲙ̄]ⲁ	in Existence […]
27	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲡⲙ̄ⲁ ⲉⲩⲟⲩ[ⲁⲁⲃ] ⲙ̄ⲙ	and a holy *pneuma*, with

[p. 24]

1	ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲛⲟⲩ· ϣⲁⲩ	nothing of his outside of him.
2	ⲛ[ⲁⲩ ⲛ]ⲉⲙ ϩⲛⲟⲩⲑⲩⲭⲏ ⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲓ	On the one hand, he sees in a perfect
3	ⲟ[ⲥ ⲉⲙ]ⲁⲛⲓⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲛⲥ· ϩⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥ	soul those of Autogenes; on the other hand, in intellect,
4	ⲇ[ⲉ ⲉ]ⲛⲁⲡⲓϣⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲧϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ· ϩⲛⲟⲩ	those of the Triple Male, in a
5	ⲡⲙ̄ⲁ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲛⲁⲙⲓⲡⲣⲱⲧⲟⲫⲁ	pure spirit, those of Protophanes.
6	ⲛⲏⲥ· ϣⲁⲩⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉⲡⲓⲕⲗⲥ	He hears about Kalyptos
7	ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ ⲛⲓⲟⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲡⲙ̄ⲁ ⲉⲧⲁⲩ	through the powers of the Spirit which
8	ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲩ ϩⲛⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲩ	emerged in a vastly superior manifestation
9	ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲩⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲁϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲙ̄	of the Invisible
10	ⲡⲙ̄ⲁ· ⲣⲣⲁⲓ ⲇⲉ ϩⲛ̄ⲑⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲉⲧ	Spirit. By the thought that
11	ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲑⲛⲟⲩ ϩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲅⲏ· ⲛ̄ϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲇⲉ	now exists in Silence [and] by the
12	ϩⲛ̄ϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ· ⲉⲧⲃⲉⲡⲓϣⲙ̄ⲙⲧ	First Thought [one learns] about the
13	ⲃⲟⲏ ⲛ̄ⲁϩⲟⲣⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲙⲙⲡⲙ̄ⲁ ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲧⲙ	Triple Powered Invisible Spirit; it is, then, an audition
14	ⲃⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲃⲟⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲟⲩⲥⲓⲅⲏ ⲉⲥ	and a power of silence which
15	ⲧⲟⲩⲃⲛⲟⲩⲧ ϩⲛⲟⲩ[ⲡ̄]ⲛⲁ ⲉⲩⲧⲁⲛϩⲟ	is purified in a vivifying spirit,
16	ⲑⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ϣ[ⲟ]ⲣ̄[ⲡ]ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ	perfect, first—perfect,
17	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲉ[ⲗⲓⲟ]ⲥ:	and all-perfect.

Table 3.

[B3] Epistemological correlates of ascent through subaeons of Barbelo in *Zostrianos* pp. 22–24.

Principle	*'Baptism' understood to occur when …*		*Faculty by which principle is apprehended*:
	22.1–12	23.2–24	24.2–17
Triple Powered Invisible Spirit			*24.10–13*: The Thought that now exists in Silence and through the First Thought, an audition and a power of silence
Kalyptos	*22.10–12* when one *joins* oneself with all of them	*23.6–24*: And [concerning] the principle of these things, if one knows how all things are manifested in a single 'head,' and how all of these that are joined, separate, and how those that are separate, join again, and how the parts join with the all and the species (Forms) with the genera; if one understands these things, one has washed in the washing of Kalyptos.	*24.6–10*: the powers of the Spirit which emerged in a vastly superior manifestation of the Invisible Spirit
Protophanes	*22.7–10*: When one *knows* all of them	*23.2–6*: One *knows* how he / it exists for him / it and one has a mutual fellowship	*24.4–5*: pure spirit
Triple Male Child		*24.3–4*: intellect	
Autogenes	*22.1–7*: When one knows how one is able to contain an eternal 'impression', and the universal intellect has *communion*		*24.1–3*: perfect soul

Table 4.

[C] *Plato, Sophist 253b8–254b6*. Text from Burnet 1900.	
{ΞΕ.} Τί δ'; ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰ γένη πρὸς ἄλληλα κατὰ ταὐτὰ μείξεως ἔχειν ὡμολογήκαμεν, ἆρ' οὐ μετ' ἐπιστήμης τινὸς ἀναγκαῖον διὰ τῶν λόγων πορεύεσθαι τὸν ὀρθῶς μέλλοντα (10) δείξειν ποῖα ποίοις συμφωνεῖ τῶν γενῶν καὶ ποῖα ἄλληλα	STRANGER: Since we have agreed also that genera are the same [as other things previously discussed with respect to the ability to mix with one another, is it not necessary—for one intending to show correctly which of the genera harmonize with which, and which do not receive one
(*c.*) οὐ δέχεται; καὶ δὴ καὶ διὰ πάντων εἰ συνέχοντ' ἄττ' αὖτ' ἐστιν, ὥστε συμμείγνυσθαι δυνατὰ εἶναι, καὶ πάλιν ἐν ταῖς διαιρέσεσιν, εἰ δι' ὅλων ἕτερα τῆς διαιρέσεως αἴτια;	other—to proceed through the arguments with some kind of science? And especially if [one intends to show] whether there is a [genus] which holds things together throughout the whole, so that they are able to be commingled, and again in the [case of] divisions, if there are other causes of division throughout the whole?
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Πῶς γὰρ οὐκ ἐπιστήμης δεῖ, καὶ σχεδόν γε ἴσως τῆς μεγίστης; (5)	THEAETETUS: How could one not need such a science, and indeed almost the greatest?
{ΞΕ.} Τίν' οὖν αὖ [νῦν] προσεροῦμεν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ταύτην;	STRANGER: So what then will we call this science, Theaetetus? Or, by Zeus, have we
ἢ πρὸς Διὸς ἐλάθομεν εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἐμπεσόντες ἐπιστήμην, καὶ κινδυνεύομεν ζητοῦντες τὸν σοφιστὴν πρότερον ἀνηυρηκέναι τὸν φιλόσοφον;	unwittingly stumbled upon the science belonging to the free, and have we, while seeking the sophist, happened by chance to have discovered the philosopher first?
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Πῶς λέγεις; (10)	THEAETETUS: How do you mean?
(*d.*) {ΞΕ.} Τὸ κατὰ γένη διαιρεῖσθαι καὶ μήτε ταὐτὸν εἶδος ἕτερον ἡγήσασθαι μήτε ἕτερον ὂν ταὐτὸν μῶν οὐ τῆς διαλεκτικῆς φήσομεν ἐπιστήμης εἶναι;	STRANGER: Will we not declare it to be of the science of dialectic to divide according to genus, and to consider neither the same form to be another nor another to be the same?
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Ναί, φήσομεν.	THEAETETUS: Yes, we will say so.

Table 4. (*cont.*)

[C] *Plato, Sophist 253b8–254b6*	
{ΞΕ.} Οὐκοῦν ὅ γε τοῦτο δυνατὸς δρᾶν μίαν ἰδέαν διὰ (5) πολλῶν, ἑνὸς ἑκάστου κειμένου χωρίς, πάντῃ διατεταμένην ἱκανῶς διαισθάνεται, καὶ πολλὰς ἑτέρας ἀλλήλων ὑπὸ μιᾶς ἔξωθεν περιεχομένας, καὶ μίαν αὖ δι' ὅλων πολλῶν ἐν ἑνὶ συνημμένην, καὶ πολλὰς χωρὶς πάντῃ διωρισμένας· τοῦτο δ' (*e.*) ἔστιν, ᾗ τε κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται καὶ ὅπῃ μή, διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι.	STRANGER: And so, then, the one able to do this adequately discerns one 'idea' extended everywhere throughout many things, each one of which lies separately, and [also discerns] many ['ideas'] which are other than one another, encompassed by one ['idea'] from the outside, and again one ['idea'] coming together into one through a multiplicity of wholes, and many entirely separate ['ideas'] bounded off [from each other]. To understand this is to [be able to] distinguish, according to genus, where each ['idea'] is both able and not able to commune.
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Παντάπασι μὲν οὖν.	THEAETETUS: In every way so.
{ΞΕ.} Ἀλλὰ μὴν τό γε διαλεκτικὸν οὐκ ἄλλῳ δώ-σεις, ὡς ἐγῷμαι, πλὴν τῷ καθαρῶς τε καὶ δικαίως φιλο- (5) σοφοῦντι.	STRANGER: But surely, I suppose, you will not grant the dialectic [science] to another, except to the one philosophizing purely and justly.
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἄλλῳ δοίη τις;	THEAETETUS: For how could one grant it to another?
{ΞΕ.} Τὸν μὲν δὴ φιλόσοφον ἐν τοιούτῳ τινὶ τόπῳ καὶ νῦν καὶ ἔπειτα ἀνευρήσομεν ἐὰν ζητῶμεν, ἰδεῖν μὲν χαλεπὸν *254.* (*a.*) ἐναργῶς καὶ τοῦτον, ἕτερον μὴν τρόπον ἥ τε τοῦ σοφιστοῦ χαλεπότης ἥ τε τούτου.	STRANGER: Indeed, if we search, we will find the philosopher in some such place sooner or later; even this one [the philosopher] is difficult to see clearly, but the difficulty with respect to the sophist is of a different manner than that of [the philosopher].
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Πῶς;	THEAETETUS: How?
{ΞΕ.} Ὁ μὲν ἀποδιδράσκων εἰς τὴν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος σκοτεινότητα, τριβῇ προσαπτόμενος αὐτῆς, διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν τοῦ (5) τόπου κατανοῆσαι χαλεπός· ἦ γάρ;	STRANGER: The one [i.e., the sophist] runs away into the darkness of Non-Being, attaching himself to it by rubbing up against it, and is difficult to comprehend because of the darkness of the place. Is it not so?
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Ἔοικεν.	THEAETETUS: So it seems.
{ΞΕ.} Ὁ δέ γε φιλόσοφος, τῇ τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ διὰ λογισμῶν προσκείμενος ἰδέᾳ, διὰ τὸ λαμπρὸν αὖ τῆς χώρας οὐδαμῶς εὐπετὴς ὀφθῆναι· τὰ γὰρ τῆς τῶν πολλῶν ψυχῆς ὄμματα (10) (*b.*)καρτερεῖν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἀφορῶντα ἀδύνατα.	STRANGER: But the other—i.e., the real philosopher, who is always, through reasoning, lying close to the 'idea' of Being—is in no way easy to see, conversely because of the brightness of his domain. For the eyes of the soul of the many are unable to endure gazing towards the Divine.

Table 5.

[D1] *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 4.19–5.26. Text from Funk et al. 1990.

19	ⲧⲙⲁϩ	The thirteenth [seal]
20	ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉ ⲉⲥⲱⲉⲭⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ	speaks about
21	ⲡⲉ[ⲧ]ⲕⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓⲧ ⲉⲙⲡⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩ	the Silent one who was not
22	ⲱ[ⲱⲛ]ⲧ̄ⲫ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲕⲁⲧⲁⲣⲭⲏ ⲛ̄	known, and the sovereignty
23	[ⲡⲉⲧ]ⲉⲙⲡⲟⲩⲇⲓⲁⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄	of *the one who was not distinguished* (διακρίνειν).
24	[ⲙⲁⲩ]· ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩⲓ͞ⲣ̄	For it is I who
25	[ⲛⲟⲉⲓ] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲙⲁⲙⲏ	[intelligized] that which truly exists
26	[ⲉ ⲉⲓ]ⲧⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲙ̄	*whether according to the part or*
27	[ⲡⲧⲏ]ⲣⲫ̄· ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲧⲇⲓⲁⲫⲟⲣⲁ	*to the whole*. According to [their] *difference* (διάφορα),
28	[ⲁϩⲓⲙ̄ⲙⲉ] ⲭⲉ ⲥⲉⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲭⲓⲛⲛ̄	I knew that they exist, since
29	[ⲱⲁⲣⲡ̄ ϩⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲙⲁ ⲧⲏⲣ[ⲫ̄] ⲉⲧⲟⲉ[ⲓ]	the beginning, in the entire place
[p. 5]		
1	ⲛ̄ⲁⲓⲱⲛⲓⲟⲛ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁϩⲱⲱ	which is eternal: all those that have come into existence
2	ⲡⲉ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ· ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲭⲱⲣⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ	whether separate from substance (οὐσία)
3	ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ϩ̄ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ· ⲛⲉⲧⲟⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧ	or in substance (οὐσία), those who are
4	ⲭⲡⲁⲩ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ· ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩ	unbegotten, and the divine aeons,
5	ⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲛⲁⲅⲅ[ⲉ]ⲗⲟⲥ· ⲁⲩⲱ	and the angels, and
6	ⲙ̄ⲫⲩⲭⲏ ⲉⲩϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲙ[ⲙⲧ]	the forthright souls
7	ⲃⲁⲗϩⲙⲧ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ϩ[ⲃⲥⲟⲩ ⲙ̄]	and the psychic 'garments,'
8	ⲫⲩⲭⲏ· ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲛⲧⲛ̄ ⲁ[ⲛϩⲁ]	the likenesses of the
9	ⲡⲗⲟⲩⲛ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ[ⲥⲱⲥ ⲁ]	simple ones. And afterwards
10	ϩⲟⲩⲧⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ[ⲉⲧⲡⲁⲣⲭ̄]	they joined with those [from whom] they
11	ⲁⲣⲁⲩ· ⲉⲧⲓ ⲇⲉ [ⲉⲣⲉⲧⲕⲉⲟⲩ]	were separated. But still [...
12	ⲥⲓⲁ ⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲥ ⲛ̄[ⲁⲓⲥⲉⲛⲧⲏ ⲧⲛ̄]	entire [sensible] substance (οὐσία)
13	ⲧⲱⲛ ⲁⲧⲟ[ⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲛⲧⲏ	resembles [non- ...
14	ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲟⲩ[ⲥⲓ]ⲁ· ⲁ[ϩⲓⲙ̄ⲙⲉ]	insubstantial ... I [knew]
15	ⲇⲉ ⲁⲡⲭⲱϩⲙ̄ ⲧⲏⲣ[ⲫ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ]	the entire corruption [of]
16	ⲉⲓ· ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲧⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲙⲟⲩ ⲛ̄	of that, and the immortality
17	ⲧⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ· ⲁϩⲓⲇⲓⲁⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ·	of that one. I '*distinguished*' (διακρίνειν)
18	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϩⲓⲡⲱϩ ⲁⲑⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓ	and I attained the end of the
19	ⲥⲑⲛⲧⲟⲥ ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ· ⲕⲁⲧ[ⲁ]	sensible cosmos, according to the
20	ⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲫ̄	parts of every place,
21	ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲥⲱⲙⲁ· ⲁⲩⲱ	the incorporeal substance and
22	ⲡⲛⲟⲏⲧⲟⲥ ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲩ	the intelligible cosmos; I
23	ⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ⲫ̄ ϩⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲣⲉⲩⲣ̄ⲇⲓ	knew, in the *distinguishing* (διακρίνειν),
24	ⲁⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ· ⲭⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲱⲥ ⲡⲓⲁⲓ	that the sensible cosmos
25	ⲥⲑⲛⲧⲟⲥ ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲭⲙ̄[ⲡⲱϩ]	was in every way worthy
26	ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲩⲟⲩⲭⲉⲉⲓ [ⲧⲛ]ⲣⲫ̄	of being saved entirely.

Table 5. (*cont.*)

[D2] *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 42.17–25		
17	[ⲛ]ⲓⲁϥ ⲉⲓⲧ[ⲉ ⲛⲉⲧϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲡⲉ]	these numbers, whether [those in heaven]
18	ⲉⲓⲧⲁ ⲛⲉⲧϩⲓⲝⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲁϩ	or those upon the earth,
19	ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧϩⲁⲡⲉⲥⲛⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡ[ⲕⲁϩ]	and those under the [earth],
20	ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲓⲁ ⲙⲛ̄	*according to the communions and*
21	ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲣⲓⲥⲙⲟ[ⲥ] ⲛⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄	*divisions among*
22	ⲛⲉⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ [ϩ]ⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲉⲥⲉ	*these* and in the rest
23	ⲉⲡ[ⲉ] ⲡ[...] ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ	[...] *parts*,
24	[ⲕⲁ]ⲧⲁ ⲅⲉⲛⲟ[ⲥ ⲁⲩ]ⲱ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ	*according to genus and according*
25	[ⲉⲓ]ⲛⲉ [...]	*to form*.

[E1] *3 Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5) 122.26–31. Text established by B. Pearson and J.E. Goehring in Pearson 1996.		
26	ⲁϯⲥⲟⲙ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ϯⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲙⲉ·	You have empowered this one in *knowing*;
27	ⲁϯⲥⲟⲙ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲟⲩⲁ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧⲁ	You have empowered another in *making*; [*Soph*. 219b–c]
28	ⲙⲓⲟ· ⲁϯⲥⲟⲙ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ ⲉⲧⲱⲙϩⲏ	You have empowered the one that is *equal*
29	ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲛ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲙϩⲏ ⲁⲛ· ⲡⲛ	and the one that is *unequal*, the one that
30	ⲉⲧⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲛ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲓⲛⲉ || ⲁⲛ·	is *similar* and the one that is *dissimilar*. [*Soph*. 254e ff.]

[E2] *3 Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5) 123.8–11		
8	ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲟⲩⲡⲱⲙ	According to a *division*
9	ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲟⲛⲧⲱⲥ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ·	*of all those truly existing*
10	ⲁⲕⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲛ̄	you appeared to them all in
11	ⲟⲩⲱⲁⲭⲉ·	a word.

[E3] *3 Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5) 123.26–33		
26	ⲛ̄ⲧⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲧⲉ	It is you alone
27	ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧ̄ⲃⲃⲟ ⲉⲛⲓⲱⲟ	who sees the first eternals
28	ⲣⲡ̄ ⲱⲁ ⲉⲛⲉϩ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲓⲁⲧⲙⲓⲥⲉ	and the unbegotten ones,
29	ⲛ̄ⲑⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲇⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲱⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ	and *the first divisions according to*
30	ⲑⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲡⲟⲱⲉ· ϩⲟⲧⲧⲙ̄ⲛ	*the manner in which they were divided.* Unite us
31	ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲑⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩϩⲟⲧⲧⲉ· ⲙⲁ	according to the manner in which you were united. Teach
32	ⲧⲁⲙⲟⲛ [ⲉ]ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲉⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟ||ⲟⲩ·	us those things that you see.

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DID PLOTINUS "FRIENDS" STILL GO TO CHURCH? COMMUNAL RITUALS AND ASCENT APOCALYPSES

Michael A. Williams

Inconvenient issues still very much haunt the cluster of texts that today are often classified as "Sethian."[1] There are the very well-known and fundamental questions of precisely how one establishes this cluster in the first place (i.e., which sources should be included and which excluded) and, once delineated, whether such a cluster is evidence for a significant degree of underlying social-historical continuity (e.g., a sect going through evolution) or instead something more in the direction of a looser network of literary borrowing and revising of mythemes.

One specific topic integral to these basic questions has always been the issue of ritual. Language that is obviously, or sometimes at least arguably, related to ritual appears in several of the texts most commonly classified as "Sethian": baptism(s) of some sort; "five seals" (possibly a term for baptism(s)); robing or investiture; crowning; doxologies that seem to reflect communal worship; stories about ascents to transcendental realms or states of consciousness that have been seen as models for meditation rituals, etc. Modern scholars debate whether some of this language implies actual physical actions (e.g., water baptism, literal robing and crowning), or rather in some cases alludes only to non-physical, spiritualized rituals (e.g., imagined as "celestial" experiences in meditative exercises).

There are several very learned studies surveying the topic of "Sethian" ritual at considerable length, and in this article I do not present still another full-scale analysis of all the texts and angles involved.[2] Instead, my goal is far more modest. I shall focus primarily on one interesting but troublesome question about "Sethian" ritual—i.e., what is the relationship of language about baptism in some of these texts to depictions of visionary ascents?

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[1] Or, as some today prefer, the "Gnostic school of thought"; see most recently Brakke 2010, who in general follows Layton 1995, 334–350.

[2] E.g., Sevrin 1986; Turner 2000, 83–139; 2001; 2006, 941–992; Cosentino 2007, 107–128; Ferguson 2009, 290–299; and, the recent excellent survey by our honoree, Pearson 2011, 119–143.

More specifically, do the striking portrayals of ascent in texts such as *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* represent a new salvation ritual that has *replaced* an earlier communal baptism?

There are two historical "moments" of particular relevance for the question under discussion here. The first "moment" is certainly one that has received a lot of attention from researchers, and yet I believe that it holds implications for this discussion that have not yet been fully explored. This "moment" is the dispute between Plotinus and certain "friends,"[3] attested most explicitly in *Ennead* 2.9, but also famously referred to by his student Porphyry in the latter's *Life of Plotinus*, chapter 16.[4] Because Porphyry asserts that writings possessed by these criticized acquaintances included apocalypses of "Zostrianos" and "Allogenes," the two tractates among the Nag Hammadi texts bearing these titles have naturally received much attention in research on Plotinus's famous complaints against his friends' teachings.

As a result, some scholars now see in the episode involving Plotinus and "friends" a contributing witness to a significant transition in "Sethian" ritual. Whereas writings such as the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2 and IV,2; a.k.a. *Gospel of the Egyptians*) are viewed as possible evidence for an initiatory water baptism in Sethian communities, tractates such as *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) are seen by some as evidence of a later evolution

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[3] In *Ennead* 2.9.10,1–6, Plotinus mentions that the teachings he is criticizing command a following among some of his "friends" (φίλοι) for whom he still holds a "certain respect" (αἰδώς τις); that these persons had taken up these doctrines prior to becoming his "friends," and that they remained in this persuasion even now. See, e.g., Edwards 1989, 228–232, who argues that the αἰδώς language here echoes Plato, *Republic* 595b–c, and Aristotle's imitation of that passage in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6.1. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16, mentions an "Adelphius and Aquilinus" as persons affiliated with the teachings that Plotinus criticizes in *Ennead* 2.9. Eunapius (*Live of the Sophists*, Boissonade, 457) refers to an "Aquilinus" as one of Porphyry's fellow students under Plotinus, but Edwards believes this ought to be corrected: "Aquilinus" was indeed among the "friends" for whom Plotinus still held some regard, but because they had been former fellow students in Alexandria under Ammonius Saccas. "Plotinus' allusion to Plato and Aristotle is an elegant device which enables him to evade the claims of friendship in the name of a tradition whose greatest masters had been distinguished by their urbane but steadfast resistance to the august proponents of error" (231–232). Tardieu 1992, 518–519, on the other hand, suggests that Adelphius and Aquilinus must have been, like Porphyry, disciples of Plotinus, and possibly even before Porphyry came to Rome. Two important recent dissertations side with something like Edwards's position on the Alexandrian context for the original "friendship": Mazur 2010, 291–323; and Burns 2011, 82–83.

[4] Porphyry places *Ennead* 2.9 as number 33 chronologically, and it is well known that it is part of a longer argument spanning *Ennead* 3.8, 5.8, and 5.5. The whole of this larger writing is important for analysis of the philosophical engagement of Plotinus with the criticized teachings, but it is in *Ennead* 2.9 that one finds the specific evidence most relevant to my topic here.

in which communal water baptism has been abandoned and replaced by an individualized ascent ritual. Under this theory, the several positive uses of "baptize" in *Zostrianos* are understood to refer only to non-physical, metaphorical elements in a process of transcendental meditation.[5]

The second "moment" is represented in the Nag Hammadi codices that contain the only known copies of the ascent treatises under discussion here: above all, Codex VIII (containing *Zost.*) and Codex XI (containing *Allogenes*). But also pertinent to this inquiry are codices containing copies of the *Holy Book* (especially IV, but also III) and of the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII).

The elements of the argument to be presented in what follows can be summarized in three points: (1) It is at least questionable that tractates such as *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* or *Three Steles of Seth* contain *in themselves* sufficient evidence to demonstrate that there had been a shift to an entirely new ritual praxis now required of everyone in this life in order to gain salvation in the hereafter. (2) Secondly, it is certainly not clear that what we know about Plotinus's "friends" either from Porphyry or from Plotinus's criticisms of them supports a narrative about a decisively new stage in "Sethian" ritual practice. (3) And finally, together with the two points just mentioned, the other most tangible "moment" in the history of the "Platonizing Sethian" texts—i.e., the nature of the books in which our surviving copies of them are found—may carry more significance than has usually been realized. For if one does hypothesize that the "Platonizing Sethian" texts come from a stage in which Sethianism had been hectored into decamping from Christian circles and had in the process completely replaced communal baptism with a new ascent ritual, then we need to explain an oddity surrounding this alleged detour: How and why did it then come to be that in the fourth century these tractates were preserved precisely in Christian books that involve collections where the theme of water baptism still seems "operative." It is not that such twists and turns are unimaginable impossibilities, but my argument is that they are unnecessary given the totality of the evidence.

The Alleged Evidence for a Radical Change in Sethian Ritual

In a famous article from the proceedings of the 1978 Yale conference on Gnosticism, Hans-Martin Schenke proposed a distinction between Sethian

[5] There is one negative reference toward the end of the text, a warning against baptizing oneself "with death." See discussion below.

baptism and a cultic ascent ritual, but suggested that these were "two sacraments, two mysteries" of the same community, at least in the case of some Sethians.[6] The ascent ritual was "higher in degree" than Sethian baptism "and repeatable."[7] As would be argued by most scholars in subsequent studies, Schenke deemed the *Holy Book* to be "our main witness for Sethian baptism," while on the other hand he found his most important evidence in support of the ascent ritual in *Steles Seth*.[8] He argued that invocations, depicted as offered by Seth but phrased several times in the first person *plural*, indicate that this writing was intended as an etiology for the ascension ritual. The mythical entity Seth voices "invocations which effect an ascension and which the community can and must reproduce."[9] Schenke was inclined to view the "celestial journey" of the seer "Allogenes" (= Seth) as a very different matter: "*Allogenes* commemorates the exceptional experience of a single individual," whose role "is that of a mediator of a revelation."[10] *Zostrianos*, on the other hand, involves not only a celestial journey but celestial baptisms received by the visionary, and Schenke pointed to this as an illustration of "a distinct ideology or mythology of baptism" in Sethianism, a mythology that ascribed to literal baptismal water a "celestial quality" and origin.[11] Schenke acknowledged the possibility of some Sethian groups "who had completely sublimated their sacrament of baptism," since the Sethian community at large might not have been "completely homogenous and fixed." But he contended that even the "most sublimated and speculative" statements about baptism in their literature could "only be understood, I think, on the basis of a strong, deeply-rooted, and obviously already traditional practice of water baptism."[12] Thus, Schenke did not work out a theory of evolutionary stages of Sethian ritual.

In 1986, two studies of considerable significance for this topic were published. One was the dissertation by the Belgian scholar Jean-Marie Sevrin, in which he analyzed baptism and baptismal themes across a selection of texts that he considered to belong to the "Sethian" tradition.[13] Sevrin's study is a well-known benchmark as the first extensive and systematic treatment

6 Schenke 1981, 588–616.
7 Schenke 1981, 602.
8 Schenke 1981, 604.
9 Schenke 1981, 602.
10 Schenke 1981, 601–602.
11 Schenke 1981, 602–603.
12 Schenke 1981, 606.
13 Sevrin 1986.

of the topic. My main interest here is in Sevrin's notions about any evolution in Sethian ritual. In fact he did postulate development, but primarily in the form of a multiplication of elements in the baptismal rite. Much as Schenke had done, Sevrin argued that a physical water initiation ritual was from the beginning aligned with a spiritual, celestial register; the "living" baptismal water here below has its source in the transcendent realm.[14] So in his explanation of the multiple baptisms received by the seer Zostrianos during his transcendental ascent, Sevrin contended that nothing in this portrait indicates a rejection of a literal rite. Instead, the evolution here was in the multiplication of immersions incorporated in the physical baptismal ritual, marking stages in a single process of initiation. He argued that this proliferation of immersions matching an expanded cast of celestial entities, also seen in the *Holy Book*, marked a ritual "degeneration" and "devalorization" the rite.[15]

The second study appearing in 1986 that must be mentioned offered a rather different interpretation. In a seminal article that foreshadowed the shape of much of his important subsequent research and publication on Sethianism and its relation to the Platonic tradition, John Turner sketched a history of five stages in the development of Sethian literature: (1) a non-Christian baptismal sect: (2) a Christianized phase; (3) followed in late second century CE by an increasing estrangement from emerging Christian "orthodoxy"; (4) then, rejection by "orthodoxy" and a consequent shift to an engagement with third century Platonist circles and their "individualistic contemplative practices"; (5) but an eventual estrangement also from "orthodox Platonists of the late third century," followed by fragmentation into various derivative sects.[16] Turner argued that this history of social dislocations also entailed a radical change in ritual. There was a shift away from the heritage of communal baptism to "the more ethereal and individualistic practice of visionary ascent," which "contributed to the eventual decay and diffusion of those who identified with the Sethian traditions."[17]

Turner subsequently refined and elaborated this bold reconstruction in a series of detailed, sophisticated, and influential studies.[18] The general

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[14] E.g., *Ap. John* BG [Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus] 26,14–27,6; II 4,18–28; *Trim. Prot.* NHC XIII 46,14–33; *Holy Book* III 63,4–64,9 // IV 74,17–75,24; and see Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, 14–15, 47–48, 56, 78, 86–87, 91, 141, 64, 251, *et passim*.

[15] Sevrin 1986, 275, 282.

[16] Turner 1986, 55–86. A still earlier article had set forth some of the foundational ideas, but had not yet postulated all the stages mentioned above: Turner 1980, 324–351.

[17] Turner 1986, 85.

[18] Especially: Turner 2000; 2001, esp. 221–301; 2006.

outlines of Turner's hypothesis about the development of Sethian ritual have remained consistent. This includes his argument that the earlier importance of a communal initiation rite of baptismal immersion in ordinary water, conceived as "living water" originating in the celestial realm, had diminished by the third century, as "Sethianism was universally rejected by the heresiologists of the apostolic Church, but in the meantime became strongly attracted to the individualistic contemplative practices of second and third century Platonism"; to this phase belongs the production of *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.[19] In a text like *Zostrianos*, "baptism in the living waters is now experienced on the heavenly rather than earthly plane";[20] it "has been divorced from any actual water rite";[21] "the original water-based rite was transformed into the practice of visionary and contemplative ascent depicted in *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, where baptismal imagery still prevails, or in *Allogenes*, where such imagery is entirely absent";[22] it "has become entirely transcendental with no reference to the Five Seals or any form of earthly ritual."[23]

Turner suggests that this shift by Sethians "entailed a gradual loss of interest in their primal origins and sacred history and a corresponding attenuation of their awareness of group or communal identity."[24] This last assertion about an attenuation of communal identity is obviously a highly significant claim about the social history of the people involved, but below I will argue that certain factors render the inference improbable. At least in the case of Plotinus's "friends," for example, the evidence points instead to a significant sense of group identity and communal concern. As I will mention below, Turner himself in a more recent study seems to leave open the possibility of a sense of community in the case of a text like *Zostrianos*.

Before turning to a critique of the hypothesis of a radical shift in Sethian ritual practice, we should underscore that there are elements of Turner's general analysis that seem beyond any real dispute. For example, the several baptisms that Zostrianos undergoes over the course of his ascent are clearly depicted as his experiences in transcendental realms (and stages of meditative consciousness), not as literal water baptisms. And it is of course

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[19] Turner 2001, 259–260.
[20] Turner 2001, 603.
[21] Turner 2000, 96.
[22] Turner 2006, 943.
[23] Turner 2006, 972.
[24] Turner 2001, 260; a position restated in his introduction to *Allogenes* in Funk et al. 2004, 112.

correct that the Nag Hammadi text *Allogenes* does not mention baptismal ritual at all. Moreover, *Zostrianos* even warns against *some* type of baptism: "Do not baptize yourselves in death!"[25] And Turner is among those who view this as further evidence that baptismal imagery in *Zostrianos*

> has been divorced from any actual water rite … . *Zostrianos* portrays a visionary and auditory experience which has no explicit ritual setting. Terms which may once have had a ritual reference now serve only as means to articulate the various stages of a visionary ascent. Celestial baptisms denote stages of increasing spiritual enlightenment, while the earthly experience of the non-spiritual mass of humanity is regarded as a "baptism with death" (NHC VIII,1: 131,2).[26]

Turner links this passage to other criticisms of baptismal practices:

> As an immersion in water, baptism may also have a negative connotation, especially when it signifies immersion in materiality, symbolized by the chaotic waters underlying the natural cosmos … . Like the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V 84,4–85,30) and *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII 131,2–5), the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII 30,21–27; 37,19–38,6) speaks also of an impure baptism in the dark water that enslaves, evidently a polemic against ordinary water baptism. The Archontics, whom Epiphanius (*Pan*. 40.2.6–8) presents as an offshoot of the Sethians, reject completely the baptism and sacraments of the church as deriving from the inferior law-giver Sabaoth; to shun baptism is to enhance the prospect of acquiring of the gnosis enabling their return to the Mother-Father of the All.[27]

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[25] *Zost*. NHC VIII 131,2.

[26] Turner 2000, 96.

[27] Turner 2000, 97; cf. his comments in Barry et al. 2000, 656–657, where he notes that the language in *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 131,2 about baptizing with/in death "sounds very much like some kind of polemic against other baptizing groups, perhaps Christians or even other Sethians who continue to practice the earthly ritual of the Five Seals" (656). He suggests that the language may contain a *double entendre*, alluding to "descent of the soul into the body" as "a kind of death represented by the mortality of the body"; but at the same time it "may constitute a polemical rejection of the baptismal practices of other contemporary groups, perhaps especially those *who practiced ordinary water baptism of a sort that the author regards as inferior to the spiritual, transcendental baptisms undergone by Zostrianos*" (657, emphasis added). And then here also he recalls the passage about the Archontics from Epiphanius and the "anti-baptismal polemic" in *Apoc. Adam*. Epiphanius, in the passage mentioned, says that the Archontics "anathematize the washing" (ἀναθεματίζουσίν τε τὸ λουτρόν), even though some of them "had previously been baptized" (προειλημμένοι καὶ βεβαπτισμένοι), and that they "reject participation in and value of the mysteries, as something alien that had originated in the name of Sabaoth" (*Panarion* 40.2.6). They say that the soul that has come into knowledge "avoids the baptism of the Church (φυγοῦσαν τὸ βαπτισμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας) and the name of Sabaoth who gave the Law" (40.2.8). I think Turner is correct to draw the parallels with this passage and those in *Apoc. Adam*. But the issue is whether the criticisms in

Thus, the fact that certain sources, including *Zostrianos*, contain negative comments about some sort of baptism has constituted an important element in the argument that there was a radical shift in Sethian ritual, from an actual communal water baptism to an individualized contemplative ascent that has no use for any physical rite.

However, the negative remarks about baptism are in fact ambiguous, and in at least one recent study Turner himself appears more open to the possibility that the command against "baptism in death" in *Zostrianos* and similar polemic may be only a rejection of inferior water baptisms practiced in certain other groups: He refers to the "pronounced" role of baptism in texts like the *Holy Book*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Zostrianos*, and to a lesser extent in *Melchizedek*, and *Apocalypse of Adam*, and then adds:

> Although the references to baptism in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and *Zostrianos* appear to characterize it more as a symbol of spiritual transformation than as a ritual procedure, they do witness various acts—though not necessarily in a plausible sequence or setting—that could be enacted in an earthly liturgical setting. Such acts include baptism, sealings, crowning, extension of joined hands, of which baptism is mentioned most often and with the greatest verisimilitude. These ritual contexts are also replete with hymns, doxologies, invocations, prayers, and stereotypically repeated formulas that manifest liturgical properties (strophes and responses in the first person singular and plural). And *Zostrianos* and *Apocalypse of Adam* contain polemic against inferior and polluted forms of baptism, suggesting adherence to a superior practice *on the part of the committed community* rather than a purely interior, spiritual exercise enjoyed only by these Gnostics [emphasis added].[28]

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these texts applied even to the literal water baptism that Turner posits as practiced in earlier stages in "Sethian" ritual (but as abandoned for authors/readers of *Zostrianos*), or whether the criticisms involved only the rejection of the wrong *kind* of water baptism—e.g., the "baptism of the Church." I think the latter is more likely; cf., among others, Logan 1997, 199; and already Schenke 1981, 606.

[28] Turner 2006, 946–947; though in his summary account of "The Sethian School of Gnostic Thought" (Turner 2007, 784–789), Turner apparently maintains the position that the group of texts including *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Three Steles Seth* and *Marsanes* "conceptualizes the means of salvation as a vertically oriented ascent by which a visionary practitioner enters a succession of mental states in which one is cognitively assimilated to ever higher levels of being (and those beyond being itself)" (787). Cf. his introductory remarks to his translation of *Zostrianos* in that same volume, where he also contrasts earlier Sethian treatises that "reflect the baptismal rite of the Five Seals as an earthly communal ritual" with *Zostrianos*, which "sets the practice of baptismal enlightenment not in the context of an earthly, communal ritual but in the context of philosophical inquiry focused on a set of questions concerning the origin of multiplicity from unity"; Zostrianos's ascent "in effect becomes a new, transcendent setting for the erstwhile earthly baptismal rite" (543).

Turner's work has unquestionably been of enormous value and importance at several levels in modern research on Sethian tradition. But I have included the extensive quotations above because they illustrate some of the difficulties faced in sorting out evidence about Sethian ritual, and the fact that there remains fluidity of opinion on the rather fundamental questions of what various people associated with this interpretive tradition were actually performing or not performing, and, correlatively, whether or not a significant communal identity might underlie ascent texts such as *Zostrianos*.[29] In what follows, I explore evidence that I believe may provide a little help in answering such questions.

Manuals for Ascent Rituals?

Everyone agrees that the depictions of the visionary ascents of Zostrianos and Allogenes must have had great relevance for devotees reading these texts. However, the nature of that relevance is not unambiguous. For example, were those ascents supposed to be engaged in by the devotee also, or were they intended merely as reports of revelation about the transcendent realm? If devotees were indeed to follow the same paths of ascent as a Zostrianos or an Allogenes, was this something to be performed *in this life*? Or was it a depiction of what to anticipate after departing this life, and how to navigate that afterlife journey successfully? If it was an ascent to be imitated here and now, was that required of *every* devotee for eventual salvation? Or was it a mystical ascent perhaps admired by many, but achieved during this

[29] Cf. the recent survey by Pearson 2011, 130–131, who cautions that the criticism in *Apoc. Adam* 84,3–26 of persons who have "defiled the water of life" should probably be understood as "people without gnosis who practice a water baptism without taking into account the 'living water' that is bestowed in true, i.e. Sethian baptism," and should not "be seen as a rejection of baptism in water". With respect to baptisms mentioned in *Zost.*: "It is clear that all of the baptisms experienced by Zostrianos are part of an ecstatic ascent, and are completely transcendent. No real water is involved. Moreover, Zostrianos' baptisms are completely individual, and do not involve ritual actions performed by a community" (135). But what Pearson apparently means is that we are not to imagine a complex set of baptisms in a community matching the multiple baptisms depicted in this apocalypse. For following this statement he discusses the command not to "baptize yourselves with death" in *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 131,2, and concludes: "It is not at all clear what is involved in the baptism here referred to. This admonition may function as a critique of those who have a rite of baptism with water without any connection to the transcendent 'living water' that surrounds the invisible Father. We saw something like this at the conclusion of the *Apocalypse of Adam*" (135). Thus, he seems to allow the possibility that it is only the wrong *kind* of water baptism that is rejected. Cf. Brakke 2010, 78; Ferguson 2009, 296.

life only by exceptional adepts? In other words, while it seems obvious that the content of the revelations in apocalypses like *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* was considered to be crucial knowledge for all readers, was reading the texts themselves therefore sufficient for now? The mythical seers Zostrianos and Allogenes needed to make the ascent in order to descend afterwards and bring the revelation. But was their message that every devotee must make the same journey *now*, or else have no hope in the future, after death?

At least one group of readers of these ascent apocalypses, Plotinus's "friends," evidently did not read them as manuals for ascents that all devotees must perform during life. For Plotinus states that "with great effort, and just barely, one or two of them are transferred out of the cosmos; and upon remembering, they with great effort give an account of the things they had seen."[30] The mention of "one or two of them" has sometimes been understood as referring to mythical seers like Zostrianos or Allogenes. But even, and perhaps especially, if Plotinus had in mind experiences on the part of contemporary visionaries among these "friends" whom he is criticizing, it is to be pointed out that he reveals no knowledge at all of any claim that most members of their circle are expected or required during this life to make the sorts of ascent ascribed to the mythical seers in these apocalypses.

More on the evidence in Plotinus in the next section, but first we must note that the ascent apocalypses themselves do not explicitly indicate that others are to attempt in this life the ascent journeys of Zostrianos or Allogenes. Turner himself has effectively acknowledged this fact about *Zostrianos*: "Certainly the celestial baptisms in *Zostrianos* could be in principle repeated by anyone undertaking such an ascent, but the text narrates only the singular experience of Zostrianos and *nowhere recommends its repetition by the readers*" (emphasis added).[31] When reaching the "aetherial earth" toward the end of his descent, Zostrianos is said to have inscribed three wooden tablets and left them there as "knowledge (*gnosis*) for those who would come after me, the living elect,"[32] before descending further and

[30] Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9.12,6–9.

[31] Turner 2006, 978. Turner makes this remark in a context where his point concerns whether Sethian baptism "constituted a single occasion of initiation into the Sethian community and the enlightenment it offered, or was a repeatable act" (978). So perhaps he is emphasizing only the lack of recommendation for *repetition*, and is not making the same point that I am here. But either way, his observation is significant: *Zostrianos* really contains no explicit recommendation that readers must imitate in this life the ascent ascribed to Zostrianos.

[32] *Zost.* NHC VIII 129,28–130,4. The "aetherial earth" (cf. *Zost.* 9,2–3) most likely refers to

resuming life in his body. So clearly the point of the revelation conveyed by the seer Zostrianos is to "show the way" in some sense. Surely devotees reading *Zostrianos* were to aspire to follow the path disclosed by the seer—at least eventually. However, there is ambiguity as to whether the passage just mentioned refers to persons making ascents (and then subsequent descents) during their lifetimes on earth, or rather to elect who would follow this path only *after death of the body*. It seems to me that the latter is at least as plausible.

The same is true for the *Allogenes* apocalypse. The divine revealer Youel first speaks to Allogenes multiple times,[33] evidently to supply the latter with the knowledge upon which he was to ruminate for 100 years,[34] as preparation for his rapture into the transcendent realm and reception of the most sublime revelation.[35] But then all these revelations, both preparatory and ultimate, are written by Allogenes in a book that is equated with the text of *Allogenes* itself, addressed to his son, Messos, and placed on a mountain.[36] The revelation is intended "for those who will be worthy" after the time of Allogenes.[37] However, it is never actually stated that all readers must replicate during life the ascent ascribed to Allogenes.

Of relevance for whether or to what degree apocalypses like *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* functioned as models for ritual exercises by devotees are scholarly debates about whether similar Jewish apocalyptic genres reflect mystical experiences and practices on the part of authors and readers. The content in *Zostrianos* seems informed by ascent motifs in apocalypses such as 1 Enoch or 2 Enoch, for example.[38] But specialists continue to debate the relationship between literature portraying mystical ascent by mythical ancient seers or revered rabbis in Jewish traditions, and actual practice by religious consumers. Some have objected to treating literary images in apocalyptic texts as direct reflections of mystical experiences or practices on the part of

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the moon; see the discussion in the dissertation by Burns 2011, 221, and n. 29; he cites, among other references, Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.11.7.

[33] *Allogenes* NHC XI 45,3–49,38; 50,17–51,38; 52,13–54,37; 55,17–30; 55,33–58,6. It is not entirely clear whether the revelations from Youel are a sequence of revelations on one occasion, or whether some are imagined as appearances on separate occasions. 50,17–21: "And then, my son Messos, the one who pertains to all the glories, Youel, *again* spoke to me and appeared to me (or perhaps: 'spoke to me again and gave a revelation to me'?)."

[34] *Allogenes* NHC XI 57,24–39.

[35] *Allogenes* NHC XI 58,26–67,20.

[36] *Allogenes* NHC XI 68,15–69,16.

[37] *Allogenes* NHC XI 68,19–20.

[38] E.g., see Scopello 1980, 376–385; Pearson 2002, 146–163, esp. 152–153; Turner 2001, 244–245; and now see the extensive analyses in Burns 2011.

authors or readers.[39] Others are quite convinced that the heavenly ascents of Enoch or similar mystical journeys do suggest analogous religious experiences on the part of ancient readers.[40]

Zostrianos and *Allogenes* have sometimes been characterized as something like "manuals" providing instruction for ascent rituals. To be sure, it is quite possible or even probable that some persons attempted to imitate as mystical exercises the ascents described in these apocalypses.[41] And

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[39] E.g., Himmelfarb 1993, 113: She argues that there is little evidence for ascent technique in hekhalot and most other Jewish ascent literature, and little evidence that the narratives describe the ascent experience of authors. Instead, in the case of hekhalot literature, "no need for the mystic to ascend, for telling the story is enough. The actual performance of the acts is attributed to the mythic past, the era of the great rabbis of the Mishnah, recitation itself has become the ritual". On the other hand, she does not see even this much involved in the ascent apocalypses: "Reading them was not a ritual act. Their stories performed no task, and they effected nothing outside the mind of the reader, which is where stories always perform their work. If I read them correctly, their most important accomplishment was to suggest an understanding of human possibility, of the status of the righteous in the universe, that goes beyond anything found in the Bible and was profoundly appealing to ancient Jews and Christians. In the midst of an often unsatisfactory daily life, they taught their readers to imagine themselves like Enoch, like the glorious ones, with no apparent difference" (113–114). Peter Schäfer has mounted similar criticisms of notions that ritual in hekhalot texts was intended to lead to ecstatic mystical experience; see, e.g., among his extensive publications, Schäfer 1988; 2011. See also Lesses 1998, 43; Lesses attempts "to go beyond the dichotomies between ecstasy and theurgy or ritual by analyzing the Hekhalot adjurations as performative acts intended to realize various ends".

[40] E.g., Fletcher-Louis 2008, 125–144. Fletcher-Louis concedes that Himmelfarb is correct that "there is no direct and simple correlation" between what pseudepigraphical apocalypses like *1 Enoch* describe and "something that happened." The accounts are fictional. "But that does not mean that there is no correlation between what they describe and ancient Jewish religious experience at all" (143). He insists that, to the contrary, "religious experience lies at the very heart of the literary phenomenon … *the apocalypses are the 'classic' texts that attest the popular piety of temple-centered Jewish practice and belief in the late Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman eras*. There is every reason to believe their authors and readers expected themselves or some of their contemporaries to experience the kinds of encounters with the heavenly world described in these texts" (143–144, emphasis his).

[41] I myself argued this in a study several years ago: Williams 1985. I suggested that persons reading texts like *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* might actually have acted out the achievement of noetic stability by "standing at rest," a technical expression appropriated and used in both texts (e.g., *Allogenes* NHC XI 59,9–61,22 and *Zost.* NHC VIII 6,2–7,27). I noted similar practices by "spiritual heroes" such as Socrates, various late antique philosophers and Christian monastics (pp. 28–29, 85–96). I continue to think those parallels are important and that aspirations to transcendental "stability" could have been acted out by some readers of *Zost.* or *Allogenes.* However, I now believe I leaned too far in imagining this as a generalized and defining sectarian praxis (e.g., 199). The comparisons I drew with spiritual *heroes* were probably more apt. That is, the depicted experience of a Zostrianos or an Allogenes might have been achieved in some sense, or at least attempted or acted out, by some individuals, just as, for example, certain monks were famous for heroic periods of "standing" in prayer or mysti-

almost certainly the texts touch in one way or another on at least *ultimate* aspirations of authors and early readers (i.e., aspirations beyond this life). However, here we are concerned with the more specific question of whether these writings are evidence that communal ritual baptism has been abandoned, and has been replaced by an individualized ascent mysticism that therefore, for the users of these writings, now remains as the only ritual of importance. If one accepts this latter conclusion, then at the very least we would have some rather *different* ascent rituals on our hands. Choose your "manual," since *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, for example, would not be presenting the same instructions. There are points of agreement or similarity, but they do not represent a consistent technique.[42]

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cal vision. Yet we need not assume that this was a new *sine qua non* for all "Sethian" devotees while in this life. In that earlier study I followed Schenke's lead when I characterized *Three Steles of Seth* as "evidently intended as some type of communal liturgy, or at least we can say that it intends to express the mystical experience and transcendental aspirations of, not merely Seth, but all 'the elect'" (67). Today I would be more circumspect about the phrase "the mystical experience" in that statement. *Especially* if *Three Steles Seth* attests a communal liturgy that was regularly recited in periodic worship, we should probably distinguish between doxological participation at regular gatherings and something we would want to call "mystical experience." Group mystical experiences are of course definitely possible, but can we really assume that a "group ascent" was a regular experience for everyone at every occasion when the doxologies in *Steles Seth* were repeated? I suspect most scholars do not ordinarily ramp the expression "mystical experience" down to include even the most general levels of religious sentiment experienced simply in repeating a doxology in worship.

[42] The diversity only expands further if we include other "Platonizing Sethian" treatises such as *Marsanes* and *Steles Seth*. The differences among these texts could be thought to match Turner's imagined stage in Sethian history of markedly individualized contemplative praxis, and the loss of a sense of communal identity. However, *Steles Seth*, with its use of first person plural hymns, has long been recognized as an exception among the "Platonizing Sethian treatises," since it would appear to assume some kind of communal context. In his introductory remarks to *Marsanes* in Meyer 2007, 633, Turner includes *Marsanes* along with *Steles Seth* as the two "Sethian Platonizing" treatises that "stand out as representative of an emphasis on the practices of an entire community," a conclusion apparently based on the inclusion in Marsanes's discourse of "both the singular and plural second-person form of address, which presuppose a small community of Marsanes' disciples …" (630). A communal context for *Marsanes* had already been suggested by Pearson 1981, 248–249, in his foundational work on the tractate for the Brill edition.

Burns 2012, 161–179, 175–176, accepts as "well-known" that "Platonizing Sethians, inspired by the baptismal rites of their forebears (the so-called rite of the 'five seals'), created Platonic manuals for eliciting visionary ascent." But he contends that "*Allogenes* takes the Sethian internalization of ritual one step further by abandoning the baptismal context and rendering the description and reading of visionary exercise a performance itself." He considers the version of *Allogenes* that we have to be a text from the turn of the fourth century CE, therefore later than *Zostrianos* or Plotinus and his circle, and to represent an example of *Lesemysterium*. "Reading the revelation in *Allogenes* is itself the revelation, whose content is ontological

In the end, it is probably not possible solely on the basis of the content in these apocalypses themselves to ascertain whether or not their authors and users read them as new paths to salvation replacing a now-abandoned communal baptism that had once upon a time provided that access. However, I would argue that we can make progress on this question by considering these apocalypses in the context of the two historical "moments" where we have the most concrete evidence about their use.

Plotinus's Friends

The first "moment" is the evidence from Plotinus and Porphyry. There is still some debate as to whether the apocalypses of "Zostrianos" and "Allogenes" mentioned by Porphyry, among those used by the persons criticized by Plotinus in *Ennead* 2.9, were Greek versions of exactly same Nag Hammadi tractates bearing those titles or whether the latter are texts that had undergone redaction under the influence of post-Plotinian Neoplatonic tradition.[43] At least in the case of *Zosrianos*, I remain unconvinced that we need to imagine much difference from the content of the apocalypse of that title mentioned by Porphyry. But even if there were some later redaction, the ver-

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assimilation to the Invisible Spirit" (174). Whether or not one agrees with the details of Burns's analysis, or his conclusion on the dating of *Allogenes*, his argument does highlight some of the potentially important differences among these descriptions of visionary ascent.

[43] For a very recent brief summary and extensive citation of modern studies related to that debate, see Burns 2011, 162–165. As was mentioned above, Burns argues that the Nag Hammadi tractate *Allogenes* dates from the post-Plotinian period. He argues that the tractate is not sufficiently Middle Platonic, and contains too many features of theurgic Neoplatonism, to be the same text mentioned by Porphyry in *Life of Plotinus* 16. But he does not agree with, e.g., Abramowski 1983, 108–128, or Majercik 2005, 277–292, who place the Nag Hammadi *Zostrianos* as well in a post-Plotinian period. I agree on this last point, since I think the work of John Turner and Kevin Corrigan, among others, has established not only the similarity of content in *Zostrianos* to points underlying Plotinus's critique, but also that Middle Platonic doctrines were perhaps more varied than has often been assumed—see, e.g., the articles by Corrigan 2000 and Turner 2000 and the relevant discussions in Turner-Corrigan 2010, 2 volumes. The argument I am making here actually bears on this debate. One of Ruth Majercik's objections, for example, to the identification of the "Zostrianos" apocalypse mentioned by Porphyry and the Nag Hammadi *Zostrianos* is that the latter is a non-Christian text, while Porphyry seems to refer to the persons using these apocalypses as "Christians." However, whether or not one concludes that there are any Christian features in the Coptic *Zostrianos* in particular, the evidence I mention below suggests that Plotinus's "friends" were likely reading other writings beyond the ones listed by Porphyry in *Life of Plotinus* 16. Any "Christian" association for these "friends" therefore does not in any event hinge entirely on the content of *Zostrianos* or on whatever version of *Allogenes* they were using.

sions used by Plotinus's friends were certainly "apocalypses," and most likely were "ascent" texts reporting visions by the seers Zostrianos and Allogenes. And in any event, I reemphasize that the specific issue at hand is whether the "Platonizing Sethian" texts we know from Nag Hammadi—*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes, Steles Seth*, and *Marsanes*—evidence a stage in the history of Sethian tradition in which communal baptism has been abandoned in favor of an ascent ritual. The argument presented here challenging that conclusion would not be adversely affected even if some amount of redaction were assumed. For I am working with the same Nag Hammadi versions appealed to by those (e.g., Turner) who have contended that the texts evidence a significant shift in ritual praxis.

Whatever versions of these apocalypses were being used by the "friends" whom Plotinus criticizes, what would we be looking to find in his (and Porphyry's) comments about them if indeed there had been the shift in Sethian ritual praxis that some have seen evidenced in *Zostrianos* or other Platonizing texts? First of all, we would presumably hope to see evidence that an ascent ritual was now the standard expectation for all devotees, the central requirement for knowledge necessary for salvation. And secondly, we would look for the alleged individualistic orientation and diminution in group self-consciousness and communal concern.[44] In my view we find neither, and in fact the evidence points in the opposite direction on both counts.

I touched earlier on the fact that neither Plotinus nor Porphyry ever suggests that the people whom Plotinus is criticizing *all* engaged in mystical ascents. To the contrary, Plotinus explicitly states that "with great effort, and just barely, *one or two of them* are transferred (κινηθῆναι) out of the cosmos; and upon remembering, they with great effort give an account of the things they had seen."[45] Now there is no reason to assume that this is merely polemical invention which Plotinus knows is contrary to fact, since such misrepresentation would hardly have served as an argument if it were known that these opponents indeed did claim regular visionary ascents or that this was a ritual praxis required at least once during life by everyone in order to attain eventual transcendence.

In one place he does speak of a general claim by his "friends" to have the ability to ascend beyond this cosmos, yet he is speaking of ascent after death. It is worth quoting several parts of this passage: "But possibly they will say

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[44] See my discussion and references above to Turner's inferences along these lines.

[45] Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9.12,6–9.

that their arguments (τοὺς λόγους) make them flee (φεύγειν) the body since they despise it from a distance, but ours hold the soul to the body."[46] He then compares his opponents' grousing about injustices or other problems in this life to people living in a house about which they complain, but refuse to vacate,[47] and says that such a person "might think that he is wiser and more prepared to exit (ἑτοιμότερος ἐξελθεῖν) because he knows how to say that the walls are made of soulless stones and wood and are greatly inferior to the true dwelling."[48] Plotinus insists that

> even if they might say that they alone are able to contemplate (θεωρεῖν), that does not render them more contemplative, neither (are they rendered more contemplative) *because they say that it is possible for them to exit* (ἐξελθεῖν—i.e., this cosmos) *when they die*, though this is not possible for those entities (stars, etc.) who eternally adorn heaven.[49]

The words: "that they alone are able to contemplate," have been read as an indication that Plotinus does know of an ascent ritual practiced in this life, "some extraordinary Gnostic praxis of visionary contemplation (*theōria*) that permits them to ascend out of the cosmos."[50]

However, I would underscore another element in this important passage: the "exiting" mentioned is after death. These comments should be considered together with Plotinus's above-mentioned observation that only "one or two of them" actually manage to pass outside the cosmos and return to tell about it—and then only with great effort. I suggest that the most economical theory is that the "friends" are people (1) who *all* aspire to *eventual* ascent ("exit," "fleeing the body") after shuffling off these mortal coils, and (2) who probably found reason for such hope in reports of the ascent experiences of a small number of spiritual heroes. Versions of apocalypses like *Zost*. and *Allogenes* or similar texts would have provided revelatory accounts ascribed to legendary worthies. In addition, it is possible that a few contemporary spiritual adepts also testified to having achieved such ascents. But Plotinus's criticisms present problems for the theory that, among the persons known to him, any devotee's successful exit from the cosmos at death first required one or more earlier successful exits or visionary ascents and returns during this life, after the fashion of heroes such as Zostrianos. For most, assimila-

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[46] *Ennead* 2.9.18,1–3.
[47] *Ennead* 2.9.18,4–18; cf. 2.9.8,43–47; 2.9.9,15–18.
[48] *Ennead* 2.9.18,9–13.
[49] *Ennead* 2.9.18,35–39.
[50] Mazur 2010, 328, n. 103.

tion of revelation brought back by Zostrianos and/or a few other successful heroes was probably deemed sufficient.

If we turn, secondly, to ask about evidence from Plotinus or Porphyry for the alleged individualistic orientation and attenuation of communal identity, once again what we find seems exactly the opposite. To begin with, though the syntax in the opening words of chapter 16 of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is famously odd, the statement seems most likely to include the *Ennead*. 2.9 opponents of Plotinus under the broad category of "Christians," even if Porphyry is referring to them with a term, αἱρετικοί, "sectarians, heretics," that he is consciously applying in the pejorative sense he had heard from Christian heresiologists in third century Rome.[51] As everyone knows, "Christianity" encompassed a very diverse assortment of groups, yet most often these did involve *communities* of some sort. Naturally one cannot leap from there without further ado to a conclusion that there was a sense of communal identity among Plotinus's "friends," but that the latter were "Christians" of some sort does render communal identity a reasonable hypothesis to be tested.

We find further suggestions of their sense of community and communal concern in Plotinus's criticisms. He speaks of their claim to "cleanse themselves from diseases," which they suppose are "demons" (δαιμόνια) which, they say, "they are able to expel by means of word."[52] Healings and exorcisms do not *per se* prove community, and certainly not a specifically Christian-related one. Yet Plotinus links this practice with their intent to impress "the masses" (τοῖς πολλοῖς),[53] and this is only one of several places where he complains about their association with lower classes of people and implies their proselytizing for converts. They promise the "humble and ordinary and common person" that: "You are a child of God, but others whom you once held in awe are not children of God, nor are the beings which they revere according to ancestral tradition; you, without making any effort, are even better than heaven."[54] This again evokes a picture that would nicely dovetail with, but does not by itself confirm, a proselytizing *community*.

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[51] So, e.g., Majercik 2005, 277, n. 6, and see other scholars cited there. Cf. the translation of the passage by Layton 1987, 184: "In his (Plotinus's) time there were among the Christians many others, members of a sect (αἱρετικοί), who were followers of Adelphius and Aquilinus and had started out from classical philosophy."

[52] *Ennead* 2.9.14,12–15.

[53] *Ennead* 2.9.14,16–17.

[54] *Ennead* 2.9.9,52–60; cf. 2.9.5,8–10; the popular appeal of their message is indicated in 2.9.6,55–56: It is, Plotinus says, a "deception that is rushing upon people!"

But when Plotinus complains that they call the "lowest" (τοὺς φαυλοτάτους) people "brothers" (ἀδελφούς), yet refuse to use "brothers" in reference to "the sun and the entities in heaven,"[55] we are hearing language that seems most naturally explained in terms of a sense of community identity—and probably Christian-related, given Porphyry's label of "Christians" noted above. The term "brothers" would not preclude a "Sethian" Christian community; although the designation is rare among documents usually categorized as "Sethian," it is used as a term for the community of devotees in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.[56] In fact, regarding this usage in *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the text's references to the Five Seals, Turner has concluded that "[t]he fact that the recipients of this ritual are referred to in the first person plural *and as 'brethren' suggests a* (*Sethian*) *community* with an established ritual tradition conceived as a mystery of celestial ascent that brings enlightening Gnosis (NHC XIII 48,33–34) and total salvation" (emphasis added).[57] The same argument is surely applicable also to Plotinus's opponents, whose use of fictive kinship language indicates that they also were self-conscious of membership in a *community*.

Thus, at least what we have from Porphyry and Plotinus about the "friends" of Plotinus, whose reading included *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* (or something like these works), does not indicate people (1) who had abandoned a communal baptismal rite in favor of an individualized visionary ascent now required of all for salvation, and (2) who in consequence showed a significantly attenuated sense of communal identity. Of course, Plotinus does not mention baptism at all, but then neither does he refer unmistakably to any other actual ritual practiced by *all* of these opponents.[58] As I have mentioned, their interest in contemplation is commented upon, but rather generally. Plotinus's one clear reference to what might be visionary ascents during this life (difficult departures from the cosmos; returning; difficult recounting of the experience) claims that they were

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[55] 2.9.18,17–21.

[56] *Trim. Prot.* NHC XIII 47,22–23: "I hid myself within them until I revealed myself to my brothers/sisters" (Coptic: ⲛϩ-ⲥⲛⲏ [ϒ]); 47,29–31: "I am the Light that rejoices within [my] brothers/sisters"; 49,20–23: "I hid myself within all of them until I revealed myself in my members, who are mine, and I taught them about the ineffable ordinances and the brothers/sisters."

[57] Turner 2006, 951–952; and earlier in his introduction to the tractate in Hedrick 1990, 379.

[58] In fact, the only ritualized activity about which he is actually explicit is the performance of exorcisms, as mentioned above, and there is no reason to assume that he means that all the opponents were exorcists.

extremely rare. And language about "exiting" seems limited primarily to ascent *after* death.

It is also germane to this discussion that there are a few features in Plotinus's description of the teaching that he criticizes which seem easier to explain if we look beyond the content of only the "Platonizing Sethian" treatises such as *Zostrianos, Allogenes*, or *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*. Though some of Plotinus's references almost certainly allude to (a version of) *Zostrianos*,[59] others sound more similar to the language outside these ascent apocalypses. For example, in his account of their Sophia myth he explicitly says that "they produce the one called by them δημιουγός and have him rebelling from his mother (ἀποστάντα τῆς μητρὸς), and they pull the cosmos that comes from him down to the lowest of the images."[60] In discussing the larger context of this passage, John Turner calls attention to important parallels between Plotinus's language here and portions of the Sophia myth as found in *Zostrianos* 9,1–10,20.[61] However, Turner also rightly notes in passing that Plotinus's reference to the *rebellion* of the Archon from its mother does not occur in what survives of *Zostrianos*.[62] I would add another significant difference: Nowhere in what survives of *Zostrianos*, or anywhere else in "Sethian" writings, is the lower creator called "Demiurge," the term Plotinus explicitly says is employed by his opponents.[63] Of course, this Platonic term is used for the creator in some other traditions, including writings usually categorized as "Valentinian."

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[59] I am thinking of his mention of their teaching about παροικήσεις ("sojourns, exiles"), ἀντιτύποι ("copies, antitypes"), and μετανοίαι ("repentances"). While these technical terms appear in the *Untitled Text* in the *Bruce Codex*, chs. 60–61 (Schmidt-MacDermot, 1978, 263,11–64,6), *Zost.* contains the more extensive and directly relevant parallels; see, e.g., important discussions in Turner 2001, e.g., 109–111, 558–570.

[60] *Ennead* 2.9.10,30–33.

[61] Turner 2001, 573–575; e.g., in *Ennead* 2.9.10,27–29, Plotinus says that his opponents "fashion an image of the image (τοῦ εἰδώλου εἴδωλον) somewhere here below, through matter or materiality or whatever they want to call it." *Zost.* NHC VIII 10,4–5 uses almost exactly the same language (ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲇⲱⲗⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲇⲱⲗⲟⲛ, "through an image of an image") for the creative procedure of the Archon.

[62] Turner 2001, 575.

[63] A fact also mentioned elsewhere by Turner—e.g., Turner 2001, 48; cf. Thomassen 1993, 226–243. As Thomassen points out (227), occurrences of the Greek term δημιουγός or its Coptic equivalents are rare in the Nag Hammadi texts, and limited to two Valentinian writings (*Tri. Trac.* and *Val. Exp.*), the wisdom writing *Teach. Silv.*, and the Hermetic treatise *Asclepius* (*Perfect Discourse*). The term δημιουγός does appear several times in the *Untitled Text* in the *Bruce Codex* (chs. 2, 3, 7, 11, 17), but always referring positively to transcendent entities and never to a rebellious offspring of Sophia.

The easiest explanation for there being both important similarities as well as notable differences between on the one hand Plotinus's description of his opponents' myth and doctrine, and on the other hand what we find in ascent texts like *Zostrianos*, is that the people whom he criticizes were using *more* than only the apocalypses mentioned by Porphyry. This is by no means a new idea, but it is very important to the present argument.[64] Turner brackets his discussion of close parallels between some of Plotinus's wording and the passage in *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 9,1–10,20, by noting that "according to Porphyry (*Vita Plotini* 16), Plotinus had read and critiqued various revelations, *Zostrianos* among them," so that the very similar wording could be from *Zostrianos*, while "the other material [in Plotinus's account] could have come from many sources, including the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and others including Valentinian ones."[65] I agree, though I would stress that Plotinus's knowledge of motifs from such other sources is most likely because his "friends" were reading this wider selection of writings.

The implication for my analysis here is that if Plotinus's opponents were reading not only the Platonizing ascent apocalypses, but potentially a much wider selection, then we cannot rule out that this wider selection included sources from Turner's hypothetical earlier stage in the evolution of Sethian ritual—i.e., sources that suggest community and baptismal initiation. Indeed, in addition to, say, the *Holy Book* or the *Trimorphic Protennoia* or the *Apocryphon of John*, their collection may also have included "Valentinian" writings and even other Christian writings. In other words, at least at this historical "moment"—one of the clearest windows we have on how something like *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* were actually being used—there is probably no reason to imagine people who had abandoned involvement in community

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[64] To mention only a few examples: Edwards 1987; Evangeliou 1992, 111–128; Tardieu 1992, 538; Corrigan 2000, 19–56 43; and cf. now Burns, 2011, 80, *et passim*.

[65] Turner 2001, 574–575. Among other examples of features in Plotinus's critique that are more easily explained from such a wider selection of texts is his reference to the creator of the cosmos changing his mind or repenting (μεταγιγνώκειν) about the creation and wishing to destroy (φθείρειν) it (*Ennead* 2.9.4,17–18), an echo of Gen 6:5–7 which at least has closer parallels in texts like the *Ap. John* (NHC II, 29,1–15) and others (e.g., *Val. Exp*. NHC XI 38,36–39) than in the Sophia myth in *Zost*. Also, though the theme of God's special providential care (πρόνοια) for these devotees (*Ennead* 2.9.9,64–66; 2.9.16,15–32) is certainly not contrary to the general spirit of the Platonizing ascent texts (Burns 2011, section 4.4.2), articulations of the role of divine πρόνοια are far more explicit in several other writings such as *Ap. John* (e.g., NHC II 30,12–31,11) or the *Holy Book* (e.g., NHC III 63,22 = IV 75,11) or many other writings. Indeed, versions of this theme were fairly widespread in Christian circles. Cf. Logan 2006, 49–50.

and a literal communal baptism of initiation in favor of a shift to completely spiritualized and individualized meditation. Plotinus's "friends" may have read ascent apocalypses as new theological-philosophical speculations, and may nevertheless have been still very conscious of an identity in a community into which they had been baptized.

Implications of the 4th Century Context for the "Platonizing Sethian" Tractates

Combined with what I have just discussed about the first "moment," I would suggest that the second "historical moment" underscores the problem with imagining texts like *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* (and *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*) as (1) de-Christianized products of third century CE devotees, (2) who had left behind communal consciousness and physical baptismal ritual to embrace instead a spiritualized ascent ritual, (3) in an attempt to assimilate with "pagan" philosophical circles such as Plotinus's school in Rome. For if that hypothesis were correct we would need to explain how and why it was that these writings nevertheless finally survived only in Christian-related books.

Admittedly, we do not have certain knowledge about the provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices. And since *Marsanes* is the only tractate in Codex X we cannot easily identify that particular codex as "Christian." However, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* and *Three Steles of Seth* all share space in codices with Christian writings. Moreover, Codex VIII, containing *Zostrianos* and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, is very closely related in physical construction and handwriting to Codex IV, containing copies of *Apocryphon of John* and the *Holy Book*. There are very slight but identifiable distinctions in the scribal hands in these two codices, but the kinship in book construction and handwriting is so close that at the very least these two volumes surely were produced in the same scriptorium or scribal group, and perhaps were even intended as a two-volume set.[66] If so, then these copies of *Apocryphon of John*, the *Holy Book*, *Zostrianos* and the *Letter of Peter to Philip* would have been produced for the same owner(s). The very close physical similarity of these two books is in any event plausible evidence that whoever produced or commissioned them had not left *Apocryphon of John* and the *Holy Book* in the dust of an irrelevant past. Obviously, we cannot know with certainty

[66] See Williams 1992, 334–342; 1995, 24–27; 1996, 251–253.

whether the owner(s) of these books practiced a literal baptism, and if so, whether the rite was called the "Five Seals." But that some kind of water baptism was still a practice observed by the fourth century owner(s) is more probable, I would say, than the possibility that *only* visionary ascent practices were now in play.

It is well known that there is a close connection between Codices I, VII, and XI involving some overlap in scribal hands and evidence for compositional planning.[67] Not only was *Allogenes* bound in a codex with texts normally associated with "Valentinian" traditions, the pages immediately preceding *Allogenes* in Codex XI are devoted to Christian rituals of anointing, baptism and eucharist. So a logical conclusion is that the book's owner(s) did indeed see in *Allogenes* an important apocalypse, and perhaps even an ideal model for mystical practice, but nevertheless had not abandoned the rituals highlighted just before it in the book.

The *Three Steles of Seth* text concludes Codex VII, another book containing several Christian texts, some voicing harsh polemic against competing Christian movements. The first tractate in this codex, the *Paraphrase of Shem*, is the one most explicit about ritual. Its criticism of water baptism is sharp and some scholars have quite plausibly considered the intention to be an absolute rejection of any water baptism whatsoever.[68] But a few of the critical remarks about baptism in the text sound as though they could be aimed only at specific *versions* of it;[69] and at least they might have been read this way by the fourth century users of Codex VII. Baptism is not explicitly mentioned in the rest of the codex, though there is a probable allusion to the Pauline baptismal motif of "dying with Christ."[70] The polemic in Codex VII is

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[67] Williams 1995, 11–20; 1996, 252–256. While I speculated about rationale of the selection and arrangement of *within* each of these three codices, Painchaud-Kaler 2007, 445–469, have presented an intriguing argument for the bolder hypothesis of a three-volume set intended to be read in a specific *order*: I–XI–VII. In any case, the codicological evidence suggests a close relation among these three codices.

[68] See, e.g., the discussion by Roberge in Meyer 2007, 445.

[69] E.g., *Paraph. Shem* NHC VII 30,21–24: "For at that time the demon will also appear on the river in order to baptize with *an imperfect baptism*" (ογβαπτισμα ⲛ̅ⲁⲧϫⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ); 31,14–22: "For when the days approach that are appointed for the demon, *he who will baptize erringly* (ⲡⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲁⲣ̅ⲃⲁⲡⲧⲓⲍⲉ ⲉⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ), then I shall appear in the baptism of the demon to reveal through the mouth of Faith a testimony to those who belong to (Faith)"; 38,5–6: "the impure baptism" (ⲡⲁⲕⲁⲑⲁⲣⲧⲟⲛ ⲛ̅ⲃⲁⲡⲧⲓⲥⲙⲁ); cf. Cosentino 2007, 214, who wonders whether, e.g., the "*imperfect* baptism" implies a contrast with a "perfect" form.

[70] "Dying with Christ" is called slavery: *Treat. Seth* NHC VII 49,26–27; cf. references to the doctrine/name "of a dead person" (ογρⲉϥⲛⲟⲟⲩⲧ): *Treat. Seth* 60,22; *Apoc. Pet.* NHC VII 74,13–14; 78,17.

directed against rival Christians.[71] Given the content not only in this codex but that in Codices I and XI, where baptismal ritual is presented quite positively,[72] it seems plausible that ascent motifs in *Three Steles of Seth* and *Allogenes* are being read by the owner(s) of these books not as a rejection of communal baptismal initiation but rather as complementary revelation.

The Rituals of Plotinus' Friends

Admittedly it is conceivable that authors and/or certain devotees of texts such as *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes* no longer belonged to communities where a physical communal baptismal ritual was observed. However, that interpretation depends heavily on treating these texts in isolation, as though their authors and readers were not also still using, and with more than antiquarian interest, *other* writings in which literal communal rituals were taken for granted—e.g., writings more similar to content in the *Holy Book* or *Apocryphon of John*. Yet the evidence from the only two historical contexts where we actually have concrete evidence about the use of these ascent apocalypses does not support the picture of such an isolated utilization. These two historical "moments" are separated by possibly a century or more, and by geography—from mid-third century Rome to sometime in fourth century Egypt. Our usual, and quite justified, instinct as historians is that writings found gathered into collections could have originated in more theologically and socially differentiated settings. But in this particular instance, the earliest historical "moment" where we see people—Plotinus's "friends"—using versions of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* is one in which such texts were most likely being utilized together with various writings that may have reflected other interests and practices than merely visionary ascent. Perhaps they always had been—and always were.

John Turner, Kevin Corrigan and others have demonstrated through meticulous and sophisticated analyses that the "Platonizing Sethian" texts do bear witness to a fascinating engagement of their authors with various aspects of Platonic tradition in Plotinus's era, and that ideas in these apocalypses may even have had some influence on Plotinus's own thinking. On the other hand, there is reason for skepticism about specific elements of Turner's thesis regarding stages in the evolution of Sethian ritual. That

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[71] So also Painchaud-Kaler 2007, 464.

[72] Not only in the liturgical sections in XI mentioned above, but also in Codex I in *Tri. Trac.* 127,25–129,34.

thesis imagines an evolution from an originally non-Christian baptismal sect; to an attempted Christianization; to eventual marginalization and rejection from emerging Christian "orthodoxy"; to a resulting pivot toward third century Platonist circles and their "individualistic contemplative practices"; to a second rejection of Sethians by the Platonists; to an eventual fissiparous assortment of sectarian offshoots. But if that scenario were correct, then we would have to ask why writings such as *Allogenes, Zostrianos*, or *Three Steles of Seth*, allegedly products of the period in which their authors had *shucked* their Christian connections to pursue non-Christian Platonist thought and practice, survived in the fourth century *almost exclusively* in distinctly Christian books, including an instance (Codices IV/VIII) in which writings from the "Christianizing" phrase were copied into one book in what is possibly a two-volume set, while a writing (*Zost.*) alleged to be evidence of a *break* from precisely that phase was copied into the other.

It seems far simpler to infer that in Plotinus's day the "Platonizing" ascent texts were already being used in comfortable combination with writings similar to content in the *Holy Book* or *Apocryphon of John*, as well as various other Christian texts (e.g., Valentinian works). While we certainly need not assume that the specific combinations in which the ascent texts are found among Nag Hammadi manuscripts matched exactly what would have been on the shelves of Plotinus's "friends," neither should those combinations be considered without further ado to be implausible juxtapositions that those acquaintances a century earlier would have deemed incongruent.

What we can say with greatest certainty about an ascent apocalypse such as *Zostrianos* is that it functioned to communicate information about transcendental realms and expectations surrounding *eventual* salvation after life in this world. There may have been exceptional adepts who sought to imitate Zostrianos's ascent as a visionary praxis here and now, and even claimed success. However, I have argued that neither the ascent texts themselves nor Plotinus's account of his "friends" provides evidence that authors and devoted readers of the ascent texts had concluded that a new ascent ritual was now the door to salvation that all must pass through, a ritual that had replaced entirely an abandoned communal initiation rite of water baptism.[73] Though obviously interested in stories of visionary ascent, Plotinus's "friends" also apparently still "went to church."

[73] Further evidence supporting the argument presented here is in the account of the "Archontics" by Epiphanius in *Panarion* 40.1.1–8. I mentioned this passage above in connection with ancient criticisms of some versions of water baptism, but other elements in his

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account are also pertinent: Epiphanius mentions the Archontics' possession of "books of Allogenes" (40.2.2). His description of their myths indicates that (1) Seth and his sons were considered to be these "Allogeneis" (40.7.2, 5); (2) that Seth was carried up by a higher power and ministering angels of the "good god" to somewhere above, where Seth was protected for "a long time" (40.7.2); (3) that the Archontics spoke of other prophets, a Martiades and a Marsianos, who also were caught up by angelic beings and then descended after three days (40.7.6). What I wish to underscore here is that nowhere in Epiphanius's account is there any mention of *all* Archontic devotees practicing these ascents. The ascents are limited to Seth and a couple of spiritual heroes. Epiphanius accuses the Archontics of licentious behavior, but this is likely an instance of his typical slander, since he says that they imitate the lifestyle of monastics (40.2.4)—which is probably precisely what they were; Williams 1996, 144–145. Thus, there might be similarities between their situation and those of producers and owners of the groups of Nag Hammadi codices I have discussed in the latter part of this paper: Criticism of ritual practices of some other groups; while probably embracing their own versions and interpretations of communal rituals such as baptism; and an avid interest in apocalyptic revelation conveying reports brought back from otherworldly trips.

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THE MEANING OF "ONE": PLURALITY AND UNITY IN PLOTINUS AND LATER NEOPLATONISM

Kevin Corrigan*

There are three typical characterizations of Plotinus and later Neoplatonism that I wish to argue against in this essay. The first is the view that Plotinus' mysticism is "solitary" as in the famous closing line of *Ennead* VI 9 [9] 11, 50—lines that perhaps have a disproportionate place because they mark the end of the sixth *Ennead*, even if VI 9 is 9th in the chronological order suggested by Porphyry.[1] The second is a view that privileges negative theology over all forms of kataphatic discourse in evaluating Plotinus' mystical language.[2] The third view is perhaps more complex still because it is so pervasive in common, even favorable assessments of Neoplatonism. It is the opinion that Neoplatonism is fatally hierarchical. Ultimately an unbridgeable chasm stretches between pagan eros, its derivatives and the Christian Biblical *agape*.[3] In each of these views, something beautiful in Neoplatonism gets swallowed up or is left undetected.

First, let me briefly examine the solitary/alone formulation. According to a common negative view, the One is solitary—*semnon kai hagion*. The self is equally so when alone with the One. The one, apparently too, has no concern for us and we have no concern for anything else when we are alone with it. In other words, we have in the flight of the solitary to the solitary, in the assessment of Julia Kristeva, "an apology of solitude … an assumption of narcissism."[4]

The opposite of this view must surely be true, for *monos* cannot be solitary, uncaring in any ordinary sense; "one," or "alone" in this case must be understood "in a larger sense." A point may be solitary: but *monos* must be "one" in a sense bigger than the "one" of soul or the "one" of intellect; VI 9:

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* This paper is written in honor of a great scholar, Birger Pearson.

1 Here I will, in part, be dependent upon my article, Corrigan, 1996, 28–42.

2 In my discussion of this view, I shall support a recent and persuasive article by Bussanich, 2007, 57–72.

3 See, for example, Barth 1969.

4 Julia Kristeva 1983, 110–111; 1987, 108–109.

"*pleonōs*." "For when you think of him as either nous or god, he is more."[5]

Briefly, how is *monos* used in Plotinus? The word occurs frequently in several different combinations: (*a*) as subject and object, as in the phrase *hina dexetai monē monon*, "in order that the soul alone may receive the Good alone";[6] (*b*) in a reflexive usage, as in the dative formulation, *monos monō*, "just as for those who go up to the celebrations of sacred rites there are purifications and strippings off of the clothes they wore before, and going up naked, until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one's self alone That alone [*autō monō auto monon*] simple, single and pure";[7] and (*c*) a prepositional usage, as in VI 9 [9] 11, 50, *phygē monou pros monon*, or V 1 [10] 6, 9–12, "Let us speak of it [Intellect] in this way, first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul [*tē psychē ekteinasin heautous*] into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone (*monous pros monon*)."[8]

Peterson (1933) and others more recently, especially Meijer, have discussed these formulations and their forerunners in Thessalus of Tralles, Numenius, Plato, the Attic dramatists, and Homer.[9] Peterson, in particular, distinguishes, on the one hand, a metaphysical aspect which he relates to the dative formulation and which, he argues, expresses the unity of isolation and community, "Absonderung und Verbundenheit," in an actual relation, and, on the other hand, a mystical, contemplative aspect (i.e., that of prayer), which he relates to the prepositional usage. He also argues that in Plotinus we have something altogether new, which cannot be traced to earlier usage in Numenius or Thessalus of Tralles. Plotinus manages to unite the "*personlich*," "*privat*," "*vertraulich*," "*intime*," or relational meaning of *monos mono* with the conceptual meaning of his metaphysics and mystical philosophy.[10]

However, with Meijer, I do not believe we can separate the metaphysical or magical aspects from the mystical. All the passages under discussion, and especially I 6 [1] 7, I; VI 7 [38] 34, 7; VI 9 [9] 11, 50, are equally mystical. Ever since Homer, *monos monō* denotes a private conversation (as it does also

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[5] VI 9 [9] 6.

[6] VI 7 [38] 34, 7–8.

[7] I 6 [1] 7, 6–10, clearly influenced by *Symposium* 211 e 1. Plato, Symposium 211e1 ff.: αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ἰδεῖν εἰλικρινές, καθαρόν, ἄμεικτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάπλεων σαρκῶν τε ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ χρωμάτων καὶ ἄλλης πολλῆς φλυαρίας θνητῆς, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν δύναιτο μονοειδὲς κατιδεῖν; Compare Alcibiades' speech at *Symposium* 217b203: συνεγιγνόμην γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες, μόνος μόνῳ …

[8] For prayer in Stoic theory and in Plotinus see Peterson 1933, 30–41; also in Plotinus, Theiler 1930, 134; and Atkinson 1983, 130.

[9] Peterson 1933; Meijer 1992, 157–162; Dodds 1960, 3–32.

[10] Meijer 1992, 35 ff.

in *Symposium* 217 b).[11] In Numenius, however, for the first time the notion of private conversation gives way to that of a private meeting between the soul and the Good (*homilesai to agathō monō monon*).[12] And this we find developed in Plotinus where the notion of intimacy is crucial and where, in my view, it does not exclude community—but community in a very special sense, the opposite of what Meijer calls "the Plotinian monology."[13]

This "aloneness" of intense intimacy Plotinus defines in V 1 [10] 6 in terms of vision, proximity, and togetherness of being: "Everything longs for its parent and loves it, especially when parent and offspring are alone [*monoi*]; but when the parent is the highest good, the offspring is necessarily with him [*synesti auto*] and separate from him only in otherness."[14] And when the vision is even more intense, not even otherness separates the two: there is nothing whatever "in between."[15] To be "alone" in this sense, then, is the opposite of isolation, but the fullest intimacy the soul has always desired ("wishing to be mingled with it" [*sygkerasthenai*]).[16] Plotinus consciously describes this union in physical, even sexual terms, and so it is not surprising in a late treatise for him to insist that the experience of lovers in sexual intercourse would be inexplicable without the Good. This aloneness is not removed from sex and desire, but the ground and root of all desire.[17] It also appears as a *single activity* which gets split up into the multiplicity of Intellect's vision and split yet again into the phenomenal multiplicity of the sense-world.

In fact, there is in this respect a strong contrast with the Gnostics (in Plotinus' explicit critique in II 9 [30]) who, according to Plotinus, claim that they *alone* contemplate.[18] By contrast, "… the person of real dignity must ascend in due measure, without boorish arrogance, going only so far as our nature can, and consider that *there is space for others at the god's side* and not *set himself alone* after god, like flying in our dreams …"[19] It is tempting to

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[11] Meijer 1992, 157.
[12] Numenius, fragment 2, E. des Places, trans, *Fragments*, Paris, 1973, lines 11–12.
[13] Meijer 1992, 162.
[14] V 1 [10] 6, 50–54.
[15] Cf. VI 7 [38] 34, 7 ff.; VI 9 [9] I, 34.
[16] I 6 [1] 7, 13; cf. VI, 7 [38] 35.
[17] III 5 [50] 1, 21–30.
[18] II 9 [30] 18, 16.
[19] II 9 [33] 9, 46–50: ἔπειτα σεμνὸν δεῖ εἰς μέτρον μετὰ οὐκ ἀγροικίας, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἰόντα ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ φύσις δύναται ἡμῶν, ἀνιέναι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις νομίζειν εἶναι χώραν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ αὐτὸν μόνον μετ'ἐκεῖνον τάξαντα ὥσπερ ὀνείρασι πέτεσθαι ἀποστεροῦντα ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ δυνατὸν ψυχῇ ἀνθρώπου θεῷ γενέσθαι.

suppose, as Jean-Marc Narbonne has suggested in conversation to me, that Plotinus virtually drops the *monos-monon* formula after II 9 [33] because of this central anti-Gnostic critique at this point of his writing career, and I think this is plausible since in his later writings he only uses it of the soul, as we have seen above in treatise 38: VI 7 [38] 34, 7–8.[20]

In other words, for Plotinus such an experience is the opposite of abstract or solitary, but the very possibility of *uniqueness* and of an intimacy where *uniqueness* is everything: one discovers oneself when one is "most what one is," and this is when one is most uncoordinated with or "unlike" everything else. So to be alone or separate from everything else means to be oneself in the generative presence of the Good: "But if it runs the opposite way, it will arrive, not at something else but at itself, and … since it is not in something else it will not be in nothing, but in itself; but when it is in itself alone and not in being, it is in that, for one becomes, not substance, but 'beyond substance' by this converse."[21] Is it within or without, Plotinus asks in V 5 (32) 7–8. A bit of both, he replies, but there is no real "whence." At the same time, one just has to wait in silence for the light, grace, or gift of the Good, which is nonetheless present to everyone according to the capacity of each. So in VI 9 [9], the flight of the alone to the alone is the being not even with another "but one with oneself," "beyond substance by this company".[22] It is "the life of Gods and of godlike and blessed men, deliverance from the things of this world."[23] and, equally, it is deliverance even from the "things" of the intelligible world, that is an experience *prior to multiplicity* (intellectual, psychic, somatic) that needs neither distinct otherness nor multiplicity but is the deepest intimacy of pre-selfishness/pre-otherness. It is neither privative nor a hyper-negation of something positive; it is not negative theology, if negative theology is to be understood as the negation of one's affirmations and the negation of one's negations. It is instead a *positive*, performative experience of happiness: "in its happiness [it] is not cheated in thinking that it is happy."[24]

I find myself in agreement here with Bussanich's assessment: "Negation preserves the one's transcendence, but it is inadequate to express the mystic's direct awareness around and "within" the One. Plotinus' mystically performative language breaks free from the discursive language of both positive

[20] For a broader analysis of some of the issues, see Narbonne 2011.
[21] VI 9 [9] 11, 38–42.
[22] VI 9 [9] 10, 21–22 and then 11, 342–343.
[23] VI 9 [9] 11, 49–51.
[24] VI 7 [38] 34, 30–31.

and negative theologies … ecstatic and performance utterance cannot be translated into discursive theological language. Nor should they be taken simply as affirmations to be negated."[25]

I also think, however, that the doctrine of henads, attributed to Iamblichus, is important for casting some light on such positive experience in Plotinus, for henadic unities beyond intellect proper play a similar role in certain passages.[26] I have in mind III 8 [30] 10 5–10: "Think of a spring that has no other origin, but gives the whole of itself to rivers and … the rivers that rise from it, before each of them flows in a different direction, remain for a while all together, though each of them knows in a way where it is going to let its streams flow."[27] Or VI 6 [34] 10, 1–2: "being, standing firm in multiplicity … was a kind of preparation and preliminary sketch for the beings … like henads holding a place for the beings which are going to be founded upon them."[28] Henads, together with the One, escape all coordination with intelligible psychic or somatic multiplicity, and yet they evoke a unified-multiplicity, beyond multiplicity, in a depth of intimate aloneness that is neither abstract nor solitary in any of the senses supposedly leveled against Neoplatonism.

So this is an experience *prior to multiplicity* (intellectual, psychic, somatic) that needs neither distinct otherness nor multiplicity but is the deepest intimacy of pre-selfness/pre-otherness. It is in no sense either privative or a hyper-negation of something positive; it is not negative theology, if negative theology is to be understood as the negation of one's affirmations and the negation of one's negations. It is instead a *positive*, performative experience of happiness: "in its happiness [it] is not cheated in thinking that it is happy."[29]

I think that we are dealing here with the emergence of a complex variegated tradition of positive mystical experience nestling in the same space as radical negative theologies and kataphatic moments within such theologies. This multi-faceted valence in Plotinian thought helps to make possible a later Cappadocian grammar for speaking positively about the Trinity:

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[25] Bussanich 2007, 70–71.

[26] See Dillon 1973.

[27] III 8 [30] 10 5–10: Νόησον γὰρ πηγὴν ἀρχὴν ἄλλην οὐκ ἔχουσαν, δοῦσαν δὲ ποταμοῖς πᾶσαν αὑτήν, οὐκ ἀναλωθεῖσαν τοῖς ποταμοῖς, ἀλλὰ μένουσαν αὐτὴν ἡσύχως, τοὺς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῆς προεληλυθότας πρὶν ἄλλον ἄλλῃ ῥεῖν ὁμοῦ συνόντας ἔτι, ἤδη δὲ οἷον ἑκάστους εἰδότας οἳ ἀφήσουσιν αὐτῶν τὰ ῥεύματα·

[28] VI 6 [34] 10, 1ff.: Ἑστὼς οὖν τὸ ὂν ἐν πλήθει ἀριθμός, ὅτε πολὺ μὲν ἠγείρετο, παρασκευὴ δὲ οἷον ἦν πρὸς τὰ ὄντα καὶ προτύπωσις καὶ οἷον ἑνάδες τόπον ἔχουσαι τοῖς ἐπ' αὐτὰς ἱδρυθησομένοις.

[29] VI 7 [38] 34, 30–31.

P-series language concerning identity of subject/attribute;[30] unrestricted positive *energeia*;[31] and an implicit doctrine of henads, and so on. I want to unravel one thread of this in later Neoplatonism that will not just be a reaction to Christianity but that arises out of its own need to think about intimacy, unity and prayer.

For reasons of time I must pass over the important question of prayer in Plotinus and Porphyry and come to Iamblichus. I shall not take up the question of henads here directly, but address instead Iamblichus' strange but important notion of prayer.[32]

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[30] For this see Lloyd 1990, 76–80.

[31] On this see Bussanich 2007; see also Corrigan 1987, 975–993.

[32] In a famous thought-experiment in the opening lines of V 8 [31] 9 (*On intellectual beauty*), Plotinus urges the reader to avoid Gnostic-like censure of the visible cosmos and to practice a deeper understanding of the cosmos as follows: "This cosmos, then, let us take in our discursive thought (*dianoia*), with each of its parts remaining what it is without confusion, gathering all of them together into one as far as we can, so that when any one part appears first, for instance the outside heavenly sphere, the imagination of the sun and, with it, of the other heavenly bodies follows immediately, and the earth and sea and all the living creatures are seen as they could in fact all be seen inside a transparent sphere. Let there be, then, in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it, either moving or standing still … Keep this, and take from yourself another, taking away the bulk; take away also the places, and the mental picture of matter in yourself, and do not try to apprehend another sphere smaller in bulk than the original one …" (9, 1–13). What is striking here is not the elimination of perception, but rather the decisive first words: *Touto toinun ton kosmon—this* cosmos is to be grasped as an interconnected, holographic entity by discursive thought. By holographic I mean that in each part of the cosmos every other part is virtually contained. Thought does not involve the obliteration, reduction or abstraction of the perceived world, but an accurate, true-to-reality phenomenological grasp, which permits the perceived world to be *augmented* by thought. And then Plotinus takes this one crucial step further: "… but calling (*kalesas*) on the god who made that of which you have the phantasm, pray him to come (*euxai elthein*). And may he come, bringing his own universe with him, with all the gods within him, and each god is all the gods coming together into one … he who is one and all" (V 8 [31] 9, 13–15). As far as I know, this is the only example of its kind in the *Enneads* where prayer is explicitly an essential part not only of ascent to the intelligible world, but also of an accurate grasp of the sensible world. This makes some sense from a rational viewpoint if the activities by which we see, imagine and think are not entirely explained by those activities themselves, but it seems strange to think that we cannot even grasp the visible world fully without address, prayer and response-or, in modern phenomenological terms, the giver and the gift. On the other side of the coin, however, since we are not the authors of the world's reality or appearance, its reality can only be a gift. The gift can only be invoked in prayer but it is finally an uncompelled gift that can be reached only from its own threshold, and it is not in any sense an "it", that is, an object, but a *god*, a much more powerful agent-subject than the invoker. So a proper form of reception, according to Plotinus in this passage, involves a calling out beyond us and the recognition of philosophy as a prayerful approach to divine wisdom. Porphyry has a similar, if more austere view. Whatever sacrifice, address and prayer may be, they do not involve the butchering of animals or human speech: "it is not sacrifices

Why should we pray to the gods, Iamblichus asks in the *De Mysteriis*, if they are, as Porphyry claims, "unbending and unmixed with sensible things?" Iamblichus' answer is interesting and complex, though it looks somewhat batty at first sight. Prayer is not a form of ordinary address, as of one person addressing another, but a kind of waking up something in us that wants to be united with the divine itself and that produces a response or "hearing" from the gods not insofar as they have organs or ears, but rather because:

> They embrace (*periechousi*) within themselves the actualities (*energeias*) of the words of good people and in particular of those [words] which, by virtue of the sacred liturgy, are seated in the gods and united to them; for in that case the divine is literally united with itself.[33]

In other words, and this seems to be clarified in a later book of the same work (*De Mysteriis* IV. 3–4), Iamblichus' position is something like the following: in the physical world, things get developed through opposition and difference. As Socrates puts this positively in *Republic* 7, 524d, things that "fall upon the senses together with their opposites" wake up or rouse (*egertikon*, as in Iamblichus)[34] *dianoia* and *noēsis*, discursive thought and understanding. Prayer works on a different principle, according to Iamblichus. It wakes up a unity, which is already always responded to in the active, unitary divine energy that already comprehends everything (as we saw above in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12, 7–9). If we say that the gods "hear" such prayer, we don't mean that they have ears, but that this divine unity is supremely responsive; and for Iamblichus it is responsive not only to and through the actuality of words but in the actuality of good holy action, namely, theurgy or god-work.

There is a sense here in which Iamblichus' view goes beyond not only philosophy but also religion in any conventional organized way, since prayer plainly starts to break down any normal separation between two heterogenous beings and seems to suggest what Henry Corbin calls—in relation to

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that honor the god, nor a multitude of offerings that enhance him, but thought full of god and well-established that joins us to god; for like must necessarily go to like" (*To Marcella* 19, trans. Clark, 2000). Instead, "we shall worship [the god who rules over all] in pure silence and with pure thoughts … We must, then, be joined with and made like him, and must offer our own uplifting (*anagōgē*) as a holy sacrifice to the god for it is both our hymn and our security. This sacrifice is fulfilled in *apatheia* of the soul and contemplation of the god" *De Abstinentia* 2. 34, Clark.

[33] *De Mysteriis* I. 15, 47. Translation and text in *Iamblichus. On the Mysteries*, Clarke-Dillon-Hershbell 2003.

[34] For varied, but interrelated usage see Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* III. 10, 123, 4: 14, 133,6; 20, 148, 3; 25, 159. 8; 31. 177. 8; V. 21, 229, 12; 239, 6.

the Sufi tradition and Ibn 'Arabi—a bi-unity, a one being encountering itself, the divine in the human and the human in the divine.[35] Just as "seeing" in the Platonic tradition is a function of the activity of the Good in my perception, so more intimately is my desire of god god's desire manifested in me. Such yearning unity resonates because it is part of its implicate, unified or enfolded structure, as it were, that becomes unfolded in my individual experience and needs, on the human side, to be developed or woken up.

The awakening of such unities, therefore, for Iamblichus includes three levels of prayer: first, introductory prayer or gathering together; second, conjunctive prayer (*syndetikon*, binding together, as in Plato's *Symposium* in Diotima-Socrates' description of *eros-daimon*);[36] and finally, perfective or unificatory prayer. But against Porphyry, and perhaps with Plotinus,[37] Iamblichus insists that *we have to ask*: "no sacred work occurs without the supplications contained in prayers."[38] So our urge to ask questions and to ask for things is not silly, even if what we often ask for can be very silly.

The experience Iamblichus seems to point to is no longer the philosophical relation of a contingent being to its supreme Necessary Cause or even that of a fully paid up worshipper in the temple of her choice, but something much more radical: an intimacy beyond classification, the lived experience of the *monos pros monon* formula (from Alexander of Tralles through Numenius to Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa), and the opposite of "solitary mysticism" since it is part of the divine creative energy that makes, and is manifest in, *everything*.[39]

From this perspective, Iamblichus' view of the "extended practice of prayer" (*hē … egchronizousa diatribē*) is also intriguing, though I do not have space here to explore its implications. The only point I can make is that such prayer apparently not only wakes up, but opens up and increases on its own account the capacity of divine unity in the soul to the degree that—in a striking and otherwise philosophically perplexing phrase—it "co-increases divine love" (*ton theion erōta synauxei*).[40] What exactly this means I am not sure, but let me explore some of its possible significance in the light of two final questions: the question of love and "divine experience" and

[35] See Corbin 1969, 147.
[36] *Symposium* 202e–203a.
[37] V 8 [32] 9, 1ff.
[38] *De Mysteriis* V. 26, 238, 11–12.
[39] See Corrigan 1996, 28–42.
[40] *De Mysteriis* V. 26, 239, 6.

the question of individuality from the perspectives of transcendence and immanence. The two questions are in fact interrelated.

In the Platonic tradition, the question of divine love is ambiguous. Is it our own love of the divine or is it a divine love for, and in, us? While one cannot readily imagine the Unmoved Mover being moved by love or passion, it nonetheless seems to be a legitimate question to ask what it means to be god-beloved, or as Plato puts it in the *Laws*, "dear to god."[41] With Iamblichus, and certainly Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, we encounter the unfolding of a remarkable view of divine love that is implicit in earlier Platonism.[42] It is not simply a reaction, I suggest, to Christian influence, namely, the view that God's love involves a kind of radical divine vulnerability, a longing that pierces all created life. Pseudo-Dionysius, in a famous passage from the *Divine Names*, puts this in the following way:

> When we talk of yearning, whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or in the spirit or in nature, we should think of a unifying and commingling power which moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, peer to be in communion with peer, and subordinate to return to the superior … (713a–b).[43]

As in Proclus, divine providential love is at root a love that recalls everything to itself, an *erōs pronoētikos/epistreptikos*, that is also a function of our love for each other.[44] However, Pseudo-Dionysius no longer views this simply as a kind of structural relation between cause and effect or as a ritualistic relation between God and worshipper. It is instead an intimate paradoxical coincidence of opposites—transcendence and immanence—in which the divine longing for created things is manifested:

> And in truth it must be said too that the very cause of the universe, in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.[45]

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[41] *Laws* 4, 716c–e.

[42] See below for Proclus.

[43] Pseudo-Dionysius, Divine Names 713a–b: Τὸν ἔρωτα, εἴτε θεῖον εἴτε ἀγγελικὸν εἴτε νοερὸν εἴτε ψυχικὸν εἴτε φυσικὸν εἴποιμεν, ἑνωτικήν τινα καὶ συγκρατικὴν ἐννοήσωμεν δύναμιν τὰ μὲν ὑπέρτερα κινοῦσαν ἐπὶ πρόνοιαν τῶν καταδεεστέρων, τὰ δὲ ὁμόστοιχα πάλιν εἰς κοινωνικὴν ἀλληλουχίαν καὶ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τὰ ὑφειμένα πρὸς τὴν τῶν κρειττόνων καὶ ὑπερκειμένων ἐπιστροφήν.

[44] Proclus, *In Platonis Primum Alcibiadem* 54–56.

[45] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 712a–b: Τολμητέον δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας εἰπεῖν, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων αἴτιος τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ τῶν πάντων ἔρωτι δι' ὑπερβολὴν τῆς ἐρωτικῆς

I do not think that this view of divine love can be fitted into any simple philosophical or religious schema, or even into any dialectical unfolding of Absolute Spirit in and through sense-perception, self-consciousness, reason and various one-sided manifestations of Spirit, as in Hegel's developmental model for understanding the ultimate unity of transcendence and immanence. For to say that God is beguiled, bewitched or enchanted (*thelgetai*) by beautiful, good things like trees, plants, animals, you and me adds an entirely different dimension to any experience of reality.[46] And this is the dimension of sympathy or co-feeling, co-inherence: in the pathos of human beings, other animals or even plants, the pathos of God is or can be manifested.[47]

It also brings into peculiar focus one feature of Platonism that often passes unobserved. The separation of soul from body is so characteristic of Platonism that it is mentioned as integral to the meaning of philosophy in the second sentence of Alcinous' *Handbook of Platonism*.[48] But what this means, among other things, is not simply, if at all, the supposedly dualistic world-renouncing view so often attributed to "Platonic" thought but rather the insight that no mindful immanence is possible in the first place without transcendence. Transcendence or "separation" makes integral immanence possible; or, in other words, individuals only emerge as unique individuals in the context of the love that makes and binds everything together. For better or for worse, and to the dismay of many scholars, Plato seems to have been profoundly persuaded that we can only love other individuals fully, realistically and wholly in and through the medium of divine love itself.[49] Such love—eros in the *Symposium*, for instance—is implicitly transformative, since Socrates' life-long pursuit of the beautiful has made him unique, *atopos*, literally, placeless, or, in the language of the *Phaedrus*, it has made him belong to what he loves rather than to himself.[50]

However, this goes far beyond a human perspective, for in the passage cited above from Pseudo-Dionysius, the divine love is *for everything*. For the

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ἀγαθότητος ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται ταῖς εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα προνοίαις καὶ οἷον ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ πάντων ἐξῃρημένου πρὸς τὸ ἐν πᾶσι κατάγεται κατ' ἐκστατικὴν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν ἀνεκφοίτητον ἑαυτοῦ.

[46] See also Agathon's speech in the *Symposium* 197e, where such a notion of enchantment is first broached.

[47] For this dimension in plants see on Proclus below.

[48] *Didaskalikos* 1, 2–4: Φιλοσοφία ἐστὶν ὄρεξις σοφίας, ἢ λύσις καὶ περιαγωγὴ ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος, ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ ἡμῶν τρεπομένων καὶ τὰ κατ' ἀλήθειαν ὄντα.

[49] For example, Vlastos1981, 3–42; Dover 1980, 113.

[50] For an echo of this see Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4, 13.

Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, human beings are only part of the *Timaeus*' Living Creature, something that makes sense to us in an ecological age, but the passage I am going to finish with from Proclus is so far outside of our modern sensibility that it will look like complete nonsense.[51] I cite the first paragraph of a little work *On the Hieratic art* by Proclus in the translation of Brian Copenhaver:[52]

> Just as lovers systematically leave behind what is fair to sensation and attain the one true source of all that is fair and intelligible, in the same way priests—observing how all things are in all from the sympathy that all visible things have for one another and for the invisible powers—have also framed their priestly knowledge. For they were amazed to see the lasts in the firsts and the very firsts in the lasts; in heaven they saw earthly things acting causally and in a heavenly manner, in the earth heavenly things in an earthly manner. Why do heliotropes move together with the sun, selenotropes with the moon, moving around to the extent of their ability with the luminaries of the cosmos? All things pray according to their own order and sing hymns, either intellectually or rationally or naturally or sensibly, to heads of entire chains.[53] And since the heliotrope is also moved toward that to which it readily opens, if anyone hears it striking the air as it moves about, he perceives in the sound that it offers to the king the kind of hymn that a plant can sing. (1–13)

Henry Corbin has written of this passage that the community between visible and invisible "is not perceived through argument proceeding from effect to cause; it is the perception of a sympathy … in the visible phenomenon of a flower … Its heliotropism (its "conversion" towards its celestial prince) is … a heliopathy (the passion it experiences …). And this passion … is disclosed in a prayer, which is the *act* of this *passion* through which the invisible angel draws the flower towards him. Accordingly, this prayer is the *pathos* of their *sympatheia*."[54] It is this complex sympathy, which makes Proclus aware "of

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[51] *Timaeus* 30c–31b.

[52] Copenhaver 1988, 79–110: Ὥσπερ οἱ ἐρωτικοὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αἰσθήσει καλῶν ὁδῷ προϊόντες ἐπ' αὐτὴν καταντῶσι τὴν μίαν τῶν καλῶν πάντων καὶ νοητῶν ἀρχήν, οὕτως καὶ οἱ ἱερατικοὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν τοῖς φαινομένοις ἅπασι συμπαθείας πρός τε ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀφανεῖς δυνάμεις, πάντα ἐν πᾶσι κατανοήσαντες, τὴν ἐπιστήμην τὴν ἱερατικὴν συνεστήσαντο, θαυμάσαντες τῷ βλέπειν ἔν τε τοῖς πρώτοις τὰ ἔσχατα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις τὰ πρώτιστα, ἐν οὐρανῷ μὲν τὰ χθόνια κατ' αἰτίαν καὶ οὐρανίως, ἔν τε γῇ τὰ οὐράνια γηΐνως. Ἤ πόθεν ἡλιοτρόπια μὲν ἡλίῳ, σεληνοτρόπια δὲ σελήνῃ συγκινεῖται συμπεριπολοῦντα ἐς δύναμιν τοῖς τοῦ κόσμου φωστῆρσιν; Εὔχεται γὰρ πάντα κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν καὶ ὑμνεῖ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας τῶν σειρῶν ὅλων ἢ νοερῶς ἢ λογικῶς ἢ φυσικῶς ἢ αἰσθητῶς· ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ἡλιοτρόπιον ᾧ ἔστιν εὔλυτον, τούτῳ κινεῖται καί, εἰ δή τις αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν περιστροφὴν ἀκούειν τὸν ἀέρα πλήσσοντος οἷός τε ἦν, ὕμνον ἄν τινα διὰ τοῦ ἤχου τούτου συνήσθετο τῷ Βασιλεῖ προσάγοντος, ὃν δύναται φυτὸν ὑμνεῖν.

[53] See also Proclus, *In Timaeum* I. 213.2–3; Wallis 1995, 155.

[54] Corbin 1969, 106–107.

the *hierophanic dimension* of the flower's sympathy whereupon he perceives the movement of the flower as a prayer whose impulse culminates in a transcending which it shows him with a gesture that speaks without the help of language."[55]

Is this crazy? Perhaps it is so from some perspectives. But Corbin shows that it is deeply in tune with the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi and with the notion of the sadness of the "pathetic" God, in whose primordial compassionate sadness for undisclosed, undeveloped virtualities in the created world our own compassionate yearning resonates and moves.[56] Such a vision also resonates, I suggest, with elements in the (very different) thought of Aquinas, especially the idea that only in God's knowing do hidden potencies and even bare possibilities arise.[57] The created universe is not just the sum of facts but a vast reservoir of dynamic possibilies that can emerge as real, and uniquely themselves, in the creative energy of divine love.[58]

What is crucial to see here, I submit, is the following. First, in all of Neoplatonism from Plotinus to Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, hierarchy, series, chains of beings are indeed important, but they are meaningless even as hierarchies without the divine goodness, oneness, and love that pierces them directly—more directly and intimately than any hierarchy. For Proclus, the influence of each hypostasis is more "piercing" the higher the entity—intellect's reality more piercingly present to every individual than that of soul's reality; that of the One pre-eminently, indeed uncoordinatingly, so.

At the end of his commentary on the First Hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, preserved in William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' *In Parmenidem*, Proclus argues (commenting on *Parmenides* 142a2–3) that while no description or knowledge can apply to the One, we call it "one" by virtue of the understanding of unity which is in ourselves. For since everything

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[55] Corbin 1969, 107.

[56] See Corbin 1969, 112–113 and 118: "To become a Compassionate One is to become the likeness of the Compassionate God experiencing infinite sadness over undisclosed virtualities; it is to embrace, in a total religious *sympathy*, the theophanies of these divine Names in all faiths. But this sympathy, precisely, does not signify acceptance of their limits; it signifies rather that in opening ourselves to them we open them to the expansion that the primordial divine *sympathesis* demands of them; that we increase their divine light to the maximum; that we "emancipate" them from the virtuality and ignorance which still confine them in their narrow intransigence. By thus taking them in hand, religious *sympathy* enables them to escape from the impasse, that is, the sin of metaphysical idolatry."

[57] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 14, article 13 (in the overall context of Questions 12–15).

[58] Compare Plotinus, *Ennead* IV 8 [6] 5, 33–35.

that exists longs for the first cause naturally, this natural, indwelling striving cannot come from the knowledge, for otherwise "what has no share in knowledge could not seek it."[59] "What else is the One except the operation and energy of this 'birth pang' in us [*dinos huius operatio et adiectio*]? It is therefore this interior [*intrinsecam*] understanding of unity, which is a projection [*provolem*] and, as it were, an expression of the One in ourselves, that we call 'the One.' So the One itself is not nameable, but the One in ourselves."[60] Does this mean that the One is purely subjective? No, simply that it is unnameable by virtue of its super-eminence, which here signifies in part (as in Plotinus) that the One extends to and beyond everything: "And much less does everything participate in life or intellect or rest or movement, but in unity, everything."[61]

Neoplatonic hierarchical thinking is pierced through and through by the non-hierarchical immediacy or intimacy of the One to each and every individual thing. Plotinus is perhaps even more radical: "The Good is gentle and kindly and gracious and present to anyone *when anyone wishes*."[62] Individuality exists at every level of Plotinus' world, but it only emerges as pure uniqueness in the vast infinite aloneness of its *homilia* with, and in, the One. In Plotinus, the Good cannot "need" me and yet it reaches into the heart of my desire and being as that which is always already there for my yearning, birth pangs, or prayer. In Iamblichus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius, this seems to go much further—even to the point of a compassion that bespeaks a "One" that is the yearning with, and in, my yearning, a divine love that increases even with my unique yearning itself.

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[59] *In Parmenidem* 54, 3–10.

[60] *In Parmenidem* 54, 11–14.

[61] See also Plotinus *Ennead* VI 7[38], chapters 21–23.

[62] Ennead V 5, 12, 33–35.

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THEURGY AND THE PLATONIST'S LUMINOUS BODY

Gregory Shaw*

> The divine mystagogy—established eternally by the gods on a pure and sacred foundation—was revealed to those of us in the temporal sphere … *by one man* whom I would not err in calling the primary leader and hierophant of the true mysteries.
>
> —Proclus[1]

The Plato praised by Proclus in his *Platonic Theology* is not the Plato taught in the philosophy departments of our universities. Our Plato is a fiction, a caricature, a venerable man of straw. The great philosopher now disparaged by post-modern critics as the architect of metaphysical dualism is not the Plato recognized by the philosophers of late antiquity. The enlightened Athenian whom we honor for transposing Western thought from "the plane of revelation to the plane of rational argument" stands as the founder of our rational tradition, for privileging thought over sensation, ideas over their material expression.[2] But this Plato—familiar to us—would scarcely have been recognizable to the Platonists of antiquity. He would have been scarcely recognizable because the Plato we have inherited is an invention of our own habits of thought, and the dualism we attribute to him reflects our own existential estrangement from the divinity of the world.[3]

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* Birger Pearson was my "doctor father" while I completed my Ph.D. at UC Santa Barbara. He encouraged me to pursue my interest in what was then a suspect field of research, Neoplatonic theurgy. More importantly, he exemplifies the kind of scholarship that I have tried to emulate. It is an honor to contribute to this volume of essays.

1 *Proclus Platonic Theology* Vol. I, I.1: 5.16–6.3: Saffrey-Westerink 1968.

2 Dodds 1949, 209.

3 Drew Hyland 2004, 11, criticizes the Platonism invented by scholars: "the set of theories and doctrines that constitute Platonism are not articulated in the dialogues themselves but are imposed from without by later scholars". These impositions, such as "dualism" and the assumption that the dialogues show a "development" in the thinking of Plato, make up the straw man that is attacked by Plato's post-modern critics. Hyland might be just as critical of the hieratic reading of Plato by the Neoplatonists, but that is another matter.

In contrast to our inherited caricature, the Platonists of late antiquity believed that Plato was "divine and Apollonian."[4] For them "philosophy was conceived as a sacred rite" and Plato a hierophant that revealed the world as theophany.[5] They recognized divine power throughout all of nature. Before dualist theologies blinded us to that world and before materialist science erased it altogether, the supernatural was not elsewhere but here, in nature. Gods were everywhere: in plants, in rocks, in animals, in temples *and in us*. And it was precisely the aim of the later Platonists to insure that this integration of the supernatural and the natural, of the divine and the human remained alive. Plato's teaching was a divine revelation that preserved this integration. It was a revelation of a specifically hermetic kind; that is, its secrets were fathomed through noetic reflection, and the philosophers of his school saw themselves as links in a Golden Chain connecting heaven to earth.[6]

Divinization for Neoplatonists meant that thinking remained rooted in the unthinkable: the ineffable One. They did not aim to articulate a true doctrine or dogma; rather their written reflections and teachings functioned as mystagogic vehicles into an ineffable identity.[7] For theurgical Platonists particularly, Plato was a mystagogue who outlined the matrix of this revelation in the *Timaeus*. As Plato explains, it is the mysterious maternal receptacle (*hupodochē*) and space (*chōra*) that allows the Forms to come

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[4] *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 1.20: Westerink 2011; 1962. This text derives from the 6th century CE Platonic school in Alexandria.

[5] Rappe 2010, xxv. In his *Life of Proclus*, Marinus says: "After he led Proclus sufficiently through the studies [of Aristotle] as preludes and Lesser Mysteries, Syrianus led his disciple into the mystagogy of Plato …" *Vita Procli*, XIII, 44–46; cited by Trouillard 1982, 9.

[6] Plato was one such link in this "golden chain" of hierophants. Proclus explained that the mysteries were revealed in different modes: Orphic, Pythagorean, Chaldean, and Platonic (*Platonic Theology* I, 20.5–25.). For the later Platonists the discursive thinking of the dialogues was intended to lead one into the noetic *archai* of thinking, and their commentaries on Platonic texts were—as Proclus and Iamblichus maintained—discursive *rituals* to evoke a hidden *gnōsis*. As Uzdavinys 2004, xxi, put it, "the Homeric image of the Golden Chain … stretching from Heaven to Earth, was used to describe both the unbroken vertical connection with the first principles (noetic sources of the demiurgic descent, as well as paradigms of the revealed wisdom), and the horizontal, or historical, succession of the qualified masters and interpreters—a succession which was not always based exclusively on direct physical relations. In fact, the Golden Chain is the same as the Hermaic Chain. This chain was both the chain of theophany, manifestation, or descent (*demiourgike seira*), and the ladder of ascent".

[7] Athanassiadi 2006, 213 says that Iamblichus felt his tradition was threatened by "l'hérésie de l'intellectualisme." It was precisely against this heresy that Iamblichus directed his efforts, seeking to protect the revelatory core of Platonic mystagogy from those who would reduce it to intellectual abstractions.

into existence. This cosmogonic *chōra*, which Plato says *cannot be thought*, has—according to the later Platonists—its correlate within us and is the receptacle for every act of theurgy.[8] The goal of philosophy, then, is not conceptual knowledge but cosmogonic activity: to become divinely creative. As Diotima tells Socrates in the *Symposium*, it is not beauty, ultimately, that you want, but to "give birth" in beauty, to participate in creation.[9]

Instead of guiding souls into this activity, the Greeks of Iamblichus' time—including his own teacher Porphyry—had uprooted platonic mystagogy from its ground.[10] In Iamblichus' view, Porphyry had translated the ineffability of the One into a dualist scheme that separates gods from material reality. In a starkly prescient warning Iamblichus says:

> This doctrine spells the ruin of all holy ritual and theurgic communion between gods and men, since it places the presence of superior beings outside the earth. It amounts to saying that the divine is at a distance from the earth and cannot mingle with men, and that this lower region is a desert, without gods.[11]

For theurgic Platonists revelation is not removed from this world; it is their daily life.[12] Yet as the heirs of a caricatured Platonism, the theurgic creation of the world seems more removed to us, more fantastical, than the stories of Harry Potter. After Christianity exiled divinity from nature—allowing only a one-time incarnation of the divine with its diminishing residues in

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[8] *Timaeus* 52b. The role of the receptacle spelled out by Iamblichus: *On the Mysteries*, translated by Clarke-Dillon-Hershbell 2003. All references will follow the Parthey pagination preceded by *DM* (*DM* 232.11–233.6; *DM* 238.13–239.10).

[9] *Symposium* 206E.

[10] As Iamblichus puts it: "At the present time the reason everything has fallen into a state of decay—both in our words and prayers—is because they are continually being changed by the endless innovations and lawlessness of the Greeks. For the Greeks by nature are followers of the latest trends and are eager to be carried off in any direction, possessing no stability themselves. Whatever they receive from other traditions they do not preserve; even this they immediately reject. They change everything through their unstable habit of seeking the latest terms" (*DM* 259.4–10). A similar criticism of the Greeks is found in the Hermetic corpus: "For the Greeks, O King, who make logical demonstrations, use words emptied of power, and this very activity is what constitutes their philosophy, a mere noise of words. But we [Egyptians] do not [so much] use words (*logoi*) but sounds (*phōnai*) which are full of effects" *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.2: Nock and Festugière 1954–1960; reprint 1972–1983, 232.

[11] *DM* 28.6–11, translated by Brown 1978, 101. I have modified his translation.

[12] After discussing the famous oracular sites of revelation at Delphi, Claros, and Asclepius Iamblichus says: "But why go through such occurrences one by one when *events that happen every day* (*kath hēmeran aei sumpiptonōn*) offer a clarity greater than any explanation" (*DM* 109.1–3).

the church—we now live in the desert prophesied by Iamblichus.[13] Not only is there no contact with gods, *there are no gods*, *no divinities here or elsewhere*. We inhabit a "flat reductionist physicalism" where there is no divine principle to which one might be assimilated.[14] Depending on our preferred world-view, we may see this as the triumph of rationalism or as the self-mutilation of our deepest gifts of imagination and creativity, available now only in the less valued forms of fiction, subjective fantasy and, I will argue, anomalous experiences of the paranormal. To understand the later Platonists requires that we recover something we have lost. It requires a re-evaluation of thinking itself. Jean Trouillard characterized the use of reason for Neoplatonists as profoundly different from enlightened rationality as well as from its post-modern derivatives: "The function of reason," he says, "is to reveal, in the unfolding of time, the Ineffable that inhabits it."[15] Trouillard explains that the "reason" of Neoplatonists—rooted in unknowable darkness—reveals the world as theophany, makes audible the voices of the gods, discloses the supernatural in nature, and shares in the creation of the world.[16]

The question is how to understand this function of reason. For us, Trouillard argues, reason oscillates between abstract speculation and technical efficacy, hardly an organ of theophany or demiurgy.[17] And until recently, Neoplatonism has been understood as a form of intellectual speculation. This is how Plotinus' *Enneads* were, and still are, read by many scholars. But it is hard to read Iamblichus in this way. He dismisses the power of abstract thought and says that only the performance of ritual can elevate the soul. In an often-quoted statement on this point, Iamblichus says:

> Intellectual understanding does not connect theurgists with the gods, for what would prevent those who philosophize theoretically from having theur-

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[13] Armstrong 1973, 11–12, reiterates this Iamblichean theme: "In so far as the Church became the only theophany, when it ceased to be an effective theophany, (as it has long ceased to be for most Europeans), there was no theophany left for the majority of men, no divine self-manifestation here below".

[14] O'Meara 2003, 205.

[15] Trouillard 1982, 233–234.

[16] Speaking of the "the One," Damascius says: "We judge even this name of 'one' to be unworthy considering the position of that principle; for this principle seems to us more venerable by being honored with the single name of 'ineffable' (*aporrhēton*), if it is permitted to say so", and he adds that the Egyptians refer to it simply as "unknowable darkness" (*skotos agnōstos*) (Combès and Westerink, II, 2002, 30.6–9). For Trouillard's quote, see Trouillard 1982, 234.

[17] "… toutes deux impuissantes à nourrir et à transfigurer l'homme …": Trouillard 1982, 234.

> gic union with them? … Rather, it is the perfect accomplishment of ineffable acts, religiously performed beyond all understanding, and it is the power of ineffable symbols understood by the gods alone, that effects theurgical union. Thus, we do not accomplish these acts by our thinking, for then their efficacy would be intellectual and depend on us …[18]

Not surprisingly, theurgy was initially dismissed by western scholars as a superstitious degeneration of Greek thought: "a failure of nerve."[19] To be precise, it was a failure to be rational as we imagine rationality. In the last decades, as theurgy has been increasingly appreciated by scholars it runs the risk of being intellectualized.[20] Despite that risk, the recognition of a principle that surpasses thought and invites theurgic participation has changed our understanding of Neoplatonism. Even Plotinus, once valorized as a "rational mystic," is now perceived to have practiced visualizations that have all the features of a theurgic rite.[21] But that still leaves us wondering what it means to have one's reason become an organ of theophany or cosmogony. Despite our best intentions, we still read the Neoplatonists from an intellectual point of view. We resist the idea that we might need to go "native" to understand the theurgical tribe and are understandably wary of becoming transfixed by a fantasy immune to scholarly criticism. But to understand the theurgical Platonists we must shift our existential habits of thought.

Rather than going native, we might discover *that we have always been natives*, that our existence is not reducible to rational theory or statistical evaluation. If we shift our focus to recognize, existentially, that breath comes before thought, that breathing creates, sustains, and absorbs thought; if we have experienced the primacy of breath through meditation, exercise, or intimacy we already possess an insight into an essential element of theurgical Neoplatonism: the *breath body*. Because it is not theoretical but experiential—we do not breathe in theory but in fact—it requires a kind of attention and immediacy not employed in metaphysical explorations.[22]

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[18] *DM* 96.13–97.9.

[19] Murray 1951.

[20] Clarke 2002, 1–2.

[21] Initially described by Rappe 1995; see also Shaw 1999, 121–143; Mazur 2003 and 2004.

[22] Irigary 2002, 7, captures the importance of the breath and how much we have forgotten about it in western philosophy: "Without doubt, at the origin of our tradition—for Aristotle, for example, and still more for Empedocles—the soul seems related to the breath, to air. But the link between the two was then forgotten, particularly in philosophy. The soul, or what takes its place, *has become the effect of conceptualizations and of representations and*

For the Neoplatonists this pneumatic body was an essential part of theurgy. It was called the vehicle of the soul, the *ochēma tēs psuchēs*, the pneumatic body, the etheric body, and the luminous vehicle. This subtle "energy body" has been studied by scholars almost exclusively through the dualist lens in which we have imagined Platonism. Thus we have focused on the *ochēma*'s descent into a material body and its ascent out of it at the moment of death. What is most important for later Platonists, however, is not the pre- or post-embodied character of this subtle body but its role *during* embodied life. Understanding the *ochēma* is the key to understanding theurgical Platonism. If we fail to grasp the function of the luminous body—the *augoeides* as Iamblichus called it—we fail to grasp the most important element of later Platonism.

The Luminous Body

> According to the ancients, souls freed from generation co-administer the cosmos with the gods … In the same way, these souls create the cosmos with the angels.
>
> —Iamblichus[23]

Thanks to the research of scholars like John Dillon, Ilsetraut Hadot, and Polymnia Athanassiadi we know that Platonists from the late 3rd to the 6th century CE followed the teachings of Iamblichus.[24] This remarkable religious genius, descended from Syrian priests and kings, unified the teachings of Plato and Aristotle within an over-arching Pythagorean framework and, most significantly, integrated this philosophic synthesis with the oldest forms of traditional worship. It was not without reason that an official of the Emperor Licinius praised Iamblichus as "[the] one appointed by the gods to

not the result of a practice of breathing. The misunderstandings are so profound … that bridges between the traditions are difficult to restore". The kind of attention required for "breath-work" might be compared to the *prosochē*, the awareness/attention that attends theurgic illumination *DM* 133.3–5. Damascius and other later Platonists maintained that this awareness underlies both our appetitive and cognitive activities. As Rappe 2010, 33, explains: "… Damascius consistently speaks of an attentive faculty that operates throughout all psychic states, standing guard over its own activity and being in fact the One of the soul".

[23] Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I 458.17–21.

[24] Dillon 1973; Hadot 2004; Athanassiadi 2006.

be the savior of the entire Hellenic world" and Emperor Julian saw him as the equal of Plato.[25]

Iamblichus' Platonism included a curriculum that required the reading of Platonic and Pythagorean texts in a specific order; it was a comprehensive form of *paideia* that aimed, as all Greek philosophy had aimed, to deify the soul.[26] Iamblichus' *paideia* culminated in theurgic rites in which gods became incarnate as theurgists, and because this practice competed with the rituals of the church, Iamblichean theurgy was denounced and its later proponents persecuted by Christian emperors. Augustine set the tone for the denunciation of theurgy, which he characterized as the worship of evil demons. He says:

> O excellent theurgy! O admirable purification of the soul!—a theurgy in which the violence of an impure envy has more influence than the entreaty of purity and holiness. Rather let us abominate and avoid the deceit of such wicked spirits, and listen to sound doctrine.[27]

We have listened for a long time. In an interesting coincidence, Augustine favored Plotinus's Platonism because it lacked a ritual practice and could be integrated with Christian theology, and later Enlightenment thinkers again favored Plotinus and dismissed Iamblichus because Plotinian discourse could be construed as rational while the ritual practices of Iamblichus clearly could not.[28] But at least Augustine recognized that the hieratic arts engaged real presences, something an enlightened rationalist could never admit. In a fascinating warning about the dangers of astrology, Augustine reveals a great deal. He says:

> When astrologers tell the truth, it must be admitted that *this is due to an instinct that, unknown to man, lies hidden in his mind*. And since this happens through the action of unclean and lying spirits … a good Christian should beware of astrologers and of all impious diviners, especially of those who tell

[25] Wright 1980, 3: 343–345.

[26] O'Meara 2003, 31–40.

[27] *The City of God*, 10.10: Dodds 1950. Augustine's demonization of theurgy stands in stark contrast to Dionysius the Areopagite who spoke of theurgy as an integral part of sacramental life. For a discussion of their respective attitudes about theurgy see Shaw 1999, 573–599; Rist 1992, 135–161.

[28] Dodds 1970a; 1965, 86, characterizes this perspective, saying of Plotinus (as opposed to Iamblichus): "His approach is severely intellectual, not physiological as in some oriental sects or sacramental as with some Christian mystics". For Dodds 1970b, 538, as for most scholars of the early 20th century, Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* was "philosophically worthless"; a "manifesto of irrationalism": Dodds 1949, 287.

> the truth, lest his soul become the dupe of demons and … enmesh itself in their company.[29]

Whether or not we are conscious of it, we remain resistant to theurgy because it has been forbidden to Christian imagination, and it is certainly forbidden to our current orthodoxy of scientific materialism.[30] To understand theurgy as more than a conceptual strategy we must risk enmeshing ourselves with Augustine's demons, those invisible presences that are engaged by all theurgists in the purification of their luminous bodies. For theurgists, our physical body is the most condensed expression of an identity that extends deeply into the invisible world. Augustine was right. Through our *ochēma* we *are* immersed in a sea of invisible entities, but theurgists saw them as ultimately beneficent, as agents of the Demiurge. Augustine's demons were streams of manifesting energy known to theurgists as daimones, and the invocation of these presences was an essential part of theurgy. Daimones are the blind, contractive, and individualizing energies that separate one thing from another: they create and sustain our bodies as well as our social identities. As Iamblichus put it, "[Daimones] reveal what is ineffable in the gods, shape what is formless into forms, and render what is beyond all measure into visible ratios."[31] To the degree that being rendered visible and measurable causes us to suffer, then daimones are a source of suffering, but their manifesting power, which is continually expressed in nature, in our bodies, and in our emotional habits, is the engine of creation. It is precisely these daimones that theurgists learned to integrate in their luminous bodies.

The concept of the *ochēma* and its function developed gradually among Platonists. It represents an amalgam of Platonic and Aristotelian themes that aimed to explain how an immortal and immaterial soul comes to inhabit a mortal and material body. The *ochēma* derives from Plato's *Timaeus* (41e) where the Demiurge places souls in starry vehicles (*ochēmata*) and the *Phaedrus* (247b) where the chariots of souls are, again, described as *ochēmata*. Perhaps more significantly, as regards physical sensation, is Aristotle's theory that each soul has a pneumatic body made of

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[29] *On Genesis*, II, 17: Hill, 2002. The italicized words: "*instinctu quondam occultismo dici, quem nescientes humanae mentes patiuntur* …"

[30] Hillman 1979, 87–89; Hillman 1983, 75–92. On the sense in which scientific materialism has come to function like a revealed dogma see Wallace and Hodel 2008, 86–107; Chapter 5: "Masquerade: Scientific Materialism Poses as Science."

[31] *DM* 16.16–17.4.

heavenly ether to serve as intermediary between the immaterial soul and the physical senses.[32] As John Finamore puts it: "… it is a simple step for later philosophers to combine Aristotle's *pneuma* with ether, the element of the stars, and with the 'Platonic' *ochēma* onto which the Demiurge placed the soul."[33] Thus, for Iamblichus, souls have an eternal etheric vehicle that animates the body with breath (*pneuma*) and coordinates sense impressions. This vehicle is also associated with *phantasia*, for imagination, like the *ochēma*, functions as a kind of intermediary between material and immaterial realms.

In his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Iamblichus says the Demiurge provides each soul with an *ochēma* "produced from the entire ether (*pantos tou aitheros*) … which has a creative power."[34] But unlike the heavenly gods, in the exercise of this power, human souls become self-alienated (*allotriōthen*).[35] When we animate bodies we lose our original spherical form and become trapped in oppositions: the divisions, collisions, impacts, reactions, growths and breakdowns that Iamblichus says are the unavoidable consequences of material life.[36] For Pythagoreans, the sphere is the image of divinity.[37] As Iamblichus put it:

> The sphere is both one and capable of containing multiplicity, which makes it truly divine, in that while not departing from unity it dominates all orders of reality.[38]

The loss of our spherical *ochēma* defines the soul's fall into mortality so its recovery is equivalent to recovering our immortality. Iamblichus maintains that "whenever the soul is especially assimilated to the [divine] Nous, our *ochēma* is made spherical, and is moved in a circle."[39] The loss and recovery of our sphere was a *topos* for Iamblichean Platonists. Damascius says the *ochēma* becomes transparently porous or densely compacted:

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[32] Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 736b.

[33] Finamore 1985, 2.

[34] Dillon 1973, Frag. 84.4–5.

[35] According to Iamblichus, the soul in its attachment to the body is "self-alienated" (*allotriōthen*, 223.26) and "made other to itself" (*heteroiousthai pros heautēn*, 223.31), in Simplicius, ed. Hayduck 1882.

[36] These are experiences of all embodied life and are under the rule of the material gods: *DM* 217.

[37] The heavenly gods remain perfectly spherical; their *archē* always united with their *telos*; *DM* 31.18–32.7. Cf. Ballew 1979, 79–107.

[38] Dillon 1973, Frag. 49.26–29.

[39] Dillon 1973, Frag. 49.13–15.

> Like a sponge … the immortal body of the soul … sometimes it is made more spherical and sometimes less; sometimes it is filled with divine light and sometimes with the stains of generative acts …[40]

In Platonic terms the stains of generative acts are the inescapable consequences of embodiment. In Pythagorean terms, to become embodied is to fall under *to apeiron*: the unlimited impulses of the more and the less described in the *Philebus*.[41] In theurgic terms, embodiment is to enter the rule of material gods and daimones who have jurisdiction over all the vicissitudes of matter. Uninitiated souls *blindly* follow daimones, but theurgy allows us to engage these streams of expansion and contraction with awareness. Life is always too much *and* too little until we weave these impulses into a spherical *ochēma*.[42] To become free from the "stain of generation" is not to escape from the body; it is to embody daimones theurgically, which is to say demiurgically, and one can do this only through a purified/spherical *ochēma*. In Pythagorean terms, to recover one's sphere is to find the Limit (*to peras*) hidden in the Unlimited (*to apeiron*).[43]

Purification of the *ochēma* is comparable to the purification of the subtle body in yoga. Both traditions require dietary rules, physical exercises, visualizations, and prayers. The 5th century Platonist Hierocles describes the discipline as follows:

> We must take care of the purity relating to our luminous body (augoeides), which the Oracles call "the light vehicle of the soul" (*psuchēs lepton ochēma*). Such purity extends to our food, our drink, and to the entire regimen of our mortal body in which the luminous body resides, as it breathes life into the inanimate body and maintains its harmony. For the immaterial body is a kind of life, which engenders life within matter …[44]

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[40] Damascius explains that the "sponge-like" subtle body is sometimes *manoumenē* = made porous/rarefied and sometimes *puknoumenē* = closed/compacted: Combès and Westerink 2003, 17.

[41] *Philebus* 25–27. In Pythagorean/Platonic metaphysics the cosmos is rooted in the two *archai*: *to apeiron* = the unlimited, and *to peras* = the limit; see Dillon 1973, 32, for a discussion of these *archai* in Iamblichus. The Demiurge weaves these opposed principles together to form the cosmos, drawing the unlimited and its infinite power into the measures of the limit (see *Philebus* 26cd). As a participant in this demiurgy, the theurgist was called upon to do the same. See Shaw 1995, 117, n.19.

[42] In sum, it is to align one's daimonic impulses with the eternal ratios (*metra aidia*) that build the cosmos (*DM* 65.6). This process is described by Shaw 1995, 219.

[43] "The spherical shape," Iamblichus says, "is most fitting to the idea of Limit (*to peras*)": Dillon 1973, Frag. 49.41.

[44] Hierocles, *In Carmen aureum* 26: Hadot 2004, 37. He is referring to the Chaldean Oracles.

For theurgical Platonists like Hierocles, breath is the trace of eternal ether in our mortal life. A subtle, breathing network, the etheric body animates our flesh and is subject to all the impressions of generated life; these images and memories are preserved in our *ochēma* and must be purified by prayer. Iamblichus explains:

> The extended practice of prayer … greatly widens the soul's receptacle (*hupodochē*) of the gods … cleanses (*apokathairei*) all internal oppositions and removes from the ethereal and luminous vehicle (*aitherōdous kai augoeidous pneumatos*) everything inclined to generation … It makes those who pray, if we may express it, companions of the gods (*homilētas tōn theōn*).[45]

To be released from generation is not to leave the physical body; it is to thread the polarities of the etheric body into a spherical body, like those of the gods. As Iamblichus put it:

> The ethereal body [of the gods] is exempt from all opposition and is free from every change … it is utterly liberated from any centripetal or centrifugal tendency because it has neither or *because it is moved in a circle*.[46]

Souls whose pneumatic vehicles are free from generation move in a circle; they align their unlimited impulses with the measures of the Demiurge.[47] They recover their uniform, spherical, identity (*autoeides*), put on the garments of the gods, and share in the demiurgy of the world.[48]

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[45] *DM* 238.13–239.10 (modified). Cf. Damascius on prayer: "… when the soul is in holy prayer facing the mighty ocean of the divine, at first, disengaged from the body, it concentrates on itself; then it abandons its own habits, withdrawing from logical into intuitive thinking; finally at a third stage, *it is possessed by the divine and drifts into an extraordinary serenity befitting gods rather than me*": Athanassiadi 1999, 99–101, my italics. Damascius is "using the cardinal Platonic distinction between the domains of *dianoia* and *nous*": Athanassiadi 1999, 101.

[46] *DM* 202.10–203.1 (modified).

[47] *Philebus* 26d8. In Pythagorean terms, to bring warring and oppositional elements into harmony is the art of both arithmogony and cosmogony. "If, as the Pythagoreans say, 'there is a combination and unification of disagreeing parts and a harmony of things naturally at war,' the essence of harmony necessarily holds rule" (Iamblichus, *In Nicomachi Arithmeticam Introductionem*, 72.26–73.3).

[48] Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I 373.28–374.1. In effect, Iamblichus translated the Pythagorean principle of mean terms that unite opposites to the existential situation of embodied souls, allowing us to share in the divine arithmogony/demiurgy by uniting opposites: the warring impulses experienced by souls. As Iamblichus puts it in his *On Nicomachean Arithmetic*, the *allelouchia* (the weaving together of opposed principles) that is established dispassionately among numbers is experienced by souls in a passionate way. This Pythagorean term, *allēlouchia*, is used by Iamblichus to describe the intimate continuity throughout the cosmos and is translated as "indivisible mutuality" (Clarke-Dillon-Hershbell 2003, 25). Iamblichus

The purification of the pneumatic body is integral to the divinization of the soul. Traditional worship therefore engages the imagination and emotions to complement the soul's mathematic and dialectical exercises. Without cleansing the luminous body the soul is incapable of *noēsis*. Hierocles spells this out:

> Philosophy is united with the art of sacred things since this art is concerned with the purification of the luminous body, *and if you separate philosophical thinking from this art, you will find that it no longer has the same power*.[49]

This art includes rites of visualization, worship, and sacrifice that limit the daimonic streams that make up our life. To separate thinking from this practice is to separate it from the ineffable presence that inhabits us. It is obvious that philosophy has been separated from this sacred art for a long time; this is why philosophers lack power, and why most intellectuals bore us with desiccated discourse or self-referential posing. People no longer come to philosophers for an experience of divine presence, for *darshan*, for transformation, because philosophers lack the power to transform. This affective dimension was an integral part of the later Platonic communities but it has become lost to us.[50] We no longer purify our pneumatic body, no longer align our personal breath with the world breath, and we no longer recognize our polarized compulsions as daimones that must be honored and absorbed into demiurgic measures.

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maintains that it seamlessly holds together both numbers and the orders of the cosmos (cf. *Protrepticus* 116.15: Pistelli 1887); *In Nicomachi Arithmeticam Introductionem* 7.10–18: Pistelli 1894; *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* 3.8: De Falco 1922. For human souls *allēlouchia* is experienced in a passionate way (*meta pathous*; *DM* 196.8–10), reflecting the condition of the embodied soul under the sway of the sublunary realm. The Iamblichean approach, as opposed to the Porphyrian or Plotinian, is not to escape these *pathē* but to ritually coordinate them into a receptacle that would give a body to the god. The theurgic approach is comparable to that of tantra in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions in that theurgy stresses the continuity, integration, and transformation of "lower" impulses through ritual.

[49] Hierocles, *In Carmen aureum* 48: 26.24–28; my italics. Hadot 2004.

[50] Socrates in particular seemed to have embodied a transformative presence. One need only consider his description by Alcibiades in the Symposium. The following testimony of Aristides captures vividly the power of Socrates as an embodiment of divine wisdom. He says: "By the gods, Socrates, you're not going to believe this, but it's true! I've never learned (*mathein*) anything from you, as you know. But I made progress whenever I was with you, even if I was only in the same house and not in the same room—but more when I was in the same room. And it seemed, to me at least, that when I was in the same room and looked at you when you were speaking, I made much more progress than when I looked away. And I made by far the most and greatest progress when I sat right beside you, and physically held on to you or touched you" (*Theages* 130d2–e2).

Yet this lost art is as close as our next breath. The contemporary French philosopher Luce Irigary, after practicing yoga, sounds very much like Iamblichus. She writes:

> For us as for the yogis breathing is what can make us spiritual. But we have forgotten this. And often we confuse cultivation with the learning of words, of knowledge, of competencies, of abilities. We live without breath, without remembering that to be cultivated amounts to being able to breathe, not only in order to survive but in order to become breath, spirit. The forgetting of breath in in our tradition is almost universal. And it has led to a separation in us between the vital breath and the divine breath, between body and soul. Between breath, that which gives life, and the body, that which permits keeping it, incarnating it.[51]

Irigary's description of enlightenment resembles the goal of theurgy: to align oneself with a spherical and cosmic body. Irigary says of the Buddha:

> He tries to become pure subject but on a model forgotten by us: pure subject here means breathing in tune with the breathing of the entire living universe. If there is suffering in living, it is that this universal and continuous communication or communion is difficult to carry out.[52]

Theurgists who embody this continuous communion have balanced the daimonic impulses of their etheric body through visualizations and the use of material objects that engage the senses and imagination.[53] When the *ochēma* is sufficiently purified theurgists may perform *phōtagōgia*, a technique of filling the porous *ochēma* with light.[54] Iamblichus describes it as follows:

> *Phōtagōgia* illuminates with divine light the ethereal and luminous vehicle of the soul (*aitherōdes kai augoeides ochēma*), from which divine visions (*phantasiai theiai*) take possession of our imaginative power moved by the will (*boulēsis*) of the gods.[55]

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[51] Irigary 2002, 76–77. Iamblichus' critique of "intellectuals" is also evident in Damascius, the 6th century successor (*diadochus*) of the Platonic school: "I have indeed chanced upon some who are outwardly splendid philosophers in their rich memory of a multitude of theories; in the shrewd flexibility of their countless syllogisms; in the constant power of their extraordinary perceptiveness. Yet within they are poor in matters of the soul and destitute of true knowledge": Athanassiadi 1999, 91.

[52] Irigary 2002, 36.

[53] *DM* 233.9–13: "… [I]n accordance with the properties of each of the gods, the receptacles (*hupodochas*) adapted to them, the theurgic art … links together stones, plants, animals, aromatic substances, and other things that are sacred, perfect and godlike, and then from all these composes an integrated and pure receptacle (*hupodochē*)".

[54] As Damscius puts it, *plēroutai theiou photos*: Combès-Westerink 2003, 17.

[55] *DM* 132.9–11: *katalambanousi tēn en hēmin phantastikēn dunamin, kinoumenai hypo tēs boulēseōs tōn theōn.*

This illumination was the theurgist's goal: to become united and filled with divine light.[56] When divine visions "take possession" of our imagination this may be seen as a passive experience but it awakens our most profound agency. Iamblichus says that in *phōtagōgia* we become possessed by the *boulēsis* of the gods. In the critical moment of *phōtagōgia* the theurgist no longer seeks the god, he becomes the god. Through the use of ritual objects and visualizations we prepare, as Iamblichus puts it, "a perfect and pure receptacle,"[57] a *hupodochē* capable of containing the god: the reception is something that happens *to* us and *through* us. We provide the receptacle (*hupodochē*) and the space (*chōra*); we *yield*; we *make room* (*chorein*) for the god to express its infinite luminosity through our porous and spherical *ochēma*. It is revealing that the critical terms Iamblichus uses to describe this reception are the same terms Plato uses to describe the receptacle (*hupodochē*) and space (*chōra*) that allow the Forms to come into the world.[58] Each theurgic rite taps the receptivity that Plato says is unthinkable and yet this unthinkable *chōra* shared by theurgists brings the world into existence.[59]

To achieve this divinization of soul the pneumatic body must become porous and our oppositions stilled, allowing us to breathe "in tune with the breathing" of the entire universe. We must circulate with the Great Breath. This allows us to take in the light, but then our vision is no longer our own; we become possessed (*katalambanein*).[60] Our vision is no longer ours but the vision of a god. We no longer receive the light, we give it. Our identity becomes divine. Iamblichus explains:

> All of theurgy has a two-fold character. One is that it is a rite conducted by men that preserves our natural place in the universe; the other is that it is empowered by divine symbols and is raised through them to be joined on high with the gods … This latter aspect is rightly called "taking the shape of the gods."[61]

Later Platonists became gods. It was the culmination and purpose of their tradition.[62] In this sense, the comparison of theurgy to yoga and tantric

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[56] Johnston 2004, 10–11, reviews the role of light among Platonists and Iamblichus in particular and notes that the goal of the theurgist was *sustasis*, (standing with) the divine. Since god is revealed as light, *sustasis* is experienced as illumination.

[57] *DM* 233.9–13.

[58] *Timaeus* 49a; 52a.

[59] *Timaeus* 52b.

[60] *DM* 132.9–11.

[61] *DM* 184.1–8.

[62] Perhaps the most striking description of this theurgic change of identity comes from

traditions is instructive. Discussing deification in yoga, Mircea Eliade explains:

> To identify oneself with a divinity, to become a god oneself, is equivalent to awakening the divine forces that lie asleep in man. *This is no purely mental exercise*. Nor, by the same token, is the final goal sought through visualization manifested in terms of mental experience …[63]

Eliade sounds like Iamblichus: "Intellectual understanding does not connect theurgists with the gods … We do not accomplish these acts by our thinking …"[64] And if this seems to have nothing to do with philosophy as we now understand it, it is because we have ignored the advice of Hierocles; we have separated philosophical thinking from theurgy, and despite our speculative brilliance and technical expertise, our thinking no longer has power.

An Instinct Unknown to Man

> Paranormal events are theurgical events in *potentia*; their teleology can be seen in Neoplatonic theurgy. It is etched out erotically. The eros goes somewhere.
>
> —Jeffrey Kripal's *Augoeides*[65]

Theurgists who had achieved divine luminosity through *phōtagōgia* became demiurgic, divinely creative; they possessed powers unavailable to those lost in the polarities of material life. In our terms, they had supernormal powers. They knew things they could not possibly know; they did the impossible. Marinus reports that Proclus performed a theurgic rite that caused it to rain and bring an end to a drought in Attica.[66] Eunapius reports that Iamblichus, after performing a sacrifice, was walking in conversation with his companions when

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Plotinus who, after performing the visualization of a luminous sphere, invokes the god to enter: the visionary, he says, "must give himself up … and become, *instead of one who sees, an object of vision to another who contemplates him shining out with thoughts of the kind which come from that world* …" *Ennead* V.8. Even more succinctly, in *Ennead* VI.5.7. (4–6): Speaking of our relation to the *noeta* he says: "If, then, we participate in true knowledge, we *are* those beings; we do not apprehend them within ourselves: *we are in them*."

[63] Eliade 1958; 1973, 208; my italics.

[64] *DM* 96.13–97.9.

[65] *Augoeides* = the "shining form" of the etheric body that appeared and spoke to the author on the night of December 17, 2010. The citation quoted was preceded by this: "Theurgy has a *telos*, a morality."

[66] Marinus *Life of Proclus* 28.686–688.

> … suddenly, even while conversing, he became lost in thought, as though his voice were cut off, and for some moments he fixed his eyes steadily on the ground and then looked up at his friends and called to them in a loud voice "Let us go on another road, for a dead body lately has been carried on this path."[67]

Some of his disciples remained on the path only to discover a funeral party returning, having taken a corpse on that road earlier in the day.

For Platonists such awareness "beyond the reach of reason" had been recognized as a sign of divine presence since the time of Socrates.[68] Sosipatra, a fourth century theurgist, was in the midst of a lecture when she suddenly become silent and announced that one of her students had been in an accident; she described in detail each of the injuries he sustained, all of which proved to be true.[69] Some of their feats, frankly, defy credulity. Eunapius says that Iamblichus performed a spell that evoked the presence of two springs in the form of young boys, each of whom embraced him. He then restored them to their springs, took his bath and "was reverenced by his pupils."[70]

What is impossible for us was possible to theurgists because they possessed a framework that allowed them to develop imaginative abilities denied to our world. For example, later Platonists believed in telepathy. Plutarch contrasts it with speech:

> Our recognition of one another's thoughts through the medium of the spoken word is like groping in the dark whereas the thoughts of daimones are luminous and shed their light on the daimonic man … [Divine] thoughts have no need of verbs or nouns.[71]

And Cicero in his treatise on divination explained divine knowing as follows:

> As the minds of the gods have community of feeling without eyes, ears, or tongues … so human minds when released … from bodily chains, or when stirred by inspiration, perceive things that minds involved with the body cannot see.[72]

Seeing without eyes and hearing without ears, communicating without verbs or nouns, such phenomena are not highlighted in our histories of ancient philosophy. Such reports are usually not mentioned at all. They are

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[67] Wright 1968, 367.
[68] Plutarch, *On the Daimonion of Socrates* 580F.
[69] Wright 1968, 415.
[70] Wright 1968, 369–371.
[71] Plutarch, *On the Daimonion of Socrates* 589B–C.
[72] Cicero, *De Divinatione* I. 129.

something of an embarrassment, most often dismissed as the superstitious residue, the cultural baggage of otherwise intelligent thinkers who, like us, knew better. But they did *not* know better. *Such supernatural abilities were understood to be the result of having lived the genuinely philosophical life nurtured by the purification of the etheric body*. This philosophy-theurgy is "no merely mental exercise." It culminates in our "taking the shape of the gods," and this divinization of souls was understood to be the purpose of creation. As a second century Platonist put it: "the will of the gods is to reveal themselves (*ekphainesthai*) through human souls."[73]

We might recall that Augustine said that when astrologers tell the truth, it is *"due to an instinct that, unknown to man, lies hidden in his mind*." The bishop warned that to engage this instinct was to engage demonic spirits, so the practice of working with the etheric body and developing our theurgic receptivity was outlawed by the Church. It was demonic, and later the demonic was morphed by enlightenment rationalism into "the irrational" where it was even more effectively repressed through ridicule. But whether the exercise of this unknown instinct has been seen as demonic or irrational, it continues to lie at the edges of our culture. Those who explored it in the last century, like Frederick Myers and Henri Bergson, were both profoundly influenced by the later Platonists. Bergson sounds like an ancient theurgist in his view of the potential of humanity when he says that "the essential function of the universe … is [as] *a machine for the making of gods*."[74] And Myers gives new formulations to theurgic possession, saying that the ideas that come to a genius "are *not consciously originated … but have shaped themselves beyond his will, in profounder regions of this being*."[75]

The efforts and contributions of these thinkers, and others like them, including Carl Jung, have been provocatively laid out by Jeffrey Kripal in *Authors of the Impossible*.[76] Kripal notes that Platonism runs like an unseen thread connecting the most recent explorations of this "unknown instinct." In addition to his exploration of thinkers like Myers and Bergson, Kripal focuses on our own engagement with paranormal events and suggests that it was the experience of profound anomalous events that inspired many of the founding scholars in the field of Religious Studies. Figures like Eliade,

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[73] Calvenus Taurus, cited by Iamblichus in Finamore-Dillon 2002, 54.20–26. The translation of this passage is my own but I have consulted the translations by Finamore-Dillon as well as that of Dillon 1977, 245.

[74] Cited by Kripal 2010, 85.

[75] Myers 1903, 71.

[76] Kripal 2010.

Jung, Henry Corbin, Gershom Scholem, and contemporaries like kabbalist scholar Elliot Wolfson and Kripal himself all had impossible and mystical experiences that their research serves to explore.[77]

As scholars who publish in academic journals and university presses, they kept their own paranormal and mystical experiences "under the radar," as Kripal puts it, undetectable by the rational orthodoxy of our materialist culture. Jung kept his infamous *Red Book* entirely secret.[78] Now published nearly 100 years after it was created, it describes Jung's twelve-year encounter with autonomous entities who initiated him into profound purifications and mysteries. In terms of our culture's norms as defined by the DSM-IV manual, the *Red Book* is a journey into madness.[79] In neoplatonic terms it is the record of the purification of Jung's etheric body and of his encounters with theurgic *phasmata*, the transphysical presences that appear in divination.[80] While Jung's language was adapted to his culture, his integration of archetypes is equivalent to the theurgic integration of daimones and his individuation the equivalent to neoplatonic divinization.

But our rules of discourse demand that we censor such irrationalities. We intellectualize the Neoplatonists and we reinterpret Jung's visions in ways that strip them of all spookiness. At the American Academy of Religions National meeting in 2010 in a session on Jung's *Red Book*, we were informed by a presenter that the female entity, Salome, whom Jung met in his visions, was "in reality" Sabina Speilrein, a woman with whom Jung had an affair. Such reductions (that is, she was nothing but Jung's unconscious projection) reassure us that there is a "logical explanation" behind all this strangeness. When queried as to the autonomy of Jung's entities, the presenter said that her training and way of viewing the world do not allow for that.

And yet we know such things happen. And the question is how to build a bridge between the academic and scientific establishment for whom the paranormal is non-existent and the pervasive anomalous experiences that have occurred to virtually everyone. We live in a profound disconnect be-

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[77] Kripal 2006, 108–114; Kripal 2001, chapter 5.

[78] Jung 2009.

[79] Specifically, "Delusional Disorder: 297.1" which, in Jung's case, would be of a "Grandiose Type" (159–160), "Schizophrenia: Paranoid Type: 295.30" (155), as well as "Narcissistic Personality Disorder: 301.81" (a now defunct category; 294): *DSM-IV-TR* (2000).

[80] Iamblichus provides a diagnostic guide of appearances (*phasmata*) in *DM* III, 3–9, describing in the following order: gods, archangels, angels, daimones, heroes, souls, and archons. Employing Aristotle's principle that the activity (*energeia*) of an entity reveals the power (*dunamis*) of its essence (*ousia*), Iamblichus reads the *phasmata* as indices of their sources.

tween private experience and public discourse, and I believe that the theurgists left a framework, a kind of visionary taxonomy, that might help us bridge this gap, not by denying the discoveries of science or by literalizing anomalous experiences into new forms of orthodoxy, but by inviting us into dimensions of human experience that they deeply and intelligently explored.[81] Theurgic Neoplatonism in this sense is a map of how some of the most brilliant minds in Western history explored what Myers calls the subliminal and Jung the collective unconscious. They combined the most acute intellectual and mathematical genius with profound visionary capacity. Philosophy for them was united with the sacred art and the crux of this hieratic art was the purification and awareness of the luminous body.

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[81] Seen in New Age circles where *phasmata* are literalized by our materialist-rational habit of mind into new forms of religious authority. In this regard one could learn a great deal from Jung who was able to experience the autonomy of *phasmata* without literalizing them. He thus learned how to inhabit his etheric body, his *ochēma*, in a world that is neither entirely physical nor spiritual, but "imaginal," a term coined by Corbin to describe the "place" where encounters with *phasmata* occur. Corbin developed this insight through his study of Neoplatonic Muslims like Ibn Arabi and Suhrawardi. Sounding like a theurgical Platonist, Corbin 1969, 189, argues that "Active Imagination is the organ of theophanies, because it is the organ of Creation and because *Creation is essentially theophany*" (my italics).

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